For the Soul of a Witch

By J. W. Brodie-Innes

INTRODUCTION

A few introductory words seem needed, they shall be as brief as possible. Though cast in a historic period, this tale is in no sense historical, no historic scene is introduced. I trust that the sixteenth century is portrayed with fair accuracy, but this was not my main purpose. The leading actors in the story are of course fictitious, but there is no reason why they should not have existed. There are blanks and lacunæ in family and local history about that period, and if Beatrix and Alasdair actually lived their lives as I have dreamed, there are certain subsequent events that would be more clearly accounted for than they are. The subsidiary characters mostly appear in family chronicles, and in Monastic and other records, so the tale moves against a background of actual fact.

The ruins of Dallas Castle are, in fact, somewhat farther to the east than, for the purposes of the story, I have placed them. Some of the lines of Cochrane's masterpiece may still be traced.

The stories of witchcraft are drawn from contemporary documents—Pitcairn's *Criminal Trials,* Mackenzie's *Criminal Law,* the records preserved in the Courts of Justiciary in Edinburgh, including many of the actual confessions of well-known witches, and other sources. Here, too, though the witch of the tale is not a recorded person, there is no point about her that has not contemporary authority. The theory I have advanced as to the real nature of witchcraft is my own, but I may say that it has the approval of some of our leading psychologists, and is at all events not inconsistent with the most modern ideas.

In regard to language, some readers may perhaps miss the familiar archaic jargon with which romances of historic periods are often plentifully besprinkled. But I would ask these to remember that in Morayshire, in the sixteenth century, Gaelic was still very generally spoken, though the nature and character of the people was far removed from that of the Western Highlanders, and among the better classes the tremendous ecclesiastical influence wielded by the powerful Bishop of Moray, by the Abbot of Kinloss, and the Prior of Pluscarden, would make Latin almost more familiar than the Scottish vernacular. Archaic English, with its quaint oaths, would be wholly out of place, and a man who said "Gramercy, good knave!" in the Laigh of Moray would be as unintelligible as though he spoke Hebrew. Equally out of place would it be to try and reproduce the language of Lowland Scottish writers of the time, as Dunbar, Douglas or Sir David Lindsay. Such language was not spoken in the Laigh, and even if it could be satisfactorily reproduced, would be unintelligible to most readers. Beatrix and her scholar father would have written and probably mostly spoke Latin; to the serving-men, and to the clansmen in the Glens, she would have spoken some form of Gaelic. On the whole, therefore, it seemed best to render their speech into a comparatively modern English, avoiding all needless archaicisms.

I wish also to record here a tribute to the memory of the late Bishop of Edinburgh, to whom I am indebted for a mass of valuable information regarding the marriage laws and customs of the early sixteenth century, especially the marriage *per procuratores,* of which every one has heard in such romances as that of Paolo and Francesca, but so few understand. Nothing could exceed the kindness with which the late Bishop put all the stores of his stupendous learning and his

magnificent library at my disposal. But for his generous help many passages in this story must have remained unwritten.

PROLOGUE

THE WIZARD LAIRD

Early in the sixteenth century a Scottish knight who in his youth had been a stout fighter, which was common enough in those days, and also a ripe scholar, which was more rare, was caught by the craze, that starting in Arabia had spread over Europe, of searching for the so-called "Stone of the Wise" which should make its possessor wealthy beyond dreams of avarice, and the Elixir which should prolong human life to the span of the patriarchs. Like every other seeker in the same fields he failed in his search, but incidentally he discovered many other things of curious interest, and his researches led him into strange bypaths of quaint learning.

His study presented a singular mixture. It was a vaulted apartment of moderate size; one or two valuable pieces of arras hung on the walls, which, however, were mostly bare stone; some open presses contained rare books and manuscripts, including some of the early printed works of Caxton, and the famous *Maying of Chaucer*, the first book printed in Scotland, some manuscripts of Paracelsus, with whom our scholar-knight maintained a correspondence, and others labelled *"Grimorium Verum," "De Præstigiis Demonum"* and such-like titles. Sconces wherein flambeaux might be stuck projected from the walls beside the arras, and various pieces of armour and gilt spurs hung from nails here and there. Over the door was a shield bearing gules a lion rampant or, within a bordure charged with eight roses, and various quarterings of the same coat on miniature shields marked the line of the spring of the vaulting. A table in the centre of the room was littered with weird implements showing the nature of the occupant's studies, chief among them being a large alembic, and several retorts. The fireplace was bricked up and fashioned into an alchemic furnace, from which a pipe was led to the table; a wide couch stood near the window, and some substantial chairs completed the furniture of the room. The knight sat by the table watching carefully some mixture boiling over a lamp. He was past middle age; a black velvet skull-cap rested on the crisp grey curls of his thick hair; bushy white eyebrows overhung kindly eyes that were full of thought, yet that could not repress the humorous twinkle that would come into them; the nose was straight and well formed, but somewhat short and broad; a grey moustache and short curly beard hid a mouth that would have indicated unusual sweetness of disposition though a somewhat hasty temper had it been visible. It was a massive head, the bead of a thinker, yet one or two deep scars showed he had taken his part in some tough fights in his time.

A girl stood by one of the presses arranging and replacing some of the books and manuscripts. She wore a long robe of vivid green clinging close to her tall, graceful figure; her proudly poised little head was crowned with an aureole of hair, whose darker shades were the colour of the squirrel's back, but shot through with golden gleams; her features were dainty, and her complexion like a wild rose; her finely curved lips, lightly parted, were red and full.

"There, father!" she said; "now I have found and arranged them all. You will find everything in order; and now I will leave you to your studies, and not disturb you again till you call. 'Tie good of you to trust me to put your precious books in order for you."

"Good child! good child!" said the old man. "Witchcraft, Beatrix—what is it? There's a secret there, 'tis some strange power. Would we could fathom it! They burn witches! Fools! No worse

use possible to put them to. Say they do hurt,—well! if so, shut them up. But for Heaven's sake have them under observation. In league with the Devil—they say. Well I but what's the Devil? Some great power again, if anything at all. A power we could use if we only knew how. 'Tis silly to be afraid of these powers. We shall never find out anything that way. Some spells I know that make things seem other than they are; but I think they only delude him who sees, so that he sees falsely—they don't change the nature of things." The knight seemed as though he were talking to himself: he suddenly broke off.

"But these matters concern you not, my Beatrix. Tell me what news of the outer world? 'Tis months since 1 heard a whisper beyond the walls of this old Tower."

The worst of news, I think, father. They say that our people have been defeated in a great battle down on the Border, at Flodden;—hundreds of our best and noblest have fallen and our King himself has been slain. Oh! it is terrible but I would not tell you before, lest it might spoil your work."

"Ever considerate, my child,—I thank you. But these temporary matters cannot affect the studies that go to the very nature of things."

"Oh, father, but our country is ruined! Can you think of that as a mere temporary matter, and treat it so lightly?"

"Ay, Trixy! so it is. Ere long, I think, an English king will rule in Scotland, or a Scottish king in England, I know not which, and 'twill make but little difference, and maybe in another hundred years a German king will rule over both countries, and the time will come when both Scotland and England will be as much matters of ancient history as Egypt or Babylon, and maybe an Eastern race will rule the world again, and the world will go on much the same. But the strife of contending forces, that is eternal. The life of man, that goes on into the infinities, and this present life of ours is but a day in our true life; we draw to sunset, we sleep, that is to say we die, and after a rest we wake again to a new day and new work. Silly to fret over the mischance of to-day,—to-morrow will cure it. But these thoughts are not for you, my Trixy. Thank God, when I am gone your husband will guard you, and your future is safe. Only I hope He will spare you to me while I am here. It may not be for long. Now leave me, dear. I have much to do, and this experiment is an important one."

Beatrix shivered slightly, and passed out of the room.

CHAPTER 1

THE TROUBLE AT BLERVIE TOWER

The declining sun shone over the Moray Firth on an autumn afternoon in the first half of the sixteenth century. Few fairer scenes could be found in the country than the view from the peel tower of Blervie. The Firth itself lay calm as a sheet of pale turquoise, and beyond, outlined in clear blue against the sky, already beginning to assume the rose hues of sunset, the mighty mass of Wyvis stood majestic, his crown slightly silvered with an early snowstorm, and beyond him on the right the picturesque line of the Ross-shire and Caithness hills. On the nearer side the indentations of the shore looked from the hill on which the Tower stood almost like a map;—the dark headland of the Broch jutting boldly out to sea, and to the left the line of a curving bay led the eye to the little fishing village of Findhorn, standing at the mouth of the large estuary of the river, where could be plainly made out in the clear light the fishing stations belonging to the rich Abbey of Kinloss.

Cornfields interspersed with thick beech woods covered the level ground that lay between the estuary and the foot of the hills, and over these rose the towers of the great Abbey itself, and nearer still, just where the hill[8] began to rise from the plain, the farm and orchards of Burgle, whose fruit trees were a fertile source of revenue to the Abbey, as well as a delightful pleasance for the Abbot and his friends in many an hour of tranquil meditation. On the left a few houses of the good town of Forres were visible beyond the Cluny hills that hid the main part of the little Burgh, and farther still, in a clearing in the dense woods, could just be seen the roofs of the Cummings' new house of Altyre.

At the base of the Tower clustered a small village of poor and squalid huts, mostly built of wood, whose inmates were fain to seek the shelter and protection of the lord of the Castle from the raids of MacIntoshes and other wild Highland clans from the Inverness neighbourhood, who regarded the fertile land of Moray as a common hunting-ground where every man might take his prey.

Not far beyond these huts was a dense dark coppice of alder trees and stunted firs, looking even from this height an evil and forbidding place. Few of the villagers would venture within its gloomy recesses for dread of the heathen temple that yet stood therein, and where, so they heard and believed, nameless rites of horror were still practised, and the spirits of the heathen who had worshipped there in times long gone might still be heard on the wild nights of winter wailing for their lost souls as they were compelled to walk in endless circles round and round those awesome stones until the great Day of Judgment.

Over such a scene the Lady Beatrix Dunbar was gazing on this autumn afternoon, yet with troubled and unseeing eyes. Her hood was thrown back, her wimple loosened, and her green kirtle rose and fell with her panting breath as she looked eagerly down at the road that curved like a white serpent up the steep ascent of the hill.

"Will he never come?" she cried impatiently, though there was none to hear. "They told me he was at Burgie, surely 'tis not so far—he might have been here by now. Oh! what shall I do? What can I do? Unless he comes soon there is no other that can help."

It was for no lover that she waited thus eagerly. Down the road, but out of sight as yet, the man she was expecting was stumping stoutly and cheerily along, beside a lanky youth whose dress indicated a serving-man rather than a peasant. One glance was sufficient to show that the man he was conducting was by no means of an ordinary type. His lameness did not hinder his getting over the ground at a pace that his companion obviously found somewhat trying. He carried a long stout stick, which he sometimes tucked under his arm like a crutch, and sometimes leaned upon as a walking-stick. As he comes nearer one sees that his left leg terminates in a stout piece of wood, for he had lost a foot in the French Wars. His dress was the usual jerkin of the period of a hodden grey, and the black hoodlike cap with lapels had something the appearance of a scapular, under which looked out a merry, kindly face, rosy as an old apple, with twinkling grey eyes and a slow, wise smile constantly curling round the corners of his mouth.

Such was Simon Tulloch, head gardener of the Abbey, a man noted for his skill in the management of fruit trees, and indeed for the introduction into the country of many species previously unknown. Men said he planted trees as though he were handling babies, and that the roots seemed to know his touch, and settled themselves down to draw nourishment from the kindly earth at once. Also he was noted as a skilled healer of wounds, which was a gift of great use in that rough time when brawls and broken heads were exceedingly common.

On their way, as they trudged along, he was trying to extract from his companion the reason of the sudden summons.

“Faith! I know no more than yourself, Master Tulloch,” said the youth. “My Lady Beatrix came to me in hot haste. ‘Fetch me Master Simon Tulloch at once,’ says she. ‘And indeed, my lady,’ says I, ‘he will be pruning the trees in Burgie Orchard,’ says I. ‘Ye daft Loon,’ says she, ‘’tis no time for pruning now—but never mind what he be doing, go at once and fetch him; tarry not one moment.’ So, as she was so urgent, I started running, and I ran down the road as far as the turn, and then, as ye well know, Master Simon, after that the road is out of sight of the Tower, and because a man may not run all day, I slackened my pace and walked soberly till I find your worship tending the trees in Burgie Orchard as I had said, whether pruning or no I know not, and I delivered my message, but what she should want with you I cannot tell, nor indeed what a maid should ever want with a man—”

“Hold your peace, boy! and prattle not of men and maids till five-and-twenty years are over your head—you are over young yet for such thoughts. But tell me, did the Lady Beatrix seem anxious, agitated, or what not?”

“Ay I that did she, Master Tulloch, that did she indeed; she was in a fine taking, I warrant you, crying and panting for breath, and her colour coming and going.”

“Well, then, ’tis something indeed serious, for her ladyship does not set her thoughts in her face thus for nothing. Tell me, boy! has that Mistress Cecily Ross been often to see her lately? Sore I misdoubt that long white slip of womanhood, ’tis an uncanny influence she has over the Lady Beatrix—such wild friendship betwixt woman and woman is against nature.”

“Sooth, I know not, Master Simon; I have not seen Mistress Ross hereabouts this month or more. I have heard my Lady Beatrix say she was a very Saint, living for nought but Our Blessed Lord, and ever giving her own frail body as a ransom for others, to ward off trouble from them. Faith! I never heard praise so extravagant.

“H’m! well, I misdoubt me, I like it not; I would for the lady’s sake that Mistress Ross would bide away. But where is my lord all this time?”

“That too I know not. Yet there is nought strange in that;—my lord, as you know, is often not seen for many days together; he sits, so they tell me, and reads curious books. He has small care for his lands or his people, he goes not hawking or hunting, yet they tell me he was a stout warrior in his day, and could handle a long-sword or drink a cup of sack with the best, but I doubt that day is past.”

“May be, may be; you prattle overmuch, boy! I wanted only to know if my Lord of Blervie was at home with his daughter, and if he were why she should send for me, for I guess he has far more learning in all things than Simon Tulloch.”

They had now reached the turn of the road leading to the Castle. The great gateway, closed with a ponderous iron grating, confronted them. The lowest floor, to which this gave access, was wholly unconnected with the house itself, being in fact a place of defence into which cattle were driven, and where the hinds of the village took refuge in the event of a raid. To the left of this gate a narrow stone stair with a high parapet ran up the side of the tower to within some ten feet of the door leading to the house itself, here it turned at a sharp angle to the door. Persons ascending this stair must do so in Indian file, there was no room for two abreast. It is easy to see the enormous advantage this arrangement gave for defence. From below, the parapet entirely hid the door, and from no possible place could the attackers get a straight rush at the defenders, while three or four stout men at the top of the steps could hurl the invaders off one by one at the angle, and might easily repel an army. Down this stair the Lady Beatrix sped with flying feet to meet Master Tulloch. In her haste and anxiety she looked singularly attractive; her bright auburn hair, shaken loose and somewhat disarranged by the light wind and by the speed of her going,

becomingly framed the pale, eager face from which her eyes gleamed with lambent green lights, and her red lips were parted lightly as her breath panted irregularly.

"I knew you would come," she exclaimed, "but I was sick with waiting. Oh, Master Tulloch, there is dire trouble here! There has been a desperate attempt to assassinate my father. But praise be to all the Saints he still lives. Oh, come quickly!"

"Tell me how," said Tulloch, as he followed up the steep and narrow stair. "There have been no catamarans seen about, nor even any strangers?"

"Nay! 'tis all a mystery, Master Tulloch. My father and I were alone in the house. He had sent all the serving-men out on some errand, save only the boy Hubert, and he was working in the garden. My father was in his library, and—for you know how he hates to be disturbed—I was in my bower busy over some embroidery. Suddenly I thought I heard a sound as of struggling feet, and then a moan; then all was still. Knowing that there was no one in the house, I rushed to my father's room and called him, but there was no answer. In spite of his often repeated prohibition I opened the door, and at first I could not see him; only the couch all tumbled, and a dark red stain slowly spreading and dripping on to the floor. Then I saw him lying all huddled up at the foot of the couch. I just moved him to lie more comfortably, and put a pillow under his head, but I dared do no more lest I should injure him. He breathed and groaned heavily, so I knew he lived. Oh, hasten, Master Tulloch!"

By this time they had passed through the strong iron-studded door and up the turret stair, past the first floor to a room above, and Master Tulloch, hurrying in, was in a moment bending over the wounded man, who lay unconscious, his heavy, laboured breathing being the only sign of life.

"H'm! scratches on face and neck," said the gardener-surgeon, as he gently and tenderly examined his patient. "Whoever has done this has fought with tooth and nail, I should say. But that doesn't account for the blood, there must be a deep wound somewhere. Ah! I see—his clothes are torn. Bear a hand, my lady, and help me to unlace the doublet—I think 'tis the right shoulder."

Tenderly as a woman did Master Tulloch loosen and turn back the collar of the doublet, slitting the seams over the shoulder, and Beatrix aided him, never flinching or faltering. A sudden sharp exclamation from her companion made her look up.

"This is no man's work, Lady Beatrix. See how this shoulder is mangled! Quick, bring me some pure water and lint and napkins and dressings. I must examine this wound."

It was a deep and ghastly wound, as though the whole shoulder had been torn and mangled, and long was it before the clotted blood was washed away and Tulloch could fully examine it. At last he said slowly and deliberately—

"No vital part has been injured; it is only shock and loss of blood that have caused this faintness. He will recover if only the wound he not poisoned, but of that I cannot be sure. Bring me some of this year's virgin honey, and, if you have gathered herbs, some aconite and moonshade and henbane. I have some of the solution of gold luckily with me. I will compound a dressing that I think will quickly heal this wound. But I misdoubt this sorely."

She ran to get the things he required, and Master Tulloch stood in grave meditation regarding his patient, who lay unconscious as a log.

"I would you could speak, Sir Wilfred Dunbar," said he. "There's more lies behind this than I like to think of. I hardly credited that such things were done. And who is there who can deal with them?—unless indeed—"

He broke off suddenly, for the Lady Beatrix returned with the medicaments he had requested.

"Tell me," he said, while his skilful hands were compounding the dressing, "you are confident that none could have had access to the house since you saw your father last—the door was fast always, and none could enter or leave?"

"As fast as bolt and bar could make it; 'twas never opened save just now, when I came myself to meet you, and it is now fast again. You can examine for yourself."

"You and I, my lady, must make a thorough search of the whole house, for by what you say the assassin must be yet hiding here, since he could not leave, and as soon as the serving-men return we must have two of them to carry Sir Wilfred to his bedroom, and get him undressed and laid to bed, where I trust within a few weeks he may be perfectly recovered."

The patient being now laid as comfortably as possible, the two undertook a minute search of the whole Tower; every little stone-floored and vaulted apartment, every nook and corner on the winding turret stair, even to the battlements, was peered into, probed, and examined, but no living thing could be discovered. Then the great door itself was looked to, but the three bolts of the huge lock were securely fast, the oaken bar was in its place, the key of the lock hung at Lady Beatrix's girdle.

"The Inneses are foes of your house," said Master Tulloch meditatively.

"Ay! and a cruel, revengeful crew they are," she replied, "but with our branch of Dunbars they have no quarrel. My father has been a man of peace for over thirty years now. Nay, Master Simon, 'twas not of Inneses you were thinking; tell me what was in your mind."

"By all appearance," he said, after a long pause, "your father must have been attacked by some great sleuth-bound; those wounds were the work of no human hand. If I know aught of surgery they were the marks of fangs and claws, but where such a brute could come from, or how it found entrance, or escaped, is, I own, beyond me at present. Come, Lady Beatrix, I hear the serving-men returning, let us summon a couple or so, and have him carried to his bedchamber."

Lady Beatrix pulled at a rope by the turret stair, and the clang of a bell on the roof of the Tower called the serving-men, who ran up the stair hurriedly, while Lady Beatrix unlocked and unbarred the strong oak door; and she and Simon, followed by three or four men, proceeded to the room where the master of the house lay helpless. But at the door they halted with an exclamation of surprise and dismay. The room was empty! The pillows and cushions on which they had laid the patient were there, the ewer with the reddened water and the stained cloths wherewith Simon had washed the wounds, the couch with its great dark patch, and the pool on the floor where the blood had dripped, and the thin stream yet crawling over the stone flags, the only thing that stirred in that room; for the little group halted on the threshold stood still as marble statues, struck with horror and amazement at the weird, mysterious ending of so tragic an adventure.

CHAPTER II

SIMON TULLOCH'S THEORIES

Simon was the first to recover himself sufficiently to speak. "I half expected something bf this kind, yet it is so terrible that in sooth I dared not expect it," he said.

"In God's name, Master Tulloch," cried Lady Beatrix, "speak plainly! I cannot now bear riddles. Let me hear and know the worst."

"I am convinced," he answered, "that this is much rather a case for the aid of Holy Church, and of a skilled exorcist, than of a humble leech. In brief, it is to my mind the work of an evil spirit.

Just consider—not a soul in the Tower save your father and yourself—not a soul in the room with him—the door secured fast—no possibility of entrance. Even though a man could climb those perpendicular walls, there is no window wide enough for even the slimmest boy to force himself through—your father is attacked, mangled, mauled, and bitten by what looks like the teeth of a huge dog, and the Tower is as empty as before. You and I search the whole Castle, while the door is still fast shut, and while we do so his body is removed from the room where it lies, and whereto no human thing could have possible access. Then consider the nature of your father's studies. You know well he has studied those books on witchcraft which the Holy Church most wisely forbids her faithful children even to look at. Does not the idea arise irresistibly that he may in his presumption have attempted to evoke some spirit, and having by permission of God, and the aid of the Devil, succeeded in so doing, have found that the spirit was too strong for him, and been unable to lay it again?"

"Master Tulloch, it looks too horribly probable. Oh, it but my dear Cecily was here, with her wondrous gifts, I believe she would tell us what had chanced to my father."

"I would not that Mistress Ross should make or mar herein," said he.

"Oh, you are prejudiced against my dear Cecily, but let me tell you, Master Simon, there is no truer, holier woman in this land of Moray, nor one so gifted,—her visions are like those of the saints. Often has Our Lady been with her, and has given her the power to avert ill, to turn evil into good, hatred to love, and to cure diseases as did the blessed saints. But it is not of her I would speak. Tell me, if you can, what we can do to find, or to rescue, or help my father?"

"It is of that I am thinking, Lady Beatrix; and first I would know, if it can be told, how came it that ye two were left alone in the Tower this afternoon. Surely that is not usual?"

Here one of the serving-men stepped forward.

"The master ordered us all to go out this afternoon in search of a wolf that had been seen."

"A wolf? I had not heard of a wolf being seen hereabouts for many a year."

"Ay I but there was," said the main "Only last evening was a great white wolf seen of Robin Thomson the smith,—'tis true Robin was full of liquor at the time, but this morning we found the track of its paws up by Callifer, and we told the master, and he was much perturbed, and bade us all go out and eek it through the woods. Though, of course, as ye know, by the haunted wood none dare to go, and not many will go near the Dune."

"I knew not of this," said Beatrix. "But this morning I bade my bower maiden go down for me to the Port of Findhorn, for I expected some laces with Master Gervis' boat, and the silly wench made request that she might go early, for she dreaded to be out in the twilight, and when I laughed at her, said she was feared for wolves."

"Now if Sir Wilfred had been found out in the woods, instead of his own chamber," quoth Simon, "we should say the wolf had attacked him; but here it is impossible."

"You spoke of the power of Holy Church," said Lady Beatrix. Then looking hastily round she waved a dismissal to the serving-men, and after they had retired she carefully locked and barred the great door.

"Knaves will gossip," she said. "It is better that what you have to say on this head should be for me alone. Think you is there any at the Abbey who has the power to cast out evil spirits?"

"There, I confess, I find it hard to answer. The Abbot is a holy man, no doubt, they say the best Abbot we have had for a hundred years, but for my thought he is too engrossed in business, in the material welfare of the Abbey, to think much of spiritual things. Of course there's the Sub-Dean, Master Robert Reid, but he is away—he is mostly away. Oh, a very popular man is our Sub-Dean, a great man at Courts. Then there is his friend Ferrers, Father Ferrerius they call him,

but he's always at the books, not very practical. And Father John Smith is ever in a dream—writing a history of the world from the Creation, he is, but the chapters I have seen are all on Kinloss Abbey—his world, you see. And Father Bairholm, he is painting the altar-piece. No, indeed, I know not, unless it were Father Ambrose."

"And who is Father Ambrose? 'Tis a new name to me."

"A new monk too. You must know, my lady, that in the late Abbot's time—Abbot William Culross that was—our affairs were in a very bad state; nay, but I should always speak well of him, for he was a great gardener, but he left no money in the kist and few monks in the cells; so when Abbot Chrystal came he set about repairing these things, and brought in a number of new monks, and among them was Father Ambrose. He has had a history, that man, my lady, but what I know not, only I will swear to it, whatever else he may be, he is a Cumming; no man ever had that long head in this world but a Cumming. I have been a gravedigger in my time, and I would swear to the skull of a Cumming if there were no more of him than that left. They tell me that Father Ambrose fought at Flodden, I know not; he is very silent, he is intent always on his religious duties, a most ascetic man, but if I read the eyes of a man aright he hath not always been so. It is on my mind that Father Ambrose has seen trouble, and has lived his life, as indeed the Cummings are wont to do. But, be that as it may, he is a man of power, and now, as I think, of true religious power and fervour."

"You interest me, Master Simon. Where may one see this monk? Methinks he might well be of great help to me now."

"It will not be very easy to see him just now. For I heard but this morning that Father Ambrose was ordered for duty at the Chanter's house of Windy-hills, and you know perhaps that there the rule is strict; the Chanter is a severe man, and there is but one monk of those on duty who is allowed to speak to visitors."

"Oh, well I know;—the Chanter is a cousin of my own, and terrified me when I was a child with his gloomy, joyless religion. Well may the people crave for the new learning of Master Martin Luther to free them from the shackles of a creed such as the Chanter professes!"

"Nay, Mistress Beatrix, I can listen to no words condoning these terrible heresies, that will eat the soul out of our land if they be not checked."

"I will not dispute with you, Master Simon; your convent training would soon overcome all my feeble arguments. Yet, pity me! proxy-wedded to a man I never saw, and only know to dread, before I knew what marriage meant; and now they tell me it is a deadly sin if I break that contract. Surely a Luther is needed to break such tyranny as that."

"I crave your pardon, Lady Beatrix. I knew not,—who is the man?"

"Oh, have you not heard? I thought every one knew. It is Norman Leslie."

"What! Leslie of the Glen—Lightsome Leslie they call him—the greatest brute and blackguard in all Scotland."

"So I am told;—a nunnery would be preferable. But, my friend, we are no nearer to finding anything about my father, or helping him."

"Pardon me, Lady Beatrix, we are much nearer; there are several clues, any one of which may help us. First, the servants were all sent out to hunt a wolf, and tracks of a wolf have been seen. There is, I think, small doubt that Sir Wilfred was attacked by a wolf, at first I thought a dog, and though I suggested evil spirits, I own I only half believed in the idea. I don't see how a spirit can produce a material result, and Sir Wilfred's wound was material enough—there were fangs and claws at work there. How a wolf could have got in, or how your father in his unconscious and helpless state could have got out, is I confess beyond me altogether. I can tend trees and dress

wounds, and do other small jobs, but I do own that at the solving of riddles I am but little use. Ah I look there."

The sun shining through the tiny slit of the window, cast a bright light on the floor, close against the wall; as this patch moved round it came on a corner that had hitherto lain in deep shadow, and revealed clearly two footprints as of huge paws marked in blood; evidently the beast, whatever it was, that had attacked Sir Wilfred, had there left the trace of its bloodstained pads.

"'Tis the mark of a wolf beyond doubt," said Tulloch, examining it carefully. "I have hunted them often in France, and here in Scotland too at times, and well I know their tracks. Now, if we could but find some other prints, we might know how the brute got in, or out."

But all search was vain; those two grim marks were alone, as though the animal had jumped against the bare stone wall.

"Pardon me now, my Lady Beatrix," said Master Tulloch but where will you lie to-night? You cannot sleep here. Will you take shelter in the Abbey Grange? The farmer's buxom wife would be right pleased to show you hospitality. She is a gossip of my own, and thus far I can vouch for her."

"Nay, that will I not, Master Tulloch. My place is here, lest any tidings should come of my father. Besides, what should harm me? For long enough I have managed all there is here. My father has been but a cipher so far as any help or protection to me goes; he has often sat for days over his books, and I have not seen him. When some Highlanders raided our lands last year, and tried to force an entrance to the Tower itself, 'twas I who armed our men and told them what to do. Ay, and fired a piece myself from that very window; oh! I can fight, mark you; I have been taught to handle weapons. My father only begged me not to disturb him, for he was in the midst of a calculation. So you see I am no more alone than I have ever been, and the serving-men are all at home now. I think no wolf can enter; the boy Hubert lies at my chamber door, and four of the serving-men are in the little apartments off the hall. Oh, I am well protected, and I assure you I feel no fear. You will come up in the morning, will you not, Master Tulloch?"

"I will indeed, my lady; and if in the meantime I can have speech of Father Ambrose I will do so. Trust me, I will not leave this mystery till I have probed it out."

"You are a true friend, Master Tulloch. Should there be any real danger the Earl of Moray will send men to guard the Tower, but believe me I apprehend none. Only, come of it what may, my poor father must be found and rescued—may God grant he be still alive!"

Simon Tulloch stumped rapidly off down the hill thinking hard. His reverence for the Lady Beatrix was unbounded; her beauty, her talents, and above all her magnificent courage and self-command, appealed to him to a remarkable degree. Never before had he seen her perturbed by aught that happened, and surely here was reason enough for perturbation, yet how soon she had recovered herself after all. With more than a man's calm judgment she had surveyed all the situation, with more than an average man's courage she elected to remain at the post of danger, notwithstanding the mysterious nature of the attack. More than ever he admired her. It was a strange friendship that had grown up between the proud, reticent Lady of Blervie Tower and the cheery, genial, one-legged gardener of the Abbey.

Was it devil's work? he asked himself. Naturally sceptical of all supernatural manifestation, he was nevertheless a very sincere Catholic, and he could not but remember how the very last Sunday Father Adam Elder, the confessor of the monks, had delivered a discourse on how our adversary the Devil goeth about as a roaring lion, telling how Satan doth sometimes take the form of a brute to work his evil will on mankind. Well, perchance Father Adam Elder might have

some form of exorcism that might fit the case. Anyhow, the circumstances could be represented to him; but on the whole, somehow, he had more faith in Father Ambrose, though so lately come as to be little more than a novice. At all events it were not amiss to try the spiritual arm, though at the same time it would be foolish to neglect all material means of searching for and routing out the great white wolf they spoke of, and ransacking every hole and corner, cave or den, on the hillside, to which Sir Wilfred could conceivably have been carried. A full-grown man, broad, and massive in build, even though helpless, was not to be wholly spirited away; it stood to reason he must be somewhere, or if not he, then his dead body, and being somewhere it could and should be found.

A quick patter of steps behind roused him from his reverie. A boy of some ten or twelve years ran up to him with a twisted piece of paper in his hand. Simon took and turned it over, strangely puzzled; the handwriting was curious, as though some one were trying to draw serpents and succeeded in forming letters. It was brief:—

"Sir Wilfred is alive, and for the present safe, but in great danger, which also threatens his daughter. Lord, save Thy servant from the power of the dog."

Simon scratched his head,—"safe, yet in danger," how might that be? and "the power of the dog"? Sir Wilfred's wounds were implied, would the same evil beast attack the Lady Beatrix? It was a horrid thought.

"Whence got you this, boy?" he said.

"From a tall man with a long white beard," replied the boy.

Simon scratched his head again—he failed to identify the description.

"Well, well, run away home, then," he said, and gave the boy a small coin out of his pouch, as he resumed his way back to the Abbey.

