Doorways in Drumorty

Lorna Moon

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DOORWAYS IN DRUMORTY ***

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DOORWAYS
IN DRUMORTY

By
LORNA MOON



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To My Dad
This, His Wee Nottie's First Book

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DOORWAYS IN DRUMORTY

THE CORP'

THE CORP'

By shutting the door to within three inches of the jamb, and moving her chair nearer the cat's hassock by the fire, old Kirsty could see Mistress MacNab's door and watch the mourners come and go.

She had been sitting there for three days, secretly watching, her dismay growing with every hour as she realized that it was possible that Mistress MacNab could carry her rage about the butter prize to the extent of not bidding her to see the corpse.

When Mistress MacKenty brought the startling news on Sunday evening that "Sandy MacNab had choked on a cold potato and hiccoughed himself to death," Kirsty had had a momentary qualm of doubt. She wished she hadn't openly scoffed at Mistress MacNab's butter and flaunted her own first prize on the way back from the show. It was "an unwise-like thing to do with death so sure and life so uncertain; but who would expect a braw man like Sandy MacNab to choke to death on a potato?"

"And besides," she reflected, "Mistress MacNab, be she as angry as she may, would never bury Sandy without all the honor that was due him." And who in all Drumorty would think of being buried without Kirsty Fraser to cry as the lid was screwed down? Had she no' cried at every funeral for forty-five years? And was it no' part and parcel of the ceremony for her to have a fit when the body was carried out? And was it no' true that the laddies of the village hung round the house of sorrow waiting for the chance to run for the doctor to bring her round?

She recalled the first time. What a day that had been! Never would she forget looking into the coffin of Maggie Sclessor and seeing her lying there so satisfied-like with the best-looking mutch[1] in

Drumorty on her head. Never would she forget the rage that had filled her at the sight. For who would have expected Maggie Sclessor, poor as she was, to have a hand-made lace mutch laid away to be buried in and never to say a word about it? She had cried with envy, but the neighbors thought it was with grief, and they had turned their attention from Maggie and her braw mutch to Kirsty as her sobs grew louder; and when the doctor averred that Kirsty had been "on the very verge o' a fit," they screwed the lid down on Maggie without further to-do.

And as they carried the body out, Kirsty reflected with satisfaction, "Weel, she had a fine mutch, but wha will think o' that noo?"

And then, with each succeeding funeral, she had added to her laurels; having once tasted the joy of stealing the attention from the corpse, she could not forego the excitement and the commiseration and the secret gratitude of the mourners. Her "fits" grew more and more masterly, until the neighbors argued boastfully:

"I'm tellin' ye, when my man died, she had the worst fit she ever had." And the answer, as positive, would be:

"Mistress MacPherson, hae I no' got the use o' my sight, praise be to God? Did I no' see her eyes roll up to heaven and her legs stiffen when my Jeannie was carried oot?"

Certainly, Mistress MacNab would never think of burying her man without Kirsty's being there, butter prize or no butter prize. Thus reassured, Kirsty had resolved to outdo all her past efforts at the funeral of Sandy MacNab. Always in the back of her head she had had a notion that by biting the sides of her

cheeks till they bled, and frothing the blood upon her lips, she could give a more convincing and gruesome fit than any she had ever given. She had saved this for some great day. And this was the day. The world would see that Kirsty Fraser scorned to bear a grudge in the face of death. She would treat Mistress MacNab better than if she had been a friend.

On Monday morning she felt so kindly toward Mistress MacNab that she was minded to step over and say a word of comfort to her. She even thought of offering to do the "biddin'," although she knew full that her legs would never stand it.

But Mistress MacKenty came in to say that Maggie Tate was to do the "biddin'," and that the funeral was on Wednesday, adding meaningly, "But there's no need to tell ye that; ye'll be the first to be bidden, nae doot."

Her tone made Kirsty uneasy.

At sundown, when Tammas, her son, came wearily in, she watched him wash his face in the tin basin, and as he spluttered and blew the water,—he never thought he was clean unless he made a noise about it,—she started to ask if he had heard anything, but stopped, mistrusting her voice. It would no' do to let Tammas know that she was anxious. And should it be that some were already bidden, Tammas would know that she had been slighted, being left to the last.

On Tuesday the coffin was brought home. Jimmy Tocher tripped on the step as they carried it in, and it banged against the door. Kirsty could hear Mistress MacNab raking them up-hill and down-dale for their fecklessness, and she wanted to join them and see for herself if they had dented the mountings, but she

couldn't make the first advance.

At dusk she saw Maggie Tate on her rounds doing the bidding. She cried in at Jessie MacLean's and then went on to Mistress MacKenty's. "She'll be here inside ten minutes," Kirsty reflected, and rose to put the kettle on, so that she could make her a cup of tea. "It's unco thirsty work, biddin' to funerals."

It was getting too dark to see. The kettle boiled dry, and she pulled it forward on the crane. "Mistress MacKenty is talking her stone-blind. She'll never get here to-night," she decided, but she couldn't give up watching.

Tammas came home. He had heard something, and was uneasy in his mind. Kirsty could tell, because he was whistling *The Lass o' Ballochmyle* between his teeth, which was a sign. And forby that, he said the *long* grace before supper, and he said it slowly, as she always had begged him to. He was trying to be kind to her; he even blew the smoke from his pipe up the chimney instead of out across the room. It was unnatural-like, and Kirsty knew that his behavior meant that he was sure that she would not be bidden to see the corpse. She resented his giving up hope before she did. He had never valued her fits. On occasions he had even advised her to bide away if funerals made her take on so. He was like his father, that he was. He was reliable-like, but he was dull. All the Frasers were dull. Why could he no' speak up and say, "Ye'll no' be bidden to see the corp', and I'm glad o' 't," if that was what he was thinking? She'd give him just a minute more; then she'd ask him outright.

"Mither." She looked at him as he spoke. To avoid her eyes, he bent down, and used the heel of his boot to press the tobacco into the bowl of his pipe.

"Weel?" she prompted, and there was an edge on her voice.

"I'm thinkin' o' drivin' up to Skilly's the morn ti borrow their rake. Would ye like to go wi' me?"

So he believed she wouldn't be bidden, and he was trying to save her face. He little knew. *He* had never set store by her fits, but others had. Mistress MacNab might wait till the last to bid her, as was natural; she'd do the same herself, but bid her she would, as Kirsty knew well. So she answered tartly:

"I'm thinkin' yer losing the wee bit o' sense ye were born wi', Tammas. The morn's Sandy MacNab's funeral."

Tammas reddened guiltily.

"Oh, aye," he murmured. "I had forgotten, mither."

And now this was the day of the funeral. Through the small space between the jamb and the door Kirsty could see Mistress MacPherson knocking for admission to the house of sorrow. She had a small parcel in her hand, which she held gingerly upright.

"A jar o' calf's-foot jelly, nae doot," Kirsty informed Tammas as she called his attention to it. "That's the tenth parcel since ten o'clock. Mistress MacNab will no' need ti buy a bite o' food for a fortnight." She said this exultantly. Funerals were Kirsty's art, and she liked them to be successful. "Tammas, keep out from between me an' the door. I can no' see through ye."

Tammas had made another attempt to shut the door in a yearning desire to spare her. Manlike, he could not understand why she tortured herself by

looking on. He had seen her put on her black mutch in readiness, and his heart was sick for her. He wondered why she could not give up hope. He paced the floor silently, stopping every now and then to do some kindly useless thing; and she, knowing what prompted him, would snap at him furiously.

The minister came. Kirsty sat rigidly forward in her chair as he was admitted and the door closed after him. Tammas stopped pacing. He didn't know what to do with his hands. He tried them in his pockets, and then took them out again, hanging them limply by his sides.

From over the street came the singing. Kirsty picked nervously at the crochet edging on her knitted wristlets. She half turned to look at Tammas, and her voice quavered:

"They're no' to bid me, Tammas." But as Mistress MacNab's door opened and Skilly's lad came running out, Kirsty rose to her feet, eager and joyous. "Aye, they're sendin' for me *noo*." She started toward the door. But the laddie ran past. Tammas helped her back to her chair. Then, for a Fraser, he rose to great heights.

"I'm sorry for them, mither," he said. "It will be feckless[2] -likefuneral without a fit at it."

She sat up at the thought, grasping at it eagerly.

"Aye, will it no', Tammas? Will it no'?" she cried gratefully.

Then, turning it over in her mind, she found it sweet with comfort, and she chuckled while the tears were still wet upon her face.

"They'll value my fits more than ever noo,

Tammas. Puir Sandy MacNab!"

She nursed the thought joyously. She was sorry that it had happened to Sandy MacNab, for he had been a good man, and deserving of honor; but she was glad that Mistress MacNab must share the humility.

"She's cuttin' off her nose ti spite her face, puir body! I could feel it in my heart ti pity her, Tammas."

Fully recovered in spirit, she got up lightsomely, and began to unfasten the strings of her mutch.

"We'll shut the door on the rest o' 't, Tammas," she said, and was moving toward it when Mistress MacKenty came breathlessly in. She was burning with news to tell, and greedy to see its effect.

"Mistress MacNab is havin' a fit, an' Skilly's laddie has gone for the doctor," she cried.

"A fit!" Kirsty screamed the words in a hysteria of unbelief. "What would *she* be knowing of a fit, she that has never had one?"

Gloating with the joy of telling it, for she had always envied Kirsty her fits, Mistress MacKenty's voice swelled with gratification as she answered:

"Such a fit as I have never seen. Her eyes are rollin' to heaven, and the blood is frothin' on her lips."

At that Kirsty's knees began to tremble beneath her. She put out a wavering hand and gripped Tammas by the sleeve, striving to keep upright and face Mistress MacKenty, who continued maliciously:

"Drumorty will never forget this fit. I'll mind on 't

mysel' if I ever hae a corp'."

And Kirsty Fraser knew that her glory was gone. Another had stolen the chief jewel of her crown. There would be none in all Drumorty who would do her homage again.

But not before Mistress MacKenty would she bow her head. She took her hand from Tammas' sleeve and stood alone, and nothing in her voice as she spoke told Mistress MacKenty that her pride lay stricken.

"Gie her the ammonia bottle to take over, Tammas. I hae had slight fits mysel', an' I ken ammonia's good."

And Mistress MacKenty wondered at this heroic thing that made Kirsty Fraser disclaim the glory of her fits and hand her laurels to another. She stood shamed before it, and she hung her head and crept away, unable longer to look Kirsty Fraser in the face.

Kirsty stood till she had gone; then her hand went feeling blindly for her chair. She cupped one hand helplessly in the other as she sat. The string of her black mutch hung down like a weary pendulum that had wagged its hour. As Tammas knelt by her, dumbly anxious to comfort, she whispered:

"Think ye she knows I care, Tammas?"

"Niver, mither. I would no' have known it mysel'."

Assured of that, she let the tears steal down her wrinkled cheeks. Her hands trembled together helplessly in her lap. Tammas reached out and held them firmly in his, and they sat there silently together.

Her thoughts went seeking comfort everywhere,

but found none. With every funeral her pride would die a little more; with every funeral Mistress MacNab would reap a greater triumph. None would think of Kirsty's fits except to say how poor they were, and how great were the fits of Mistress MacNab. And so until the end.

"O Tammas," she cried, "when I am dead and lying helpless, ye'll no' let that Mistress MacNab have fits at my funeral! Promise me that, Tammas!"

SILK BOTH SIDES

SILK BOTH SIDES

"—And two and a half yards o' four inch black satin ribbon."

Jessie MacLean added this last fatal item with an upward jerk of her head lest Mistress MacKenty, at the other side of the counter, should think she was ashamed of her purchase. But Mistress MacKenty had a nose for news rather than an instinct for tragedy, and by the suppressed eagerness in her voice as she asked, "And ye'll want it silk on both sides I'll warrant?" you could see that she was already half-way down the road to the smithy to spread the news that: "Jessie MacLean had lost heart and would be out in a bonnet in the morn, so help her Davey."

"Aye, silk both sides," Jessie answered, letting her eyes range the shelves carelessly to prove that there was nothing momentous in her buying bonnet strings.

Silk both sides proved it! A satin-faced ribbon might have many uses, but silk both sides was a bonnet string by all the laws of millinery known to Drumorty.

Telling about it five minutes later, Mistress MacKenty said, “I might hae been wrang when she bought the silk geraniums, and I may hae been over-hasty when she said ‘half a yard o’ black lace’—but silk both sides is as good as swearing it on the Bible.”

In Drumorty, a bonnet with strings tied below the chin means that youth is over. About the time the second baby is born, the good wife abandons her hat —forever—and appears in a bonnet with ties. She may be any age from eighteen to twenty-five; for matrimony, and motherhood, and age, come early in Drumorty. The spinster clings longer to her hat, for while she wears it, any bachelor may take heart and “speer”[3] her; and if she be “keeping company” she may cling to her hat until she be thirty “and a bittock”; but after that—if she would hold the respect of her community, she must cease to “gallivant” about “wi’ a hat” and dress like a decent woman, in a bonnet with ties.

And Jessie MacLean was six and thirty as Baldie Tocher could tell you, for did he no’ have the pleasure of burying the exciseman the very morning that Jessie first saw the light of day, and was it no’ the very next year that Nancy MacFarland’s cow got mired in the moss?

Drumorty had been very lenient with her. Many a good wife thought it was high time that Jessie laid aside her hat, but always she held her peace, remembering her bridal gown and the care with which Jessie had made it, for Jessie was the village seamstress, and it was a secret, whispered, that she

charged only half price for making wedding gowns, because she liked to make them so much.

Another reason for their lenience was Jock Sclessor. For fifteen years Jock had “kept company” with her; not one Sunday morning had he missed “crying by” for Jessie to go to morning service. He would come round the bend of the road from Skilly’s farm just as the sexton gave the bell that first introductory ring which meant “bide a wee till I get her goin’ full swing and then bide at hame frae the kirk if ye dare”; and Jessie would come out of her door and mince down the sanded walk between the rows of boxwood to the gate, and affect surprise at seeing Jock just as if she had not been watching for him behind her window curtain this past five minutes.

Jock was the cotter[4] on Skilly’s farm. Every year he intended to “speer” Jessie when thrashing was over. Tammas, his dog, will tell you how many times he had been on the very point of asking her the very next day, but—always the question of adding another room came up and not for the life of him could he decide whether to level the rowan tree and build it on the east—or to move the peats and build it on the west; and by the time he had made up his mind to cart the peats down behind the byre and build it on the west, lambing was round again and he let it go by for another year.

