

Crockett Samuel Rutherford

Lochinvar: A Novel



Samuel Crockett

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S. R. Crockett

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FOREWORD TO THE TALE, TELLING WHAT BEFELL AT THE HOUSE OF BALMAGHIE IN THE YEAR OF GRACE 1685, AND HOW MY LADY WELLWOOD PARTED TWO YOUNG LOVERS

"Aye," said Mistress Crombie, house-keeper to Roger McGhie, Laird of Balmaghie, a considerable house in the south-lying and better-cultivated part of the wild lands of Galloway – "aye, indeed, ye may well say it, Alisoun Begbie. It is a wondrous and most ungentle thing when the doe seeks the hart – panting and brayin' for a man, as the Guid Buik says. And saw ye ever sic feathers? – I declare they nearly soopit the floor. My Lady Wellwood, or no my Lady Wellwood, I trow she didna come ridin' by the hoose o' Balmaghie only to ask the time o' day, upsetting besom that she is!"

During this harangue Alisoun Begbie was clattering about among her bottles and dishes in the stone-flagged, slate-shelved still-room which constituted her pantry. A few minutes before she had cried mischievously out of the window to Lang Wat, the new under-gardener of Balmaghie, to the effect that "siccan a guid-lookin' chiel should be seen oftener about the house – but that she, Alisoun Begbie, was not wanting anything to do with the likes of him. She could get plenty of lads, and it was weel-kenned that the Glenkens' folk aye took up wi' their ain folk at ony rate." But as soon as the "bauchles"¹ of Mistress Crombie, the shrill-tempered house-keeper, were heard scuffling up the stairs, Alisoun made a pretty warning face of silence at Lang Wat, and tossed her head to intimate that some one approached from behind; so that, without making any verbal answer, the under-gardener resumed his occupation of the moment, which was the pruning and grafting of sundry rose-bushes – the pride and care of Mistress Kate McGhie, the "young leddy" of the great house of Balmaghie.

"Na, 'deed, Alisoun Begbie," cried Mistress Crombie once more, from the cheek of the door, "believe me when I tell ye that sic a braw city madam – and a widow forbye – doesna bide about an auld disjaskit rickle o' stanes like the Hoose o' the Grenoch withoot haeing mair in her head than just sending warnings to Clavers about the puir muirland folk, that keep their misguided conventicles up ayont there, and pray a' nicht in the lirks o' the hills and the black hags o' the peat-mosses."

"Aye, ye may say so, 'deed, mistress," agreed Alisoun, keeping an eye upon the window of her pantry, through which she could see Lang Wat bending his back among the rose-bushes. Spite of his good looks, he had proved himself a singularly flinty-hearted fellow-servitor, and ill to set to the wooing. But Alisoun had still hopes of him. She had succeeded with some difficult – indeed, almost hopeless – cases in her time, and the very unresponsive nature of the young Glenkens' gardener stirred her ambition to brighter and more inviting glances, as well as to gayer and ever daintier ribbons.

But in spite of both loving looks and lovers' knots, Lang Wat neither succumbed nor yet appeared so much as conscious of her regard. Truly a marvellous young man – such as had never come within the sphere of the comely handmaiden's influence before.

"Weel, I'se warrant my lady needna set her cap at our maister," said Alisoun Begbie, willing to agree with the powerful and cantankerous house-keeper: "Na, Roger McGhie o' Balmaghie has his wits about him. Surely it is a terrible thing when a woman so far forgets hersel' as to set her cap for a man."

¹ Certain heelless and shapeless slippers, characteristic of the district.

And pretty Alisoun glanced at the silver salver she was polishing, in order to be sure that her silken snood was in its proper place, and that the braids of her hair were drawn back smoothly and daintily from her brow. Being reassured on these points, she resumed the salver with renewed complaisance. Lang Wat was now standing meditatively outside, quite near the house, and with his face turned towards her window. He was leaning upon his spade; any moment he might look up. Pretty Alisoun Begbie breathed upon the silver with a certain seductive pouting of her lips, rubbed the place clear, breathed again upon it, and last of all frowned alluringly at it – for the very excellent reason that one of her former admirers had incautiously told her that such frowning became her mightily. But in spite of all, Lang Wat remained rapt in abstractest meditation. At which Alisoun Begbie tossed her head and frowned again – not this time for picturesque reasons, but in good earnest.

"He micht at least have kissed his hand, the silly cuif!" she said, half to herself, looking resentfully at the impervious under-gardener of Balmaghie.

"What!" cried Mistress Crombie, "kissed his hand, indeed, ye daft-speaking, licht-headed hizzie! I hope that my maister has something else to do than to gang kissin' his hand to a' the high-flyin' madams that likes to come aboot the hoose – wi' their auld guidmen hardly cauld in their coffins, and as much paint on their impudent faces as wad serve for the body o' a trail cart. Kiss his hand to her, indeed! Na, na, set her up; a deal less than that will serve her."

A stir was heard at the top of the stairs which led up from the still-room, among the cool recesses of which this conversation had been proceeding between Mistress Crombie and her favorite assistant.

"Dear sirs, that's the maister himsel', I declare," said the house-keeper, looking cautiously up, "and dressed in his Sunday breeks – mercy on us! – and his best coat wi' the new lace on the collar, and the cuffs that I laid aside for the next burial or siclike festivity. But – Lord preserve us! – here on a Wednesday he maun gang and put them on! The man's surely gane clean mad. He shall sup sorrow like sowens for this yet, and that will be seen."

"Maybe he has been kissin' mair than his ain hand," said Alisoun Begbie, slyly. She was still smarting from her rebuke by the house-keeper; besides which, Lang Wat would not look up.

Mistress Crombie started as if she had been stung.

"Save us!" she cried, "do ye think so? Then a' our good days aboot the hoose o' the Balmaghie are numbered! Oh, the bonny place, where I thocht to end my days wi' a guid maister and a kindly! Oh, women, women – what hae ye no to answer for, upsettin' a' plans, stirrin' up a' ill, pu'in' doon a' guid! Eh, Alisoun, but what a paradise the world wad be wi' only men in it, and no a woman frae end to end o't —*forbye mysel'* – whatna Gairden o' Eden wad that no make!"

But the eyes of Alisoun Begbie were fastened on a certain shaded nook among the rose-bushes, wherein a pretty enough comedy was being enacted; though, be it said, one little to the taste of the still-room maid. Mistress Crombie, had she been observant, might have discovered abundant cause to find fault with her maid's diligence and attention to the details of her duty during the next half-hour. But luckily for Alisoun Begbie, that good though suspicious lady had betaken herself indignantly upstairs. There, with haughty head tossing in the air and a certain ominously aggrieved silence, she proceeded to meditate upon the other details of her master's attire – his Sunday shoes with silver buckles, his ribbons of pale blue at the knee, and especially the grand new wig of the latest court fashion, which Colonel John Graham of Claverhouse had brought all the way in his saddle-bag from Robin Rae's, the periwig-maker in the Lawnmarket, the last time he rode to Edinburgh to consult with the Lords of the Privy Council.

Now, what Alisoun Begbie watched behind the rosebushes was this:

She saw the under-gardener, "Lang Wat o' the Glenkens," as he was called about the house, in close and kindly converse with Mistress Kate McGhie, the only daughter of the house and heiress of her father's wide estates. She had come, a tall and graceful maid attired in white, lightfoot down a shady garden-path, the sunshine and the leaves together flecking her white dress with wavering shadows, her dark, shapely head thrown a little back, her chin tilted somewhat defiantly in the air,

and her broad summer hat a-swing in her left hand. Fitfully she hummed a tune, but whenever she forgot the words (which was very often) the song dropped, and, without the least break of continuity, proceeded on its way as a whistle. And in either case the sounds proceeded, so thought the under-gardener, from the prettiest and most appetizing mouth in the world.

Indeed, as soon as Mistress Kate came within hearing distance of him, Lang Wat promptly swept his broad bonnet from his head in salute, and told her so. Which, when one thinks of it, was a considerable liberty for an under-gardener to take.

But the lady received the compliment not amiss, being to all appearance neither elated nor astonished. Was she not Kate McGhie of Balmaghie, and had she not been accustomed to be told that she was beautiful as long as she could remember? Consistent and continuous admiration had become familiar to her as the air she breathed, and had done her as little harm. It seemed to Kate as natural that she should be assured that she was winsome as to be told that she had a good appetite. And the information affected her equally in either case. Since her very tenderest years there had been but one dissentient voice in this chorus of universal love and admiration – a certain small boy from the Glenkens, a laird's son, one Walter Gordon of Lochinvar, who had come to the house of Balmaghie on a visit with his father, and had enshrined his dissent in a somewhat memorable form.

For, by the common bruit of the country-side, the girl had been denominated – while yet but a child with great hazel eyes that promised dangerous things, and a tossing fleece of curls – the Pride of Balmaghie. And the maid herself, when asked her name, was accustomed to reply frankly:

"I is little Kate McGhie —
What everybody loves."

But this same Gordon lad from the Glenkens, scornful in the pride of half a dozen years of superior age, never heard the phrase without adding his own contemptuous disclaimer, "Little brute, I don't love her."

Nevertheless, the time came when the scorner recanted his renunciation. And that time was now, under the garden trees of the house of Balmaghie and the jealous eyes of Alisoun Begbie. For "Lang Wat o' the Glenkens," under-gardener to Roger McGhie of Balmaghie, was none other than Walter Gordon, the young laird of Lochinvar, fallen into ill-odor with the King's government – both in the matter of the wounding of my Lord of Wellwood, and as being suspected of companying and intercommuning with the wild Whigs of the hills. For the times bore hard on all such as were of doubtful loyalty, and fines and confiscations were the least those had to expect who refused to side openly with the blustering riders and galloping compellers of the King's forces. The blaze of muskets in face of a stone wall, the ever-busy rope in the Grassmarket of Edinburgh (where during two brisk years of the "Killing Time" the hangman needed a new "tow" every month from the Town Council, and the pay of an additional assistant whenever "he was overthrong with the hanging of so many Westland men") – these and other symptoms of troublous times sent many well-disposed and innocent folk into hiding.

But it was not alone the superior advantages of Balmaghie as a hiding-place which had brought Wat Gordon of Lochinvar thither in search of shelter. It might rather be the sweeping, darksome under-curve of Kate McGhie's eyelashes, and the little specks of light which swam and sparkled in the depths of her hazel eyes, like the shredded gold in that rare liqueur which John Scarlett, the famous master-at-arms, had brought back with him last year from Dantzic.

Not that Wat Gordon was very deeply or seriously in love. He dallied and daintied with it rather. True – he thought about love and the making of it night and day, and (for the time being) his ideal and liege lady was the young mistress of the house of Balmaghie.

And Kate McGhie, knowing him for what he was, and being (unlike her father, but like most of the women-folk of Scotland) a sympathizer with the oppressed of the Covenant, showed no small kindness to the under-gardener.

She was a maiden left much alone. She was at the age when love is still an insubstantial, rosy dream, yet few youths of her own quality were ever encouraged to come about her father's house. So that her pity and her admiration were the more easily engaged on behalf of the handsome and unfortunate young laird who told her at least ten times a day (when he had the chance) that he was as willing as any Jacob to serve seven years, and seven to the back of that, in the hope of such a Rachel. For even before he began to do more than play with true love, Wat Gordon had a gift of love-making which might have wiled a bird off a tree.

Yet, for all that, when he came to practise on Kate McGhie, he wiled in vain. For the girl was buttressed and defended by a lifetime of admiration from all who came about her – by her father's adoration, the devotion of every man, woman, and child about the house of Balmaghie, and, above all, by the repute of reigning beauty athwart all the country-side. So, though she might think well enough of Wat Gordon, that handsome exile from his heritages and lordships now in picturesque hiding as her father's under-gardener, she was (so at least she told herself) in no danger of permitting that liking to develop into any feeling more dangerous or more exacting.

So these two fenced, each of them in their own way, right gallantly with lightsome love; while the love that is not lightsome, but strong as death, smiled out upon them from behind the rose-bushes, and lay in wait for one and the other.

Presently, while they were yet talking and Alisoun Begbie still carefully observant of them, the front door of the house of Balmaghie opened wide, and the laird himself came down the steps looking a little dashed and shamefaced, for Mistress Crombie had ushered him to the door with ironic state and ceremony.

"Dootless your honor is on his way to pay duty to the King's Commissioner at Kirkcudbright," she said, with pointed sarcasm which the shy laird did not know well how to parry. "But ye hae forgotten your pearl studs in your sark, and the wee hangie-swordie o' the court that will no draw oot o' its scabbard, nor so muckle as hurt a flea."

"I thank you, mistress," said Roger, not daring to look at his too faithful domestic, "but I go not so far afield as to see His Majesty's Commissioner. 'Tis but the matter of a visitor whom we must expect this forenoon. See that some collation is prepared for her."

"*Her!*" ejaculated Mistress Crombie, with an indescribable accent of surprise, not unmingled with scorn. "*Her*– we are to hae the company o' a great lady, nae doot. And this the first that your humble servant and house-keeper has heard o' the matter! 'Collation,' quo' he? Whatna dinner do ye think can be got ready between eleven and twa o' the clock on a Wednesday, wi' a' the lasses at the washin' except Alisoun Begbie, and nocht in the larder forbye twa pookit chuckie-hens, that came frae the Boat Craft less than half an hour since?"

"But, surely, these will do very well," said Roger McGhie, with increasing nervousness. "'Tis only my Lady of Wellwood, who rides over from the Grenoch."

For in truth he had been afraid to mention the matter to Mistress Crombie, and so had put off till it was too late – as the manner of men is.

"I forgot to acquaint you with the fact before; it – ah – it altogether escaped my memory," said he, beginning to pull his gloves on as he descended the steps.

"But ye didna forget to put on your Sunday claes, Laird Balmaghie," cried the privileged domestic after him, sarcastically; "nor did your best silken hose nor your silver buckles escape your memory! And ye minded brawly to scent your ruffles wi' cinnamon and rosemary. Ye dinna forget ony o' thae things – that were important, and maitters o' life and death, as one might say. It only escaped your memory to tell your puir feckless auld house-keeper to mak' ony provision for your dainty dames and court leddies. Ou aye, it maitters little for the like o' her – Marion Crombie, that

has only served ye for forty year, and never wranged ye o' a fardin's-worth. Dinna waste a thought on her, puir auld woman, though she should die in a hedge-root, so long as ye can hae a great repair o' powdered weemen and galloping frisk-me-denties to come ridin' about your hoose."

But whatever else Mistress Crombie might have had to say to her master was lost in the clatter of hoofs and the stir and bustle of a new arrival.

Up the avenue came a bold horsewoman riding a spirited bay, reining it like a man as she stayed her course on the river gravel before the front door and sent the stones spraying from its fore-feet at the halt. The new-comer wore a plumed hat and the riding-dress of red, which, together with her warm sympathies with the "persecutors," caused my Lady Wellwood to be known in the country-side as "The Scarlet Woman." She was a handsome dame of forty, or mayhap a little more; but, save for the more pronounced arching of her haughty nose and the rounding curves of her figure, she might well have passed for ten or twelve years younger.

The Laird of Balmaghie went eagerly forward to meet his visitor. He took gratefully enough the hand which she reached to him a little indulgently, as one might give a sweetmeat to a child to occupy its attention. For even as he murmured his welcomes the lady's eyes were certainly not upon her host, but on the erect figure of his under-gardener, who stood staring and transfixed by the rose-bush which he had been pruning.

"My Lady Wellwood," said Roger McGhie, "this is indeed an honor and a privilege."

"Who may this youth be?" interrupted the lady, imperiously cutting short his sober courtesies and pointing to Lang Wat of the Glenkens.

"It is but one of my gardeners; he has lately come about the house," answered Roger McGhie, "a well-doing carle enough and a good worker. But hark ye, my lady, perhaps a wee overfond of Whiggery and such strait-lacedness, and so it may be as well to give his name the go-by when John Graham comes this way."

My Lady of Wellwood never took her eyes off the gardener's face.

"Come hither and help me to dismount," she said, beckoning with her finger.

Wat Gordon went reluctantly enough, dragging one foot after the other. He realized that the end had come to his residence among the flower-closes of Balmaghie, and that he must e'en bid farewell to these walks and glades as of Paradise, upon which, as upon his life, the hazel eyes of Kate McGhie had lately rained such sweet influences. Meanwhile the laird stood meekly by. The caprices of great court-ladies were not in his province, but, having set out to humor them, he was not to be offended by the favor shown his servitor. He had heard of such things at Whitehall, and the memory rather kindled him than otherwise. He felt all the new life and energy which comes of being transported into a new world of new customs, new ideas, and even of new laxities.

Wat gave my Lady Wellwood his hand in the courtliest manner. The habit and gait of the under-gardener seemed to fall from him in a moment at the sound of that voice, low and languorous, with a thrill in it of former days which it irked him to think had still power to affect him.