But though Simon made the most extraordinary efforts, inquiring everywhere and stumping gallantly over the whole countryside, two days passed and never a trace or clue to the mystery could be found. The Lady Beatrix sent parties of serving-men in every direction, sometimes heading them herself, to seek for any track of the white wolf that had been said to be prowling about, or for any story of Highland raiders or any hostile families that might have been seen in the neighbourhood, with equal unsuceess. She had also sent a special message to the Earl of Moray, and a troop of spearmen galloped through Rafford and passed to the north of Callifer, and down again by the Kirk of Alves, but with no result.

Then on the evening of the second day there was a clatter of horses' hoofs below the Tower, and Beatrix ran with fleet foot down the stairs to embrace a tall, slim girl who had just alighted from her palfry with the aid of a single serving-man. So slight she was she seemed like a willow wand, and her face was absolutely colourless, of an ivory white pallor, made more singular-looking by the contrast of heavy masses of straight jet black hair, and eyes with all the gloom of a moonless night in their weird depths, arched over by thick black eyebrows almost too regular in their arch. Her features were high and aristocratic, and her finely moulded lips though rather thin were startling in their redness as set in that strange white face.

"Darling Cecily," cried Beatrix, "how sweet of you to come! We are in terrible trouble."

"I know," replied the other; "I dreamed it all last night, and I lost no time in setting out this morning. I knew I must come to help you—I felt you wanted me."

"You dear, sweet, unselfish creature!" said Beatrix. "Where were you?"

"Oh, not far off. I went to nurse a sick friend at Rothes on the Spey. And listen while I tell you, Beatrix, there came to me a lovely vision concerning you. A great Angel with a rosy robe and

gold wings standing keeping guard over you, and the Angel told me that I might always shield you from any harm. Was it not beautiful?"

"Indeed, a rare vision! What splendid things you see, Cecily! Look now, there is Master Simon Tulloch; doth he bring news, I wonder? Good evening, Master Tulloch. Here is my dear friend, Mistress Cecily Ross."

Simon saluted gravely.

"I think ye stayed with Robert de Grant on Speyside. He was at the Abbey and was telling me that ye had left there four days ago."

"Nay indeed—'twas but this morning."

"Then was Master Robert a prophet, for 'twas yestreen I saw him. Nay, my lady, there is no news; we have scoured the whole hill, and save for some wolf tracks, two or three days old, have found nothing."

"And nothing of my father?"

"Not a trace, my lady; but we give not over searching, nor shall, till we find him and restore him to you."

"Thanks, true friend! Well, well, come within, Cecily, and rest you after your long ride. Strange that your host should mistake the day of your leaving!"

"Nay, I think 'twas Master Tulloch who mistook. But 'tis no matter."

And the two girls passed into the Tower.

CHAPTER III

A CONFERENCE AT THE CHANTER'S HOUSE

Father Gavin Dunbar, the Chanter of Moray, was a gloomy, ascetic man, very rigorous in his religious duties, and very stern in enforcing them on all under his jurisdiction; moreover, a man of great pride of family. When not on duty as Chanter or Precentor in Elgin Cathedral he occupied a small unfortified house, little more than a farm in fact, that nestled snugly under the lee of the hill, known locally as the Windyhill, which sheltered it from the bleak winds of the north-east. Here, with three or four monks, he cultivated a garden and home farm which supplied fruit and vegetables to the Abbey, and also ministered to the spiritual needs of the inhabitants of the parish of Alves.

Looking round from the top of his hill he could see the territories of a circle of his own kith and kin, interspersed with his spiritual brethren. From the village of Findhorn, over the low ground southwards, extended the Abbey lands up to the march of Dunbar of Blervie. Over the river Findhorn on the coast lay the lands of Walter Kinnaird of Culben, who had married his cousin Marjory Dunbar and was reckoned as a kinsman. Eastward of these came the Abbey lands of Burgie, then Dunbar of Asleisk, and eastwards toward the sea Dunbar of Hempriggs. Thus spiritually as well as temporally he felt himself the centre of a circle of vast importance. And as the family of Dun bar was the most important in the North, so the Abbey of Kinloss was in his opinion the greatest religious establishment in Scotland.

When, therefore, Simon Tulloch coming to tend the fruit trees in the garden of Windyhills had brought the news of the mysterious attack on Sir Wilfred Dunbar, and his subsequent unaccountable disappearance, the Chanter was greatly perturbed. It was a breach of the circle of honour surrounding himself—an infringement of the sanctity that ought to hedge the Dunbars as with an inviolable fence.

After seriously pondering the matter for a day and a night, he sent an urgent message to his cousin the Lady Beatrix, requesting her to visit his house of Windyhills, and to confer with him on the matter.

By this time the story of Sir Wilfred's disappearance was noised through the countryside, and every Dunbar within twenty miles was all agog. Some declared it must certainly be a device of their hereditary foes the Inneses, and would fain have raided Innes House and slaughtered all the inmates. Others, again, were no less certain that it was the deed of the MacIntoshes, whose raids and rapine made them the terror of the whole low country, and it was said that mothers in Dyke village frightened their bairns into good behaviour with threats of the bloody MacIntoshes. And with one thing and another there were many visits of sympathy and curiosity paid to the Tower of Blervie, and many dire threats of vengeance from irate kinsmen against the unknown perpetrators of the outrage, and many offers of hospitality and safeguarding to the Lady Beatrix, all of which she declined with gracious thanks but distinct firmness.

And so it came to pass that when, in obedience her cousin's summons, she rode down to the low country to visit the house of Windyhills with Cecily Ross by her side, they were attended by several kins-folk and a troop of serving-men. By her side rode Alexander Dunbar, son of Sir James of Westfield, the hereditary Sheriff, and himself to be known as "the Bold Sheriff" in later years, and young Dunbar of Asleisk, who had not long since come into his property, and was considering the feasibility of uniting the lands of Blervie and Asleisk by a marriage with Lady Beatrix. The tale of her precontract with Norman Leslie was a sad shock to him when he heard it, but for the present he was riding beside Cedily Ross, and whispering compliments to which she scarcely seemed to listen. Two other younger Dunbars rode behind.

So they ambled gently down the hill, a gallant company, past the fertile lands of Burgie and down on to the great Abbey through the yellowing beech woods. The pile of buildings looked very beautiful as it was approached from the south. The Abbot's house, newer than the rest of the buildings, was on their right, immediately in front the refectory, and the Chapter-house with the lower buildings where the lay brothers lived, and the guest-rooms on the right, and behind rose the stately and imposing mass of the great Abbey church, with its graceful arched windows whose lovely tracery and resplendent glass was the wonder and despair of the architects and craftsmen of the time; and above these, again, the smaller but no less beautiful windows of the clerestory, all leading up to and culminating in the great tower whose spire sprang aloft with a soaring lightness that seemed, as Father Adam Elder said in one of his Chapter discourses, like a finger pointing the way to heaven. This spire had only recently been completed, and the monks were somewhat inordinately proud of it.

As they rode down the last slope of the hill before reaching the Abbey, and entered on the road that passed between the west door of the church and the grange or farm buildings, Cecily drew closer to Beatrix, and said softly, so as only to reach her ear—

"Ah, my Beatrix, what a terrible oppression there is here! It is like a great prison rising all round tee—do you not feel it?"

"No; surely, Cecily dear, you must be mistaken. All is holy and good; our monks are full of good works."

"Oh, the monks, I dare say, but I see them not for the dark shadow that broods over every one—it is horrible. I see them all in fetters and chains, and that dreadful cloud ever enfolding them, and those cold, ghastly prison walls all round—never a ray of love can come into their lives. Let us hurry on, Beatrix; it oppresses me. When will the new revelation break over Scotland and the light dawn? Luther is preaching in Germany. I can see a great Scotsman, who

will bring the light here and cast down all these prison walls, and set the poor captives free to love and live their own sweet lives."

"Oh, Cecily, what dreadful things you are saying! Think only if our beautiful Abbey, whereof we are all so proud, should be destroyed!"

"What a splendid thing it would be, Beatrix!"

The two Dunbars had fallen behind by this time, and Beatrix and Cecily were riding alone together at the head of the cavalcade.

"You know how I love and trust your visions," said Beatrix, "but I do believe, Cecily, that your prejudices have coloured your dreams in this. I have read and I admire much in the New Learning, but if it is to destroy all our beautiful churches, and all the glory of our religion, I am sure it cannot be good."

"Listen, Beatrix—the Spirits have told me that you are a chosen instrument to break down the walls of this cruel iron bondage of superstition, and I have had—oh! such lovely visions of you, reaping your sure reward in joy and love, when you are free."

"And will my dear father be restored to me? I can fancy no joy or love so long as he is, I know not where, in trouble, in danger—perhaps even now dead. Oh, Cecily, cannot your Spirits tell me so much?"

"Last night there came a great Angel, with wings all green and gold, and he held in his hand a lily, and he said to me that a lover would come to you, and that he should not only bring joy to you, but he should restore your father to your arms."

"'Tis wondrous to have such visions. Oh, how I wish I could see as you do!"

"Not always, dear. I have terrible dreams sometimes, when I seem to do horrible wickedness, and to rejoice in cruelty and murder and hatred. I have thought sometimes I must have lived some life before, and been terribly wicked, and that I remember it in my dreams; but my dear old pastor, an exile from Geneva, told me that this was not to be believed on any account, and now in this life it has been given to me to know that I am without sin. So I can't tell, it is very strange. But this I know, these dreams have made me understand the cruelty of men, and their lust for blood, and the spirit of fighting. I feel I could do it all myself sometimes; I could kill my enemies with my own hands—ay, and mangle them for the sheer love of killing."

There was a strange gleam seeming to come up from the sombre darkness of her eyes, but a moment later her brows contracted, she shook her head with a slight shiver.

"My imagination is too vivid,—I frighten myself sometimes,—it is the price I have to pay for what you call my beautiful visions. You know, Beatrix, I couldn't hurt any living thing, but I can fancy the spirit that makes men love all games that mean killing, and if I but give rein to fancies, then I begin to feel as if I loved them too, and then I come to myself and I am frightened."

Beatrix did not reply; this side of Cecily was new and strange to her, and repelled her a little, though her intense loyalty to her friend would not acknowledge the feeling. So for awhile they rode in silence through the beech woods lying between the Abbey and the Chanter's house of Windyhills, following the course of the burn that flowed under the Abbot's house, and turned his mill. On their left hand they passed a tiny chapel with a tinier cell attached, where dwelt a hermit reputed holy, and the peasants of the district counted that they were free from ill chance for two weeks if they might have the privilege to serve at his daily mass. Right in front of them rose an octagonal tower.

"See you that, Cecily?" said Beatrix, glad to have a chance to turn the conversation. "'Tis the Chanter's watch-tower, he has certain prearranged signals with the Abbey; also because the house is unfortified, he has to keep a sharp eye against raiders."

A short way farther they halted before the lych gate leading to the Chanter's grounds. Here they dismounted; a lay brother came forward to take their horses to the stables, and a monk bowing silently and gravely led them across the grass. The house was to their left, what was known then in Scotland as "a single house," that is to say, it was only one room thick from back to front, a kitchen and offices and a large parlour or spence on the ground floor, the monk's dormitory above, where the whole little colony lay down to rest together, each in his monk's habit on a low truckle bed, covered by a single rug winter and summer. An inquisitive visitor had once asked the Chanter if it was true that the monks slept in their coffins. "Perfectly true," he replied, indicating his habit. "These are our coffins; we sleep in them, and we are buried in them."

Immediately in front, as they approached the house, was the little chapel where mass was said every morning for all the district around, to whom it was more convenient than the Abbey on the one hand or the Kirk of Alves on the other. Beyond the chapel was the garden, pride of the heart of Simon Tulloch, whence many dainties were supplied to the Abbot's table, and to the right was the look-out tower before mentioned.

At the Abbey itself, under the strict Cistercian rule, no woman could enter, though scandal had hinted at exceptions in the late Abbot's time—"the fat, amorous old gardener," as Cumming of Altyre called him, with some sardonic humour and but little reverence. But in any case the Chanter was under different rule, for indeed he was more a secular priest of the Cathedral staff than a regular of the Abbey, though the appointment was joint and the house was provided by the Abbey. There was therefore nothing to prevent the Chanter from summoning his cousin the Lady Beatrix Dunbar to confer concerning the disappearance of her lather, which had affected him also very powerfully. And so the little company followed the monk who guided them, with fullest confidence of welcome, over the shaven grass to the door of the house, where the Chanter himself stood to meet them, a tall spare man with a lean, ascetic face and a stern expression. He wore only a simple cassock with a black girdle round his waist and a heavy gold cross hanging on his breast. Some said that he hoped for a bishopric and wore the cross in anticipation.

"Welcome, fair cousin, welcome!" he said. "And this, if I mistake not, is Mistress Cecily Ross, to whom Heaven in its infinite mercy hath vouchsafed to see visions such as we poor sinners seldom get a glimpse of."

Whether he spoke seriously or in sarcasm was impossible to say—the Chanter's manner admitted of either interpretation. He went on to greet his cousins of Asleisk and of Westfield and the two other cousins, and with grave courtesy invited them within. As they approached the door a tall monk emerged with a stately stride, who as he passed hastily drew his cowl down and bowed his head so that no vestige of his face could be seen.

"Father! *Pax vobiscum!"* said a lay brother who was digging in front of the house. The monk made the sign of the cross hurriedly in benediction and passed on.

"Who is that, Cousin Gavin?" said Beatrix. "Me-thinks that is more the stride of a soldier than a monk."

"May be, may be," replied the Chanter. "He has been a soldier, I am told; in fact, they say he fought at the ill-starred field of Flodden, whereat our gracious King fell and many another gallant man, including the father of our good Sub-Dean, who on that account is mightily taken up with Father Ambrose."

"Oh, is that really Father Ambrose? I have heard much of him."

"Not much, my child, not much; 'tis impossible, for he is but a novice, though I grant most assiduous in all his duties, a man now full of religion whatever his former life may have been.

The lay brethren all desire his blessing as though he were a Saint. But come in, come in; we have serious matters to talk of, and I trust with the Divine blessing we may arrive at some idea of the truth regarding these mysterious happenings, and may find a means to rescue or relieve my good cousin of Blervie from whatever fate hath befallen him."

They followed the Chanter into a pleasant apartment to the left of the entrance door facing to the south, and having a window also to the west. The floor was of stone, and the windows owing to the thickness of the walls were deeply recessed. A massive oak table with carved edges and fantastic legs stood in the centre, at the upper end of which the Chanter seated himself, with Beatrix on his right hand and Cecily on his left, the Dunbar kinsmen sitting lower down.

"I have made every possible inquiry," said the Chanter, "and ye may know I hove some facility for inquiring through my good cousin and namesake, Gavin Dunbar, who is now by God's grace the Lord Bishop of Aberdeen, and I am satisfied myself that no foeman that we wot of could have been near the fortalice of Blervie when our cousin was abducted. How say you, young Alexander of Westfield? Has the Sheriff thought on this matter at all?"

"Indeed he has," replied the youth; "his men as well as my Lord of Moray's have scoured all the neighbourhood and made every inquiry, but without result. The little Earl was very angry at his ill success, but I think my father had small hope of finding anything."

"You are confident, cousin Beatrix," the Chanter said, turning to her, "that the Tower was safely locked and barred, and that none could have had access to your father's room?"

"Perfectly confident, cousin Gavin. The room is all stone, the drop from the window is over thirty feet, and a sheer wall none could climb, and the window itself has iron stanchions, the door was locked and barred, and Master Tulloch had dressed his wounds with me, and when we returned after searching the Tower he was gone; the great door was locked and barred all the time."

"That, then, brings me to my conclusion," said the Chanter: "this is no man's work, it is the direct operation of the Devil. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, my children, but against the Enemy of mankind himself, and by God's grace Holy Church hath weapons fit for the encounter."

"My friend Mistress Ross hath seen it in a vision," said Beatrix. "Tell cousin Gavin, Cecily, what you told me."

Cecily raised her strange white face, and the midnight gloom of her eyes rested intently on the Chanter's till his stern eyes seemed to quail before hers, and she spoke in a low deep voice scarcely like that of a woman, yet gathering intense eagerness as she went on, throwing back her white fur hood from the cloudy masses of raven hair.

"It is not fitting," she said, "that the visions that have been vouchsafed to me should be recounted to so eminent a Churchman. Poor and insignificant they must appear to you, to whom Heaven hath shown such abundant favour. Yet if you please to order me, I will tell as well as I may that which I saw. On the day on which my dear friend fell on trouble, as I was praying earnestly, it seemed to me that a Spirit stood by me and said, 'Come, my child, I have somewhat to show you,' and then I thought I saw the Tower of Blervie, and round and round it there ran a great white wolf, and I was sore frightened, for always the mere sight of those cruel beasts, or indeed of any beast of prey, makes me shudder and feel like to faint; all cruelty must be so opposed to the will of the good God. And then, I know not how, I seemed to be in Sir Wilfred's room, and I think he was reading some book of magic, and the white wolf seemed to come out from the stone wall and to fall upon him. Ah! I cannot bear even now to think of it. And I covered my face, and could not look, and when I looked again the wolf was gone, and Sir

Wilfred was gone, only there were great patches and stains of blood all about. And then the Spirit bade me go to Beatrix at once, and told me that it was given to me by the grace of Heaven to take upon myself the trouble and the punishment that should fall on another, and to turn the forces of evil to good. I was nursing a sick woman at the time away on the Spey, but I could not disobey the heavenly vision, and I came at once, and then too I saw a great Angel with a rosy robe and gold wings keeping guard over my Beatrix."

"You are indeed highly favoured, my daughter, to see such vision as we poor sinners can only dream of; truly the purity of a pure woman is a great thing in the eyes of Heaven, and we must bow in thankful wonder at the grace of God so signally displayed. Our Lord hath given His Church power over the wiles of the Devil; that power will we exercise, and I doubt not ere long, by totally routing all the forces of evil, we shall restore our good cousin of Blervie to his home and to the arms of his daughter. Now come, my children, having decided what this danger is and how to meet it, let me show you the garden, which indeed hath some little repute, and where Master Tulloch hath done unusual well this season."

CHAPTER IV

THE CONFESSION OF CECILY ROSS

The party strolled across the grass to the old walled garden, the Chanter and Lady Beatrix leading; Cecily followed with young Alexander Dunbar, and the rest came on in a group together. Two or three monks were busy digging and weeding; one was removing a sort of temporary arbour in the south-east corner.

"A garden shrine," said the Chanter in reply to an inquiring look from Beatrix. "On the day of Corpus Christi the Abbot and monks came over from the Abbey bringing the Blessed Host in solemn procession to bless the farms and the gardens, and their last station was here. The custom was much neglected in the days of the late Abbot, gardener though he was, but our present lord, to his honour, has revived it."

"'Tis a sweet and noble custom," said Beatrix.

A tall monk stood by a sundial as they passed. His cowl was drawn down over his face, yet there could be no doubt that this was the same Father Ambrose whom they had seen coming from the house as they entered. Beatrix felt that his eyes were fixed on her as she passed, and a strange thrill ran through her like an electric shock. It seemed as if those eyes burned through the folds of the black cowl. "No need to confess to that man," she thought; "he would read one's inmost thoughts before one had time to utter them, yet I think his eyes would be like the eyes of God, all-pardoning because all-wise." Clearly Father Ambrose was a man of great strength as well as great holiness, and Beatrix, though she had never beheld the least glimpse of his face, nor heard his voice, could fully understand Simon Tulloch's enthusiasm for the novice.

Some distance behind, Cecily and Alexander Dunbar also passed the sundial, and were subjected to the same intensity of gaze. An impulse, she knew not what, caused Cecily to walk a little aside from her companion, and close by the monk as he stood by the sundial; as she passed she was startled to hear almost under his breath, in a deep musical voice with a note of sadness below it, the words, "Elspet Simpson, beware!"

Hurriedly, with catches of the breath, she spoke hardly above a whisper.

"Father, you are the appointed one,—I know it, I feel it,—you must hear my confession."

“Nay, that I may not, my child,” said the same low sad voice; “but wait for me in the chapel. I may be able to help you.”

“You have fascinated our friend the monk,” said her companion. “I never saw a monk speak to a woman before; the Chanter, of course, is a secular of the Cathedral. I don’t count him.”

“No rules avail against the power to help a soul. That has been shown to me. But perhaps you will not believe such things. I know that many do not, and hence I am loth to speak much of the wondrous love and beauty that has been shown to me.

“Ay! I have heard that you have seen strange visions. So much my cousin Beatrix hath told me. But indeed, Mistress Cecily, I am a plain man, and have but scant time for visions and the like—the real things of life take all my care.”

“Ay! so I wot; but if ye but knew, the things of vision are far more real than those that ye call so. May I crave a favour of you?” she said, with a sudden change of tone.

“Surely—anything that is in my power.”

“I wish to pray alone in that little chapel for awhile. Be a good and true friend, and take me there and leave me; let Beatrix know where I am, but none of the others. I will rejoin you before you ride homewards.”

“That will I certainly. I am rejoiced to be able to serve ye so easily, Mistress Cecily.”

While these two took their way to the north-west corner of the garden, where a small postern gate gave access to the little chapel, Father Ambrose approached the Chanter and said a few words in his ear, too low for any of the others to catch. The Chanter looked surprised and was about to speak, when the monk made a rapid sign with his hand and continued earnestly—the Chanter interposed, staying his speech.

“Well, it is granted, but godly counsel only, brother; there can be no question of absolution.”

“None is needed, Father, or sought for.”

So saying, Father Ambrose took himself with his long stately stride down the walk among the trees to the west of the garden, known as the Monk’s Walk, and bowing his lofty head disappeared under the low portal, keeping always his cowl drawn and his hands close wrapped in the long sleeves of his habit.

Inside the tiny chapel the light glowed through the richly tinted glass. The ruby lamp denoting the perpetual presence of the Holy Sacrament gleamed on the altar and its furnishings, and on the jewelled front of the tabernacle. In one of the stalls sat Father Ambrose in his white habit with black scapular, and black cowl still drawn over his face, only slightly withdrawn on one side that he might see and hear her who knelt beside him,—her weird white face upturned, and the thick black hair falling now from beneath the white fur of her hood, and never a gleam of light in the dusky eyes that looked like two openings into the unfathomable night.

“Father,” she said at last, almost too low for him to bear, “let me ask you one thing. Why did you speak the name of Elspet Simpson?”

“I know not, my daughter; but as you passed me in the garden it seemed I could see behind you, and almost 0vershadowing you, the form of a very evil woman, a woman as I think sold body and soul to the Devil, whom I saw down on the English marches before the battle of Flodden; I partly think she was of the race of those wandering Egyptians against whom a recent law has been passed in England, and who I deem have brought their evil sorcery with them. I feared her influence might be upon you, and that she might seek to practise her wicked arts on you, therefore I would bid her begone and trouble you not.”

“Listen then, Father; for herein is great trouble to me, and as I think you, and perhaps you alone, can help me, for indeed this name of Elspet Simpson has greatly troubled me. You know

that it has been vouchsafed to me to see wonderful visions and to hear marvellous things from the blessed Angels, who from time to time come to me and tell me of the mysteries of God's kingdom, and moreover grant me the inestimable privilege to help and protect His sorrowing children, and to take on myself the sorrows and blows which would be too heavy for them to bear."

"I have so heard, my child, yet I bid you beware; for herein do I perceive there may be a great danger to your soul of spiritual pride, and of too readily believing what may be but the effort of a lying spirit to deceive, permitted to do so in order to test your humility and faith."

"Oh, Father, take not away, I pray you, my belief in my Spirit guides. None can say how their sweet presence and support has sustained me when troubles and temptation seemed about to overwhelm me; but I will continue, and you shall hear. All my life, when I am myself, my whole desire is to Our Blessed Lord; and I believe that He in His mercy has accepted the gift of my heart, I feel wholly consecrated to His service. Yet at times, almost at regular intervals, there come over me evil dreams. I seem as though I had no longer power over my own body, or over my own thoughts, as though in spite of myself, and not wishing to do so, I am driven to the imagination of terrible things; the pure temple of my mind seems assailed by horrid thoughts, and though I long to drive them forth, yet, if you can understand, I long not to; it seems as if life would be all empty and colourless if I were to drive away and reject these images, yet I hate them all the time, and I hate myself for even seeming to encourage them,—forms of lust and cruelty, and of the service of the Devil instead of that of Our Lord,—and at such times I feel the only safe refuge is to go into absolute retirement till the evil thing has passed, lest I do a mischief to some dear friend, or lest some other pure and holy soul should catch my evil thought."

"Tell me, my daughter," said the monk, "have you ever at all been tempted to put these thoughts into action, to do any of the things you dream of?"

"No, Father; God in His mercy has spared me that. It is enough to have the thoughts, but even at their worst there is always shuddering horror of physical actions, corresponding to them. But always, at these times, does the name of Elspet Simpson come to me—a sort of conviction, I know not how, that I am dreaming or thinking what Elspet Simpson would have me, yet have I never heard her name in the flesh, never did I know such a woman existed till you said so just now. Oh, Father, can you help me? I feel there is no one else who can, and if you should fail me my last hope will be gone; never to any other human soul have I dared to tell what I have now told to you. And they think me so holy! Oh, Father, help me!"

"It is clear to me, my daughter," said Father Ambrose, "you are extremely sensitive, and your religious enthusiasm and your remarkable gift of vision have strained your nerves almost beyond their power. Reaction must come—it is against all human strength to keep the bow thus eternally strung to a pitch so far above ordinary human powers—and the reaction brings the tendency to thoughts as far below the common level of mankind as your religious fervour is above it. At such times you are open to any suggestion or temptation of evil from whatever source. This Elspet Simpson, if I mistake not, is an evil witch such as our Holy Father Innocent VIII. has recently directed a Bull against, and she, I think, has obsessed you, or at least has endeavoured to do so. I thank God she has not so far succeeded. Now my counsel is that you endeavour to moderate the fervour of your devotions; restrain, so far as you can, these visions, beautiful as they are; occupy yourself in some material work, grow and tend flowers, make simples, work embroidery, anything you will; and when you feel the first assaults of the thoughts whereof you speak, seek some holy priest, the Father Abbot or the Lord Bishop, or whom you will, and beseech them to exorcise this evil thing. So do I think you will be freed altogether from this tyranny. It rejoiceth

me, my child, that you stand in no need of absolution, for indeed I am not permitted to give you more than godly counsel and advice."

"Father, you have saved me!" cried Cecily, wildly clasping and kissing his hand, which he strove gently but firmly to withdraw. "If only I can follow your counsels I shall be free indeed. Thank you, thank you, a thousand times—my poor tongue cannot express my thanks."

Before she had finished the place was empty, the monk had passed out of a side door by the altar, and Cecily was left alone kneeling in prayer a few moments before she passed out again into the afternoon sunshine to rejoin the others, calmer in mind and heart than she had been for some time. Thanks to the tact of young Alexander of Westfield, Cecily's absence had not been noticed. The Chanter accompanied them to the lych gate, and just before saying farewell he reiterated his opinion.

"I have come to the deliberate conclusion that no human agency has carried off my cousin of Blervie, neither raids of the wild Highlandmen nor any incursion of his family foes, nor yet human agents of evil. I know well that there be witches against whom our Holy Father Innocent hath so recently warned the faithful, but, so far as I have studied, and I have carefully considered all that is known on this matter, I deem not that any witch hath the power to abduct or carry away a christened man—though the first attack might have been caused by a witch. Therefore do I clearly think it is the direct work of the Arch Enemy, even the Devil himself, who as we know goeth about seeking whom he may devour; I hold that my cousin, by his study of unlawful books, against which I have so often warned him, hath put himself within the power of Satan, which Satan hath not been slow to avail himself of. Yet are the powers of Holy Church stronger by far than any malice of the Devil; and these powers I will exercise, by Divine permission, in a solemn exorcism, the which I have no doubt, in spite of all the forces of hell, will be sufficiently potent to restore my kinsman to his borne, and set him free from the captivity wherewith Satan hath bound him."

The Chanter was falling into the verbiage of one of his own sermons, and his guests speedily took their leave.

As they rode homewards Beatrix and Cecily again took the lead. They seemed to have much to say to each other, but as a fact they spoke but little for a long time. The thoughts of each revolved persistently around the personality of Father Ambrose, yet in very different manner. Cecily's reviewed over and over again, mentally re-enacting every point of it, the strange confessional scene in the little chapel. The wisdom of the man, his calm strength, and his evident earnestness impressed her greatly. In a world of shifting instability here was a firm rock on which she could rely in time of trouble. She had little faith in monks or priests generally, trusting far more to the revelation of her own visions, and being moreover not a little inclined, as we have seen, to the greater liberty of the New learning, as preached by Master Martin Luther, and impatient of the rules and discipline of the Church. For Beatrix, on the other hand, the prominent thought was the personality of the man, the soldierly bearing which his monkish robe could not hide, the intensity of his gaze fixed upon her, the strange electric thrill that passed through her as she felt those unseen eyes burning on her face, the stories she had heard of his courage, his learning, his sanctity, his vivid and romantic history. She shook her head impatiently—these thoughts were idle and useless.

"Cecily," she said, "were you ever in love?"

"Never with any human being, Beatrix. You know I have been consecrated from my childhood. Our gracious Lord has marked me—I am the bride of Holy Church. Oh! I can well

understand the feelings of those who are still of the earth and rejoice in their happy loves, but to me it would seem a profanity, an outrage."

"Poor Cecily! I think you miss the crowning glory of womanhood. Surely there is no power like the power of love; with that we women sway men till they, with all their strength, all their wisdom and courage, just follow at our heels tame as a pet dog, and do exactly what we wish; we are the rudder that guides and controls the rich argosy or the mighty warship. Yet our highest glory lies in our supreme surrender; with all the power to wield man's force as we will, we yet yield ourselves to them body and soul, and are proud to do so."

"You talk strangely, Beatrix. Tell me—who is it you have found? Never have we had a secret from one another. If you have indeed met the man to whom your heart is in all loyalty given, none will rejoice more than I, your poor friend, who lives apart and knows not such matters save by repute."

"Nay, Cecily, believe me I spoke but at random, for the sake of talking it may be. As yet I have never seen the face of the man who could stir my heart. But, as you know, I am precontracted to Norman Leslie of the Glen, and well I know that he could never stir aught but disgust and hatred within me."

"Pray Heaven, then, Beatrix, that never may your heart be touched, and indeed I think for all your wild words, that it never will. For I see above and around you that great guardian Angel whose sword still threatens all who would do you any ill."

They were taking the lower or carse road home, instead of passing close to the Abbey, as Beatrix wished to show her friend something of the low grounds near the estuary. From where they rode they could plainly see the ingenious yards by which the monks took salmon. Stout fences were erected in the sea, covered by the water at high tide. As the tide receded many fish that had swum over the fences found their retreat cut off, and were taken by the brethren in the shallow water.

Out to sea the sun glinted golden on the great masses of sand that had grown up by degrees from the disintegration of the coast and the inroads of the sea, and which in later years were to be laid hold of by the mighty tearing force of the westerly winds and carried over the land, to swamp many fertile acres and utterly to overwhelm the fair lands of Culben, then lying basking in the afternoon sun, the rich golden harvest justifying the title of "the granary of Moray." To their right as they turned inland the pleasant house and good lands of Tannachy made a bright foreground, beyond which the spires of Forres rose picturesquely against dark woods of Altyre backed by the blue hills over Inverness. From the left like the sudden chime of a song floated on the golden haze the sound of the three great bells of the Abbey, St. Anne, St. Mary, and St. Jerome, newly placed there by Abbot Chrystal, and now ringing the Angelus for Compline.

Up from the marshy levels that bordered the estuary rose a solitary white heron, and gracefully circled in the amber sunlight, her long legs stretched out behind, the wide white wings scarce moving as she swept in a great circle past the troop, returning again in a long curve to sail over their heads. The string of a cross-bow twanged, the bolt sped and smote the bird in the midst of her joyous sweep in the sunshine, and a mangled mass of tumbled feathers and a body drenched in blood, struggling its blithe little life away, fell with a heavy thud on the ground just by Beatrix's horse's feet. She shuddered and turned quickly away, but in Cecily's eyes there came a sudden cruel gleam as of exultation, they narrowed almost to slits in her deadly white face, till they looked more like the eyes of an animal than a human being, and her lips involuntarily framed the words, "Elspet Simpson," but muttered under her breath. The next instant she looked at Beatrix and caught her breath with a gasp, and her face resumed its normal appearance.

