

CHAPTER X

The mist had floated away, and the moor was drenched with golden sunshine when we went back to the castle. As we entered the hall I heard the sound of a dog howling, and spoke of it to one of the men-servants who had opened the door.

"That sounds like Gelert. Is he shut up somewhere?"

Gelert was a beautiful sheep-dog who belonged to Feargus and was his heart's friend. I allowed him to be kept in the courtyard.

The man hesitated before he answered me, with a curiously grave face.

"It is Gelert, miss. He is howling for his master. We were obliged to shut him in the stables."

"But Feargus ought to have reached here by this time," I was beginning.

I was stopped because I found Angus Macayre almost at my elbow. He had that moment come out of the library. He put his hand on my arm.

"Will ye come with me?" he said, and led me back to the room he had just left. He kept his hand on my arm when we all stood together inside, Hector and I looking at him in wondering question. He was going to tell me something--we both saw that.

"It is a sad thing you have to hear," he said. "He was a fine man, Feargus, and a most faithful servant. He went to see his mother last night and came back late across the moor. There was a heavy mist, and he must have lost his way. A shepherd found his body in a tarn at daybreak. They took him back to his father's home."

I looked at Hector MacNairn and again at Angus. "But it couldn't be Feargus," I cried. "I saw him an hour ago. He passed us playing on his pipes. He was playing a new tune I had never heard before a wonderful, joyous thing. I both heard and SAW him!"

Angus stood still and watched me. They both stood still and watched me, and even in my excitement I saw that each of them looked a little pale.

"You said you did not hear him at first, but you surely saw him when he passed so near," I protested. "I called to him, and he took off his bonnet, though he did not stop. He was going so quickly that perhaps he did not hear me call his name."

What strange thing in Hector's look checked me? Who knows?

"You DID see him, didn't you?" I asked of him.

Then he and Angus exchanged glances, as if asking each other to decide some grave thing. It was Hector MacNairn who decided it.

"No," he answered, very quietly, "I neither saw nor heard him, even when he passed. But you did."

"I did, quite plainly," I went on, more and more bewildered by the way in which they kept a sort of tender, awed gaze fixed on me. "You remember I even noticed that he looked pale. I laughed, you know, when I said he looked almost like one of the White People--"

Just then my breath caught itself and I stopped. I began to remember things--hundreds of things.

Angus spoke to me again as quietly as Hector had spoken.

"Neither Jean nor I ever saw Wee Brown Elspeth," he said--"neither Jean nor I. But you did. You have always seen what the rest of us did not see, my bairn--always."

I stammered out a few words, half in a whisper. "I have always seen what you others could not see? WHAT--HAVE--I--SEEN?"

But I was not frightened. I suppose I could never tell any one what strange, wide, bright places seemed suddenly to open and shine before me. Not places to shrink back from--oh no! no! One could be sure, then--SURE! Feargus had lifted his bonnet with that extraordinary triumph in his look--even Feargus, who had been rather dour.

"You called them the White People," Hector MacNairn said.

Angus and Jean had known all my life. A very old shepherd who had looked in my face when I was a baby had said I had the eyes which "SAW." It was only the saying of an old Highlander, and might not have been remembered. Later the two began to believe I had a sight they had not.

The night before Wee Brown Elspeth had been brought to me Angus had read

for the first time the story of Dark Malcolm, and as they sat near me on the moor they had been talking about it. That was why he forgot himself when I came to ask them where the child had gone, and told him of the big, dark man with the scar on his forehead. After that they were sure.

They had always hidden their knowledge from me because they were afraid it might frighten me to be told. I had not been a strong child. They kept the secret from my relatives because they knew they would dislike to hear it and would not believe, and also would dislike me as a queer, abnormal creature. Angus had fears of what they might do with doctors and severe efforts to obliterate from my mind my "nonsense," as they would have been sure to call it. The two wise souls had shielded me on every side.

"It was better that you should go on thinking it only a simple, natural thing," Angus said. "And as to natural, what IS natural and what is not?"

Man has not learned all the laws of nature yet. Nature's a grand, rich, endless thing, always unrolling her scroll with writings that seem new on it. They're not new. They were always written there. But they were not unrolled. Never a law broken, never a new law, only laws read with stronger eyes."

Angus and I had always been very fond of the Bible--the strange old temple of wonders, full of all the poems and tragedies and histories of man, his hates and battles and loves and follies, and of the Wisdom of the universe and the promises of the splendors of it, and which even those of us who think ourselves the most believing neither wholly believe nor will understand. We had pored over and talked of it. We had never thought of it as only a pious thing to do. The book was to us one of the mystic, awe-inspiring, prophetic marvels of the world.

That was what made me say, half whispering: "I have wondered and wondered what it meant--that verse in Isaiah: 'Behold the former things are come to pass and new things do I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.' Perhaps it means only the unrolling of the scroll."

"Aye, aye!" said Angus; "it is full of such deep sayings, and none of us will listen to them."

