

CHAPTER XXVIII--IN WHICH I AM LEFT ALONE

I opened the door to Catriona and stopped her on the threshold.

"Your father wishes us to take our walk," said I.

She looked to James More, who nodded, and at that, like a trained soldier, she turned to go with me.

We took one of our old ways, where we had gone often together, and been more happy than I can tell of in the past. I came a half a step behind, so that I could watch her unobserved. The knocking of her little shoes upon the way sounded extraordinary pretty and sad; and I thought it a strange moment that I should be so near both

ends of it at once, and walk in the midst between two destinies,  
and could not tell whether I was hearing these steps for the last  
time, or whether the sound of them was to go in and out with me  
till death should part us.

She avoided even to look at me, only walked before her, like one  
who had a guess of what was coming. I saw I must speak soon before  
my courage was run out, but where to begin I knew not. In this  
painful situation, when the girl was as good as forced into my arms  
and had already besought my forbearance, any excess of pressure  
must have seemed indecent; yet to avoid it wholly would have a very  
cold-like appearance. Between these extremes I stood helpless, and  
could have bit my fingers; so that, when at last I managed to speak  
at all, it may be said I spoke at random.

"Catriona," said I, "I am in a very painful situation; or rather, so we are both; and I would be a good deal obliged to you if you would promise to let me speak through first of all, and not to interrupt me till I have done."

She promised me that simply.

"Well," said I, "this that I have got to say is very difficult, and I know very well I have no right to be saying it. After what passed between the two of us last Friday, I have no manner of right. We have got so ravelled up (and all by my fault) that I know very well the least I could do is just to hold my tongue, which was what I intended fully, and there was nothing further from

my thoughts than to have troubled you again. But, my dear, it has become merely necessary, and no way by it. You see, this estate of mine has fallen in, which makes of me rather a better match; and the--the business would not have quite the same ridiculous-like appearance that it would before. Besides which, it's supposed that our affairs have got so much ravelled up (as I was saying) that it would be better to let them be the way they are. In my view, this part of the thing is vastly exaggerate, and if I were you I would not wear two thoughts on it. Only it's right I should mention the same, because there's no doubt it has some influence on James More. Then I think we were none so unhappy when we dwelt together in this town before. I think we did pretty well together. If you would look back, my dear--"

"I will look neither back nor forward," she interrupted. "Tell me the one thing: this is my father's doing?"

"He approves of it," said I. "He approved I that I should ask your hand in marriage," and was going on again with somewhat more of an appeal upon her feelings; but she marked me not, and struck into the midst.

"He told you to!" she cried. "It is no sense denying it, you said yourself that there was nothing farther from your thoughts. He told you to."

"He spoke of it the first, if that is what you mean," I began.

She was walking ever the faster, and looking fain in front of her;

but at this she made a little noise in her head, and I thought she

would have run.

"Without which," I went on, "after what you said last Friday, I

would never have been so troublesome as make the offer. But when

he as good as asked me, what was I to do?"

She stopped and turned round upon me.

"Well, it is refused at all events," she cried, "and there will be

an end of that."

And she began again to walk forward.

"I suppose I could expect no better," said I, "but I think you might try to be a little kind to me for the last end of it. I see not why you should be harsh. I have loved you very well, Catriona--no harm that I should call you so for the last time. I have done the best that I could manage, I am trying the same still, and only vexed that I can do no better. It is a strange thing to me that you can take any pleasure to be hard to me."

"I am not thinking of you," she said, "I am thinking of that man, my father."

"Well, and that way, too!" said I. "I can be of use to you that way, too; I will have to be. It is very needful, my dear, that we

should consult about your father; for the way this talk has gone,

an angry man will be James More."

She stopped again. "It is because I am disgraced?" she asked.

"That is what he is thinking," I replied, "but I have told you

already to make nought of it."

"It will be all one to me," she cried. "I prefer to be disgraced!"

I did not know very well what to answer, and stood silent.

There seemed to be something working in her bosom after that last

cry; presently she broke out, "And what is the meaning of all this?"



Why is all this shame lounded on my head? How could you dare it,

David Balfour?"

"My dear," said I, "what else was I to do?"

"I am not your dear," she said, "and I defy you to be calling me

these words."

"I am not thinking of my words," said I. "My heart bleeds for you,

Miss Drummond. Whatever I may say, be sure you have my pity in

your difficult position. But there is just the one thing that I

wish you would bear in view, if it was only long enough to discuss

it quietly; for there is going to be a collieshangie when we two

get home. Take my word for it, it will need the two of us to make

this matter end in peace."

"Ay," said she. There sprang a patch of red in either of her

cheeks. "Was he for fighting you?" said she.

"Well, he was that," said I.