“Thank God! ’tis gone,” she murmured low to herself; “almost had the evil dream come over me then, almost I rejoiced in the blood and the pain of that poor creature. Father Ambrose will save nie yet.” Then turning to Beatrix with the tenderest compassion in her tones she said—

“The poor sweet bird! Which of us all has had such a pure and beautiful life? and we must slay it, who never did us harm. Ah! why must all creation for ever prey on each other?”

“I trow ’tis nature,” said Beatrix. “For myself, I love hawking, yet can I not bear to see the gentle things die. I suppose the animal in me loves the sport, but the angel in me, if one there be, regrets it. Far rather could I kill a man in fair fight than an animal—often when fencing in sport I feel the wild nature within me. Methinks I could be the mate of some primitive man, and fight by his side and live free on the hills, away from all our petty conventions.”

“How strangely you speak, Beatrix! The thought of that monk, Father Ambrose, banishes wild thoughts from me.”

Beatrix too thought of Father Ambrose; but her wild thoughts were not banished.

So they rode back in the mellow evening to Blervie Tower.

CHAPTER V

THE LAST OF THE DRUIDS

In spite of the most strenuous efforts of all the Dunbars and their kindred through the countryside, days passed fruitlessly. Nothing was heard of Sir Wilfred. Life at Blervie Tower went on much as usual, though Beatrix was consumed with anxiety for her father’s fate, yet for long she had been so much practically the sole responsible head of the household, and seeing her father sometimes only at intervals of four or five days, and then only to hear a disquisition on some of his researches or readings, that his disappearance scarcely made any difference to the management of the property or the control of the establishment. She resolutely declined all offers of hospitality, and all proffered visits of old or young matrons; she would bide in the Tower, and she would have no company but that of Cecily Ross. On these points she was fixed as fate.

Of Father Ambrose nothing whatever was heard, much to the disappointment of both the girls; for Beatrix, inspired by Master Simon Tulloch, was fully persuaded that from him if from any one might there be hope of rescue for her father, or at all events some solution of the mystery of his fate. And to Cecily the monk offered a means of escape from the evil dreams that periodically troubled her, and were beginning to prey upon her mind and nerves. The Chanter, so they heard, was preparing for the solemn exorcism on which he placed much faith. And rumour had it that he was endeavouring to persuade the Abbot of Kinloss, or the Lord Bishop of the diocese, to conduct the ceremony in person.

So again one evening Master Simon Tulloch came up the long slope of the hill leading to Blervie Tower. Full of importance was the genial one-legged gardener, for he had had an interview with his hero, Father Ambrose, and if not precisely messages for the ladies of the Tower, yet counsel given that he had requested should be repeated to them. As he turned up the last steep slope towards the Tower he saw a strange figure coming down as though to meet him. Simon thought he knew by sight every person of any note in the whole district, yet here he was fairly puzzled. He had never seen this man before, yet he was remarkable enough in appearance to attract attention anywhere. He was of unusual height, spare and erect as a lance; a long white beard fell almost to his girdle; a long grey gown something like a cassock in shape fell almost to his feet, which were shod with sandals; his robe was bordered with a brown fur, and on his head

was a black skull-cap; his features were high and regular, and his keen grey eyes shone with an intense gleam that betokened a fiery enthusiasm, or perhaps an incipient gleam of madness.

"Master Simon Tulloch," he said as he drew near, "I give you greeting."

"I would know who thus greets me, and who is so free with my name," said the gardener. "I seem not to have met your worship before."

"Yet I deem my name will be not wholly unfamiliar. I was known as Eochain Beag when I was more familiarly known hereabouts, and yourself, Master Tulloch, a stripling."

"Ah! I have ye now; methought there was something I recognised about the cut of ye. Ye are that Cumming of Altyre whom they called 'the Apostate,' who went after some strange heathen religion, and forsook the faith of our fathers—even denied your Christianity, so I've heard."

"Nay, man! speak of what ye know, and keep your tongue from slanders. I profess, it may be, a holier and purer faith than you do, and it may be I am a better Christian, were all known; but this you could not understand if I talked till to-morrow. 'Tis true I am Eochain Cumming, the younger brother of Sir Alexander Cumming of Altyre, and let that suffice. I sent ye a note some days since concerning Sir Wilfred Dunbar of Blervie."

"Ay, so! I wondered who was the tall man with a long white beard that the loon spoke of. I mind ye spake of Sir Wilfred being safe but in danger, and that the same threatened also his daughter."

"I wished you to know that—though as you knew not who sent the note it could carry no conviction to your mind; still, it might have served to let you know that he was in the care of friends."

"Strange sort of friends who could come through a stone wall and take a living Christian man out through the same!"

"Stranger things than that may be done, my friend. I may not tell you more, but meantime rely on the honour of a Cumming that I know 'where Sir Wilfred is, that he is alive and safe, and thanks to your medicaments he is healing rapidly of his wounds. Meantime I would but ask you to carry this note to his daughter and bid her be of good cheer. And hereafter, if any should speak to you of Eochain Beag as 'the Apostate,' try to believe that he is, as I trust we all are, a humble seeker after truth, who having found a high and holy faith, is endeavouring as far as in him lies to follow the same."

He handed to Simon a missive addressed to the Lady Beatrix Dunbar, written in the same curious hand as the former one to himself; then turned aside on to the moor and seemed to vanish, almost before the astounded eyes of Simon Tulloch.

Simon scratched his head. Strange tales had been told of Eochain Beag, a bright, handsome, and very popular boy; he had, so it was said, been addicted to odd and uncanny learning. Some maintained that he had the second sight; he himself used to speak of seeing fairies on the moor, and hearing fairy music below the dunes. And one night it was told that he slept within the haunted ring at Clava, and saw strange things whereof he would never speak; but from that time he went no more to mass, but communed with himself on the lone hillsides, and when he was about eighteen he left home for good and was heard of no more in Morayshire, save that from time to time came weird rumours. Now it was reported that Eochain had been burned in Edinburgh for a wizard, and again that he had gone to some far foreign country where he had renounced his Christianity and joined the Moslem. Wild enough were all the brood of the Cummings, but Eochain was the wildest of them all, so it was said, and no story was too strange to obtain credence. All these tales belonged to Simon's boyhood. Since that time Eochain Beag had disappeared altogether, and the stories about him had passed into the realm of legend. His

sudden reappearance now was as weird and strange as his disappearance half a century ago had been. Simon looked at the note in his hand as if it were some unholy thing. It was addressed in the same queer script, as though serpents had twisted themselves into letters. He was more than half afraid of the thing. But it had to be delivered to the Lady Beatrix, and though it came straight from the Devil himself Simon would not fail of his trust.

A clatter of hoofs sounded behind him, and a serving-man on a black horse galloped past. Simon's eye caught the arms wrought on his surcoat, a shield argent, a bend azure charged with three buckles or, and a griffin's head for crest.

"Norman Leslie of the Glen," he muttered to himself, "the precontracted spouse of my Lady Beatrix. Now what does that rascal here? No good, I'll be bound; he never did any good to any human soul in all his evil life that ever I heard tell of. God help my lady, if she be bound to marry him. A nunnery would be preferable, she said, and she is right. What could Sir Wilfred have been thinking of to allow that precontract? I will never believe the Church could enforce it, but they could prevent her marrying any one else. I must ask Father Ambrose how that stands. Well, well, I've a budget for my lady to-day: first what the good Father said, then this letter,—best not to tell her about Eochain Beag, I deem too much knowledge of the wild Cummings is not wholesome for a maid, though indeed this one seems to be more serious-minded than most of the race, but what sort of mad faith he professes is beyond me. I must deliver his letter, however. 'Wild Cummings,' said I. Well, if Father Ambrose is not one of the breed then am I a heathen Turk. I suppose it may be possible even for a Cumming to win to sanctity. I would far sooner credit it of them than I would of lightsome Leslie of the Glen."

Simon, as it will be seen, had the habit that many more or less solitary men fall into, of talking to himself.

At this moment his thoughts were interrupted by Beatrix and Cecily, who came suddenly upon him from the road leading up to the Tower.

"Give you good day, Master Simon," said Beatrix. "By your face I see you come with news."

Simon hurriedly doffed his cap in a profound salutation.

"Your ladyship, I have indeed words to say to you, yet not altogether such as you most desire, for of your father I have heard nothing whatever, alas! All our search has still been in vain, though to be sure there is one crack-brained person who tells me that he is safe and in the care of friends, yet I think not that he knows anything. More of him presently. I have also had a long conversation with Father Ambrose."

Both the girls looked up in sudden and vivid interest, and Beatrix blushed deeply, and seemingly unnecessarily.

"The Father was cutting some figures on a sundial, while I was planting an apple tree close by, and I spoke to him and told him the whole story. He bade me say to you that he has no doubt that this is the work of one who has commerce with the Devil. But why, he said, should the Lady of Blervie seek counsel of a poor and humble monk, who has enough to do to win pardon for his own sins. 'Not counsel, Father,' I said, 'but help.' He shook his head gently. 'I have taken the final vows,' he said, 'I am bound to the life of religion, and as you know, Master Simon,' he said, 'not one minute of a monk's time is his own, nay not one thought of his mind; all are given to his Order. Gladly as I would help your lady, I cannot take back what is given to God, save by the direct command of the Father Abbot. This, however,' he went on, 'I may say; when I was down on the English marches I heard tell much of a notorious witch whom they called Elspet Simpson.'"

Neither Beatrix nor Simon noticed how Cecily winced and started at the name, almost as from the cut of a whip; it was of evil import to her. She quickly recovered herself, however, and Simon went on.

"The Father said that there had been witchwork down there very similar to what we have here, and that nought but the full rite of exorcism would avail, but that until this could be performed, for your own safety ye should take certain precautions, for he deems that either this Elspet Simpson can exercise her evil power even at this distance,—and it is well known that witches by the aid of their master the Devil can even do this,—or, may be, that there is hereabouts a witch of similar power and malice. These things therefore should ye do, as prescribed by the venerable Abbot of Melrose, who knoweth much of these matters. First, then, ye shall hang fresh boughs of the rowan over the main door of the Castle, and over the door of Sir Wilfred's study, and of his bedroom; but over the door of your own chamber ye shall place the crucifix, and ye shall sprinkle holy water all around, and on the floor at the door of your sleeping-chamber ye shall trace a pentagram or five-pointed star, and the single point thereof shall be towards the room.

"Oh, Beatrix! not that, not that!" cried Cecily, in great distress. "It is the sign of the Inneses, the cruel and bloody foes of your house—it will bring you ill luck."

"I would not that ye make or mar much herein, Mistress Ross," said Simon, with some asperity. "I think ye have not the knowledge. I have given the Father's message, and I think that he has skill. He sent a word to you also. He said, 'Tell Mistress Ross, if you should see her, that I have asked for the prayers of Holy Church, both in the Abbey and in the Cathedral at Elgin, against the wiles and malice of this Elspet Simpson, for the reason that I told her before God's altar, and that whenever she shall think of Elspet Simpson she shall pray most earnestly that this Elspet cast no spells upon her."

Cecily lowered her eyes. She seemed as if praying; her face had grown even more strangely white than ever.

"Tell the Father, if ye should see him, that I will try," she murmured almost under her breath.

"Furthermore," said Simon, full of great importance of the messages he had to deliver, "I am bidden to tell you this, Lady Beatrix, from the Chanter, that in three days' time the Abbot of Kinloss, or it may be the Bishop himself, doth propose to perform the solemn rite of exorcism here in the Tower, and that the Chanter hath good hopes that thereby the spells of evil magic shall be broken, and that Sir Wilfred Dunbar may be restored to his family in safety and good health. The Chanter therefore bids you to prepare to receive on that occasion so dignified a company with due honour and reverence."

"I will do so, as in duty bound," said Beatrix; "yet I confess I would rather that Father Ambrose should perform the ceremony alone, and in such simple style as our faith prescribes."

"I doubt not but it might be more effective," said Simon, "yet we must always look with becoming reverence on our Fathers in God, and gratefully accept their ministrations on our behalf, as said Father Adam Elder in his discourse last Sunday. But now finally, Lady Beatrix, I have to give ye this, and so is my mission accomplished."

He handed to her the scroll he had received from Eochain Beag. Beatrix took it and looked at it curiously; the odd script imitating the twining of serpents affected her more than she showed. It was so like the carvings on some of the old heathen stones that yet stood in many places about the land, shunned with a superstitious dread by the people as altars for the worship of the Evil One, yet preserved, for in truth they dared not meddle with them lest a worse thing might befall them. It was some time before she broke the seal. At length she opened it, and read thus

"If thou wouldest have news of thy father, come alone and unattended to the dune at Callifer at midnight on the day of the full moon. This, if thou darest to do, thou shalt be certified that he is alive and on the road to perfect recovery." Instead of a signature were two serpents twining contrary ways round a rod, and in ancient letters thereunder, "The Last of the Druids."

"Whence got you this, Master Simon?"

"From a tall man with a long white beard—somewhat crack-brained as I think, but yet he professes to know much."

"Well, we shall see. I mean to keep this tryst. 'If I dare,' he says. He knows me not; I think that very sentence would move me to go straight into the jaws of hell. When is the full moon, Simon?"

"On the fourth day after this, Lady Beatrix."

"So! on the very day after the exorcism. Well, the powers of evil are to be broken by that time, so my cousin the Chanter thinks. If they be broken, there is no need for me to fear them; and if they be not, then there is not much good in longer heeding our Mother Church, for she will have failed to produce the very effect that Our Master said should follow them that believed. Ergo, if this effect followeth not, then hath the Church ceased to believe, and who shall believe in that which believes not in itself, and we may accept Master Martin Luther without compunction."

Coolly, who had walked away a short distance, with a certain instinctive delicacy, while Beatrix read the missive, now drew near again; and her eye fell on the paper in Beatrix's hand. Instantly she drew in her breath with a sobbing sound, and gave a low cry, almost like that of an animal in pain or deadly fear; it was faint and scarce audible, yet it was a wail that was like the moan of a beaten dog. Beatrix turned in surprise.

"Oh, Beatrix! it was a terrible vision came on me. I saw bars, iron bars all round me. I was shut in prison, and your great Angel was standing over you, and pointing a cruel sword at me, and from the sword came lightnings, and I could not come to you." Beatrix noticed the direction of her eyes, and instinctively concealed the letter in her dress. Almost immediately the fit passed, and Cecily controlled herself, but she was still trembling violently, and in great distress.

"What was that paper, Beatrix? It was something terrible. Whoever wrote that has some strange power over me—I know not what. My Spirits cannot answer—the good Angels seem to stand far apart. It is like a great serpent that holds me captive. I felt then as if I was in prison, just as I saw those poor monks down in the Abbey—only there is no Master Luther who can set me free from this thrall. I must go and lie down to rest for a little, my heart thumps so I can scarcely breathe."

She turned into the Tower, tottering, and clinging to the stone parapet of the stairs for support, but refusing all offer of help.

"Poor girl!" said Beatrix, after she had left them, "she is terribly sensitive, and exhausted by her work for others. You are a skilled leech, Master Simon, can you not suggest some potion of simples that would give her strength, or rest in any case?"

"Nay, Mistress Beatrix, I am but a gardener with a trifling skill in tending wounds and the like, such as an old soldier may have; but I confess the ways of women are beyond me. When there is nothing ill but fantasy, then do they make the most ado."

So saying, Master Tulloch, making low reverence, turned down the hill again towards the Abbey.

Near the foot of the hill, where the last slope began to descend upon the Abbey, a small company crossed his path—a man on a huge black warhorse, followed by five or six men in buff jerkins carrying spears, one of whom had a pennon charged with a golden buckle. The leader of

the troop was a burly, dissipated-looking man, with close-cropped black hair, and a pointed black beard. He had plate armour over his embroidered buff coat, and a helmet hanging at his saddle-bow with a griffin crest.

Simon looked up with some curiosity.

"So that's Lightsome Leslie," he said to himself. "Grown coarser, and as I think wickeder, since I saw him last—indeed, my Lady Beatrix is right, a nunnery were preferable."

The horseman halted.

"Hie, fellow! Hast heard tell of a certain Mistress Elspet Simpson in these parts?"

"That have I not. We love not to deal with witches in Morayshire."

"Then is Morayshire much misrepresented. I have been told your town of Forres is a favourite haunt. But no matter! we ride to punish the MacIntoshes, and we need this Elspet Simpson. I was well informed she had been seen hereabouts."

"I think you were misinformed, Sir Norman Leslie."

"Eh! how know you me?"

"Any man with eyes can see the buckles and the griffin's head, and no Leslie but Sir Norman of the Glen rides thus accoutred."

"Well, well! 'tis no matter. See, fellow! if you chance on this Elspet wench, tell her that Leslie seeks her company."

So saying, he clattered away, with a great jangling of spears and horses' bridles, and prancing and stamping of heavy hoofs.

"And indeed I will do no errands for your like, my lord of the Glen," quoth Master Simon. "Fellow, indeed! fellow yourself! And Elspet may be a witch or whatever they please, I doubt she is too good for the like of you. No woman could ever be foul enough not to be too clean for you. Hey! Is it possible that any proxy marriage with such a swine could hold binding? My poor sweet lady! I must ask of Father Ambrose."

As Master Simon was stumping off cheerily intent on his duty, Cecily Ross sat in her chamber in Blervie Tower that was above Beatrix's, and looking out to the Firth and the sunset over Wyvis, and all the gorgeous colours that were reflected in the sea, leant her face on her hands on the window-seat in deep dejection. The three sweet bells from the Abbey were ringing out the Angelus.

"Is there no hope?" she cried aloud to the still evening air. "Oh, must those dreadful dreams come over me again? O sweet Angelus, is there no Angel message any more for me? I have done all that Father Ambrose said, but it grows worse; soon I shall not be able to recover myself. And they are new dreams—worse than any I have ever had before. Why should the Star of the Inneses terrify me so? They are Beatrix's foes, I know, but that is not the reason I shudder before that Star, and I feel I can't pass it. Is it possible that the Inneses will separate me from her? Oh! God forbid! What is this Elspet Simpson? I seem to long for her, while I dread and hate her. No one but Father Ambrose ever knew of her. Did I ever see her, I wonder? I see her in dreams. O God, deliver me—let me not long for Elspet—it is the evil thing, I know."

She cast herself on her knees and prayed fervently, clasping her hands so tight that the slender fingers were bruised and cut with her rings. Then for long she gazed again out to the sunset over the sea.

"'Tis a pity," she went on a little more calmly now, "that the rite of exorcism is such poor superstition and mummery. If indeed the Church could cast out devils! Nay, Master Martin Luther himself has had several tussles with the Evil One,—threw an inkpot at his head, so they tell me. Why then should not the monks and their Abbot heir me? Oh, they are all in prison as I

saw them, shut up in darkness till some brave soul shall break their bondage as Master Luther has done in Germany. They cannot help—Ah! woe is me that it is so sinful! Oh, the wild exultation of those dreams—Oh, the joy, the mad rush—the blood surging through the veins—the throb of the heart like a mad thing—Oh, the blood! How I have dreamed of killing—the hunter's mad ecstasy. Why was I not born a man? All this Elspet gives me in my dreams—Ah! I must—I must!"

She writhed on the floor, clinging hard to the stone window-sill with both hands, and dragging her slender body up to the window with strange contortions.

Then suddenly she cried, with a wild moan—

"No! no! I must not—I will not yield to it here. I can keep Elspet away;—she would kill my darling Beatrix. No! before the dreams get overpowering I must go. I must hide myself somewhere;—Beatrix must never know how this frightful thing gets hold of me. Oh, if Father Ambrose would but take me and keep me till the spell is past, let me lie in some cell, shut away from all but himself, and dream out my wicked dreams. I am calm when it is over. Ah me! how tired I am now! I would I might die, all strength and force is gone from me. Let me but lie down and sleep, and ah! dear God! keep all evil dreams from me."

She sank worn out on the couch, but no quiet sleep was hers. Two hours later, when Beatrix came with some small cakes and a soothing drink, Cecily was still tossing wildly, with short barking cries, her cheek was flushed through its usual unnatural whiteness, her heavy black hair in strange disorder, and on her lip where she had bitten it in her struggle was a tiny spot of blood.

CHAPTER VI

FATHER AMBROSE OF KINLOSS

The rule of a Cistercian monastery enjoined labour as well as prayer. After the long religious services, and when they had made their beds, changed their cowls and scapulars, and had a wash in the lavatory, the manual work of the day began, varied according to the duties and capacity of each brother. The officiating priest might take off his vestments and grasp the stilts of the plough or wield the sickle, the monks who sang the service might go to work hi the carpenter's shop, or some might write, or paint, or teach the choir to sing the chants, but all must work and work hard, till the bell summons them to Vespers. And thus it chanced, when the afternoon sua was pouring full on the western front of the Abbey church, that Master Simon Tulloch was watching Father Ambrose training a young horse for use in the grange fields. Not much of an agricultural labourer was the Father, but his skill with horses was beyond all question, and the Abbot wisely put him to the work that he could do better than any other in the community.

Simon, not being a monk, and having been a soldier too in his day, could take a spell of idleness when he listed, and amuse himself with watching the training process, which he himself had often carried through in the days of his youth, and before he had lost his foot. He was somewhat sarcastic of the Father's skill and patience with his pupil.

"Give him the whip, Father, give him the whip. Ye'll never make aught of a horse till he learns who is master."

"He knows that already, Master Simon; but he is like many another good Christian, he knows not what his master wants. There's many a one would do right if they did but understand. I am trying to teach him my language—so, boy!"

He walked up to the horse, which tied by a long rope had been galloping round in a ring; the animal with a vicious gleam in its eye put its head down, and half turning on all four feet, lunged a fierce kick at the monk. Father Ambrose dexterously slipped past the flying heels, and before the horse could raise his head again had caught the bridle and held the head down, grasping the ear with his other hand. In utter amazement at this sudden reversal of the situation the animal stood stock still, sweating and trembling. The Father held the ear and gradually drew it through his hand again and again, till the fiery gleam died out of the eye, and the savage teeth were no longer shown by the upcurled lip. Very gently he allowed the head to be raised a few inches, and began to stroke the other ear and to allow a still further slight raising of the head, as he let his stroking hand pass a little downwards over the horse's face and under his chin and soon Simon was astounded to see the proud black head rubbing caressingly against the Father's breast.

"'Tis but a question of language," said he. "This fellow thought I meant him ill, and he was for protecting himself, as I think we should all be. I have explained to him now that we are friends."

As he spoke he was by gradual and gentle degrees stroking all the front of the horse, and over his back and sides, returning over and over again to pull the silky ears that seemed to quiver with pride at his caressing touch, till at last he arrived at the dangerous hind hoofs, and Simon stood in amazement as he saw the fierce creature that none dared approach allow his hind feet to be lifted and placed wherever the Father wished.

"You see he wants to be good, he only didn't know how, or what was require[4] of him. There's many a man like that. Now that is lesson enough for to-day."

He gathered up the rope round his arm to lead his pupil back to the stable.

"I ween that's like to witchcraft," said Simon in great wonderment.

"Only the witchcraft of love and sympathy—perhaps the most powerful of all. I look on the creatures as friends, not as servants. We give them food and shelter in exchange for their work and that's fair, but I never could see by what right we should want them to conform to every whim of ours, and become just our puppets. A horse, to my thinking, has as much right to his individuality as a man. And because I understand this they will do almost anything for me when once we understand each other."

Simon and the monk were passing in front of the great west door of the Abbey church, and round to the south side where were the guests' quarters; for the Abbey still exercised a princely hospitality, notwithstanding that it had really never recovered the enormous drain on its resources when Edward I. of England and all the English army lived there at free rack and manger for a fortnight, when they came North to punish the Cummings.

"Ye have guests," said Master Tulloch, seeing signs of activity about the wing devoted to entertainment.

"They arrived but last evening," replied the monk, "and truth to tell I like not much the appearance of any of them, but they claim our hospitality as going to punish the authors of the recent raid that sent so many hopeless and helpless fugitives seeking shelter with us—I mean the MacIntoshes."

Simon pricked up his ears.

"In that case your guests will be Sir Norman Leslie of the Glen and his serving-men."

"Ay, in good sooth so they are, and I think that however cruel and rough the MacIntoshes may be, they are angels of light compared with that Leslie."

"I hold the same opinion, yet I trust it may be ill-founded, for he is the precontracted spouse of my Lady Beatrix Dunbar."

The monk started and looked keenly at his companion.

“Is this really true?” he said. “God pity the poor lady if it be.”

“The matter is true enough, yet I doubt it cannot stand. Surely, Father, no Church would fetter a lady of gentleness and nurture to a brute like that, whom at the time she had never seen, by virtue of this proxy ceremony.”

“I know not—I know not,” said Father Ambrose, and hi~ voice had a curious strain in it. “I have heard of such marriages, yet never have I met with any, and indeed I know not the law. Come in to the library, Master Simon. Father Ferrerius, or Father John Smyth, or one of our learned brethren, will resolve this point for us.”

The library of Kinloss was a noble vaulted apartment, lying on the south side of the cloisters, between the Chapter-house and the refectory. It was already well stored with books; for Robert Reid, the Sub-Dean of Moray, had been most enthusiastic in collecting all the most precious works of the day in his extensive travels. Father Ferrerius, the librarian, was busily engaged as they entered in affixing the seal of the monastery to a beautifully illuminated Book of Hours. He looked up with something of wonder; for the gardener, though a privileged person and a universal favourite, rarely entered the monastic buildings.

“Reverend Father,” said Father Ambrose, “our good friend Simon Tulloch desires to ask a question concerning the marriage *per proeuratores* as it is termed, and how far it is binding on the parties thereto.”

“That is soon resolved,” quoth Father Ferrerius, a gaunt-looking monk with a skin yellow and dried like a herring, who appeared, what indeed he was, a scholar and a bookworm, in whom all humanity had long been crushed out by gigantic learning. “Father Smyth,” he called to a young dreamy-eyed monk who was writing diligently in the Scriptorium that opened out of the library, “bring me hither the Corpus Juris Canonici”

A ponderous volume bound in vellum was laid on the table in front of him, and John Smyth retired as silently as he had emerged from his den.

“Ye see here,” said Father Ferrerius, rapidly turning over the pages till he found the reference he sought, “there is no doubt that a marriage *per procuratores* is valid if the proxy be specially commissioned for the purpose of contracting marriage with a particular person. Look now at the first book of the Decretals of Sextus, the nineteenth title and the ninth chapter, ye shall see there, and also at the place I first pointed out, and also in the comment which hath been written thereon, that the proxy cannot commission another person to act for him. Also that the party may revoke the mandate before the actual contract. And this even although the revocation is unknown to the proxy or to the other party, and from this have very cruel wrongs to innocent persons arisen. For a marriage may be celebrated in all good faith both by the proxy and by the lady and may be consummated on the faith thereof, and yet be void. Consent is carefully guarded. Thus ye will see here a case where a man took an oath that he would not revoke his mandate or commission to his proxy, and yet he did revoke it, and the marriage though celebrated with all formalities was null and void. The man in that instance was proceeded against for perjury, but being high placed (in fact he was a cousin of the Emperor) he escaped the punishment he richly deserved.”

This discourse was delivered in a dry, unemotional voice, as was habitual to Father Ferrerius, in whom the acquirement of knowledge had dried up and atrophied all other faculties.

Simon looked and felt seriously disturbed. “So, then, the Church will enforce this infamous bargain, and the only means of escape are if the man should have recalled his mandate, and this I am sure he hath not done. Yet she never saw him or knew of his vile repute, and never have they come together.”

"It matters not, my son," replied Father Ferrerius, still in the same dry, hard voice, as though he were lecturing to students on some ordinary historical or theological topic. "*Consensus non concubitus, fctcit matrimonium.* I know not of whom ye speak, and indeed it skills not. For if the man giveth his consent by his proxy, and the woman giveth her consent by going through the ceremony of marriage, which it is clear she could not have gone through without consenting, and the Church hath blessed their union by the solemn ceremony of matrimony, then there can be no doubt that a valid marriage hath been constituted, and it remaineth only for the bridegroom to come and claim the bride, and if she marry any other it shall be a bigamy, and also an adultery of the foulest type; and thereon are the laws of God and of man agreed. I see not where any doubt can arise. If the lady hath made a bad bargain, let her understand that very many have done likewise; and if the Church were to allow all who have made bad bargains to be off with them, then is the sanctity of the matrimonial tie in danger of being wholly destroyed, and we shall be like brute beasts; though Christ Himself hath told us that same tie hath been from the beginning when God made them male and female. But if indeed the man be so evil as you, Master Simon, would hint, let her seek the shelter of Holy Church. In the good town of Elgin there is a nunnery where the Sisters will gladly receive her, and whence no power on earth can drag her."

He ceased abruptly and waved his hand in token of dismissal, returning at once to his task among the books.

"Ay," said Simon Tulloch, as they passed out, "my lady said that a nunnery were preferable, and I deem she was right. Give you good day, Father. I must to my plantation at Burgie—there is still much work there."

So he stumped away, graver than was his wont, and noting with something of a frown the blare of a trumpet and clatter of horses' hoofs as Sir Norman Leslie, followed by his men-at-arms, galloped in from the direction of Forres towards the guest wing of the Abbey.

"He asked me concerning Elspet Simpson," said

Simon to himself. "Something may lie therein, for if he have commerce with notorious witches, surely Mother Church must take notice thereof and free her faithful child, that is to say my Lady Beatrice, from a notorious evil-doer. Nay! I see not why he should not be burned, or at the least worried at the stake, as one having dealings with the Devil. This shall be looked to."

Father Ambrose stood long on the road between the great western gate of the Abbey and the grange or farmsteading, watching the retreating figure of Master Simon Tulloch as he stumped up the hill road leading to Burgie. Sir Norman Leslie and his men clattered past him, dismounting at the stables, where they separated to attend to the care and grooming of their horses for the night. The monk's face was unmoved, but wild and troubled thoughts surged through his brain. The adventurous life of his youth, when often he had only his own wits to depend on for daily food and shelter, had made him acutely observant of trifles and quick to draw inferences, and besides this he had a strange intuitional faculty that might almost have passed for second sight, a curious sensitiveness enabling him to feel the approach of danger. The image of Lady Beatrix Dunbar haunted him, and over her he seemed to see two dark shadows impending. One whereof he had but just now heard, namely, the precontract of marriage with Sir Norman Leslie of the Glen, from whence, knowing somewhat of the character of the man, he felt assured nothing but misery could result, unless it could be prevented, and this from the sentence of Father Ferrerius seemed beyond hope. The other was far more undefined and vague, but perhaps for that very reason even more terrible—it was the influence of Elspet Simpson.

Yet why, he asked himself, should he connect that evil witch, of whom he had known far away on the English Border, with the Lady of Blervie Tower, especially seeing that he had no cause to

suspect her of being anywhere in the neighbourhood of Morayshire? There was but one rational solution, and he eagerly caught at it; her bosom friend Cecily Ross was by her own confession obsessed, or overshadowed, by this Elspet Simpson—how that occurred the monk did not stay to inquire, but so it evidently was. He had thought of the obsession of Cecily as a physician might think of a strange and interesting case to the cure of which he had given the best of his care and attention; he had thought deeply, be had prayed earnestly, he had sent a message by Simon Tulloch embodying the best advice his experience and skill could suggest, but when the thought was born in his brain that the Lady Beatrix also was threatened, then the vision of that eager, lovely face as he had seen it last in the Chanter's garden rose before him vivid as a picture—the green kirtle, the bright auburn hair slightly disarranged by the light wind and the speed of their riding, the eyes gleaming with lambent green lights, and the lightly parted red lips, and the dark cloud of witchcraft and evil magic hanging over her.

There was no doubt that it was merely the association of ideas. Cecily Ross was obsessed by the influence of Elspet Simpson, and Cecily was the bosom friend of Beatrix, his imagination had supplied all the rest. Nevertheless, it was dominant, insistent, and in spite of himself he said to himself, "It must not be—it shall not be! Nay, though I give my own body to be burned, and my soul to be eternally damned, it shall not be."

