

Arthur Conan Doyle

The Great Shadow and Other Napoleon



Arthur Conan Doyle
The Great Shadow
and Other Napoleon

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=8508701

Аннотация

"The Great Shadow and other Napoleonic Tales", is an Action & Adventure novel published in 1892. The novel takes place in the Napoleonic era on the English-Scottish border city called West Inch. The Great Shadow refers to the Napoleon's influence and his reputation that forms a shadow over West Inch.

Содержание

Chapter I – The night of the beacons	4
Chapter II – Cousin Edie of Eyemouth	17
Chapter III – The shadow on the waters	27
Chapter IV – The choosing of Jim	38
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	47

The great shadow and other Napoleonic tales by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Chapter I – The night of the beacons

It is strange to me, Jock Calder of West Inch, to feel that though now, in the very centre of the nineteenth century, I am but five-and-fifty years of age, and though it is only once in a week perhaps that my wife can pluck out a little grey bristle from over my ear, yet I have lived in a time when the thoughts and the ways of men were as different as though it were another planet from this. For when I walk in my fields I can see, down Berwick way, the little fluffs of white smoke which tell me of this strange new hundred-legged beast, with coals for food and a thousand men in its belly, for ever crawling over the border. On a shiny day I can see the glint of the brass work as it takes the curve near Corriemuir; and then, as I look out to sea, there is the same beast again, or a dozen of them maybe, leaving a trail of black in the air and of white in the water, and swimming in the face of the wind as easily as a salmon up the Tweed. Such a sight as that would have struck my good old father speechless with wrath as well as surprise; for he was so stricken with the fear of offending the

Creator that he was chary of contradicting Nature, and always held the new thing to be nearly akin to the blasphemous. As long as God made the horse, and a man down Birmingham way the engine, my good old dad would have stuck by the saddle and the spurs.

But he would have been still more surprised had he seen the peace and kindness which reigns now in the hearts of men, and the talk in the papers and at the meetings that there is to be no more war – save, of course, with blacks and such like. For when he died we had been fighting with scarce a break, save only during two short years, for very nearly a quarter of a century. Think of it, you who live so quietly and peacefully now! Babies who were born in the war grew to be bearded men with babies of their own, and still the war continued. Those who had served and fought in their stalwart prime grew stiff and bent, and yet the ships and the armies were struggling. It was no wonder that folk came at last to look upon it as the natural state, and thought how queer it must seem to be at peace. During that long time we fought the Dutch, we fought the Danes, we fought the Spanish, we fought the Turks, we fought the Americans, we fought the Monte-Videans, until it seemed that in this universal struggle no race was too near of kin, or too far away, to be drawn into the quarrel. But most of all it was the French whom we fought, and the man whom of all others we loathed and feared and admired was the great Captain who ruled them.

It was very well to draw pictures of him, and sing songs about

him, and make as though he were an impostor; but I can tell you that the fear of that man hung like a black shadow over all Europe, and that there was a time when the glint of a fire at night upon the coast would set every woman upon her knees and every man gripping for his musket. He had always won: that was the terror of it. The Fates seemed to be behind him. And now we knew that he lay upon the northern coast with a hundred and fifty thousand veterans, and the boats for their passage. But it is an old story, how a third of the grown folk of our country took up arms, and how our little one-eyed, one-armed man crushed their fleet. There was still to be a land of free thinking and free speaking in Europe.

There was a great beacon ready on the hill by Tweedmouth, built up of logs and tar-barrels; and I can well remember how, night after night, I strained my eyes to see if it were ablaze. I was only eight at the time, but it is an age when one takes a grief to heart, and I felt as though the fate of the country hung in some fashion upon me and my vigilance. And then one night as I looked I suddenly saw a little flicker on the beacon hill – a single red tongue of flame in the darkness. I remember how I rubbed my eyes, and pinched myself, and rapped my knuckles against the stone window-sill, to make sure that I was indeed awake. And then the flame shot higher, and I saw the red quivering line upon the water between; and I dashed into the kitchen, screeching to my father that the French had crossed and the Tweedmouth light was aflame. He had been talking to Mr. Mitchell, the law student

from Edinburgh; and I can see him now as he knocked his pipe out at the side of the fire, and looked at me from over the top of his horn spectacles.

"Are you sure, Jock?" says he.

"Sure as death!" I gasped.

He reached out his hand for the Bible upon the table, and opened it upon his knee as though he meant to read to us; but he shut it again in silence, and hurried out. We went too, the law student and I, and followed him down to the gate which opens out upon the highway. From there we could see the red light of the big beacon, and the glimmer of a smaller one to the north of us at Ayton. My mother came down with two plaids to keep the chill from us, and we all stood there until morning, speaking little to each other, and that little in a whisper. The road had more folk on it than ever passed along it at night before; for many of the yeomen up our way had enrolled themselves in the Berwick volunteer regiments, and were riding now as fast as hoof could carry them for the muster. Some had a stirrup cup or two before parting, and I cannot forget one who tore past on a huge white horse, brandishing a great rusty sword in the moonlight. They shouted to us as they passed that the North Berwick Law fire was blazing, and that it was thought that the alarm had come from Edinburgh Castle. There were a few who galloped the other way, couriers for Edinburgh, and the laird's son, and Master Clayton, the deputy sheriff, and such like. And among others there was one a fine built, heavy man on a roan horse, who pulled up at our

gate and asked some question about the road. He took off his hat to ease himself, and I saw that he had a kindly long-drawn face, and a great high brow that shot away up into tufts of sandy hair.

"I doubt it's a false alarm," said he. "Maybe I'd ha' done well to bide where I was; but now I've come so far, I'll break my fast with the regiment."

He clapped spurs to his horse, and away he went down the brae.

"I ken him weel," said our student, nodding after him. "He's a lawyer in Edinburgh, and a braw hand at the stringin' of verses. Wattie Scott is his name."

None of us had heard of it then; but it was not long before it was the best known name in Scotland, and many a time we thought of how he speered his way of us on the night of the terror.

