

thought weighed a little on my arm. "It is you that are the good

friend to me."

CHAPTER XXIII--TRAVELS IN HOLLAND

The rattel-waggon, which is a kind of a long waggon set with

benches, carried us in four hours of travel to the great city of

Rotterdam. It was long past dark by then, but the streets were

pretty brightly lighted and thronged with wild-like, outlandish

characters--bearded Hebrews, black men, and the hordes of

courtesans, most indecently adorned with finery and stopping seamen

by their very sleeves; the clash of talk about us made our heads to

whirl; and what was the most unexpected of all, we appeared to be

no more struck with all these foreigners than they with us. I made

the best face I could, for the lass's sake and my own credit; but
the truth is I felt like a lost sheep, and my heart beat in my
bosom with anxiety. Once or twice I inquired after the harbour or
the berth of the ship Rose: but either fell on some who spoke only
Hollands, or my own French failed me. Trying a street at a
venture, I came upon a lane of lighted houses, the doors and
windows thronged with wauf-like painted women; these jostled and
mocked upon us as we passed, and I was thankful we had nothing of
their language. A little after we issued forth upon an open place
along the harbour.

"We shall be doing now," cries I, as soon as I spied masts. "Let
us walk here by the harbour. We are sure to meet some that has the
English, and at the best of it we may light upon that very ship."

We did the next best, as happened; for, about nine of the evening, whom should we walk into the arms of but Captain Sang? He told us they had made their run in the most incredible brief time, the wind holding strong till they reached port; by which means his passengers were all gone already on their further travels. It was impossible to chase after the Gebbies into the High Germany, and we had no other acquaintance to fall back upon but Captain Sang himself. It was the more gratifying to find the man friendly and wishful to assist. He made it a small affair to find some good plain family of merchants, where Catriona might harbour till the Rose was laden; declared he would then blithely carry her back to Leith for nothing and see her safe in the hands of Mr. Gregory; and in the meanwhile carried us to a late ordinary for the meal we

stood in need of. He seemed extremely friendly, as I say, but what surprised me a good deal, rather boisterous in the bargain; and the cause of this was soon to appear. For at the ordinary, calling for Rhenish wine and drinking of it deep, he soon became unutterably tipsy. In this case, as too common with all men, but especially with those of his rough trade, what little sense or manners he possessed deserted him; and he behaved himself so scandalous to the young lady, jesting most ill-favouredly at the figure she had made on the ship's rail, that I had no resource but carry her suddenly away.

She came out of the ordinary clinging to me close. "Take me away, David," she said. "YOU keep me. I am not afraid with you."

"And have no cause, my little friend!" cried I, and could have found it in my heart to weep.

"Where will you be taking me?" she said again. "Don't leave me at all events--never leave me."

"Where am I taking you to?" says I stopping, for I had been staving on ahead in mere blindness. "I must stop and think. But I'll not leave you, Catriona; the Lord do so to me, and more also, if I should fail or fash you."

She crept close into me by way of a reply.

"Here," I said, "is the stillest place we have hit on yet in this

busy byke of a city. Let us sit down here under yon tree and

consider of our course."

That tree (which I am little like to forget) stood hard by the

harbour side. It was like a black night, but lights were in the

houses, and nearer hand in the quiet ships; there was a shining of

the city on the one hand, and a buzz hung over it of many thousands

walking and talking; on the other, it was dark and the water

bubbled on the sides. I spread my cloak upon a builder's stone,

and made her sit there; she would have kept her hold upon me, for

she still shook with the late affronts; but I wanted to think

clear, disengaged myself, and paced to and fro before her, in the

manner of what we call a smuggler's walk, belabouring my brains for

any remedy. By the course of these scattering thoughts I was

brought suddenly face to face with a remembrance that, in the heat and haste of our departure, I had left Captain Sang to pay the ordinary. At this I began to laugh out loud, for I thought the man well served; and at the same time, by an instinctive movement, carried my hand to the pocket where my money was. I suppose it was in the lane where the women jostled us; but there is only the one thing certain, that my purse was gone.