She gave a dreadful kind of laugh. "At all events, it is

complete!" she cried. And then turning on me. "My father and I

are a fine pair," said she, "but I am thanking the good God there

will be somebody worse than what we are. I am thanking the good

God that he has let me see you so. There will never be the girl

made that will not scorn you."

I had borne a good deal pretty patiently, but this was over the  
mark.

"You have no right to speak to me like that," said I. "What have I  
done but to be good to you, or try to be? And here is my  
repayment! O, it is too much."

She kept looking at me with a hateful smile. "Coward!" said she.

"The word in your throat and in your father's!" I cried. "I have  
dared him this day already in your interest. I will dare him  
again, the nasty pole-cat; little I care which of us should fall!

Come," said I, "back to the house with us; let us be done with it,  
let me be done with the whole Hieland crew of you! You will see

what you think when I am dead."

She shook her head at me with that same smile I could have struck her for.

"O, smile away!" I cried. "I have seen your bonny father smile on the wrong side this day. Not that I mean he was afraid, of course," I added hastily, "but he preferred the other way of it."

"What is this?" she asked.

"When I offered to draw with him," said I.

"You offered to draw upon James More!" she cried.

"And I did so," said I, "and found him backward enough, or how  
would we be here?"

"There is a meaning upon this," said she. "What is it you are  
meaning?"

"He was to make you take me," I replied, "and I would not have it.

I said you should be free, and I must speak with you alone; little

I supposed it would be such a speaking! 'AND WHAT IF I REFUSE?'

said he.--'THEN IT MUST COME TO THE THROAT-CUTTING,' says I, 'FOR I

WILL NO MORE HAVE A HUSBAND FORCED ON THAT YOUNG LADY, THAN  
WHAT I

WOULD HAVE A WIFE FORCED UPON MYSELF.' These were my words, they

were a friend's words; bonnily have I paid for them! Now you have

refused me of your own clear free will, and there lives no father  
in the Highlands, or out of them, that can force on this marriage.  
I will see that your wishes are respected; I will make the same my  
business, as I have all through. But I think you might have that  
decency as to affect some gratitude. 'Deed, and I thought you knew  
me better! I have not behaved quite well to you, but that was  
weakness. And to think me a coward, and such a coward as that--O,  
my lass, there was a stab for the last of it!"

"Davie, how would I guess?" she cried. "O, this is a dreadful  
business! Me and mine,"--she gave a kind of a wretched cry at the  
word--"me and mine are not fit to speak to you. O, I could be  
kneeling down to you in the street, I could be kissing your hands  
for forgiveness!"

"I will keep the kisses I have got from you already," cried I. "I will keep the ones I wanted and that were something worth; I will not be kissed in penitence."

"What can you be thinking of this miserable girl?" says she.

"What I am trying to tell you all this while!" said I, "that you had best leave me alone, whom you can make no more unhappy if you tried, and turn your attention to James More, your father, with whom you are like to have a queer pirl to wind."

"O, that I must be going out into the world alone with such a man!"

she cried, and seemed to catch herself in with a great effort.

"But trouble yourself no more for that," said she. "He does not know what kind of nature is in my heart. He will pay me dear for this day of it; dear, dear, will he pay."

She turned, and began to go home and I to accompany her. At which she stopped.

"I will be going alone," she said. "It is alone I must be seeing him."

Some little time I raged about the streets, and told myself I was the worst used lad in Christendom. Anger choked me; it was all very well for me to breathe deep; it seemed there was not air enough about Leyden to supply me, and I thought I would have burst



like a man at the bottom of the sea. I stopped and laughed at myself at a street corner a minute together, laughing out loud, so that a passenger looked at me, which brought me to myself.

"Well," I thought, "I have been a gull and a ninny and a soft Tommy long enough. Time it was done. Here is a good lesson to have nothing to do with that accursed sex, that was the ruin of the man in the beginning and will be so to the end. God knows I was happy enough before ever I saw her; God knows I can be happy enough again when I have seen the last of her."

That seemed to me the chief affair: to see them go. I dwelled upon the idea fiercely; and presently slipped on, in a kind of malevolence, to consider how very poorly they were likely to fare

when Davie Balfour was no longer by to be their milk-cow; at which,  
to my very own great surprise, the disposition of my mind turned  
bottom up. I was still angry; I still hated her; and yet I thought  
I owed it to myself that she should suffer nothing.

This carried me home again at once, where I found the mails drawn  
out and ready fastened by the door, and the father and daughter  
with every mark upon them of a recent disagreement. Catriona was  
like a wooden doll; James More breathed hard, his face was dotted  
with white spots, and his nose upon one side. As soon as I came  
in, the girl looked at him with a steady, clear, dark look that  
might have been followed by a blow. It was a hint that was more  
contemptuous than a command, and I was surprised to see James More  
accept it. It was plain he had had a master talking-to; and I

could see there must be more of the devil in the girl than I had guessed, and more good humour about the man than I had given him the credit of.