"You have not quite forgotten me, then, sweet lad of Lochinvar?" asked the Duchess of Wellwood softly in his ear. For so in the days of his sometime madness she had been wont to call him.

"No," answered Wat, sullenly enough, as he lifted her to the ground, not knowing what else to say.

"Then meet me at the head of the wood on my way home," whispered the lady, as she disengaged herself from his arm, and turned with a smiling face to Roger McGhie.

"And this is your sweet daughter," she murmured, caressingly, to Kate, who stood by with drooping eyelids, but who, nevertheless, had lost no shade of the colloquy between Wat Gordon and her father's guest.

The Lady Wellwood took the girl's hand, which lay cold and unresponsive in her plump white fingers. "A pretty maid – you will be a beauty one day, my dear," she added, with the condescension of one who knows she has as yet nothing to fear from younger rivals.

To this Kate answered nothing. For her flatterer was a woman. Had the Duchess of Wellwood been a man and condescended to this sort of left-handed praise, Kate would have flashed her eyes and said, "I have not seldom been told that I am one already." Whereupon he would have amended his sentence. As it was, Kate said nothing, but only hardened her heart and wondered what the great court lady had found to whisper to the man who, during these last months, had daily been avowing himself her lover. And though Kate was conscious that her heart sat secure and untouched on its virgin throne, it had, nevertheless, been not unpleasant to listen to the lad. For of a surety Wat Gordon told his tale wondrously well.

Roger McGhie conducted the lady gallantly through the garden walks towards the house. But she had not gone far when she professed herself overcome by the heat, and desired to be permitted to sit down on a rustic seat. She was faint, she said; yet, even as she said it, the keen eye of Kate McGhie noted that her color remained warm and high.

"A tass of water – nay, no wine," she called after the Laird of Balmaghie; "I thank you for your courtesy."

And Kate's father hastened away a little stiffly to bring it. She knew that his Sunday shoes irked him. It served him right, she thought. At his age he ought to know better – but there remained the more important matter of the under-gardener.

"Come and sit by me, pretty one," said the Lady Wellwood, cooingly, to Kate.

The "pretty one" would infinitely rather have set herself down by the side of an adder sunning itself on a bank than shared the woodland seat with the bold horsewoman of Grenoch.

"Ah! sly one," she said, "I warrant you knew that your under-gardener there, that handsome lad, was not the landward man he seemed."

She shook her finger reproachfully at her companion as she spoke.

Kate blushed hotly, and then straightway fell to despising herself for doing it almost as much as she hated my lady for making her. Lady Wellwood watched her covertly out of the corner of her eyes. She cultivated a droop of the left eyelid on purpose.

"I know that he is proscribed, and has a price set on his head," Kate said, quietly, looking after Wat with great indifference as he went down the avenue of trees.

"And do you know why?" asked the duchess, somewhat abruptly.

"No," answered Kate, wondering at her tone.

"It was for wounding my late husband within the precincts of Holyrood," said Lady Wellwood.

But Kate McGhie's anger was now fully roused, and her answer ran trippingly off her tongue.

"And was it for that service you spoke so kindly to him just now, and bade him meet you at the head of the wood as you went home?"

The duchess stared a little, but her well-bred calmness was not ruffled.

"Even so," she said, placidly, "and for the further reason that Walter Gordon was on his way to see *me* on the night when it was his ill fortune to meet with my husband instead."

"I do not believe it," cried the girl, lifting her head and looking Lady Wellwood straight in the eyes.

"Ask him, then!" answered the duchess, with the calm assurance of forty answering the chit of half her years. For at first sight my lady had envied and hated the clear, blushful ivory of the girl's cheek and the natural luxuriance of her close-tangled curls. And since all the art of St. James's could not match with these, she was now getting even with Kate in ways of her own.

The girl did not speak. Her heart only welled within her with contradiction and indignation.

"Or if you will not do that, sit down half an hour hence and read your book in the little arbor by the end of the avenue, and you will hear news. Whether you may like it or not is another question. But, at all events, you shall not have cause to say again that a Duchess of Wellwood lied."

Kate rose and walked away without answering a word. She cared no jot for Wat Gordon, so she told herself. He was nothing to her, save that she desired his safety and had risked much to give him

shelter. Yet this Duchess of Wellwood – that woman of whom the gross popular tongue whispered commonly the most terrible things! Had Lochinvar made love to her? Was he to meet her at the end of the avenue? She could not believe it. It was, indeed, no matter if he did. What did she care? Go to the arbor, become an eavesdropper – not for any man alive, least of all for Wat Gordon! Thank God, she had a tongue in her head, and was not afraid to ask Wat Gordon, or any living soul, whatever she desired to know.

But after a little hesitation she went up-stairs to her chamber, and, denying herself the listening of the ear, she listened with her eyes instead. For she watched my Lady Wellwood being helped into her saddle right courteously by her father. She saw her looking down at him the while with a glance professionally tender – a glance that lingered in the memory by reason of the quiver of an eyelid and the pressure of a soft, reluctant hand. And Roger McGhie bowed over her plump fingers as though he had been bidding farewell to some angelic visitant.

For the first time in her life Kate McGhie despised her father. And, lo! to hurt her heart yet more, and to convince her of the ultimate falsity of all men, there was Wat, his tall figure overtopping the hawthorn hedge, walking briskly in the direction of the pinewood at the end of the avenue.

Kate went down-stairs with a set, still face. She would not cry. She did not care. She was only bitterly disappointed with the whole race of mankind, nothing more. They were all no better than so many blind fools, ready to be taken in by a plausible tongue and a rolling eye. A fine figure of a woman, and – Lord, where was the best of them?

But her Wat – and with the Duchess of Wellwood; she could not believe it! Why, she might be his – well, hardly that – but his mother at the very least.

Not that she cared; she had her work to think about; and Kate McGhie went down to the little suckling lamb she had fed daily with warm milk out of a wooden spoon, and which, though now almost of the greatness of a full-grown sheep, still leaped and fawned upon her. She fetched her pail and mixed pet Donald's mid-day meal.

Outside the garden wall the lamb was standing, bleating indignant petitions, and there Katie McGhie fed him with a gradually swelling heart. As the last drops disappeared into the moist black muzzle, Kate put her arms about the woolly neck and sobbed aloud.

"Oh, Donald, Donald, my lamb, you are the only friend I have! I do not love anybody else, and no one in the world loves me. But I am not sorry – I am glad, and I will not cry. It is not that I love him, Donald; but, oh! he might not have done it!"

That same evening Wat Gordon, as was his custom, came walking slowly through the garden pleasaunce. Kate McGhie met him by the rose-bush he had been pruning that morning.

"Is it true," she asked, looking at him bravely and directly, "that you are in hiding because, when going to visit the Duchess of Wellwood, you encountered her husband instead?"

"This much is true," answered Wat, promptly, "that while passing down the Canongate one snowy night, my cousin, Will Gordon of Earlstoun, and I were beset by a band of ruffians in the pay of the Duke of Wellwood, and that in defending ourselves the Duke himself was hurt."

"And when you went out of your lodging that night, was it to walk with your cousin or to visit my Lady of Wellwood in her boudoir?"

Wat Gordon took his breath hard. The manner of the question left him no escape with honor. But he could not lie. And he would offer no excuse.

"I went out to visit my Lady Wellwood!" he said, very shortly.

Kate McGhie held out her hand.

"I bid you good-bye," she said; "you will find your ancient friend and hostess at the Grenoch. There is nothing to detain you any longer about the poor house of Balmaghie."

And so saying the girl turned on her heel and walked slowly through the garden garth and past the pruned rose-bushes. She crossed the grassy slope to the door and there disappeared, leaving Wat Gordon standing silent, shamed, and amazed.

CHAPTER I

FROM LIKING TO LOVE

It was graying to the edge of dark upon one of the evenings towards the end of April, in the year 1688, when Walter Gordon, of Lochinvar in Galloway, and now for some time private in the Prince of Orange's Douglas regiment of dragoons, strode up the stairs of his cousin Will's lodging in the ancient Dutch city of Amersfort. The young man had come straight from duty at the palace, and his humor was not exactly gracious.

But Wat Gordon could not long remain vexed in spirit in the presence of his cousin Will's wife, Maisie Lennox. Her still, sweet smile killed enmity, even as spring sunshine kills the bite of frost. The little, low-roofed Dutch room, panelled with oak, had its windows open towards the sun-setting, and there in the glow of the west two girls were sitting. At sight of them Walter Gordon stopped suddenly in the doorway as he came bursting in. He had been expecting to see but one – his cousin's young wife, into whose pretty ear of patientest sympathy he might pour his fretful boyish disappointments and much-baffled aspirations.

Mistress Maisie Lennox, now for half a year Will Gordon of Earlstoun's wife (for by her maiden name she was still used to be called, and so she signed herself, since it had not yet become the custom for a women to take among her intimates the style of her husband's surname), sat on a high-backed chair by the oriel window. She had the kind of sunny hair which it is a pleasure to look upon, and the ripples of it made crisp tendrils about her brow. Her face underneath was already sweetening and gaining in reposefulness, with that look of matronhood which comes early to patient, gracious women, who would yet venture much for the man they love. And not once nor yet twice had Maisie Lennox dared all for those whom she loved – as has, indeed, elsewhere been told.

But, all unexpected of the hasty visitor, there was yet another fair girl looking up at him there in that quaint, dusky-shadowed room. Seated upon a low chair, and half leaning across the knees of Mistress Maisie, set wide apart on purpose, there reclined a maiden of another temper and mould. Slender and supple she was as willow that sways by the water-edges, yet returning ever to slim, graceful erectness like a tempered blade of Damascus; above, the finest and daintiest head in the world, profiled like Apollo of the Bow, with great eyes that were full of alternate darkness and tenderness, of tears and fire; a perfectly chiselled mouth, a thing which is rarer and more excellent than the utmost beauty of splendid eyes – and sweeter also; a complexion not milk and rose like that of Maisie Lennox, but of ivory rather, with the dusky crimson of warm blood blushing up delicately through it. Such was Kate McGhie, called Kate of the Dark Lashes, the only daughter of Roger McGhie of Balmaghie, a well-reputed Galloway gentleman in the country of Scotland.

As Walter Gordon came bursting in his impetuous fashion into his cousin's room, his sword clashing about his feet and his cavalry spurs jingling against his boot-heels, he was stopped dead by this most pleasant sight. Yet all he saw was a girl with her head resting upon her own clasped hands and reclining on her friend's knee, with her elbows set wide apart behind her head – while Maisie's hand played, like a daring swimmer in breaking surf, out and in among the soft crisps of hair, which were too short to be waves and too long to be curls. And this hair was of several curious colors, ranging from black in the shadows through rich brown into dusky gold where the sun's light caught it lovingly, as though he had already begun to set over the sand-dunes into the Northern Sea. As Wat stood there, his fingers tingled to touch. It seemed somehow a squandering of human happiness that only a girl's hand should smooth that rich tangle and caress those clustering curls.

Walter Gordon of Lochinvar had flung himself into the little room in Zandpoort Street, ripe to pour his sorrows into the ear of Maisie Lennox. Nor was he at all forgetful of the fact that the ear was an exceedingly pretty one. Most devoutly he hoped that Will, his very excellent cousin and Maisie's

good husband, might have been kept late at the religious exercises of the Regiment of the Covenant – as that portion of the Scotch-Dutch auxiliary force was called which had been mostly officered and recruited from among the more militant exiles and refugees of the Scottish persecution.

But as Lochinvar came forward somewhat more slowly after his involuntary start of surprise, his eyes continued to rest on those of the younger girl, who remained thus reclined on her gossip's lap. She had not moved at his entrance, but only looked at him very quietly from under those shadowy curtains which had gained her the name of Kate of the Dark Lashes. Then in a moment Wat set his hand to his breast suddenly, as if a bullet had struck him upon the field of battle.

"Kate!" he cried, in a quick, hoarse whisper, as though the word had been forced from him.

And for a long moment the young soldier stood still and speechless, with his eyes still fixed upon the girl.

"Walter, mind you not my dearest friend and gossip Kate, and how in old sad days in the dear far-away land we there underwent many things together?" asked Maisie Lennox, looking up somewhat doubtfully from her friend's face into that of Walter Gordon.

"I did not know – I had not heard – " were all the words that the young squire of dames could find to utter.

"Also there were, if I remember aright," the young matron went on, with that fatal blundering which sometimes comes to the kindest and most quick-witted of women, "certain passages between you – of mutual friendship and esteem, as it might be."

Then, with a single swift movement, lithe and instantaneous as that of a young wild animal which has never known restraint, Kate of the Dark Lashes rose to her feet.

"Walter Gordon of Lochinvar," she said, "is a Scottish gentleman. He will never be willing to remember that which a lady chooses to forget."

But Lochinvar himself, readiest tongue in wit-play as well as keenest blade when the steel clashed in sterner debate, on this occasion spake never a word. For in that moment in which he had looked upon Kate McGhie resting her beautiful head upon her clasped hands in her friend's lap he had fallen from the safe heights of admiration into the bottomless abysses of love.

While the pair were still standing thus face to face, and before Kate sat down again in a more restrained posture on the low-cushioned window-seat, Will Gordon strode in and set his musket in a corner. He was habited simply enough in the dark gray of the Hill Folks' regiment, with the cross of St. Andrew done in blue and white upon his breast. His wife rose to kiss him as he entered, and then, still holding her by the hand, he turned to the tall, slim girl by the window.

"Why, Kate, lass, how came the good winds to blow you hither from the lands of mist over the sea?" he asked.

"Blasts of ill winds in Scotland, well I wot," said Kate McGhie, smiling at him faintly and holding out her hand.

"Then the ill Scots winds have certainly blown us good here in Holland," he answered, deftly enough, in the words of the ancient Scottish proverb.

But the girl went on without giving heed to his kindly compliment.

"The persecution waxes ever hotter and hotter on the hills of the south," she said, "and what with the new sheriffs, and the raging of the red-wud Grier of Lag over all our country of Galloway, I saw that it could not be long before my doings and believings brought my easy-tempered father into trouble. So, as soon as I knew that, I mounted me and rode to Newcastle, keeping mostly to the hills, and avoiding the highways by which the king's soldiers come and go. There, after some wearisome and dangerous waiting, I got a ship to Rotterdam. And here I am to sorn upon you!"

She ended with a little gesture of opening her hands and flinging them from her, which Wat Gordon thought very pretty to behold.

"You are as welcome to our poor soldier's lodging as though it had been the palace of the stadtholder," answered William Gordon – with, nevertheless, a somewhat perplexed look, as he

thought of another mouth to be fed upon the scanty and uncertain pay of a private in the Scottish regiments of the prince.

While his cousin was speaking Wat Gordon had made his way round the table to the corner of the latticed window farthest from Kate, where now he stood looking thoughtfully upon the broad canal and the twinkling lights which were beginning to mark out its banks.

"Why, Wat," cried his cousin Will, clapping him lovingly upon the shoulder as he went past him to hang up his blue sash on a hook by the window, "wherefore so sad-visaged, man? This whey face and dour speechlessness might befit an erewhile Whig gardener of Balmaghie, with his hod and mattock over his shoulder; but it sets ill with a gay rider in Douglas's dragoons, and one high in favor in the prince's service."

Lochinvar shook off his cousin's hand a little impatiently. He wanted nothing better than just to go on watching Kate McGhie's profile as it outlined itself against the broad, shining reach of water. He marvelled that he had been aforetime so blind to its beauty; but then these ancient admirations in Scotland had been only lightness of heart and a young man's natural love of love-making. But Walter Gordon knew that this which had stricken him to the heart, as he came suddenly upon the girl pillowing her head on her palms at Maisie's knee, was no mere love-making. It was love.

"Who were on duty to-day at headquarters?" Wat asked, gruffly enough.

"Who but Barra and his barbarians of the Isles!" William Gordon made answer.

Wat stamped his foot boyishly and impatiently.

"The prince shows these dogs overmuch of his favor," he said.

Will Gordon went to the chamber door and opened it. Then he looked back at his wife.

"Come hither, sweetheart," he said. "It is pay-day, and I must e'en give thee my wages, ere I be tempted to spend them with fly-by-night dragoons and riotous night-rakes like our cousin here. Also, I must consult thee concerning affairs of state – thy housewifery and the price of candles belike!"

Obediently Maisie rose and followed him out of the room, gliding, as was her manner, softly through the door like water that runs down a mill-lade. Kate of the Dark Lashes, on the contrary, moved with the flash and lightsome unexpectedness of a swallow in flight. Yet now she sat still enough by the dusky window, looking out upon the twinkling lights which, as they multiplied, began to be reflected on the waters of the long, straight canal.

For a while Wat Gordon was content silently to watch the changeful shapeliness of her head. He had never seen one set at just that angle upon so charming a neck. He wondered why this girl had so suddenly grown all wonderful to him. It was strange that hitherto he should have been so crassly blind. But now he was perfectly content only to watch and to be silent, so that it was Kate who first felt the necessity for speech.