"You will have thought of something good," said she, observing me to pause.

At the pinch we were in, my mind became suddenly clear as a perspective glass, and I saw there was no choice of methods. I had not one doit of coin, but in my pocket-book I had still my letter

on the Leyden merchant; and there was now but the one way to get to

Leyden, and that was to walk on our two feet.

"Catriona," said I, "I know you're brave and I believe you're

strong--do you think you could walk thirty miles on a plain road?"

We found it, I believe, scarce the two-thirds of that, but such was

my notion of the distance.

"David," she said, "if you will just keep near, I will go anywhere

and do anything. The courage of my heart, it is all broken. Do

not be leaving me in this horrible country by myself, and I will do

all else."

"Can you start now and march all night?" said I.

"I will do all that you can ask of me," she said, "and never ask you why. I have been a bad ungrateful girl to you; and do what you please with me now! And I think Miss Barbara Grant is the best lady in the world," she added, "and I do not see what she would deny you for at all events."

This was Greek and Hebrew to me; but I had other matters to consider, and the first of these was to get clear of that city on the Leyden road. It proved a cruel problem; and it may have been one or two at night ere we had solved it. Once beyond the houses, there was neither moon nor stars to guide us; only the whiteness of the way in the midst and a blackness of an alley on both hands.

The walking was besides made most extraordinary difficult by a

plain black frost that fell suddenly in the small hours and turned

that highway into one long slide.

"Well, Catriona," said I, "here we are like the king's sons and the

old wives' daughters in your daft-like Highland tales. Soon we'll

be going over the 'SEVEN BENS, THE SEVEN GLENS AND THE SEVEN

MOUNTAIN MOORS'." Which was a common byword or overcome in those

tales of hers that had stuck in my memory.

"Ah," says she, "but here are no glens or mountains! Though I will

never be denying but what the trees and some of the plain places

hereabouts are very pretty. But our country is the best yet."

"I wish we could say as much for our own folk," says I, recalling

Sprott and Sang, and perhaps James More himself.

"I will never complain of the country of my friend," said she, and spoke it out with an accent so particular that I seemed to see the look upon her face.

I caught in my breath sharp and came near falling (for my pains) on the black ice.

"I do not know what YOU think, Catriona," said I, when I was a little recovered, "but this has been the best day yet! I think shame to say it, when you have met in with such misfortunes and disfavours; but for me, it has been the best day yet."

"It was a good day when you showed me so much love," said she.

"And yet I think shame to be happy too," I went on, "and you here
on the road in the black night."

"Where in the great world would I be else?" she cried. "I am
thinking I am safest where I am with you."

"I am quite forgiven, then?" I asked.

"Will you not forgive me that time so much as not to take it in
your mouth again?" she cried. "There is nothing in this heart to
you but thanks. But I will be honest too," she added, with a kind
of suddenness, "and I'll never can forgive that girl."

"Is this Miss Grant again?" said I. "You said yourself she was the best lady in the world."

"So she will be, indeed!" says Catriona. "But I will never forgive her for all that. I will never, never forgive her, and let me hear tell of her no more."

"Well," said I, "this beats all that ever came to my knowledge; and I wonder that you can indulge yourself in such bairnly whims. Here is a young lady that was the best friend in the world to the both of us, that learned us how to dress ourselves, and in a great manner how to behave, as anyone can see that knew us both before and after."

But Catriona stopped square in the midst of the highway.

"It is this way of it," said she. "Either you will go on to speak

of her, and I will go back to yon town, and let come of it what God

pleases! Or else you will do me that politeness to talk of other

things."

I was the most nonplussed person in this world; but I bethought me

that she depended altogether on my help, that she was of the frail

sex and not so much beyond a child, and it was for me to be wise

for the pair of us.

"My dear girl," said I, "I can make neither head nor tails of this;

but God forbid that I should do anything to set you on the jee. As
for talking of Miss Grant, I have no such a mind to it, and I
believe it was yourself began it. My only design (if I took you up
at all) was for your own improvement, for I hate the very look of
injustice. Not that I do not wish you to have a good pride and a
nice female delicacy; they become you well; but here you show them
to excess."