And every year Jessie was in a flutter as thrashing was nearing the finish. One year she had been so sure that he would “speer” her that she bought a new scraper; for Jock could make your very heart stand still, he was that careless about scraping the mud off his boots. Often when she was alone, she would practise ways of telling Jock that he must clean his

boots before he came in: “Good man, hae ye forgotten the scraper?” was abandoned because it wasn’t strictly honest, for Jessie knew full well that he always forgot the scraper. “Gang back and clean your feet,” was set aside also, because it was too commanding and “Dinna forget the scraper” was also discarded because it isn’t good to nag a man before he has set foot in the door. But none of the expressions had been tried out yet—for when Jock dropped in with her, after service, Jessie hurried him by the scraper as if it might shout at him, “She expects you to speer her!” and so put her to shame.

But now thrashing had been over for weeks, and every Sunday since then, she had looked for the white gowan[5] in Jock’s coat, for what swain “worth his ears full of cold water” ever asked the question without that emblem of courage in his buttonhole? It is a signal to the world that he means to propose, that he is going in cold blood to do it—and forever after his good wife can remind him of that, should he suggest that he was inveigled into it by some female wile.

Last Sunday, on their way to church, Jessie cleared her throat nervously and grasped her new testament, bracing herself as she asked in a thin voice that was much too offhand: “Would your peats no’ be better sheltered in the lea o’ the byre?” and Jock replied: “Na, they are better where they are.”

And so a hope, nourished fifteen years, died, and through the service she sat gazing straight ahead, with her eyes wide open, for the wider eyes are open, the more tears they can hold without spilling over. And next Saturday she bought black satin ribbon “silk both sides” and the world, meaning Drumorty, knew that Jessie’s tombstone would not

read “Beloved wife of ——”.

In Jessie’s cottage the blinds were drawn on Saturday evening, and you who have suffered will not ask me to pull them aside and show you how a faded spinster looks when she weeps; nor how her fingers tremble when she sews upon bonnet strings; but let me tell you how bravely she stepped out next morning wearing her bonnet, with never a look through the curtain to see if Jock was on his way, nor a glance to see if the neighbors were watching. Her step was just as firm upon the sanded path, and her head just as high; perhaps she grasped her testament more tightly than usual, but what soul on the rack would not do that?

Jock came round the bend as she reached the gate. She clung to the latch to keep herself from tearing the bonnet from her head. Oh, Fate, that sits high and laughs, have you the heart to laugh now? Jock was wearing a white gowan. It was just a dozen steps or so back to the house, and a hat, and happiness; but the world knew that she had bought bonnet strings and was that not Mistress MacKenty watching from behind her curtain? Go forward, Jessie—there is no turning back, and go proudly! Open the latch and answer his “guid morning” and smile—and don’t, don’t, let your hands tremble so, or he will surely guess!

Look your fill from behind the curtain, Mistress MacKenty! You can not see a heartache when it is hidden by a black alpaca gown and when the heart belongs to Jessie MacLean!

Jock Sclessor, your one chance of happiness is now! Lead her back into the house and take the bonnet from her head! No, laggard and fool that you are, you are wondering if she has noticed the gowan!

Has she not! She has watched for it for fifteen years! Speak, you fool! Don't keep staring at her bonnet! You dullard, Jessie must come to your rescue, and she does, "Is the sexton no' late this morning?" Jessie turned out of the gate as she spoke, snapping the latch with the right amount of care.

"Aye, later than usual," Jock agreed. (The sexton was never late in his life, and at that moment the bell rang out to give Jock the lie.) But Jock was so dazed, he would have agreed if she had said, "Let us choke the minister."

As they walked to the church, he meditated, "Evidently she never expected me to speer her, and she's never so much as glimpsed the gowan. I'll slip it out when we kneel in the kirk. But maybe I better sound her out first. It's gey[6] and lonesome for a man biding by himself."

They were just turning round by the town hall where the rowan trees are red, when he said, "I had been thinkin' o' levelin' my rowan tree." Jessie's heart thumped. Here it came! (That was why he wouldn't move the peats.) But she wouldn't help him a foot of the road—she had waited too long—he must come every step himself.

"Oh, that would be a pity—it's a bonnie tree," she answered.

Not much help here, but he would try again. "I was thinking o' building."

"Building? My certies! What could ye be building so near the house?" this with some malice for all the fifteen long years. But you have gone too far, Jessie; he needs help.

"I—oh—I thought I'd build a shed for peats."

Thud! That was Jessie's heart you heard and that queer thin voice is Jessie's, saying, "I thought—ye were minded to leave the peats the other side o' the house."

"Aye, I am minded to leave them there—but a body canna hae too many peats."

And as they knelt in kirk, he slipped the gowan out—and Jessie did not need to widen her eyes to hold the tears this time. That sorrow was past, she would never weep over it again.

At home, she brewed her tea, looking round at her rag rugs and white tidies with pleasure. The tidy on the big chair was as white and smooth as when she pinned it there in the morning, and there was no mud to be carefully washed off the rug by the door. There was a certain contentment in knowing that it would never be; a certain exhilaration in knowing that next Sunday she could not be disappointed, because next Sunday she would not hope. She sipped her tea peacefully and smiled at the bonnet sitting so restful-like on the dresser, and at the tidy on the big chair so spotless and smooth, and thought, "Jock Sclessor would have been a mussy man to have about a house. I'm thinkin' his mother was over-lenient when she brought him up."

And Jock, at Skilly's, was thinking, "I wouldna had time to build it anyway. Lambing is here—and that is too bonnie a tree to be cut down."

THE SINNING OF JESSIE MACLEAN

THE SINNING OF JESSIE MACLEAN

Jessie MacLean felt that their romance belonged also to her, for she had seen their first meeting. It was on a Sunday morning after service, and Jessie was returning from her walk along by Skilly's wood. She was wondering as she stepped daintily, rustling her Sunday-best alpaca gown, if the gold chain she wore had marked her neck; and whether the gimlet-eyed Mistress MacKenty had seen it as she sat behind her in kirk. (Well, it wasn't all gold, but, as Jessie protested defensively to herself: "Pure gold's that soft ye have ti mix it.")

On hot Sundays it was always a race between the sermon and the chain; about the time the minister got to the "thirdlies" and "lastlies" Jessie was in a fidget. She could wear the chain a bare hour and a half without it marking if the weather was cool; but this had been a very hot Sunday. Out of the sight of inquisitive eyes she stopped and spread her handkie between the chain and her neck. Then she turned along Skilly's burnside intending to cross it at the stepping-stones; and it was here she came upon them. So flustered was she, that she forgot the dangling handkie, but then she might have worn ram's horns and they would not have noticed it.

Gawky and shy, they were exchanging their first "It's waurm the day" and "What's yer hurry" which in Drumorty may mean: "Who is this gallant youth who stirs my bosom?" or, "Fair maid, eternity were too brief, could I but spend it gazing in your eyes."

Jessie understood, and seeing their embarrassment, blushed in sympathy and tilted her parasol between herself and them. She had meant to cross the burn at the stepping-stones, but, her heart

pleasantly aflutter with a sense of being a sharer in a secret, she kept on down the burnside until she was out of sight; and there she sat down and removed her shoes and stockings before hitching her dress to her knees and wading the burn.

Jessie's own romance laid away in the lavender of memory, stirred again at the thought of the two. Walking home she pondered who the lad might be. He was a stranger in Drumorty. The lass was Bella Tocher, the kitchen wench at Skilly's farm; a well-favored lass, and hard working, rosy and full-bosomed although barely sixteen.

So engrossed was she, that she went all the way home without remembering to remove the telltale handkie from her neck; and never gave it a thought, until, as she was turning in at her own door, Mistress MacKenty leaned over the gate and sweetly malicious, called, so that Jessie would know she had seen: "Ye do weel ti guard agin' blood-poisinin', Jessie lass."

Next Sunday Jessie did an unheard-of thing. She stayed at home from the morning service and watched the road to Skilly's farm to see if the lad would come back. She had fortified herself against disappointment by boiling dumplings in the broth. No matter how keen the edge of disappointment, Jessie had proved that dumplings in the broth could ease it a little. And after spending all morning at the window watching, with a bandage bound about her neck to advertise to the curious that a sore throat had kept her at home from the kirk, she was just about to turn to the dumplings for solace, when he came by whistling and heading up the road to Skilly's.

"My certies!" she cried, pretending to herself that she was shocked at his ardor. "He's back *again*, doesna gie the lassie time to draw a lanely breath."

Feeling the need of some one to rejoice with her, she gave the cat a dumpling. It sniffed it, and showed its contempt for her frivolity by crossing to the other side of the fireplace and seating itself with its back to her. Jessie, taking this rebuff with unusual spirit, retorted: "You're a persnickety old maid, there's no' a romantic hair on yer head." And to show that she wouldn't be brow-beaten by the cat on this joyful day, she opened the glass-door of the what-not with a loud click; and later, ate her dumplings off the best willow-pattern china.

Through that winter Jessie didn't need the dumplings to fortify her. The lad was attentive enough. She would see the two by the hayricks, or wandering with fingers entwined by the burnside every Sunday evening. But in the spring he stopped coming. And Bella would stand for hours watching the empty road; while Jessie in an anguish of sympathy would watch both the girl and the road from her corner window.

Bella was listless and pale. There was something pathetic in the way she made no pretense of doing anything but watching. This was intolerable to Jessie who wanted the girl to save her pride, so when she would see a neighbor coming, she would whisper fiercely: "Walk along as if ye were looking for gowans, dinna let them see yer looking for the lad," but only the muslin curtains heard Jessie's advice. Bella, dazed with despair, was indifferent to gossip.

Then it was rumored that, "Bella Tocher's lad had gone to Edinburgh to the soldierin'." And after that Bella watched the road no more.

It was Mistress MacKenty who said: “I’m thinkin’ Skilly’s will be needin’ a new kitchen wench afore Whitsuntide; and there’s them that will learn that nae guid ever came o’ gallivantin’ wi’ a strange lad on the Sabbath day.” And having delivered this darkly meaning speech she pursed withered lips with vindictive relish and refused to say more, adding only: “I hae lassies o’ my ain, it ill becomes me to speak; but mark my words, there’ll be an elders’ meeting in Drumorty afore many weeks.”

Jessie understood now the pale watching face of Bella; and understood, also, the despair that made her watch for him without pretense. “Puir wee lass,” she whispered. “Watching for her man, and him awa’ to no’ come back.”

When Mistress MacKenty came in that evening to say, that: “Skilly was sendin’ the shameless limmer packin’ the morn’s mornin’,” Jessie furtively hid something white and small upon which she had been sewing. She stood up while Mistress MacKenty spoke, and no line of her figure, nor any tone of her voice, could be taken to mean that she invited Mistress MacKenty to take a chair.

“It’s a sore disgrace to the whole parish, and harder forby on Skilly himsel’ and him an elder o’ the kirk.” Mistress MacKenty’s voice was dulcet with sympathy for the poor elder. She was looking around for a seat in which to sink and continue her lamentations, when, in the chill silence of the usually sympathetic Jessie, she sensed something strange. Jessie was clasping and unclasping her hands in front of her thin waist, and her eyes were glinting. Could it be that the gentle Jessie MacLean was fighting to keep her hands from flying in the face of Mistress MacKenty? Mistress MacKenty must have shared that

wild thought also, for, catching sight of Jessie, she paused and backed away, suddenly remembering that she had “a pot o’ kale on the fire,” and was gone without even closing the door as she went.

Jessie closed the door after her and bolted it, and drew down the blinds. The little bit of white sewing came out from its hiding-place. Mistress MacKenty vowed next day that Jessie’s light had burned all night but added that she didn’t know why, because; “Jessie MacLean is *that* secretive her window-blinds fit all the way round.”

All next morning Jessie sat by the window watching Skilly’s road, her head propped wearily on her palms, a bright red spot on the wrinkled apple of each cheek. All Drumorty was watching Skilly’s road, but *not* with the tender purpose that was in the heart of Jessie MacLean. Drumorty was swollen with righteous wrath. The virtue of Drumorty was outraged; and it was waiting to visit its saintly indignation on the head of “the shameless limmer.”[7] Jessie shut up alone knew nothing of this.

At noon she saw Bella coming along the road toward the village street, a bundle with all her belongings slung on her arm. She would proceed in little tumbling runs, then stop and sway, gather strength again, and run a little more. Sometimes she would drop the bundle and have to get down laboriously on one knee to pick it up.

Then Jessie saw the thing that stilled her heart for a moment. As Bella turned into the street, the blinds of Mistress MacPherson’s cottage snapped down and remained, like eyelids in death. Then, down with swift vindictiveness came the blinds of the next cottage; Bella heard, and looked about her, as blinds

on either side of her hurried down to their righteous window-sills. She stopped and tottered feebly, then, as if blows were showering upon her, she flung her arm across her face, and lowered her head and ran.

"Click" went the blind of Mistress MacKenty's window as she passed; this brought Jessie to her feet with blazing eyes. Rushing out, she ran along the street after the fleeing girl, calling: "Bella—Bella Tocher."

Thinking she was being pursued only to be taunted, Bella gathered her strength anew and ran faster. Sobs rose in Jessie's throat as she saw her reel in her efforts to get away; and she called her name again, trying to make her voice both loud and coaxing. As Jessie caught up and touched her arm, the girl stopped and faced her panting, a driven thing, ready to fight if she must.

"Come back to my house, Bella," Jessie urged breathlessly.

"So ye can take yer ease while ye tell me I've disgraced the parish o' Drumorty?—So ye can tell me I am justly punished for my sins?" Bella's voice rose in hysterical gasps, her white face twitched piteously.

"Na, na," urged Jessie, speaking in soothing accents. "Come so I can show ye the wee shirts I've been makin'."

It was the tone of her voice and tears on Jessie's cheeks, not her words, that brought the answering sob in Bella's throat and softened the defensive lines of her form.

"Come back and stay wi' me," Jessie's tone was tender.

Responding to it, the tears streamed down Bella's face, but she shook her head: "I winna stay an' face the elders. I'll walk till I drop first."

"Ye'll no'—I'll face them for ye. Come awa'," Jessie coaxed, then in a warning whisper: "The blinds are down; but they are peekin' out below them." She put an arm round the girl and, reaching out a hand for the bundle, said tenderly: "Yer nathing but a bairn yersel'—come."