But early in the morning we had our minds set at ease. It was grey and cold, and my mother had gone up to the house to make a pot of tea for us, when there came a gig down the road with Dr. Horscroft of Ayton in it and his son Jim. The collar of the doctor's brown coat came over his ears, and he looked in a deadly black humour; for Jim, who was but fifteen years of age, had trooped off to Berwick at the first alarm with his father's new fowling piece. All night his dad had chased him, and now there he was, a prisoner, with the barrel of the stolen gun sticking out from behind the seat. He looked as sulky as his father, with his hands thrust into his side-pockets, his brows drawn down, and his lower lip thrusting out.

"It's all a lie!" shouted the doctor as he passed. "There has been no landing, and all the fools in Scotland have been gadding about the roads for nothing."

His son Jim snarled something up at him on this, and his father struck him a blow with his clenched fist on the side of his head, which sent the boy's chin forward upon his breast as though he had been stunned. My father shook his head, for he had a liking for Jim; but we all walked up to the house again, nodding and blinking, and hardly able to keep our eyes open now that we knew that all was safe, but with a thrill of joy at our hearts such as I have only matched once or twice in my lifetime.

Now all this has little enough to do with what I took my pen up to tell about; but when a man has a good memory and little skill, he cannot draw one thought from his mind without a dozen others trailing out behind it. And yet, now that I come to think of it, this had something to do with it after all; for Jim Horscroft had so deadly a quarrel with his father, that he was packed off to the Berwick Academy, and as my father had long wished me to go there, he took advantage of this chance to send me also.

But before I say a word about this school, I shall go back to where I should have begun, and give you a hint as to who I am; for it may be that these words of mine may be read by some folk beyond the border country who never heard of the Calders of West Inch.

It has a brave sound, West Inch, but it is not a fine estate with a braw house upon it, but only a great hard-bitten, wind-swept

sheep run, fringing off into links along the sea-shore, where a frugal man might with hard work just pay his rent and have butter instead of treacle on Sundays. In the centre there is a grey-stoned slate-roofed house with a byre behind it, and "1703" scrawled in stonework over the lintel of the door. There for more than a hundred years our folk have lived, until, for all their poverty, they came to take a good place among the people; for in the country parts the old yeoman is often better thought of than the new laird.

There was one queer thing about the house of West Inch. It has been reckoned by engineers and other knowing folk that the boundary line between the two countries ran right through the middle of it, splitting our second-best bedroom into an English half and a Scotch half. Now the cot in which I always slept was so placed that my head was to the north of the line and my feet to the south of it. My friends say that if I had chanced to lie the other way my hair might not have been so sandy, nor my mind of so solemn a cast. This I know, that more than once in my life, when my Scotch head could see no way out of a danger, my good thick English legs have come to my help, and carried me clear away. But at school I never heard the end of this, for they would call me "Half-and-half" and "The Great Britain," and sometimes "Union Jack." When there was a battle between the Scotch and English boys, one side would kick my shins and the other cuff my ears, and then they would both stop and laugh as though it were something funny.

At first I was very miserable at the Berwick Academy.

Birtwhistle was the first master, and Adams the second, and I had no love for either of them. I was shy and backward by nature, and slow at making a friend either among masters or boys. It was nine miles as the crow flies, and eleven and a half by road, from Berwick to West Inch, and my heart grew heavy at the weary distance that separated me from my mother; for, mark you, a lad of that age pretends that he has no need of his mother's caresses, but ah, how sad he is when he is taken at his word! At last I could stand it no longer, and I determined to run away from the school and make my way home as fast as I might. At the very last moment, however, I had the good fortune to win the praise and admiration of every one, from the headmaster downwards, and to find my school life made very pleasant and easy to me. And all this came of my falling by accident out of a second-floor window.

This was how it happened. One evening I had been kicked by Ned Barton, who was the bully of the school; and this injury coming on the top of all my other grievances, caused my little cup to overflow. I vowed that night, as I buried my tear-stained face beneath the blankets, that the next morning would either find me at West Inch or well on the way to it. Our dormitory was on the second floor, but I was a famous climber, and had a fine head for heights. I used to think little, young as I was, of swinging myself with a rope round my thigh off the West Inch gable, and that stood three-and-fifty feet above the ground. There was not much fear then but that I could make my way out of Birtwhistle's

dormitory. I waited a weary while until the coughing and tossing had died away, and there was no sound of wakefulness from the long line of wooden cots; then I very softly rose, slipped on my clothes, took my shoes in my hand, and walked tiptoe to the window. I opened the casement and looked out. Underneath me lay the garden, and close by my hand was the stout branch of a pear tree. An active lad could ask no better ladder. Once in the garden I had but a five-foot wall to get over, and then there was nothing but distance between me and home. I took a firm grip of a branch with one hand, placed my knee upon another one, and was about to swing myself out of the window, when in a moment I was as silent and as still as though I had been turned to stone.

There was a face looking at me from over the coping of the wall. A chill of fear struck to my heart at its whiteness and its stillness. The moon shimmered upon it, and the eyeballs moved slowly from side to side, though I was hid from them behind the screen of the pear tree. Then in a jerky fashion this white face ascended, until the neck, shoulders, waist, and knees of a man became visible. He sat himself down on the top of the wall, and with a great heave he pulled up after him a boy about my own size, who caught his breath from time to time as though to choke down a sob. The man gave him a shake, with a few rough whispered words, and then the two dropped together down into the garden. I was still standing balanced with one foot upon the bough and one upon the casement, not daring to budge for fear of attracting their attention, for I could hear them moving

stealthily about in the long shadow of the house. Suddenly, from immediately beneath my feet, I heard a low grating noise and the sharp tinkle of falling glass.

"That's done it," said the man's eager whisper. "There is room for you."

"But the edge is all jagged!" cried the other in a weak quaver. The fellow burst out into an oath that made my skin pringle.

"In with you, you cub," he snarled, "or – "

I could not see what he did, but there was a short, quick gasp of pain.

"I'll go! I'll go!" cried the little lad.

But I heard no more, for my head suddenly swam, my heel shot off the branch, I gave a dreadful yell, and came down, with my ninety-five pounds of weight, right upon the bent back of the burglar. If you ask me, I can only say that to this day I am not quite certain whether it was an accident or whether I designed it. It may be that while I was thinking of doing it Chance settled the matter for me. The fellow was stooping with his head forward thrusting the boy through a tiny window, when I came down upon him just where the neck joins the spine. He gave a kind of whistling cry, dropped upon his face, and rolled three times over, drumming on the grass with his heels. His little companion flashed off in the moonlight, and was over the wall in a trice. As for me, I sat yelling at the pitch of my lungs and nursing one of my legs, which felt as if a red-hot ring were welded round it.