"This is a strange new land," she said, thoughtfully, "and it is little wonder that to-night my heart is heavy, for I am yet a stranger in it."

"Kate," said Wat Gordon, in a low, earnest tone, leaning a little nearer to her as she sat on the window-seat, "Kate, is there not, then, all the more reason to remember old friends?"

"And have I not remembered?" answered the girl, swiftly, without looking at him. "I have come from my father's house straight to Maisie Lennox – I, a girl, and alone. She is my oldest friend."

"But are there, then, no others?" said the young man, jealously.

"None who have never forgotten, never slighted, never complained, never faltered in their love, save only my sweet Maisie Lennox," returned the girl, as she rose from her place and went towards the door, from behind which came the soft hum of voices in friendly conference.

Wat took two swift steps forward as if to forestall her, but she slipped past him, light as the shadow of a leaf windblown along the wall, and laid her hand on the latch.

"Will not you let me be your friend once again after these weary years?" he asked, eagerly.

The tall girl opened the door and stood a moment with the outline of her figure cut slimly against the light which flooded the passage – in which, as it grew dark, Maisie had lighted a tiny Dutch lamp.

"I love friends who never need to be friends *again*!" she said, in a low voice, and went out.

Left to himself, Wat Gordon clinched his hands in the swiftly darkening room. He strode back to the window pettishly, and hated the world. It was a bad world. Why, for no more than a hasty word, a breath of foolish speech, a vain and empty dame of wellnigh twice his age, should he lose the friendship of this one girl in all the world? That other to whom he had spoken a light word of passing admiration he had never seen again, nor indeed wished to see. And for no more than this, forsooth, he must be flouted by her whom his very soul loved! It was a hard world, a bad world – of which the grim law was that a man must pay good money, red and white, for that which he desires with his heart and reaches out his hand to possess himself of.

Just then the street door resounded with the clang of impetuous knocking. His cousin Will went down, and presently Wat heard the noise of opening bars, and then the sough of rude, soldier-like speech filled the stairway.

"Wat Gordon! Wat Gordon!" cried a voice which sounded familiar enough to him, "come down forthwith! Here! I have brought you a letter from your love!"

And Wat swore a vow beneath his breath to stop the mouth of the rascal who knew no better than to shout a message so false and inopportune in the ears of the girl of the dusky eyelashes. Nevertheless, he went quickly to the landing and looked down.

A burly figure stood blocking the stairway beneath, and a ruddy face gleamed upward like a moon out of a mist, as Maisie held the lamp aloft. A voice, somewhat husky with too recent good living, cried, "Lochinvar, here is a letter to you from the colonel. Great good may it do you, but may the last drop in the cogie of him that sent it be the sourest, for raising Davie Dunbar from the good company and the jolly pint-stoup, to be splattered at this time of night with the dirty suds of every greasy frow in all Amersfort!"

And the stout soldier dusted certain befouling drops from his military coat with a very indignant expression.

"Not that the company was over-choice or the wine fit to be called aught but poison. 'Mony littles mak' a mickle,' says the old Scots saw. But, my certes, of such a brew as yon it might be said 'mony mickles make but little'! For an it were not for the filling up of your belly, ten pints of their Amersfort twopenny ale is no more kenned on a man than so much dishwashings!"

"Come your ways in and sit down, sergeant," said Mistress Maisie, hospitably. For her hand was somewhat weary with holding the lamp aloft, while Sergeant Davie Dunbar described the entertainment he had just left. Meanwhile Wat had opened his scrap of gray official letter, and appeared to stand fixed in thought upon the words which he found written therein.

"What may be the import of your message, since you are grown suddenly so solemn-jawed over it, Wat?" cried Davie Dunbar, going up to look over his shoulder, while Maisie and Kate McGhie stood talking quietly apart.

"I am bidden go on a quest into the wild country by the seashore, a mission that in itself I should like well enough were it not that it comes to me by the hand of Black Murdo of Barra."

Davie Dunbar whistled thoughtfully.

"When the corbie is from home, it's like to be an ill day for wee lame lammies!" he said, sententiously. Wat Gordon cocked his guardsman's cap at the words. He had set it on his head as he went down-stairs.

"I am Walter Gordon, of Lochinvar, and though that be for the nonce but a barren heritage, I am also a gentleman-private in the prince's Scots Dragoons, and I count not the Earl of Barra more than a buzzard-kite."

"I see well that ye are but a wee innocent lammie after all," retorted Sergeant Dunbar; "little ye ken about the regimen of war if at the outset of a campaign ye begin by belittling your enemy. I tell you, Murdo of Barra has more brains under his Highland bonnet than all your gay Douglas dragoons,

from your swearing colonel to the suckling drummer-boy – who no sooner leaves his mother's breast than he learns to mouth curses and lisp strange oaths."

Wat Gordon shook his head with a certain unconvinced and dour determination.

"I have been in wild places and my sword has brought me through, but though I own that, I like not this commission – yet feared of Barra I am not."

And he handed Davie Dunbar the paper. The sergeant read it aloud:

"Walter Gordon, some time of Lochinvar, of the Prince's Scottish Dragoon Guards, you are ordered to obtain the true numeration of each regiment in the camp and city of Amersfort – their officering, the numbers of each company, and of those that cannot be passed by the muster officers, the tally of those sick with fever, and of those still recovering from it, the number of cannon on the works and where they are posted. These lists you are to transmit with your own hand to an officer appointed to receive them by His Highness the Prince at the Inn of Brederode by the Northern Sanddunes, who will furnish you with a receipt for them. This receipt you will preserve and return to me in token that you have fulfilled your mission. The officers of the regiments and the commanders of batteries have hereby orders to render you a correct and instant accompt.

"(Signed) For the Stadtholder and the States-General,

"Barra,

"Provost-Marshal of the City and Camp."

William Gordon had come into the room while the sergeant was reading the paper, and now stood looking at Walter's unusual commission.

"There will be murder done when you come to our colonel," he said, "and ask him to tell you that the most part of his regiment is already in hospital, and also how many of the rest are sickening for it."

But Wat Gordon stood up and tightened his sword-belt, hitching his sword forward so that the hilt fell easily under his hand. Then he flipped the mandate carelessly upon the widened fingers of his left hand before sticking it through his belt.

"It is, at least, an order," he said, grandly, "and so long as I am in the service of His Highness the Prince, my orders I will obey."

"And pray what else would you do, callant," interjected Sergeant David Dunbar, "but obey your orders – so long, at least, as ye are sure that the lad who bids ye has the right to bid ye?"

CHAPTER II

WHY KATE HATED LOCHINVAR

It was the evening of the following day before Wat Gordon was ready to start. It had taken him so long to obtain all the invaluable information as to the strength of the armies of the States-General and of their allies, which were collected at Amersfort in order to roll back the threatened invasion of the King of France. Twice during the day had he rushed into his cousin's lodging for a brief moment in order to snatch a morsel of food, but on neither occasion had he been able to catch so much as a glimpse of Kate. It was now the gloaming, and the night promised to fall clear and chill. A low mist was collecting here and there behind the clumps of bushes, and crawling low along the surface of the canals. But all above was clear, and the stars were beginning to come out in familiar patterns.

For the third and last time Wat made an errand up to his cousin's rooms, even after his escort had arrived, and once more Maisie took him gently by the hand, bidding him good-speed on his quest perilous. But even while his cousin's wife was speaking the young man's eye continued to wander restlessly. He longed rather to listen to upbraiding from another voice, and, in place of Maisie's soft, willing kiss, to carry away the farewell touch of a more scornful hand.

"Cousin," he said at last, reluctantly and a little shyly, "I pray you say farewell for me to Mistress Kate, since she is not here to bid me farewell for herself. In what, think you, have I offended her?"

"Nay, Wat," answered the gentle Maisie, "concerning that you must e'en find means of judging for yourself on your return."

"But listen, Cousin Maisie, this venture that I go upon is a quest of life or death to me, and many are the chances that I may not return at all."

"I will even go speak with my gossip Kate, and see whether she will come to bid you good prospering on your adventure and a safe return from it."

And so saying Maisie passed from the room as silently as a white swan swims athwart the mere. In a little while she returned with Kate, who, beside her budding matronhood, seemed but a young lissom slip of willow-wand.

"Here, Kate," said Maisie, as she entered holding her friend by the hand, "is our cousin Wat, come in on us to bid farewell. He goes a far road and on a heavy adventure. He would say good-bye to the friends who are with him in this strange land before he departs, and of these you are one, are you not, my Kate?"

As soon as Mistress Maisie loosened her hand the girl went directly to the window-seat, where she stood leaning gracefully with her cheek laid softly against the shutter. She turned a little and shivered at her friend's pointed appeal.

"If Walter Gordon says it, it must be so," she answered, with certain quiet bitterness.

Lochinvar was deeply stung by her words. He came somewhat nearer to her, clasping his hands nervously before him, his face set and pale as it had never been in the presence of an enemy.

"Kate," he said, "I ask you again, wherein have I so grievously offended you that, on your coming to this land of exile, you should treat me like a dog – yes, worse than a wandering cur-dog. It is true that once long ago I was foolish – to blame, blackly and bitterly in the wrong, if you will. But now all humbly I ask you to forgive me ere I go, it may be to my death."

The girl looked at him with a strange light in her eyes – scorn, pity, and self-will struggling together for the mastery.

At last, in a hard, dry voice, she said, "There is nothing to forgive. If there had been I should have forgiven you. As it is, I have only forgotten."

Maisie had left the room and there was deep silence in it and about, save for the distant crying of the staid Dutch children late at their plays on the canal-sides of Amersfort, and the clatter of the

home-returning wooden shoon on the paved streets. The young man drew himself up till his height towered above the girl like a watch-tower over a city wall. His eyes rested steadfastly on her the while. She had a feeling that a desperate kind of love was in the air, and that for aught she knew he might be about to clasp her fiercely in his arms. And it had, perhaps, been well for both if he had, for at that moment she raised her eyes and her heart wavered within her. He looked so tall and strong. She was sure that her head would come no higher upon his breast than the blue ribbon of his cavalry shoulder-knot. She wondered if his arms would prove as strong as they looked, if she suddenly were to find herself folded safe within them.

"Kate," he said, wistfully, coming nearer to her.

Now Wat Gordon ought not to have spoken. The single word in the silence of the room brought the girl back to herself. Instinctively she put out her hand, as though to ward off something threatening or overpowering. The gulf yawned instantly between them, and the full flood-tide of Wat Gordon's opportunity ebbed away as rapidly as it had flowed.

Yet when a moment later the girl lifted her long, dark lashes and revealed her eyes shining shyly glorious beneath them, Wat Gordon gazed into their depths till his breath came quick and short through his nostrils, and a peal of bells seemed to jangle all out of tune in his heart. He stood like some shy woodland beast new taken in a trap.

"Well?" she said, inquiringly, yet somewhat more softly than she had yet spoken.

Wat clinched his fist. In that single syllable the girl seemed to lay all the burden of blame, proof, explanation of the past upon him alone, and the hopeless magnitude of the task cut him to the quick.

"Kate!" he cried, "I will not again ask you to forgive me; but if I do not come back, at least believe that I died more worthily than perhaps I have lived – though neither have I ever lived so as to shame you, even had you seen me at my worst. And, ere I go, give me at least a love-token that I may carry it with me till I die."

Kate's lips parted as though she had somewhat to answer if she would, but she kept a faintly smiling silence instead, and only looked casually about the room. A single worn glove lay on the top of a little cabinet of dark oak. She lifted it and handed it to Wat. The young man eagerly seized the glove, pressed it with quick passion to his lips, and then thrust it deep into the bosom of his military coat. He would have taken the hand which gave him the gift, but a certain malicious innocence in the girl's next words suddenly dammed his gratitude at the fountain-head.

"I have nothing of my own to give," she said, "for I have just newly come off the sea. But this glove of Maisie's will mayhap serve as well. Besides which, I heard her say yestreen that she had some time ago lost its marrow in the market-place of Amersfort."

With a fierce hand Wat Gordon tore the glove from his bosom and threw it impulsively out of the window into the canal. Then he squared his shoulders and turned him about in order to stride haughtily and indignantly from the room.

But even as he went he saw a quaintly subtle amusement shining in the girl's eyes – laughter made lovely by the possibility of indignant tears behind it, and on her perfectest lips that quick petulant pout which had seemed so adorable to him in the old days when he had laid so many ingenious snares to bring it out. Wat was intensely piqued – more piqued perhaps than angry. He who had wooed great ladies, and on whom in the ante-chambers of kings kind damsels all too beautiful had smiled till princes waxed jealous, was now made a mock of by a slim she-slip compact of mischievous devices. He looked again and yet more keenly at the girl by the window. Certainly it was so. Mischievous lurked quaintly but unmistakably under the demure, upward curl of those eyelashes. A kind of still, calm fury took him, a set desperation like that of battle.

"I will take my own love-token," he cried, striding suddenly over to her.

And so, almost but not quite, ere Kate was aware, he had stooped and kissed her.

Then, in an instant, as soon indeed as he had realized his deed, all his courage went from him. His triumph of a moment became at once flat despair, and he stood before her ashamed, abject as a dog that is caught in a fault and trembles for the lash.

Without a word the girl pointed to the door. And such was the force of her white anger and scorn upon him that Wat Gordon, who was about to ride carelessly to face death as he had often done before, slunk through it cowering and speechless.

Maisie was coming along the little boarded passage as he passed out.

"Farewell, cousin," she said to him. "Will you not bid me good-bye again ere you go, if only for the old sake's sake?"

But Wat Gordon went past her as though he had not heard, trampling stupidly down the narrow stairs like a bullock in the market-place, the spring all gone out of his foot, the upstanding airy defiance fallen away from his carriage.

Then in a moment more there came up from the street front the sound of trampling horses and the ring of accoutrement, as three or four riders set spurs to their horses and rode clattering over the cobbles towards the city gates.

Maisie went quickly into the sitting-room to her friend.

"What have you been doing to my Wat?" she asked, grasping her tightly by the arm. "Have you quarrelled with him?"

Kate was standing behind the shutter, looking down the street along which the four riders were rapidly vanishing. At the corner where they turned one of the horses shied and reared, bringing down its iron-shod hoofs sharply on the pavement with a little jet of sparks, and almost throwing its rider. Instinctively the girl uttered a little cry, and set her hand against her side.

"What said Wat to you, dearest Kate," asked Maisie, again, altering the form of her question, "that you sent him thus speechless and dumfounded away? He passed me at the stair-head as if he knew me not."

Finding Kate still absorbed and silent, Maisie sat down in her own chair and waited. Presently, with a long sigh, the girl sank on her knees beside her, and, taking her friend's hand, set it on her head. With sympathetic and well-accustomed fingers Maisie, as was her custom, softly smoothed and caressed the dark tangle of curls. She did not utter a word till she heard a quick sob catch at the bottom of Kate's throat. Then she spoke very low, leaning forward till she could lay her cheek against the girl's brow.

"What said he? Tell me, dearest, if you can; tell your gossip, Maisie," she whispered.

It was a voice that not many could resist when it pleaded thus – most like a dove cooing to its mate in the early summer mornings.

There fell a silence for a while in the little upper room; but Maisie the wise one did not again speak. She only waited.

"Oh, I hate him!" at last said Kate McGhie, lifting her head with centred intensity of expression.

Maisie smiled a little, indulgently, leaning back so that her friend's dark eyes should not notice it. She smiled as one who is in the things of love at least a thousand years older, and who in her day has seen and tasted bread sweet and bread bitter.

"And certainly you do well to hate him, my Kate," this cunning Mistress Maisie said, very gently, her hand continuing to run softly through the meshes of Kate's curls; "nevertheless, for all that you are glad that he kissed you."

The girl lifted her head as quickly from its resting-place as though a needle had pricked her unawares. She eyed her friend with a grave, shocked surprise.

"You were listening!" she said.

And the censure in her tone might have been that of a General Assembly of the Kirk, so full of weighty rebuke was it.

"No, Kate," said her friend, quietly. "I was in the kitchen all the time, putting the bone in the broth for William's supper. I heard no single word of your talk. But, Kate, my lassie, I am not so very ignorant concerning these things which you stand on the brink of. Come, what had you been saying to him to provoke him to kiss you?"

"He but asked me for a love-token to take with him to the wars – which I gave him, and how could I tell?" said the girl, a little plaintively. Things had not gone as they ought, and now her own familiar friend was about to blame her for it.

Maisie waited a moment discreetly, hoping that Kate would go on; but she appeared to consider that she had said enough. She only pillowed her head lower on her gossip's knee, and submitted contentedly to the loving hand which caressed her ringlets.

"And you gave him the love-token?" queried her friend, quietly.

"I told him that I had nothing of my own to give him, because my baggage had not yet arrived; and it chanced that I saw one of your old marrowless gloves lying there on the cabinet – so I gave him that. I thought," she added, plaintively, after a pause, "that it would do just as well."