He began, at least, calling me Mr. Balfour, and plainly speaking from a lesson; but he got not very far, for at the first pompous swell of his voice, Catriona cut in.

"I will tell you what James More is meaning," said she. "He means we have come to you, beggar-folk, and have not behaved to you very well, and we are ashamed of our ingratitude and ill-behaviour. Now we are wanting to go away and be forgotten; and my father will have guided his gear so ill, that we cannot even do that unless you will give us some more alms. For that is what we are, at an events,

beggar-folk and sorners."

"By your leave, Miss Drummond," said I, "I must speak to your father by myself."

She went into her own room and shut the door, without a word or a look.

"You must excuse her, Mr. Balfour," says James More. "She has no delicacy."

"I am not here to discuss that with you," said I, "but to be quit of you. And to that end I must talk of your position. Now, Mr.

Drummond, I have kept the run of your affairs more closely than you

bargained for. I know you had money of your own when you were borrowing mine. I know you have had more since you were here in Leyden, though you concealed it even from your daughter."

"I bid you beware. I will stand no more baiting," he broke out.

"I am sick of her and you. What kind of a damned trade is this to be a parent! I have had expressions used to me--" There he broke off. "Sir, this is the heart of a soldier and a parent," he went on again, laying his hand on his bosom, "outraged in both characters--and I bid you beware."

"If you would have let me finish," says I, "you would have found I spoke for your advantage."

"My dear friend," he cried, "I know I might have relied upon the generosity of your character."

"Man! will you let me speak?" said I. "The fact is that I cannot win to find out if you are rich or poor. But it is my idea that your means, as they are mysterious in their source, so they are something insufficient in amount; and I do not choose your daughter to be lacking. If I durst speak to herself, you may be certain I would never dream of trusting it to you; because I know you like the back of my hand, and all your blustering talk is that much wind to me. However, I believe in your way you do still care something for your daughter after all; and I must just be doing with that ground of confidence, such as it is."

Whereupon, I arranged with him that he was to communicate with me,  
as to his whereabouts and Catriona's welfare, in consideration of  
which I was to serve him a small stipend.

He heard the business out with a great deal of eagerness; and when  
it was done, "My dear fellow, my dear son," he cried out, "this is  
more like yourself than any of it yet! I will serve you with a  
soldier's faithfulness--"

"Let me hear no more of it!" says I. "You have got me to that  
pitch that the bare name of soldier rises on my stomach. Our  
traffic is settled; I am now going forth and will return in one  
half-hour, when I expect to find my chambers purged of you."

I gave them good measure of time; it was my one fear that I might see Catriona again, because tears and weakness were ready in my heart, and I cherished my anger like a piece of dignity. Perhaps an hour went by; the sun had gone down, a little wisp of a new moon was following it across a scarlet sunset; already there were stars in the east, and in my chambers, when at last I entered them, the night lay blue. I lit a taper and reviewed the rooms; in the first there remained nothing so much as to awake a memory of those who were gone; but in the second, in a corner of the floor, I spied a little heap that brought my heart into my mouth. She had left behind at her departure all that she had ever had of me. It was the blow that I felt sorest, perhaps because it was the last; and I fell upon that pile of clothing and behaved myself more foolish than I care to tell of.



Late in the night, in a strict frost, and my teeth chattering, I came again by some portion of my manhood and considered with myself. The sight of these poor frocks and ribbons, and her shifts, and the clocked stockings, was not to be endured; and if I were to recover any constancy of mind, I saw I must be rid of them ere the morning. It was my first thought to have made a fire and burned them; but my disposition has always been opposed to wastery, for one thing; and for another, to have burned these things that she had worn so close upon her body seemed in the nature of a cruelty. There was a corner cupboard in that chamber; there I determined to bestow them. The which I did and made it a long business, folding them with very little skill indeed but the more care; and sometimes dropping them with my tears. All the heart was

gone out of me, I was weary as though I had run miles, and sore like one beaten; when, as I was folding a kerchief that she wore often at her neck, I observed there was a corner neatly cut from it. It was a kerchief of a very pretty hue, on which I had frequently remarked; and once that she had it on, I remembered telling her (by way of a banter) that she wore my colours. There came a glow of hope and like a tide of sweetness in my bosom; and the next moment I was plunged back in a fresh despair. For there was the corner crumpled in a knot and cast down by itself in another part of the floor.

But when I argued with myself, I grew more hopeful. She had cut that corner off in some childish freak that was manifestly tender; that she had cast it away again was little to be wondered at; and I

was inclined to dwell more upon the first than upon the second, and  
to be more pleased that she had ever conceived the idea of that  
keepsake, than concerned because she had flung it from her in an  
hour of natural resentment.