Startled by the vehemence of his own thoughts, he walked rapidly up and down for some minutes to compose himself.

It was no sudden impulse that had driven Father Ambrose to take the vows of religion; he had arrived at the conviction that for him the world was dead and his work in the world was over, and much earnest prayer had convinced him of his vocation, and of the entire change of outlook that had converted the dashing, reckless soldier into the fervent ascetic whose devotion to all the duties of his Order was somewhat remarkable in those days when religious discipline was growing very lax. In these circumstances the insistent suggestion of a woman's face was disconcerting, and Father Ambrose was far too honest with himself to plead that it was merely the concern for an immortal soul, such as ought to actuate every true priest, that moved him to such intense anxiety on her behalf.

He glanced at the sun and the length of the shadows; it was just about the hour at which Father Adam Elder, the Confessor of the monks, would be finishing hearing the confessions of those who came to him—he would not yet have left the church. Moved by a sudden intuition, he turned in to the great west door of the Abbey church and walked up the nave between the beautiful carved pillars, hardly noticing their light and graceful spring, or the soaring magnificence of the vaulted roof, and the gorgeous colours as the setting sun shone through the blazoned windows of the clerestory. On the south side, in a familiar little chapel, still sat the venerable Father, whose Chapter discourses have lived to be read with interest and appreciation nearly four hundred years after they were composed for the edification of his brethren. A ray from the low sun striking through a coloured window to the north-west fell on his beautiful and saintly old face, and formed almost the image of a halo round his bead.

The monk knelt by the grill at the side of the confessional, his keen handsome face strangely tense as the words poured forth in a rapid stream very unlike his usual calm and balanced utterances, as though it were the natural man escaping for the moment from the stern restraints he had laid upon himself. Into the privacy of that confessional no stranger may intrude, nor may we disclose the purport of the grave and solemn yet kindly words of the Confessor; but his last words may be set down, seeing that they formed the basis of his next Chapter discourse.

“Brother,” he said, “it hath been truly said by a great saint, when the Devil assails thee, ofttimes the truest wisdom and the greatest courage is in flight. I counsel thee that thou retire for a season. In our house of Strathisla there is much that needs attention, and thy time may be profitably occupied; for much hath been neglected there since the death of our late Abbot. Or if that also be too nigh, then thou nmayest even go to Orkney. On this I will see the Father Abbot. Fare thee well, brother! May all the Saints have thee in their holy keeping!”

Father Ambrose left the church calmer and more tranquil in mind than he had been for some days past. He now saw the line of duty clear before him, and the protection of the Lady Beatrix must be left to higher hands than his.

Meantime in the Chapter-house also the affairs of Blervie Castle were the subject of an anxious conference. The Chapter-house was a noble and beautiful building, square in shape, supported by four slender carved pillars, from which pointed arches sprang to each other, and to pilasters on the walls, between which spread delicate fan tracery, and the walls were decorated with fresco paintings by Master Andrew Bairholm, the painter who was now at work on the great altar’piece, which was to be the supreme effort of his life.

The Father Abbot sat in his carved chair at the head of the oaken table. On one side of him was Father Ferrerius, on the other Father John Smyth, the dreamy-eyed monk; and several other monks were grouped on either side.

“This is a difficult task that our worthy Chanter hath devised,” quoth the Abbot, “and it is rendered none the easier by the resolve of the Bishop to hold a high ceremonial of exorcism. There be none who know how such a ceremony should be ordered, and our Sub-Dean, who might have given us good counsel herein, is away.”

“Why not leave it, my Lord Abbot?” said Ferrerius. “There can be no obligation on your Lordship to perform so unusual an act.”

“True! there is no obligation,” retorted the Abbot, “but if we do not concur herein, the Bishop of Moray will perform it alone, and you know, Fathers, that his Lordship of Moray is something perhaps over-anxious to assume to himself every office and every function in this province; he and his predecessors have but scantly regarded the rights of Kinloss Abbey, which was here before ever there was an efficient Bishop. Yet it will not be easy to arrange the ceremony. Father Ferrerius, where do we find the office of exorcism? Never in my life have I had occasion to pronounce such.”

It is in the Rituale,” replied the monk addressed. “Father John Smyth, you will find it on the second shelf on the right hand; bring it for the Lord Abbot.”

“This,” he said, as he laid the book before the Abbot, “is the most recent recension as set forth by the authority of our Holy Father in God, Leo the Tenth.”

“Yes, I see,” said the Abbot, rapidly turning the pages over; “yet this provides but for an exorcism or casting out of the Devil by a single priest, or not even a priest; for any faithful layman may, as it seems, use the office. Moreover, the person possessed must be there *in propriâ persona*, and the end of the violet stole must be laid over his shoulders, but here we have no such thing. As I gather, the body of Sir Wilfred Dunbar has been secretly, and by the device of Satan, carried away no man knoweth where. How then may we cast out the Devil, if we know not from whence to cast him? Yet will I not on any account leave this matter wholly to the discretion of the Bishop of Moray; for, as I say he takes too much upon himself.”

“Give me leave, my Lord Abbot,” said Father Ferrerius, “and I will compose a ritual appropriate to the occasion, designed after the model here laid down, and I make no doubt but

that the Bishop of Moray will accept it, and also shall all your Lordship's rights and privileges be preserved."

"Do so, good Father, and take my blessing; you have relieved my mind of a great anxiety. And now, Fathers, as touching the action still pending between ourselves and the little Earl of Moray, regarding our fishings in the river Findhorn—" he broke off suddenly as the venerable and saintly Father Adam Elder entered the Chapter-house, and coming up to the Abbot's chair, spoke a few words to him in a low tone. After a brief conversation, unheard by the rest of the Fathers, the Abbot said aloud, "It is quite true, as you say, Father Elder. Our house of Strathisla needs personal supervision very sorely. Truly I am loth to lose our Father Ambrose from his work here, for none hath such skill of horses as he, yet there is none other that I can spare. Father Ambrose is ordered for duty at Strathisla, and will proceed thither at once. To-morrow, immediately after the first offices in the church, our Father shall set forth. It were better that he go on foot—we have no plenitude of horses here. There be many along the road who will give him hospitality."

Here we may leave the conclave to their deliberations, which do not any further concern the course of this history.

Simon Tulloch, examining and tending the trees in Burgie Orchard, was seriously perturbed; dangers and difficulties were threatening his favourite, the Lady Beatrix. The mysterious attack on her father, and his still more mysterious disappearance, was bad enough, but now this further question of her pro-contract with Sir Norman Leslie of the Glen was a cause of almost worse anxiety, and his interview with Father Ferrerius that afternoon had set it in a still graver aspect. Seemingly the Church could not, or would not, afford any help—rather would enforce the contract. Simon longed earnestly for some one who would help, or in any case offer some counsel in this emergency. And as if in answer to his desire he saw descending the hill from Callifer the tall, stately figure of Eochain Beag.

"I give you greeting, Master Simon Tulloch," he said as he drew near and leaned over the low wall of the orchard.

"And greeting to you, Master Eochain. I was hoping I might meet your worship again, for indeed my mind is sore disturbed for my dear lady."

"You mean the chatelaine of Blervie? Already I have told her that if she will come to me on the night of the full moon I will bring her face to face with her father, whereby she may be assured of his safety."

"I know, and she will be there, though indeed there be but few maids in this realm of Scotland who would dare to keep such a tryst; but my lady knows no fear. Yet it is not of that I would speak, but rather of her precontract or proxy marriage with Sir Norman Leslie of the Glen, whom perhaps ye may know as the greatest brute and blackguard in all Scotland. Yet doth it seem that unless she should immure herself for ever in a nunnery, there is no other means of escape."

"In truth, as ye well know, Master Simon, I have but little to do with the Church, or with Church marriages, and it is but little that I can help herein. My nephew might advise in such matters far better than I, but I have been long estranged from my family, as ye know well, and I think they look not with very friendly eyes on 'the Apostate.

Simon had but little knowledge of the Cummings of Altyre, whom he looked on as a wild brood, scarcely if at all better than the Highland clans who ravaged the lands of Moray at frequent intervals. But he knew of the family by repute, and rapidly ran over them in his mind in search of Eochain's nephew Sir Alexander of Altyre, now an old man, had two sons, Thomas and Ferquhand; but neither of these were likely to be chosen as the squire of a lady in distress;—but by his second wife, the widow of Urquhart of Burdsyards, there were three sons—Robert and

Alasdair and James—and of these rumour said that Alasdair was destined for the Church. This, then, was the champion proposed.

"You mean Alasdair Cumming of Altyre?" he said.

"Ay! Alasdair Cumming of Altyre, I suppose he should be. Well, Master Tulloch, I believe he is the man who will serve your lady. I like not that he should serve the Church, yet my brother would have it so. God keep you, Master Tulloch! I would there were more as loyal as you to your lady."

So saying, he passed into the wood and was gone, leaving Simon considerably mystified, yet withal relieved. It was hard to credit that Eochain "the Apostate," of whom so many evil tales were told, and who was supposed to have utterly vanished, and probably died in far countries, should be able to influence his powerful kin of Altyre on behalf of the Lady Beatrix; yet if it were so—well, so much the better. And Simon went on with his tree-tending in better spirits than he had been for some time.

CHAPTER VII

A SOLEMN EXORCISM

The Chanter of Moray had succeeded beyond his utmost hopes in the arrangements for the great ceremony of exorcism on which he had set his heart. It was not merely that he was anxious for the fate of his kinsman, Sir Wilfred Dunbar of Blervie. His pride was touched at the idea that a Dunbar could be spirited away in this mysterious fashion, leaving none who could be called to account for the deed; moreover, he sincerely believed that black magic had been at work with which only the powers of the Church could deal. And beyond all this he thoroughly appreciated the prospect of a gorgeous and solemn function inaugurated by himself, and of which he might justly claim the credit. Like the skilful diplomatist that he was, he had craftily played on the rivalry and mutual jealousy of the Bishop of Moray and the Abbot of Kinloss, until, because each feared that the other would alone direct and perform what was likely to be a unique ceremony, they had both agreed to be present and officiate—Father Ferrerius having cleverly designed a ritual which should give neither of them the precedence over the other.

Beatrix Dunbar had good cause to pray earnestly for the success of the powers of Holy Church, for not only was her anxiety as to her father's fate increasing day by day as time passed and no word came as to what had chanced to him, and the mystery grew continually more dark and insoluble, but there had come a disquieting message from Sir Norman Leslie of the Glen, to the effect that he deemed it undesirable that his wife should longer remain alone and unprotected, and since her father had thus mysteriously disappeared he purposed within a few days to carry her away with him to his fortress in the east. In fact, he only delayed until he had punished the MacIntoshes for their raid, in 'which some Leslies of his kin had been killed.

Master Simon Tulloch had told her of his interview with the Fathers of Kinloss and the opinion of Father Ferrerius, from which but scant comfort could be derived. Of little use was it to say No. Leslie of the Glen was powerful and unscrupulous, and said to be in high favour With the Pope. Her own serving-men were but a handful compared with his troop, and though the old Tower of Blervie would stand a tough siege, and would have to be battered piecemeal before they could win an entrance, yet hunger would force them to capitulate at last; and none others would take her part, for the Church held her lawfully wedded to Leslie, and fear of the Church's ban would restrain many a good man who would fain have fought for her. It was but too evident that in the

event of her resistance he would carry her off by force. True, there was the convent in Elgin, but the convent life did not appeal to her, though she frankly admitted it was preferable to a union with the chief of the Glen. Moreover, even the convent might be barred to her if the Church insisted on the consummation of her marriage, as seemed only too likely. Small wonder that she earnestly prayed for the success of the ceremony of exorcism! If but it might dissolve the powers of evil and restore her father to her, he at all events could contrive to postpone this dreaded union, and in postponement might be some hope.

Simon Tulloch told her nothing of his meeting with Eochain Beag, yet he did venture to hint that in Alasdair Cumming there might be some help. Beatrix remembered the second son of Sir Alexander's second marriage, a brave handsome boy, but she failed to see how help could come from that quarter, especially since James Stuart, the little Earl of Moray, natural son of James Iv., was her friend and protector, and there was small love lost between the Cummings and the Earls of Moray. Altogether, in spite of a few gleams, the future looked very black and threatening, and her usually brave and confident spirit was sorely tried.

Cecily Ross had fallen into a morbid dread of the approaching ceremony. An evil dream growing to a nightmare stirred all her imagination, and haunted her waking hours in spite of all she could do to banish it. She had seen in vision the Bishop and the Abbot performing the impressive formulas of the sacred office, and she had seen or fancied legions of devils, expelled by that powerful incantation, cast out homeless and seeking where to go, and with one consent the whole evil swarm swept round herself, seeking to enter in as they did to the Gadarean swine. In her dream she cried aloud, calling on Christ and His Virgin Mother and on all the Saints, calling on Father Ambrose, and on Beatrix. Then it seemed her dreaming self arose and went to Beatrix's chamber for protection, and over the door hung the rowan branch, and it seemed to her to be a holy guardian holding back the evil swarm that assailed her; but before the door on the floor was cut the five-pointed star, the device of the Inneses, and all her old shuddering horror revived at the sight of this, utterly unreasonable, as she knew even in her dream, yet it affected her with wild terror. Beatrix was within, and peace, comfort, and safety, the swarm of devils and the dark, lonely night were without, yet not for all this could she pass that sign on the floor. Often, as she tried and tried again, it seemed to rise against her, and every nerve in her body became as water, and wild and causeless physical fear seized her brain till she shrieked for aid, so woke trembling in every limb and bathed in perspiration in her own chamber.

Here she paced uneasily up and down in the moonlight—up and down, and up and down—with long ceaseless padding, like a wild animal caught, her brain all in a whirl, longing now for the quiet and safety of Beatrix's chamber, and the solace of those loving arms, and that gentle sympathetic voice, but ever conscious of that awesome sign that barred her omit, and which even now, awake and able to think, she quailed before, and shivered in mortal dread, yet again longing to be out there in the moonlight, for her nerves were strained almost to breaking, and the physical restlessness of the body could be combated only by physical fatigue. If but she could get out there, where the moon shone so white and still, and run and run till exhausted nature must needs yield the sweet boon of sleep!

She threw herself on the bed and dozed fitfully for a short while, then tossed restlessly and grew wide awake again; she got up and sat by the window, weary and despondent. In spite of herself she could not help recalling the wild exultation of the dreams she had had of Elspet Simpson, when she and Elspet, playfellows of the wind and the storm, had rushed madly along in a glorious race, joying in their strength, their pulses leaping with the mad excitement of the gallop, and all their blood surging in bounding time to the glorious rhythm of life.

Àу! that was it, blood in their veins, then in those wild dreams they *lived,* but now—how cold and bloodless it all was! In her lassitude and weariness she longed for the excitement, the bounding pulses, the blood of life. If only blood could be poured into her! She felt the fires of life dying down in sick, weary depression. Those dreams would give her life and force again.

In the cold grey light of the morning a figure passed below the Tower, taking the road towards Callifer past the haunted wood. It was a tall, stately-looking monk; his cowl was drawn over his head, yet she recognised Father Ambrose. He made the sign of the cross as he passed the Tower, and she watched his long soldierly stride as he turned the corner and disappeared. She curiously and unreasoningly resented the sacred sign, feeling a wholly illogical conviction that he had made it against herself. Then she recalled his words and all he had counselled her to do. "Yet," she said to herself, "he could not know of this ghastly weakness—of the nightmare of last night. To do what he advised takes strength—I must have some fresh strength somehow, and from my dreams I can get strength. Oh, I know he would say so himself, if he were here and knew it all. Only once more—oh, Father, only once! Let me dream just this once, and have the excitement and the rush and the glory and the lust of blood. Let me know all once more, and I will come back refreshed, and do all that he wishes. He thought so much of my visions of Angels and Spirits. I wonder does he know how they drain all my strength? It is only by my dreams of Elspet that I can get strength for the visions he loves. But Beatrix—no! no! I dare not dream here. All the devils that come round would attack her too. I can deal with them. Oh! I shall be strong—they cannot harm me, but they will attack her. Oh! I know the malice of them—I must get away and dream my dreams alone. My God! forgive me; but if I be damned for it, I must—I must!"

Thus it chanced that Beatrix rising early found Cecily's room empty, and a tiny note saying that she had been suddenly and unexpectedly called away.

"That good Cecily!" said Beatriz. "Some errand of mercy; she never spares herself. There are few like her in this world."

Cecily's horse was still in the stables, and her serving-man reported that he had had no instructions, but presumed he must wait for Mistress Ross.

"Oh, she will not be long away; she has clearly gone on foot," said Beatrix. "You will just wait here; she has gone to some place quite near."

The serving-man made no reply—unless a half-inarticulate grunt be counted as such—but he doffed his bonnet in a low obeisance to the Lady of Blervie.

Master Simon Tulloch came up that afternoon to Blervie Tower to warn the Lady Beatrix that on the following day the Abbot of Kinloss and the Lord Bishop of Moray, with their trains, and the Chanter of Moray would come to the Tower and perform the solemn rite of exorcism. In this way they hoped to break the power of the Devil, by which Sir Wilfred Dunbar had been by evil magic foully attacked and carried away. Also they doubted not that by virtue of the ceremony and the efficacy of their prayers Sir Wilfred would be released and restored to his daughter and to his friends. Even while he was speaking the lad Hubert came up to say that a boy craved speech of the Lady of the Tower.

Following almost at his heels came the boy who had delivered Eochain Beag Cumming's first note to Simon Tulloch. With a scared white face he peered round from behind the shelter of Hubert's arm.

"Come hither, boy! What is it?" said Beatrix; and Simon gripped him by the arm, not unkindly, and drew him forward.

"I've seen Sir Wilfred's ghost!" he gasped, after a moment.

“Sir Wilfred’s ghost? Nonsense, boy! you are dreaming,” quoth Master Simon, wondering nevertheless whether in fact the Lord of Blervie had not actually passed away, and at the instant of his death appeared to the boy, as is well known to be the custom of spirits of the dead.

“Nay, wide awake,” gasped the boy,—“down in the thicket yonder.” He pointed to the haunted wood. “Sure I saw him there, looking out from the bushes, and his jaw was bound up with a napkin as they bound up nay father’s when he was dead, and his face was as white as time cloth that bound it. Ay me! but I’m feared to go back there. And sure, as I came away, I saw the track of a wolf in the soft ground.”

“Nonsense!” said Simon again; “there hath no wolf been seen hereabouts for many a long day. It was some big dog running about, a shepherd’s dog belike—no wolf, trust me. And for the napkin, I myself bound his head where it was scratched.”

He spoke confidently, but his mind was working rapidly all the same.

“Nay, master, not so long since,” said the boy, “Robin Thomson saw a big white wolf slink past his smithy, and the track of the paws was all round the ground about his cottage next morning. Indeed, Master Tulloch, ’tis true—I saw it myself.”

“I think he speaks truth,” said Beatrix. “Yet I cannot think my father to be dead; I believe this boy hath seen himself. Oh, Master Simon, think you he can be so near and we not know it?”

“Nay, that I think not—saving your presence, Lady Beatrix; whatever have chanced to Sir Wilfred, he hath not tarried near here. Yet indeed why do I say tarried? God help the poor gentleman, he was in no case to tarry or to travel when I saw him last, but just to lie wherever man should place him, and sooth I think not that his recovery can have progressed far enough yet to enable him to move of himself. Yet do I think for certain that if he were anywhere near to this we should have had word of it, All the same, I hold with you that he is yet alive; indeed, I have information to that effect, though but from a crazy loon. Now, boy, run away; and hark ye, no word to any mortal man of Sir Wilfred’s ghost. If ye would keep your head from a skelping ye will mention this to none.

“Indeed and I will not, Master Tulloch”; and with that the boy, released from Simon’s grip, sped swiftly down the road.

The next day was that appointed for the solemn ceremony, and precisely at an hour before noon, when the morning services at the Abbey church were over, a procession with all the pomp of ecclesiastical ritual might be seen wending its way up the hill from Kinloss to Blervie Tower. The Bishop of Moray for convenience sake had lain the previous night at Kinloss Abbey, not without certain covert sneers at the poor accommodation as compared with his own Castle of Spynie, or even his manse in Elgin. For though the Abbey was the older establishment, and had acquired ecclesiastical rule over the district, which indeed owed its civilisation and its Christianity to the monks of Kinloss, yet the Bishop, deemed that he should hate all the dominion over the province of Moray, and he resented the privileges wherewith David the royal Saint had endowed the Abbey he founded in the fertile lowlands. Hence were Abbot and Bishop continually inclined to belittle each other. But now their mingled pomp made a brave show on the country roads.

A band of choristers went first, followed by two thurifers swinging censers, and after these came the banner of St. Jerome from Kinloss, and the banner of Our Lady from Elgin. Then followed the Chanter, as the representative of both the great religious foundations. He wore the simple habit of a Cistercian monk, for he was taking no part in the actual ceremony of the day, though in fact the whole of it originated from his subtle brain. Behind him came acolytes from the Cathedral, in scarlet cassocks and lace cottas and scarlet skull-caps, sprinkling holy water as

they walked. Behind them came the Bishop of Moray and the Abbot of Kinloss, both in episcopal robes; for the latter was a mitred Abbot and was also Bishop of Orkney. Their jewelled mitres flashed in the sunshine. The Bishop of Moray wore a cope of cloth of gold, embroidered with a picture of Our Lady, among curious devices of scroll-work. The Abbot's cope was a rich dark violet, with ecclesiastical symbols wrought in gold. Both wore violet stoles as befitting the occasion. Behind each his chaplain bore his pastoral staff thickly crusted with gems. Father Ferrerius, as the Ceremonarius or master of ceremonies, followed alone, in the plain Cistercian habit. The monks of Kinloss and the Cathedral staff from Elgin brought up the rear.

The sweet voices of the choristers rose in the hot summer air as they chanted the 54th Psalm. *Deus in nomine tuo salvum me fac*—the notes rang thrilling over the fields, and many of the country folk came out to see, and knelt in the road as the train passed. As they came to the boundary that divided the lands of Blervie from those of the Abbey the procession halted, the two Bishops took their staffs from their chaplains, and the choristers grouped round them, holy water was sprinkled, and incense waved. The Bishop of Moray intoned the word "Oremus," and the Abbot prayed that those lands and their inhabitants might be released from the chain wherewith, by evil-doing, the Devil had been permitted to bind them. Then the Bishop, invoking all the Divine names, and calling for help on all Saints, "O Lord," he chanted, "who hast sent Thy Son into the world to destroy the malice of the Devil, come swiftly and save this land and them that dwell therein from the terror that walketh in darkness, and from the Demons that lay waste in the noonday." Then both raised their pastoral staffs and traced the sign of the cross in the air, after which the procession reformed and wound slowly up the hill to Blervie Tower.

At the foot of the Tower stood Beatrix, stately now and self-composed. Her hood, slightly thrown back with its dark green lining, threw up the red golden tints of her hair; her face was flushed, and the lambent green lights in her eyes gleamed strangely; her red lips were lightly parted, and her wimple rose and fell as her breath came quick and short, the only sign about her of mental perturbation. Behind her stood the boy Hubert and Master Simon Tulloch, and behind these again a group of the serving-men of Blervie Tower, all keenly interested in what was doing. The choristers' song came sweetly borne from the lower ground as the head of the train wound into sight, and the Bishop and Abbot advancing together, and carrying their pastoral staffs, mounted the stairs leading to the door of the Tower, and thence, raising their stain, they blessed all the lands.

Then there was a great silence, and the Bishop of Moray handing his staff again to his chaplain and raising aloft a small reliquary wherein was a fragment of the consecrated Host, faced slowly to the four quarters, and at each one the chime of a silver bell sounded from the foot of the stair, and then he spoke solemnly.

"I command thee, whosoever thou art, O impure and foul spirit, and all thy fellows who oppress and hurt this land of Blervie and those who dwell thereon, and who hast even ventured to attack, wound, and carry off the body of a christened man, even our brother Wilfred Dunbar, and I adjure thee by the mystery of the Incarnation of Our Lord, and by His Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension, by the sending forth of the Holy Spirit, and by the coming of Our Lord to Judgment, that thou disclose to me thy name, and the day and hour of thy going forth, and that thou refrain henceforth and for ever from any attack upon these lands, or this Castle, or any that are therein."

As he spoke the concluding words the long wild howl of a wolf came from the haunted wood, instantly drowned by the chant of the choristers, "Gloria Patri," and the voice of the Abbot of Kinloss intoning the lesson taken from the concluding words of St. Mark's Gospel, and

containing Christ's promises as to the casting out of devils. The Bishop then read a portion from St. Luke, and the Chanter followed with another selection from the same Gospel narrating the Master's miracles of this nature. Then, after giving to the assembled people the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, the Bishop and Abbot, preceded by the acolytes bearing incense and holy water and by the great golden cross, and followed by their chaplains with the pastoral staffs, and by Beatrix, the boy Hubert, and Master Simon Tulloch only, entered the Castle. The Chanter meanwhile, with the monks and the Cathedral staff, under the direction of Father Ferrerius, solemnly circumambulated all the space around the Castle and its offices three times, chanting psalms and attended by the Chanter's own acolytes with holy water and incense.

Meantime those within the Castle proceeded systematically from room to room, chanting psalms and pausing in each room while the Bishop and the Abbot alternately recited the solemn and impressive formulæ of exorcism.

When they came to the chamber in which Sir Wilfred had been found grievously wounded and from which he had so strangely disappeared, Beatrix gripped Simon Tulloch by the arm, saying in an agitated whisper in his ear, "Look there!"

To the eyes of those two there seemed slowly forming the bloodstains they had seen on that day when Sir Wilfred was attacked, even to the two marks of great paws against the wall, and even as they watched, the singing of the acolytes and the voices of the prelates grew faint and distant, and they seemed to see dim and shadowy the form of a huge gaunt white wolf crouching against the wall; and creeping up to it and threatening it was an enormous serpent. At last the wolf made a great spring, and seemed to vanish into or through the wall, and that instant the whole scene disappeared—the voices of the chanting choristers came clear and distinct, as the procession turned to leave the room. So up the winding stair they passed, going through the room where Cecily had lately lodged; and here the Bishop of Moray, who had somewhat of the second sight, declared afterwards that he had been dimly conscious of a great Angel with a rose robe and pale green shadowing wings. Up and up, till they came out on to the roof. Here the two prelates, facing the one to the east, the other to the west, solemnly adjured the foul spirit in the name of the Ever Blessed Trinity to depart and trouble no more the inhabitants of those lands. Each raised the consecrated Host in his right hand, while grasping his staff with the left, and thus made a circuit of the lands, pointing the reliquaries at the marches as they paced round the battlements. Beatrix distinctly saw the dim spectral form of the wolf racing at full speed round the Castle, as though it were pursued by the influences radiating from the Bishop's hands or from the Host, and finally, just before the circuit was closed, making a sudden bolt for either Callifer or the haunted wood, none could tell which. Simon Tulloch saw only a grey shadow, like the shadow of a cloud flitting over the fields.

So, with a great burst of jubilant psalm-singing and thanksgiving, ended the ceremony of exorcism, and a feeling of peace restored settled on all present, and a general expectation that Sir Wilfred Dunbar, released from the power of the Evil One, might walk in and take his place among them hale and whole as though nothing had happened. This expectation, however, was not realised. The assembly on emerging from the Tower broke up into small groups, talking over the scene they had been through; the emotional tension of the last hour was relaxed for the moment, and even the Cistercian monks were freed of their discipline to allow of the necessary reaction.

The Bishop of Moray approached the Lady Beatrix, taking from the hand of his chaplain a large and important-looking missive. "The Cardinal Legate, my daughter, has addressed a communication to the Lord Bishop of Aberdeen and myself touching your marriage. He has

received letters from Rome whereby it appears that the Holy Father is anxious that the consummation thereof should be no longer delayed. And he hath so written to the Cardinal. I will leave with you, my dear child, this copy of the letter addressed to us by the Legate, counting on your prompt acquiescence therein, as indeed is your bounden duty, and I trust your pleasure also. I hope and believe that many happy years of wedlock lie before you with our dear son Sir Norman Leslie of the Glen, who I may tell you, being in special favour at the Court of the Vatican, may confidently reckon on the highest advancement in this realm of Scotland. You know that until by God's mercy your father is restored to his home and kin I am by settlement the guardian of your fortune, even as the Lord Bishop of Aberdeen is by right of kinship the guardian of your person, and we have both decided to take prompt measures in obedience to the Holy Father to hand over your possessions and yourself to the safe keeping of your lawful spouse, deeming, as in conference it appeared to us, that it was not meet that you should remain longer alone and unprotected."

He spoke gravely and solemnly, as befitted a prelate of the Church, handing to Beatrix as he did so the massive packet sealed with the arms of Elgin Cathedral, and counter-sealed with the arms of the Diocese of Aberdeen quartered with the three cushions of Dunbar.

"God pity me!" murmured Beatrix—"a nunnery were preferable."

CHAPTER VIII

THE HEART OF A MONK

The town of Forres slopes away rapidly towards the north, the main street running east and west along the ridge of a bill, and the side streets branching off on either side at an angle, so that seen from above, as from the summit of the Cluny Hill, it has something the appearance of the bones of a herring. The houses down these side streets are set with their gables to the road, and at the time of our story many of them were houses of some pretension.

In an upper room of one of these houses two men were sitting with a stoup of Spanish wine between them. One of them we may at once recognise as Sir Norman Leslie of the Glen. His coarse face and a certain thickness of speech showed that he had already paid some devotion to the flagon. He lay back in his chair with his leathern jerkin unloosened, his legs stretched out in front of him, in lazy and somewhat insolent abandon. His companion was a spare, active-looking man with a face like a ferret, a straggling red beard, and a suit of faded and frayed velvet that had once been a smoke-grey, but now bore many stains of divers colours, the memorials of various drinking bouts.

"My word! Urquhart," said Leslie," but indeed I am weary of biding still here, no disrespect to your town, but in sooth it is damned dull, and that you must know. Yesterday there was not even a monk to talk to; the whole lot were off to transact some mummery of exorcism over the house and lands of my beloved wife—the Devil fly away with her!"

"But why tarry, then, Sir Norman? If, as I understand, you ride to punish the MacIntoshes, why not ride into their country and do it without more ado?"

"And bring the whole of Clan Chattan about my ears, most sapient counsellor? It is but one family of MacIntosh that I design to punish, and them, the Lord helping me, I will exterminate. I mean that old fox Farquhar, not the chief's son and heir though he is ruffian enough for anything, but the outlaw, robber, cateran, he with the seven Sons who has taken to the hills. Of late they raided down the Spey and carried off women and cattle of the Leshies, and a cousin of mine was

killed. So I ride for vengeance. And I look for the guide you promised me, friend Urquhart, that I may come upon them, and leave no man, woman, or child of that cursed family alive, and be away before ever any others of the Clan are aware."

"Àay! I have a trusty man who will take ye there, Sir Norman, a kinsman of my own indeed; and we have no goodwill to Farquhar MacIntosh, for he was in the raid when my cousin and chief of Cromarty was attacked, and many killed, and great booty taken—my kinsman lost his wife and his only son in that raid. This man knows every inch of the MacIntosh country, and will bring ye with dispatch and secretly to the Dune where .Farquhar and his seven sons dwell. But hark ye, Sir Norman, 'tis not only the Clan Chattan ye have to fear. There hath been some sort of a truce patched up between the MacIntoshes and the Cummings, and through the Cummings' lands of Altyre ye needs must pass to win to Farquhar's Dune, and mind ye Sir Alexander of Altyre hath five sons, all stalwart men and good fighters; though indeed here I might help you, for the three youngest are in a sort cousins of mine, being born from his second wife, who was the widow of my own kinsman, Urquhart of Burdsyards."

"Friend Urquhart, I think you trace cousinship farther than your kinsmen would acknowledge, and this seems to me distant enough."

"Well, well! I know the young men, and may be they would listen to me. Alasdair, they say, will be a Churchman; he is called of St. Germaine du Pré, I know not why. Well, Sir Norman, when want you this guide?"