At which conclusion Maisie laughed helplessly, rocking to and fro; then she checked herself, and began again. Kate raised her head and looked at her in new surprise.

"You are the strangest girl!" at last Maisie said. "You have sundry passages with a gallant youth. You smile not unkindly upon him. You quarrel and are separated. After years you meet in a distant land. He asks you for a gage to carry with him to the wars, a badge fragrant of his lady and his love, and you give him – an odd glove of his cousin's wife's. Truly an idea most quaint and meritorious!"

"And Maisie," said Kate, solemnly, looking up at her with her head still on her hands, "would you believe it? He stamped his foot and threw the glove out of the window there into the canal! He ought not to have done that, ought he?"

"My Kate," said her friend, "do not forget that I am no longer a girl, but a woman wedded – "

"Six months," interrupted Kate McGhie, a little mischievously.

"And when I see the brave lass with whom, in another and a dearer land, I came through so many perils, in danger of letting foolish anger wrong both herself and another, you will forgive me if I have a word to say. I speak because I have come in peace to the goal of my own loving. Wat loves you. I am sure of that. Can you not tell me what it is that you have against him? No great matter, surely; for, though reckless and headstrong beyond most, the lad is yet honest, up-standing, true."

Kate McGhie was silent for a while, only leaning her head a little harder against the caressing hand.

Then, with her face bent down, she spoke, softly:

"In Scotland he loved *me* not, but only the making of love. If so be that Wat Gordon will love me here in the Lowlands of Holland, he must do it like one that loves for death or life; not like a gay gallant that makes love to every maid in town, all for dalliance in a garden pleasaunce on a summer's day."

The girl drew herself up nearer to her friend's face. Maisie Lennox, on her part, quietly leaned over and laid her cheek against Kate's. It was damp where a cherry-great tear had rolled down it. Maisie understood, but said nothing. She only pressed her gossip a little closer and waited. In a while Kate's arms went gently round about her neck, and her face drew yet a little nearer to the listening ear.

"Once," she whispered, "I feared that I was in danger of loving him first and most – and that he but played with me. I feared it much," she went on, with a little return of the low sob, which caused her friend's arms to clasp themselves more tightly about her, "I feared that I might learn to love him too soon. So that is the reason – why — *I hate him now!*"

CHAPTER III

THE BULL, THE CALF, AND THE KILLER

Wat Lochinvar rode out of the city of Amersfort with anger humming fierce in his heart, the Black Horseman riding pickaback behind him. He paid little attention to the three cutthroat-looking knaves who had been provided as his escort, till the outer port of the city gates had closed behind him and the chill airs of the outlands, unwarmed by friendly civic supper-fires, met him shrilly in the teeth.

He had been played with, tricked, betrayed, so he told himself. Never more would he think of her – the light trifler with men's hearts. She might gang her own wilful gait for him; but there was one thing he was well assured of – never more would Wat Gordon trust any woman born of woman, never speak a word of love to one of the fickle breed again. On this he was resolved like steel. For him, henceforth, only the stern elation of combat, the clatter of harness, the joy of the headlong charge – point to point, eye to eye, he would meet his man, when neither would be afraid of aught, save of yielding or craving a favor. From that day forth his sword should be his love, his regiment his married wife, his cause and king his family; while his faithful charger, nuzzling against his breast, would bestow on him the only passionate caresses he would ever know, until on some stricken field it was his fate to fill a soldier's grave.

Almost could Walter Gordon have wept in his saddle to think of his wrongs, and death seemed a sweet thing to him beside the fickle favors of any woman. He bethought him of his cousin Will with something of a pitying smile.

"Poor fool!" he said to himself; "he is married. He thinks himself happy. How much better had it been to live for glory!"

But even as he battered himself into a conviction of his own rooted indifference to the things of love, he began to wonder how long his present adventure would detain him. Could he be back in time on the morrow to hear the first trip of a light foot on the stairs in Zaandpoort Street, as *she* came from her sleeping-room, fresh as though God had made her all anew that morning?

For this is a quality of the wisdom of man, that thinking upon a maid oftentimes makes it vain – especially if the man be very brave or very wise, and the maid exceeding fair. Gradually, however, the changing clatter of the dozen hoofs behind Lochinvar forced itself upon his hearing, and he remembered that he was not alone.

He turned to his followers, and, curbing his horse a little, waited for them to come up. They ranged themselves two on one side of him and one on the other. Lochinvar eyed them with surprising disfavor.

"You are surely the last scourgings of the camp," he said, brusquely, for it was too little his habit to beat about the bush; "what may you have been doing with yourselves? You could not all three have been made so unhallowedly ugly as that. After all, God is a good God, and kind to the evil and to the good."

The fellow on Lochinvar's left was a great red-faced man with an immense scar, where (as it appeared) one side of his face had been cut away wellnigh to the cheek-bone – a wound which had healed unevenly in ridges and weals, and now remained of a deep plum-color.

"What is your name?" said Lochinvar to this man.

"I am called Haxo the Bull," he answered, "and I am of the retinue of my Lord of Barra."

"And how came you by your English?" asked Lochinvar.

"My mother always declared that my father was of that nation," answered the man, readily enough.

"To conclude," continued Wat, who was impatient of further conference with such rank knaves, "what might be your distinguished rank in the service of my Lord of Barra?"

"I am his camp butcher," said the man, laying his hand on a long, keen knife which swung at his belt on the opposite side from his sword.

"And these other two gentlemen, your honorable companions?" queried Wat, indicating them over his shoulder with contemptuous thumb.

The hulking fellow of the scar made a gesture with his shoulders, which said as plain as might be, "They are of age; ask themselves."

But the nearer of the two did not wait to be asked. He was a hairless, flaccid-faced rogue of a pasty gray complexion, and even uglier than the plum-colored Bull, with a certain intact and virgin hideousness of his own.

"I, for my part, am called Haxo's Calf, and I am not ashamed of the name!" he said.

And, thinking this an excellent jest, he showed a row of teeth like those of a hungry dog when he snatches a bone from a comrade not his equal in the fray.

"And, I doubt not, a fit calf of such a sire," quoth Lochinvar, looking from one to the other.

"He is my apprentice, not my son – praise to the Virgin and all the saints!" said Haxo, looking at the Calf quite as scornfully as Wat himself.

Lochinvar now transferred his attention to the third. He wore a small round cap on the top of his head, and his narrow and meagre forehead ran back shining and polished to the nape of his neck. His lack-lustre eyes were set curiously at different angles in his head. He had thin lips, which parted nervously over black, gaping teeth, and his nose was broken as if with a blow of a hammer.

"And is this gentleman also of Monsieur Haxo's gallant company, and in the suite of his Excellency my Lord of Barra?"

Haxo nodded his head with some appreciation of Wat's penetration.

"He is, indeed," he said; "he is my chief slaughterman, and a prince at his business."

"He is called 'The Killer,'" interjected the Calf, smacking his lips with unction. "It is a good name for him."

Wat Gordon urged his horse onward with great and undisguised disgust. To be sent on a dangerous mission with three such arrant rascals told him the value that his employers set upon his life. And if he had chanced at that moment to turn him about in his saddle, the evil smile of triumph which passed simultaneously over the faces of his companions might have told him still more.

The small cavalcade of four went clattering on through the dusky coolness of night, across many small wooden bridges and over multitudinous canals. It passed through villages, in which the inhabitants were already snoring behind their green blinds the unanimous antiphonal bass of the rustic just – though, as yet, it was little past nine of the clock on the great kirk tower of Amersfort, and in the city streets and in the camp every one was at the height of merriment and enjoyment.

Wafts of balmy country scents blew across the by-ways along which they went; and through the limpid gray coolness where the young leaves of the sparse hedgerow trees brushed his face, Wat could see that he was passing countless squares of parti-colored bloom. Miles of hyacinth, crocus, and narcissus gardens stretched away on either hand beyond the low, carefully cut Dutch hedges. Haxo the Bull rode first, showing them the way to the inn of Brederode, silently, save that every now and then he would cry a word over his shoulder, either to one of his ill-favored retinue or to an unseen watcher at some lonely cross-road.

Wat followed sullenly and fiercely, without caring much about the direction in which he was being taken. His mind, however, was preternaturally busy, going carefully over all the points of his interview with Kate, and very soon from the heights of justified indignation he fell to accusing himself of rude stupidity.

"I fear she will never look kindly on me again," he said, aloud. "This time I have certainly offended her forever."

And the thought troubled him more than all the traitorous Barras and ill-conditioned Bull Haxos in the world.

A breath of perfume blew fresh across the way from a field of dark purple bloom, and with an overpowering rush there came back to him the sweet scent of Kate's hair as for a moment he had bent over her by the window. He let the reins fall on his horse's neck, and almost cried aloud in agony at the thought of losing so great a treasure.

"And shall I never see her more," he said, "never watch the responsive blood spring redly to her cheek, never see the anger flash proudly in her eye, never (were it but for once) touch the sweet tangle of her hair?"

Wat's love-lorn melancholy might have driven him to further and yet wilder utterance had he not been conscious of a slight metallic click behind him, which certainly did not come from the hoofs of the horses. He turned sharply at the sound and caught Haxo's Calf with a pistol in his right hand, and the Killer with his long butcher's knife bare and uplifted. Haxo himself was riding unconcernedly on in front. Wat quickened the pace of his horse, and rode alongside the Bull.

"Sir Butcher," he said, calmly, "do your men behind there wish to have their weapons ready in case of meeting the enemy, or do they perchance desire to flesh them in my back? It may seem a trifling matter to trouble you with, and of no great consequence, nevertheless I should somewhat like to ascertain their intentions."

Haxo glanced behind him. The Calf and the Killer were closing in upon Wat.

"Varlets," cried Haxo, in a terrible voice, "put your weapons in your belts, ride wide apart and far behind, or I will send you both quick to hell!"

The men fell asunder at the words, and for a mile or two only the sound of the horses' feet pounding the hard paven road came to Wat's ears. But he did not again return to that entrancing dream of Kate, her beauty, and her hard-heartedness which had so nearly led to his destruction. Yet, nevertheless, whatever he said or did, he remained through all that followed conscious of his love for her, and for the remainder of the night the desire of getting back to Amersfort in order to see her sharpened every faculty and kept every sense on the alert.

More than once during the night Haxo endeavored to enter into conversation, but Wat, indignant at the cowardly attempt on his life (for so he was bound to consider it), waved him peremptorily aside.

"Do your duty without further words," he said; "lead on directly to the inn of Brederode."

It was long past the gloaming, and already wearing nigh to the watershed of the night, before the perfectly flat country of marsh and polder through which they had been riding gave place to a district in which the undulations of the surface were distinctly felt beneath the horses' feet. Here, also, the hard-baked, dusty roads gave place to softer and more loosely knit tracks of sand, on which the iron-shod hoofs made no sound. They were, in fact, fast approaching that broad belt of dunes which shuts off the rich, flower-covered nurseries of Haarlem from the barren, heathy wastes along the borders of the Northern Sea.

On their right they passed the dark walls of the castle of Brederode, and pursued their way to the very edge of the lofty dunes, which at this point are every year encroaching upon the cultivated fields. Presently they came to a long, low, white building surrounded by dark hedges, which in the coolness of the night sent out a pleasant odor of young beech leaves. The court-yard was silent, the windows black. Not a ray of light was visible anywhere.

Walter Gordon rode directly up to the door. He felt with his hand that it stood open to the wall, and that a dark passage yawned before him. Instinctively he drew back a little way to decide what he should do. With an unknown house before him and a cut-throat crew behind, he judged that he would be wiser to proceed with extreme caution.

"Keep wide from me at your peril," he cried, threateningly, to his rascal company. The three horses backed simultaneously, and Haxo, his Calf and his Killer, waited in an irregular semicircle, while Wat took out of his pocket a tinder-box and from his holster a candle. There was not a breath of air, and when Lochinvar lighted the taper the flame mounted steadily upwards, so that he had no

need even to shelter it with his hand while the flame went down and then as slowly came again, as all candles do when they are first lighted.

Wat glanced up at the sign of the Black Bull's Head, which was set in rude caricature over the door of the inn. His mind wandered grimly to the significance of that emblem in his own country, and to the many good men and true who had dined with the Black Bull's head on the table – and thereafter dined no more in this world. And to think that he, Wat Gordon of Lochinvar, had brought the Bull with him, together with the Bull-calf and the Killer, to keep him company to the Black Bull of Brederode! He took the conceit as an omen, and gritted his teeth to remember what an arrant gull he had been.

"I shall never see my love more," he said under his breath; "well, never mind, Wat Gordon, lad – if die you must, there are some now alive who will be in a similar plight ere you turn up your toes. And at all events I am glad that I kissed her."

He dismounted and drew his sword.

"Stand still where you are," he cried to Haxo. "Advance an inch at your peril till I give the word."

He looped his horse's rein to the iron hook at the cheek of the inn door. Then he gripped his sword tighter, and said a prayer which ended somewhat unorthodoxly:

"I wish I had that glove which I threw into the canal. For, after all, she gave it to me. Also, her lips pout most adorably when she is angered."

And this seemed strange enough information to give the Deity. But without doubt its sincerity carried it further heavenward than many an empty Credo. For the God who made love does not, like Jove, laugh at lovers' vows.

CHAPTER IV

THE DUEL AT THE INN OF BREDERODE

So, thinking with all his might upon the adorable pout of his lady's lips, that right loyal lover Walter Gordon strode, not without fear, but all the braver for mastering it, into the dark passage which stretched straight before him, gloomy as a sea cave at midnight. Doors still blacker yawned on either side of him like the mouths of huge cannon. He held his candle aloft, and paused a moment at each, striving with all his might to penetrate the silence that reigned within. But the faint circle of illumination hardly passed beyond the threshold. Wat, as he held his breath and listened, only heard the rats scuttle and the mice cheep in the oaken wainscoting.

It was with a feeling of chill water running icily down his back that he passed each black cavern, glancing warily over his shoulder lest he should catch the downward stroke of an arm in the doorway, or see the candle-light flash on the deadly blade of the Killer's butchering knife.

It was nerve-shaking work. The sweat, chill as the clammy mist of the night, began to pour down Wat's face, and his flesh grew prickly all over as though he had been stuck full of pins.

Unless something happened, he felt that in another moment he must shriek aloud. He stopped and listened. Somewhere near him he felt sure he could distinguish the sound of breathing. It was not the heavy, regular to-and-fro respiration of unconscious sleep, but rather the quicker and shorter breathing of one who has recently undergone severe exertion, and whose heart still runs fast ahead.

Wat stood and listened. The sound came from half-way up the stairs, out of a room with a door which opened wider than the others, and which now stood, gaping black and ominous, directly before him. Wat could hear the sound of feet behind him, cautiously shuffling on the flags of the doorway, and by this sign he knew that his three ruffians were there waiting for him with the weapons of their trade naked and deadly in their hands. He was trapped, taken between the brutal, dastard butchers behind him and the unknown but more terrible breathers in the dark above him.

Yet his very desperation brought a compensating calmness. He pressed his arm against his side, where, in an inner pocket, he carried the papers he had come to deliver. He undid the button of his cloak, and let it fall to the ground to clear his sword-arm. Then, bending forward like a runner straining to obtain good pace at the start of a short race, he went up the stairs steadily and warily till he had reached the door of the room. His candle was almost blown out with the quickness of his motion. It flickered low, and then caught again, as Wat stepped nimbly within, and made the point of his sword circle about him to clear himself a space against attack.

Then he looked around him. He found himself in a wide, low-ceilinged room, with many small windows along the side. A curtain of arras hung at one end, and a table stood in front of it – a hall of rustic assembly, as it seemed. At the far side of the table from him and between its edge and the curtain, calm as though it had been broad day, sat a tall, thin man. He had red hair and a short red beard, both liberally sprinkled with gray. His eyes were of a curious China blue, pale and cold. He was clad in a French uniform, and a pair of pistols and a drawn sword lay on the table before him.

The man sat perfectly still, with his elbows on the table and his chin on the knuckles of the hands which were joined beneath his beard. His eyes were alive, however, and surveyed Wat Gordon from head to foot. The effect of this scrutiny upon the man in the chair was somewhat surprising.

He started half-way to his feet, and so disturbed the table behind which he sat that one of the pistols rolled off and fell underneath, so that the butt appeared on the side nearest to Wat. At the noise the arras behind was disturbed, and Lochinvar felt that unseen eyes were watching and unseen ears listening behind its shelter.

Wat, on his side, was not less astonished. For at the first glance he knew the man at the table.

"Jack – Jack Scarlett?" he stammered, half holding out and half withholding his hand, as to a friend met unexpectedly in more than doubtful circumstances. The man nodded without appearing to notice the outstretched hand, and continued to look the young man over with the pale, piercing eyes of blue.

"Then you are the officer of the prince appointed to receive my despatches?" cried Wat, when words came back to him.