"Well, then, have you done?" said she.

"I have done," said I.

"A very good thing," said she, and we went on again, but now in
silence.

It was an eerie employment to walk in the gross night, beholding only shadows and hearing nought but our own steps. At first, I believe our hearts burned against each other with a deal of enmity; but the darkness and the cold, and the silence, which only the cocks sometimes interrupted, or sometimes the farmyard dogs, had pretty soon brought down our pride to the dust; and for my own particular, I would have jumped at any decent opening for speech.

Before the day peeped, came on a warmish rain, and the frost was all wiped away from among our feet. I took my cloak to her and sought to hap her in the same; she bade me, rather impatiently, to keep it.

"Indeed and I will do no such thing," said I. "Here am I, a great, ugly lad that has seen all kinds of weather, and here are you a tender, pretty maid! My dear, you would not put me to a shame?"

Without more words she let me cover her; which as I was doing in the darkness, I let my hand rest a moment on her shoulder, almost like an embrace.

"You must try to be more patient of your friend," said I.

I thought she seemed to lean the least thing in the world against my bosom, or perhaps it was but fancy.

"There will be no end to your goodness," said she.

And we went on again in silence; but now all was changed; and the happiness that was in my heart was like a fire in a great chimney.

The rain passed ere day; it was but a sloppy morning as we came into the town of Delft. The red gabled houses made a handsome show on either hand of a canal; the servant lassies were out slestering and scrubbing at the very stones upon the public highway; smoke rose from a hundred kitchens; and it came in upon me strongly it was time to break our fasts.

"Catriona," said I, "I believe you have yet a shilling and three baubees?"

"Are you wanting it?" said she, and passed me her purse. "I am wishing it was five pounds! What will you want it for?"

"And what have we been walking for all night, like a pair of waif Egyptians!" says I. "Just because I was robbed of my purse and all I possessed in that unchancy town of Rotterdam. I will tell you of it now, because I think the worst is over, but we have still a good tramp before us till we get to where my money is, and if you would not buy me a piece of bread, I were like to go fasting."

She looked at me with open eyes. By the light of the new day she was all black and pale for weariness, so that my heart smote me for her. But as for her, she broke out laughing.

"My torture! are we beggars then!" she cried. "You too? O, I could have wished for this same thing! And I am glad to buy your breakfast to you. But it would be pleisand if I would have had to dance to get a meal to you! For I believe they are not very well acquainted with our manner of dancing over here, and might be paying for the curiosity of that sight."

I could have kissed her for that word, not with a lover's mind, but in a heat of admiration. For it always warms a man to see a woman brave.

We got a drink of milk from a country wife but new come to the town, and in a baker's, a piece of excellent, hot, sweet-smelling bread, which we ate upon the road as we went on. That road from

Delft to the Hague is just five miles of a fine avenue shaded with trees, a canal on the one hand, on the other excellent pastures of cattle. It was pleasant here indeed.

"And now, Davie," said she, "what will you do with me at all events?"

"It is what we have to speak of," said I, "and the sooner yet the better. I can come by money in Leyden; that will be all well. But the trouble is how to dispose of you until your father come. I thought last night you seemed a little sweir to part from me?"

"It will be more than seeming then," said she.

"You are a very young maid," said I, "and I am but a very young callant. This is a great piece of difficulty. What way are we to manage? Unless indeed, you could pass to be my sister?"

"And what for no?" said she, "if you would let me!"

"I wish you were so, indeed," I cried. "I would be a fine man if I had such a sister. But the rub is that you are Catriona Drummond."

"And now I will be Catriona Balfour," she said. "And who is to ken? They are all strange folk here."

"If you think that it would do," says I. "I own it troubles me. I would like it very ill, if I advised you at all wrong."

"David, I have no friend here but you," she said.

"The mere truth is, I am too young to be your friend," said I. "I am too young to advise you, or you to be advised. I see not what else we are to do, and yet I ought to warn you."