Bella relinquished the bundle to Jessie's urging hand, and, faltering like a tired child, turned back with her along the street of drawn blinds.

2

With what terror, or with what bravery, these two met the turmoil of that night we may not tell. Nor may we echo the brave words that a gentle spinster used, to hearten an erring child in her hour of sore trial. These things are written by the angels, and only mothers may read them.

But we may look in with dawn, and see the puckered pink velvet son of Bella Tocher as he lies on Jessie's lap screaming, for he can not see yet how near is Jessie's lap to the tender heaven of her heart. But we can see, and we are shamed to look unbidden upon the glory of a spinster's face, when mother-love has wakened in her breast.

3

There was defiance in Jessie's gait as she stepped up to the entrance of Mistress MacPherson's byre at milking time that evening. She rattled the two flagons she carried challengingly, and forestalled any

comment from Mistress MacPherson about the extra flagon, by saying cheerily: “I’ll need a quart extra ilka[8] day now.”

Her boldness had the effect of completely winding Mistress MacPherson, who had been waiting all day for milking time so that she could “gie Jessie MacLean a piece o’ her mind.” “Let her come creepin’ up here askin’ for milk for that hussy—” Mistress MacPherson had finished the implication with a grim-faced nod, as she discussed the “goin’s on” with Mistress MacKenty that morning.

But Jessie hadn’t “come creepin’,” and Mistress MacPherson, ready to attack, hesitated with that confusion which comes also to a dog, when it has got all ready to chase a cat that refuses to run. Jessie, palpitating with victory, airily handed over the two flagons; and Mistress MacPherson, unable to rally for the moment, took them murmuring only, “Oh, aye.”

But if it was a victory for Jessie, it only added to the virtuous indignation Drumorty felt toward Bella. Had Bella been found dying in a ditch that morning, the good women of Drumorty would have found pity for her in their hearts. But that Bella should have faced her hour with a roof over her head and a bed beneath her, and a kindly hand to meet her needs; that, in the opinion of Drumorty was nothing short of “lauding the evil-doer.”

“Revelin’ in her sins,” “Made o’ and tended, as if she were an honest woman,” these and other denunciations flew rife at mart and meeting as the weeks passed, and it was reported that “Jessie MacLean was sleepin’ on a shake-down while that limmer was lying like a queen in Jessie’s feather bed.” But that was only hearsay, for not once did

Jessie let one of them pass the door, though many were the pretexts devised by Mistress MacKenty to gain admission, from the borrowing of an egg which she returned the next day (the same egg, as Jessie could prove, for did she not mark it on purpose; for what use would Mistress MacKenty be having for an egg three days before Sunday?) to the bringing of a bottle of raspberry-vinegar to see if Jessie had a corkscrew that could get the cork out.

Bella sensed it all with sullen resentment which would show in her eyes when the baby's cries forced its existence more sharply upon her. She hated her motherhood. Motherhood, that was thrust cruelly upon her while she was still a child; motherhood, robbed of its honor and covered with shame; motherhood and its pains, stripped of the love which makes its agony a glory. This was the motherhood Bella knew, and her heart was bitter against it. She felt trapped. Perhaps the child, helpless in her arms, crying to her for food, might have saved her from this, and have roused in her girl-heart that compassion for the helpless which is mother-love. But Jessie, all eagerness to surround Bella with comfort, took the care of the baby upon herself; and as love for it fastened upon her heart, Jessie could not bear to let any hand touch it but her own. Its morning bath was a rite to be lingered over with exclamations of wonder and delight. If Jessie noticed at all that Bella did not share her ecstasy she didn't think it strange; for Jessie had quickly ceased to think of Bella as the baby's mother. Her feeling for Bella was in a smaller measure the same feeling she had for the baby. She felt herself mother to both of them. So while Jessie's heart was greatened and stirred by her care of these two, Bella, robbed of the saving outlet of service, became daily more morose.

The memory of the drawn blinds seared her; and she knew that the day would come soon when she must face Drumorty again. She felt little gratitude toward Jessie, and just a cool wonder that a good woman could also be kind.

The baby was about six weeks old, when Jessie came in one day with heightened color, and her step brisk with excitement. She opened her hand to disclose three gold sovereigns and a half-sovereign.

"Three pounds ten, Bella; the gentry at the big hoose hae paid their sewing bill." Then turning swiftly to the baby she cried crooningly: "Jessie's wee lamb will no' need ti sleep in the clothes-basket noo; it's a pram an' a cradle he'll be havin'."

Jessie dropped the money into the toby-mug on the mantel and was preparing to gather the baby up from the clothes-basket when she heard a step on the path outside. She glanced through the window, then dodged back with the warning whisper: "It's Skilly!"

Like a flash she clapped on her bonnet, and seized a basket and was stepping sedately out at the door just as Skilly raised his hand to knock upon it.

"My certies, Skilly," exclaimed Jessie, shutting the door carefully behind her as she stopped facing him on the step. "Wha wid expect *you* to be visitin' this time o' day?"

"I hae come ti see Bella Tocher," said Skilly, looking suggestively at the closed door before which Jessie stood like a sentinel.

"Weel, I'm vexed for ye;" cooed Jessie. "Bella's oot bye somewhere, an' I'm on my way ti the flesher's."

Skilly was not deceived, and indeed Jessie didn't

expect him to be. She smiled grimly as she caught his eye glancing searchingly at the window as the muslin curtains moved under Bella's touch; but she continued to stand barring his way to the door, her arms folded militantly through the empty basket which posed like a shield upon her breast.

Skilly lengthened out his gangling inches to a greater assumption of dignity, and, ignoring Jessie's hostility with a lofty tolerance, said in the tone he usually kept for reading the first lesson:

"As an elder o' the kirk it is my duty to speak wi' Bella Tocher aboot her misbegotten bairn; and wha we may name as the father o' 't."

"An' it was yer godly duty as an elder, nae doot, that made ye turn her oot to die by the roadside?" Jessie's tone was the essence of sweetened venom.

But Skilly, not meaning to lose his unimpeachable superiority by bandying words with a woman, answered calmly:

"I hae no call to shelter a wanton and unrepentant woman; if Bella Tocher is minded to face the elders and make admission o' her sins——"

"Her sins!" Jessie broke in. "It's no' her sins Drumorty is punishin' her for; it's the evidence, Skilly. It's the bairn. There's them that sit on the elders' bench and gie judgment, that ken more o' sin than Bella Tocher, but they dinna get found out: their siller in the collection plate blinds the minister."

This was a home thrust, and Skilly reddened under it, but he clambered back to his official dignity by booming pontifically:

"It behooves us to deal kindly wi' the repentant. If

Bella Tocher is humble of spirit and contrite of heart, I will see mysel' that her bairn is housed in the alms-house; an' I'll take her back—" Then, seeing the chance to make a bargain, Skilly dropped his oratorical tone, and added hastily: "But mind ye, no' at the old price; I'll gie her half o' 't."

At that Jessie laughed grayly, and two red lights flashed battle from her eyes.

"Yer a sainted and godlike man, Skilly, wi' a heart sweet wi' charity. Now that the lass is able to work again, ye'll put her bairn in the alms-house at nae cost to yersel'; and ye'll let her carry swill to yer pigs at half the siller ye'd have to pay anither; it's a forgivin' an' tender heart ye have—"

Skilly bridled impatiently and turned away; the woman would try the patience of a saint!

"Aye! Run, run, Skilly," urged Jessie tauntingly. "If ye bide, I may let ye see yersel'; and the sight will make ye sick."

It was too much! An elder of the kirk couldn't be expected to stand it any longer. Skilly left her and stalked down the path, his back stiff as buckram.

Jessie turned back into the house all aflutter. Nature had not made her a fighter; she could not have lifted a whisper to defend herself; but accident had made her play mother and so she could fight like a tiger, although her knees might tremble for hours afterward.

"Did ye hear, Bella?" she asked the girl who sat stolidly on the bench by the window, ignoring the whimperings from the clothes-basket.

"Aye." There was nothing in the girl's tone to

indicate her thoughts. After a moment her eyes wandered up to the toby-jug on the mantel, and she said:

"How much will the pram an' the cradle cost?"

Jessie, with most of her attention centered on the commotion in the basket, answered:

"I can get the pram for thirty shillings; an' I've been promised the use o' Maggie Duncan's cradle for naething—but she kens fine I'll make her next gown on account o' 't."

4

In the straggling light next morning, Jessie slipped a long thin leg out of bed, and her toes went searching with cat-like caution for a crocheted slipper; finding it, they wriggled into its woolly depth.

Jessie was making one of her countless trips to the clothes-basket by the fireside in the next room to see if all was well. She clutched her long pink flannelette night-gown to keep it from touching the floor; and was moving carefully past Bella's bed, when its unusual flatness made her look at it again.

It was empty! Jessie hastened into the next room with fussy concern, sure that whatever Bella was doing for the baby was wrong.

But Bella wasn't there! Her hat wasn't hanging on the back of the door where it had hung for six weeks. Her shoes weren't on the peat-backet[9] where she had put them last night.

The baby! Jessie gave a cry that ended in a

strangled sound, half laugh, half sob, as she sprang to the clothes-basket and dropped down beside it. The baby was there. Jessie's heart resumed action again, she bent over the basket and tenderly touched the baby's warm sleeping face; then her thoughts returned to Bella. She looked about for fresh proof that she had really gone.

Against the toby-jug a sheet of writing-paper was propped. Jessie reached for it and carried it to the window. In the graying light she peered at the words written upon it until they formed into things of meaning. And she read:

> "I am going to Edinburgh. I have taken two pounds from the toby-jug; that leaves enough for the pram. It is ill done of me, but I will no stay in Drumorty. If I get a place I'll send back the siller, and if Geordie will wed me I'll come back for the bairn. You have been kinder to me than I am deserving, and I will no forget. You can send the bairn to the alms-house; it will be better there than with me if Geordie will no have me."

Jessie trembled as she read. Bella had gone! And the baby was here,—was hers to keep! Joy sent her heart racing heavenward. She turned and sank to her knees beside the clothes-basket, stretching greedy arms about it and whispering passionately to the sleeping child:

"She'll no' come back. She'll no' come back;—and ye'll be my ain, my ain wee lamb."

Then in the flush of her riches, kneeling there in the still gray morning, she thought of Bella and her

poverty. Bella, stealing out loveless in the night. Bella who had borne the suffering and shame. Bella with empty arms. And a great remorse for the greed of her own rejoicing tore at her breast, and she clasped her hands and cried in anguish:

"God be merciful to her!—And forgie me, a covetous sinner."

WANTIN' A HAND

WANTIN' A HAND

The moisture from the tub curled her hair into babyish ringlets that hung about her flushed face. Despite her form made broad with the daily travail of washing clothes, and her face pouchy with drink, suggestions of beauty still lingered about her as perfume might cling to a garment after it was soiled and torn.

There was no hint of age or decay in the square tower of her body, no thought of handicap in her actions as she squeezed and rubbed the clothes upon the board with her one powerful hand. The small stump of her missing arm jerked vigorously from the shoulder in time to the hand upon the board. She would stop at times to pin the empty sleeve more snugly to her side and then resume the crawling, gripping motion of her one hand in the tub. It was a great-jointed hand, corded along the back, and broad, and when it had squeezed the water from a garment she could defy any woman with two hands

to wring one drop more from it. The clothes washed by Jean Sclessor were truly washed, and clear and fragrant when she took them from the line.

And so, although she tried them sorely by her frequent drinking spells, the good wives of Drumorty would rather wait for Jean than have some feckless two-handed woman wash in her stead. And the greatest church-goers among them would ignore the smell of whisky on her breath and would even comment sympathetically upon her bunions when her steps began to waver.

But Jean was long past caring what Drumorty thought about her drinking, long past the time when she turned her head away so that they wouldn't catch her breath. She cared only for evening to come, and she worked through the day with a driving force which became a frenzy of haste as night-fall drew near, for she was going home to the kist under the stairs, home to dreams, home to love and revenge and despair, home to forgetfulness, home to the flat-sided bottle of whisky wrapped in a gray petticoat.

And when at evening she groped her way toward the kist in the musty hole beneath the stairs filled with the odor of sprouting potatoes, she was already tearful with welling memories, melting with the vision of the lass that once was Jean Sclessor and the lad that had been Sandy Morrison. They came to her as always, bright with the sunlight of a harvest day and fragrant with the breath of reaping time. *He* stood by the reaper bareheaded in the high noon sun. Lesser lads had sought the shade panting and weary, but he, foreman of them all and master of them all by height and strength, stood stretching in the glare. And *she* came laden with the scones fresh from the griddle and the mulled ale cool in its great earthen

bottle. There was a power in him that brought her eyes to his, and whether she would or no' she looked at him, and he looked back at her.

And then at milking time he came. She knew it was his shadow in the door as she sat milking there. But never a move made she, and never a turn of her head, although her heart was singing louder than the milk that struck the pail. And never a word she said about the singing of her heart, and never a word said he. But every night he came and watched, and every night he waited while she strained the milk.

Lightsome days they were, and work was easy in the doing. And she would sing and scrub the yard for Mary Tate the second lass, and often she would do the work for both when Mary's cough confined her to her bed. Nor did she care about the extra tasks, but rather she welcomed them, knowing that Sandy loved her all the more that she was strong. And though at times he looked on Mary with admiring eyes, seeing her hair that lay like silken wheat against her head, Jean did not care; she knew the kindling of his heart was but for her, and the strength that lay in her round arms. And nearing thrashing time he said:

"Come, Martinmas, I'll go a cotterin'."

And Jean replied with hurrying heart, tossing her head to give the words a careless lilt:

"'Deed? An' wha will cotter wi' ye?"

"Yersel', I'm thinkin'," he made answer. And lingering by the stooked grain that stood like little tents beneath the moon, he told her of the fine bay mare he had his mind upon; and of the farm, come time, they'd rent together; and of the butter she

would make for marketing, and of the long, long hours that they would work, he, with his back that had the strength of two, and she, with arms that had the strength of any man's. And by and by they'd own a farm, and *she* would go to kirk in taffetas, and *he* would wear a tall gray hat on market days.