It was not long, as may be imagined, before the whole

household, from the headmaster to the stable boy, were out in the garden with lamps and lanterns. The matter was soon cleared: the man carried off upon a shutter, and I borne in much state and solemnity to a special bedroom, where the small bone of my leg was set by Surgeon Purdie, the younger of the two brothers of that name. As to the robber, it was found that his legs were palsied, and the doctors were of two minds as to whether he would recover the use of them or no; but the Law never gave them a chance of settling the matter, for he was hanged after Carlisle assizes, some six weeks later. It was proved that he was the most desperate rogue in the North of England, for he had done three murders at the least, and there were charges enough against him upon the sheet to have hanged him ten times over.

Well now, I could not pass over my boyhood without telling you about this, which was the most important thing that happened to me. But I will go off upon no more side tracks; for when I think of all that is coming, I can see very well that I shall have more than enough to do before I have finished. For when a man has only his own little private tale to tell, it often takes him all his time; but when he gets mixed up in such great matters as I shall have to speak about, then it is hard on him, if he has not been brought up to it, to get it all set down to his liking. But my memory is as good as ever, thank God, and I shall try to get it all straight before I finish.

It was this business of the burglar that first made a friendship between Jim Horscroft, the doctor's son, and me. He was cock

boy of the school from the day he came; for within the hour he had thrown Barton, who had been cock before him, right through the big blackboard in the class-room. Jim always ran to muscle and bone, and even then he was square and tall, short of speech and long in the arm, much given to lounging with his broad back against walls, and his hands deep in his breeches pockets. I can even recall that he had a trick of keeping a straw in the corner of his mouth, just where he used afterwards to hold his pipe. Jim was always the same for good and for bad since first I knew him.

Heavens, how we all looked up to him! We were but young savages, and had a savage's respect for power. There was Tom Carndale of Appleby, who could write alcaics as well as mere pentameters and hexameters, yet nobody would give a snap for Tom; and there was Willie Earnshaw, who had every date, from the killing of Abel, on the tip of his tongue, so that the masters themselves would turn to him if they were in doubt, yet he was but a narrow-chested lad, over long for his breadth; and what did his dates help him when Jack Simons of the lower third chivied him down the passage with the buckle end of a strap? But you didn't do things like that with Jim Horscroft. What tales we used to whisper about his strength! How he put his fist through the oak-panel of the game-room door; how, when Long Merridew was carrying the ball, he caught up Merridew, ball and all, and ran swiftly past every opponent to the goal. It did not seem fit to us that such a one as he should trouble his head about spondees and dactyls, or care to know who signed the Magna Charta. When

he said in open class that King Alfred was the man, we little boys all felt that very likely it was so, and that perhaps Jim knew more about it than the man who wrote the book.

Well, it was this business of the burglar that drew his attention to me; for he patted me on my head, and said that I was a spunky little devil, which blew me out with pride for a week on end. For two years we were close friends, for all the gap that the years had made between us, and though in passion or in want of thought he did many a thing that galled me, yet I loved him like a brother, and wept as much as would have filled an ink bottle when at last he went off to Edinburgh to study his father's profession. Five years after that did I tide at Birtwhistle's, and when I left had become cock myself, for I was wiry and as tough as whalebone, though I never ran to weight and sinew like my great predecessor. It was in Jubilee Year that I left Birtwhistle's, and then for three years I stayed at home learning the ways of the cattle; but still the ships and the armies were wrestling, and still the great shadow of Bonaparte lay across the country. How could I guess that I too should have a hand in lifting that shadow for ever from our people?

Chapter II – Cousin Edie of Eyemouth

Some years before, when I was still but a lad, there had come over to us upon a five weeks' visit the only daughter of my father's brother. Willie Calder had settled at Eyemouth as a maker of fishing nets, and he had made more out of twine than ever we were like to do out of the whin-bushes and sand-links of West Inch. So his daughter, Edie Calder, came over with a brow red frock and a five shilling bonnet, and a kist full of things that brought my dear mother's eyes out like a partan's. It was wonderful to see her so free with money, and she but a slip of a girl, paying the carrier man all that he asked and a whole twopence over, to which he had no claim. She made no more of drinking ginger-beer than we did of water, and she would have her sugar in her tea and butter with her bread just as if she had been English.

I took no great stock of girls at that time, for it was hard for me to see what they had been made for. There were none of us at Birtwhistle's that thought very much of them; but the smallest laddies seemed to have the most sense, for after they began to grow bigger they were not so sure about it. We little ones were all of one mind: that a creature that couldn't fight and was aye carrying tales, and couldn't so much as shy a stone without flapping its arm like a rag in the wind, was no use for anything. And then the airs that they would put on, as if they were mother

and father rolled into one; for ever breaking into a game with "Jimmy, your toe's come through your boot," or "Go home, you dirty boy, and clean yourself," until the very sight of them was weariness.

So when this one came to the stading at West Inch I was not best pleased to see her. I was twelve at the time (it was in the holidays) and she eleven, a thin, tallish girl with black eyes and the queerest ways. She was for ever staring out in front of her with her lips parted, as if she saw something wonderful; but when I came behind her and looked the same way, I could see nothing but the sheep's trough or the midden, or father's breeches hanging on a clothes-line. And then if she saw a lump of heather or bracken, or any common stuff of that sort, she would mope over it, as if it had struck her sick, and cry, "How sweet! how perfect!" just as though it had been a painted picture. She didn't like games, but I used to make her play "tig" and such like; but it was no fun, for I could always catch her in three jumps, and she could never catch me, though she would come with as much rustle and flutter as ten boys would make. When I used to tell her that she was good for nothing, and that her father was a fool to bring her up like that, she would begin to cry, and say that I was a rude boy, and that she would go home that very night, and never forgive me as long as she lived. But in five minutes she had forgot all about it. What was strange was that she liked me a deal better than I did her, and she would never leave me alone; but she was always watching me and running after me, and then saying,

"Oh, here you are!" as if it were a surprise.