"As soon as may be. Stay, though, there is another matter. I must have Elspet Simpson with me. Luck was ever with me when I rode with her, but curse the wench! she hath such moods. At one time there is naught too much that she can do for me. Then again will she leave me, but always on some pretext or another; either the climate doth not suit her, or she hath promised some one something. The Devil catch her, and he will, for she is a very witch; but she hath bewitched me till I cannot do without her. Faith! Urquhart, I talk to you. You are a faithful dog, I think. Damn it! drink, man, empty out that stoup, and we'll crack another. The Spanish wine is good, though I have no great liking for the Dons. Well, well! this Elspet Simpson I must find. Or you must find her for me."

"Nay, Sir Norman, I am no witch-finder. How should I know of her whereabouts?"

"She's here or here by. Mark you! she was with me on the Border—warned me not to ride to Flodden, and I rode not, and so escaped getting a cracked skull; and she cursed Jock Elliot who had sworn to slay me for some talk about his wife forsooth; made a wax image of him, I think; anyway, he was torn by a wolf and died,

Then must she needs say she was ever ill on the Border lands, and in sooth the wench was ill, but she made herself so with brooding and fretting, got to talking of her soul, too, though the Devil hath that safe enough. In any case, she left me, and never could I find her or hear any tidings of her, till one day at the Abbey there I heard a monk mention her name. It was a tall monk who should have been a soldier, and was once—fought at Flodden, they told me. He spoke of Elspet to the game-legged gardener so when I found him out horse-breaking I asked what he knew of Elspet. 'She hath obsessed a sweet and pious lady,' he said. 'How know you Elspet?' I asked. 'I saw her deviltries down on the Border,' he said, and with that he would say no word more.

"Now who might that be?" said the man addressed as Urquhart. "I did hear something of a lady who they say was bewitched, one who was biding with the Lady Beatrix Dunbar."

"With Dame Leslie, you mean? Speak respectfully of my wife, confound you! So ho sits the wind that way? Elspet hath overlooked my wife's intimate friend! Well, 'twere like her. A

jealous little beast she always was, and mighty angry that I was married—not more angry than I was myself. But, look you, I need the revenues of Blervie. There be over many harpies round me, and besides I must needs have an heir to the Glen. Well, here's the wine—fill up, Urquhart. Gad! a man must talk sometimes."

They drank for some minutes in silence, then Urquhart said, "And what shall I say to this Elspet Simpson, if I should succeed in finding her?"

"Tell her that Norman Leslie needs her at once. Though she left me so cavalierly, truth, I think the wench will come anywhere if she deems I need her. Stay! show her this buckle, 'tis a pledge betwixt us, and bid her by the word 'Grip fast' that she delay not, but come to me with all speed. Lord! but that wench's black eyes have clean bewitched me—I cannot get them out of my mind. Ah, Urquhart! if you must be damned for a woman, get a woman worth being damned for. What was she doing working her witchcraft on my wife's friend, I wonder? Gad! I pity her if Elspet gets a hold of her. Her victims have a bad time, I warrant you. She'll be burnt one of these days. By the way, what the Devil were the monks and the Bishop and all the psalm-singing lot of them doing, exorcising on my wife's lands yesterday? They should have asked my leave, confound them!"

"I heard all about that in the town this morning. It was about the affair of Sir Wilfred Dunbar."

"What affair?"

"Well, you know, Sir Wilfred, the father of the Lady Be—I mean of Dame Leslie," this in response to a dangerous look from his companion,—"Sir Wilfred, I say, was found insensible, torn and mangled they say by a wolf, and thereafter he mysteriously disappeared from out his chamber, whereto none could have access, and no wolf could possibly have come there."

"Ho, ho! a wolf, say you? That smacks devilishly of Elspet's work; 'twas ever a wolf that tore those whom she cursed. So she hath been busy here overlooking my wife's friend and cursing my wife's father, and sending her wolf to savage him? I never heard that any were carried off, though; that is a new game of my black-a-vised gipsy sweetheart. She mustn't play those pranks, though, till I get my wife safe in my own keeping, and the good lands of iBlervie are mine and an heir to the Glen, then she may do what she will and welcome; and if a legion of devils should fly away with my wife and leave the lands and gear—gad! I'd drink their health. Eh! but this Spanish wine is good. Friend Urquhart, you have an excellent house here, yet must I bid you good day. It grows late, and I must even ride to mine Abbey. I deem the pious monks would count it all joy if I were to ride away; they love not one who keepeth seasons of the Church, and hath not been within their sacred walls once yet either to mass or matins or vespers or any of their functions; sooth I love better to fly a hawk at a heron, or to crush a cup with a friend, than listen to their droning chants and their dull sermons. Fare you well, friend!—give me leave."

Here be threw open the window and blew a blast of a hunting horn out into the street, whereat half a score of men-at-arms came clattering up, leading in their midst a great warhorse, while the burgesses fled to right and left, and some were hurt; but little reeked the Leslie I or this, for never in his life had he heeded any other where his own pleasure or convenience were concerned. He stretched his great limbs, turned the flagon upside down to be sure that the last drop had been drained, and strode heavily down the stair, till he reached the street, and mounted on his big horse and trotted away with much noise and jangling and clattering through the quiet streets. Urquhart stood long at the window looking after him. The jackal to a most ignoble lion, so he apostrophised himself, having so much grace left in him that he was somewhat ashamed of his position.

“One were a fool to trust to the Lightsome Leslie,” he muttered to himself. “Yet better have him as a friend than an enemy, since it must be one or the other. And he shall avenge us on the MacIntoshes. Also with an empty pouch, no employment, and no credit, and only this poor house to call my own, one must needs serve whatsoever master Heaven or the Devil may send. What sees he in Elspet Simpson, I wonder? Either he is in love with her or her witchcraft aids him; may be ‘tis both. Well, around Blervie Tower is the place to whistle for that hen falcon. She will harry the Leslie’s bride, I doubt me.”

He stood long looking out from his window, that commanded a magnificent view over the Moray Firth to the hills of Ross, where the afternoon sun now showed the masses of Wyvis in the daintiest tints of cerulean blues and pearl greys.

That sun bathing in his radiant light all the low lands of Moray glinted on the rich accoutrements of Sir Norman of the Glen, as his troop went jangling along the carse road towards the Abbey of Kinloss, where he had temporary lodgement. The road to Elgin, though little more than a rough track trodden by men and horses through the level lands, could be clearly made out in the bright sunlight, and beyond the parish church of Alves it entered a dense wood of oak and beech.

On a large flat stone under a great spreading tree was seated a tall, stately monk; no second glance was needed to see that it was Father Ambrose pursuing his way to Strathisla. His Breviary was open in his hand, but he was not reading; he was lost in meditation, and at intervals talking to himself, after the manner of solitary men.

“A curious case of conscience,” he mused. “On the one hand is Father Adam Elder’s injunction as Confessor, and the Father Abbot’s distinct commands to go to Strathisla; on the other is that strange wild soul Eochain Beag. He made shipwreck of the faith through foolish handling in his youth, yet now hath he almost won his way back, and I deem he is a Christian in all but the name. A few more talks such as we had last night and a soul would be saved. But dare I go back into temptation? Dare I fly in the face of my confessor’s injunction and the Abbot’s commands even to save a soul? Am I strong enough, anyhow, to say farewell absolutely and for ever to the love that tugs my heart? Oh, how bewitchingly she glides before me! *Vade retro Sathanas.”*

Long he sat meditating, then he took out his writing tablets and began to scribble a Latin poem.

Two hundred years later that poem was found, its paper discoloured and frayed with age, between the pages of the monk’s Breviary, which had passed into a private collection, and was roughly Englished thus:—

“I mourn for a love of the past,
A love that for ever will last,
Fast in my memory, fast,
 Fast as the tooth of care.
As the gold round the Virgin’s head
When the light through the window is shed,
A bright auriferous red,
 Such is my darling’s hair.
O loving lips to me denied,
O cloven cherries, laughter-tied,
The great heart of the world is wide—
 A full white heart of misery.
As I stand before the altar,

As I say the Holy Mass,
My love-led lips will falter,
Her image still ill pass,
Smiling sweetly, smiling sadly,
On my hurtful, guilty love;
On my passion cherished madly,
Like an angel from above.
I have striven, I have striven,
With this hurtful, guilty thing,
Still forth it is not driven,—
Ah, God! it hath a sting.
O Heaven, in mercy send me
An end to all my woe!
O Virgin Queen, defend me
From love, my direst foe!"

The monk placed the paper between the pages of his breviary. "Now I am strong," he said to himself; "I have said farewell. I am dead to the world and the world to me. All the same, to help Beatrix I would give my body to be burned and my soul to be damned, if need were. And still the case of conscience remains. Should I obey my confessor and the Lord Abbot, or should I go to the rescue of a living soul gone wrong through no fault as I deem? Would that I could refer this to some other—I am unable to determine what is right to do."

As if in answer to his thought there came a sound of horses' hoofs trotting at a decorous pace along the road, and presently entering the beech wood appeared the train of the Lord Bishop of Moray returning from Kinloss.

"Good!" said Father Ambrose to himself. "I will place the question before his Lordship, and whatsoever he shall say that will I do, and I pray that Heaven in its mercy will inspire and illuminate him that he may rightly resolve my difficulties."

He stood up as the train approached. The Bishop was riding an ambling pad that went softly, as befitted a dignified Churchman; he drew rein on seeing the monk.

"Father Ambrose of Kinloss, is it not?" he inquired.

The monk bowed gravely.

"I heard much of you from the Father Abbot. I understand you fought at the disastrous battle of Flodden, when so many of our best and noblest were killed?"

Father Ambrose bowed again.

"And you are on your way to Strathisla, by the Father Abbot's orders—is it not so?

"That is as your Lordship may decide. A case of a divided duty has arisen where conscience sees not which way to turn. On the one hand is my confessor's advice, backed by the Lord Abbot's commands, to go to Strathisla on the business of the monastery; on the other, a soul in great difficulty has most unexpectedly been thrown in my way, a soul that has wandered far from the fold of the Church, but which I think may now be led back into the faith of Our Lord. By a chance I can reach him, to no other Christian would he hearken at all on the subject of faith. It seems to me that he hath been specially led to me. Tell me, my lord—and may the grace of the Holy Spirit guide you, as it always does, to counsel truly in this—am I justified in refusing this, which seems verily a call of the Spirit? or am I justified in disobeying the advice of my confessor and the commands of my superior the Lord Abbot?"

The Bishop sat for some moments in deep thought. At length he said—

"Father Ambrose, the question is weighty and puzzling, but on the whole I think that a real call has been vouchsafed to you, and you would be seriously to blame if you should neglect it. I give my word, therefore, that you should go where you are called, and should do your best to bring this soul back into the true fold. Thinking this, by the authority committed unto me as Bishop of this diocese, I absolve you *pro hac vice et tempore* from your obligation to obey the Lord Abbot in this particular, and I recall the counsel given by your confessor, and I impose this new duty on you that, in expiation for the sins which you have committed and which you have confessed, you do bring back into the fold of the true Church this wandering sheep. And may God bless you in your endeavours!"

The Bishop raised his hand in benediction, and Father Ambrose knelt by the wayside to receive his blessing, and the train passed on and were lost to sight at a turn of the road.

The Bishop was a good and pious man though slightly pompous, and after he had parted from Father Ambrose his mind was haunted by uncomfortable doubts whether he had counselled aright. The instinctive desire born of the long rivalry between the two foundations might, he thought, have clouded his judgment and inclined him to decide against the ruling of the Abbot. He endeavoured to review the question as though it had been put by a perfect stranger. Yet still he thought he must have given the same answer.

"As God wills," said Father Ambrose, as he replaced his breviary in his girdle and turned his face towards the setting sun, taking the path that struck off to the left hand up the hill towards Callifer, leading to a point away on the wild waste moors of Dallas where he knew he might expect to meet with Eochain Beag.

Meanwhile a messenger sped from Forres up into the Altyre woods charged with a letter from Urquhart to the Dame Cumming of Altyre, recalling the writer's kinship with her first husband, Urquhart of Burdsyards, and requesting that she would use her influence with her stalwart sons Robert, Alasdair, and James to allow free passage through the Cummings' country for Sir Norman Leslie of the Glen, who rode to take vengeance on one family of the MacIntoshes who had done grievous wrong to the family of Urquhart, to which her Ladyship owed some affectionate remembrance, and who were in no way connected with those MacIntoshes who had recently concluded a truce with the house of the Cummings, but were outlaws and freebooters, against whom should be the hand of every honest man.

Dame Cumming was walking in the woods with her second son Alasdair when the messenger met her. She was at first greatly puzzled, for she failed to recall this alleged kinsman of her late husband; but Alasdair, reading the letter over her shoulder, said—

"Never heed who the rascal is, mother—in truth it matters not. I know this Farquhar MacIntosh, a thief and a cateran, and Leslie is one of the biggest blackguards in Scotland. If they should exterminate each other the world will be all the cleaner, and if by chance Leslie is victorious we will call him to account as he comes back for molesting one who is at peace with the Cummings;—so the land will be quit of a pair of rascals anyway."

He called up the messenger.

"Say to Master Urquhart that the permission is granted. I, Alasdair Cumming, make myself responsible that his friends shall pass in safety through the Cummings' country."

The messenger bowed low and withdrew, and the Dame and her son continued their walk.

Up in Blervie Tower Beatrix Dunbar was sorely ill at ease. Over and over again she had read the missive which the Bishop had handed to her without any ray of comfort coming to her. It was curt and concise almost to baldness; to the scholastic Latin in which it was written the Bishop

had appended a translation, hardly indeed required; for Beatrix, educated by her scholar father, could read the ancient classic tongue almost as easily as modern Scots.

It set forth that the Cardinal Legate had received instructions from the Vatican that the Holy Father hearing that the marriage celebrated *per procuratores* between his well-beloved son Sir Norman Leslie of the Glen, and his beloved daughter Beatrix, only child of Sir Wilfred Dunbar of Blervie Tower in the county of Moray, had not yet been consummated, and that the parties were still living apart in disregard of the said marriage ceremony; therefore the Holy Father did command that the said Norman Leslie should with all convenient speed take unto him his said wife Beatrix, and should live with her according to the due intention of Christian marriage, and he ordained that the Bishop of Moray should exhort both parties thereto that they conform presently to this decree, and that the Bishop of Aberdeen, as being, in her father's absence, by reason of kinship, guardian of her person, should exercise his power to hand her over to her lawful spouse as aforesaid, and that failing their doing so he should take such means as he should think most advisable to ensure their obedience thereto. To which missive the Cardinal Legate had added a note of his own to the effect that, owing to the strange and unexplained disappearance of Sir Wilfred Dunbar, the said Beatrix being left without any lawful guardian, it was the more essential that the decree of the Holy Father should be carried into effect with no delay whatsoever, for that the same was a position most undesirable for any Christian young woman, and he accordingly called on the Bishop of Aberdeen as the interim guardian of the said Beatrix to enforce the same immediately.

To this there was appended a postscript by both Bishops setting forth that the decree had been served upon Sir Norman Leslie, who had promised compliance therewith when he should return from the present expedition on which he was bound, and wherein not merely his interest but his honour and the honour of his house were involved.

In these clear-cut sentences lay no hope. Beatrix perceived a web woven around her from which no escape was possible, except on the remote chance of her father being restored to her; even the refuge of a convent seemed out of the question in view of the Pope's letter and the Cardinal's addendum. She was a married woman, she could only be treated as a fugitive from her husband, and she knew well that in those days but small grace was extended to such, especially when the husband was a man of importance as was Sir Norman Leslie. Even if the convent at Elgin would receive her for a few days, she would soon be sent back to him. In her father, however, she had supreme confidence.

Then she recurred to the other missive in her hand, as often and as eagerly conned as the one from the Bishop. At the Dune on Callifer she was to hear tidings of her father, to be convinced that he was alive and on the road to recovery.

Hardly any of the country folk even by day would venture to pass the Dune at Callifer; it was scarcely less dreaded than the haunted wood at night, and on the night of the full moon it needed more than ever an undaunted courage, yet this did Beatrix propose to herself. Even at first she had not shrunk from the adventure. Now, since the Pope's letter, it seemed the only possible thing to do, if the future were to hold any hope for her. She recalled also Master Simon Tulloch's suggestion that a champion for her might be found in Alasdair Cumming. Why had he said that? It was a curious thing to say, but Master Simon was not wont to say things at random, and sometimes he was very slow to give his reasons. Well, if Alasdair would befriend her, she was willing to welcome any champion. Simon had once spoken of Father Ambrose, but what could a monk do? She blushed hotly as she caught herself thinking of him, and after all she had never seen his face, only she had felt those keen eyes burning on her in the Chanter's garden.

She looked at the sky; the sun was setting fast, midnight was but a few hours off, and she must start fully an hour before to be on Callifer at the stroke of twelve. She hurried within to dismiss her bower maiden to bed, and see that all was well in the Tower, and make a few simple preparations for her midnight expedition.

Unknown to her, Master Simon Tulloch walked up to the base of the Tower, and passed round out of sight behind the flanking walls. He knew she would indignantly refuse his aid or his company, nevertheless he was resolved that his dear lady should run no risk unattended by him, however much he had to keep out of her sight and hearing.

CHAPTER IX

MIDNIGHT ON CALLIFER

Blervie Tower in the early sixteenth century stood as it were on the boundary line between civilisation and the wild country. From the shoulder of the hill on which it stood the ground sloped rapidly down towards the fertile lowlands of Moray, dotted over with smiling farms and the rich Abbey lands, interspersed with magnificent beech woods. But looking in the other direction was a No Man's Land, hated and shunned by all the peasantry, a district of extremely ill repute. A short distance to the south-west of the Castle was a stone circle, said to have been in ancient days a Druidic temple, where, so it was reported, the vilest of heathen rites had been continually practised and the stones were bloodstained with human sacrifices. It was firmly believed among the people that demons haunted the old stones, and that any one who incautiously ventured therein at certain times was carried away and kept in endless torment, and never seen again. Moreover, other legends had it that under the stones there was a hidden treasure, and whoever could get into the circle on a certain night when the demons were away at the sea, might seize the treasure and keep it, if only he could get away before the rightful guardians could return. Notwithstanding this tempting tradition, the sinister stories obtained such a hold that the place was universally shunned, and a thick wood had grown up around the stones whose whereabouts and indeed their very existence became almost a matter of myth and legend. Eastward from the haunted wood and behind the Castle but only some half-mile from the cluster of small cottages around its base was the margin of a desolate peat bog, on which grew here and there clumps of dreary, wind-distorted trees, and beyond the bog the shoulder of the hill rose again towards Callifer, which was another reputed Druid centre. This high ground, the highest for a circuit of some ten or a dozen miles, was covered with a wood of very old oak trees, vast and gnarled and twisted, so old that some of them might well have sheltered the white-robed Druids in the days when their faith was the living religion of these islands. On the very top of the hill was a high cairn of rough stones, surrounded by a turf rampart, known as the Dune of Callifer.

On the southern side the hill sloped down again to the lands of Dallas, and beyond and to the right of these were the woods of Cumming of Altyre, and farther on might be seen in the dim distance the bare hilltops of the MacIntosh country. The feuds of these two great families, their mutual raids and slaughters would fill many volumes, though here and there in history there occurs some isolated and ephemeral alliance between cadet branches; but on the lands of Moy no Cumming might ever set foot, not even as gillie or gamekeeper or crofter. Yet there is little record that either family interfered with the other in their raids on the fertile pastures of the land of Moray, where, as it was once said by a Highland cateran, "every man taketh his prey." So the

civilised lands where the Church influences prevailed and peaceful occupations were followed in the main were separated almost by a sharp line from the hill country of the wild Scots. But to both that hilltop whose highest point was marked by the Dune of Callifer was a spot of dread, a sinister district haunted by wild beasts, and still worse by evil spirits, the false gods of the old heathen to whom human sacrifices were offered and all manner of cruel and wicked rites were performed. Ill luck ever brooded over this desolate tract. If an old woman should gather dry and rotten wood there to kindle her fire, be sure the hut would be burnt down, or her cow refuse her milk, or her lambs would die, or some mischance or other would surely befalL Nay, if a man did but enter the accursed place be would be dogged by ill luck, and his neighbours would avoid him as one forbid.

When Sir Wilfred Dunbar had ordered that hunt for the wolf whose tracks had been seen the day before the mysterious attack upon himself, the serving-men with one consent, notwithstanding their master's imperative orders, had refused to enter the evil land. Not only their own superstitious dread of what might happen to themselves, but their fear of their neighbours, and of what might be said of them, or indeed done to them, held them in strong leash; for it was on record that one man who had stumbled in there when blind drunk, and emerged seemingly unharmed, had been deemed a wizard on account of his immunity, and because he had sold his soul to the Devil was beaten to death with pitchforks.

Simon Tulloch had determined without any hesitation in the light of day that nothing would deter him—come what might, he would not suffer his dear lady to brave the dangers of the haunted land alone. But now in sooth, as he stood near the margin of that sinister tract, as the full moon rose slowly over the crest of Callifer, things wore a different aspect. He was a man of good pluck and resource, strong and sturdy and little burdened with superstition. Still, if there were really uncanny things, could he help her? Might he not indeed hinder and endanger her? She was a very saint of God; he was, he admitted to himself with shame, anything but a saint. In view of anything pertaining to the Devil, such as was only too likely to be stirring within those evil precincts, she would be safe from her holiness, but what about him? Could her saintliness save him? And even if so, it would be she who would help him, not he her—was this fair? Again, should they both come out safe and the thing should ever be known, most assuredly both of them would be burnt or drowned by the infuriated populace, as having unlawful dealings with the Evil One. Now, in such case, if it chanced to Beatrix alone, he Simon Tulloch had some influence with the Abbot, and even perhaps with the Bishop; but if he were in the same condemnation he could be of no assistance to her.

Specious reasoning was this, yet it served its purpose under the moonlight; for in good sooth Master Simon Tulloch was afraid, and was also mortally ashamed of being so, and would not for worlds acknowledge the fact even to himself. He had no fear for his own skin, he had been in the wars, and had met blows and wounds and even imminent death with cheery and imperturbable good humour; but these strange things that strike unseen, horrible formless evils that threaten not the body only but the soul, that daze a man's brain and turn his blood to water, that was a different matter. And so as he walked along, keeping the Lady Beatrix in sight, as he had vowed to do, he yet kept carefully along the lower path, as far as reasonably he could get from the margin of the forbidden tract. Yet all the while he tried in the brain of him to reconcile his loyalty and his physical pluck with his fear of the uncanny and the supernatural. Much also he wondered at the courage of the Lady Beatrix, as closely wrapped in black hood and mantle and indistinguishable save for her gracious carriage of body from any ordinary peasant woman, she walked calmly and steadily along the path leading into the great woods around Callifer.

Steadily she walked, it is true, yet her mind was far from steady. Beatrix was a very woman, though all the courage of her race was in brain and nerve. Belief in supernatural forces and in the physical powers of the Prince of Evil were universal at the time of our story, and there was no doubt in her mind as to the terrible risks she was running. To physical dangers she could brace herself, but at any moment some unseen, unknown power of ill might enter into and obsess her, paralysing will and thought. Possession of the Devil was a real and horrible thing, yet on the other hand was this terrible alternative of the marriage with Leslie of the Glen. This seemed unavoidable, unless her father could save her, and there was no other way of seeing him except by means of this strange summons to the Dune of Callifer. Everything else had been tried and failed, and now the Leslie claimed his bride, and the Church backed his claim, and she felt utterly helpless. The thought of all this and of the one ray of hope held out to her as it were from an unknown hand in the mysterious epistle that had brought her here this night seemed to give her courage to face anything, and instinctively she dwelt on these thoughts to banish the cold chill fear that, spite of herself, would creep over her. Her whole soul shuddered with sick dread of Leslie, as if from contact with some unclean animal. She had appealed to the Church, and the Church had responded that she was married to him, and demanded from her the performance of her duty as a wife. The law was powerless, no convent would receive a runaway wife. Her father, it is true, was a scholar and a student; he held Churches and Church law in no very high esteem. He had great powers, she knew, uncanny and unlawful powers the country people believed, perhaps he might be able even to defy this Leslie. But he was gone, spirited away, overcome possibly by spells stronger than his own. Then out of all this darkness and confusion a friendly hand had been held out to her, from what was deemed the most evil and sinister quarter in the whole of the land of Moray. No matter, the message was friendly, and the only friendly one she had received, the only gleam of hope. She felt at the moment that she would have grasped the hand of the Devil himself if he only offered to free her from this loathsome marriage.

Timidly she looked up to the great dark forest whose gaunt twisted trees that looked like tortured souls writhing in agony rose close to her on her right hand, and which she must enter in a hundred paces more. Simon Tulloch watching from below saw what was unseen to her, a tall figure standing on a knoll silhouetted against the sky. The moon, still low in the east, was large and red, and the figure seemed to be wrapt in a sort of fiery halo. Simon, if he had thought calmly and collectedly, would have known that it was only the red moon shining through a light vapour condensed from the chill night air. But in his state of brain excitement it seemed the Prince of Evil himself in a garment of flame. Or was it Eochain Beag? If it were the former, he Simon could but pray to be delivered from the malice of the Devil;—if it were the latter, then he who had summoned her was waiting to receive her, and he could do nothing, and salving his conscience with these thoughts he fell down on his knees and began to pray lustily.

Meanwhile Beatrix, holding on her way, pursued the path that turned now under a giant oak tree of many hundred years' growth and then lost itself in the thick moss and fern that carpeted the ground. Very dark and forbidding looked the wood. Vivid gleams of brilliant moonlight alternated with the densest black shadows, striking now on some fallen tree whose barkless twisted boughs looked like tangled white serpents, now on some small stagnant pool that looked even more gruesome.

The tension of nerve and will that enabled her to go on alone wrought up her imagination to fever point. Evil things were all round her, fiery eyes gleamed among the mosses on the dank ground, imps horrible in their grotesquerie grinned at her from among the branches. One she seemed to see more clearly than the others bore a fantastic resemblance to the Leslie's griffin

crest. Next moment she saw it was but a twisted oak branch, but it started a new horror. What if this summons on which she had built so much were but a trap of Leslie himself to draw her into these lonely woods, where he might seize and carry her off unmolested, and there would be none then who would ever dare to rescue her. Her brain was whirling—would she faint? or would she go mad? Either was equally horrible here, in these ghastly shades, demon-haunted. Then on her came the thought of the power of the Church. If only she could invoke that mighty force! Not the Abbot or the Bishop—their solemn exorcism had passed off without effect so far as she could see—but some real saint, some strong Churchman—Ah! what was that? A long grey shape i~hat slid past at a swinging trot, or was it only a gleam of moonlight—a delusion? She could no longer distinguish. There it was again, a little farther in the wood—a wolf—it must be! And now her need shaped itself—If only Father Ambrose were here! And with the thought there came a wild longing for that tall, stately figure; she could feel the keen eyes that burned upon her from behind the folds of his hood;—with him she would feel safe, but with no other. Truly her brain played her strange tricks! Almost out loud she called for the monk, feeling that if she did not fall on the ground, there to lie and die, she must shriek aloud and rush into the depths of the wood, to throw herself before the great grey wolf, a self-immolated victim.

But as she called in thought her brain grew calmer, as though the very mention of the Father's name brought back strength and sanity. Why was it that she began to feel as though she could imagine him walking there beside her, supporting and comforting her? Willingly, gladly, she let her fancy play upon this thought. Among all these shapes and thoughts of evil this must be good. And if the bare thought of the Father could bring such peace, surely he must be a great saint~; hence to dwell on his image was the truest and best protection she could have.

Fired by this thought, she concentrated all her imagination, stimulated as it was to the highest pitch, to formulate his appearance by her side. In fancy she could see the very texture of his black robe and his white hood and scapular; the wonderful eyes burned on her. She could not see the face distinctly, and memory gave her no aid, but she seemed to see the glint of a crisp chestnut curl under the white hood. Timidly she put out her hand, and almost thought she felt the harsh contact of the monk's coarse habit—almost felt through it the warm clasp of a strong hand. Then, with a reaction, she knew it was all delusion and that she was alone; yet so powerful and consoling was the fancy that she strove hard to recapture it. In vain at first. The world of imagination took control of her, refused to be manipulated by her will. The evil things were all round her, only loathsome now rather than terrible, they were shapes of death or of a hideous life in death, dank and decaying vegetation, slimy and decaying flesh rotting away in silent, stagnant pools. The wholesome moonlight was quenched, but a ghastly bluish phosphorescent light played over the ground and among the trunks of the dead and rotten trees.

Suddenly, from far away down towards the low grounds, came the distant sound of a trumpet; her quick ear caught the notes of Leslie's call. Almost immediately it was answered by the wild howl of a wolf from the deep shadows of the wood, but near at hand. Absolute human terror now assailed Beatrix, almost displacing the supernatural awe of the uncanny wood. Her premonition, then, was true; it was a subtle scheme of Leslie's that had lured her here at the midnight hour, and the only alternative to yielding herself to him was to fall a prey to the wolf. The events of the last few days had greatly clarified her ideas of her own position. She knew now that she was in fact a married woman seeking to avoid her lawful husband, of that there was no doubt,—the Church was certain on the point, and moreover prepared to enforce his claim,—not for her, then, could be even the satisfaction of the wronged maiden resisting a lawless ravisher; as such she would have both right and human sympathy on her side, and congratulations on her triumph if

she resisted successfully. No, in any event whatever, she was wicked, she would be reprobated; and if she died, Church and laity alike would pronounce it to be a righteous doom.

Again sounded that challenging howl of the wolf, and the spectre-haunted deadness of the putrid marsh struck with a mortal chill on her soul. If she died here, none would ever know. Once more she called for Father Ambrose, but aloud this time, as she felt her strength failing, her knees giving way beneath her, and her sight growing dim.

As she called, she felt almost immediately a strong hand grasp hers, and a tall black-robed figure was walking at her side—not, however, with the familiar white hood and scapular. A black cowl was drawn over his head, his face was invisible, but the hand that held hers was, she saw, lean and strong, tanned by sun and wind, yet delicately formed and finely shaped—a hand of race. She wondered afterwards how she had come to notice such a detail so minutely. What she was most conscious of, however, at the time was that from that hand there came to her a feeling of strength, of courage and sanity. All imaginary terrors fled, delusions vanished; the moonlight among the twisted stems was just ordinary moonlight and no more, and therewith came also a strong sense of human protection. Wolves might howl through the wood, Leslie of the Glen and his troop might range through the fertile lowlands in search of her, the Church might thunder, and judges might pronounce what sentence they would, here was a firm rock at last to which she could cling fast, and that would never fail her, come what might. She missed, however, the sensation of the burning eyes devouring her from under his cowl, and when he had seemed to walk beside her before it was in the white hood and scapular that she knew so well.

For half a moment her delusions returned. Father Ambrose was dead—she was dead—all were dead—in a dead world. At that instant they emerged from the shadow of the last great oak tree into an open patch of full clear moonlight, and there before them rose the great Dune of Callifer.

Just at the edge of the wood, near to the spot where they had left it, was a little wattled shelter, hardly more than a circle of poles with withy boughs intertwisted, and a beehive roof, open at one side towards the Dune, and inside of it lay a heap of soft, dry moss. To this she was led, yielding herself to every motion of her guide with a delicious sense of confidence and security, and sank down on the moss feeling as though after all the toils of earth she had at length reached the heavenly rest. Then clouds and oblivion swept down, and she slept.

And first confused lights and colours of rare beauty passed before her eyes, and faded into a warm, velvety dark, then sweet, faint strains of far-away music murmured plaintively and sank to silence, and deliciously she lost consciousness, but soon waking again with a sensation as though the brain were washed and thoroughly refreshed. A cool hand was on her brow, and a feeling of well-being was over her.

As she opened her eyes the hand was removed. A tall man, very spare, and erect as a lance, stood by the opening of the hut, clad in a dark hued robe somewhat like a cassock and bordered with brown fur, a black skull-cap on his head, and a long grey beard that fell almost to his girdle. He was leaning on a great staff of nearly his own height, and as she looked at him with wondering curiosity but no fear in her eyes, he raised the staff and pointed to the dune.