Down on her knees she fumbled for the bottle, pulling it with avid hand from its wrapper in the kist. Seizing the cork with yellowed teeth, she spat it out, and drank, gulping dryly in her haste. She settled back upon the piled potatoes in the fusty murk, her heavy throat racked with bitter sobbing. The thrashing machine sounded in her ears again. She stood in its sucking wind, feeding the yellow sheaves to its hungry mouth. Sandy swung by calling her above the roar, love glimmering in his face. She stopped to wave at him—to watch his glinting head go by—the crunching mouth reached for her fingers —drew them onward with the wheat—seized them, pulled them in,—the hand, the arm, up, up the arm: —Oh, God, stop it!—stop—

She jerked from side to side with the pain of sharp remembering, thumping the potatoes with the splashing bottle. And then she licked the whisky from her hand, and drank, whimpering as the glow stole round her heart.

Sandy came to the hospital, silent and down-looking, and every time he came his stay was shorter. The smell of medicine made him fit to spew, or the second man was away gallivanting with a lass, and he must hurry back to do his work. And then he got to bringing Mary Tate along, and she would sit and look at him and giggle when he looked at her as if they had a joke between the two of them. And Jean could never speak to him alone or ask a word

about the cottering.

Long after thrashing she came back from hospital, and Martinmas was drawing near. Lads were speaking of feeing time and whether they would stay, or seek a better place. But Sandy never spoke a word, but had some business in the byre, or other work to do when she would question him. And Mary Tate would make his brose with extra butter, and mealy-mouth about him in the evening, and make as if she knew what she would never tell. When Jean could bear no more of that she asked:

"Is Sandy biding here or goin' cotterin'?"

And Mary laughed and said:

"If he's yer man ye've little need to ask."

And Jean could barely keep from riving her. "What mean ye by that taunt?" she cried.

But Mary laughed, smirked and simpered while she stepped about as if the kitchen were a dancing hall, and all the lads had come to look at her.

So she cornered Sandy in the stubble field at loosing-time. He bore the harness on his arms and round his neck, for he would sooner break his back than tire a horse for no good end. He saw her, and he tried to pass, making as if the horses needed him, but Jean put out her hand.

"A word wi' ye. What's come o' a' yer talk o' cotterin'?"

"Oh, nathin'," he replied. And cried: "Whoa, Bess, whoa!" as if the horses were astray.

"Nathin'?"

"No." And looked ahead, straining as if to see the

horses reach the watering trough.

“Look at me, Sandy Morrison: Why will ye no’ go cotterin’?” she cried, shaking his harness-laden arm with her one hand.

“I’ll cotter come time, nae doot,” he said, with more ease in his voice than in his face.

“Wi’ *me*?” Her voice was shrill and cut him like a lash. The red rose up his throat. “Wi’ me? Will ye go cotterin’ wi’ me. Answer me *that*, Sandy Morrison.”

He could not look at her, and tried to turn away.

“Answer me!” She screamed and beat his breast, and as she struck her dangling stump jerked to the motion of the beating. Sandy’s eyes were on it.

“I canna, Jean,” he said. “I’ve nae use for a wife wantin’ a hand.”

And so he married Mary Tate and took her cottering, her that could never wet her feet, her with arms like matches, and legs like clay-pipe stems. He took her cottering for a year, and then the baby came, and Mary couldn’t leave her bed for many a month, and when she *did* they said she’d creep about more like a ghost than anything that drew the breath of life.

Sandy left the cottering and hired out again. Soon there was another wean[10] to feed and tend; and every year or two another wean, another mouth for Sandy Morrison to feed, and Mary always lying in the bed. And he that had so proud a head left the farming to do what work he could about the town by nights, and tend the weans and make their porridge by day. He that spoke of fine bay mares, and cottering, and rented farms, and tall gray hats, was

doing work that none would do,—emptying garbage in the night. She lived again that first night of his shame, when he crept up the lane at dawn, his head hung low, hoping none would see. But *she* was there and screamed her scorn, as many a dawn since then she'd screamed her scorn:

"Nae use for a wife wantin' a hand, eh? Fine for ye emptying garbage, fine for ye." He never looked toward her, crying in the window there, nor raised his head. And all the years he never looked nor spoke, but moved about as if her jeering fell on ears that could not hear.

Why did he not cry back at her or lift his head? Oh, to make him give a sign, to get her hand upon his shrunken flesh and rive it with her nails. To tear him open that her eyes could see his bleeding. To make him scream his pain as *she* must scream—to make him cry her name—to *know* that he was suffering. She rocked tortured on the shifting pile of potatoes, breaking their white sprouts as her hand grabbed anguished for the bottle.

Oh, what was he to her? He was a dour down-looking chiel[11], thin he was, thin and withered, withered like a turnip at the winter's end. And his hair, his bonnie hair that shone like a Michaelmas penny, was grizzled and sparse and dry like dusty moss. And the shoulders of him that had filled the door from side to side as he stood watching her at the milking, were shrunk and bent, and bent and shrunken was his neck that had been straight and pink and moist with the sweat of the fields. And the eyes of him were bleared and wavering, and his gait was like a weary dog's.

Oh, what cared she? Why wait to shame a bleary dog—a bleary dog—a weary dog? Why sit and rock,

and wait, and cry at dawn? She'd stop her rocking and her crying. She'd stop her drinking and her wailing. She'd buy a dolman trimmed with bugle beads and go to kirk on Sunday. She'd cry in by to her that lay a coughing in the bed, and him that pottered about wiping noses. She'd stop a while and sweep the floor, and wash the faces of the glowering weans. And all the time that image in the bed would hate her for her strength. And Sandy would be shamed and he would see what he had cast aside. She'd stop and bake and throw her dolman on the chair so that its beads would shine. She'd feed the weans and tend the image in the bed, and it would choke with rage and cough, and cough, and cough.

She'd stop her drinking, this would be the last. She'd be looked up to and respected, she'd go to kirk, she'd make red petticoats for naked heathens, she'd stop her drinking. The higher she was held the more would be his shame. She'd stop her drinking, break the bottle—break it on the wall—but first she'd drink —no use to waste good whisky—this would be the last—the very last—the last.

She started to sway pendulum-wise, settling deeper in the pile, rolling her head as if in time to some well-remembered chant. Her vacant eyes were bleared with tears that fell on this shoulder, and on that, with the rolling of her head. Her purple lips forming the silent words twisted in a half-forgotten pain, and then her voice meaningless as a wind in a hollow place took up the dirge: "Nae use for a wife wantin' a hand, wantin' a hand...."

THE TATTIE-DOOLIE

THE TATTIE-DOOLIE[12]

His name was James MacDonald MacGregor, as you could prove by reading the newly painted sign over his door, which told Drumorty in yellow and black that he was: “A high-class tailor; pressing and mending also done.” But Jean MacFarlane had nicknamed him the “Tattie-Doolie” on the very first Sunday. But this was not until after the service, not until after he had outsung her, outsung her in time and outsung her in volume. Even in the final hymn, when she had held the last note until her ears buzzed and her face was like a harvest moon, *he* had held it just a second longer.

Jean had always been proud of her breath. It lasted longer than any breath in the parish of Drumorty. She was proud, too, that no voice in the parish could be heard above her own. Many had tried it, both man and woman!

Skilly’s “Gype,”[13] called that because he was daft-like and wore fancy waistcoats on week-days, had a roaring fine voice; and Mary Macrimmon, who had a wooden leg, “could make a braw noise when she put her mind to ’t.” But even they had lost heart at last and had left Jean to lead the singing. The Gype stayed away from the service altogether and spent his Sunday mornings “sellin’ his soul to the devil on a dambrod.” But Mary Macrimmon was a God-fearing woman, so she made up for her loss by coming late every Sunday, and the ring of the brass ferrule on her wooden leg announced her passage up the flagged aisle to her seat in the front pew. Each entrance was a dramatic triumph, for she changed

the trimming on her hat every week, so that the congregation "wouldna crane their necks for naught." Jean MacFarlane was well content to let her have this triumph: there *should* be compensations for a wooden leg.

In four years none had ventured to dispute Jean's right to sing the last note of each line as a solo. The members of the congregation accepted it with the same placidity that they accepted the fact that the varnish had never really hardened on the pews; and if you sat too long or too solidly on one place, you left the nap of your suit embedded on the seat.

In time they came to be proud of Jean, and they waited for her to finish with their mouths agape, as much out of admiration as out of a desire to be ready to start the next line when her breath finally gave out.

The organist, who was blind, knew better, and longed for the courage to terminate Jean's stentorian solos. But she dared not, for the congregation believed that she couldn't be so good as an organist that could see, and this made her timid; so she would humbly hold the last note until Jean's final gasp signaled that she could start a new measure. But in return for this, Jean defended her when some young snip would suggest that she wasn't much of an organist. "No," Jean would admit. "She's no' a great musician, but she's a gran' accompanist, an' that's what's needed in a kirk like ours."

Until that first Sunday Jean had held no grudge against James MacDonald MacGregor, although it would have been natural, and even dutiful, for her to have sniffed a little in affected disdain when she heard his name mentioned, for his arrival was a source of much distress to her father, Perney

MacFarlane, who had been the only tailor in Drumorty for twenty-five years, as had been his father before him. Indeed, old Perney had given Jean the rough side of his tongue for her undaughterly lack of resentment over the new tailor. But Jean, while realizing that his advent would end her father's sartorial monarchy, was none the less conscious of a pleased flutter when Mistress MacKenty stepped in by to say: "The puir man's single dootless, for I hae seen neither hide nor hair o' a wife, nor her belongings."

"That's a consideration," Jean had answered; and, giving her father an accusing look, added: "to them that never sees a man frae one day's end to the other."

Jean was a little irritated with her father on this score, and blamed him that she hadn't been married long since. For, although his trade should have supplied her with more suitors than any other lass in Drumorty, it was a fact that, while the grocer's daughter by making smirking pretense of helping, could meet young men on Saturday evenings in her father's shop; and even the druggist's boarding-school daughter could "happen" to come in to kiss her father good night when a prosperous young farmer was in, Jean could never meet a man that way, because Perney insisted that it wasn't seemly for a single woman to come in, when a man *might* be having his trousers fitted. To Jean's protest: "Father, ye canna always be fittin' the crotch," he merely answered, "I *might* be."

On the way to kirk that first Sunday, Jean was in a twitter. She had even gone the length of putting Jockey Club on the front of her bodice as well as on her handkerchief. This made her feel akin to Jezebel,

and for a moment she liked the feeling. She wished that a woman could be “wanton in her ways” and yet seem respectable. Then, appalled at her own wickedness, she made a hasty prayer for her soul’s salvation, and decided that scent was a hand-maiden of the devil and that she would never use it again. But the next moment she was glad that she *had* used it, and sorry that she hadn’t used more, as the new tailor passed her on the road and remarked to his neighbor something about “a fine smell.”

He was grand beyond Jean’s expectations. He wore a frock coat and a “tile,”[14] and she gasped in admiration of his “venturesomeness” in wearing them when there was neither a marriage nor a funeral in the neighborhood to justify such splendor.

For in Drumorty the laird is the only man entitled by common opinion to wear such grandeur on ordinary Sundays. Many a tattie-doolie in the fields around Drumorty flapped in solitary dignity with the scarcely worn frock coat and “tile” of some deceased farmer, who had been too modest to wear them.

Jean had even been pleased when he came boldly up to the choir and took a seat in the front row of the men’s pew directly facing her. It was a bit forward of him to sit in the choir without a public invitation from the minister, but Jean thrilled. “It’s all of a piece wi’ his wearin’ a tile, he’s a man that kens his mind and does it.” She was glad also that he was where he could see her, and know at once who it was that sang so long and so loud.

She settled herself in her seat with the dignity that a duck acquires upon water. Debating the relative effectiveness of a lace handkerchief emerging from her sleeve or thrust daintily into the front of her

bodice, she decided in favor of the former, because if she wore it on her breast the book would hide it when she stood up to sing.

Satisfied that she was at her best, she glanced across the aisle. She was disappointed to find that he was not watching her. He was reading the hymn numbers on the announcement slate and looking them up in his hymn-book.

"A singer himsel', nae doot," she reflected. "All the better; it takes a singer t' appreciate a singer." She looked him over carefully and decided that he was "over thin for good looks, and over white in the face. But he had a grand mustache! A manly-like an' full-growin' mustache. A careful wife that tended him like a chicken on a brod,[15] could make a fine strappin' chiel out o' him."

A yearning tenderness toward him, the passion of a brood hen, stirred in her breast. She wanted to envelop him in her care; already he seemed to belong to her. Feeling the need to emphasize this to herself by speaking of him, she whispered to Mary Macrimmon:

"What think ye o' the new tailor?"

When Mary answered: "He's unco chilpet[16] and hungry-like aboot the jaw-bones," she answered tartly:

"He's no' hog-fat. For *mysel'*, I like a man on the thin side."

Indeed, Jean had even found herself thinking with satisfaction of the twenty-four hand-made and feather-stitched night-gowns that lay at the bottom of her kist.[17] Not that she was ready to jump down the throat of the first man that asked her. Indeed not!

She wouldn't fash[18] herself if she never married! But twenty-four night-gowns made a body feel prepared for anything.

When the organist began the prelude to the first hymn, Jean took a deep breath, and set her head like a filly fighting the snaffle.

Now he would see! Now he would take notice! She charged the first note with a vociferation that made Mary Macrimmon drop her hymn-book. Never had her voice been so loud. Never had she felt more exultant in its power. He would be looking at her now! But wait! Wait until the end of the verse when she could show him the length of her breath. *That* would make him take stock and wonder. *That* was where breath could show to advantage.

As she reached the last phrase, she filled her lungs. Now he would see. This would be the best that she had ever done.

Her voice rose powerfully above the others. They were falling away. As the last note was reached, Jean's voice took hold of the ragged edges of sound and knit them up. Soon she would be singing alone.

But what was this? A voice full and strong was keeping pace with her. *He* was still singing. Was he trying to compete with her? It couldn't be! She glanced across at him, her face red with the strain of holding the note. Yes! He was wilfully trying to outsing her. In his eyes was the insolent look of a duelist who is sure of victory. Outraged, Jean lost her hold upon the note, and James MacDonald MacGregor's voice boomed out in triumphant solo for two beats more.

Affronted! Affronted she was and shamed before

the whole congregation! Shamed and affronted in her own kirk. And by *this*; this whippersnapper. Made mock of and be-meaned by a half-starved bantam-cock, with a tile on his brainless head.

