

CHAPTER XXX - END OF THE JACOBITE RISING

In the small hours of the following night the pulse of Thrums stopped for a moment, and then went on again, but the only watcher remained silent, and the people rose in the morning without knowing that they had lost one of their number while they slept. In the same ignorance they toiled through a long day.

It was a close October day in the end of a summer that had lingered to give the countryside nothing better than a second crop of haws. Beneath the beeches leaves lay in yellow heaps like sliced turnip, and over all the strath was a pink haze; the fields were singed brown, except where a recent ploughing gave them a mourning border. From early morn men, women and children (Tommy among them) were in the fields taking up their potatoes, half-a-dozen gatherers at first to every drill, and by noon it seemed a dozen, though the new-comers were but stout sacks, now able to stand alone. By and by heavy-laden carts were trailing into Thrums, dog-tired toilers hanging on behind, not to be dragged, but for an incentive to keep them trudging, boys and girls falling asleep on top of the load, and so neglecting to enjoy the ride which was their recompense for lifting. A growing mist mixed with the daylight, and still there were a few people out, falling over their feet with fatigue; it took silent possession, and then the shadowy forms left in the fields were motionless and would remain there until carted to garrets and kitchen corners and other winter quarters on Monday morning. There were few gad-aboutings that Saturday night. Washings were not brought in, though Mr. Dishart had preached against the unseemly sight of linen hanging on the line on the Sabbath-day. Innes, stravaiging the square and wynds in his apple-cart, jingled his weights in vain, unable to shake even moneyed children off their stools, and when at last he told his beast to go home they took with them all the stir of the town. Family exercise came on early in many houses, and as the gude wife handed her man the Bible she said entreatingly, "A short ane." After that one might have said that no earthly knock could bring them to their doors, yet within an hour the town was in a ferment.

When Tommy and Elspeth reached the Den the mist lay so thick that they had to feel their way through it to the Ailie, where they found Gavinia alone and scared. "Was you peeping in, trying to fleg me twa

three minutes syne?" she asked, eagerly, and when they shook their heads, she looked cold with fear.

"As sure as death," she said, "there was some living thing standing there; I couldna see it for the rime, but I heard it breathing hard."

Tommy felt Elspeth's hand begin to tremble, and he said "McLean!" hastily, though he knew that McLean had not yet left the Quharity Arms. Next moment Corp arrived with another story as unnerving.

"Has Grizel no come yet?" he asked, in a troubled voice. "Tommy, hearken to this, a light has been burning in Double Dykes and the door swinging open a' day! I saw it mysel', and so did Willum Dods."

"Did you go close?"

"Na faags! Willum was hol'ing and I was lifting, so we hadna time in the daylight, and wha would venture near the Painted Lady's house on sic a night?"

Even Tommy felt uneasy, but when Gavinia cried, "There's something uncanny in being out the night; tell us what was in Mr. McLean's bottle, Tommy, and syne we'll run hame," he became Commander Sandys again, and replied, blankly, "What bottle?"

"The ane I warned you he was to fling into the water; dinna dare tell me you hinna got it."

"I know not what thou art speaking about," said Tommy; "but it's a queer thing, it's a queer thing, Gavinia"--here he fixed her with his terrifying eye--"I happen to have found a--another bottle," and still glaring at her he explained that he had found his bottle floating on the horizon. It contained a letter to him, which he now read aloud. It was signed "The Villain Stroke, his mark," and announced that the writer, "tired of this relentless persecution," had determined to reform rather than be killed. "Meet me at the Cuttle Well, on Saturday, when the eight-o'clock bell is ringing," he wrote, "and I shall there make you an offer for my freedom."

The crew received this communication with shouts, Gavinia's cry of "Five shillings, if no ten!" expressing the general sentiment, but it would not have been like Tommy to think with them. "You poor things," he said, "you just believe everything you're telled! How do I know that this is not a

trick of Stroke's to bring me here when he is some other gait working mischief?"

Corp was impressed, but Gavinia said, short-sightedly, "There's no sign o't."

"There's ower much sign o't," retorted Tommy. "What's this story about Double Dykes? And how do we ken that there hasna been foul work there, and this man at the bottom o't? I tell you, before the world's half an hour older, I'll find out," and he looked significantly at Corp, who answered, quaking, "I winna gang by mysel', no, Tommy, I winna!"