"It has taken man eons of time," Hector MacNairn said, thinking it out as he spoke--"eons of time to reach the point where he is beginning to know that in every stock and stone in his path may lie hidden some

power he has not yet dreamed of. He has learned that lightning may be commanded, distance conquered, motion chained and utilized; but he, the one CONSCIOUS force, has never yet begun to suspect that of all others he may be the one as yet the least explored. How do we know that there does not lie in each of us a wholly natural but, so far, dormant power of sight--a power to see what has been called The Unseen through all the Ages whose sightlessness has made them Dark? Who knows when the Shadow around us may begin to clear? Oh, we are a dull lot--we human things--with a queer, obstinate conceit of ourselves."

"Complete we think we are," Angus murmured half to himself. "Finished creatures! And look at us! How many of us in a million have beauty and health and full power? And believing that the law is that we must crumple and go to pieces hour by hour! Who'd waste the time making a clock that went wrong as often? Nay, nay! We shall learn better than this as time goes on. And we'd better be beginning and setting our minds to work on it. 'Tis for us to do--the minds of us. And what's the mind of us but the Mind that made us? Simple and straight enough it is when once you begin to think it out. The spirit of you sees clearer than we do, that's all," he said to me. "When your mother brought you into the world she was listening to one outside calling to her, and it opened the way for you."

At night Hector MacNairn and his mother and I sat on the terrace under stars which seemed listening things, and we three drew nearer to one another, and nearer and nearer.

"When the poor mother stumbled into the train that day," was one of the things Hector told me, "I was thinking of The Fear and of my own mother. You looked so slight and small as you sat in your corner that I thought at first you were almost a child. Then a far look in your eyes made me begin to watch you. You were so sorry for the poor woman that you could not look away from her, and something in your face touched and puzzled me. You leaned forward suddenly and put out your hand protectingly as she stepped down on to the platform.

"That night when you spoke quite naturally of the child, never doubting that I had seen it, I suddenly began to suspect. Because of The Fear"--he hesitated--"I had been reading and thinking many things new to me. I did not know what I believed. But you spoke so simply, and I knew you were speaking the truth. Then you spoke just as naturally of Wee Brown Elspeth. That startled me because not long before I had been told the tale in the Highlands by a fine old story-teller who is the head of his clan. I saw you had never heard the story before. And yet you were telling me that you had played with the child."

"He came home and told me about you," Mrs. MacNairn said. "His fear of The Fear was more for me than for himself. He knew that if he brought you to me, you who are more complete than we are, clearer-eyed and nearer, nearer, I should begin to feel that he was not going--out. I should begin to feel a reality and nearness myself. Ah, Ysobel! How we have clung to you and loved you! And then that wonderful afternoon! I

saw no girl with her hand through Mr. Le Breton's arm; Hector saw none. But you saw her. She was THERE!"

"Yes, she was there," I answered. "She was there, smiling up at him. I wish he could have known."

What does it matter if this seems a strange story? To some it will mean something; to some it will mean nothing. To those it has a meaning for it will open wide windows into the light and lift heavy loads. That would be quite enough, even if the rest thought it only the weird fancy of a queer girl who had lived alone and given rein to her silliest imaginings. I wanted to tell it, howsoever poorly and ineffectively it was done. Since I KNEW I have dropped the load of ages--the black burden. Out on the hillside my feet did not even feel the grass, and yet I was standing, not floating. I had no wings or crown. I was only Ysobel out on the hillside, free!

This is the way it all ended.

For three weeks that were like heaven we three lived together at Muircarrie. We saw every beauty and shared every joy of sun and dew and love and tender understanding.

After one lovely day we had spent on the moor in a quiet dream of joy

almost strange in its perfectness, we came back to the castle; and, because the sunset was of such unearthly radiance and changing wonder we sat on the terrace until the last soft touch of gold had died out and left the pure, still, clear, long summer twilight.

When Mrs. MacNairn and I went in to dress for dinner, Hector lingered a little behind us because the silent beauty held him.

I came down before his mother did, and I went out upon the terrace again because I saw he was still sitting there. I went to the stone balustrade very quietly and leaned against it as I turned to look at him and speak.

Then I stood quite still and looked long--for some reason not startled, not anguished, not even feeling that he had gone. He was more beautiful than any human creature I had ever seen before. But It had happened as they said it would. He had not ceased--but something else had. Something had ceased.

It was the next evening before I came out on the terrace again. The day had been more exquisite and the sunset more wonderful than before. Mrs. MacNairn was sitting by her son's side in the bedroom whose windows looked over the moor. I am not going to say one word of what had come between the two sunsets. Mrs. MacNairn and I had clung--and clung. We had promised never to part from each other. I did not quite know why I went out on the terrace; perhaps it was because I had always loved to

sit or stand there.

This evening I stood and leaned upon the balustrade, looking out far, far, far over the moor. I stood and gazed and gazed. I was thinking about the Secret and the Hillside. I was very quiet--as quiet as the twilight's self. And there came back to me the memory of what Hector had said as we stood on the golden patch of gorse when the mist had for a moment or so blown aside, what he had said of man's awakening, and, remembering all the ages of--childish, useless dread, how he would stand-- I did not turn suddenly, but slowly. I was not startled in the faintest degree. He stood there close to me as he had so often stood.

And he stood--and smiled.

I have seen him many times since. I shall see him many times again. And when I see him he always stands--and smiles.