But soon I found that there was good in her too. She used sometimes to give me pennies, so that once I had four in my pocket all at the same time; but the best part of her was the stories that she could tell. She was sore frightened of frogs, so I would bring one to her, and tell her that I would put it down her neck unless she told a story. That always helped her to begin; but when once she was started it was wonderful how she would carry on. And the things that had happened to her, they were enough to take your breath away. There was a Barbary rover that had been at Eyemouth, and he was coming back in five years in a ship full of gold to make her his wife; and then there was a wandering knight who had been there also, and he had given her a ring which he said he would redeem when the time came. She showed me the ring, which was very like the ones upon my bed curtain; but she said that this one was virgin gold. I asked her what the knight would do if he met the Barbary rover, and she told me that he would sweep his head from his shoulders. What they could all see in her was more than I could think. And then she told me that she had been followed on her way to West Inch by a disguised prince. I asked her how she knew it was a prince, and she said by his disguise. Another day she said that her father was preparing a riddle, and that when it was ready it would be put in the papers, and anyone who guessed it would have half his fortune and his daughter. I said that I was good at riddles, and that she must send it to me when it was ready. She said it would be in the Berwick

Gazette, and wanted to know what I would do with her when I won her. I said I would sell her by public roup for what she would fetch; but she would tell no more stories that evening, for she was very techy about some things.

Jim Horscroft was away when Cousin Edie was with us, but he came back the very week she went; and I mind how surprised I was that he should ask any questions or take any interest in a mere lassie. He asked me if she were pretty; and when I said I hadn't noticed, he laughed and called me a mole, and said my eyes would be opened some day. But very soon he came to be interested in something else, and I never gave Edie another thought until one day she just took my life in her hands and twisted it as I could twist this quill.

That was in 1813, after I had left school, when I was already eighteen years of age, with a good forty hairs on my upper lip and every hope of more. I had changed since I left school, and was not so keen on games as I had been, but found myself instead lying about on the sunny side of the braes, with my own lips parted and my eyes staring just the same as Cousin Edie's used to do. It had satisfied me and filled my whole life that I could run faster and jump higher than my neighbour; but now all that seemed such a little thing, and I yearned, and yearned, and looked up at the big arching sky, and down at the flat blue sea, and felt that there was something wanting, but could never lay my tongue to what that something was. And I became quick of temper too, for my nerves seemed all of a fret, and when my mother would ask me what

ailed me, or my father would speak of my turning my hand to work, I would break into such sharp bitter answers as I have often grieved over since. Ah! a man may have more than one wife, and more than one child, and more than one friend; but he can never have but the one mother, so let him cherish her while he may.

One day when I came in from the sheep, there was my father sitting with a letter in his hands, which was a very rare thing with us, except when the factor wrote for the rent. Then as I came nearer to him I saw that he was crying, and I stood staring, for I had always thought that it was not a thing that a man could do. I can see him now, for he had so deep a crease across his brown cheek that no tear could pass it, but must trickle away sideways and so down to his ear, hopping off on to the sheet of paper. My mother sat beside him and stroked his hands like she did the cat's back when she would soothe it.

"Aye, Jeannie," said he, "poor Willie's gone. It's from the lawyer, and it was sudden or they'd ha' sent word of it. Carbuncle, he says, and a flush o' blood to the head."

"Ah! well, his trouble's over," said my mother.

My father rubbed his ears with the tablecloth.

"He's left a' his savings to his lassie," said he, "and by gom if she's not changed from what she promised to be she'll soon gar them flee. You mind what she said of weak tea under this very roof, and it at seven shillings the pound!"

My mother shook her head, and looked up at the fitches of bacon that hung from the ceiling.

"He doesn't say how much, but she'll have enough and to spare, he says. And she's to come and bide with us, for that was his last wish."

"To pay for her keep!" cried my mother sharply. I was sorry that she should have spoken of money at that moment, but then if she had not been sharp we would all have been on the roadside in a twelvemonth.

"Aye, she'll pay, and she's coming this very day. Jock lad, I'll want you to drive to Ayton and meet the evening coach. Your Cousin Edie will be in it, and you can fetch her over to West Inch."

And so off I started at quarter past five with Souter Johnnie, the long-haired fifteen-year-old, and our cart with the new-painted tail-board that we only used on great days. The coach was in just as I came, and I, like a foolish country lad, taking no heed to the years that had passed, was looking about among the folk in the Inn front for a slip of a girl with her petticoats just under her knees. And as I slouched past and craned my neck there came a touch to my elbow, and there was a lady dressed all in black standing by the steps, and I knew that it was my cousin Edie.

I knew it, I say, and yet had she not touched me I might have passed her a score of times and never known it. My word, if Jim Horscroft had asked me then if she were pretty or no, I should have known how to answer him! She was dark, much darker than is common among our border lasses, and yet with such a faint blush of pink breaking through her dainty colour, like the deeper

flush at the heart of a sulphur rose. Her lips were red, and kindly, and firm; and even then, at the first glance, I saw that light of mischief and mockery that danced away at the back of her great dark eyes. She took me then and there as though I had been her heritage, put out her hand and plucked me. She was, as I have said, in black, dressed in what seemed to me to be a wondrous fashion, with a black veil pushed up from her brow.

"Ah! Jack," said she, in a mincing English fashion, that she had learned at the boarding school. "No, no, we are rather old for that" – this because I in my awkward fashion was pushing my foolish brown face forward to kiss her, as I had done when I saw her last. "Just hurry up like a good fellow and give a shilling to the conductor, who has been exceedingly civil to me during the journey."

I flushed up red to the ears, for I had only a silver fourpenny piece in my pocket. Never had my lack of pence weighed so heavily upon me as just at that moment. But she read me at a glance, and there in an instant was a little moleskin purse with a silver clasp thrust into my hand. I paid the man, and would have given it back, but she still would have me keep it.

"You shall be my factor, Jack," said she, laughing. "Is this our carriage? How funny it looks! And where am I to sit?"

"On the sacking," said I.

"And how am I to get there?"

"Put your foot on the hub," said I. "I'll help you."

I sprang up and took her two little gloved hands in my own.

As she came over the side her breath blew in my face, sweet and warm, and all that vagueness and unrest seemed in a moment to have been shredded away from my soul. I felt as if that instant had taken me out from myself, and made me one of the race. It took but the time of the flicking of the horse's tail, and yet something had happened, a barrier had gone down somewhere, and I was leading a wider and a wiser life. I felt it all in a flush, but shy and backward as I was, I could do nothing but flatten out the sacking for her. Her eyes were after the coach which was rattling away to Berwick, and suddenly she shook her handkerchief in the air.