There was a sputtering and sizzling of suppressed mirth from the body of the kirk. The new verse started, and staggered along in gusts like a drunken man. The McKenzie lassie with the fat legs was giggling and nudging her neighbor. The minister was hiding behind his prayer-book, but the redness of his ears told that even *he* was laughing. Mary Macrimmon was making no pretense of singing but was frankly laughing under cover of the organ. The new tailor was looking about him, smirkingly appreciative of his victory, although he did not yet know its magnitude.

Jean's heart was fit to fly out of its cage, so angry was she. For little more she would have thrown her hymn-book in his face. He would come here, would he? Come here and set up opposition to her father. Horning his nose in on a man that had worked in Drumorty all his life. But that wasn't enough. He must dare to outsing *her*, that had led the singing for years. He must make a byword of *her* that had defended him against her own father. Oh, but she was well punished that she hadn't hated him from the first, the swaggering dandyprat, the fribble popinjay, all dressed up like a tattie-doolie! In that moment she hated him as only a heart that might have loved *can* hate.

It had been a bitter Sunday morning; and a bitter, bitter walk back from the kirk with whisperings and laughter all about her, and handkies held up to hide wide grins of amusement. It had been hard to bear with Mistress MacKenty when she said with ill-

disguised glee: “Weel, weel, he’s goin’ t’ lead the singin’ as well as the tailorin’.”

But there had been comfort in seeing the pleasure it gave old Perney to hear her flay the new tailor. So delighted was he with her nickname for his rival that he pressed her to take the neck of the boiled fowl, a delicacy which he only relinquished in moments of great emotion. For Perney was troubled in his heart, deeply troubled and anxious, and he dare not speak of it. He had a secret which he believed was shared by no one. It was this. He didn’t know how the collar of a coat should be cut! For, although he had been fully thirty-five when his father had died and left him the tailoring business, he had never up to that moment either cut or fitted a collar. It had been the elder MacFarlane’s belief that his son was a witless warlock[19] who was by nature bound to ruin any piece of cloth into which he put a pair of shears.

In time he begrudgingly and with loud-voiced distrust, allowed Perney to cut and fit trousers, and at a pinch, when his eyes began to trouble him, he would prayerfully let him work on a portion of a coat. But never to his last day would he let him touch a collar.

So Perney inherited the business with a perfect knowledge of trousers, a partial knowledge of waistcoats, and a complete ignorance of collars. For so jealous was old MacFarlane of this knowledge that he had always retired behind a screen for the cutting and fitting of this mystic portion of the garment.

On the first day he was alone, Perney had embarked on a series of experiments. From then on, every suit he cut was a hazard, an adventure. This much he suspected about collars. Something had to be cut on the crosswise, and something had to be

stretched. But which had to be stretched, which had to be cut crosswise, he never was able to find out. Sometimes he did it one way, and sometimes the other, but little satisfaction resulted. When, occasionally, the miracle happened, and he would produce a collar that did neither stick out at the back like a spout, nor shy away from the neck in a coy semicircle, he had always forgotten how he had cut that particular collar, and try as he would he couldn't duplicate it.

Perney had never told this to a soul, not even his wife; nay, *least* of all, his wife. But sometimes he wondered uneasily if she knew. There was something too impassioned in the way she defended him when a customer complained that the collar didn't fit. It looked like something more than chance that brought her hurrying down the stairs just in the nick of time, and there was something more than affability in her voice when she exclaimed to the customer upon her entrance: "My certies, but that jacket brings out the breadth o' yer shoulders." If in the face of her evident admiration, the customer still murmured that the collar didn't set to his neck, her voice became a shade scornful as she replied: "Think ye the collar's human? How would *it* know where yer neck is? Hae patience and wear it a while, and come time, it will grow to the set o' yer body." And if he still complained, she would deride him playfully, crying: "Certies, man, expect ye the collar to grip yer neck like yer lass's arm?" If this didn't send him away with his face red and the suit under his arm, she could go even further.

It was not so easy with the young ones who had been to Aberdeen to take the agricultural course at the university. *They* were "very notional," and would

bring a suit back again and again for alterations. But smart though they were, they hated to encounter Mistress MacFarlane, and would peep in at the window first to see that she was out of the way. But in the end she would always vanquish them. And it is a tribute to her eloquence that they sometimes came to agree with her that “a collar couldna be expected to fit, until you had worn it six months.”

In all the twenty-five years, Perney had never had a suit left on his hands; but he knew well where the credit lay for that.

He spent long hours turning it over in his mind. Did she truly believe that his collars were perfect, and his customers sorely wanting in sense? Or did she know all the time that he couldn’t cut a collar? But no—that thought smarted too keenly. She would never be able to keep from telling him if she knew. He knew women, with their tongues always wag-wagging. She’d cast it in his face in one of her tempers. She’d never be able to hold it back. No, she didn’t know. Of course she didn’t know. But why, then, did she never mention collars when they were alone? Because she thinks I can cut them. Because she knows I can’t. It was plausible either way. She knows. She doesn’t. She knows. She doesn’t. For hours his needle would flash out and in to this torturous refrain. Overhead he would hear her, heavy-footed, going back and forth about her work. Many times he had risen from his bench, determined to go up and have it out. Or sitting by her in the evenings, he had often been tempted to break the long silence by shouting the one word “Collars!” just to see what she would do. But he never dared carry out his resolve, because he couldn’t bear to learn that she knew.

Most of the time he was comforted by the thought that she didn't know, and he loved her fiercely for her blind faith in him. But on occasions when she would defend him too loudly, he was convinced that she knew. And he tortured himself by the thought that she despised him in her heart. At such times he almost hated her, not only for the knowledge she had, but that she was strong enough never to give it voice.

One thing made it bearable. He could laugh at her. She had a notion about the making of broth. Nay, more than a notion, it was a belief as dear to her heart as her religion. And he knew it to be founded on folly.

Mistress MacFarlane was a Fraser, and the Frasers had always held the reputation of making the best Sunday broth-with-dumplings in the parish. It was their crown. How to make it was their secret. It necessitated the constant attention, for the whole forenoon, of a member of the family. This meant that some one must stay away from the kirk during the morning service; and as this mortification seemed to be borne more cheerfully by the male portion of the family, it came to be a tradition that the Fraser men were a godless ilk that would rather tend broth than praise the Lord. Indeed, one minister had even preached a sermon on setting up graven images, and it was clear that he exhorted the Fraser family to choose between their broth and the Kingdom of Heaven. But it was useless.

So, the Sunday morning after his marriage, Perney learned the secret of the Fraser broth. His wife told him every detail, as indeed she had continued to tell him every detail every Sunday morning since, for somehow she could never believe that he could

retain all its intricacies; and never once did she fail to come back from the door-step to repeat: “Mind ye now, quarter of an hour apart.”

That was the secret! Other benighted Drumortians put everything into the pot at once. But the Frasers first boiled a shin bone in the water for half an hour, then added the turnips. A quarter of an hour later the carrots went in, and so on, until finally the dumplings.

Before leaving for the kirk, Mistress MacFarlane would arrange the different vegetables in bowls and set them in a row leading away from the fire. Just before tying her bonnet strings, she would drop the bone into the water and remind him: “The bowl next the fire goes in first.”

It was a ritual gone through with much gusto on her part and great patience on the part of Perney.

At first he had blundered, forgetting this or that, or he would go down to the shop to play a solitary game of chess and forget the broth altogether, and bowls of raw vegetables would betray him to his wrathful wife upon her return.

One Sunday, in a flush of rebellion, he had dumped the contents of all the bowls into the pot the moment she was off the door-step, and thumped defiantly down-stairs to play chess. But he had little peace that morning, for in spite of himself, he believed in the superiority of the Fraser broth. He was apprehensive about its flavor, and in two minds whether to confess or not, until they sat down to the table and Mistress MacFarlane, taking the first spoonful exclaimed just as she always did, just as every Fraser always did: “My, that’s fine broth.” And he agreed, just as the spouse of every Fraser always

agreed. He never let a hint of what he had done cross his lips; after that, his Sunday mornings were tranquil.

But now Perney was troubled. The arrival of the new tailor sharpened his anxiety about the collars, for not only might his wife discover the truth, but soon all Drumorty might know. He tortured himself by attributing to his rival great skill in collar making, and by magnifying his own lack of skill. Soon the sight of a new suit, with the collar snugly fitting the neck, justified his fears. And with every day came discouraging news of another customer gone over to the enemy. Fear was added to fear, as orders came in more and more slowly. Even the report that the "Tattie-Doolie" couldn't hang trousers didn't bring the consolation it should have. He began to lean on Jean, seeking comfort in the increasing scorn she expressed for the "Tattie-Doolie," for Jean's emotion was growing more keen with each Sunday. She existed from week to week in a fever of anticipation. She lived only for those moments when they faced each other across the aisle in combat. One morning he was late and she was beside herself for fear he would not come. At his sudden appearance her heart raced in an intoxication of *something*, she called it hatred.

After the services, when she reached home, she would deride him with a wit that delighted Perney, and a venom that surprised herself. But sometimes, following these outbursts, she would go to her room and cry helplessly, and she knew that she wasn't crying because he had outsung her.

There is no knowing how it might have ended, had not the organist died suddenly, making it necessary to send hurriedly to Aberdeen for another to take her

place. Five minutes after the train came in with the new one, Mistress MacKenty was spreading the news that it was a man this time, with most extraordinarily thin legs. By noon the next day she was able to tell that he demanded no less than two eggs for his breakfast, and that he was bound and determined to conduct the choir practise himself without interference from the minister. So it was clear that he was a feckful man in spite of his legs.

And his hands on the organ proved this to be true. Jean was filled with a new excitement as the organ woke clamorously and shook itself at his commanding touch. This was playing! This was music worth singing to! The "Tattie-Doolie" would never outsing her again. Here was music that would give her strength to conquer him. The new organist would see who had the longest breath. He would judge who was best fitted to lead the singing.

Her voice rose with clarion strength. The tailor was doing his best also. Jean was reluctantly obliged to admit that there were worse voices than the tailor's. They were nearing the end of the line. *Now* for the struggle! But something was amiss. The last note slipped away from her like an eel, and the next line was in progress before she knew it. She tried to hold on at the end of the next line; but again the organist didn't wait.

Of course, he didn't know any better. *That* was it, Jean reasoned. She would have to wait till the end of the verse to show him. *Then* he would be glad to hold the note for such a voice. An organist had to be trained to a singer's ways. Nearing the end she raised her voice so that he couldn't help but hear her. But with a loud blast from the quaking pipes he drowned her out and briskly started the next verse.

Dumfounded, she looked across the aisle to see what the "Tattie-Doolie" thought of this. He was glaring furiously at the organist's head. Presently his glance met Jean's, and they gazed at each other in a common bond of indignation. He signaled to her not to sing, and closed his hymn-book emphatically, to show that he meant to be silent. Jean did the same, and he nodded his approval. Exchanging knowing smirks they waited for the collapse of the singing.

But it was not the hopeless failure they expected it to be. Their revenge was *no* revenge. Nobody missed their singing. The organ sped its multisonous way with the abandon of a calliope at a circus. It cared not a penny who sang or who didn't. Its very abandon was inviting, and they fain would have joined in the singing but pride forbade them.

The tailor became more and more crestfallen as the service progressed. He fingered his hymn-book longingly, but he could not bring himself to start again.

Seeing his dejection, Jean forgot her own disappointment and yearned over him. She understood only too keenly how he was missing the exaltation of singing to the full capacity of his lungs. She knew only too well the sense of loss he felt, and the bitter hurt to his pride. His emotions found a dual echo in her breast; she was heartsick for herself, but she was doubly heartsick for him. Her one thought was to save his pride for him at any cost.

At the close of the service she eluded her mother, and caught up with him as he walked with slackened step and drooping shoulders along the road. It was a thing she could not have done for herself. But she was doing this for *him*. Nothing else could have given her courage to make that advance under the critical

watching eyes of the congregation. She reached his side gasping, and a little hesitant, but the sight of his despondent face spurred her afresh, and she cried with well simulated derision: “Heard ye ever such singin’! A lot o’ women squeakin’ like mice in a trap, an’ no’ a man’s voice among the lot!”

He braced up at her approach and the gloom lifted from his face at her words, but settled back again as he answered doubtfully: “Skilly an’ the minister were singin’.”

“Singin’, were they!” Jean cried with a chuckle. “Man, yer over-generous to call it *singin’*.”

“They’re no’ so bad,” he said, inviting her to fresh protest. She laughed shrilly. “Ye ken fine, we never had a proper man’s voice till ye came.”

The swing was coming back to his shoulders again, and he was taking bigger strides.

“Think ye that?” he questioned anxiously. “I had a notion ye didna like my singing.”

He would never know what her next words cost her. For a moment the old rivalry came to life and pride strove with love. In that swift space she was a singer again, proud of her voice and contemptuous of his, but *only* for a moment. Then came her admission from quiet lips: “I was jealous o’ yer voice; jealous o’ yer breath bein’ longer than mine.” With those words she retired forever, leaving the stage to him. She would never compete with him again.

His step was jaunty now, and his face beamed with gratification.

“Aye, my breath is a *lot* longer than yours,” he replied.

Jean's heart faltered a little at his reply. It was true that his breath was longer than hers; it was true that his voice was louder, but he might have said something kind about her voice, even if he didn't believe it. *She* could tell any lie to make him feel better, it hurt that he didn't care to lie for her. Now that his spirits were restored and he no longer needed her, Jean lost her courage. A dull ache assailed her heart and sharp tears forced their way into her eyes. She continued to walk beside him only because she could not do otherwise with all Drumorty looking on. Her brimming tears were about to fall in spite of her struggle to keep them back, but the tailor saved her this humiliation. His momentary exhilaration was passing away, and shadows were gathering over him again.

"I missed the singin'," he sighed dolefully. "I like to sing. It seems like as if I had to sing something out o' me on the Sabbath, to get a fresh start for the next week."

"I ken what ye mean," Jean cried with ready sympathy, blinking away her unseen tears. "That's the way *I* feel—bottled up like."

"Aye," he agreed.

A daring thought came to Jean, a very daring thought. Quivering with excitement at her own temerity, she said: "I hae a harmonium. Would ye like to step in by wi' me for an hour an' sing the hymns?"

He looked full at her for the first, and there was admiration in his eyes. "Ye can *play*?" he questioned eagerly. "I'd like it fine, if—if—"

Jean knew what he meant.

"My father likes music," she answered.

She was fluttering inside like a nest of young birds, half with joy, and half with fear of her father. But she would go through with it if the heavens were to fall.