She saw then that at its base and fronting the shelter where she lay on the moss-heap was a door, standing wide open, disclosing a cell within, brightly lighted now with large lamps that shed their rays on a couch whereon lay her father.

Beatrix would have started up to run to him, but the tall bearded man motioned her back with a simple gesture of his left hand, and a feeling of powerlessness surged over her whole body, as though vitality were withdrawn from every muscle, and only eyes and ears remained fully alive.

On the other side of the entrance there stood another figure, tall almost as the bearded man, robed all in black, and with his head covered entirely with a black cowl. It was he who had walked beside her in her utmost need in the wood, and had brought her to this haven of rest. Somehow she felt an increased sense of safety and protection in seeing him.

And so for a measurable space of time these three—Beatrix between the two tall strangely robed men—remained motionless as statues gazing at the recumbent figure of Sir Wilfred Dunbar.

Meanwhile, Master Simon Tulloch, whom we left praying vigorously by the roadside as he saw his dear lady entering the evil wood, and passing into the very power of the Devil, was roused from his devotions by the sound of that same trumpet which she had heard, and he too recognised Sir Norman Leslie's call, and the wild howl of the wolf came in weird answer.

"God save us!" he cried, "what ill deeds are in the wind now? It must be some unusual deviltry that brings the Leslie out at such an hour."

Down on the low ground, in the clear moonlight, could be plainly seen a troop of spearmen winding up the hill from the Abbey. Once again the trumpets rang out the Leslie's call, and again came the wolf-howl in answer. It was strange and uncanny. Simon, puzzled beyond measure, sat down on the ground and scratched his head. Norman Leslie was riding out for no good, and if he should meet the Lady Beatrix Heaven alone knew what evil schemes might enter into his head. Simon prayed earnestly that she might not return from Callifer till the peril had passed. On the other hand, there was not only the danger of the Devil within the wood, and of the evil spirits of the old heathen who still haunted it, but there was the obvious and manifest danger of the wolf. There could be no manner of doubt that the wolf so often heard of during the last few days was there still, loose and raging—the same, beyond question, that had torn and mangled Sir Wilfred Dunbar—the same whose tracks bad been seen by Robin Thomson the smith, and for which Sir Wilfred's serving-men had been sent to hunt the day that he had been so fearfully attacked.

Simon shuddered as he thought of the Lady Beatrix in the wood exposed to this beast that had well-nigh slain her father. But what could he do? Then his superstitious terrors revived again at the apparent uncanny understanding between the Leslie and the wolf.

On the road below the orchards of Burgie, Leslie of the Glen rode easily along, his trumpeter beside him.

"Heard ye that?" he said, calling up an esquire from behind. "Was it not the note of a wolf? By the Mass but I thought I recognised it. Sound again! Devil take ye, man!—not afraid of a wolf, are ye? Sound, confound you! By the living Lord I believe it was Elspet Simpson's cry! You remember, boy, that wench could mock the cry of a wolf so that its own dam might well be deceived."

Again the trumpet sounded, and again came the long low howl in response.

"There it is!" cried Leslie in great delight. "I swear *'twas* Elspet's call. Say, boy, you were with me on the Border, and you remember, was that not the call of Elspet Simpson when she mimicked a wolf?"

"Nay, master," said the young esquire, his voice quavering. "I pray you ask me not. 'Twas witchcraft, and it frights me, for I was christened man, and I fear no mortal danger, but 'tis no part of a man's duties to place his soul in peril to the Devil."

"Tut, tut, boy I art a fool. Elspet Simpson was just a gipsy lass, born and bred in the free, open air, and she could mimic any bird or beast in broad Scotland. Witchcraft, indeed! Ày! the fools would have it that she had a wolf for her familiar. But you who have ridden with me for a year and a half now, and looking forward to the gilt spurs I warrant, should know better. Besides,

Elspet was my sweetheart, as well ye know, and Devil a hit am I ashamed to own it, and he who calls my sweetheart a witch shall feel if the Leslie's arm hath lost its pith. Nonsense! nonsense! Anyhow, know this, and don't forget it, we need Elspet when we ride to punish the MacIntoshes. No one else can guide us through that~ God-forsaken country, and if she has come back to me now, when all these days I have been seeking for her—well, then, I'll give thanks to God, or Devil, or whoever hath brought her in my way again. Now, then, forward! and no more nonsense, as you value your skins."

The young esquire fell behind as they rode forward silently; but Master Urquhart, who rode beside the boy, chuckled grimly, and muttered to his companion—"Gad! it's not wholesome for a man to have a wife and a sweetheart at the same time, especially if his sweetheart be a black-a-vised gipsy that can cry like a wolf, and his wife be a Dunbar with all the pride and the fight of all the Dunbars in her blood. Deuce take me, my Lord of the Glen, if I want to be in your shoes

CHAPTER X

MONK AND DRUID

For a few minutes, that seemed like ages to Beatrix, the little group of four remained motionless. Then the tall bearded man spoke, and his voice was low and musical, like the tones of the great hell at the Abbey.

"My child, I have kept my word. I promised to you and to him that this night you should see your father and should be certified yourself that he was alive and recovering. Much depended on your own courage and fortitude, but on these I knew I could rely, and my confidence was not in vain. You have to-night shown yourself worthy of your great race."

"Let me go to him!" cried Beatrix. "Let me nurse him and take care of him, now that I have found him again! Oh! may I not take him back to-night to his own home, where he will be safe?"

"Peace, child!" said the old man. "See you not at present he sleeps? When he wakes you shall go to him and hear his story from his own lips. But as for safety—was he safe before in Blervie Tower? And it was far safer then than now. There are deadly foes; there are those who seek to possess his lands, and they think because he is a scholar he has hoarded treasure; there are those who seek to possess yourself—to force you to an evil union. See you now—all the powers of your kin, all the powers of the law, in the person of the Sheriff and the Earl of Moray, all the powers of the Church, wielded by the Abbot and the Bishop, were in vain to discover whither Sir Wilfred Dunbar had been taken, or his assailant. Yet there he lies, rapidly recovering, and his assailant is in my power. Leslie of the Glen would harry the whole land of Moray—ay! and of broad Scotland—to find you and coerce you to marry him, and the Church would aid him, and the law dare not say nay, yet here you are safe as in an impregnable fortress. You have dared to pass through the defences, but none less brave and true, none less innocent than yourself, could do so."

Beatrix shuddered at the memory of the terror she had passed through.

"I was helped," she murmured; "a monk with a black robe and white scapular, a Cintercian monk, walked beside me. Where is he? I would fain thank him."

Her companion once more laid a cool hand on her forehead as he stood beside her.

"Look up," he said.

Over her father's couch was bending the familiar figure in the black robe and white scapular that she had learned mentally to call Father Ambrose. Still his face was hidden in his hood, but

that tiny crisp curl she had noticed before was visible beneath it. In wonder she turned to look at the black shrouded figure at her left hand, the man who had guided her to this wattled hut. He still stood motionless as before—the weird, mysterious protector whom she had thought to be Father Ambrose. A hundred questions rose in her mind. What was real and what was delusion in this strange region? Was she awake, or still dreaming?

As though anticipating and replying to her unuttered thoughts, the musical, melancholy voice spoke again in answer.

"No, my child, it is not delusion; it is the power of seeing somewhat more than the mere material envelope of things. In this region to which you have penetrated, and to which I bid you welcome, the dread it causes, its sinister history, and the superstition of the people, all help to guard and protect a spot sacred far beyond the ordinary.

"Sacred?" said Beatrix. "I thought it was accursed."

She marvelled at herself, resting here on the moss-heap in perfect ease of body and rest of mind, almost forgetting that she was absolutely within the sinister, forbidden district, and conversing with no sense of constraint or of strangeness with this man who seemed like a being from another world. Her brain was active and all her senses vividly alive, her limbs were as though paralysed and her muscles refused their office, yet she felt absolutely safe. She felt towards this bearded stranger as a good Catholic might feel on beholding his patron saint in vivid dream.

"This ground," he continued, "was sacred thousands of years ago. On the top of this hill the powers of good—all they who bring peace and blessing on the earth—concentrated their beneficent influences, and here the true doctrines of the faith of wisdom and love were taught and practised long before the Eastern teaching filtered through Rome to this land. Be that as it may, the angels still keep the spot pure from profanation, and they have fenced it with a wall of terror. Yet they who believe shall not be afraid for the terror that walketh ty night. You were called, and you believed and came, and because you believed the terror had no power to hurt. You called on my dear friend Father Ambrose, and instantly his thought was round you to protect you. It was not himself you saw in the black robe and the white scapular, but it was the guarding and guiding of his thought that you felt, and the terrors fled away. So it is here; for those who enter this holy spot see that *which* is. And so they who enter to profane the sanctuary with evil and hatred in their hearts may well be slain by the terrors they so rashly dare."

"Who, then, are you?" said Beatrix almost in a whisper, awed by the solemn tones of the old man's voice and his mysterious harangue. "Are you a saint or angel? Or one of the mighty dead come back to earth?"

"Nay, child; I am none of these. I am the last priest of the old faith, the true religion of our race, wherein is embraced all the faith of Christ and all the faith of every other great religion of the world; older than them all, it will outlast them all. Even as the Celt will be here always, whatever other races may come and go, so will his religion lie at the base of whatever other faith may prevail for the time being."

She listened as in a dream, feeling that the supernatural was all round her. The powers that are now more or less familiarly know as hypnotism were then unexplored, and where exercised were ascribed either to the direct agency of the Devil or to the interposition of some saint or angel, according to whether it were practised by an outsider or by the hands of Holy Church herself.

All who have given even a slight degree of attention to the subject will understand how very light hypnosis would be necessary to account for the calm peace and trust in the stranger that came over Beatrix, and for the materialisation of natural and almost inevitable fancies.

“Is that really Father Ambrose attending on my father?” she said. “Or,” as a new thought crossed her mind, “is it really my father, or is he too a delusion? Do tell me plainly what is real and what is not.”

“That is in very deed your father, and as soon as he wakes you shall go to him, talk to him, and satisfy yourself that it is his very self. Father Ambrose has nursed and tended him, and will do so again. I merely caused you to see his wraith there that you might understand how you saw him in the wood when yet his body though not far away was not actually beside you.”

“But this is a miracle!”

“Nay, it is no miracle—a simple knowledge commonly taught by the priesthood of the old faith, whereby also they were able to cast out devils and heal diseases, even as your own priests could do if only they had faith as a gram of mustard seed. But they are corrupt! Even for their prayers they demand money; falsely they think that the gift of God can be purchased f or money.”

The long, dreary howl of a wolf rang through the wood close to them as it seemed. Eochain Beag half turned in the direction from which it came, and raising his staff be pointed it steadily towards the sound.

“Peace, peace, perturbed spirit!” he said solemnly and impressively. “Yea! I know thy lover calls, yet will I not let thee go. Ere yen silver shield of the moon hath become her sacred sickle thou shalt thank me for restraining thee.”

An angry snarl ending in a low, wailing cry answered him.

As if roused by the sound, Sir Wilfred Dunbar opened his eyes and looked round a little vaguely at first, afterwards gradually recognising and assimilating the persons and circumstances.

At the same moment the strange powerlessness which had come upon Beatrix seemed to give way. The two men who stood by the entrance of the wattled hut extended each a hand, and between the two she advanced to the door in the Dune within which lay her father. The form of Father Ambrose had vanished. Eochain Beag looked strangely picturesque, with his white hair and his long snowy beard. He wore, as she could now clearly perceive, a robe down to his feet, but of what colour she could not tell in the moonlight, save that it was dark; it was clasped on the breast with a golden brooch shaped like two rings joined by a rigid bar, each ring being filled with filigree devices wrought in fine gold wire. On his shoulder was a badge, also in gold, shaped like a fish. The other man, who was as tall as Eochain, was closely muffled from head to foot in a black robe whose hood completely veiled his face.

Sir Wilfred looked somewhat emaciated and pale from his illness, but the appearance of returning health and strength was about him; his velvet skull-cap rested on his close grey curls, and his curly beard and moustache was trimmed and neat. His grey eyes twinkled as he saw his daughter advancing between her two conductors.

“My dear child,” he said, “welcome! I knew you would come to-night; my good friend here promised me I should see you, and he never breaks his word.”

“Father,” said Beatrix, “I have come to take you home—back to the Tower and your own old rooms and your books—and nurse you till you are well and strong again.”

Sir Wilfred smiled and shook his head, and signed towards Eochain Beag.

“Ask him—nothing can be done without his consent. You know not what a Supreme Lord he is over all that are here.”

Eochain shook his head gravely.

“My patient is in no condition to be moved at present. Yet you shall nurse him, Lady Beatrix; but you must be content to be our guest for a short time, at all events. Blervie Tower would be no safe place for you tonight; indeed, it was for this among other and more vital reasons that I desired you to come here to us at this time rather than any other.”

“The Tower not safe!” cried Beatrix. “What can you mean? It has sheltered the Dunbars for two hundred years.”

“Nevertheless, to-night it will be in the hands of Sir Norman Leslie of the Glen. Seeking in your father’s absence to possess himself of you, and to compel you to join him as his wife before he rides on into the MacIntosh country, he expects to have an easy enterprise; he knows not that you have powerful friends, able and willing to protect you against any of his evil house. And I think, moreover, that Blervie Tower will give him such a scare that it will be many a Long day before he or any of his following will venture to set foot within it.”

“How can I thank you?” said Beatrix. “When all the world seemed to be turned against me, and there was no help or hope anywhere, you—a total stranger—stretched a hand to me in my extremest need.”

“Nay, not quite a total stranger,” said Eochain. “Your father and I have been fellow-students of the mysteries of Nature, though we have met less often than I could have wished, and I have seen yourself many times when you thought you were unobserved. It was my watching of you that convinced me you would have the courage to pass through the terrors of the haunted wood, which are really no terrors to those who come in faith and with a clear conscience. But see now—”

Leaving her side for a moment, he passed round behind Sir Wilfred’s couch, and drew aside a heavy curtain of skins that hung there, disclosing a small room beyond, wherein was a couch, a prie-dieu placed in front of a crucifix on the wall, and other furniture very like Beatrix’s own room in Blervie Tower.

“Here you shall stay to-night, my child; and to you I commit the trust to watch over your father and take care of him—not that he will want for anything till the time for his morning draught at dawn. But you will be there, in case he should call for anything. I think, however, that he will not waken, nor will you. My good friend here and I have a serious and urgent task to accomplish before the dawn breaks.”

“The wolf?” said Beatrix.

“The wolf,” replied Eochain, “is safely under my control. These howlings mean nothing. But even though it were loose and ranging the forest, nothing living can enter into the Dune of Callifer when once the entrance is closed. Outwardly, as you see, it seems but a cairn of rough stones, but within and around these two chambers it is a solid core bound together by a cement whereof the priest-builders of old had the secret, which will turn the edge of a pick and resist the stoutest crowbar—nay, even this modern gunpowder that so much is told of would fail to move it.”

“I have much to say to you, dear Beatrix,” said Sir Wilfred. “Fain would I crave your forgiveness for the cruel injury I did you unthinking when I wedded you to that evil ruffian, Leslie of the Glen. I knew not his character, I thought only of obtaining a strong man’s protection for you when I should be here no longer; and indeed at the time I thought my span was very short, and the Inneses were threatening all of our house and name.”

“All this may well wait, Sir Wilfred,” said Eochain; now you must sleep. Already you have had somewhat overmuch excitement.” His voice changed to something like a chant. “Fair are the fields of scarlet poppies, and drowsy is the scent that you inhale. Languorously the warmth

creeps over all your limbs, and more heavily you nestle down among the cushions. A weight is on your eyeballs—you can even now scarce keep your eyes open; the heavy scent of the poppy steals through all your senses—my voice sounds to you faint and far away. Scarlet and green arc the poppies, and heavy and hot is their scent. You cannot resist that soft influence, soothing the weary brain."

He spoke in a slow, rhythmic cadence, growing slower and letting his voice almost die away in a musical murmur. Faintly Sir Wilfred muttered, "Fair are the scarlet poppies—I see them."

Then suddenly Eochain stretched his hand over his patient's head, the fingers quivering with intense concentration.

"Sleep!" he commanded.

A moment later, the regular soft breathing, the calm look on the kindly old face of the scholar, showed that he had passed into a deep, restful slumber.

Beatrix watched in silent amazement.

"'Tis miracle!" she said.

"Nay, no miracle; a very simple and ordinary power. He will not, I think, waken until the dawn. Give him his drink then—it stands by his couch. Meantime, pass within and repose yourself. By my advice, you will not undress, but lie down as you are—calm and peaceful sleep will be yours also; to-morrow you shall hear much that it concerns you to know. And now God be with you. He whom they call 'the Apostate' has provided for your evening devotions; but be speedy, for in ten minutes' time from now you will be fast asleep."

Beatrix passed within the skin curtain, finding herself in a vaulted room not unlike a convent cell such as she had seen when she had visited the nuns in Elgin. A single lamp hung from the ceiling illuminated it faintly, showing the couch, the chair, the prie-dieu, and other simple furniture. Through a row of narrow slits high up the gleam of the moonlight could be seen.

Hastily she cast herself upon her knees, rendering to her Creator heartfelt thanks for her safety and for the recovery of her father. Then, after a rapidly muttered Ave Maria, she went on: "O Mary Mother, thou who hast held in thine arms the Incarnate Love of the Father, bless him—guard and keep him, O Mother! I know not if it be a sin in me to think of him so much, yet if it be, thou, O Mother, hast a woman's heart—thou wilt understand. I ask not for his love, Mother, for that were a sin in him, and I would keep him from all evil; if suffering there must be, let me suffer! O Mother, take thou my sacrifice, and let my love wrap him round as a garment! And if he has sins, let me bear them, and let him pass on and stand ever in the light of thy glory and in the grace of thy dear Son. So shall I chant thy praise ever, though it be from the depths of the pit itself."

Intolerable sleep was oppressing her; scarce could she stagger to the couch and throw herself thereon before she fell into a sound and dreamless slumber.

Eochain Beag dropped his arms, which up to this moment he had held outstretched, pointing steadily at the closed curtain, and turning to his companion he said—"Now, my brother, you may drop that masking robe; we have much to do. Both our patients are wrapt in that wonderful healing mystery of sleep. In the long ago days, when our holy faith was still a vital power in the land, the sick came from all quarters that they might sleep within the holy Dune of Callifer, and they that slept here woke healed. Yea! I see that in days yet to come this dune shall be thrown down, and no trace of its place shall be found, and the protection of the guardian spirits shall be withdrawn, yet shall the place remain holy for ever, and the wandering shepherd shall see strange lights and spirit forms, until the day when the old faith shall come back, and the old race shall find their hearts again."

His companion had thrown off the voluminous black robe that hid his face and figure, and stood revealed in the black habit and white scapular of Father Ambrose.

"Thank God she is safe!" he said; "my prayers are round her always. Oh, master, I love her!—can you not give me some hope that at least I may be of a little service to her? I ask no more.

"Nay, my son, I have answered already. What has a monk to do with love? I know you would teach me your faith, so be it; but first you must learn mine, and by the power of my priesthood I can pierce somewhat the lists of the future. It cannot be Father Ambrose who shall bring joy and help and peace to Beatrix Dunbar—yea, joy such as few have known. It is shown to me that it is Alasdair Cumming who shall give her this, and in giving shall be blest. Yet he shall suffer in the end as few have suffered, and all his sins shall be expiated at last."

"But, master—"

"Peace, my son! I know. Take my advice, for indeed to me has been given a certain power of sight and of knowledge. A monk has left all the world behind—he is dead to the world and to love. Father Ambrose can but pray. We have an urgent duty now to do—a duty that concerns the happiness and the very safety of Beatrix Dunbar. I will not speak of her as Dame Leslie—that is the sentence of your Church, but not of my faith. And this done, get you hence—go to Strathisla if you will, or go where you will—and pray."

"But, master, what shall I—nay, what can I—pray for her?"

"Pray, my son, that she may meet with Alasdair Cumming. Pray that Alasdair Cumming may take her to his heart, may cherish her, love her, and protect her for evermore, and that Father Ambrose may pass away again into the silence from whence he emerged. See you, my son, you came here to reason with me—is it not so? And now, behold, it is I, even he whom they call 'the Apostate,' who teaches you the law and the faith of your own Church."

"Master," said Father Ambrose,—"for such you have taught me to call you, and such indeed I think you are to me,—believe me, in sooth, I realise to the full your wisdom and deep learning. I know that your goodness and piety, and your real religion in all that is most vital, is far before my own. I am but a simple soldier trained in the faith of Christ, and late in life driven to convictions that have forced me into the religious life. I am a very child beside you, yet to me does it humbly seem that you have made shipwreck of the faith, and I would fain that words of mine might bring you to a truer understanding of what I think my Master taught, and which I would humbly follow. Yet your teaching is grievous indeed to accept. I am a monk to-day, but only a short while back I was a man and a soldier. The man has risen within me, and with all my heart and soul I love this woman. You speak to me as a monk, and you say, 'Give her to another, renounce yourself altogether.' You tell me this is the voice of the Church, and I know you are right. But is it the voice of God? You tell me that it is for her good and for her happiness that I give her up to Alasdair Cumming. Were I convinced of this, I would go into a solitary cell and there pray that what you say might come to pass; but, forgive me, I am not. Master, give me your credentials, convince me that what you say is true, and I will obey, though it cost my life or my reason; but I warn you I shall be hard to persuade. As you know, there were two Alasdairs. One would have loved her as few men could—he is dead—must I sacrifice my whole self and yield her to the other?"

"My son," said Eochain, "unwittingly you have answered me as I knew you would. Father Ambrose is vowed to the Church, the voice of the Church bids him renounce love. So far we are agreed. You love this woman, and you desire her happiness above all. I tell you that her happiness is with Alasdair Cumming, but this at present I do not ask you to believe. Hereafter I will undertake to convince you. Nay more, she shall herself assure you of it. That Alasdair

Cuxnming of whom you speak is not dead—it is to him that Father Ambrose shall resign her. But all I ask you now is that you will pray for her happiness and welfare whatever it may be, and that you will leave the means in the hands of the All Father, whom we both revere and worship though it may be under different names. Needs must I speak in parables who would fain speak plainly, but according to my faith your real and immortal part only is you: the young Chief—the soldier—the monk—are but costumes that you wear for a time and put off again. Furthermore, know you not how often what looks like a cataclysm that shakes the very foundation of things, at a very short distance of time or space seems but one essential link in the infinite chain of the scheme of the Divine Artificer?"

"Ay! that I can well realise. But a short while ago I fought at Flodden—wounded and a fugitive I lay in hiding on a desolate moor, and deemed that ruin had fallen on this whole realm of Scotland. I passed through Edinburgh, and I heard nothing but lamentation and despair. I come up into the land of Moray, and save fur the mourning over our gallant soldiers killed, I find life goes on as usual, Though an army has been wrecked and a King slain, and a foreign foe has entered our land, yet none despair. The mighty storm is felt but in small waves."

"So will it ever be, brother. Rash and faithless are they who despair. A great and beneficent Power rules all, and they who can see the end know the good. One thing only I would suggest for your meditation. When King James lay dying on Flodden field, he called with his last breath for Alasdair Cumming. Where was Alasdair?"

Before Father Ambrose could reply, a vehement trumpet peal sounded near at hand.

"Come, brother," said Eochain; "that which we have to do must be done at once. Later I will tell you something of my own story, and how I found my faith, and you shall judge for yourself; but now Leslie and his men surround Blervie Tower. Our friends within the Dune will sleep till dawn, and there is no power in Scotland that can enter there, even though they knew there were any living within; nor is there a man in Scotland save you and myself who knows even that much. We have about a mile to walk, but it will be an hour yet before the Leslie can gain an entrance to the Tower."

Thus saying, he pulled a chain, and a huge slab of concrete hung on compensating weights slid down into position, completely closing the entrance. The outer face of this was set with rough boulder stones exactly like the rest of the Dune, so that no human eye could ever see that there was anything save a continuous heap of stones, whose circuit was some twenty or thirty yards. So the two men strode off side by side westwards, descending the hill slightly to the south, till they saw Blervie Tower rising clear against the star-spangled sky, the bright moonlight throwing it into strong relief, and plainly silhouetted against the pale silver light the crowding forms of men and the gleam of spears.

Behind them the great Dune stood calm and placid, like a solitary vestige of immemorial antiquity.

CHAPTER XI

HOW NORMAN LESLIE BESIEGED BLERVIE

Where the road from Kinloss turns to the last steep ascent to Blervie Tower, but well out of sight, Sir Norman Leslie and his troop halted to reconnoitre. The full moon showed up clearly every detail of the building, in which all apparently lay fast asleep.

Sir Norman beckoned Urquhart to his side.

“Faith! they keep but careless watch. No such slovenly management when I am master there, I’ll warrant! Some of those idle hounds will be on duty all night. Damn it! Urquhart, who can say that even now some of the Inneses or some of those cursed Highland robbers may not have carried off my wife?”

“But what is it that you do yourself, Sir Norman? Dash me, if I can understand you! You summon me to come and help you to bring Dame Leslie home. Yet if you ride into the MacIntosh country, I see not how you can ciimber yourself with a wife, nor indeed where you can leave her in safety if you take her not. For indeed I think she would not bide merely for the love of you.”

“Friend Urquhart, I deem that God made you a fool, and you have since improved on the making by your own efforts. See you not, I must take the lady to get the lands, and this I must make safe before I ride.

Your Churchmen, confound them! must not think me reluctant. And as for keeping her when I’ve got her—I shall just send her in charge of a cousin of my own to the Glen; I think not she will win out of there, especially with Dame Catherine Leslie to keep an eye on her. Oh, but she’s a rare duenna is my Aunt Catherine!—frightened me in my boyhood, I can tell you—sharp as a fox. My lady will play no games there, I’ll warrant—and maybe when I come back there’ll be a son and heir to the Glen. ‘Twill be the summer, anyhow, before I am in that country.”

“Well, then, what do we tarry for, Sir Norman? If you are to take the lady from the Tower there’s no time to be lost, and in any case where the Devil will you take her? Methinks, for all the Church’s favouring of your marriage, she would not be welcomed as a guest at Kinloss Abbey.”

“Faith, no! No women in the Abbey now. Not since old William Culross died—rest his soul! He was a sportsman! No! ‘tis your house we are bound for to-night, Urquhart. Oh! make no wry faces, man,—a bridal pair pay handsomely for their entertainment. But see you, we must needs tarry a bit to be sure there’s no trap; I like not altogether that peaceful calm. At the Glen it would mean a dozen men lying in the reeds with their knives out, ready to slit the throats of the first who came by. Another thing now, and mark me well. I spoke to you before about Elspet Simpson—you have my token for her. Well, Elspet I must have, come what may, and she’s hereabout. You heard that wolf cry some half-hour back? Of course you did!—well, that was Elspet. Man, she can mimic any bird or beast, but I know the meaning of that cry. Down there on the Border I’ve heard her call the wolves that way. Ay! she’s sat on her horse beside me and given that cry, and you would hear an old grey brute answer from the woods, till you would swear they were talking together. Gad! but she looked wild then, with her black hair and the black eyes in her white face, and her lips as red as blood. ’Pon my soul, Urquhart, she was a woman who would tug the very soul out of a man’s body and lead him straight to the Devil if she wanted to. Well! but that cry I heard just now, that was an agreed call between us, so I know she’s hereabouts. Devil take her! she mustn’t savage my wife—jealous little beast, she’s quite capable of it, if I don’t keep a good hold of her. But she’s got to come with me up into the MacIntosh country—I can’t get to Farquhar’s Dune without her. She may bring a whole pack of her wolves there for aught I care, and fatten them on MacIntoshes—I talk to you, Urquhart! Damn it! a man must talk sometimes, and there’s no one else. Ah! here come the two scouts I sent out to view the land. Well, lads, any one about?”

“Not a soul, your honour,—all sound asleep.”

“So! Well, forward then, in the Devil’s name! See here, march quietly,—not a whisper till we hold the outer stair. Forbes and I will be at the top, we are the two biggest, a dozen others on the

stair, then give them a rousing call on the trumpet. If they don't open, Gad! we'll make 'em. Urquhart, you take the rest of my men and look after the servants sleeping outside. Don't let them try a rescue—we'll deal with al] who are in the Tower."

In about ten minutes the dispositions were carried out as ordered. The Leslie and a hulking giant beside him stood at the top of the outer stair, the lower steps being occupied by his men. Urquhart and the remainder with levelled spears surrounded the base of the Tower. It was thus evident that the besiegers had now obtained the advantage which the building was designed to give to the defenders.

A blare of trumpets sounded the notes of the Leslie's call, and again came the weird howl of the wolf in response, sounding this time from the haunted wood.

"Ho! there you are!" cried Leslie. "Well! come out, lass. 'Tis our old signal call—you want me, and, by Gad! I want you more than badly. Come out here—how the Devil can I find you in that wood? No wolves to answer you there. Grip fast! Damn it! Come, I say."

But there was no answer, though the stentorian voice of the knight rang almost as loud as his own trumpets. The serving-men from the cottages round the base of the Tower tumbled out half dressed and with their eyes full of sleep, roused by the din, to find the stair in the possession of a strange band of armed men and spears all round. Wisely enough, they gathered at a respectful distance, watching what should next befall;—their captain and leader was within the Tower, where with three or four of the trustiest he lay just inside the door. There were some other serving-men in the Tower, enough to hold the great door and the outer stair against any attack before the days of firearms.

Sir Norman Leslie thundered on the door with an axe that had hung at his girdle, but there was no response from within—it was like a Tower of the dead.

"Confound it!" shouted Leslie, "why did we not bring an arquebus to blow off that infernal lock? No matter! we'll just hew down the door. At it, Forbes, man, for all you're worth!"

Heavy blows from the two axes swung by brawny arms fell on the huge iron-bound door whose mighty timbers were almost as hard as the iron bands that girt them. Many a deep dint was cleft in the door, but it showed no sign of yielding. Some distance away Simon Tulloch, lying hid in a wild patch of bramble and bracken, noted the attack, and piously thanked God that his lady had not returned. He knew the Tower well and the strength of its great door, and surmised to himself that it would take the besiegers many hours' work before they could batter it down, even though no active resistance was offered; but he was sorely puzzled, as also, truth to tell, was Sir Norman himself, at the apathy of the men within.

The blows of the great axes fell with a wearisome persistence of rhythm; they seemed at last to be beating in his own brain, and even the mighty muscles of the two who were hewing seemed to flag, when suddenly, and with no warning, the great door quietly and silently swung open of itself, not under a blow but actually while the assailants were pausing for breath, and within, a dark cavity yawned before them. Sir Norman, still apprehensive of traps, paused for a space, then cried loudly for torches. Two were quickly passed up from the men below, and thrust through the gaping aperture. Their gleams fell on a knight's helmet with a golden lion for crest, and a small eagle plume.

"Ho, la! a Cumming here!" cried Sir Norman, and he swung up his ponderous axe. "Well, there's his quietus, anyhow!" As the axe crashed down, cleaving through crest and skull plate and visor, the helm clattered on the stone floor, and an eyeless skull rolled out.

The Leslie had the superstitions of his country and time; he started back and crossed himself, more it must be admitted from early habit than from faith. The silent, automatic opening of the

door that his stoutest efforts had failed to move, the empty passage behind it, the appearance of the helmet and the skull, all combined to pour terror into the soul, whose body had never known any feeling but that of insolent confidence in his brute strength. The next moment the torches' glare fell on a spear shaft stuck in a niche in the wall, showing clearly what had been the support of the helmet that had scared him.

"Ha! so they think to fright us with a bogy ghost? 'Twas well conceived, my lady,—worthy of my wife! No matter, you and I will speak further to-night over this merry prank. I won't have such games played on me. Forward, men, and find my lady—we escort her to-night to Forres."

