

miscarry!"

CHAPTER X--THE RED-HEADED MAN

It was about half-past three when I came forth on the Lang Dykes.

Dean was where I wanted to go. Since Catriona dwelled there, and

her kinsfolk the Glengyle Macgregors appeared almost certainly to

be employed against me, it was just one of the few places I should

have kept away from; and being a very young man, and beginning to

be very much in love, I turned my face in that direction without

pause. As a slave to my conscience and common sense, however, I

took a measure of precaution. Coming over the crown of a bit of a

rise in the road, I clapped down suddenly among the barley and lay

waiting. After a while, a man went by that looked to be a

Highlandman, but I had never seen him till that hour. Presently

after came Neil of the red head. The next to go past was a

millers cart, and after that nothing but manifest country people.

Here was enough to have turned the most foolhardy from his purpose,

but my inclination ran too strong the other way. I argued it out

that if Neil was on that road, it was the right road to find him

in, leading direct to his chiefs daughter; as for the other

Highlandman, if I was to be startled off by every Highlandman I

saw, I would scarce reach anywhere. And having quite satisfied

myself with this disingenuous debate, I made the better speed of

it, and came a little after four to Mrs. Drummond-Ogilvy's.

Both ladies were within the house; and upon my perceiving them together by the open door, I plucked off my hat and said, "Here was a lad come seeking saxpence," which I thought might please the dowager.

Catriona ran out to greet me heartily, and, to my surprise, the old lady seemed scarce less forward than herself. I learned long afterwards that she had despatched a horseman by daylight to Rankeillor at the Queensferry, whom she knew to be the doer for Shaws, and had then in her pocket a letter from that good friend of mine, presenting, in the most favourable view, my character and prospects. But had I read it I could scarce have seen more clear in her designs. Maybe I was COUNTRYFEED; at least, I was not so much so as she thought; and it was even to my homespun wits, that

she was bent to hammer up a match between her cousin and a beardless boy that was something of a laird in Lothian.

"Saxpence had better take his broth with us, Catrine," says she.

"Run and tell the lasses."

And for the little while we were alone was at a good deal of pains to flatter me; always cleverly, always with the appearance of a banter, still calling me Saxpence, but with such a turn that should rather uplift me in my own opinion. When Catriona returned, the design became if possible more obvious; and she showed off the girl's advantages like a horse-couper with a horse. My face flamed that she should think me so obtuse. Now I would fancy the girl was being innocently made a show of, and then I could have beaten the

old carline wife with a cudgel; and now, that perhaps these two had set their heads together to entrap me, and at that I sat and gloomed betwixt them like the very image of ill-will. At last the matchmaker had a better device, which was to leave the pair of us alone. When my suspicions are anyway roused it is sometimes a little the wrong side of easy to allay them. But though I knew what breed she was of, and that was a breed of thieves, I could never look in Catriona's face and disbelieve her.

"I must not ask?" says she, eagerly, the same moment we were left alone.

"Ah, but to-day I can talk with a free conscience," I replied. "I am lightened of my pledge, and indeed (after what has come and gone

since morning) I would not have renewed it were it asked."

"Tell me," she said. "My cousin will not be so long."

So I told her the tale of the lieutenant from the first step to the

last of it, making it as mirthful as I could, and, indeed, there

was matter of mirth in that absurdity.

"And I think you will be as little fitted for the rudas men as for

the pretty ladies, after all!" says she, when I had done. "But

what was your father that he could not learn you to draw the sword!

It is most ungentle; I have not heard the match of that in anyone."

"It is most misconvenient at least," said I; "and I think my father

(honest man!) must have been wool-gathering to learn me Latin in the place of it. But you see I do the best I can, and just stand up like Lot's wife and let them hammer at me."

"Do you know what makes me smile?" said she. "Well, it is this. I am made this way, that I should have been a man child. In my own thoughts it is so I am always; and I go on telling myself about this thing that is to befall and that. Then it comes to the place of the fighting, and it comes over me that I am only a girl at all events, and cannot hold a sword or give one good blow; and then I have to twist my story round about, so that the fighting is to stop, and yet me have the best of it, just like you and the lieutenant; and I am the boy that makes the fine speeches all through, like Mr. David Balfour."

"You are a bloodthirsty maid," said I.

"Well, I know it is good to sew and spin, and to make samplers,"

she said, "but if you were to do nothing else in the great world, I

think you will say yourself it is a dreech business; and it is not

that I want to kill, I think. Did ever you kill anyone?"

"That I have, as it chances. Two, no less, and me still a lad that

should be at the college," said I. "But yet, in the look-back, I

take no shame for it."

"But how did you feel, then--after it?" she asked.

"Deed, I sat down and grat like a bairn," said I.