"I will have no choice left," said she. "My father James More has not used me very well, and it is not the first time, I am cast upon your hands like a sack of barley meal, and have nothing else to think of but your pleasure. If you will have me, good and well.

If you will not"--she turned and touched her hand upon my arm--

"David, I am afraid," said she.

"No, but I ought to warn you," I began; and then bethought me I was the bearer of the purse, and it would never do to seem too churlish. "Catriona," said I, "don't misunderstand me: I am just trying to do my duty by you, girl! Here am I going alone to this strange city, to be a solitary student there; and here is this chance arisen that you might dwell with me a bit, and be like my sister; you can surely understand this much, my dear, that I would just love to have you?"

"Well, and here I am," said she. "So that's soon settled."

I know I was in duty bounden to have spoke more plain. I know this was a great blot on my character, for which I was lucky that I did not pay more dear. But I minded how easy her delicacy had been

startled with a word of kissing her in Barbara's letter; now that she depended on me, how was I to be more bold? Besides, the truth is, I could see no other feasible method to dispose of her. And I daresay inclination pulled me very strong.

A little beyond the Hague she fell very lame and made the rest of the distance heavily enough. Twice she must rest by the wayside, which she did with pretty apologies, calling herself a shame to the Highlands and the race she came of, and nothing but a hindrance to myself. It was her excuse, she said, that she was not much used with walking shod. I would have had her strip off her shoes and stockings and go barefoot. But she pointed out to me that the women of that country, even in the landward roads, appeared to be all shod.

"I must not be disgracing my brother," said she, and was very merry with it all, although her face told tales of her.

There is a garden in that city we were bound to, sanded below with clean sand, the trees meeting overhead, some of them trimmed, some preched, and the whole place beautified with alleys and arbours.

Here I left Catriona, and went forward by myself to find my correspondent. There I drew on my credit, and asked to be recommended to some decent, retired lodging. My baggage being not yet arrived, I told him I supposed I should require his caution with the people of the house; and explained that, my sister being come for a while to keep house with me, I should be wanting two chambers. This was all very well; but the trouble was that Mr.

Balfour in his letter of recommendation had condescended on a great deal of particulars, and never a word of any sister in the case. I could see my Dutchman was extremely suspicious; and viewing me over the rims of a great pair of spectacles--he was a poor, frail body, and reminded me of an infirm rabbit--he began to question me close.

Here I fell in a panic. Suppose he accept my tale (thinks I), suppose he invite my sister to his house, and that I bring her. I shall have a fine ravelled pirl to unwind, and may end by disgracing both the lassie and myself. Thereupon I began hastily to expound to him my sister's character. She was of a bashful disposition, it appeared, and be extremely fearful of meeting strangers that I had left her at that moment sitting in a public place alone. And then, being launched upon the stream of

falsehood, I must do like all the rest of the world in the same
circumstance, and plunge in deeper than was any service; adding
some altogether needless particulars of Miss Balfour's ill-health
and retirement during childhood. In the midst of which I awoke to
a sense of my behaviour, and was turned to one blush.

The old gentleman was not so much deceived but what he discovered a
willingness to be quit of me. But he was first of all a man of
business; and knowing that my money was good enough, however it
might be with my conduct, he was so far obliging as to send his son
to be my guide and caution in the matter of a lodging. This
implied my presenting of the young man to Catriona. The poor,
pretty child was much recovered with resting, looked and behaved to
perfection, and took my arm and gave me the name of brother more

easily than I could answer her. But there was one misfortune:
thinking to help, she was rather towardly than otherwise to my
Dutchman. And I could not but reflect that Miss Balfour had rather
suddenly outgrown her bashfulness. And there was another thing,
the difference of our speech. I had the Low Country tongue and
dwelled upon my words; she had a hill voice, spoke with something
of an English accent, only far more delightful, and was scarce
quite fit to be called a deacon in the craft of talking English
grammar; so that, for a brother and sister, we made a most uneven
pair. But the young Hollander was a heavy dog, without so much
spirit in his belly as to remark her prettiness, for which I
scorned him. And as soon as he had found a cover to our heads, he
left us alone, which was the greater service of the two.