"He took off his hat," said she. "I think he must have been an officer. He was very distinguished looking. Perhaps you noticed him – a gentleman on the outside, very handsome, with a brown overcoat."

I shook my head, with all my flush of joy changed to foolish resentment.

"Ah! well, I shall never see him again. Here are all the green braes and the brown winding road just the same as ever. And you, Jack, I don't see any great change in you either. I hope your manners are better than they used to be. You won't try to put any frogs down my back, will you?"

I crept all over when I thought of such a thing.

"We'll do all we can to make you happy at West Inch," said I, playing with the whip.

"I'm sure it's very kind of you to take a poor lonely girl in," said she.

"It's very kind of you to come, Cousin Edie," I stammered. "You'll find it very dull, I fear."

"I suppose it is a little quiet, Jack, eh? Not many men about, as I remember it."

"There is Major Elliott, up at Corriemuir. He comes down of an evening, a real brave old soldier who had a ball in his knee under Wellington."

"Ah, when I speak of men. Jack, I don't mean old folk with balls in their knees. I meant people of our own age that we could make friends of. By the way, that crabbed old doctor had a son, had he not?"

"Oh yes, that's Jim Horscroft, my best friend."

"Is he at home?"

"No. He'll be home soon. He's still at Edinburgh studying."

"Ah! then we'll keep each other company until he comes, Jack. And I'm very tired and I wish I was at West Inch."

I made old Souter Johnnie cover the ground as he has never done before or since, and in an hour she was seated at the supper table, where my mother had laid out not only butter, but a glass dish of gooseberry jam, which sparkled and looked fine in the candle-light. I could see that my parents were as overcome as I was at the difference in her, though not in the same way. My mother was so set back by the feather thing that she had round her neck that she called her Miss Calder instead of Edie, until my cousin in her pretty flighty way would lift her forefinger to her whenever she did it. After supper, when she had gone to bed,

they could talk of nothing but her looks and her breeding.

"By the way, though," says my father, "it does not look as if she were heart-broke about my brother's death."

And then for the first time I remembered that she had never said a word about the matter since I had met her.

Chapter III – The shadow on the waters

It was not very long before Cousin Edie was queen of West Inch, and we all her devoted subjects from my father down. She had money and to spare, though none of us knew how much. When my mother said that four shillings the week would cover all that she would cost, she fixed on seven shillings and sixpence of her own free will. The south room, which was the sunniest and had the honeysuckle round the window, was for her; and it was a marvel to see the things that she brought from Berwick to put into it. Twice a week she would drive over, and the cart would not do for her, for she hired a gig from Angus Whitehead, whose farm lay over the hill. And it was seldom that she went without bringing something back for one or other of us. It was a wooden pipe for my father, or a Shetland plaid for my mother, or a book for me, or a brass collar for Rob the collie. There was never a woman more free-handed.

But the best thing that she gave us was just her own presence. To me it changed the whole country-side, and the sun was brighter and the braes greener and the air sweeter from the day she came. Our lives were common no longer now that we spent them with such a one as she, and the old dull grey house was another place in my eyes since she had set her foot across the

door-mat. It was not her face, though that was winsome enough, nor her form, though I never saw the lass that could match her; but it was her spirit, her queer mocking ways, her fresh new fashion of talk, her proud whisk of the dress and toss of the head, which made one feel like the ground beneath her feet, and then the quick challenge in her eye, and the kindly word that brought one up to her level again.

But never quite to her level either. To me she was always something above and beyond. I might brace myself and blame myself, and do what I would, but still I could not feel that the same blood ran in our veins, and that she was but a country lassie, as I was a country lad. The more I loved her the more frightened I was at her, and she could see the fright long before she knew the love. I was uneasy to be away from her, and yet when I was with her I was in a shiver all the time for fear my stumbling talk might weary her or give her offence. Had I known more of the ways of women I might have taken less pains.

"You're a deal changed from what you used to be, Jack," said she, looking at me sideways from under her dark lashes.

"You said not when first we met," says I.

"Ah! I was speaking of your looks then, and of your ways now. You used to be so rough to me, and so masterful, and would have your own way, like the little man that you were. I can see you now with your touzled brown hair and your mischievous eyes. And now you are so gentle and quiet and soft-spoken."

"One learns to behave," says I.

"Ah, but, Jack, I liked you so much better as you were!"

Well, when she said that I fairly stared at her, for I had thought that she could never have quite forgiven me for the way I used to carry on. That anyone out of a daft house could have liked it, was clean beyond my understanding. I thought of how when she was reading by the door I would go up on the moor with a hazel switch and fix little clay balls at the end of it, and sling them at her until I made her cry. And then I thought of how I caught an eel in the Corriemuir burn and chivied her about with it, until she ran screaming under my mother's apron half mad with fright, and my father gave me one on the ear-hole with the porridge stick which knocked me and my eel under the kitchen dresser. And these were the things that she missed! Well, she must miss them, for my hand would wither before I could do them now. But for the first time I began to understand the queerness that lies in a woman, and that a man must not reason about one, but just watch and try to learn.

We found our level after a time, when she saw that she had just to do what she liked and how she liked, and that I was as much at her beck and call as old Rob was at mine. You'll think I was a fool to have had my head so turned, and maybe I was; but then you must think how little I was used to women, and how much we were thrown together. Besides she was a woman in a million, and I can tell you that it was a strong head that would not be turned by her.

Why, there was Major Elliott, a man that had buried three

wives, and had twelve pitched battles to his name, Edie could have turned him round her finger like a damp rag – she, only new from the boarding school. I met him hobbling from West Inch the first time after she came, with pink in his cheeks and a shine in his eye that took ten years from him. He was cocking up his grey moustaches at either end and curling them into his eyes, and strutting out with his sound leg as proud as a piper. What she had said to him the Lord knows, but it was like old wine in his veins.

"I've been up to see you, laddie," said he, "but I must home again now. My visit has not been wasted, however, as I had an opportunity of seeing la belle cousine. A most charming and engaging young lady, laddie."

