

CHAPTER XXV--THE RETURN OF JAMES MORE

I was called on the morrow out of a late and troubled slumber by a knocking on my door, ran to open it, and had almost swooned with the contrariety of my feelings, mostly painful; for on the threshold, in a rough wraprascal and an extraordinary big laced hat, there stood James More.

I ought to have been glad perhaps without admixture, for there was a sense in which the man came like an answer to prayer. I had been saying till my head was weary that Catriona and I must separate, and looking till my head ached for any possible means of separation. Here were the means come to me upon two legs, and joy was the hindmost of my thoughts. It is to be considered, however,

that even if the weight of the future were lifted off me by the
man's arrival, the present heaved up the more black and menacing;
so that, as I first stood before him in my shirt and breeches, I
believe I took a leaping step backward like a person shot.

"Ah," said he, "I have found you, Mr, Balfour." And offered me his
large, fine hand, the which (recovering at the same time my post in
the doorway, as if with some thought of resistance) I took him by
doubtfully. "It is a remarkable circumstance how our affairs
appear to intermingle," he continued. "I am owing you an apology
for an unfortunate intrusion upon yours, which I suffered myself to
be entrapped into by my confidence in that false-face,
Prestongrange; I think shame to own to you that I was ever trusting
to a lawyer." He shrugged his shoulders with a very French air.

"But indeed the man is very plausible," says he. "And now it seems that you have busied yourself handsomely in the matter of my daughter, for whose direction I was remitted to yourself."

"I think, sir," said I, with a very painful air, "that it will be necessary we two should have an explanation."

"There is nothing amiss?" he asked. "My agent, Mr. Sprott--"

"For God's sake moderate your voice!" I cried. "She must not hear till we have had an explanation."

"She is in this place?" cries he.

"That is her chamber door," said I.

"You are here with her alone?" he asked.

"And who else would I have got to stay with us?" cries I.

I will do him the justice to admit that he turned pale.

"This is very unusual," said he. "This is a very unusual
circumstance. You are right, we must hold an explanation."

So saying he passed me by, and I must own the tall old rogue

appeared at that moment extraordinary dignified. He had now, for

the first time, the view of my chamber, which I scanned (I may say)

with his eyes. A bit of morning sun glinted in by the window pane, and showed it off; my bed, my mails, and washing dish, with some disorder of my clothes, and the unlighted chimney, made the only plenishing; no mistake but it looked bare and cold, and the most unsuitable, beggarly place conceivable to harbour a young lady. At the same time came in on my mind the recollection of the clothes that I had bought for her; and I thought this contrast of poverty and prodigality bore an ill appearance.

He looked all about the chamber for a seat, and finding nothing else to his purpose except my bed, took a place upon the side of it; where, after I had closed the door, I could not very well avoid joining him. For however this extraordinary interview might end, it must pass if possible without waking Catriona; and the one thing

needful was that we should sit close and talk low. But I can
scarce picture what a pair we made; he in his great coat which the
coldness of my chamber made extremely suitable; I shivering in my
shirt and breeks; he with very much the air of a judge; and I
(whatever I looked) with very much the feelings of a man who has
heard the last trumpet.

"Well?" says he.

And "Well," I began, but found myself unable to go further.

"You tell me she is here?" said he again, but now with a spice of
impatience that seemed to brace me up.

"She is in this house," said I, "and I knew the circumstance would be called unusual. But you are to consider how very unusual the whole business was from the beginning. Here is a young lady landed on the coast of Europe with two shillings and a penny halfpenny. She is directed to yon man Sprott in Helvoet. I hear you call him your agent. All I can say is he could do nothing but damn and swear at the mere mention of your name, and I must fee him out of my own pocket even to receive the custody of her effects. You speak of unusual circumstances, Mr. Drummond, if that be the name you prefer. Here was a circumstance, if you like, to which it was barbarity to have exposed her."

"But this is what I cannot understand the least," said James. "My daughter was placed into the charge of some responsible persons,

whose names I have forgot." "Gebbie was the name," said I; "and there is no doubt that Mr. Gebbie should have gone ashore with her at Helvoet. But he did not, Mr. Drummond; and I think you might praise God that I was there to offer in his place."

"I shall have a word to say to Mr. Gebbie before long," said he.

"As for yourself, I think it might have occurred that you were somewhat young for such a post."

"But the choice was not between me and somebody else, it was between me and nobody," cried I. "Nobody offered in my place, and I must say I think you show a very small degree of gratitude to me that did."

"I shall wait until I understand my obligation a little more in the particular," says he.