The man whom Wat had called Jack Scarlett shook his head.

"With another I might pretend it," he said, "but not with you, Lord of Lochinvar. Now do I see that Barra plots deeper and yet more simply than I had given his Highland brains credit for. I little knew that the cavalier whom I was to meet to-night was Wat Gordon, mine ancient scholar and good ally."

"It pleases you to speak riddles with your tongue, John," replied Walter, "you that were wont to strike so strong and straight with the blade of steel. You that know me well, mine old master of the fence, I beseech to speak plainly and riddle to me no more."

Scarlett never took his blue eyes off Lochinvar's face as he spoke.

"We are here, my Lord of Lochinvar, in the matter of a most serious conference," he said; "therefore, do not stand there fixed and forwandered in the midst of the floor. Set your candle on a sconce and be seated."

Wat shook his head.

"There are too many perils behind me and before," he replied; "I must have light and room to guard my head ere I can sit or talk with you or any man, seeing that my life is not my own so long as my commission remains unfulfilled."

Scarlett knocked three times loudly on the board in front of him.

In a moment the arras stirred behind, and a man-at-arms appeared. He was clad in a pale-blue uniform, unlike any that Wat had seen in the army of the States-General.

"Bring lights," said Scarlett to him in French.

In a few minutes the room was fully illumined by the rays of half a dozen candles set in a pair of silver candlesticks, each of them holding three lights.

Then Scarlett pointed Wat to a chair.

"Surely you will do me the honor to be seated now," he said, courteously.

Wat replied by picking up a cross-legged stool of black oak and setting it down at the angle of the room, at the point most distant from the arras, and also from the door by which he had entered. Then he sat down upon it, still holding his sword bare in his right hand, and made the point of it play with the toe of his buff leathern riding-boot, while he waited impatiently for Scarlett to speak.

The man at the table had never once removed his eyes from Lochinvar's face. Then in a quiet, steady, unhurried voice he began to speak:

"You have not forgotten, my Lord of Lochinvar – "

At the repetition of the title Walter stirred his shoulders a little disdainfully.

"I say again, my Lord of Lochinvar has not forgotten – my lord has every right to the title. It was given to his ancestors by the grandfather of his present majesty – "

"His present majesty?" said Walter, looking up inquiringly.

"Aye," replied Scarlett, with some apparent heat, "His Most Gracious Majesty James the Second, King of Great Britain and Ireland. Since when did Walter Gordon of Lochinvar need to stand considering who has the right to be styled his lawful king?"

And the keen, cold eyes glinted like steel blades in the candle-light.

"It was in fencing and not in loyalty that I took lessons from you, John Scarlett," replied Lochinvar, haughtily, looking with level brows at the red-bearded man across the table, who still leaned his chin on the tips of his fingers. "I pray you, say out your message and be done."

"But this is my message," Scarlett went on, "which I was commanded to deliver to the man whom I should meet here in the inn of Brederode. You are the servant of King James, and his messages and commands are yours to obey."

Wat Gordon bowed stiffly. "In so far," he said, "as they do not conflict with my orders from my superior officers in the service of the Prince of Orange, in whose army I am at present a humble soldier."

"You are indeed a soldier in the Scottish Guards, which were raised in that country by permission of King James, and by him lent to his son-in-law, the Stadtholder of Holland. But surely the commands of your king are before all; before the mandates of Parliament, before the commands of generals – aye, before even the love of wife and children."

And the sonorous words brought a fire into the cold eyes of the speaker and an answering erectness into the pose of Wat Gordon, who had hitherto been listening listlessly but watchfully as he continued to tap the point of his riding-boot with his sword-blade.

"I have yet to hear what are the commands of his majesty the king," said Wat, lifting his hat at the name.

Scarlett tossed a sealed paper across the table, and as Wat rose to take it he kept a wary eye on the two chief points of danger – the division in the arras and the door, behind which, as he well knew, were stationed those three worthy gentry of my Lord Barra's retinue, Haxo the Bull, the Calf, and the Killer.

Wat took the paper with his left hand, broke the seal, and unfolded it by shaking it open with a quick, clacking jerk. It read thus:

JAMES II., by the GRACE OF GOD, etc

It is my command that John Scarlett, Lieutenant of the Luxemburg Regiment in the service of the King of France, obtain the papers relating to the numbers and dispositions of the troops of the States-General in the city and camp of Amersfort, which I have reason to believe to be in the possession of my trusty servant and loving Cousin, Walter Gordon, Lord of Lochinvar in Galloway.

At Whitehall, this 14 of Aprile, 1688.

JAMES R.

Walter bent his knee, kissed the king's message, and, rising to his feet, as courteously folded it and handed it back to Lieutenant Scarlett.

"I am the king's subject, it is true," he said. "Moreover, the king is anointed, and his word binds those to whom it is addressed. But I am also the soldier of the Prince of Orange and of the States-General of Holland. I eat their bread; I wear their uniform; I take their pay; to them I have sworn the oath of allegiance. I am in this inn of Brederode as a plain soldier, charged with orders given to me by my superior officer, and I cannot depart from these orders while I live a free man and able to carry them out."

"But the king – the king – ?" sternly reiterated Scarlett, rising for the first time to his feet, and clapping the palm of his hand sharply on the table by way of emphasis.

"The king," replied Walter, in a voice deeply moved, "is indeed my king. But he has no right to command a soldier to become a traitor, nor to turn an honest man into a spy. He may command my life and my fortunes. He may command my death. But, landless, friendless, and an exile though I be, mine honor at least is mine own. I refuse to deliver the papers with which I have been intrusted, or to be a traitor to the colors under which I serve."

While Walter spoke Scarlett stood impatiently tapping the table with the paper, which he had refolded.

"The request, at any rate, is nothing more than a formality," he said. "You are here alone. Your three attendant rascals are, equally with myself, in the pay of the King of France. They wait under arms at that door –"

"Under butchers' knives, say rather!" interrupted Lochinvar, scornfully.

But Scarlett paid no heed to his words.

"If you will deliver up the papers cheerfully, according to the mandate of your king, I have in my pocket a patent of nobility made out for the man who should put them into my hand at the inn of Brederode – besides the promise of pardons and restoration of heritages for all his friends and associates at present lying outside the law in Scotland and elsewhere. Think well, for much more than the present hangs upon your answer. Life and death for many others are in it!"

Wat stood still without making any answer. With his left hand he turned the dainty lace upon the cuff of his coat-sleeve carefully back. He thought vaguely of his love whom he was renouncing to go to certain death, of the friends whose pardon he was refusing. Most clearly of all he bethought him of the old tower in the midst of the Loch of Lochinvar under the heathery fell of lone Knockman. Then he looked straight at the man before him.

"Jack Scarlett," he said, "it was you who taught me how to thrust and parry. Then your hand was like steel, but your heart was not also hard as the millstone. You were not used to be a man untrue, forsworn. God knows then, at least, you were no traitor. You were no spy. You were no murderer, though a soldier of fortune. You called me a friend, and I was not ashamed of the name. I do not judge you even now. You may have one conception of loyalty to the king we both acknowledge. I have another. You are in the service of one great prince, and you are (I believe it) wholly faithful to him. Do me the honor to credit that I can be as faithful to my uniform, as careless of life, and as careful of honor in the service of my master as you would desire to be in yours."

Scarlett turned his eyes away. He felt, though he did not yet acknowledge, the extraordinary force and fervor of the appeal – delivered by Wat with red-hot energy, with a hiss in the swift words of it like that which the smith's iron gives forth when it is thrust into the cooling caldron.

Wat turned full upon him. The two men stood eye to eye, with only the breadth of the table between them.

"Look you, Scarlett," Lochinvar said again, without waiting for his reply. "You are the finest swordsman in the world; I am but your pupil; yet here and now I will fight you to the death for the papers if you will promise to draw off your men and give me free passage from this place should I kill you or have you at my mercy. But I warn you that you will have to kill me without any mercy in order to get the documents from me."

Scarlett appeared to consider for a space.

"There is no risk, and, after all, it makes it less like a crime," he said, under his breath. But aloud he only answered, "I will fight you for the papers here and now."

Walter bowed his head, well pleased.

"That is spoken like my old Jack!" he said.

Lieutenant Scarlett went to the arras and threw it open with both hands. It ran with brazen rings upon a bar in the Flemish manner.

"Clairvaux! Ferrand!" he cried.

And two young officers in gay uniforms immediately appeared.

"Gentlemen," he said, addressing them, "this is Walter Gordon, Lord of Lochinvar. He has done me the honor to propose crossing swords with me here in this room. If he should kill me or have me at his mercy he is to be allowed free passage and outgate. Also he fights far from his friends, and therefore one of you will be good enough to act as his second."

The younger of the two officers, he who had answered to the name of Ferrand, a tall, fair-haired Frenchman of the Midi, at once said, "I shall consider it an honor to act as second to the Sieur of Lochinvar."

"In the event of my death you will consider these orders imperative, and equally binding upon your honor as upon mine own," said John Scarlett.

The two officers bowed.

"I think we should know the length of each other's swords by this time," he said, looking at Wat; "there is therefore no need that our seconds should measure them." For he had noted Walter's disinclination to let his weapon leave his hand. So far as his own life was concerned, Wat hoped little from this combat. But he desired greatly to die an honorable death, with his face to a worthy enemy; for John Scarlett had been in his time the greatest swordsman in Europe, and though Walter was by far his ablest pupil in Scotland, yet at no time could he have stood any chance in open field against his master.

So, as the swords felt one another after the salute, Wat set his teeth and wondered how long it would last, and how much Kate would ever know. There is little need to describe the fight at length. From the first Scarlett contented himself with keeping his opponent's blade in play, feeling it, humoring it, and, as it were, coaxing it into position. And for some bouts Wat fought without any of that verve and lightning versatility of fence which were his usual characteristics in action. Something seemed to paralyze his powers and weigh down his sword-blade, as though the quick and living steel had turned to lead in his hand. It might be that the feeling of ancient pupilage had returned to him, for to himself he seemed rather to be taking a lesson in the finesse of defence than to be fighting against terrible odds for his life and honor.

But suddenly a wonderful change came over him. A laugh was heard out in the passage, in which stood Haxo the Bull and his satellites – a laugh thin, acrid, unmistakable. It stung Wat to the roots of his heart. For a moment he was in difficulty. The problem divided his mind even between thrust and parry. There was no man whom he knew well whose laugh rang like that. But even as he fought he remembered how once, in the palace of the stadtholder, he had seen the prince come in leaning upon the arm of a young, dark-haired man, whose meagre, hatchet face was decorated, for all ornament, with a black mustache so scanty that it seemed twisted of twenty hairs, and whose ends hung down, one on either side of his lips, like a couple of rats' tails. This, and a certain bitter, rasping laugh to which he had at once taken a dislike, were all Wat remembered of that young man. But after the distinguished party had passed in to supper he learned that the prince's companion and confidant was one of his own nation, Murdo McAlister, Lord of Barra and the Small Isles, and that he was one to whom the Prince of Orange looked for counsel in all that did not touch the ecclesiastical position of affairs of Scotland.

The laugh which rang out from the dark passage behind the Bull, the Calf, and the Killer was the same which he had heard at the supper-party of the stadtholder.

From that moment Wat knew that in no event had he now any chance for his life. It mattered little whether or not he killed John Scarlett. Barra would certainly have the papers. For he knew the man well enough to know that, having taken such trouble to obtain the return of the numbers and positions for his own traitorous purposes, he would never let the bearer of them slip through his fingers. No oaths of his own or another would serve to bind Murdo of the Isles in that which concerned his schemes. Yet even in that moment of agony Wat could not help wondering why Barra had taken so difficult and roundabout a way of obtaining and transmitting a paper which it would have been perfectly easy for him to have gained by means of his official position, and to have forwarded to the King of France by more ordinary channels. But, however this may be, certain it is that the laugh irritated Wat Gordon strangely, and at the first sound of it he sprang towards Scarlett with an energy and fierceness entirely unlike the lassitude with which he had previously fought.

From that moment he forced the fighting, attacking with furious vigor and astonishing rapidity, so that the great master-at-arms soon found that even he had enough to do simply to stand it out on the defensive. Yet Scarlett smiled, too, for he thought that this bout of youthful fury would soon wear

itself down, and that then he would easily enough get in his favorite deadly thrust in quart, to which no answer had ever yet been discovered.

But Walter never gave him time; for again the acrid laugh came from the dark passage and set all the young man's blood tingling to put a sword deep in the traitor's throat, and then, if need be, die with his foot on his enemy's breast. He sped two thrusts one after the other so swiftly that Scarlett, countering over-late for the first, had to leap back in order to measure his distance for the second. In so doing his foot slipped, and his blade, caught unexpectedly by Lochinvar's, went ringing against the ceiling and fell on the floor. Walter's point was at his breast the next moment.

"Yield!" said Walter; "I hold you to your word. You are at my mercy."

"I yield," said Scarlett. "It was well done. Never before in any land was I thus vanquished in a fair fight."

CHAPTER V

HAXO THE BULL INTERFERES

Walter bowed and returned him his sword, holding it by the blade.

"And now, Lieutenant Scarlett," he said, "I desire to ride back to Amersfort, and you, I doubt not, wish as eagerly to return whence you came – by sea to Flanders, as I guess. I shall be grateful, therefore, if you will draw off your company, and give an order that my horse be brought to that door which is in possession of your own men."

At this moment Haxo the Bull stepped into the room.

"Not so fast by a great deal, master-fighter with windlestraws," he cried. "If it have pleased this friend of yours and traitorous officer of the King of France to make a public bargain upon the issue of a private duel, that has nothing to do with me. There are many other fights to be fought ere you leave this house with the papers safe in your pocket. Listen," he continued, addressing the officers and soldiers standing in the opposite doorway behind Lieutenant Scarlett: "are you to lose your reward and be left without reason or remedy here in the very heart of an enemy's country – your work undone, your doom sealed? For if ye let him escape, this fellow will instantly set the prince's horsemen or his swift Dutch ships upon your track. Better to kill him and take his papers without delay, when rewards and promotions will assuredly be yours on your return to your master."

It was easy to see that this harangue had not been the inspiration of Haxo himself, for he delivered it, now trippingly and now haltingly, like a schoolboy who does not know the meaning of his lesson. But yet it was perfectly comprehensible to all in the room, and Wat could see that the purport of it moved the officers and men greatly. The wide archway behind the table from which the arras had been drawn back was now thronged with faces.

Wat Gordon stood aside whistling an air softly, like one who waits for a discussion to be concluded in which he has no interest. He had not so much as looked at Haxo the Bull while he was speaking.

But John Scarlett grew redder and redder as he listened, and so soon as the butcher was finished he started towards him so abruptly and fiercely that that worthy gat himself incontinently behind the weapons of his allies, the Calf and the Killer, with an alacrity which seemed quite disproportionate to his physical condition.

"I am the commander here," Scarlett cried, "and I am bound by my promise. I am determined to let this man go according to my word. Stand back there!"

But the elder of the two French officers came forward.

He saluted Scarlett and addressed himself directly to him.

"Lieutenant Scarlett," he said, "I am your equal in rank though not in standing. We were sent here under your orders to obtain certain despatches of great importance to our general and to the coming campaign. We shall therefore be compelled to take this man with us, with all the papers in his possession, and to report your conduct to the commander at headquarters."

His words appeared first to amuse and then to infuriate John Scarlett.

Striking suddenly at the triple candlestick on his right, he leaped over the table, crying, "Down with the lights! I am with you, Wat Gordon. Through the door and have at them out into the open. It is your only chance."

Wat, whose sword was ready in his hand, struck sideways at the other group of lights and sent them crashing to the floor. Most of these went out at once in their fall, but one or two continued to burn for a moment with a faint light as they lay among the trampling feet. Wat threw himself at the doorway in which he had heard the laugh, and through which Scarlett had preceded him a moment before. Wat could hear that valiant sworder somewhere in front of him, striking good blows

and swearing, "Out with you, devil's brats!" at the top of his voice. So when he reached the end of the passage he found at the outer door Scarlett making brisk play with four or five men, who were endeavoring to hem him into a narrow space where he should not have the liberty of his sword-arm.

Wat ranged himself beside his late enemy, the two long blades began to flicker fatally in the starlight, and the hurt men to cry out and stagger away. Then quite unexpectedly the crowd in front broke and fled.

"Get on your horse, Wat!" Scarlett cried. "I can keep the door against these loons of mine – at least till you are well out of the way."

There were two good horses, one on either side of the doorway – Wat's, and that upon which Haxo had ridden. Wat sprang upon his own, and, with a cut of his sword, Scarlett divided the halter. The horse wheeled and set off at a gallop through the sand-hills. Yet he went reluctantly, for, had it not been for the safety of his papers, Wat would gladly have stayed and helped John Scarlett to engage the whole of the army of France, with any number of Bulls and Killers in addition thereto.