As they reached the door, Mistress MacFarlane caught up with them. Being a true woman, she had already decided that Jean's wedding veil would be at least half a yard longer than the veil of that high-handed lassie of the druggist's had been.

"I'm goin' to play the hymns for Mr. MacGregor," Jean explained.

"Aye, aye," said Mistress MacFarlane, with a comfortable, round pink smile, as if it were the most natural thing in the world. "Aye, aye, that will be fine." With an elaborate wink to Jean, she slipped in and up the stairs. Understanding her maneuver, Jean lingered below until she heard the kitchen door shut quickly, then, knowing that her father was safely imprisoned, she followed, leading the tailor into the heavy-curtained, musk-scented parlor.

It was well that Mistress MacFarlane went first and pushed the enraged Perney backward into the kitchen, for he had seen Jean approaching with the "Tattie-Doolie" and was seething at her treachery.

"What means this?" he demanded when he regained his balance after his wife's unexpected violence.

"Whist!" she commanded. "Dinna make an uproar. It's the new tailor come to sing the hymns wi' our lassie."

"In *my* hoose?"

"Why should he no'?" questioned his wife with irritating calmness, pulling at the tips of her black kid gloves the while, but carefully keeping between Perney and the door.

"Nae in *my* hoose! Step aside, woman."

"Sit doon, man, an' stop yer haverin'," she answered with easy contempt. "Do ye expect yer bairn to go to her grave a maiden?"

"What's that?" cried Perney with fresh fury. "He wants to *marry* Jean. He would *dare*!"

Mistress MacFarlane snorted and elbowed him out of the way with a pitying superiority.

"No," was her cryptic reply. "He has no' dared *yet*, but he'll dare come time."

Perney was bewildered. It was hard to maintain his indignation in the face of his wife's dispassionate assurance. She was his rock of strength. He followed in the course she steered, for her steering was always for his betterment. But now she seemed to have turned traitor and he felt lost. If she would only speak up and tell him her mind; he could always bear her lectures better than her silences. She was stepping about the room quietly, as if it were no concern of hers that his rival was here, under his roof.

The tailor's voice rose lustily singing. "Oh, come all ye faithful."

It was more than Perney could bear in silence.

"What mean ye, woman?"

"Man, hae a little sense," she urged, as if speaking to an unreasoning but lovable child. "It's high time that Jean was married—an' there's no room for *twa*

tailors in Drumorty."

So *that* was it! It was a staggering thought. He sat down in his chair the better to support it. He might have known that she had *some* bee in her bonnet. She was not a woman to act without a purpose. And she was right. She was quite right. It would be a blessing to have a partner instead of a competitor. He would give him the collars to do! That would be a great relief. The thought made him light-hearted, and he was just about to show her that he saw some reason in her plans, when she said: "Ye can give him the collars to do."

At that he straightened in his chair, on the defensive again. So she knew! She had known all the time! She had lain beside him for thirty years with that secret knowledge in her heart. Despising him, perhaps! Yes, despising him. It wasn't for Jean she wanted the new tailor; it was because she knew that *he* could make better collars. She put her trust in the "Tattie-Doolie," in a stranger, an enemy, and she had turned against *him,* that had sheltered and loved her for thirty years.

She despised him, did she? Laughed at him? Well, he'd let her know that there were *others* that could laugh. He would tell her about the Fraser broth. He would lay *her* pride in the dust. There would be more than *one* humble heart in the house this day!

He turned toward her to launch his arrow of revenge.

All innocent of her blunder, she was lifting the lid of the broth pot and sniffing ecstatically: a Fraser worshiping at the shrine of the Fraser broth. He couldn't do it. Never, if she trod him in the dust, never could he hurt her like that. He turned away,

his heart sick and lonely, his soul bereft and bitter. She was no longer his. No longer the woman who believed in him.

But there would be no more hiding behind a wall. He would speak to her about the collars. He would have it out with her. He turned back and asked in a voice sharp-edged, because it was so near to breaking: “Why say ye I can give him the collars to do?”

A flicker of alarm came into her eyes, but she finished the sip of broth she had in the spoon before answering, and then her voice came with easy assurance.

“Weel, ye’ll never be able to trust him wi’ trousers; so ye can give him the coats and waistcoats to do.”

“An’ the *collars*,” he said bitingly.

“Aye, an’ the collars, an’ other easy bits,” she answered with lazy ease.

Collars and other easy bits! So she *didn’t* know. The foolish woman didn’t know! She thought a collar was an “easy bit.” She had always believed in him. In face of everything, she still believed that he was right. Oh, she was a foolish, feckless woman, with her blindness about collars, and her folly about broth. But he loved her. The very pattern of his soul was woven with the threads of hers, dear, blind, trusting woman that she was. She didn’t know. And now she would *never* know.

Her feet as she stepped about setting the table made a happy homelike music in his heart. How he loved her!

She paused at the table with an extra plate and spoon, and looked toward him questioningly. He had

been so silent, she was not sure that she had won him over yet, so her voice was timorous and a little pleading: “Could I ask him, Perney?”

“Aye, lass, ask him,” he agreed. Then, searching in his flowing heart for words to tell her how he loved her, he said: “An’ I’m thinkin’, he has never tasted the like o’ the broth he’ll taste this day.”

THE COURTIN’ OF SALLY ANN

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Mistress MacIntosh was firmly upholstered back and front in black satin of a thick dull quality. In front she was tightly encased and well pushed up. On the resulting ledge, there rested a locket containing on one side a picture of the deceased Sandy MacIntosh, “a saint on earth if there ever was one,” and on the other, a portrait of “my poor blind girl when a child.”

Everything about Mistress MacIntosh seemed to be pressed backward by determined though invisible fingers. It was as if she were forever breasting a gale. Her shoulders were thrown back so far that there was an indenture between her shoulder-blades. Even her thin gray hair seemed to be striving to leave her face; the marks left by the comb divided it into little railways that went hurrying to the back of her head, and the scalp between was pink with the exertion.

The small black lace cap on her head, coming to a

point neatly on the front parting, carried out the illusion. At either side of the point, three baroque pearl beads were sewed into the lace half an inch apart. For some reason they suggested hidden artillery. She resembled nothing so much as a battleship steaming out to the field of action.

Mistress MacIntosh had dealt fairly with life, as she was wont to point out, but life had been far from dealing fairly with her. First there was Sandy MacIntosh, a hard man to catch he had been, and no such great catch at that, when all was done. But this she wouldn't admit now, for it is ill-done and unwise-like to belittle the dead. So she loudly proclaimed his saintliness to the neighbors, but in her heart she admitted that he had been a sore disappointment.

When, after thirty years of constant persuasion, she had got him at last convinced that it was his clay pipe that made his tongue sore and bleeding, and got him to give up smoking, a saving of eighteen pence a week, he had gone out one Sunday morning for a walk along the railway tracks, "and him as deaf as a door nail."

They gathered him up piecemeal and brought him back in a gunny-sack, and there had been nothing to dress up and show the neighbors. All the expense and work of a funeral and none of the pleasure.

And then there was young Sandy, sure to be dead by spring with that cough he had that was like to split him in two; but nothing would do but he must get up and put on his braw new boots and walk with them in the backyard, scratching the soles up so that the shoemaker would never take them back in this world. And *this*, after she had watched him every day for three months to prevent it, for what was the

sense of letting him put the boots on at all when he'd never live to wear them out? But he was just as contrary as his father. He *would* have the boots bought, and he *would* put them on. And now the best she would get for them would be four or five shillings, if she would get *that*; for there were them that thought that you could get consumption by barely touching something a consumptive had worn.

And the blind girl! A body might think there would come an end to trouble *sometime*. But no! She was just as unreasonable as the father of her. Without giving a thought to anybody's comfort except her own, and with no provocation whatsoever, she had died the week after they had laid her father away, and *this*, mind you, at the very time that the elders had finally consented to raise her salary for playing the organ, from ten shillings a week to ten shillings and sixpence.

It was just another instance of the perversity of life, that the daughter who had the musical education should die, and Sally Ann, who had nothing, not even enough get-up-and-go to catch a man, should be left.

Goodness knows it wasn't for the want of help that Sally Ann was single! Fowl after fowl had been killed, even the speckled hen that laid the brown eggs that were so tasty; and pot after pot of broth had been thrown away on lads that never came to the scratch. Worse-looking lasses than Sally Ann, with nobody to help them, had landed good husbands. It was Sally Ann's own fault, as she had told her time and time again, when some lad that might just as well have married *her*, stepped up the aisle with another.

But it was useless to speak to her, useless to instruct her in the ways to inveigle a man. If you left her alone with one purposely, instead of edging him into a dark corner to give him courage to kiss her, she would hand him the family album to look at, and flutter back and forth like a hen before rain, until somebody came to keep them company. It seemed that the more you threw a man at Sally Ann, the more she drew back and let her chances slip by.

She had no more sense than the father of her, and *he* had little enough. Many a time when a customer had called to take out an insurance policy, she had waited just out of earshot till Sandy would call her to witness the document, but when, after an hour had passed, she would hear the front door shut on the customer's departing heels, she would find him carefully putting away his luster china, with never a thought of insurance policy in his head, and his only excuse would be: "It's unpleasant-like, woman, t' keep harpin' on death when a man comes t' see ye."

She was a sorely tried woman, Mistress MacIntosh; sorely tried and ill-done by.

But after all, the way things had turned out now, it was a mercy that no man would batter down the door to get Sally Ann. With nobody else to bring in a penny, it was just as well that Sally Ann was free footed and not tied to some man who might not so much as give her mother a pail of skimmed milk on Saturday night. For you can never tell about a man; there was Mistress MacKenty's Nellie that married Bransbog's laddie, you would think that she'd get all the butter she needed, and him with a byre full of Jersey cows, but no, she was down at the grocer's every Saturday night as usual buying her pound, just as if she had never had a daughter in this world.

It was a blessing too, although it had looked like a wilful waste of siller at the time, that Sally Ann had spent her grandmother's legacy of three pounds ten shillings to go to Fraserburg and learn candy-making. And it seemed like a special consideration from the Lord, that at the very time Sally Ann started in business, Sweetie-Annie's asthma took a turn for the worse, and she was obliged to give up her shop and go to live with her daughter, so that Sally Ann was able to buy her bottles and pans for next to nothing, and get all her trade forby.

Not that Sally Ann would ever make a success of the business if it were left to her. Indeed no; it was a case of constant watching to see that she didn't give the candy away to any red-cheeked bairn that pushed his nose against the window. Things had come to such a pass one day that she had even caught her putting her thumb on the weight side of the scales right under her very eyes, and she had barely prevented her from giving the Fraser bairn three half-penny's worth of butterscotch for his half-penny.

It was the like of *this* which proved that Sally Ann was not fit to serve the public, and that finally persuaded her to don her black satin gown and serve the candy herself. It was a sorry down-come that the widow of an insurance man, with a brass plate on his door, should be serving candy to any wet-nosed bairn that had a half-penny to spend; but the black satin gown made it bearable. And even the like of Skilly's Gype, that carried a high head and an impudent tongue in it, had been impressed by the gold locket, and remarked that it "dootless had cost a bonnie penny"; and when he ordered a pair of knitted gloves, he asked if she would *mind* knitting

them in a heather mixture color; so it wasn't as if they didn't *know* that she was above such doings.

It had been a bitter privation to give up the front parlor and turn it into a shop where all and sundry could come to geek and glower; and harder still to take the lace curtains off the window and fill it with pans of candy. She didn't want to do it, but Sally Ann had been determined about this; she had even gone the length of saying: "It's no secret that we're sellin' candy, mither." That wasn't like Sally Ann, she was unreasonable and feckless like the father of her, but it was seldom that she was impudent.

Sally Ann turned out to be very notional about the window. She thought it was a tasty-like arrangement to have the woolen gloves knitted the same color as the candy, and hang the pink gloves above the pink candy, and the red above the red. But everybody kept crying for navy blue and heather mixture gloves, and try as she would, Sally Ann couldn't make heather mixture candy, and when she did manage to make *something* like it, it was so queasy-looking that the bairns wouldn't buy it.

So there hung the pink gloves and the red, and the green and white ones that matched the peppermint rock, and nobody would buy them. But Sally Ann didn't care. They charmed her eye, and she excused them to herself and to her mother by saying: "We have t' look on 't as necessary oot-lay t' decorate the winda. It lets them ken we sell gloves as weel as candy."

She banked the back of the window up with pink and red geraniums, and sometimes in the quiet of the morning, she would steal out to the middle of the street and take a sly look at it, coming back to say guilelessly: "It's unco bonnie, mither, I hae the real

knack o' trimmin' a winda."

But Mistress MacIntosh would only sigh, and her sigh would mean: "T' think that I hae come t' *this*!" It made Sally Ann feel guilty, as if somehow in selling candy, she were also selling her mother's pride, bit by bit in paper bags; and she would take tentie[21] steps on the edges of her feet the rest of the morning, and speak to her mother only in compassionate whispers.

There was something gleyed[22] about Sally Ann. She had started to be a perfect copy of her mother, and then lost heart. Her prominent brows were made to be heavily marked with dark eyebrows, but instead, each hovered naked as an unstroked T above a timid, vague blue eye. Her shoulders had the challenging set of her mother's, and her dominant cheek-bones were molded by the same firm hand, but her hair was the yellow of a mavis' breast, and her ways were shy and tender, as if some essence of her gentle father had crept by mistake into the wrong casket.

In the shelter of her room as she braided her hair by the candle-light, Sally Ann would dream rash and glowing dreams of flashing lovers who would not be denied. Or walking alone in the bracken-scented gloaming, she would thrill in sweet enchantment at the thought of some bold gallant, riding down the lane to clasp her wildly to his breast.

But it was only in her dreams that she was brave enough to lift eyes to them; for the very approach of a man made her wits fly two ways at once in a frenzy of embarrassment. Before her sister died, leaving her to provide for the family, she had been steeped to the lips in mortification at her mother's constant angling after a man for her. She liked it better the

way it was now, with her mother on the watch to prevent her seeing any man who might want to marry her. There was more room for self-respect in that; although in truth, as she told herself ruefully, her mother had no need to watch; the gallants of Drumorty took little heed of *her*, they hankered after quick-eyed saucy lasses that were loud in their laughing, and free at tossing gibe for gibe.