He seized a torch and led the way himself into the Tower, passing from room to room and searching eagerly, half a dozen men-at-arms following him close. In the banquet-hall the serving-men of the Tower huddled unarmed and defenceless. They had been taken by surprise and, with none to give orders, knew not what to do. With a gesture of contempt for such cowards, Sir Norman motioned to two of his men to guard the entrance to the hall and hold them prisoners, and renewed his search. In the uppermost rooms were shivering in affright Beatrix's bower maiden and a few of the serving-wenches, but of Beatrix herself not a trace. Sternly interrogated, the bower maiden could say nothing; indeed, she vehemently and with much clamour denounced the Leslie for having abducted her lady. She had gone to rest at the usual time, and nothing more had happened until all were awakened by the unholy clamour of the trumpets, the howling of the wolves, and the unseemly hammering on the door—enough to fright all Christian men and women out of their reason. Moreover, her lady had been ravished away by a most monstrous incursion of midnight robbers, worse far than the Highland caterans. And indeed she knew Leslie quite well enough, a man so please you with whom no woman was safe, who feared neither God nor man. And indeed the Lord Bishop and the Sheriff—ay! and the King himself—should know of this raid.

"I think the King is about three years old," said Leslie, "and not like to be greatly interested. But 'tis no matter; tie up this brawling wench—she can tell us nothing."

The burly form of the Leslie with his men behind him emerged on the battlements, having searched the whole Tower without result.

"Gad! but my wife must be hiding in some hole or corner of this ramshackle old place," he muttered. "I won't leave it till I find her—what the Devil! a shy bride, is it? Well, so much the better—I like them not over forward. Hello, there! what's that?"

There was a swishing sound as of draperies against stone, the flutter of a trail of green silk against a window below him on the winding stair. Leslie dashed down in hurried pursuit, upsetting two of his men as he did so, who sat ruefully rubbing their shins, as they heard their master clattering down the stone stair and swearing volubly. At the door of the room which had been Sir Wilfred's study he thought again that he had caught a glimpse of the flying silk. Undoubtedly the Lady Beatrix was running before him—nay! who knows women?—perhaps she designed to be caught here in the solitary room that had been her father's. She wanted none of his men to witness their meeting.

"Well, that's all right," he chuckled to himself. "Saucy little devil! she knows the game well enough. I've known them like that—and, Gad! that sort show good sport."

He dashed into the room, holding his torch above his head and peering into the corners in search of Beatrix, who, he was convinced, had run in before him. As he did so, turning round, he saw the door quietly and noiselessly close behind him.

"Here, now! none of those games," he said. "Come out into the open and play fair—you're caught."

The idea of a trap was still on him. He rushed to the door and shook it; it was fast, and would not yield to the stoutest tug or hardest kick. Two seemingly gigantic figures emerged from the dark corners by the door, with black masks over their faces, and wolf-skins on their shoulders. In an instant his torch was snatched from his hand and extinguished, and he felt himself seized and thrown roughly to the ground, and held as in a grip of iron; his legs were bound together, his arms tied behind his back, a bit of rope in his mouth and knotted behind his head formed a gag, and he was rolled up against the door and laid across it, with his face to the wail.

Bruised and sore and mightily indignant at the treatment he had received, he yet saw that vengeance sure and swift was in his reach. His men were outside the door. If it did not open on the outside, they would soon batter it down, and his captors could not escape. All very well for two giants to take one man by surprise and throw him down and bind him! But twenty would make short work of two, whoever they were. He lay across the door—they could not pass that way, and the window was impossible for anything but a cat. They must have thought he was alone. All the same, he would rather his men did not find him in this bound and helpless condition—it was hardly dignified. If he could but wrench himself free of these bonds he would be found fighting, anyhow, and his men would complete the job, and pay the rascals back in their own corn. Confound them! they should be tortured for this—he would have some fun out of them before killing them. He tugged hard at his right arm, and found he could contrive to wrench it loose; with a little difficulty he got his left arm also free, and untied the gag. He heard his men at the door, they were trying to get in; then he heard Forbes call to them, “Come away! The master will be angry if you go in when he’s shut the door.” He was rather astonished that his captors had so easily permitted him to free himself even partially from his bonds, and he rolled over to see what they were about, but could see nothing; the torch was extinguished, the moonlight through the window only illuminated a patch on the opposite wall. They must be lurking in the shadows ready to make another attack upon him. He sat up and began to disentangle his legs from the coils of rope wound round them. Springing to his feet, he shouted to his men to break down the door, adding that it had slammed to behind him. He felt at his belt—they had left his axe. Short-sighted not to take that! No matter, so much the better; they should not escape him now, anyhow. He planted himself against the door, grasping his axe firmly; the moon would show him any man who came out to attack him, and give quite enough light for him to cleave any skull that appeared. A swashing blow from Forbes’ axe without shattered the lock; the men rushed in with torches, lighting up every corner and cranny of the room. It was empty!

No trace of the Lady Beatrix—no trace of the two who had seized and bound him!

Leslie swore and raved. Two men were there who had attacked him shamefully, laying hold on him from behind; also the Lady Beatrix his wife was there, he had seen her enter. Round and round the room they searched, tearing down the cases of Sir Wilfred’s books and manuscripts, throwing everything that stood near the walls into a heap on the floor, and probing with their daggers at every joint in the masonry; but neither there nor in the stone floor was there the faintest sign of any entrance or exit; none could pass out either at the window or door, so much was plain.

“This is witch-work,” Leslie roared. “Gad! Urquhart, I like it not! Those men were in wolf-skins—think you they were any familiars of Elspet’s? I warrant that little devil is jealous. Could she have sent these to savage my wife out of pure spite, and they fell on me by mistake? ’Tis like enough—but how the plague gat they in and out? This passes any witch-work I ever knew, and Elspet’s no witch—no! spite of all they say, a little devil of a black-a-vised gipsy lass, with the

gift of the wild in her blood, and fool enough to love me. Not much to love—am I, Urquhart? No matter! If she have sold her soul to the Devil, he shall have mine, and I'll go with her. All the same, I like not this. Out of it, men! We're for clean fighting, not witch-work."

They hurriedly unhitched their horses that had been tied up to the trees of the Tower during their wild raid—the men, sooth to say, all glad enough to be quit of a job that savoured far too much of black magic and dealings with the Devil to suit their tastes; wild and lawless and with little enough religion of any sort, they were yet deeply convinced of the reality of the Prince of Darkness, and of the power of his sworn servants.

The deep notes of the single bell from the Abbey floated up, and a pink glow of morning began to spread over the eastern sky beyond the Broch.

"The monks are just going to church for Prime, or whatever they call it," said Leslie,—"early beggars! Well, we're just going to bed. Gad! I think they don't approve of our hours, but the Bishop and the Abbot favour me—they've got to support my marriage, and they'll be bound to get some fat fees out of it! Trust Holy Mother Church for that! So I think they won't make much ado to let us in. Sorry we can't oblige you with a newly-wedded pair to-night, Urquhart. Better luck next time."

So saying, the worthy pair parted. Urquhart back to Forres to curse himself again roundly, and to curse the destiny that drove him to be jackal to so shameful a lion; and Sir Norman to the Abbey, there to knock up some weary, heavy-eyed guest brethren whose duty was to take him and his men to their quarters, after they had stabled their steeds.

Simon Tulloch from his lair among the brambles and bracken watched the going of the troop curiously. That their search had been fruitless he knew; but there was a dejected and beaten air about them which he could ill account for. "Like men who have seen a ghost," he said to himself,—" they look scared."

There was a rustle of a light step among the heather. Simon crouched closer—he deemed nothing human was like to pass at that hour, but a roe deer or even a dog might be padding it through the heather. If anything human were by chance afoot he would not willingly be seen.

He felt a light touch on his shoulder, as if a small hand were laid on his jerkin. He looked up, astonished, and saw Cecily Ross standing before him in the moonlight. For a moment he was too surprised to speak; then he saw that her eyes were closed, her face slightly drawn, and her lips lightly parted. She had all the appearance of being fast asleep and, as Simon at once concluded, walking in her sleep.

She spoke slowly and dreamily, as if confirming the idea. "I am sent with a message to you, Simon Tulloch," she said, and her voice was level, without any intonation. "The Lady Beatrix is safe. She is with her father, and she will nurse him till he is well again. Where she is you cannot find her, and she may not return to this side of the hill for the present. Yet you may see her soon down in the lands of Dallas. You shall have word."

Then, with a rapid, bewildering change, the words hissed out, as through shut teeth: "Curse it! Cannot I wake?" and the long, nervous hands gripped each other fiercely, as though struggling with something unseen that she would master or strangle.

Simon was petrified for a moment; he knew not what to say or do, though he would fain aid her. His mind ran on soporific herbs and cool lotions such as he had before administered to check nightmare and to relieve brains inflamed with wounds or with drink, but while he thought she had turned and glided swiftly away over the heather,—a short distance off he saw her running rapidly in the direction of the haunted wood, past the now deserted base of the Tower. So fast she fled that pursuit was hopeless, and in utter bewilderment Simon scratched his head and

abandoned the effort to pierce the mystery. Nevertheless, his old distrust of Mistress Cecily Ross revived as he trudged down the hill to the cottage he occupied in the Abbey Grange. He slept late into the morning, tired out with his night's fruitless watching, and his dreams were haunted with the vision of that fleeing figure in the grey mantle, stooping near the ground in the speed of her flight, with the white fur on her hood showing clear in the strong moonlight. It was weird, uncanny, and he felt instinctively there was danger to Beatrix, though as he woke he felt a strong sense of trust in Eochain. He had promised to guard her, and wild, reckless, and lawless as the Cummings were, they never, so Simon reflected, betrayed a trust.

Meanwhile, as Simon was watching the Leslie's men ride away, two men lying at ease on the soft moss in a small clearing in the haunted wood, beside a slowly dying fire, were talking over the situation.

"You must be weary," said the elder; "turn in and sleep—I can watch alone for the return of my messenger. Besides, old eyes need not the amount of sleep that young ones must have."

"I shall not sleep to-night," said the other. "Let us talk—you promised me the story of your life, will you not tell it now? It is odd, you seem to me now like a human comrade that I can talk to, but a short while since you seemed aloof, impenetrable, you compelled me,—I felt almost as though it were our Holy Father the Pope, or even one greater. Why was this?"

"That too I can explain. Well! since you will not sleep, and I may not, it were perhaps as well to divert the night with a story; but blame me not if you find it dull. My life has not been so adventurous as the lives of many of my kin."

CHAPTER XII

THE STORY OF EOCHAIN BRAG

"I must have been an odd, precocious boy, I think. I was left very much to myself. I was, you know, the younger son of Cumming of Altyre, the father of the present chief."

Father Ambrose started slightly, but said nothing.

"My father was away mostly. When he was not at the wars he was fighting with some of the families of the MacIntoshes, or defending himself against some other Highland clan. My eldest brother was away too. No one heeded me much; I was left at home at Altyre with servants. Those were wild and turbulent times when I was a boy. You know the Lords of the Isles always wanted to rule in Moray, and my grandfather was killed at Inverary, fighting under the Earl of Mar to repel them. Then there came into this country one Cochrane,—they said he was a mason's prentice, but he was a wonderful man, and using the terms of masonry he taught me to understand God as the Architect of the Universe. I was a dreamy, inquisitive boy, left to myself, as I told you, and Cochrane was kind to me; so I trotted about after him everywhere, and sat for hours out on the hillsides to hear him talk. Always he used the language of building, for he was bitterly opposed to the corruption of the priests, and they would have had him burnt for a heretic had he spoken plain. I was at his heels constantly when he built the Castle of Dallas down below us here. Some day you must go and see it; 'tis a wonderful building, teaching indeed many profound truths in symbol in its design and measurements. Also it belongs of right to Alasdair Cumming—the Tannist of the Dallas sept."

The monk looked up sharply, but Eochain went on in the same level voice.

"Well, so it was that the ordinary religion of my own people had no reality for me. My father kept a tame priest at our own little chapel in the wood. I fancy he was somewhat lenient in giving

absolution, and probably my father needed that—most of our race have done so. At any rate, the Mass never touched me, but Cochrane's discourses opened a new world. Poor Cochrane! When the King's brother, the Earl of Mar, was murdered, the King gave the earldom to Cochrane, and not long afterwards he was hanged over the bridge of Lauder—not by his own silk scarf, as he begged he might be, but by a hair tether. There are many of his works about the countryside—Kilravock, Cawdor, Spynie, Ernside, and others, besides Dallas, which was his masterpiece. It is forty years ago now since he was hanged, and I was out of Scotland then.

"Well, it was Cochrane's masonry that showed me first how stones can tell the secrets of nature to the eyes that can read them, and men may set down their knowledge in stones, so that it can only be read by those who are fit to receive it, and so it endures for all time. And that set me wondering about the old stone rings that are scattered all over the country, shunned by ignorant people as heathen temples, and that our priests tell so many lies about; and I could not believe that our own ancestors could have been the wicked and bloodthirsty men they would have us think them. You may imagine me thus, a solitary, queer boy, sullen and unpopular with other boys, despised by men because I cared not for blood-shedding, sneered at by women as fit only to be a monk, everywhere looked on as a very degenerate Cumming, but happy in myself with my own dreams and Cochrane's teaching, and continually working out new ideas and secrets of the universe. When I grew to be a young man, they wanted me to be the Tannist of the Dallas Cummings. You know it has usually been a younger son of Altyre that has been Tannist and afterwards Chief there; but though I lived with that branch of the family and they were the first who really loved me and were good to me, yet I felt I had a mission and I must study, and could not be the chief of a clan.

"Then, one night, I slept in the great ring at Clava, and never shall I forget that night; for I saw a circle of friends, and I knew them all, and called them by their names, though in actual waking life I never so much as heard of them; and they told me they had waited long for me, and they were our own folk,—kings of Scotland in the very far-away days, and priests that Columba called Druids afterwards,—and they welcomed me, and took me into the great ring, and taught me.

"When I woke I knew I had been in a strange country, but it was far more real and like home to me than the real world as people called it, and I tried hard to get back there, and now and then I succeeded. I'm not going to weary you with all that I learned in those queer dreams of mine—I will only say just now that it seemed to be true teachings of what the little fat tame priest read on Sunday at Mass, only carried down into actual life and made real, which it never was in the world that I knew. For instance, the chief thing that these Druid priests told me they had to do, and taught me, was to heal the sick, and that without any fee or reward, just as men were told to do in the Gospel. I asked our fat little Father about that, and he told me that the days of miracles were over; but that was not true, for I learned to do it. They used no drugs, but they made the patient sleep, and they made him think what they wished, and through the brain they influenced and cured the body."

"But this is truly miracle," said Father Ambrose, interrupting.

"Oh no! it is power every one has. You have but to fix your mind with intense concentration on the brain of another when that person is passive and attentive to you, and his thought will begin to follow yours. The rest is merely a matter of training which enables you to concentrate your own thought and will, but you must believe intensely that you can do it, or you will fail."

"These signs shall follow them that believe," muttered Father Ambrose; but he said nothing aloud, fearful to check the flow of the other's story.

“Well, at that time I gave up going to Mass, for it seemed to me a poor pretending at the reality which I had found, and after a while I was told in my dreams of a real Druid temple still served by living men who kept the old faith alive, hidden away in an untravelled district of Asia Minor, where no merchants went.

“Thither, then, I betook myself in fullest confidence, and I was rewarded, for I found the temple, and there for many years I was trained in all the knowledge and the power of the faith. I wish I could tell you my adventures, for I saw much that was interesting and beautiful; but I must leave that for another time. You asked why a while since I appeared aloof and impenetrable; do you see what I had to do? Sir Wilfred was sick of his wounds, and had to sleep that he might recover. His daughter was in danger from a villain, and had to be brought back to him and put in safety. His assailant, whom on the Border you knew as Elspet Simpson, had to be restrained. You yourself were necessary to the performance of all these things—there was no time or chance to explain all in words to you. This was the task set to me, and to do it I had to use all the strength that many years of training had given me. Think, when you are yourself in rapt concentration on some special thing you are giving your whole energies to do, must you not appear to any one who sees you then to be aloof and apart?

“But to resume my story. You may perhaps imagine, perhaps you have even heard, the evil stories that were told of me—Eochain Beag they called me—you would hardly call me the little Eochain now, would you? But I did not go to Mass, I did not follow the ways of the religion that every one else professed, and then I went away without telling any one where I was going—and that was an unforgivable sin; so they invented every sort of scandalous story about me, and ‘the Apostate’ was one of the lightest names they bestowed on me. At length I was reported dead, and after a while the name of ‘Eochain the Apostate’ had passed into a kind of legend; and even my brother, Sir Alexander, was convinced of my death, and I doubt not was secretly much relieved that the family would have no more disgrace to bear. I must pass over my life abroad—some day I will tell you about that. It was wilder and more interesting than most romances.

“At last I was told to return to my own country. You may not know—very few indeed do know—that there are always a few of the trained priests of the old faith living in the country to keep the torch alight. But there was another commission given to me besides this. There has been a peculiar development of witchcraft, and I was ordered to try to oppose it, and do my best to prevent the worst evils that arose from it, and to heal those who suffered from bodily ills brought about in this manner.

“Well, I knew, from what I had learned from Cochrane, how the Dune was constructed, and I soon made the old mechanism work again, and repaired the inner chambers; and here I have lived ever since, until I gave up the outer room to Sir Wilfred, and now the inner one to his daughter. The stone circle you have seen in this wood is to us a church,—in fact, the word ‘circle’ means the same thing,—and so, you see, I have been in the same position as a priest of your faith, living near by, and saying his daily Mass in an old deserted church. Only that for me the angels or spirits in whom I believe actually come to me in my devotions and teach me, which I gather ought to, but very rarely does, happen with those of your faith, and when it does you hail the one who gets such a revelation as a great saint.

“No! don’t interrupt. You shall say anything you have to say afterwards, but I want to tell my story first.

“I told you that my commission here was to try to oppose by faith and prayer the evil power of witchcraft. Some there are who say that there is no such thing, but you must see that if by faith and love we can work miracles, or what the foolish call miracks, of healing, so there must be

some who, moved by selfishness and by hatred of the human race, or hatred of particular people, may work similar miracles of harm. And understand that, according to our faith, this is not in any way contrary to the will of God, for they who deserve harm will come to harm; but if one should, from hatred or malice, offer himself as the instrument of that harm, God's will is still done,—but woe to the human instrument who coveted the satisfaction of doing harm!

"And some there are, perverse and wicked men, who give themselves over for spite and malice to doing harm to their fellow-men, and who take weak women as their instruments and helpers. On these they exercise a power akin to that which is taught to us of causing sleep, and of controlling the will, only being used for evil ends and to compass harm and gratify envy, hatred, and malice it becomes black magic, and the woman so coerced becomes a witch. Many of these poor creatures retain much of the sense of good, and desire to do good, but their wills are dominated by a strong and evil influence, and they cannot escape. It is no wonder that they believe that they have actually sold their souls to the Prince of Evil, for the sake of power or knowledge, or whatever first tempted them. Perhaps it may be true—none of us can say. Those men who coerce and use these poor creatures encourage the idea, in order to render their escape more hopeless.

"Away in the South, near the Border, there is such a man as I have described—strong, learned, and malignant beyond all imagining—his whole thought and aspiration being continually to hurt and destroy. Hate and the wish to hurt are to him as strong a motive of action as the wish to help and to heal are to normal men, and it is developed as strongly as the principle of love is said to be in the greatest saints. This monster—for such he is, he cannot be thought of as human—iS known as IDr. Finn; but whence he came none know, nor where he lives; he appears at rare intervals, always to do some deed of deadly and deliberate cruelty, and disappears again. He has under his control a considerable number of women whom he has coerced, as I have said, and who do his bidding implicitly—among them is one Elspet Simpson."

Father Ambrose started and was about to speak, but Eochain imperatively imposed silence.

"I know you would say something, and I will gladly hear; but give me leave to finish. You will be able to help greatly in this, if I mistake not.

"Well, this Dr. Finn gave these women power to tame and use various beasts, especially beasts of prey, to harm and destroy those against whom he employed them—wolves and eagles, and even the deadly adder. Some of them carry bags full of adders which they can charm. It is said they have the power to raise storms of wind. It may be so, but I have never seen it. I could pardon them if they looked on Dr Finn himself as being the Devil in human shape, and thought they were bound to him for ever. I was telling you about Elspet Simpson. She came up to this country, following after Sir Norman Leslie. I believe she had been his mistress in the Border country. And when I learned this I knew why I had been sent here.

"To turn now to another thing. I told you how Cochrane taught me to read the language of masonry, which is a secret confined to very few, and when I came to see and examine Blervie Tower I knew at once that it had been built by those who had learned the mysteries of their craft. The builders had provided a way of escape in case of danger by means of a secret passageway running a long distance underground, and emerging in the old stone circle where I now daily perform~1 my devotions to the God of my fathers—that passage, in fact, by which we entered just now, when we put the fear of God on the Lightsome Leslie. Man! I would not have missed the sight of his face for a year's rental of my brother's lands.

"So I watched and waited, for I knew something would be sure to happen presently; and one evening I found the opening of the passage just by the stones was unfastened, and I knew then

there was some mischief afoot, so I went myself along the underground way. You know how the secret stair goes up through the thickness of the wall to the little recess behind the wall of Sir Wilfred's study—the place where we waited for Leslie to come, after you had rustled the silk to entice him. Well, on that day the whole passage was empty. I waited there, and I heard Mistress Beatrix and the one-legged gardener talking together, and I gathered that Sir Wilfred had been attacked and that Simon was dressing his wounds. He is a very skilled man at wounds, and I was sure what he did would be well done, but I was sure also that there was no safety for Sir Wilfred in his own Tower of Blervie; the assailant, whoever it was, knew of the secret entrance, and none other knew it. I might watch, but hate is strong and sleepless. I might fasten up the passage-way so that none could enter that way, but before I could do so another, and probably this time a fatal attack would be made. There was nothing that I could see but to remove Sir Wilfred at once to a place of safety, and the Dime was the safest place I knew of in all the North of Scotland. I just waited till Mistress Beatrix and the gardener were gone, and then I turned the stone pivot. You have seen it, and I think you will agree with me that it is a triumph of masonry; fitting so close that not the thinnest knife-blade can be inserted, it yet opens with a touch from the inside. "There I found that Sir Wilfred had been unmistakably worried by a wolf, and I remembered that wolves had been spoken of as the familiars of Elspet Simpson. Indeed, it was for setting on a wolf to kill a woman on the Border that it was said she had to fly the country, for the country folk suspected her, and would have laid hands on her and burnt her for a witch. I was told that she had been heard telling another woman of how she had gone to North Berwick kirkyard to meet the Devil, sailing thither in a sieve,[1] with two other girls lately enrolled in Dr. Finn's crew. So there was nothing else for it, and I just lifted Sir Wilfred on my shoulders and carried him out, and that was simply how he came to disappear in the manner that so puzzled all the countryside.

"I have had many a talk with him since, and I find that his calculations had brought him near to the knowledge of the secret entrance; but he never could find it, because he had not the masonic craft. He told me how he had heard tidings that a wolf had been seen prowling about the Tower, and had sent all his servingmen to hunt and destroy it, and while they were all out, as he sat deeply engrossed in his books, he suddenly heard a snarl behind him, and looking round an enormous white wolf sprang on him from behind; he fought hard for his life, but the brute bore him down and fastened on his throat. Then, just as he gave himself up for dead, there came a sound as of some one entering the door, and he felt the great fangs loosen; he fell over on to the ground and fainted, but not before he had seen, or thought he had seen, that the room was empty. The next thing he knew was awaking in the Dune, when I was taking care of him. I could not improve on friend Simon's bandaging, but I gave him the boon of sleep, and his wounds healed rapidly.

"So you see his mysterious disappearance, ascribed by the kinsmen and the Church to the direct power of the Devil, is very easily accounted for; but I confess the wolf baffles me more. Such power over wild creatures, especially the savage, untamable, lawless brood of wolves, is beyond all the laws of nature, and would seem to confirm the stories of Dr. Finn. I learned much also of this Elspet Simpson from the Borderlands. She is of singular power, and deemed by him a most valuable acquisition; for she has the gift of imagination, and of great concentration, by which it is said she can accomplish more than most of his victims. Yet she has never been completely under his power; indeed, I am told that at any time the Lightsome Leslie has far more influence with her than Finn himself, and at times neither of them could move her at all. But she

[1] This is told of Scottish witches and of no others, so far as I am aware—a testimony to Shakespeare's accuracy.

can influence others, and has obsessed women, and brought several innocent victims into the clutches of this Finn.

"Now I see that you have something to tell me about this Elspet Simpson, and I pray you tell it now. For indeed I know I shall want your help, and it will tax all our united efforts to prevent harm from falling on innocent persons."

"Your story has been most enthralling to me," said Father Ambrose slowly, "for I myself also came across this same Elspet Simpson down on the Border. I followed our King there, as perhaps you know, and fought by his side at the fatal field of Flodden. I loved him—a gentler, nobler man never drew breath—and I think he loved me too. We were together much. We knelt together to hear the Mass, we hunted together, and capped rhymes with each other as we passed the wine cup in the evening; we danced together with the village girls, when he would go to a frolic as a plain esquire; and in camp I waited on him, for he would have none other. One day, as we rode along the hill road by North Berwick, we passed a woman on horseback, and she cried to us, '0 King, thou art young and proud! The winding-sheet is round thy breast, and I see the spot where thou wilt lie ere many days be passed.' And the King halted and bade bring her to him, for ever he was gentle, and he would have rewarded her, though she prophesied evil and not good concerning him; and he would have questioned her further, for he had always a desire to know how and when he should die. But his men found her not. Only they heard a wolf's wild howl in the woods.

"You know how our King was slain at Flodden. Men say now it was his own fault, and that the disposition of the battle was all wrong. I know not. I shall always believe that all he did was right, and he died just because a spirit so rare could not long bide on our gross earth. I was at his side, and got such a crack on the skull that 'twas thought I was dead too, and a day and a night I lay there, with all the flower of our Scottish nobility around me, thousands of gallant men, and I was as one dead. But when they came to bury that heap wherein I lay, I just recovered my senses enough to crawl away with a broken head and several deep wounds, half starved and faint from loss of blood; so I got into the woods, and found a shepherd's hut where they gave me shelter and tended me for our dear King's sake, for they all loved him; and there too I heard more of Elspet Simpson, and how the country people ascribed to her all the disasters of the battle and all the trouble that had fallen on our King and on the country, and they would have burnt her then if they could have caught her, for they said she had sworn that the King should die for some fancied wrong. Leslie, too, should have been at the battle, for he held a command from the King; but this evil witch warned him, so when the roll was called Leslie and his command were missing.

Well, when I fully came to myself, I knew that henceforth the world held nothing for me, and there seemed nothing to do but to make my peace with Heaven. Sincere conviction it was that sent me to the monastery, that I might find that joy and rest in the service of God that I never hoped to find any more in the service of the world; for my King was dead, and the joy of earth had closed with his grave.

"Then one day but a few weeks back there came one tome at the Chanter's house of Windyhills, seeking ghostly comfort and advice. As a novice, of course, it was no part of my duty, nor was it in my power, to give any priestly consolation; but by the permission, indeed by the command of the Father Abbot, I was told to listen to her story and to give such encouragement and advice as I might feel to be in place. I could hear no confession, neither could I give any absolution, and none such were asked. But behind and over her appeared the form of Elspet Simpson as I saw her that day on the cliff road by North Berwick. But the woman

who came seeking my advice was a sweet and saintly soul in great distress from evil dreams and imaginings of some cruel and foul witch, whom I recognised as being Elspet Simpson, and then I thought that this Elspet must have somehow managed to obsess this poor lady—indeed, it had gone so far that I fancied some physical likeness to Elspet, but this must have been imaginary. I knew not then what you have now told me of Elspet's power to influence other women and to bring recruits to this accursed Finn.

"Her name was Mistress Cecily Ross—a woman who I think should have the makings of a very great saint—indeed, already she is privileged to see visions of angels, and other matters not vouchsafed to us poor ordinary mortals, and I thought it were a deed well worth doing to rescue her from this cruel and evil witch, and set her feet on the path to true holiness that she longs to tread." "It may be that you are right. I know not this Cecily Ross, yet I have heard of her, and not always with such complete trust as your words would seem to convey. But see, here comes my messenger returning."

"You never told me who your messenger was."

"No, I did not. I kept that for a dramatic surprise at the end of my story. What if I have trapped the assailant of Sir Wilfred, and proved that the magic of the powers of love and of help are more potent than those of evil? What if I have coerced the coercer, and forced the would-be murderess to become a messenger of good?"

A woman stooping close to the ground, and running fast, came into the open place where they sat. Her grey robe brushed the heather, and her white hood bordered with white fur caught the light of the now fast sinking moon, and from its shadow a long trail of night-black hair escaped. She raised her face, drawn and white and full of pain.

"That is Elspet Simpson," said Eochain, "now fast asleep and knowing not what she does—but she must do my bidding."

"That," said Father Ambrose, "is Cecily Ross."

CHAPTER XIII

HOW BEATRIX FOUND THE GLEN OF DALLAS

For a moment the three remained absolutely motionless and intent. Eochain and Father Ambrose fixing concentrated attention, Cecily drawn and white, without will or consciousness, moving like one asleep. In an instantaneous picture the whole position started visibly into Eochain's mind. In the Dune slept Sir Wilfred Dunbar and his daughter Beatrix, safe hidden for the present from all foes; down in the Abbey Norman Leslie, having seen to the stabling of his war-horse and swallowed a mighty flagon of Spanish wine, was stretching his limbs on his couch in the guest chamber, dreaming of new schemes to possess himself of the person of Beatrix and her lands, and counting on the assistance of Abbot Chrystal, whose voice he thought he could hear in the distance singing the early offices of the Church. The Church had made his marriage, and the Church must stand by it; yet he would not give up his black-a-vised sweetheart, not for a dozen Abbots and Bishops to boot. Simon Tulloch, in his cottage in the Abbey Grange, foresaw the risk to his dear Lady Beatrix, and resolved with all the energy that was in his sturdy, staunch body to foil the Leslie. He perceived, too, the danger from Cecily, but could not exactly understand where it came in; coupled her somehow with the attack on Sir Wilfred, yet knew not how she could have any share therein. Master Urquhart lay in Forres, ready to act his contemptible jackal part for the Leslie, ashamed of himself, but seeing nothing else to do. Farther on, the Altyre

woods sheltered the sleep of Sir Alexander Cumming and his stalwart sons, among whom Eochain's intuition or second sight seemed to see the destined prince who was to break the toils that gathered round Beatrix; though, sooth to say, his intuition only gave him in some mysterious flash the name of Alastair Cumming; and farther still the wild country of the MacIntoshes, the present goal of Leslie's fighting energies.

How far it was knowledge and memory, and how far second sight or intuition, or a subtle blend of them all, he himself could not have told; it sufficed for him that he knew where the threads of the situation lay. How he knew mattered not—here in a sleeping world his brain was awake and alive to seize the occasion, and the key to it he knew to be with the woman before him, whom as yet he admitted to himself he only half comprehended, though she was now absolutely dominated by his will.

"Hast done my bidding?" he said sternly.

"I have, Master," she replied, in the same level tone, with no intonation, as though speaking in sleep; then in a fierce, hurried whisper, "Oh, God! let me wake and go."

"Not yet," he said, "not till that full moon shows but half her circle, then you shall wake, and thank me for restraining you this time. Now go to your hut, and sleep sound and unconscious for twelve hours, then you shall rouse and eat."

The strained, tense look passed from her face, which grew to an almost passive gentleness as she bowed low and retired to where, beside the clearing in which they sat, was a tiny hut, not much more than a shelter. Into this she retired, and they heard the door bolted behind her.

"That is indeed Cecily Ross of whom I was telling you," said Father Ambrose; "there is some weird mystery about her which I cannot fathom. Can you help me?"

"That is indeed Elspet Simpson, the witch of the Border, and the mistress of the Lightsome Leslie," replied Eochain; "but there is, as you say, a mystery, and vainly at present do I try to solve it. Only this much I think I see. It is only at certain times that the evil spirit is upon her, and it seems to be at the time when the moon is full, though whether it is every full moon I know not yet. At such time I suppose as that Dr. Finn gained his influence over her, and I fancy that at such time also the Leslie has power to draw her, and could probably even draw her away from Finn. But then, again, there are times when neither of them has any power over her; but what is her condition or nature in these intermediate times I have never been able to learn."