"I know that, too," she cried. "I feel where these tears should come from. And at any rate, I would not wish to kill, only to be

Catherine Douglas that put her arm through the staples of the bolt, where it was broken. That is my chief hero. Would you not love to die so--for your king?" she asked.

"Troth," said I, "my affection for my king, God bless the puggy face of him, is under more control; and I thought I saw death so near to me this day already, that I am rather taken up with the notion of living."

"Right," she said, "the right mind of a man! Only you must learn

arms; I would not like to have a friend that cannot strike. But it

will not have been with the sword that you killed these two?"

"Indeed, no," said I, "but with a pair of pistols. And a fortunate

thing it was the men were so near-hand to me, for I am about as

clever with the pistols as I am with the sword."

So then she drew from me the story of our battle in the brig, which

I had omitted in my first account of my affairs.

"Yes," said she, "you are brave. And your friend, I admire and

love him."

"Well, and I think anyone would!" said I. "He has his faults like

other folk; but he is brave and staunch and kind, God bless him!

That will be a strange day when I forget Alan." And the thought of him, and that it was within my choice to speak with him that night, had almost overcome me.

"And where will my head be gone that I have not told my news!" she cried, and spoke of a letter from her father, bearing that she might visit him to-morrow in the castle whither he was now transferred, and that his affairs were mending. "You do not like to hear it," said she. "Will you judge my father and not know him?"

"I am a thousand miles from judging," I replied. "And I give you my word I do rejoice to know your heart is lightened. If my face

fell at all, as I suppose it must, you will allow this is rather an
ill day for compositions, and the people in power extremely ill
persons to be compounding with. I have Simon Fraser extremely
heavy on my stomach still."

"Ah!" she cried, "you will not be evening these two; and you should
bear in mind that Prestongrange and James More, my father, are of
the one blood."

"I never heard tell of that," said I.

"It is rather singular how little you are acquainted with," said
she. "One part may call themselves Grant, and one Macgregor, but
they are still of the same clan. They are all the sons of Alpin,

from whom, I think, our country has its name."

"What country is that?" I asked.

"My country and yours," said she

"This is my day for discovering I think," said I, "for I always
thought the name of it was Scotland."

"Scotland is the name of what you call Ireland," she replied. "But
the old ancient true name of this place that we have our foot-soles
on, and that our bones are made of, will be Alban. It was Alban
they called it when our forefathers will be fighting for it against
Rome and Alexander; and it is called so still in your own tongue

that you forget."

"Troth," said I, "and that I never learned!" For I lacked heart to take her up about the Macedonian.

"But your fathers and mothers talked it, one generation with another," said she. "And it was sung about the cradles before you or me were ever dreamed of; and your name remembers it still. Ah, if you could talk that language you would find me another girl.

The heart speaks in that tongue."

I had a meal with the two ladies, all very good, served in fine old plate, and the wine excellent, for it seems that Mrs. Ogilvy was rich. Our talk, too, was pleasant enough; but as soon as I saw the

sun decline sharply and the shadows to run out long, I rose to take
my leave. For my mind was now made up to say farewell to Alan; and
it was needful I should see the trysting wood, and reconnoitre it,
by daylight. Catriona came with me as far as to the garden gate.

"It is long till I see you now?" she asked.

"It is beyond my judging," I replied. "It will be long, it may be
never."

"It may be so," said she. "And you are sorry?"

I bowed my head, looking upon her.

"So am I, at all events," said she. "I have seen you but a small time, but I put you very high. You are true, you are brave; in time I think you will be more of a man yet. I will be proud to hear of that. If you should speed worse, if it will come to fall as we are afraid--O well! think you have the one friend. Long after you are dead and me an old wife, I will be telling the bairns about David Balfour, and my tears running. I will be telling how we parted, and what I said to you, and did to you. GOD GO WITH YOU AND GUIDE YOU, PRAYS YOUR LITTLE FRIEND: so I said--I will be telling them--and here is what I did."

She took up my hand and kissed it. This so surprised my spirits that I cried out like one hurt. The colour came strong in her face, and she looked at me and nodded.

"O yes, Mr. David," said she, "that is what I think of you. The head goes with the lips."

I could read in her face high spirit, and a chivalry like a brave child's; not anything besides. She kissed my hand, as she had kissed Prince Charlie's, with a higher passion than the common kind of clay has any sense of. Nothing before had taught me how deep I was her lover, nor how far I had yet to climb to make her think of me in such a character. Yet I could tell myself I had advanced some way, and that her heart had beat and her blood flowed at thoughts of me.

After that honour she had done me I could offer no more trivial

civility. It was even hard for me to speak; a certain lifting in

her voice had knocked directly at the door of my own tears.

"I praise God for your kindness, dear," said I. "Farewell, my

little friend!" giving her that name which she had given to

herself; with which I bowed and left her.