Sally Ann also hated the "church socials" at which she would perch nervously on the edge of a chair, with a strained smile to show that she was enjoying herself. As she sat hour after hour watching the lads petitioning smiles from other lasses, but with never an eye for *her*, she would seem to herself to get smaller and smaller and quieter and more gray with every passing hour, until she would think that she had become invisible, and would relax her effort to smile; but then her mother would nudge her, whispering impatiently: "Dinna sit there wi' a face that would sour milk; there's nae lad likes a dour-faced lass." And she would pick up her smile again and wear it dutifully the rest of the evening.

Each time she would plead to stay at home, saying that sitting so long gave her a stiff neck, as indeed it did; but her mother insisted, and somehow managed to prove that it was some unnatural ingratitude in Sally Ann that made her not want to go.

But all that was changed now. Far from urging her to go, Mistress MacIntosh even contrived to have "a sinkin' aboot her heart" every time there were any social doings, so that Sally Ann had to stay at home and tend her. She even kept her from going to serve the customers in the front parlor, except on those rare occasions when the water on her knee made her a cripple. And she believed that Sally Ann was

content, and would never give marrying a thought unless some man came troubling her with his haverings.

It was a Monday morning when Sally Ann made all the treacle candy for the week. She always pulled it on a big hook in the front parlor, and because customers might come in, she wore her sky-blue print gown fresh from the ironing.

“Here’s Skilly’s Gype ridin’ doon the brae, the dirt flyin’ o’er his head as if auld Nick were at his heels,” commented Mistress MacIntosh. “He’ll be after his gloves, an’ them barely cast on yet. Tak’ the candy ben the hoose, Sally Ann; ye’ll no’ be wantin’ t’ hae speech wi’ the like o’ him.”

“I canna, mither,” Sally Ann protested. “I hae t’ pull it when it’s at *this* heat, or I’ll hae t’ heat it o’er again.”

“Weel then, turn yer back on him, and dinna let on ye ken he’s here.”

“He’ll think I’m deaf,” said Sally Ann with a flustered giggle. Her heart was capering queerly at the nearing clatter of hoofs.

“Better think ye deaf than think ye wanton,” warned her mother, bracing herself against the Gype’s arrival by feeling if her lace cap was straight.

He came in like a hurricane and was filling the parlor to the ceiling before Sally Ann had time to catch up with her heart. Everything about him, from his checked yellow waistcoat to his crinkling red hair bespoke achievement and the poise and pride that comes of it.

Ten years ago they had called him daft-like, and nicknamed him “Skilly’s Gype,” and had cried down

scorn upon him at market and meeting-place because he had come back from Aberdeen University with new-fangled notions about farming. And the worthies had held their sides when he put a roller over his newly sprouted oats; and loud had been their clamor over the "tiled bathrooms for his Jersey cows." This was when he put a tiled gutter and running water in byre. But the derision had died out when his oats and Jerseys robbed them of the best county prizes; and though they called him "the Gype" still, and cracked their jokes about his waistcoats, there was not one of them above stepping up to Skilly Farm on a dark evening to ask him for a little advice. And now that "Auld Skilly" was dead, and the Gype owned the farm, the lassies were fairly on tiptoe at his approach and angling to catch him with every wile, as much for the fine figure of a man he was, as for the grand farmhouse and byre full of Jerseys.

But he had a high-handed way with them, and never went so far forward that he couldn't step back, for he was not minded to be married for his Jersey cows, and indeed, he was not minded to be married at all while there were willing red lips to be kissed and new waists to be circled in Drumorty.

He included Sally Ann in his hearty "Guid day t' ye," but minding her mother's warning, she didn't turn round. Indeed, she *couldn't* have turned round, in such a flurry was she. The sound of his horse's hoofs had made her heart float out of her, and for the moment he was strangely mixed up with the lover of her dreams, whose horse's hoofs also sprayed the sod behind him in his haste to reach her side.

"Yer gloves are no' but just cast on yet," Mistress MacIntosh was saying discouragingly.

But the Gype was leaning far over the counter to attract Sally Ann.

“How long will I hae t’ wait t’ get some o’ the candy ye’re pullin’, Miss MacIntosh?”

Her mother made answer, cutting off his view of Sally Ann. “We hae lots o’ treacle candy all ready in the winda. How much wad ye be wantin’?”

“But I’m minded t’ hae some o’ the fresh,” he answered, stepping round the short counter to Sally Ann’s side. Seeing him, she missed the hook, and the candy would have fallen had he not deftly grabbed it and tossed it upon the hook again.

“It’s sticky stuff, that,” he laughed, taking out his handkerchief to wipe his fingers. Sally Ann smiled shyly up at him.

“It’s the verra color o’ yer hair,” he said, contemplating her. “Only it’s no’ so bonnie as yer hair.”

“Yer horse is scarin’ at something,” said Mistress MacIntosh with a clinking chill in her voice. “Better tend t’ yer ain business and let the lassie tend t’ hers. She wants none o’ yer haverin’, keep that for Bransbog’s lassies that hae nothing better t’ do than listen t’ the like o’ ye.”

“Mither!” cried Sally Ann reproachfully.

“Dinna ‘Mither’ me,” snapped Mistress MacIntosh. “Gae ben the hoose as I tel’t ye in the first place.”

“Mither—” began Sally again.

“Na, noo,” remonstrated the Gype. “I’ll no’ tak’ a bite oot o’ the lass.” He put out a hand to detain Sally Ann, but, obeying a commanding signal from

her mother, she had the candy from the hook and was through the door like a frightened squirrel.

"Be steppin' yer way, ma mannie," said Mistress MacIntosh with withering patronage.

The Gype loitered. "I'll tak' a pound o' candy first." He was not minded to go at Mistress MacIntosh's bidding; it pleased him to make her drop her triumphant air and reach down groaningly to the shelf under the counter for a bag of candy.

"Noo," he said, with the devil dancing in his face, "present it t' Miss MacIntosh wi' my compliments an' tell her frae me that I'd tak' her walkin' if she didna hae such an ill-natured mither."

"Awa', ye impudent bletherskate, an' tak' yer candy wi' ye. I'll break her twa legs afore I let her tak' a step wi' the like o' ye."

"We'll see aboot that," he mocked. "Tell her I'll be in by on my way home t' kiss her guid night."

"Awa'!" Mistress MacIntosh was too angry for further speech. "Na, ye'll no leave it here," she cried as he pushed the candy back at her, and hurried laughing from the shop, banging the door so hard that the glass bell that covered the wax flowers on the mantel, jarred loose and crashed to the floor. She hurried round the counter as fast as her stiff knee would let her, intending to throw his candy after him, but as she heard the thud of departing hoofs, she stopped to consider it. After all, it was a shilling's worth of candy and it had been paid for; and she could sell it again and never let on to Sally Ann; and forby that, she would charge him for the broken bell the next time he came in.

The Gype went thudding down the street,

scattering the sod along the gutter-side as he went, and laughing in appreciation of his own wit. Then he bethought him of Sally Ann and his threat to kiss her good night. He hadn't meant it at the time. But why should he not? He was surprised that he hadn't noticed before how bonnie her hair was. And she had a soft-like look in her eyes that was unco becoming in a young lass. He recalled the rustling cleanness of her starched blue gown. He liked that in a lass. His mother had always said it was an ill sign when a woman could bear to be aught but spotless. She was wont to say: "Dirt on the sark[23] is a sign o' dirt on the soul." And he believed her words to be true, although he had often found her too clean for comfort when she would follow him through the house with a besom[24] and a duster, crying out upon him for a worthless clout that kept her cleaning from morning to night. Nevertheless he felt it was a failing that brought her all the nearer to the kingdom of Heaven; and somehow his heart could never center for long on a lass who was not "persnickety" about dirt. There had been a chorus-girl in Aberdeen who could keep him waiting by the hour, and who had even made him miss a class or two to humor her; but a glimpse of her grimy chemise showing at the neck of her dress had cured him of that.

You could tell that Sally Ann was clean right to her skin; and how white her skin was, almost blue-white, like milk that had been skimmed. It would not be a very sore trial to have to kiss Sally Ann! He grinned at that. How would she take it? She would like it, of course. She would pretend that she didn't, but she *would*. He knew his worth too well to doubt that. Doubtless she would be proud and brag about it. He must watch, though. No use letting a lass think fun

was more than fun. Lasses had a way of seeing wedding rings and the like—queer how the least thing could set them thinking that way. It would be wise to make it clear to begin with—that was the best way.

Then he wondered who came courting Sally Ann. There was sure to be somebody, for all her quietness. His mother had often said that the quiet ones were the worst. She had been a wise woman, his mother. Maybe Sally Ann knew a lot more than she was minded to let people see. She had given him a look, shy-like up out of the corner of her eyes. There had been encouragement in it, for all it was shy and soft-like. Oh, she was no guileless lamb, blush though she may. It might well be that she was as free with her kisses as Bransbog's lasses, for all her mousey ways. Doubtless she was expecting him this very minute, and thinking him blate[25] that he hadn't ridden round to the back of the house as soon as he left the shop. And why hadn't he? Dullard that he was, to keep a lass waiting! He wheeled his horse about, his mouth widening roguishly. "All right, Sally Ann. I'm no' one t' keep a lass waitin' for a kiss. My mither always tel't me I must be obligin' wi' the women-folk."

Sally Ann dumped the candy back in the pan, and took her flushed cheeks out to the back yard. Her heart needed more room to beat. She was dismayed by the pother it was making, and looked round for some sane thing to do with her hands. Something to steady her.

A bag of oats for the chickens stood near. She noticed for the first time that rust had made little holes in the tin basin, and she found herself trying to push a kernel of oats through one of the holes. "Fine

nonsense," she scolded, stopping herself. "Fine nonsense, this," and with reproving haste she filled the basin and took it down to the henhouse, although it was unheard of and witless to give chickens their evening meal at ten in the morning. She stood scattering the oats before the lackadaisical hens and wondering at herself that she could be so mazed by the Gype.

"It's no' as if I thought he meant a word o' 't," she reasoned. "And what did he say, but that my hair is the color o' the candy, which is nothing but the bare truth. Fine nonsense, this, to fash mysel' o'er a bare civility."

She barely heard the Gype ride up to the hedge when he vaulted over it, high-headed, thinking she was waiting there for him. He swaggered approaching her, his cap far back upon his head, his lip lifted in amusement over his glistening teeth.

Expecting some coquettish resistance, he lunged toward her and circled her tightly with his arms. The pan slipped from her hands and rolled away.

Sally Ann, crushed against his breast, lay quiet. This was her dream as she had dreamed it. This was love. This was her lover come to claim her. A tide of sweetness welled up to her eyes.

Her quietness surprised the Gype, who would have understood better if she had given him a clout on the ear.

He looked down at her quince-colored head lying bright against the rough gray of his coat.

"She's a bonnie lass," he jested to himself. "It would be ill-done to disappoint her." He felt for her chin and raised her scarcely resisting face. She

looked up at him timidly; tears darkened her yellow lashes. In alarm the Gype relaxed his hold. “This is a bonnie business,” he reflected irritably. “Devil take me for a witless lout to meddle wi’ her. She’ll hae me walkin’ down the aisle to the altar afore I’ve time t’ draw my breath.”

He would have taken his arms away, but Sally Ann leaned helplessly against him. He was thinking of escape when a smile flickered across her tear-wet face. This reassured him. So she wasn’t blaming him. Maybe she wasn’t taking him as seriously as he had feared. Some women cried for nothing, and meant nothing by it.

His arms closed about her again and his arrogant lips covered her warm mouth. Its willingness bewildered and conquered him. His emotions took a new color, his arms about her were more gentle and his lips sought her kisses with greater tenderness. He thought how soft and small she was against his breast, and how foolish she was to trust him so. He must warn her of that. A man might well think her wanton to be so free.

Sally Ann turned her face against his shoulder, a gentle sobbing fluttered in her throat, her small round body drooping in his arms. Seeing her so helpless, he thought he understood, and a bitter shame smote his heart. He had frightened her! Frightened her so that she was powerless to resist him. He had thought her free; had thought her willing for his kisses, and all the time the poor lass had been too mazed to cry out against him. Oh, prideful popinjay that he was, he had frightened the lass out of her wits, and now she was crying as if the heart of her would break in two.

“Oh, Sally Ann,” he cried, “I didna mean t’ fright

ye so. Dinna greet,[26] dinna greet, my wee lamb. I'm a lout that's no' worth the hangin', but I'd bake on a griddle afore I'd do aught t' harm ye, Sally Ann."

She stopped sobbing, wondering at the trouble in his broad flushed face.

"Yer no' a lout," she said, ignoring all his protestations save that one. Eager to drive away the signs of weeping, he was daubing awkwardly at her face with his red-spotted handkerchief. But more tears kept falling, for Sally Ann was so full of happiness it *had* to overflow.

"Sally Ann," came shrilly from the house.

"My mither," cried Sally Ann, and her eyes became alert. "She'll flay me alive."

"Wait," begged the Gype, staying her as she started toward the house. "Will ye meet me at gloamin'? Come along the Bracken Lane. I'll be waitin', Sally Ann."

"I canna."

"Ye can. I'll be waitin'," he urged, releasing her struggling hand as the cry from the house rang again more insistent.

"I canna," and she darted away.

He watched her as she ran unsteadily along the cobble path between the rows of boxwood, and when the last pale blue glimmer of her was lost in the shadow of the doorway he went soberly out by the gate and found his horse.

It was a day of mazement past all telling. What pans of candy were left to burn. What pails of water left to overflow. What questions left without answer. Well might Mistress MacIntosh cry out upon her for a

heedless limmer. No warlock upon the moors at evening ever went its way with less direction than did Sally Ann. At gloaming she sought her room beneath the thatch, brushing her hair with hands that flew aimlessly and got tangled. And when at last she was ready, dressed in her Sunday best taken by stealth from the kist on the stair landing, she found that no feet of hers could take her one step from the shelter of her room.

Could *she* go boldly down the lane to meet a lad at evening time? Could *she* walk up to him with lightsome words upon her lips as he stood waiting there? Oh, no, she could not. Lasses there were that could go with high heads and light laughing, and go, and go again. But *she* could not. Trysts in the gloaming were not for her.

She sat down upon her chair again, contemplating herself in the blistered glass between the candlesticks. Oh, to be broad-hipped and glib-tongued like Bransbog's lasses; to toss a lightsome head when lads were havering; to swing by in rustling petticoats, confident that they were admiring. Oh, to be *anybody* but Sally Ann MacIntosh, so that the Gype might love her. Oh, to *know* that he loved her, so that she might be bold enough to go to him!