So Tommy had to accompany him, saying, valiantly, "I'm no feared, and this rime is fine for hodding in," to which Corp replied, as firmly, "Neither am I, and we can aye keep touching cauld iron." Before they were half way down the Double Dykes they got a thrill, for they realized, simultaneously, that they were being followed. They stopped and gripped each other hard, but now they could hear nothing.

"The Painted Lady!" Corp whispered.

"Stroke!" Tommy replied, as cautiously. He was excited rather than afraid, and had the pluck to cry, "Wha's that? I see you!"--but no answer came back through the mist, and now the boys had a double reason for pressing forward.

"Can you see the house, Corp?"

"It should be here about, but it's smored in rime."

"I'm touching the paling. I ken the road to the window now."

"Hark! What's that?"

It sounded like devil's music in front of them, and they fell back until Corp remembered, "It maun be the door swinging open, and squealing and moaning on its hinges. Tommy, I take ill wi' that. What can it mean?"

"I'm here to find out." They reached the window where Tommy had watched once before, and looking in together saw the room plainly by the light of a lamp which stood on the spinet. There was no one inside, but otherwise Tommy noticed little change. The fire was out, having evidently burned itself done, the bed-clothes were in some disorder. To avoid the

creaking door, the boys passed round the back of the house to the window of the other room. This room was without a light, but its door stood open and sufficient light came from the kitchen to show that it also was untenanted. It seemed to have been used as a lumber-room.

The boys turned to go, passing near the front of the empty house, where they shivered and stopped, mastered by a feeling they could not have explained. The helpless door, like the staring eyes of a dead person, seemed to be calling to them to shut it, and Tommy was about to steal forward for this purpose when Corp gripped him and whispered that the light had gone out. It was true, though Tommy disbelieved until they had returned to the east window to make sure.

"There maun be folk in the hoose, Tommy!"

"You saw it was toom. The lamp had gone out itself, or else--what's that?"

It was the unmistakable closing of a door, softly but firmly. "The wind has blown it to," they tried to persuade themselves, though aware that there was not sufficient wind for this. After a long period of stillness they gathered courage to go to the door and shake it. It was not only shut, but locked.

On their way back through the Double Dykes they were silent, listening painfully but hearing nothing. But when they reached the Coffin Brig Tommy said, "Dinna say nothing about this to Elspeth, it would terrify her;" he was always so thoughtful for Elspeth.

"But what do you think o't a'?" Corp said, imploringly.

"I winna tell you yet," replied Tommy, cautiously.

When they boarded the Ailie, where the two girls were very glad to see them again, the eight-o'clock bell had begun to ring, and thus Tommy had a reasonable excuse for hurrying his crew to the Cuttle Well without saying anything of his expedition to Double Dykes, save that he had not seen Grizel. At the Well they had not long to wait before Mr. McLean suddenly appeared out of the mist, and to their astonishment Miss Ailie was leaning on his arm. She was blushing and smiling too, in a way pretty to see, though it spoilt the effect of Stroke's statement.

The first thing Stroke did was to give up his sword to Tommy and to apologize for its being an umbrella on account of the unsettled state of

the weather, and then Corp led three cheers, the captain alone declining to join in, for he had an uneasy feeling that he was being ridiculed.

"But I thought there were five of you," Mr. McLean said; "where is the fifth?"

"You ken best," replied Tommy, sulkily, and sulky he remained throughout the scene, because he knew he was not the chief figure in it. Having this knowledge to depress him, it is to his credit that he bore himself with dignity throughout, keeping his crew so well in hand that they dared not give expression to their natural emotions.

"As you are aware, Mr. Sandys," McLean began solemnly, "I have come here to sue for pardon. It is not yours to give, you reply, the Queen alone can pardon, and I grant it; but, sir, is it not well known to all of us that you can get anything out of her you like?"

Tommy's eyes roved suspiciously, but the suppliant proceeded in the same tone. "What are my offences? The first is that I have been bearing arms (unwittingly) against the Throne; the second, that I have brought trouble to the lady by my side, who has the proud privilege of calling you her friend. But, Sandys, such amends as can come from an erring man I now offer to make most contritely. Intercede with Her Majesty on my behalf, and on my part I promise to war against her no more. I am willing to settle down in the neighboring town as a law-abiding citizen, whom you can watch with eagle eye. Say, what more wouldst thou of the unhappy Stuart?"