He had a formal stiff way of talking, and was fond of jerking in a bit of the French, for he had picked some up in the Peninsula. He would have gone on talking of Cousin Edie, but I saw the corner of a newspaper thrusting out of his pocket, and I knew that he had come over, as was his way, to give me some news, for we heard little enough at West Inch.

"What is fresh, Major?" I asked. He pulled the paper out with a flourish.

"The allies have won a great battle, my lad," says he. "I don't think Nap can stand up long against this. The Saxons have thrown him over, and he's been badly beat at Leipzig. Wellington is past the Pyrenees, and Graham's folk will be at Bayonne before long."

I chucked up my hat.

"Then the war will come to an end at last," I cried.

"Aye, and time too," said he, shaking his head gravely. "It's been a bloody business. But it is hardly worth while for me to say now what was in my mind about you."

"What was that?"

"Well, laddie, you are doing no good here, and now that my knee is getting more limber I was hoping that I might get on active service again. I wondered whether maybe you might like to do a little soldiering under me."

My heart jumped at the thought.

"Aye, would I!" I cried.

"But it'll be clear six months before I'll be fit to pass a board, and it's long odds that Boney will be under lock and key before that."

"And there's my mother," said I, "I doubt she'd never let me go."

"Ah! well, she'll never be asked to now," he answered, and hobbled on upon his way.

I sat down among the heather with my chin on my hand, turning the thing over in my mind, and watching him in his old brown clothes, with the end of a grey plaid flapping over his shoulder, as he picked his way up the swell of the hill. It was a poor life this, at West Inch, waiting to fill my father's shoes, with the same heath, and the same burn, and the same sheep, and the same grey house for ever before me. But over there, over the blue sea, ah! there was a life fit for a man. There was the Major, a man past his prime, wounded and spent, and yet planning to get

to work again, whilst I, with all the strength of my youth, was wasting it upon these hillsides. A hot wave of shame flushed over me, and I sprang up all in a tingle to be off and playing a man's part in the world.

For two days I turned it over in my mind, and on the third there came something which first brought all my resolutions to a head, and then blew them all to nothing like a puff of smoke in the wind.

I had strolled out in 'the afternoon with Cousin Edie and Rob, until we found ourselves upon the brow of the slope which dips away down to the beach. It was late in the fall, and the links were all bronzed and faded; but the sun still shone warmly, and a south breeze came in little hot pants, rippling the broad blue sea with white curling lines. I pulled an armful of bracken to make a couch for Edie, and there she lay in her listless fashion, happy and contented; for of all folk that I have ever met, she had the most joy from warmth and light. I leaned on a tussock of grass, with Rob's head upon my knee, and there as we sat alone in peace in the wilderness, even there we saw suddenly thrown upon the waters in front of us the shadow of that great man over yonder, who had scrawled his name in red letters across the map of Europe. There was a ship coming up with the wind, a black sedate old merchant-man, bound for Leith as likely as not. Her yards were square and she was running with all sail set. On the other tack, coming from the north-east, were two great ugly lugger-like craft, with one high mast each, and a big square

brown sail. A prettier sight one would not wish than to see the three craft dipping along upon so fair a day. But of a sudden there came a spurt of flame and a whirl of blue smoke from one lugger, then the same from the second, and a rap, rap, rap, from the ship. In a twinkling hell had elbowed out heaven, and there on the waters was hatred and savagery and the lust for blood.

We had sprung to our feet at the outburst, and Edie put her hand all in a tremble upon my arm.

"They are fighting, Jack!" she cried. "What are they? Who are they?"

My heart was thudding with the guns, and it was all that I could do to answer her for the catch of my breath.

"It's two French privateers, Edie," said I, "Chasse-marries, they call them, and yon's one of our merchant ships, and they'll take her as sure as death; for the Major says they've always got heavy guns, and are as full of men as an egg is full of meat. Why doesn't the fool make back for Tweedmouth bar?"

But not an inch of canvas did she lower, but floundered on in her stolid fashion, while a little black ball ran up to her peak, and the rare old flag streamed suddenly out from the halliard. Then again came the rap, rap, rap, of her little guns, and the boom, boom of the big carronades in the bows of the lugger. An instant later the three ships met, and the merchant-man staggered on like a stag with two wolves hanging to its haunches. The three became but a dark blurr amid the smoke, with the top spars thrusting out in a bristle, and from the heart of that cloud came the quick

red flashes of flame, and such a devils' racket of big guns and small, cheering and screaming, as was to din in my head for many a week. For a stricken hour the hell-cloud moved slowly across the face of the water, and still with our hearts in our mouths we watched the flap of the flag, straining to see if it were yet there. And then suddenly, the ship, as proud and black and high as ever, shot on upon her way; and as the smoke cleared we saw one of the luggers squattering like a broken winged duck upon the water, and the other working hard to get the crew from her before she sank.

For all that hour I had lived for nothing but the fight. My cap had been whisked away by the wind, but I had never given it a thought. Now with my heart full I turned upon my Cousin Edie, and the sight of her took me back six years. There was the vacant staring eye and the parted lips, just as I had seen them in her girlhood, and her little hands were clenched until the knuckles gleamed like ivory.

"Ah, that captain!" said she, talking to the heath and the whin-bushes. "There is a man so strong, so resolute! What woman would not be proud of a man like that?"

"Aye, he did well!" I cried with enthusiasm.

She looked at me as if she had forgotten my existence.

"I would give a year of my life to meet such a man," said she. "But that is what living in the country means. One never sees anybody but just those who are fit for nothing better."

I do not know that she meant to hurt me, though she was never

very backward at that; but whatever her intention, her words seemed to strike straight upon a naked nerve.

"Very well, Cousin Edie," I said, trying to speak calmly, "that puts the cap on it. I'll take the bounty in Berwick to-night."

"What, Jack! you be a soldier!"

"Yes, if you think that every man that bides in the country must be a coward."

"Oh, you'd look so handsome in a red coat, Jack, and it improves you vastly when you are in a temper. I wish your eyes would always flash like that, for it looks so nice and manly. But I am sure that you are joking about the soldiering."

"I'll let you see if I am joking."

Then and there I set off running over the moor, until I burst into the kitchen where my mother and father were sitting on either side of the ingle.

"Mother," I cried, "I'm off for a soldier!"

Had I said I was off for a burglar they could not have looked worse over it, for in those days among the decent canny country folks it was mostly the black sheep that were herded by the sergeant. But, my word, those same black sheep did their country some rare service too. My mother put up her mittens to her eyes, and my father looked as black as a peat hole.