My way was down the glen of the Leith River, towards Stockbridge

and Silvermills. A path led in the foot of it, the water bickered

and sang in the midst; the sunbeams overhead struck out of the west

among long shadows and (as the valley turned) made like a new scene

and a new world of it at every corner. With Catriona behind and

Alan before me, I was like one lifted up. The place besides, and

the hour, and the talking of the water, infinitely pleased me; and

I lingered in my steps and looked before and behind me as I went.

This was the cause, under Providence, that I spied a little in my

rear a red head among some bushes.

Anger sprang in my heart, and I turned straight about and walked at

a stiff pace to where I came from. The path lay close by the

bushes where I had remarked the head. The cover came to the

wayside, and as I passed I was all strung up to meet and to resist

an onfall. No such thing befell, I went by unmeddled with; and at

that fear increased upon me. It was still day indeed, but the

place exceeding solitary. If my haunters had let slip that fair

occasion I could but judge they aimed at something more than David

Balfour. The lives of Alan and James weighed upon my spirit with

the weight of two grown bullocks.

Catriona was yet in the garden walking by herself.

"Catriona," said I, "you see me back again."

"With a changed face," said she.

"I carry two men's lives besides my own," said I. "It would be a sin and shame not to walk carefully. I was doubtful whether I did right to come here. I would like it ill, if it was by that means we were brought to harm."

"I could tell you one that would be liking it less, and will like little enough to hear you talking at this very same time," she

cried. "What have I done, at all events?"

"O, you I you are not alone," I replied. "But since I went off I have been dogged again, and I can give you the name of him that follows me. It is Neil, son of Duncan, your man or your father's."

"To be sure you are mistaken there," she said, with a white face.

"Neil is in Edinburgh on errands from my father."

"It is what I fear," said I, "the last of it. But for his being in Edinburgh I think I can show you another of that. For sure you have some signal, a signal of need, such as would bring him to your help, if he was anywhere within the reach of ears and legs?"

"Why, how will you know that?" says she.

"By means of a magical talisman God gave to me when I was born, and

the name they call it by is Common-sense," said I. "Oblige me so

far as make your signal, and I will show you the red head of Neil."

No doubt but I spoke bitter and sharp. My heart was bitter. I

blamed myself and the girl and hated both of us: her for the vile

crew that she was come of, myself for my wanton folly to have stuck

my head in such a byke of wasps.

Catriona set her fingers to her lips and whistled once, with an

exceeding clear, strong, mounting note, as full as a ploughman's.

A while we stood silent; and I was about to ask her to repeat the

same, when I heard the sound of some one bursting through the bushes below on the braeside. I pointed in that direction with a smile, and presently Neil leaped into the garden. His eyes burned, and he had a black knife (as they call it on the Highland side) naked in his hand; but, seeing me beside his mistress, stood like a man struck.

"He has come to your call," said I; "judge how near he was to Edinburgh, or what was the nature of your father's errands. Ask himself. If I am to lose my life, or the lives of those that hang by me, through the means of your clan, let me go where I have to go with my eyes open."

She addressed him tremulously in the Gaelic. Remembering Alan's

anxious civility in that particular, I could have laughed out loud
for bitterness; here, sure, in the midst of these suspicions, was
the hour she should have stuck by English.

Twice or thrice they spoke together, and I could make out that Neil
(for all his obsequiousness) was an angry man.

Then she turned to me. "He swears it is not," she said.

"Catriona," said I, "do you believe the man yourself?"

She made a gesture like wringing the hands.

"How will I can know?" she cried.

But I must find some means to know," said I. "I cannot continue to go dovering round in the black night with two men's lives at my girdle! Catriona, try to put yourself in my place, as I vow to God I try hard to put myself in yours. This is no kind of talk that should ever have fallen between me and you; no kind of talk; my heart is sick with it. See, keep him here till two of the morning, and I care not. Try him with that."

They spoke together once more in the Gaelic.

"He says he has James More my father's errand," said she. She was whiter than ever, and her voice faltered as she said it.

"It is pretty plain now," said I, "and may God forgive the wicked!"

She said never anything to that, but continued gazing at me with the same white face.

"This is a fine business," said I again. "Am I to fall, then, and those two along with me?"

"O, what am I to do?" she cried. "Could I go against my father's orders, him in prison, in the danger of his life!"

"But perhaps we go too fast," said I. "This may be a lie too. He may have no right orders; all may be contrived by Simon, and your father knowing nothing."

She burst out weeping between the pair of us; and my heart smote me hard, for I thought this girl was in a dreadful situation.

"Here," said I, "keep him but the one hour; and I'll chance it, and may God bless you."

She put out her hand to me, "I will be needing one good word," she sobbed.

"The full hour, then?" said I, keeping her hand in mine. "Three lives of it, my lass!"

"The full hour!" she said, and cried aloud on her Redeemer to

forgive her.

I thought it no fit place for me, and fled.