For, as he vanished into the black night, he could hear John Scarlett advising the first man who desired three feet of cold steel through his vitals to step up and be accommodated. And as he turned eastward towards Amersfort, riding beneath the silent bulk of the old castle of Brederode, he heard again the clash of iron and the cry of pain which he knew so well. He smiled a little grimly, and wished nothing better than that his papers had been delivered, and he again at work at his old master's elbow.

Presently, however, having, as it seemed to him, left all possibility of pursuit behind, Wat put his horse into an easier pace, and rode on by silent and unfrequented paths towards the east, judging his direction by the stars – which had been an old study of his when it was his hap to take to the heather in the black days of the Covenant in Scotland.

As he went he became aware of the noise of a horse galloping swiftly behind him. He drew his sword and stood on the defence, lest the sound should betoken a new danger; but presently he heard a voice calling his own name loudly:

"Wat Gordon! I say, Wat Gordon!"

It was the voice of Jack Scarlett, his late enemy and present deliverer.

He rode up beside Walter, very strange to look upon, clad in some suit of white or pale blanket-color that glimmered in the dusk of the night.

"I gave half a dozen of the rascals that which it will be two days or they get the better of, I'se warrant," he said, chuckling to himself; "and then, thinking that mayhap I might not be welcome any longer in the army of France, I e'en came my ways after you. As I rode I cast my uniform and left my commission in the pocket of my coat. So I am but poor masterless Jack Scarlett once more – a free comrade looking for a regiment, and equipped with nothing but his thews and his long sword, which, God be thanked, are both his own. Think ye the States-General and the Yellow Prince have need of such as I?"

"And how now about the anointed king?" Wat could not help saying.

"The anointed king is safe in Whitehall, and can afford to wait till Jack Scarlett is a little less hungry," answered the free-lance, frankly.

Having been thus fortunate in obtaining the only two good horses about the inn of Brederode (for the Frenchmen had come by sea to the little port of Lis-op-Zee, and the horses of the Calf and the Killer were but sorry jades), Scarlett had ridden all the way back without a challenge, or so much as encountering any sound more threatening than the roopy chuckle of disturbed poultry on the farmhouse roosts as he clattered by on his way.

As the two horsemen came nearer to the city, and the east began to send up a fountain of rosy hues to mingle with the gray spaces of the early morning, Wat could not help laughing at the figure his comrade presented. The master-at-arms was attired simply and Spartanly in such darned and patched underclothing as he had amassed during half a dozen campaigns. These were not all of the same material nor color. They were not, indeed, at all points strictly continuous, the native hide

being allowed to show itself through here and there, while only the long sword belted about the waist and the cavalry boots remained to tell of the well-seasoned man of wars and stratagems.

Jack Scarlett was noways offended at Wat's frank laughter. He even glanced down at himself with a comically rueful air.

"I wish to the saints that I had met somebody else in this garb," he said; "and then I own I could have laughed myself off my horse."

But, nevertheless, laugh he did, and that most heartily, like a good-humored carle, at the figure of sin he cut in the morning light; and specially he was delighted at the paralyzed astonishment of a lank, hobbledehoy gooseherd who came trolloping along a path towards a canal bridge, yawning so that his lower jaw and his head well-nigh dropped apart. For at sight of the red-bearded man in the white sacking and top-boots the wand-twirling yokel gave a yell sudden as the popping of a cork, and forthwith fled, running fleet-foot along the edge of the canal as though the devil himself had been tattering at his tail.

"This guiser's mode will never do to enter the city of Amersfort withal!" quoth Scarlett, looking down at his own inconsequent ragamuffin swathings.

And he paused to consider the problem, while Wat divided himself between chuckling at his late enemy's dilemma, thinking what he would say in his coming interview with Barra in the camp, and (what occupied nine out of every ten minutes) wondering how Kate McGhie would receive him in the street of Zaandpoort.

At last the man in the white bandagings had an idea. He clapped his hand suddenly to his brow.

"What a dull dotard am I to forget Sandy Lyall!"

"I know," he continued in explanation, "a certain honest fool of a Scot that hath wedded a wife of the country. He lives but a mile from here and breeds young Flamands for the prince's armies, and ducks for the Amersfort market. We will e'en go find him, and make him deliver of the best in his wardrobe. For he and I count kin in some seventeenth or eighteenth degree, though this is the first time I ever bethought me of claiming it."

And with no more words John Scarlett turned his horse briskly down a side lane, just as the sun was rising and beginning to shine ruddily brown through the morning haze. The sails of a score of windmills darted up suddenly black in the level rush of light, and every hissing goose and waddling, matronly hen had a rosy side and a gray side, together with an attenuated shadow which stretched up the dikes and away across the polders.

Presently Scarlett and his companion, at the foot of a leafy by-lane, came to the house of the Scot who had married the Flemish wife for the very practical purposes described by Scarlett.

The madcap figure in white went forward to the door, while Wat remained behind cackling helplessly with idiot laughter. Scarlett thundered on the warped and sun-whitened deal of the panels with the hilt of his sword. Then, receiving no response, he kicked lustily with his boots and swore roundly at the unseen occupants in a dozen camp dialects.

During his harangues, sulky maledictions grumbled intermittently from the house. Presently an upper window flew open, a splash of dirty water fell souse on the warrior, and still more sadly bedraggled the preposterous quixotry of his attire.

The temper of the master-at-arms was now strained to the breaking-point. "Sandy Lyall," he cried – and to do him justice, his voice was more full of sorrow than of anger – "Sandy Lyall, of Pittenweem, listen to me, John Scarlett, gin ye dinna come doon this minute and get me a suit o' claes, warm and dry, I'll thraw your dirty Fifish neck – aye, like a twist of rotten straw at a rick-thatching."

But even this explicit malediction threatened to go by without effect.

But at long and last there looked out of the small diamond-paned window from which the jar of water had fallen the head of a respectable enough woman, who wore a red shawl wrapped round her coarse black hair in the fashion of a nightcap.

"Decent woman," cried Jack Scarlett to her, "is your man at hame?"

But the woman, feather-bed sleep yet blinking heavily in her eyes, threw up her hands and shrieked aloud at the unexpected apparition of a man thus mountebanking before her window in white and incomplete skin-tights.

Without articulate speech she withdrew her head and fled within. Whereat Scarlett fell to louder knocking than before, exclaiming all the while on the idleness, incapacity, and general uselessness of such men of Fife as had married foreigneering sluts, and especially threatening what he would do to the particular body and soul of Sandy Lyall, sometime indweller in the ancient borough of Pittenweem.

"Never did I see such a man. The ill-faured wife o' him settin' her head out o' a winnock-sole at five in the morning, and Sandy himsel' lyin' snorkin' an' wamblin' in his naked bed like a gussy swine in a sty! Lord, Lord, wait till I get my hands on him! I'll learn him to keep honest men than himsel' waitin' on the loan of his Sabbath gear, crawling partan o' the East Neuk that he is!"

"Aye, John Scarlett, man, but is that you, na?" drawled a quiet, sleepy voice at the window. "Wha wad hae thocht on seeing you in mountebank's cleading so early in the morning? Hae ye been at some play-actin' near by? Ye dinna look as if you had gotten muckle for your pains. Come awa ben, and I'll gar the wife rise an' get ye porridge – siclike porridge as ane can get in this Guid-forsaken country, that is mair like hen-meat than decent brose for Scots thrapples, to my thinkin'!"

"Sandy Lyall!" cried Scarlett, still much incensed, "hear to me! Come down this instant and let me in! Gi'e me a pair o' trews, a coat, and a decent cloak, and let me be gaun, for I am on an errand of great importance which takes me before the Prince of Orange himsel' this very morning, and it befits not a Scot and a soldier to appear before his high mightiness in this costume."

"I'll come doon the noo, as fast as I can don my gear and truss my points!" cried Sandy Lyall. "Ye were aye a rude man and unceevil a' the days o' ye, John Scarlett. But I canna leave ony Scots lad to want for a pair o' breeks and a cloak to cover his nakedness – or what amounts to the same thing, as the monkey said when he sat down on the hot girdle and gat up again before he was fairly rested."

And with these words, Sandy Lyall, of Pittenweem, in the shire of Fife, slowly descended, his feet sounding portentously on the wooden ladder. The door opened, and there was the master of the dwelling standing with outstretched hand, bidding his compatriots welcome to his house. The action would have disarmed a Cossack of Russia. It quenched the anger of John Scarlett like magic.

"Aye, man, an' hoo's a' wi' ye?" he said, as it is the custom for all Scots to say when they forgather with one another in any land under the sun.

After turning out of one drawer and another various articles of his wife's attire, which were clearly not intended (as Sandy remarked) "for breeks to a grown man like John Scarlett," the master of the house at last managed to array his friend somewhat less unsuitably in a coat of dark-blue Rotterdam cloth, adorned with tails, which on his thinner figure clapped readily together in a military manner; a pair of breeches of tanned leather went very well with the boots and sword-belt of buff, which were all that remained to Scarlett of his fine French uniform. The master-at-arms surveyed himself with no small satisfaction.

"For a Fifer, ye are a man of some discernment," he said; "and your duds fit me no that ill. They maun hae been made for ye when ye were younger, and altogether a better-lookin' figure o' a man!"

"Aye; they were cutted oot for me when I was coortin' – no this ane," Sandy Lyall explained, indicating his present wife with a placid, contemptuous thumb, "but a braw, weel-tochered lass oot o' the pairish o' Sant Andros. But she wadna hae me because I cam' frae Pittenweem. She said I smelled o' fish-creels."

"And what, Master Lyall, might have brought you to Flanders?" asked Wat, who had been waiting as patiently as he might while his companion arrayed himself.

He thought that this otiose burgher of Pittenweem must be a strange subject for the religious enthusiasm which was mostly in these days the cause of a man's being exiled from his native country.

"Weel," returned Sandy, with immense and impressive gravity, checking off the details upon the palm of one hand with the index-finger of the other, "ye see the way o't was this: There was a lass, and there was a man, and there was me. And the man and me, we baith wanted the lass – ye comprehend? And the lass didna want but ane o' us. And that ane wasna me. So I gied the man a clour, and he fell to the grund and didna get up. And the lass she gaed and telled. So that was the way that I left my native land for conscience' sake."

Wat marvelled at the simple, quiet-looking man who had so strenuously arranged matters to his satisfaction before leaving his love and the land of his birth.

"Aye, but that wasna the warst o' it," Sandy Lyall went on, "for, a' owin' to that lang-tongued limmer, I had to leave ahint me as thrivin' a cooper's business as there was in a' the heartsome toon o' Pittenweem – aye, and as mony as half a score o' folk owin' me siller! But I owed ither folk a deal mair, and that was aye some consolation."

CHAPTER VI

THE PRINCE OF ORANGE

In a long, low, narrow room in the palace of the stadtholder in the city of Amersfort, sat Murdo, Lord of Barra and the Small Isles. The head of a great though isolated western clan, he had detached himself from the general sentiments of his people with regard to religion and loyalty. First his father and then he himself had taken the Covenanting side in the national struggle – his father through interest and conviction, the son from interest alone. Both, however, had carried with them the unquestioning loyalty of their clan, so that it became an important consideration to any claimant for the throne of Britain who desired quietness in the north to have on his side the McAlisters, Lords of Barra and the Small Isles.

The Prince of Orange had given to both father and son a welcome and a place of refuge when the storm of persecution shook even the wild Highlands and the government was granting to its more zealous adherents letters of fire and sword for the extirpation of suspected clans, and especially for the encouragement of the well-affected by the plunder of rebels and psalm-singers.

Now, in acknowledgment of this timely succor and safe harborage, Barra had, ever since his father's death, given his counsel to the prince on many matters concerning Scotland. Yet, though Murdo McAlister had been used, he had never been fully trusted by William of Orange, nor yet by those wise and farseeing men who stood closest about him. Something crafty in Barra's look, something sinister in his eye, kept those who knew him best from placing complete confidence in him. And there were those who made no difficulty about declaring that Murdo of Barra had a foot in either camp, and that, were it not for the importance of the information sent from Holland to the court of James the Second, my Lord of Barra could very well return home, and enjoy his long barren moorlands and wave-fretted heritages in unvexed peace.

It was yet early morning when Wat and John Scarlett stood before my Lord of Barra in the palace room which he occupied as provost-marshal of the city and camp. They saluted him civilly, while his cold, viperish eye took in the details of their attire with a certain chill and insolent regard, which made Wat quiver from head to foot with desire to kill him.

To judge by the provost-marshal's reception, he might never have seen either of them before. Yet Lochinvar was as certain as that he lived that it was his laugh which had jarred upon him in the passage behind Haxo in the inn of Brederode, and which had been the means of bringing the combat to a close. Yet he, too, must have ridden fast and far since the fight at the inn, if Wat's vivid impression had any basis in fact.

"Your business with me?" inquired Barra, haughtily, looking straight past them into the blank wall behind.

"You know my business," said Walter, abruptly. "I carried out your orders in collecting information with regard to the number of the troops, the position of the regiments, and the defences of the camp and city. This report I was ordered to deliver to an officer of the prince privately – in order, as I was informed, not to offend those dignitaries of the city and others who hated the war and wished ill-success to the prince's campaigns. I set out, therefore, last evening with three of your retainers, supplied for the purpose by you, to the inn of Brederode. There I was met, not by an accredited servant of the prince, but by an officer of the French king, who endeavored first by promises and then by force to obtain the papers from me; and now I have brought back the reports safely to Amersfort, to lay them before the prince in person, and, at the same time, to tax you with double-dealing and treachery."

Barra listened with an amused air.

"And pray, whom do you expect to delude with this cock-and-bull story?" he said. "Not, surely, the prince, in whose company I was till a late hour last night; and not surely myself, who never in my life either issued or heard of any such preposterous order."

"I demand to see the prince, to whom I shall speak my mind," reiterated Walter, still more curtly.

"You shall see the inside of a prison in a few moments," returned Barra, with vicious emphasis. But ere he could summon an officer the inner door opened, and there entered a dark, thin, sallow-faced man, with brilliant, hollow-set eyes, who walked with his head a little forward, as if he had gone all his life in haste.

It was the Prince of Orange himself, dressed in his general's uniform, but without decorations or orders of any kind.

Barra rose at his entrance and remained standing.

"Pray sit down," said the prince to him, "and proceed with your conversation with these gentlemen of your country."

"I was about," said Barra, deferentially, "to commit to prison this soldier of the Douglas Dragoon regiment for a most insolent slander concerning myself, and also for collecting information as to the condition of our forces with intent to communicate it to the enemy. There is, indeed, an officer of the King of France with the man at this very moment, but in disguise."

The prince turned his bright keen eyes upon Wat and Scarlett in turn.

"And you, sir! what have you to say?" he asked, quietly.

Whereupon, nothing daunted, Wat told his plain tale, and showed the order which he had received from Sergeant Davie Dunbar, signed with Barra's name.

"I never wrote the order, and never heard of it," said Barra, who stood, calmly contemptuous, at the prince's elbow.

"Call Sergeant David Dunbar!" ordered the prince.

It was a few minutes before that stanch soldier arrived. In the mean time, the prince turned his attention to Scarlett.

"You are an officer of the King of France?" he said, with an ominous gleam in his eye as he spoke of his arch-enemy.

"I had that honor," replied Scarlett, "till early this morning, when it was my fortune to help this ancient friend of mine out of a difficulty into which I had led him. Moreover, being a gentleman, I could not remain in such a service nor serve with subordinates who knew not the sacredness of a soldier's pledge. I am, therefore, once more a free man, and my sword is at the disposal of any honorable prince who will accept of it."

"You were a celebrated master-of-arms in Scotland, were you not?" asked the prince.

"If your highness is good enough to say so," said Scarlett, bowing. "And also in France, the first in estimation in the army of the Prince of Condé."

"And you understand the drilling and mustering of raw levies?" asked the Prince of Orange, with some eagerness in his tone.

"There are a dozen regiments in the French service at this moment who are exceedingly well aware of that, your highness," replied John Scarlett, with a somewhat peculiar smile.

"Come to me this day week at the camp," said the prince, abruptly, after remaining a moment in deep thought.

"Sergeant David Dunbar!" announced an officer of the prince's retinue.

And in a moment that sturdy Scot stood before the stadtholder exceedingly flustered by his sudden summons, and cudgelling his brains to think why he should be sent for so early in the day by his general.

"You took an order the night before last to this gentleman's quarters?" said the prince. "From whom did you receive that order, and what speed did you make with your mission?"

"I received the letter from one whom I knew as a servant of my Lord of Barra – one Haxo, a butcher in the camp. 'Make haste,' he bade me, 'this is from my lord to the Scot who dwells in the street of Zaandpoort, the dragoon called Walter Gordon of Lochinvar, serving in Douglas's regiment.' So I went there willingly enough, and eke with speed, the more by token that I knew Wat Gordon and his cousin well, as also Will Gordon's wife, who is a wise, sober-like lass of Galloway, and can cook most excellent suppers."