"Hoots, Jock, you're daft," says he.

"Daft or no, I'm going."

"Then you'll have no blessing from me."

"Then I'll go without."

At this my mother gives a screech and throws her arms about my neck. I saw her hand, all hard and worn and knuckly with the work she had done for my up-bringing, and it pleaded with me as words could not have done. My heart was soft for her, but my will was as hard as a flint-edge. I put her back in her chair with a kiss, and then ran to my room to pack my bundle. It was already growing dark, and I had a long walk before me, so I thrust a few things together and hastened out. As I came through the side door someone touched my shoulder, and there was Edie in the gloaming.

"Silly boy," said she, "you are not really going."

"Am I not? You'll see."

"But your father does not wish it, nor your mother."

"I know that."

"Then why go?"

"You ought to know."

"Why, then?"

"Because you make me!"

"I don't want you to go, Jack."

"You said it. You said that the folk in the country were fit for nothing better. You always speak like that. You think no more of me than of those doos in the cot. You think I am nobody at all. I'll show you different."

All my troubles came out in hot little spurts of speech. She coloured up as I spoke, and looked at me in her queer half-mocking, half-petting fashion.

"Oh, I think so little of you as that?" said she. "And that is the reason why you are going away? Well then, Jack, will you stay if I am – if I am kind to you?"

We were face to face and close together, and in an instant the thing was done. My arms were round her, and I was kissing her, and kissing her, and kissing her, on her mouth, her cheeks, her eyes, and pressing her to my heart, and whispering to her that she was all, all, to me, and that I could not be without her. She said nothing, but it was long before she turned her face aside, and when she pushed me back it was not very hard.

"Why, you are quite your rude, old, impudent self!" said she, patting her hair with her two hands. "You have tossed me, Jack; I had no idea that you would be so forward!"

But all my fear of her was gone, and a love tenfold hotter than ever was boiling in my veins. I took her up again, and kissed her as if it were my right.

"You are my very own now!" I cried. "I shall not go to Berwick, but I'll stay and marry you."

But she laughed when I spoke of marriage.

"Silly boy! Silly boy!" said she, with her forefinger up; and then when I tried to lay hands on her again, she gave a little dainty curtsy, and was off into the house.

Chapter IV – The choosing of Jim

And then there came those ten weeks which were like a dream, and are so now to look back upon. I would weary you were I to tell you what passed between us; but oh, how earnest and fateful and all-important it was at the time! Her waywardness; her ever-varying moods, now bright, now dark, like a meadow under drifting clouds; her causeless angers; her sudden repentances, each in turn filling me with joy or sorrow: these were my life, and all the rest was but emptiness. But ever deep down behind all my other feelings was a vague disquiet, a fear that I was like the man who set forth to lay hands upon the rainbow, and that the real Edie Calder, however near she might seem, was in truth for ever beyond my reach.

For she was so hard to understand, or, at least, she was so for a dull-witted country lad like me. For if I would talk to her of my real prospects, and how by taking in the whole of Corriemuir we might earn a hundred good pounds over the extra rent, and maybe be able to build out the parlour at West Inch, so as to make it fine for her when we married, she would pout her lips and droop her eyes, as though she scarce had patience to listen to me. But if I would let her build up dreams about what I might become, how I might find a paper which proved me to be the true heir of the laird, or how, without joining the army, which she would by no means hear of, I showed myself to be a great warrior until my

name was in all folks' mouths, then she would be as blithe as the May. I would keep up the play as well as I could, but soon some luckless word would show that I was only plain Jock Calder of West Inch, and out would come her lip again in scorn of me. So we moved on, she in the air and I on the ground; and if the rift had not come in one way, it must in another.

It was after Christmas, but the winter had been mild, with just frost enough to make it safe walking over the peat bogs. One fresh morning Edie had been out early, and she came back to breakfast with a fleck of colour on her cheeks.

"Has your friend the doctor's son come home, Jack?" says she.

"I heard that it was expected."

"Ah! then it must have been him that I met on the muir."

"What! you met Jim Horscroft?"

"I am sure it must be he. A splendid-looking man – a hero, with curly black hair, a short, straight nose, and grey eyes. He had shoulders like a statue, and as to height, why, I suppose that your head, Jack, would come up to his scarf-pin."

"Up to his ear, Edie!" said I indignantly. "That is, if it was Jim. But tell me. Had he a brown wooden pipe stuck in the corner of his mouth?"

"Yes, he was smoking. He was dressed in grey, and he has a grand deep strong voice."

"Ho, ho! you spoke to him!" said I.

She coloured a little, as if she had said more than she meant.

"I was going where the ground was a little soft, and he warned

me of it," she said.

"Ah! it must have been dear old Jim," said I. "He should have been a doctor years back, if his brains had been as strong as his arm. Why, heart alive, here is the very man himself!"

I had seen him through the kitchen window, and now I rushed out with my half-eaten bannock in my hand to greet him. He ran forward too, with his great hand out and his eyes shining.

"Ah! Jock," he cried, "it's good to see you again. There are no friends like the old ones."

Then suddenly he stuck in his speech, and stared with his mouth open over my shoulder. I turned, and there was Edie, with such a merry, roguish smile, standing in the door. How proud I felt of her, and of myself too, as I looked at her!

"This is my cousin, Miss Edie Calder, Jim," said I.

"Do you often take walks before breakfast, Mr. Horscroft?" she asked, still with that roguish smile.

"Yes," said he, staring at her with all his eyes.

"So do I, and generally over yonder," said she. "But you are not very hospitable to your friend, Jack. If you do not do the honours, I shall have to take your place for the credit of West Inch."

Well, in another minute we were in with the old folk, and Jim had his plate of porridge ladled out for him; but hardly a word would he speak, but sat with his spoon in his hand staring at Cousin Edie. She shot little twinkling glances across at him all the time, and it seemed to me that she was amused at his backwardness, and that she tried by what she said to give him

heart.

"Jack was telling me that you were studying to be a doctor," said she. "But oh, how hard it must be, and how long it must take before one can gather so much learning as that!"

"It takes me long enough," Jim answered ruefully; "but I'll beat it yet."

"Ah! but you are brave. You are resolute. You fix your eyes on a point and you move on towards it, and nothing can stop you."