"Indeed, and I think it stares you in the face, then," said I.

"Your child was deserted, she was clean flung away in the midst of Europe, with scarce two shillings, and not two words of any language spoken there: I must say, a bonny business! I brought her to this place. I gave her the name and the tenderness due to a sister. All this has not gone without expense, but that I scarce need to hint at. They were services due to the young lady's character which I respect; and I think it would be a bonny business too, if I was to be singing her praises to her father."

"You are a young man," he began.

"So I hear you tell me," said I, with a good deal of heat.

"You are a very young man," he repeated, "or you would have understood the significance of the step."

"I think you speak very much at your ease," cried I. "What else was I to do? It is a fact I might have hired some decent, poor woman to be a third to us, and I declare I never thought of it until this moment! But where was I to find her, that am a foreigner myself? And let me point out to your observation, Mr. Drummond, that it would have cost me money out of my pocket. For here is just what it comes to, that I had to pay through the nose for your neglect; and there is only the one story to it, just that

you were so unloving and so careless as to have lost your daughter."

"He that lives in a glass house should not be casting stones," says he; "and we will finish inquiring into the behaviour of Miss Drummond before we go on to sit in judgment on her father."

"But I will be entrapped into no such attitude," said I. "The character of Miss Drummond is far above inquiry, as her father ought to know. So is mine, and I am telling you that. There are but the two ways of it open. The one is to express your thanks to me as one gentleman to another, and to say no more. The other (if you are so difficult as to be still dissatisfied) is to pay me, that which I have expended and be done."

He seemed to soothe me with a hand in the air. "There, there,"
said he. "You go too fast, you go too fast, Mr. Balfour. It is a
good thing that I have learned to be more patient. And I believe
you forget that I have yet to see my daughter."

I began to be a little relieved upon this speech and a change in
the man's manner that I spied in him as soon as the name of money
fell between us.

"I was thinking it would be more fit--if you will excuse the
plainness of my dressing in your presence--that I should go forth
and leave you to encounter her alone?" said I.

"What I would have looked for at your hands!" says he; and there was no mistake but what he said it civilly.

I thought this better and better still, and as I began to pull on my hose, recalling the man's impudent mendicancy at Prestongrange's, I determined to pursue what seemed to be my victory.

"If you have any mind to stay some while in Leyden," said I, "this room is very much at your disposal, and I can easy find another for myself: in which way we shall have the least amount of flitting possible, there being only one to change."

"Why, sir," said he, making his bosom big, "I think no shame of a

poverty I have come by in the service of my king; I make no secret that my affairs are quite involved; and for the moment, it would be even impossible for me to undertake a journey."

"Until you have occasion to communicate with your friends," said I, "perhaps it might be convenient for you (as of course it would be honourable to myself) if you were to regard yourself in the light of my guest?"

"Sir," said he, "when an offer is frankly made, I think I honour myself most to imitate that frankness. Your hand, Mr. David; you have the character that I respect the most; you are one of those from whom a gentleman can take a favour and no more words about it. I am an old soldier," he went on, looking rather disgusted-like

around my chamber, "and you need not fear I shall prove

burthensome. I have ate too often at a dyke-side, drank of the

ditch, and had no roof but the rain."

"I should be telling you," said I, "that our breakfasts are sent

customarily in about this time of morning. I propose I should go

now to the tavern, and bid them add a cover for yourself and delay

the meal the matter of an hour, which will give you an interval to

meet your daughter in."

Methought his nostrils wagged at this. "O, an hour" says he.

"That is perhaps superfluous. Half an hour, Mr. David, or say

twenty minutes; I shall do very well in that. And by the way," he

adds, detaining me by the coat, "what is it you drink in the

morning, whether ale or wine?"

"To be frank with you, sir," says I, "I drink nothing else but

spare, cold water."

"Tut-tut," says he, "that is fair destruction to the stomach, take

an old campaigner's word for it. Our country spirit at home is

perhaps the most entirely wholesome; but as that is not come-at-

able, Rhenish or a white wine of Burgundy will be next best."

"I shall make it my business to see you are supplied," said I.

"Why, very good," said he, "and we shall make a man of you yet, Mr.

David."

By this time, I can hardly say that I was minding him at all, beyond an odd thought of the kind of father-in-law that he was like to prove; and all my cares centred about the lass his daughter, to whom I determined to convey some warning of her visitor. I stepped to the door accordingly, and cried through the panels, knocking thereon at the same time: "Miss Drummond, here is your father come at last."

With that I went forth upon my errand, having (by two words) extraordinarily damaged my affairs.