"That will serve, sergeant," said William of Orange. "There is some mistake or double-dealing here which I shall doubtless discover in good time. Come to me both together at the camp this day week at the hour of noon, and I will have further conference with you in my tent. You are at liberty to join your regiment, and take your friend with you."

Thereupon Walter went to the prince, and, bending on his knee, presented him with the despatches which, in the inn of Brederode, he had guarded with his life.

The prince took them without a word of thanks or commendation, and thrust them into the breast of his coat as carelessly as though they had been so much waste paper.

For the soldier-prince, who had never known fear in his life, took courage in others as a matter of course.

And so my Lord Barra was left alone in the office of the provost-marshal, looking blackly across his table after Wat and Scarlett as they followed the prince from the room.

CHAPTER VII

MISTRESS MAISIE LENNOX, DIPLOMATIST

When they reached the outer air, Wat drew a long breath. He was still alive and still a soldier of the States-General, and now at last he had a whole week's time to think uninterruptedly of Kate. But first of all he must see her. He was for starting off in the direction of Zaandpoort Street, but the thoughts of his companion were thirsty thoughts.

"I declare," he cried, "my throat is parched like an Edinburgh ash-bucket on these accursed roads. Let us go to a change-house and slake our thrapples with a draught of Hollands and water. 'Tis the poor best that the country affords."

But Wat had other things than Hollands in his mind – the distracting ripple of Kate's hair, and the way she had of holding the fingers of one hand on her side when she stood for a moment pensive.

He searched in his belt for a silver thaler, and gave it to Scarlett.

"Go drink, and meet me at the camp to-morrow," he said. Then he strode away towards the street of Zaandpoort, leaving his companion alternately looking at the broad unclipped silver piece in his hand, and staring after him in astonishment.

"The young fool is either mad or in love," confided Scarlett to the world at large; "but he has not forgotten how to draw a good blade – so he cannot be so very deeply in love as yet!"

Wat started out boldly and bravely enough, but so soon as he reached the lilac-bushes which were planted at the foot of the dam of Zaandpoort he began to feel his shyness returning trebly upon him. He had not been afraid during the night when he stood surrounded by assassins and enemies. Joyously and lightheartedly he had crossed swords with the greatest master-of-arms in Europe. But now, when he was at the foot of a little wooden stairway, the thought of a simple, slim-figured girl at the top of it caused the hot blood to tingle in his cheek, and little helpless pulses to throb and sting in his palms. Gladly would he have turned and fled. His hands had grown suddenly great and dirty. His military coat appeared so frayed and dragged with the night dews and the accidents of the way that he dared not venture in such a guise into the presence of the lady of his dreams.

But it chanced that Will Gordon, his cousin, had been shaving at a small mirror which he had set against a twisted chimney-stack on the roof, both because it was a fine morning and because in the lodging in the street of Zaandpoort the chambers were small.

"Welcome back, Wat!" he cried, craning his neck over the parapet, and wiping the soap from the razor upon the high stone coping. "Went your night-ride to rights?"

"It went most mightily to wrongs!" cried Wat, as cheerfully.

"Nevertheless, in spite of it you are here, safe and sound. Come up, man, therefore, and tell us the tale. My little lass will doubtless have something fragrant for breakfast in a moment."

Whereupon he cried lustily down to Maisie, his wife, who was at the pan in the kitchen: "Put on a full platterful more. Here is our adventurer returned with a torn coat, a piteous tale, and a right hungry stomach!"

There was clearly no escape now, so Wat, with his heart in his boots, strode as manfully as he could up the stair which he had been wont to climb but a day or two before with such complete and careless lack of thought.

When he opened the outer door, a cheerful smell of morning cookery took him gratefully by the nostrils, for the long ride and brisk adventure had quickened his appetite.

"Hither, cousin mine!" cried a light and pleasant voice from the kitchen.

"And welcome home again!" Maisie added, as he appeared in the doorway.

She had both her hands busy with eggs and flour about the cooking-pan.

"I cannot shake hands with you, Wat," she said, "but to spite William I will give you a nice kiss."

And she came straight to him where he stood balancing himself uncertainly just within the threshold. Wat hesitated for the smallest part of a second.

"Do it quickly, or the eggs will be spoiled," she said, standing on tiptoe with her floury hands behind her.

"A kiss is worse spoiled by haste than ever an egg can be," said Wat, as with the kindly pressure of her lips his words and his confidence began to come back to him.

At his first entering in he had seen Kate stand at the other side of the fire from Maisie, but now he looked in vain for her. Yet she had not left the room. Only at the first word of kissing she had entrenched herself behind a great oaken settle and on the farther side of a wide Dutch table, where, with her head bent upon an earthenware bowl, she began to prepare a salad with the most absolute attention and studious care.

Having kissed Maisie most dutifully, Wat went forward to offer his hand to Kate. She gave hers to him quickly, and yet, as it seemed to him, reluctantly also. Instinctively she kept a chair between them as she did so.

"See, it is all over with oil and chopped lettuce," she said, looking plaintively at her hand, as though Wat had been personally responsible for the defilement.

Maisie was at the farther end of the room, bending over her saucepans. Wat leaned quickly across the table to Kate.

"Are you glad I have come back?" he asked, in a low voice.

"You had a fine morning for your ride," she replied, looking down at the salad and mixing the ingredients with the most scrupulous exactitude.

Wat straightened himself instantaneously as if on parade, and stalked with much dignity to the end of the room at which Maisie was still busy.

And this caused him to miss a singular look which Kate cast after him, a look of mingled pity and entreaty, wholly wasted on the square shoulders and erect head, but from which, had Wat caught it, he might have learned that though it may sometimes be well to appear proud with a girl, nevertheless, if you love her, not too soon and not too often.

Presently Will Gordon came bustling down to breakfast, having cleaned his accoutrements and adorned himself with such sober trappings as were permitted by the Spartan taste of the Covenanting regiment. Will had still that noisily cheerful self-consciousness which always characterizes the very young husband doing the unaccustomed honors of his house.

"Sit down and be welcome, Wat, lad," he cried, "and tell us all the tale of your journeying."

And so at the table which Maisie had covered with plain coarse Dutch linen, very unlike the fine cloths which she had left behind her in Scotland, the four sat down. It was a heartsome meal, and after a little while Lochinvar began to tell his tale, giving himself little honor, making nothing of the danger, and dwelling much on the ridiculous aspect of Haxo the Bull, his ill-favored Calf, and his bald-headed Killer.

As the tale proceeded Will kept up a constant fire of interjections, such as "That was well thought on!" "Bravely! my lad!" and "Well done, Glenkens!" But presently Maisie left her seat, and came round to sit beside Wat as he began to tell of entering alone at midnight into the dark house of Brederode with the unknown danger before and the three traitors behind. All the time Kate sat still, saying nothing and eating nothing, her lips a little open and tremulous, and her dark eyes shining with a light in them like a sunbeam in the still water of a sea cave.

And when it came to the telling of the combat, and the little chance of life that he had, it so fared that Wat raised his eyes to Kate's, and lo! tears were running silently down her face and falling unregarded on her white gown.

In a moment more she had risen and left the table, slipping like a gleam of light into the next room.

Maisie looked up with much astonishment as she caught the waft of the girl's gown.

"Why, Kate!" she exclaimed, and without another word sped after her. When she reached the little room where Kate slept, she found the girl standing by the window, leaning her head against the thin curtain. She kept her back to her friend, and did not turn round at her entrance. Maisie carefully closed the door and went up quickly to Kate. Silently she put her arm about the slim and supple waist.

"I – I am not crying – I am not indeed!" said Kate, a little indignantly, putting her hand on her friend's wrist as if to push it away.

"No – no, of course you are not," said Maisie, making (to say the least of it) an affirmation the truth of which was not wholly obvious. For the girl's tears dropped steadily upon her white gown, a great one even falling warm upon Maisie's hand at her waist, while all her slender body was shaken with sobs.

"It was only – " Kate began, and then stopped.

Maisie sighed as she sat down on the white bed, which, as was its occupant's custom, had been made up with military precision quite an hour before. She drew Kate down beside her gently till the girl's head rested on her shoulders.

"There, there, my lamb," she whispered, soothingly, when at last Kate found what most she wanted – a soft and comfortably sympathetic surface to cry upon. Maisie's hand passed lightly over the shapely head with its straying and enticing thatch of dark love-locks, and her voice crooned and cooed over her friend like a dove over its mate in the nest. Then for a long time she continued to hush the girl in her arms, as if she had been but a little ailing child.

Once there came the sound of a foot heavily masculine in the passage, and a hand was laid on the latch. Kate made a motion to rise and dry her face, but Maisie's arms held her tight.

"Go away, William! Go away at once!" she cried, with instant change of tone, her voice ringing out in such imperious fashion that Will Gordon, her husband, fled back to the sitting-room, feeling that he had just saved himself on the brink of some absolutely fatal mistake.

Yet all the while Maisie offered her friend not a word of sympathy, only the comforting of silent understanding, the touch of loving lips and hands, and the pressure of loving arms. Kate (she said to herself) would tell her what she wished at her own time. Maisie had a woman's tact and did not press for an explanation of a girl's wayward moods, as even the wisest of men would have done on such an occasion.

"Oh, he might have been killed," at last Kate's words came in a rushing whisper, as she lifted her face a little higher on Maisie's shoulder. "And I had sent him away so cruelly. And when he came back I never told him that I was glad to see him, Maisie. I snatched away my hand." She added the last words as if that indefensible action had only crowned a long series of enormities.

"Well," answered her friend, smiling very lovingly down at her, "he is not gone yet. Come back and say it now. I dare say he will forgive you, if you look at him like that."

But Kate only sadly shook her head, a little reproachfully that such a revolutionary proposal should come from one of Maisie's pretended sympathy and understanding.

"How can I go back?" she said, hopelessly. "They *saw* me crying, and they would sit and look at me all the time – like – like – " (and Kate paused while she searched the universe for a comparison to express the most utter and abject stupidity) "well, just like men."

Yet she sighed and turned her face a little more inward towards Maisie's shoulder. "No, decidedly," she said, as if after all she had been considering the question; "I cannot go back."

Maisie loosened her arms from about Kate's neck. "Then you shall not, sweeting," she said, with determination, as if a coercive army had been at hand; "lie you still there and I will get them away. Trust me, they shall know no more than it is good for men to know."

And she nodded her head to express the limited capacity of mankind, and the absolute necessity that there was for the wiser portion of the race to maintain them in a condition of strictly defined and diplomatic ignorance.

Before she went out of the bedroom Maisie set by the girl's side a small bottle of the sweet-scented water of Cologne, one which Wat himself had brought back from his last campaign. "He carried that nearly a year in his haversack," Maisie said, irrelevantly, as she set the vial within reach of Kate's hand. "I will go send him to take a bath. He must have ridden both hard and fast to be back from Brederode by six o'clock in the morning."

"You will not tell them," whispered the girl, faintly, catching at Maisie's hand as she went out, "nor let him think that I am – foolish?"

"Trust to me," said Maisie Lennox, nodding her head and smiling serenely back as she went out.

In the sitting-chamber she found the two young men still at the table talking together. They stopped with badly assumed masculine ease as she entered. Since Will's rebuff at the chamber door they had sat conversing in perfunctory and uncomfortable sentences, their ears directed towards the door like those of a dog that hears an unkennd foot on the stair, their attention anywhere but upon the subject concerning which they were speaking.

Maisie began at once in the hushed and important tone of the messenger fresh from the seat of war. "Kate could not sleep last night for the noise of the wooden sabots upon the street outside. She has had a headache all this morning, and I ought not to have let her listen to Wat's tale of horrors – "

"I trust I did not – " Wat began, suddenly conscience-stricken.

"No, no," said Maisie, motioning him to sit down, "it was all my fault, not yours at all – I should have bethought me in time. She will be quite well after she has slept. Be sure you remember to walk quietly with your great boots," she added, looking viciously at her husband.

At this hint Wat rose to go. In doing so he accidentally pushed his stiff wooden chair back from the table with a loud creak, and then abjectly recoiled from Maisie's face of absolute horror.

He sat down again disconsolately. Will Gordon and he cast a pathetic look at each other. Their place was obviously not here. So one after the other they bent and pulled off their heavy foot-gear, while Maisie watched them with uplifted finger of the most solemnizing caution. Then very softly the two men stole down the stairs, carrying their boots in their hands.

Maisie listened till they were fairly out of the house. Then she went directly to Kate's door. She opened it and set her head within. There was an expression of almost heavenly peace and serenity upon her face. The consciousness of infinite well-doing dwelt upon it.

"It is all right!" she said, "they will never so much as guess why. They went out like lambs – carrying their boots under their arms!" And again Maisie nodded her head with smiling encouragement.

And yet diplomatists are usually selected from among men.

CHAPTER VIII

THE STREET OF THE BUTCHERY

It was still quite early one crisp morning when Kate McGhie set out to do her marketing. Ever since the first few days after her arrival in the city of Amersfort, she had been intrusted with this duty – both because she desired to do something to help her friend and gossip Maisie with her household cares, and also because, being a laird's daughter, she was more learned in the accomplishments of foreign tongues than the daughter of Anton Lennox of the Duchrae.

The sun shone on her face and touched lovingly the small straying curls of her hair, as Kate stood at the outer door of the lodgings in Zaandpoort Street. She was drawing on a pair of gloves which made a difficulty about the matter, and needed to be repeatedly coaxed with that adorable pout which Wat loved. She was clad from head to foot in doublet and pleated skirt of gray Scots cloth, woven both of them by that very worthy man and elder in the Kirk, William Edgar of Rhonehouse. She wore also a flat, broad bonnet; and the ribbon of the blue snood, which, in token of maidenhood, bound her hair, was tied in a dainty love-knot behind her ear.

The rebellious gloves were a pair of Spanish gauntlets of untanned leather, and she was calculating what she could buy for the silver florin, which comprised all the united resources of the Zaandpoort establishment for the day. She allowed the slightest sigh to escape her of regret for the easier finances of Balmaghie, where neither her father nor she herself ever knew aught of the providing till the dishes were on the table, so completely did the ancient house-keeper of Roger McGhie keep the matter in her own responsible but exceedingly jealous hands.

"This experience of marketing will teach you many things you do not know," said Maisie, the newly married wife, darkly. "It would indeed be a pretty pass if when you came to be married you did not know a leg of beef from a shoulder of mutton."

Yet, in spite of Maisie's words, there was no great chance, in the ordering of the domestic economy of Zaandpoort Street, of getting first-hand information upon the subject of such expensive and formidable dainties as these.

For the pay of a gentleman-private in the Covenanter's regiment did not allow of extravagances, even when it was supplemented by certain small sums brought safely over from Scotland by the hand and favor of more recent exiles.

But Kate McGhie had not come to live upon Will and Maisie as a dependant. She would be, she declared to her hostess, neither sornor nor idler; for she had brought with her certain moneys of her own, and her father in Scotland had promised to send her more at such times as he got the chance of a douce Scottish merchant coming to the Low Countries in search of Dutch tobacco and Flemish cloth.

It was, therefore, with the light, free step of one who is a partner in the concern that Kate took her way towards the market-place of Amersfort. She carried a small white wicker-basket over her right arm, and in her left hand she held the skirt of her kirtle as she went alertly stepping over the puddles and gutters in the streets, and even overleaping the backs of sundry slumbering dogs with a quick and dainty disdain which became her well. The soldier lads hurrying by with despatches turned their heads to watch her as she passed; and the brisk merchant 'prentices, going to their counting-houses at six in the morning (as was the custom of the time and place), risked their master's reprimand to stand awhile and gaze as she tripped out of sight, careless in her maiden freedom alike of the gold braid of the officer and the broadcloth of the merchant.

At last Kate arrived in the wide square, into which looked down the hundred windows of the historical townhall of Amersfort, one of the most famous in Netherlandish history. She at once penetrated fearlessly into that babel of discord, and, disregarding the proffered attentions of the first noisy stall-keepers, she swept past them and threaded her way steadily to the favored and regular

recipients of her custom, who by honest dealing and courtesy had already established their right to her confidence.

Pretty enough it was to see the practical intentness with which she examined the portions of meat and bundles of vegetables submitted to her judgment. How sagely and charmingly, and eke with what an air of wisdom, did she not listen to these voluble explanations, one word in ten of which she might possibly understand. Then, holding up three or four slender white fingers, she would indicate the number of infinitesimal copper coins which she was willing to pay for the article.

Whereat the vendor would laugh, and reject the offer with a sadly resigned air, as much as to say that doubtless such a noble young lady must needs have her jest with a poor man. And when, in her turn, Kate would smile sweetly and persistently, or even as a last resort pretend to go on to another stall, then presently and swiftly the bargain would be completed upon her own terms, and to the ample profit and satisfaction of the merchant.