And what had made her believe that the like of the Gype, proud footed as he was, could love Sally Ann MacIntosh? What folly was it that made her think that he was waiting for her now? Why would the Gype, sought as he was by every lass in Drumorty, why would the Gype love her?

Oh, it was well she had come to her senses! Fine food for laughter it would be if she walked down the lane to meet the Gype; fine food for laughter if she

found him there with Bransbog's lassie, waiting to see her come; or with the MacKenty lass that had so sharp a tongue. Well was it, that her feet were wiser than her head and kept her home where none could see her folly. She began to undo the black ribbon at her neck, which was clasped by the brooch of twisted gold.

By sunset the Gype had reasoned with himself that no lass could cry over a kiss of his. The little limmer had tricked him, had made him go further than he meant. Oh, well, he was not unwilling to make her happy for a time. She was a bonnie wee lass. He turned his horse into the Bracken Lane with a sense that he was being very kind to Sally Ann. He had come early, for he knew that in her eagerness to see him again she would think gloaming had come when the sun had barely set and it would not be the gallant thing to keep her waiting. He was pleased with himself. He liked to make a lass happy.

Dismounting, he found a place to tie his horse, not so near that every passer-by could see it from the road, for he was not minded to be explaining to Bransbog's lass, nor to Janet MacKenty whose tongue was keen, nor even to Mary MacIntyre, though *she* would never reproach him; but it was hard to bear with her when she sat with tight lips and looked past him as if seeing warlocks. A lass had many ways of making a man itch to slap her. He sat where he could see Sally Ann approaching, and measured with his eye just where her head would come as she turned the corner by the sweetbrier rose-bush. It got darker and he had to change his seat in order to see the road. He had been wrong to think that she would come early. Of course she would come late. They always did for the first tryst. Lasses were so retiring

to begin with, and so demanding at the finish. He wished that they worked the other way, it would save him many a weary hour. It was getting murky and thick and well past gloaming. Sally Ann could come now without any blame of being hasty at a tryst.

Doubtless she was on her way. Little limmer to keep him waiting so. But clever little limmer!

The moon was coming up. This was past a joke, past clever wiles. The lass must be blate to think he'd wait for her till moonrise. She must set high store by herself to think he'd cool his heels for two hours waiting for a kiss of hers. Did she think that James Minty of Skillymarnoe was sore put-to to get a lass to meet him at gloaming? Thought she that? What had she to command her that she set such value on herself? Little that *he* could see. Nothing for looks, and never a penny to her name. Was he going to sit till he took root waiting for such a lass?

No, he was but waiting to let her see how little store he set on any kiss of hers. He'd make her rue this high-handed work. He had set down higher-headed wenches than Sally Ann MacIntosh. When she came, he would kiss her light-like, and he'd talk a while cheerily, then he'd say canty[27] and smiling at her, "Weel, my lass, it's gettin' late. I maun be gaun' back to Skilly." And he would be forgetful to kiss her good night, but very friendly with it all for fear she thought that he was vexed. And when next he saw her he would call her "Miss MacIntosh" as if naught had been between them.

But she wasn't coming, that was clear. How could he lower her pride for her if she didn't come near him? He'd go after her. Just at first it would give her

more reason for her pridefulness, but the higher he made her think of herself, the greater would be her down-come when he passed her by.

Sally Ann was braiding her hair with troubled fingers when she heard a light tap upon the small window that opened upon the roof of the peat-shed. Her heart told her who it was, and she hurriedly snuffed out the candles, fearing that he could see her as she sat there in her nainsook night-gown with the frilled cuffs.

But how could he come without a sound? How climb the roof without her brother hearing?

The tapping again! How dare he knock so loudly? How could he be so bold? Her fingers danced about the dressing table in a frenzy. She was afraid, but wildly happy. “Fairly batterin’ down the hoose t’ get me,” her heart sang. Oh, that this should happen to *her*. And then she saw his face against the window-pane, a white wedge in the moonlight. He was raising the sash. Her heart broke into panic. What should she do? Should she call her mother?

The Gype was propping the sash with his shoulder. There was just room for his arm and face in the narrow opening of the window.

“Sally Ann,” he whispered, searching for her in the dark room. “Come here.”

“I canna,” she whispered back at him, but left the chair and came a little way toward him.

“Come here,” he said again as she paused timidly.

“I canna,” she answered, coming nearer as she spoke.

“Come and kneel by me,” he commanded.

"I canna," she said softly, but came and knelt by the window so that her face was level with his.

"Noo ye'll gie me a kiss, Sally Ann MacIntosh," he said, catching hold of her.

"I canna," she gasped. How sweet was the tumult in her heart!

"Ye *will*."

"No, I canna," she faltered, praying that he would insist.

"It would be a sore pity t' wake yer puir sick brother," he whispered mockingly. "A sore pity, but there's a loose slate by my foot, and down it goes unless ye kiss me this minute."

"Oh!"

"It would be ill done t' wake him, puir lad," sighed the Gype.

"No, dinna," she begged.

"Weel, I'm waitin'." He thrust his gleaming face through the opening.

"Then I maun do it," said Sally Ann, more to assure herself than him.

"First put yer arms about my neck," he ordered.

"I canna." But her arms trembled to obey.

"Down goes the slate then," he threatened.

Her arms flew up in obedience. Oh, how bold she was. How bold, but how happy.

"Kiss me!"

"I canna," she said, and kissed him eagerly.

"Again an' longer," he ordered.

"I canna," kissing him as she spoke.

"Na, dinna stop," he said, as she drew back. "Ye'll hae t' keep on wi' the kissin', for I'm sorely tempted t' kick down the slate."

"Oh!" Surely this was Paradise.

"I'm sorry for ye, Sally Ann," he commiserated. "It's a sore trial t' hae t' kiss me."

"It's no' a trial," she whispered shyly.

"Is it no'?" His voice was eager, and then he was vexed at his eagerness. He was there to lay low her pride. This was the time that he should go away and leave her. Leave her lightsomely, and then, when next they met, greet her as if naught had ever been between them.

But it would be well, and nothing more than just, to let her tell why she had broken the tryst. So he'd sound her out on that.

"I'm thinkin' ye hate me for my impudence," he ventured.

"I dinna hate ye," she said softly, a timid hand reaching up to his crinkling hair.

"Then why did ye no' meet me?"

"I couldna."

"Fine story, *that*," he cried scornfully. "Nae lass ever missed a tryst t' please her mither."

Sally Ann could not answer. How could she say all that was in her breast? How tell him that her feet were not brave enough to go to him? Go to him? Oh, no, her heart was too faint with her unworthiness.

Sally Ann had no words to tell him this.

The Gype brooded upon her silence. “She didna wish t’ cheapen hersel’ by meeting me at the first askin’,” he told himself. Here was a lass who was not minded to melt in his mouth like a ripe berry at the first tasting. Here was a lass that would take some reaching for. And she was right. His mother had always said: “A worthy bride’s no’ easy won.” She had been a wise woman, his mother.

But he was thinking of Sally Ann as a bride? Oh, no, but there was no harm admiring a lass that held herself high. He wondered what she thought of him, and longed for some reassurance, some word to show that she did not quite despise him.

“Ye dinna hate me, Sally Ann?”

She shook her head.

“Yer no’ angry that I made ye kiss me?”

She shook her head again.

“Will ye let me kiss ye, Sally Ann?”

She nodded shyly and turned her face to his. And then he knew that there was nothing sweeter than to lie there on the slated roof in the moonlight with Sally Ann’s timorous arms about his neck, and her breath, fragrant as the air from new milk, upon his face. He knew that there was nothing dearer than the warmth of her lips upon his, and the gentle flutter of her breast.

And so throughout the months of sweetbrier roses, and well into berry-picking time, he sought Sally Ann by stealth upon the roof or in the gloaming along the Bracken Lane. And on market days, when Mistress MacIntosh was well occupied, he would venture into

the kitchen for a hasty kiss. But he had never said a word of marriage to Sally Ann, and though at times she saw herself riding to the kirk in Skillymarnoe's phæton behind the dappled grays, she would push the picture away from her, not daring to look upon its brightness. Nor did she grieve at the thought that it might never be, but rather she held her happiness breathlessly, as one might hold a gleaming bubble with spread fingers.

It was the evening of "Stookie Sunday" and the Gype had been to the kirk to pray for drought to dry the grain, for this was the only occasion when he put any faith in the Lord. He had hoped to overtake Sally Ann in the Bracken Lane, but she was not at the kirk, and neither was Mistress MacIntosh. This was more than unusual, it came nigh to being alarming, and the Gype made sure that some mishap had come to young Sandy. So it was with little caution that he sought Sally Ann in the kitchen.

"Yer brother?" he asked as he entered the door.

"Na," said Sally Ann, understanding him. "It was the hens."

"The hens?"

"Aye. They're crop-bound. We fed them wi' the oats left frae decoratin' the kirk. My mither thinks it's a visitation frae the Lord for stintin' Him. We hae operated on sax o' them wi' Sandy's razor. Five are doin' fine, but this ane's like t' pass awa'!"

She put the basket with the drooping Black Minorca hen upon the table. The Gype inspected it, fingering its faded comb soberly.

"Tell yer mither t' put a drop o' oil t' keep the feathers frae stickin'."

"Aye, she's done that. Ye'd better awa'," Sally Ann advised. "My mither's only at the hen hoose."

"Come down the lane, then."

"Na, I couldna an' leave the hens."

"Hens or no hens, I'll no' leave without a kiss." He pressed her close, and held her all the closer as she struggled, begging him to mind her mother.

And then it was too late. Mistress MacIntosh stood in the doorway, a wilting hen under either arm, her face as red as the combs upon their heads.

"Fine work this on a Sabbath day! Fine wanton's work! Standin' there haverin' wi' the scum o' the earth while a hen worth eighteen pence is like t' pass awa'. Lord pity me that I brought the like o' ye into the world, ye wanton limmer."

"Nae more o' that!" cried the Gype. "Ye'll no' call wife o' mine a wanton limmer."

"Wife o' *yours*," screamed Mistress MacIntosh derisively.

"Aye, just that," said the Gype with furious calm. "Sally Ann, come wi' me."

"No' a foot," cried her mother. "Oot o' my hoose, ye worthless prodigal, afore I hae my sick laddie rise frae his bed t' throw ye oot."

"Sally Ann," said the Gype, "I maun go for Sandy's sake. Meet me in the lane."

"Niver!" cried Mistress MacIntosh.

"The lass has a tongue o' her ain," the Gype reminded her scathingly as he went.

Sally Ann faced her mother, trembling, but there

was something of new strength in her blue eyes.

“Dinna glower at me,” cried her mother. “Tak’ yer sinful face oot o’ my sight. Up t’ yer room, ye worthless besom!”

“I canna, mither, I maun meet him,” said Sally Ann in a voice so quiet with certainty that Mistress MacIntosh floundered, incredulous.

“Ye defy yer ain mither? Oh, that I should live t’ see this day!” She set the hens down hurriedly, not caring how they flopped helplessly on the floor, and clutched the front of her bodice, gasping as she did when her sinking spells were upon her.

Sally Ann regarded her with troubled eyes, but made no move toward her.

“Dinna hae a sinkin’ spell, mither,” she advised, “for I maun leave ye.”

“Devil tak’ my glib tongue,” thought the Gype as he went striding down the lane. “What call had I t’ go proposin’ marriage? I’m no’ hankerin’ t’ be tied faster than a ram at shearin’ time. Forby that the lass never looked for it. Never so much as said, ‘It maun be lonesome for ye at Skillymarnoe.’ Never so much as mentioned that a hoose is na a hame without a woman in it. Never even tried t’ sew a button or mend a sock for me.”

No, he couldn’t blame the lass. She was not one to snare a lad with wiles and glances. But it was not too late. He could pull in his horns again, blame his hasty speech upon her mother, and keep away from Sally Ann. Never see her again, that would be best.

Never see Sally Ann again? What havering was this? How could he live without seeing Sally Ann? What would he do without her kisses at gloaming?

What could he do without her gentle glances? It was for Sally Ann he hurried through the day with lightsome singing. It was for Sally Ann he had painted the barn. How could he live without Sally Ann?

He looked yearningly along the lane. Why didn't she come? He could not bear this waiting. His heart was harried with the need to hold her. How could she loiter so?

And then he saw her coming, her feet falling daintily upon the moss-dappled path. How could she take such care in coming? How dally so? He could not bear the space between them any longer, and so he ran to meet her, stumbling in his eagerness, his face strained with the pain of his need.

"Oh, Sally Ann," he cried, sweeping her within his grasp. "I canna wait. Say ye'll have me. I ken I should hae asked ye afore. I ken I should hae asked ye different—Sally Ann!"

Sally Ann could not speak. She was full of shame that she had ever doubted him. He had meant this from the first! He had been courting her for marriage, and she had thought he held her lightly. She had given him her kisses while she had doubted him. Oh, he must never know. He must never know what a wanton heart was in her breast. She was so poor a thing, how could he love her so? And from the full tide of her humility, she cried, "How can ye want me for a wife, that none has ever sought before?"

And the Gype replied—for this answer had come to him many times as he wondered at his love for her: "It takes a man o' taste t' appreciate ye, Sally Ann."

And she was happy, not seeing that half the compliment was for himself.

THE END

FOOTNOTES

[1] A close-frilled cap.

[2] Without strength, worthless.

[3] Ask, particularly ask in marriage; proposal.

[4] One who rents a small portion of a farm from the farmer and gives his services in exchange. The cotter's wife also assists in the farm kitchen and in the fields at harvest time, so a cotter's wife must be strong.

[5] Field daisy.

[6] Very.

[7] Worthless, impudent girl.

[8] Every.

[9] A built in box for holding peats.

[10] Infant.

[11] Man.

[12] Scarecrow.

[13] A corruption of Geck, a term of derision, applied especially to one who puts on airs.

[14] High hat.

[15] Something requiring careful attention,

like a newly hatched chicken under which a board is placed to keep its feet off the damp ground.

[16] Pinched, thin.

[17] Trunk.

[18] Worry.

[19] Witch-body, applied to anything that doesn't use human reasoning.

[20] Nonsense, flattery.

[21] Careful, cautious, quiet.

[22] Off the straight, wrong, oblique.

[23] Shirt, vest.

[24] Broom made of heather.

[25] Dull-witted.

[26] Cry.

[27] Cheery.

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