"Indeed, I've little to boast of," said he. "Many a one who began with me has put up his plate years ago, and here am I but a student still."

"That is your modesty, Mr. Horscroft. They say that the bravest are always humble. But then, when you have gained your end, what a glorious career – to carry healing in your hands, to raise up the suffering, to have for one's sole end the good of humanity!"

Honest Jim wriggled in his chair at this.

"I'm afraid I have no such very high motives, Miss Calder," said he. "It's to earn a living, and to take over my father's business, that I do it. If I carry healing in one hand, I have the other out for a crown-piece."

"How candid and truthful you are!" she cried; and so they went on, she decking him with every virtue, and twisting his words to make him play the part, in the way that I knew so well. Before he was done I could see that his head was buzzing with her beauty and her kindly words. I thrilled with pride to think that he should

think so well of my kin.

"Isn't she fine, Jim?" I could not help saying when we stood outside the door, he lighting his pipe before he set off home.

"Fine!" he cried; "I never saw her match!"

"We're going to be married," said I.

The pipe fell out of his mouth, and he stood staring at me. Then he picked it up and walked off without a word. I thought that he would likely come back, but he never did; and I saw him far off up the brae, with his chin on his chest.

But I was not to forget him, for Cousin Edie had a hundred questions to ask me about his boyhood, about his strength, about the women that he was likely to know; there was no satisfying her. And then again, later in the day, I heard of him, but in a less pleasant fashion.

It was my father who came home in the evening with his mouth full of poor Jim. He had been deadly drunk since midday, had been down to Westhouse Links to fight the gipsy champion, and it was not certain that the man would live through the night. My father had met Jim on the highroad, dour as a thunder-cloud, and with an insult in his eye for every man that passed him. "Guid sakes!" said the old man. "He'll make a fine practice for himsel', if breaking banes will do it."

Cousin Edie laughed at all this, and I laughed because she did; but I was not so sure that it was funny.

On the third day afterwards, I was going up Corriemuir by the sheep-track, when who should I see striding down but Jim

himself. But he was a different man from the big, kindly fellow who had supped his porridge with us the other morning. He had no collar nor tie, his vest was open, his hair matted, and his face mottled, like a man who has drunk heavily overnight. He carried an ash stick, and he slashed at the whin-bushes on either side of the path.

"Why, Jim!" said I.

But he looked at me in the way that I had often seen at school when the devil was strong in him, and when he knew that he was in the wrong, and yet set his will to brazen it out. Not a word did he say, but he brushed past me on the narrow path and swaggered on, still brandishing his ash-plant and cutting at the bushes.

Ah well, I was not angry with him. I was sorry, very sorry, and that was all. Of course I was not so blind but that I could see how the matter stood. He was in love with Edie, and he could not bear to think that I should have her. Poor devil, how could he help it? Maybe I should have been the same. There was a time when I should have wondered that a girl could have turned a strong man's head like that, but I knew more about it now.

For a fortnight I saw nothing of Jim Horscroft, and then came the Thursday which was to change the whole current of my life.

I had woke early that day, and with a little thrill of joy which is a rare thing to feel when a man first opens his eyes. Edie had been kinder than usual the night before, and I had fallen asleep with the thought that maybe at last I had caught the rainbow, and that without any imaginings or make-believes she was learning to

love plain, rough Jock Calder of West Inch. It was this thought, still at my heart, which had given me that little morning chirrup of joy. And then I remembered that if I hastened I might be in time for her, for it was her custom to go out with the sunrise.

But I was too late. When I came to her door it was half-open and the room empty. Well, thought I, at least I may meet her and have the homeward walk with her. From the top of Corriemuir hill you may see all the country round; so, catching up my stick, I swung off in that direction. It was bright, but cold, and the surf, I remember, was booming loudly, though there had been no wind in our parts for days. I zigzagged up the steep pathway, breathing in the thin, keen morning air, and humming a lilt as I went, until I came out, a little short of breath, among the whins upon the top. Looking down the long slope of the farther side, I saw Cousin Edie, as I had expected; and I saw Jim Horscroft walking by her side.

They were not far away, but too taken up with each other to see me. She was walking slowly, with the little petulant cock of her dainty head which I knew so well, casting her eyes away from him, and shooting out a word from time to time. He paced along beside her, looking down at her and bending his head in the eagerness of his talk. Then as he said something, she placed her hand with a caress upon his arm, and he, carried off his feet, plucked her up and kissed her again and again. At the sight I could neither cry out nor move, but stood, with a heart of lead and the face of a dead man, staring down at them. I saw her hand

passed over his shoulder, and that his kisses were as welcome to her as ever mine had been.

Then he set her down again, and I found that this had been their parting; for, indeed, in another hundred paces they would have come in view of the upper windows of the house. She walked slowly away, with a wave back once or twice, and he stood looking after her. I waited until she was some way off, and then down I came, but so taken up was he, that I was within a hand's-touch of him before he whisked round upon me. He tried to smile as his eye met mine.

"Ah, Jock," says he, "early afoot!"

"I saw you!" I gasped; and my throat had turned so dry that I spoke like a man with a quinsy.

"Did you so?" said he, and gave a little whistle. "Well, on my life, Jock, I'm not sorry. I was thinking of coming up to West Inch this very day, and having it out with you. Maybe it's better as it is."

"You've been a fine friend!" said I.

"Well now, be reasonable, Jock," said he, sticking his hands into his pockets and rocking to and fro as he stood. "Let me show you how it stands. Look me in the eye, and you'll see that I don't lie. It's this way. I had met Edi – Miss Calder that is – before I came that morning, and there were things which made me look upon her as free; and, thinking that, I let my mind dwell on her. Then you said she wasn't free, but was promised to you, and that was the worst knock I've had for a time. It clean put me off, and

I made a fool of myself for some days, and it's a mercy I'm not in Berwick gaol. Then by chance I met her again – on my soul, Jock, it was chance for me – and when I spoke of you she laughed at the thought. It was cousin and cousin, she said; but as for her not being free, or you being more to her than a friend, it was fool's talk. So you see, Jock, I was not so much to blame, after all: the more so as she promised that she would let you see by her conduct that you were mistaken in thinking that you had any claim upon her. You must have noticed that she has hardly had a word for you for these last two weeks."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.