Thus drawing all eyes upon her as she went by, trim and dainty from head to foot, graceful from the proud setting of her head on the swan-like neck to the turn of the slender ankle, this tall young Scots maid passed, light-foot, heart-whole, and fearless, through the discursive clamor of the market-place. Verily, a most pleasant sight for the eyes of men and women to behold.

And amongst others, my Lord of Barra watched her this day, not by any means for the first time. For though he had left his bed betimes and come down to the market-place of the city, ostensibly in order to observe the mood of the turbulent and often rebellious town – in reality he had left the palace solely for the purpose of watching for the slight form and swiftly gracious carriage which pertained to the latest arrival among the exiles from his own country. Nevertheless, he did not try to speak to her. Murdo of Barra had wisdom enough to wait till by chance or stratagem he could compass an effective entrance upon the stage of her life. On the very first day of her sojourn in Amersfort he had taken the trouble to find out all that was known about her among the Scottish refugees. And without any great difficulty he had discovered a man from Galloway who had informed him how that this maid was not only the sole heiress to the broad acres of Balmaghie, but also a true-blue daughter of the Covenants, and one who had quarrelled with her father and all her kin for the sake of the banner of the Bible and the Sword.

Barra shrugged his shoulders.

"For such a lip and such a waist the king himself might venture to subscribe as many covenants as there are, and yet cry out for more!"

So it came to pass that, as often as Kate McGhie visited the morning bustle of the thronging market-place of Amersfort, so often there could be seen on the skirts of the crowd a tall, dark man in a close-fitting suit of black velvet, with ribbon-bows of the new flat shape at the knees, and the orange-colored hose and cloak of the prince's household. He seemed mainly to be watching the delivering of the customs-dues by the incoming merchants, but also to be keeping a wary eye upon the chaffering crowd in the interests of law and order, as indeed became a provost-marshal.

But, in spite of all, his eye never for a moment lost sight of the slim, graceful figure, nor of the gray cap and eagle's feather which told of another country and a warmer blood than that which flowed so placidly in the veins of the honest burghers' wives who did their serenely contentious marketing at Kate McGhie's elbow.

It was nigh upon the stroke of seven when the girl emerged with heightened color and quickened breath at the far end of the market-place. Her basket had grown heavy upon her rounds, and the long, green purse was weighty now with copper coin, instead of holding a single knob of silver at one end.

Straight in front of Kate lay an alley which promised to conduct her by a nearer way to the shaded canal bank, from which diverged the street of Zaandpoort, where already Maisie would be waiting for her return with the daily stores.

Kate struck fearlessly into the opening. It was a narrow and steep lane which led abruptly upward from the market-place. The houses, with their beetle-browed swallow-nests' balconies, almost

met overhead, while the lower stories were taken up with crowded booths containing the humblest merchandise. Dirty children swarmed in the gutters. Fierce, battered, scowling faces of men looked out of sullen doorways, and scarred and disfigured women showed their heads, fiercely or inquiringly, at the rag-stuffed holes which served for windows.

At a curious elbow in this street of the Butchery (as was its well-befitting name) Kate paused, startled a little at her strange surroundings. She looked anxiously about her. The girl had never been in this part of the town before, and she began to wish that she had taken her usual circuitous route homeward by the main streets and the canal bank.

But even while she looked uncertainly about, several fellows of the baser sort disengaged themselves from various low doorways and strolled towards her. Instantly Kate gripped the handle of her basket a little tighter, and, keeping well in the middle of the street, endeavored to pass the men by with great unconcern.

The first pair, who were indeed none other than our friends of the inn of Brederode, the Calf and the Killer, divided to let her pass. And Kate, having swept between them with her head high, found herself almost in the arms of Haxo the Bull, who held his hands wide to intercept her, laughing the while, as though she had been a poor beast that wished to escape from his shambles.

"Gently, my pretty one," he said, cocking his scarred and brutal head to the side to look at her, "'tis not so often that we have such dainty, high-stepping maids come to visit us here in the Street of the Butchery; and when they do, it is the custom of the country that they pay toll ere they depart."

And he would have laid a heavy hand on her shoulder; but Kate started back so quickly and fiercely that Haxo thought that she was about to draw a weapon upon him. With a well-executed feint she pretended to pass him on the right hand, then, light as a swallow, she made a dart past on his left, and, lifting her kirtle wellnigh to her knee, she ran swiftly up the street. But from a dark alley in front two other men emerged and intercepted her, while from behind Haxo and his myrmidons closed in upon her, running with all their might.

Seeing that it was impossible for her to escape by flight, Kate set down her basket at her feet and drew forth the keen little hunting-knife which she always wore in her garter. Then she set her back to the nearest wall, and resolved that it should go ill with the first who dared to lay a hand upon her.

"Fairly and softly, beauty," cried Haxo, insinuatingly, as he came up panting, "we mean you no harm, lady. But you must know that it is the custom of the Street of the Butchery that every stranger must pay toll to us. And for you the toll is of the sweetest, and will cost you naught but what you have plenty store of. I' faith! when did the tasting of such lips as yours do harm to any man!"

And Haxo's smile as he spoke became an entire infernal epic.

He drew cautiously closer, and as he brought his hideous, greasy face, stamped with all pollution, nearer to hers, Kate drew back her hand ready to strike at him desperately with the knife. But as she did so, the snaky hand of the Killer grasped her wrist like a vise, while the Calf leaned over her shoulder and with his right hand took away the weapon. Kate was left completely at their mercy.

"Help! Help!" she shouted, desperately, and the cry of pity and appeal rang vainly up and down the street. A few of the battered drabs of women leaned listlessly out of the windows, scarcely amused by the horse-play of Haxo and his companions. They saw so many much more terrible things every night and day in the Street of the Butchery.

CHAPTER IX

MY LORD OF BARRA

"Help! Help! For God's sake, help!" again cried Kate. And the lamentable cry was at once a prayer to God and an appeal to man.

Very pitiful her voice sounded, and she thought, "Oh, if Wat Gordon were only here, I should not have been treated so!" Alas! it was the more unfortunate for both that Wat at that moment stood on guard at the city entrance of the camp of Amersfort.

But just as Haxo put his arm about her waist, a loud, clear voice higher up the street cried with authority, "Hold, rascals, what would you with the lady?"

"That is no business of yours!" instantly replied one of the men who had come up last.

Kate looked up hopefully. She saw at the corner of the street a tall, soldierly man clad in black velvet and wearing an orange cloak, evidently an officer of the prince's household. He had his sword bare in his hand, and seeing her manifest distress, he ran towards her eagerly, his shoulder-ribbons waving as he came.

The fellows about her shrank back and drew their short sailors' "whingers." But the gentleman instantly attacked them furiously with his long sword, for Haxo and his companions had fled at the first sound of Barra's voice, while the two who had arrived later were engaging Kate's deliverer. Their short swords, however, were no match for the officer's cavalry blade. The weapon of one presently clattered upon the pavement while his comrade ran off down an alley, holding his side as if he had been wounded.

Then, putting his left arm firmly about her, and holding his sword bare in the other, Kate's rescuer urged her to mount quickly up the street.

"They may return," he said; "they may bring others with them, my lady, in which case I might not be able to protect you, or even to serve you otherwise than by dying for you, which very gladly I would do."

Now Kate desired much to walk by herself, finding the arm about her waist discomposing, and having also the market-basket to carry; but it seemed at the time a thing impossible to say to a man who had just saved her life – or, at the least, had preserved her from the hands of many cruel ruffians.

In this manner they reached in safety the wider spaces of the upper streets, where Kate gladly saw the town's officers marching hither and thither with their halberds ported and their pistols in their belts.

Then she disengaged herself deftly from her protector's circling arm.

"I thank you, sir," she said, very gratefully, "for your so great and timely kindness to me. I shall never forget it; nor yet will my father, whose name is Roger McGhie of Balmaghie, in the country of Scotland, ever forget your gentle courtesy to his daughter in the land of her exile."

The stranger doffed his bonnet and bowed low.

"I also am of your nation, fair mistress," said he. "In my own country I am called Murdo, Lord of Barra and the Small Isles; but now it is mine honor alone that is great, for I also am an exile for truth's sake, and must serve a foreign master, as you see."

And he touched with a certain noble humility his orange cloak and the prince's badge and motto that were upon it.

Kate bowed in turn, and her eyes expressed a warmer interest than she had yet shown.

"My Lord of Barra," she said, "I have heard of you and of your distinguished services and position. I am the more grateful to one so noble for protecting a poor maid and an exile from insult."

"It is my privilege and my very great good fortune," said he, again lifting his hat with more than ordinary deference. "Let us walk together to your home; you lodge with your cousin of Earlstoun, do you not?"

"Yes; but how may my Lord Barra know of that?" said Kate, in some bewilderment.

Her companion smiled complacently.

"Though I be but an exile, yet, by the prince's special favor, I am set in charge of the good behavior of this turbulent city, wherein it is my duty to know everything. This morning it chanced that I was on a tour of inspection in the worst and most dangerous parts, when it was my hap to be able to render you a very slight service."

Barra called a porter and bade him carry Kate's basket and walk behind them; but this that proud lass would not allow, whereupon the provost-marshal dismissed the man with a movement of his hand. And so in earnest talk the pair approached the entering in of the street of Zaandpoort.

It so happened that Wat Gordon, released from his duty in the camp, had hastened homeward as fast as he could, hoping that he might be in time to help Kate with the preparation of the vegetables, and in especial with the salad; for it had become his utmost pleasure to do for her the most common and menial offices. As he arrived at the end of the street he saw Kate coming towards him, apparently lost in friendly intercourse with a tall officer of the prince's household. He stood transfixed.

Presently she paused at the door and, looking across, she saw him.

"Wat!" she cried, eagerly, "come hither!"

For she wished to tell him of her adventure.

But facing about and standing straight as an arrow, Walter Gordon (being an exceedingly foolish person) saluted the officer in the orange cloak and marched past as though he had not heard. Whereat Kate, mightily offended at his rudeness, asked my Lord of Barra to do her friend Mistress Maisie Gordon and herself the honor of entering their poor rooms.

"For it is not needful that those who are of the same country and cause should stand on punctilios."

So because of the pride of this stiff-necked Wat, my Lord of Barra found footing in the street of Zaandpoort; for pride oftentimes breeds more and worse things than many sins called deadlier.

* * * * *

Before Scarlett and Wat issued forth from the presence of the prince on the day appointed for the interview, Wat had received a commission in his own regiment, while Scarlett was nominated instructor to the newly formed companies of exiles, called first Buchan's and afterwards Egerton's Foot.

In addition to all this, Wat had not forgotten to represent to the prince the case of his cousin Will, and had reminded him of the great services he had rendered the cause in Scotland; to which William of Orange had listened with seeming pleasure, but with regard to Will Gordon's promotion in the corps of the Covenant he had made no promises.

It was, nevertheless, with a proud and happy heart that Wat returned to his cousin's lodgings in the street of Zaandpoort. He had seen the prince and found him well disposed. Even his enemy Barra had been able to do nothing against him, and if their feet were already climbing the lower rungs of the ladder of fortune, he felt that in some measure it was owing to his courage and address.

All that day Wat's heart kept time to a new and unwonted tune. The streets had never seemed so smiling, the faces of the children never so mirthful. The commonwealth of things was manifestly in excellent repair that afternoon in the city of Amersfort. Lochinvar hummed a jaunty marching-stave as he strode towards the low door in Zaandpoort Street, while his heart beat fast to think that in a moment more he would be looking into those wondrous eyes whose kindness or cruelty had now become to him as life or death.

As he went a little softly up the stairs, he heard above a noise of cheerful converse. An unknown man's voice spoke high and clear among the others. The lighter tones of women intermingled with it, pleasantly responsive. For a moment those within did not in the instance of their discourse hear Wat's summons. At last Maisie opened the door, astonished that any one should knock at inner chamber-port, and as Wat entered he saw, sitting in his own accustomed place, his hat on the table, his sword unslung for ease, his enemy the Lord of Barra. The provost-marshal was talking easily and familiarly to Kate, who sat on the low window-seat leaning a little forward, with interest written clearly on every line of her face. She was nursing her knee between her clasped palms with that quaint and subtle grace which had often gone to Wat's heart. Her dark eyes rested, not upon his incoming, of which she appeared to be for the moment unconscious, but upon the face of the speaker.

Wat and Barra submitted (it could not be called more) to Maisie's introduction – Wat with sullen blackness of countenance and the slightest inclination of his head, Barra with smiling patience, as though by the very irony of circumstances it had chanced to him to be introduced to his stable-boy.

Kate rose and took Wat's hand a moment in kindly fashion, though with eyes a little downcast, being not yet ready quite to forget his rudeness upon the street. But immediately she went back to her seat in order to listen to the conclusion of the story which Barra had been relating. It concerned the loyalty of the Highland clans to their chiefs, and as Barra told of their sacrifices, a genuine pleasure lightened in his dark face, his eyes glittered, and a new life breathed through his whole form. For pride in the loyalty of his clan was the selfish man's one enthusiasm.

Maisie sat down with her sewing close to where Wat stood moping and bending his brows, and, noting his brow of constraint and gloom, she set herself lovingly to cheer him.

"We have had good news to-day," she said, smiling pleasantly at him – "news that William does not know yet. See!" she added, handing him a parchment from the table with heightened color, for she had been married but six months, and her William was the pivot on which the universe revolved.

It was a commission as captain in the Covenant regiment in favor of William Gordon, called younger, of Earlstoun. Wat continued to look at it in amazement. It was what he had asked for from William of Orange that day without obtaining an answer.

"My Lord of Barra had it from the prince's own hand. He says that the stadtholder has long marked the address of my husband, and hath only delayed to reward it lest the short space he has been with the colors should arouse the jealousy of his comrades."

A spark of fury burned up suddenly in Wat's eyes.

"Is the paper genuine, think you?" he asked, loudly enough for all to hear.

Maisie looked up quickly, astonished, not so much at his words as by the fierce, abrupt manner of his speech.

"Genuine!" she said, in astonishment. "Why, my Lord Barra brought it himself. It is signed by his own hand and issued in the name of the prince. Why do you ask if it be genuine?"

"I ask," cried Lochinvar, in the same fiercely offensive tone, "because the only document which I have ever seen bearing that signature and issued in the name of the prince was a forgery, and as such was repudiated two days later by my Lord of Barra."

The words rang clearly and unmistakably through the room. Doubtless Barra heard them, and Kate also, for a deep flush of annoyance mounted slowly to her neck, touched with rose the ivory of her cheek, and faded out again, leaving her with more than her former paleness. But Barra never stopped a moment in the full, easy current of his narration. He continued to let fall his sentences with precisely the same cool, untroubled deliberation, fingering meanwhile the prince's signet-ring, which he habitually wore on his hand. Kate almost involuntarily moved a little nearer to him and fixed her eyes the more earnestly on his face, because she felt that Wat's words were a deliberate insult intended for her deliverer of the preceding day.

Wat on his part pushed his chair noisily back from the table, and rapped nervously and defiantly with his knuckles on the board.

"There is not a man in my wild western isles," Barra's voice was heard going on, evenly and calmly, "who would not die for his chief, giving his life as readily as a platter of drammoich – not a poor unlearned cotter who would not send his family to the death to save the honor of the clan from the least stain, or the life of the chief from any shadow of danger. The true clansman can do anything for his chief – "

"Except tell the truth," burst in Walter Gordon, fiercely.

Barra paused a moment and looked calmly at the interrupter. Then, turning a little more squarely to Kate and his hostess, he continued his speech without betraying the least annoyance.

"He will do anything for his chief which does not involve the loss of his honor and his standing in the clan."

"Does this your noble Highland honor include treachery, spying, and butchery?" cried Wat, now speaking directly to his enemy.

"It includes good manners in a lady's presence, sir," said Barra, calmly.

"Do these your clansmen of honor and courtesy wear butchers' knives in their belts, and go by the name of Haxo the Bull, the Calf, and the Killer?"

Barra spread his hands abroad with a French gesture of helplessness which was natural to him, and which expressed his inability to comprehend the vagaries and fancies of a person clearly out of his mind. Then, without betraying the least annoyance, he turned suavely to Kate, and began to tell her of the new ambassadors from Austria who, with a great retinue, had that day arrived at the court of the Prince of Orange.

Wat rose with his hand on his sword. "Cousin Maisie," he said, "I am not a man of politic tricks nor specious concealments. I give you fair warning that I know this man. I tell him to his face that I denounce him for a traitor, a conspirator, a murderer. I find Murdo of Barra a guest in this house, and I do what I can to protect those I love from so deadly an acquaintance – the very shadow of whose name is death."

"Protect! You forget, Cousin Walter," returned Maisie, indignantly, standing up very white and determined – "you forget that I have a husband who is entirely able to protect me. And you forget also that this is his house, not yours. Moreover, if you cannot suffer to meet my friends here as one guest meets another, it is entirely within your right to go where you will only meet with those of whom you are pleased to approve."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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