But Tommy would say nothing, he only looked doubtfully at Miss Ailie, and that set McLean off again. "You ask what reparation I shall make to this lady? Sandys, I tell thee that here also thou hast proved too strong for me. In the hope that she would plead for me with you, I have been driven to offer her my hand in marriage, and she is willing to take me if thou grantest thy consent."

At this Gavinia jumped with joy, and then cried, "Up wi' her!" words whose bearing the school-mistress fortunately did not understand. All save Tommy looked at Miss Ailie, and she put her arm on Mr. McLean's, and, yes, it was obvious, Miss Ailie was a lover at the Cuttle Well at last, like so many others. She had often said that the Den parade was vulgar, but she never said it again.

It was unexpected news to Tommy, but that was not what lowered his head in humiliation now. In the general rejoicing he had been nigh forgotten; even Elspeth was hanging on Miss Ailie's skirts, Gavinia had eyes for none but lovers, Corp was rapturously examining five half-crowns that had been dropped into his hands for distribution. Had Tommy given an order now, who would have obeyed it? His power was gone, his crew would not listen to another word against Mr. McLean.

"Tommy thought Mr. McLean hated you!" said Elspeth to Miss Ailie.

"It was queer you made sic a mistake!" said Corp to Tommy.

"Oh, the tattie-doolie!" cried Gavinia.

So they knew that Mr. McLean had only been speaking sarcastically; of a sudden they saw through and despised their captain. Tears of mortification rose in Tommy's eyes, and kind-hearted Miss Ailie saw them, and she thought it was her lover's irony that made him smart. She had said little hitherto, but now she put her hand on his shoulder, and told them all that she did indeed owe the supreme joy that had come to her to him. "No, Gavinia," she said, blushing, "I will not give you the particulars, but I assure you that had it not been for Tommy, Mr. McLean would never have asked me to marry him."

Elspeth crossed proudly to the side of her noble brother (who could scarcely trust his ears), and Gavinia cried, in wonder, "What did he do?"

Now McLean had seen Tommy's tears also, and being a kindly man he dropped the satirist and chimed in warmly, "And if I had not asked Miss Ailie to marry me I should have lost the great happiness of my life, so you may all imagine how beholden I feel to Tommy."

Again Tommy was the centre-piece, and though these words were as puzzling to him as to his crew, their sincerity was unmistakable, and once more his head began to waggle complacently.

"And to show how grateful we are," said Miss Ailie, "we are to give him a-- a sort of marriage present. We are to double the value of the bursary he wins at the university--" She could get no farther, for now Elspeth was hugging her, and Corp cheering frantically, and Mr. McLean thought it necessary to add the warning, "If he does carry a bursary, you understand, for should he fail I give him nothing."

"Him fail!" exclaimed Corp, with whom Miss Ailie of course agreed. "And he can spend the money in whatever way he chooses," she said, "what will you do with it, Tommy?"

The lucky boy answered, instantly, "I'll take Elspeth to Aberdeen to bide with me," and then Elspeth hugged him, and Miss Ailie said, in a delighted aside to Mr. McLean, "I told you so," and he, too, was well pleased.

"It was the one thing needed to make him work," the school-mistress whispered. "Is not his love for his sister beautiful?"

McLean admitted that it was, but half-banteringly he said to Elspeth: "What could you do in lodgings, you excited mite?"

"I can sit and look at Tommy," she answered, quickly.

"But he will be away for hours at his classes."

"I'll sit at the window waiting for him," said she.

"And I'll run back quick," said Tommy.

All this time another problem had been bewildering Gavinia, and now she broke in, eagerly: "But what was it he did? I thought he was agin Mr. McLean."

"And so did I," said Corp.

"I cheated you grandly," replied Tommy with the audacity he found so useful.

"And a' the time you was pretending to be agin him," screamed Gavinia, "was you--was you bringing this about on the sly?"

Tommy looked up into Mr. McLean's face, but could get no guidance from it, so he said nothing; he only held his head higher than ever. "Oh, the clever little curse!" cried Corp, and Elspeth's delight was as ecstatic, though differently worded. Yet Gavinia stuck to her problem, "How did you do it, what was it you did?" and the cruel McLean said: "You may tell her, Tommy; you have my permission."

It would have been an awkward position for most boys, and even Tommy--but next moment he said, quite coolly: "I think you and me and Miss Ailie should keep it to oursels, Gavinia's sic a gossip."