"It must have been in such an intermediate time that she came to me," said Father Ambrose. "It is strange that I did not recognise her, for, as I told you, I saw her at North Berwick when I was riding with the King, but she looked wholly different, yet I seemed to see the form of Elspet Simpson, as it were, like a wraith behind her or enwrapping her—I cannot tell— perhaps as if one woman were impersonating another. I thought that Elspet Simpson was obsessing her, and almost without my will I said, 'Elspet Simpson, beware.' Then it was she sought my aid, and told me how periodically she was beset by dreams of foul evil, in which she was the creature of this Elspet, and driven, so she fancied, to do deeds of lust and cruelty at which she shuddered when awake. Clearly she thought it was all dreams, and she desired to be delivered from them, else why should she come to me. Down there on the Border I think the evil period must have lasted more than the period of a full moon, if one may trust the country folk's tales of her."

"She would be more under the direct and constant influence of Finn there," replied Eochain. He fell silent for a short while in deep thought, then he continued—"The attack on Sir Wilfrid was nearly a month ago, the full moon was then waning. It was the end of her evil period. She opened the secret way and sent, perhaps even conducted, the wolf who mangled him; shortly

after she woke and knew nothing of it. Then it was that she came to Blervie Tower, but I imagine she did not wholly recover, for the dread of the dreams still pursued her when she came to you."

"But why should she set her wolf on Sir Wilfred?"

"She was, as I told you, the mistress, at least so I think, of the Leslie, and he is married by the Church to the Lady Beatrix Dunbar. Here is sufficient cause for jealousy, it may be that Beatrix was the intended victim, and she could not wholly control her familiar. I know not—nothing is really clear—we are groping among guesses. But from my home here in the wood, where no man comes, and the land which is forbid, I have watched her, and as the moon drew towards its full I saw her leave the tower early one morning before the world was astir, and I knew that the evil spirit was on her again. She stood by the edge of the wood, and gave a long weird cry, like the howl of a wolf—a cry to freeze the blood. I have since made sure that this is an agreed signal between her and the Leslie, and she was meaning to join him. So I set the spell of sleep on her. It was with great difficulty, for she struggled hard against it, and it was only when I spoke words that she knew and feared, and compelled her to look at the point of my boar-spear gleaming in the light of early dawn, and advanced it till it dazzled and half blinded her, that I was able to bring sleep on her brain, and ordered her to go to that hut where she now is. And since then I have held her asleep, the creature of my will, and so have kept her from harm for this time, at all events. Now from all this I deem that the evil time comes on her not all at once, but gradually, in the semblance of dreams, growing more and more vivid until they seem to become irresistible; then to herself she seems to sleep entirely, and to dream of cruelty and lust and every kind of evil, until she wakes and loathes the dream. Yet the dream, too, is real; and when she is in this state she forgets wholly the existence of Cecily Ross, or remembers but some dim vision of the self she despises and resents. She glories in every form of evil, delights in lust and bloodshed and in torture; in fact, entirely reverses her nature. Then it is she is a fitting mate for the Leslie. So I have pieced together the indications I have myself observed, and what I have heard, largely cleared up by what you have told me. But it still remains much of a mystery, and I am sure that in this woman there is great danger in the future. I have controlled this fit, but who knows if I can do it again, or even if I shall be there to try; and bad as this period of hers is, it may be worse. Even now she is wholly savage when the fit comes on. Then she is a wild beast, mad with the blood-lust, and still more with spite and jealousy, and the Leslie revels in her savagery, which matches his own.

"But the fit is already passing. She has been half conscious all the time in spite of my efforts, as you saw, when she answered Leslie's trumpet, and when just now she prayed to wake. I shall allow her to come gradually to consciousness as the brain calms, and in a week's time or so you will see the Cecily Ross who came to ask your aid, but I hope still calmer and more self-possessed. She will remember nothing of all this wild time save as having had troubled dreams, and I would not that she should know. A cure may be possible; but if once Cecily Ross should realise that she is actually Elspet Simpson in the flesh, and not merely in a nightmare dream, it will be for ever hopeless. We shall need to watch carefully for the first indications of a renewal of the evil fit, for therein will lie great danger, especially if she and the Leslie should meet then. Now my watch is over. I have talked overmuch, I fear, and you are full of sleep too. Out there towards my circle is a shelter where we can lie till morning. Come."

So ere half an hour had gone by the spell of sleep held fast all the personages of our story, but very diverse were the visions it showed them. Only down in the great Abbey Church the monks were still singing their litanies, wakefully praying for the salvation of a sleeping and unheeding world.

Uneventfully the next few days passed. Beatrix tended her father assiduously under the directions of Eochain. There was nothing needed for him now but recovery of strength from his wounds and loss of blood, but he was cheery as of old, and quite reconciled to his quarters, and Eochain brought him his favourite books and manuscripts, being, as we have seen, able to come and go at will through the secret passage to the tower and to Sir Wilfred's study. Moreover, he could throw much light on many dark passages that had long puzzled the old knight himself. Of Father Ambrose she saw nothing, and believed him to have departed. Searching into her soul she could find no reason for the peculiar influence the monk had over her; she would not know his face if she saw him; she had never even heard his voice; only she had felt or fancied deep, luminous eyes burning on her through the folds of his cowl, drawn always close to hide his face. At anyrate, now he had passed away, she thought, to the performance of the duties of his Order, and it was unlikely that she would ever again come across him. In any case his religious vows and her unlucky marriage must ever make an impenetrable barrier, and the chance meeting in the Chanter's garden, and his protective influence as she passed through the terrors of the haunted regions of Callifer, must be relegated to the dreams of the past, beautiful and unrealisable. So she could let her fancy play, imagining what manner of face lay hidden behind that cowl, and treat it all as a fairy tale of childhood.

Father Ambrose, however, did not leave for some time. He had the Bishop's authority for remaining, and there were many long talks between him and Eochain Beag, much to their mutual enlightenment over their respective faiths, which day by day they discovered to be more strangely alike. And in fact Father Ambrose was often bound to admit that where there were differences they arose from corruptions introduced by the greed of Churchmen in the Middle Ages, more keen for the preservation of their temporal power and the accumulation of wealth to their Church than for carrying out the precepts of their founder. Eochain also had to confess that the real religion of the Saviour of mankind, as taught in the Gospels, and as actually practised by a few true Christians, was a far different thing from the parody of it taught and practised by the fat, little, tame priest kept by Cumming of Altyre, whom he had known in his boyhood, and which had so revolted him. Meanwhile both of them watched over the Lady Beatrix. It was evident that Blervie Tower was no safe place for either her or her father, so long as the Leslie and his men were in the neighbourhood. Every day some scouts of his were reported to be spying about, evidently on the watch for any appearance of the Lady of the Tower, and they surmised, what was the actual fact, that a handsome bonus had been promised to whoever should bring such a report as would enable their lord to carry out his scheme of capturing his wife.

Down by Dallas, however, on the other side of the hill, it was safe. None would pass through the forbidden land of Cahhifer and the haunted wood; and round the base of the hill by Rafford was no public road, and the tracks, such as they were, led through the lands of the Cummings, who were not generally over gentle with strangers passing without permission over their lands. Sir Norman Leslie certainly had leave to pass the lands of Altyre on the way to punish the MacIntoshes, but that by no means entitled him to cross the moors of Dallas, where a different branch of the clan was settled.

This way, then, Beatrix used to walk when not in attendance on her father, and she greatly delighted in the beautiful wild glen. One spot was a special favourite with her, about half-way down the steep slope of the hill almost below Callifer, whence she could see the distant sea and the end of the valley, and to the left the wooded hillside that sloped down to the lovely priory of Pluscarden, nestling as though softly cradled in a nook of the curving hill. Down below her in the flat land that bordered the stream was the castle of Dallas, deserted now, for Ferquhard

Cumming, Sir Alexander's second son and half brother of Alasdair, who afterwards headed that branch, had not yet taken possession of the castle which Eochain called Cochrane's masterpiece. Beatrix looked often longingly at this castle, and planned a walk down there some day when her father could spare her for so long.

Meanwhile the days passed peacefully enough. Father Ambrose took his leave of Eochain, who was very grieved at losing him, but the monk urged business that brooked no delay, yet promised to return. However, when Beatrix asked Eochain about the monk who had nursed her father, and had protected herself through the terrors of the wood on the night of the full moon, Eochain had said—

"He left his blessing—pray for him. I think that Father Ambrose will come back here no more."

Being questioned further, he said—"Ask nothing more. There are times when it is better for a man to run away from a danger than to face it." And this sentence remained a puzzle to Beatrix for long. Eochain's mind was working much over the problem of Elspet Simpson, and one day he asked Beatrix when she last had tidings of her friend, Cecily Ross.

"Oh! the sweet Cecily!" said Beatrix. "How I miss her. I would I could hear news of her. She left suddenly on the morning before the Bishop and the Abbot came to perform the solemn exorcism at the Tower. I suppose it was some errand of mercy and kindness as usual. She is so unselfish, always taking some one else's burden on her own frail shoulders." Eochain asked if she had any objection to the services of the Church. But Beatrix, loyal to her friend, would not admit this. "Yet I know that she somewhat favours the New Learning of Master Martin Luther, and she has told me that in vision she saw the monks of Kinloss as though they were shut up behind prison bars."

Eochain queried if she were well.

"Oh, yes! And yet I don't know; she was curious, hysterical. I remember she took the most extraordinary alarm at the five-pointed star that I was told to trace in front of my chamber door, and begged and prayed me not to put the sign of the Inneses there."

"Who advised you to put it there?"

"It was a message from Father Ambrose, brought to me by Simon Tulloch," said Beatrix, and blushed rosily us she said it, though why she could not tell. Eochain, however, noted the answer and the blush, and enquired if Cecily had shown agitation in any other ways.

"Oh, yes, she did. She was very curious sometimes, and spoke continually of evil dreams, and then since that affair of the star of the Inneses that I had cut on the stone outside my chamber door she came never to my bedside as she had been ever wont to do. And she would go and lie down for long periods. Oh! I fear she must have been ill, now you ask me. I seem to remember so many little things that I never thought of at the time. Poor Cecily! Do you think she went away because she was ill, so as not to be a burden on us in the time of our trouble?"

"I think that is very likely to be the explanation," said the old man, feeling that she had come in her innocence nearer to the true explanation than she could possibly realise. "But I think she is better now, and I have a sort of premonition that she may come to visit you before long."

He spoke with careful calculation, for he foresaw that as Cecily recovered her normal senses, released from the spell of sleep he had laid upon her, it would be impossible to keep her and Beatrix apart, and he wished to prepare the latter for her friend's return. He knew it was a dangerous prospect anyhow; but on the whole the danger seemed less if he could keep Cecily under his own watchful eye. He had carefully thought out all his own information, and all he had learned from Father Ambrose, and all that his learning had taught him about these curious cases

of mental imbalance, and he was fully persuaded that when once more awake and normal she would remember nothing of Elspet Simpson, save perhaps a mere name associated with a nightmare dream, and she would know nothing of Leslie—indeed, if she met him by chance, would look on him with utter aversion and loathing. Therefore, the dangers, though still great, seemed to be minimised so far as human foresight could contrive.

One day, as Beatrix sat in a half day dream in her favourite seat looking down the glen and away to the distant sea, she heard a voice behind saying—

"Give you good day, Mistress Beatrix," and turning quickly she saw Master Simon Tulloch, cap in hand, m low salutation. "Ah, Master Tulloch, I am right well pleased to see you. You can give some news of the outer world, which hath been all closed to me since the night of the full moon."

"'Tis I would ask news of you, Mistress Beatrix. I hope to hear of Sir Wilfred's welfare."

"Aye! my father is fast recovering, and he is in good hands—Master Eochain Beag, as he wishes to be called, has tended him, and I believe, under God's Providence, has saved his life, and I also have been with him since the night of the full moon, and have nursed him till now he is scarce in need of nursing. But tell me, Master Simon, how learned you where I was?"

"That, my lady, I heard from Mistress Cecily Ross on that same night of the full moon. As I lay watching she came to me, walking as I think in her sleep, and bade me come and look for you here, and then she turned and fled, I know not whither; and day by day I have come seeking you and found you not. Now at last I find you."

"My dearest Cecily!" Beatrix murmured, and then fell silent for a space thinking, wondering how Cecily came to be taking news of her to Simon on that terrible night.

"And what is happening out in the world, Master Simon?" she said at length. "You know Master Eochain saith it is unsafe for me to revisit Blervie Tower, or even to be on that side of the hill."

"And indeed he is right, my Lady. The Lightsome Leslie still lingers at Kinloss, and I have myself heard him swear that he will seize your ladyship and carry you away somehow, and many a question hath he put to me, but poor is the information that he hath gotten. You know he besieged and took the Tower on the night of the full moon."

"Nay, I know nothing."

"Well, there's no more to it than that, that he and his men came with trumpet-blowing and clattering of horses to the Tower about an hour or more after your ladyship had left, and I thanked God that you had left. And how he gained access to the Tower I know not, but he did, and he and his men were tramping all over the house; but they left at last looking like whipped mongrels with their tails between their legs. Yet 'twas not for any resistance from your serving men, for I heard afterwards there was none. But, as I say, he seeks you still, and his men ride ever up and down through the Lowlands, between Alves Kirk and Forres, but dare not cross the forbidden ground on the hill. I myself came round by Rafford, and some of the Cumming clansmen would have stayed me, but I am well known among the Cummings. I have healed some of their broken heads, of which they have plenty, and they let me by. And that minds me—Master Alasdair Cumming is like to prove a good friend to you, for he hath given permission to Sir Norman Leslie to pass through the Cummings' lands when he rides to punish the MacIntoshes. But he bears him no good will, and if he should be successful, Master Alasdair designs to hang him on his way back, and if this Leslie should come by a mischance either in the MacIntosh country or in the Altyre lands, I may have to congratulate your ladyship on an easy widowhood, wherein I trow will not be great mourning."

“And what news from the Abbey, Master Simon?” There was a faint tremor in her voice as she spoke.

“All goes as usual, my lady. Father Robert Reid, our Sub-Dean, hath returned from some mission to the English court, and he was wroth and grieved when he found that Father Ambrose had left. There were words between him and the Abbot about it, for Father Reid’s father was killed at Flodden, and Father Ambrose fought there, and Father Reid desired to hear all about the battle, and so he was angry when he heard that Father Adam Elder and the Abbot between them had sent Father Ambrose on a mission. For indeed I think our worthy Sub-Dean considers the Abbot as an inferior official to himself. And so this morning, as I heard them saying when I was tending some trees, there comes a message from Father Ambrose saying that by the Bishop’s orders he had stayed a while to reason with a straying soul (I think this must have been Eochain, with whom he tarried for a time), but now that mission was ended, and he was free to go. And that, so the Father Abbot said, must mean to Strathisla, and after to Orkney, yet Father Ambrose said not whither he was bound. And his word to Father Adam Elder was that until that demon, whereof the Father knew was conquered, Morayshire would not see aught of Father Ambrose, which word, referring to a matter of confession, the Abbot inquired not of. So I fear me we shall not see Father Ambrose here again for many a long day, whereof I am sorry, for he was a true man, albeit he was a monk.”

Beatrix felt a chill wave pass over her. She had schooled herself to the conviction that the attraction she had clearly felt towards Father Ambrose could be nothing but delusion, that she had built up an ideal probably very far away from th’e truth, and that in any event he could never be more to her than a name; still, with all this, there had remained the feeling that he was a strong spiritual stay. Common sense and reason had resisted the strange physical attraction, but still she had pictured him as possibly her confessor and adviser, the one on whom, if her father were taken away, she could confidently rely. In such light she might surely regard him. Now that ideal too had passed—Father Ambrose had gone out of her life; under what strange circumstances was he to come back into it, if at all, she could not tell.

The following day she extended her walk to the foot of the hill. Here there was no vestige of cultivation. Little streams dashed down the hillside, and wandered over the levels at the bottom of the valley, where they sang over the gravel or crawled sluggishly through the peat bogs, or played at hide and seek under the thick rank growths of heather and the birch woods that grew at frequent intervals through the long glen. At times her feet sank in the soft wet moss, at times she felt the stones, and sprang from one to another in pure joy of living, then again the heather took her almost waist high. On and on she walked, loving every yard of the new and beautiful country that she had never before visited, for all her walks and rides had been confined to the low country to the north of the hill, the land of the wild Cummings being looked on as unsafe for any maiden unless attended by a company of men such as Beatrix seldom rode with.

She sniffed the pure breezes laden with the scents of heather honey, and full of the sting of the salt from the open sea, and bearing on its wings all the music of the brae. The belling of the great red deer came from the opposite hill, and the chirk of the grouse sounded close to her feet. A great golden eagle swept screaming down the glen, and passed away over Carn na Cailleach, the witch’s hill, to his distant eyrie on the top of Ben Rinnes.

Scarcely knowing how far she had wandered, she found herself beside the Black Burn, a line of stepping stones in front of her. Suddenly, from the heather on the other side, rose the forms of two stalwart Highlanders. Their red polls were bare, their plaids were old and torn, they boasted neither stockings nor brogues on their legs, that were hairy and shaggy as a Shetland pony, yet

both had the unmistakable carriage of the true gentleman, and Beatrix recognised the green and red of the Cumming tartan.

"Whence come you, lady?" said the elder of the two; "these moors are no fit travelling for stranger maidens."

"No stranger, I think," said Beatrix. "I come from Eochain Beag."

"Ha! then you will be the lady of whom we were told. Humbly I crave your forgiveness, mistress! Right welcome are you, and free to come and go, and there's no soul in all Scotland shall do you scaith while there remains a Cumming that loves the name of Eochain or that follows Alasdair."

"Eochain Beag's word is law in Dallas," said the younger. "He sent a message that you were to be welcomed, and Lord Alasdair confirmed it, saying you were to be as one of the clan."

One on each side of her they ranged themselves, walking through the water that they might help her each with a hand, as she crossed the stepping stones, and it was done with a courtly grace that many courtiers might covet.

Right before them rose the deserted castle, grey and bleak amid the mosses and molasses, with flights of wild fowl circling round it, and on the battlements a solitary man stood shading his eyes as he looked out towards the sea. A tall eagle feather indicated the chieftain, but no more could be seen at that distance.

Beatrix already felt as though she had known these courteous and kindly guides for half her life. She talked to them with great enjoyment, and they told her the names of all the hill tops in sight, and of the clans that ruled them, and showed her where the moor-fowl bred, and where the herons nested; and now as they came on the castle, with the solitary watcher on the battlements, she said—

"Is not that Dallas Castle? I thought it was empty and deserted."

"So it was, till just now, when Providence has been good to us, and our beloved Alasdair Oge is back with us again; and he has brought us tidings of Eochain Beag, and now the Cummings of Dallas are no longer without a chief."

"Is that Alasdair Cumming?"

"Aye, it is," replied the clansman, with a salutation at the name. " Thomas may have Altyre when old Sir Alexander dies, and for aught I know he may own the lands of Dallas too, but the Cummings of Dallas have ever been led by a younger son, and Alasdair Oge is our chief. Yea! There have been Cummings in the glen when the title, as they say, was in Dallas of that Ilk, or in Hay of Lochloy. We care not for these feudal titles. We are Cummings of Dallas, whoever may profess to own the land."

Beatrix was seized with a sudden desire to return home, an absolutely unreasoning shyness and self-consciousness roused by the thought of Alasdair Cumming struggling with a great wish to meet the man who had been, she was told, so great a friend to her. Responsive to her lightest wish, the clansmen turned and escorted her to the very margin of the haunted wood, beguiling the time with many an old legend of their clan. Their names, they told her, were Roy and Alpin, sons of the Black Burn, and if she should ever stand in need of help both would gladly lay down their lives for her, for the sake of Alasdair Oge and for the love they bore to Eochain Beag.

As she turned the last corner of the wood path leading to the Dune, Beatrix caught sight of Cecily Ross.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW CECILY ROSS CAME BACK

Beatrix sprang forward delightedly.

"Dearest Cecily, where have you come from? All unattended too. Where have you been ever since the day before our solemn exorcism? I found your little note, and I have missed you dreadfully. And how did you find me here?"

"I have been ill, Beatrix dear, terribly ill; and I don't know what has happened to me. How long ago is it? Yesterday was it not that the Bishop and the Abbot were to come. I got a call that I could not refuse."

"Dear Cecily! some errand of mercy I know, you good, unselfish creature. Never mind. Don't tell me. I know you prefer to keep these good deeds of yours in your own true heart. I will ask nothing."

"Oh, Beatrix! but I never did it. I got a short distance, and I felt so faint I had to sit down by the roadside, and then it seemed I was so weary I must fall asleep just where I was. I struggled—oh how I struggled against it!—but could not keep awake; indeed I thought I was dying, and at last I lost consciousness altogether. Then, oh, Beatrix, such awful dreams! You know how I sometimes have dreadful dreams, and this time I think they were worse than ever. For, besides all the old horrors, I was shut up in prison, and some one was calling—calling—to me to come out and play in the free, wild country, and I couldn't go; I could only cry in answer. It must have been all yesterday that I was asleep, or fainting, or something. Then through these terrible dreams came the vision of a radiant angel, and I seemed to know that you were wanting me, and I struggled and opened my eyes, and I was just where I had fainted, but there was a dear, benevolent old man with a long white beard standing by me. At first I thought he was a vision too, he looked so like some venerable spirit, and all the influences about him were so good and holy. I think he must have tended me and taken care of me all yesterday. He told me to wait here for you."

Beatrix remembered that ten days had passed since the day of the exorcism, and that Cecily had lost all count of time. She must have been cared for by some kindly creatures during this time, and have been found by Eochain on the roadside where she had fainted. It would be kinder not to tell her unless she found it out for herself.

"But now tell me, Beatrix dear, about yourself. How do you come to be here and not in the tower! What came of that exorcism? You will think me a terrible heretic, I know, but I was glad I was not there; the monks and churchmen always seem to make me shiver. I can't help thinking all their vows and their binding are so wrong, Master Martin Luther says so, and he says it is right to break vows that take away people's freedom."

"Oh, Cecily! how dreadful! Don't tell me any more. It cannot be right to break a vow; however wrong or foolish, one must stick to it. Why, one would not even break a promise given to a fellow human being, and is one to break a promise made at God's own altar."

"Well, never mind, you dear, holy creature. Keep your sweet faith. But it has been shown to me that the time is coming when the freedom preached by Martin Luther will dawn over all the world. But tell me your news. I am dying to hear of what you did yesterday."

"Well, nothing much came of the exorcism as far as one could see. It was all very solemn and impressive; but after the Abbot and the Bishop and the monks and the rest of them had gone away, I found, or rather I was brought to, my dear father, who had been close to us here all the time."

“Oh, Beatrix! and I never knew it! I must have done something very bad that my dear spirits should leave me without knowledge of what mattered so very much to you, and of course to me too, as your friend. Well, go on, dear; is he alive and better?”

“He is both, and perhaps I was wrong to say that the exorcism did nothing, for certainly the evil spirit plagues him no longer, and he is now calm and happy. But for the present I stay here to nurse him. I cannot go back to the Tower.”

“Oh, Beatrix! but why?”

“Because it was attacked and taken possession of by my unworthy lord and master, Sir Norman Leslie of the Glen, hunting for me, and determined to get possession of my poor person and my lands which are, I wean, of more moment to him than the person of any lady.”

Cecily showed no sign of recognition at the name of Leslie.

“How terrible,” she said. “Yes, I remember you told me you had been proxy-married to some brute of that name, and you hoped to be able to break it.”

“So I did; but the power of the whole Church, and the Keys of St. Peter, have tied me up, and not even the Holy Father himself can untie me, unless they can find some irregularity in it, and that is not likely, for my lord is a powerful man, and hath influence at Rome, so they tell me.”

“And can you really believe that a contract like that with a man you never even saw can bind you all your life. Oh, Beatrix! you must see how right Master Luther is.”

“Nay, Cecily! I see only that I am married, and such as it is, I must hold to it. I have given my word at the altar. But willingly I go not with my husband. I must hold myself true to him, blackguard though he be, for so did I in my ignorance promise.”

“Well, you brave soul, you will do as you see right to do. But I am shown a lovely future for you. There is a great golden angel hovering over you now, and his wings form a protection for you against all evil; and I hear voices saying that you shall be blest, and by one whom you have barely seen. The road looks all golden before you;—but I shall be away—I shall do you harm, so I seem to see—but I shall be away before the worst.”

“You could never do harm to me, Cecily; nothing but good. Do you know, your sweet, unselfish example has often kept me from doing wrong things myself, and your wonderful visions of saints and angels have kept my faith alive when it came very near to failing sometimes. You mustn’t get morbid; we must have long walks together, we can’t ride just now. Oh, yes! I know your horse and your man are at the Tower still, eating their heads off, and all my horses. But that brute Leslie—God forgive me that I should have to speak so of my husband—is always on the watch. He does not know where I am, and he must not know.”

“But where are you, Beatrix, if not at the Tower?”

“My chamber is inside the Dune of Callifer, with my dear father. Oh, don’t look so startled; there is a house inside there. But where to entertain you I don’t know. I must ask Eochain.”

“Who is Eochain? Beatrix, you bewilder me. Only two days, and you have got as new a life as if you were another person. A new home, new friends, shall I say new enemies? What does it all mean?”

“’Twould take long to tell. Persecution drove me out, and new friends took me in, and brought me to my father. We shall have plenty of time to talk. I must show you this country; though ‘tis only a mile from time Tower, this side is all as new to me as if it were really another land.”

A thought crossed Beatrix’s mind and troubled her. Hitherto the two girls had shared all their walks and rides whenever Cecily was at the Tower, and there was no secret between them. But now Beatrix felt the strangest reluctance to take her friend to Dallas Castle, or even to say anything about it. That adventure, and the friendliness of the Cummings, and the appearance of

the lonely chieftain on the battlements, seemed a sort of sacred possession of her very own, that not even with Cecily could she share.

At this moment Eochain, emerging from the wood, came upon the two girls.

"Mistress Ross, if I mistake not," he said, with grave courtesy. "I am glad you have found our dear lady; she has missed you greatly. Our ways are rough here, and our accommodation is of the humblest, but I have contrived to prepare a tiny cottage, a hut—really it is no more—for your abode while you will remain the guest of our primitive life. Come and see."

Together they walked to the haunted wood, where Eochain had with his own hands removed all traces of former occupation, and made the tiny shelter look quite fresh and almost new. Beatrix had never seen it before, and all memory of it had passed completely from Cecily's mind.

"Oh, how delightful!" she exclaimed. "I am sure there are good spirits very close around here. I see a great golden rose brooding over the roof, and two lovely figures in pure white guarding the door."

"You will join me at supper here in the open, at the hour of sunset," said Eochain. "Meantime, will you, my Lady Beatrix, give your father his evening meal. You will find it all ready. I doubt it will be best that he should not see Mistress Ross to-night. He will sleep as soon as he has had his broth—to-morrow, I hope, he may be up for a short time."

"Do tell me," said Beatrix, "how in this lonely spot you contrive to provide for us all our meals, and everything as though we were in the Tower, with all our own serving men."

"I am a Cumming," replied the old man, "and no Gumming was ever yet at a loss when there was any game to be had, either to kill or to cook it; but within the last few days the clan have come to know of my being here, and I have wanted for no assistance. Game of all kinds, and wine hath been brought daily, and I could have any help I wanted for anything."

"Are you really one of the wild Cummings," said Cecily. "I thought they were all—"

She checked herself hurriedly.

"A wicked and lawless crew," said the old man, with a smile. "You have gauged us correctly I think, and some there are who would tell you that I am the absolute worst of a very bad family. My elder brother, the chief of Altyre, thinks so still, I believe. I came back to this dear land some time since, but I told no one. Now they have found me out I know that the clan still have some love for the old man. The grey beards who were boys with me have remembered me ever since I went away, and have taught their children to look always for the return of Eochain Beag, as they used to call me, and my nephew Alasdair is the chosen chief of the Dallas branch of the Cummings. I hope he will now take up his position. Long ago they wanted me, but my work lay otherwheres. Now, Mistress Ross, as I think that your strength is not yet wholly returned, I counsel that you rest for awhile, and try to sleep until supper, and the Lady Beatrix will minister to her father. All three of you are for the present the guests of Eochain Beag Cumming, who feels himself honoured to have the privilege of entertaining you. Mistress Ross, I am somewhat of a leech. When we first nmet an hour or so since, you spoke of terrible dreams and nightmares. I hope after supper you will tell me a few particulars. I may be able to put them away altogether."

"Oh, if you only could!" said Cecily, as she passed into the shelter obediently to carry out the old man's behest, and repose till supper time.

Beatrix went to the Dune to give her father the usual evening meal, consisting of a savoury broth of various kinds of game, which she found simmering on a turf fire, and she realised with a thrill of sudden compunction how she had accepted all the delicate and gracious hospitality of Eochain Beag and his thoughtful courtesies as a matter of course. When she had first come here

fatigue, and the only half-allayed terror of the forbidden land, and her anxiety about her father, and joy at finding him still alive and recovering, and then the heavy hypnotic sleep into which she had been cast, had altogether dulled her senses to the novel strangeness of her surroundings. Then, when she came to herself, Eochain had taken the whole position so naturally that instinctively she felt at home at once, and the old life in Blervie Tower seemed a thing far away and already half forgotten.

Sir Wilfred was cheery as usual; his face had filled out in the last few days, and now had the fresh colour of health; his grey eyes were bright and full of humour.

"Welcome, my child," he said, "you have brought me a savoury mess such as I love, as the good book says. I recognise Master Eochain's cooking."

"Father, how good Master Eochain hath been to us!"

"Good, child—'tis too faint and poor a word. He is a man among ten thousand and of a fine old race. En! my Trixy, what an old fool I was not to wed you to a Cumming. I must have been half besotted. I remember I was studying some manuscripts about witches. Do you remember old Maggie Angus, who used to live in a turf hut in the hollow below the tower on the Rafford road—a hideous, dirty old woman. They said she turned herself into a hare; and one day a boy threw a stone at a hare and broke its fore leg, and the old woman was found with a broken arm. I wanted to know what spell would do this, and I had got some manuscripts from Rome; and the man who gave them to me was in the confidence of the Pope, and he persuaded me that if I were to marry you to Leslie your future was safe. I suppose it was thinking so much of the manuscripts took away my common sense, and he persuaded me that Sir Norman Leslie was high in favour at Rome. I know now that this was true, and that is the trouble, for Rome won't annul the marriage, the Churchmen are so anxious to get our lands. Eh! if it had only been a Cumming."

"Never mind, father. There must be some way out. Come, drink your broth and go to sleep. You will be out and about again in a few days."

In a very short time sleep was coming fast over the old man's eyes, and Beatrix gently arranged the cushions under the curly grey head, and drew the skin rug over him, and left him sleeping soundly, while she tripped back to rouse Cecily to join Eochain in their alfresco supper.

It was a bright and happy meal. Eochain was no longer the sage or theologian, no longer the Druid priest or the powerful magnetic hypnotist, ruling the bodies and brains of those under his spell. He was simply the courteous host, with the fascinating manners of his race, recounting legends of the countryside, and tales of mischief and adventures of his boyhood, or anon whimsically alluding to some item of their supper and narrating how hard it had been to snare, or how difficult to cook. And from this he told them of the cookery he had learned in gipsy tents,—of roasting a hedgehog in a casing of clay, or baking a blackbird inside a ball of meal.

From that he went on to speak of the gipsies with whom he had had great friendship in various countries, and of their wonderful skill in fortune-telling, and in the interpretation of dreams. Wonderful were the stories he told, and told so simply and graphically the girls were enthralled.

"But you, Mistress Ross," he said at length, "have had some remarkable experiences of dreams. It would be a great favour if you would tell me some. I have heard of your visions of saints and angels, and you have told me how you have suffered from horrible nightmare dreams. I wish I might lend you my aid to combat the latter. Please tell me something about them. When do they come, and what causes them? Do you know?"

"No! I only wish I did," she replied. "As for the nightmare itself, it is nearly always of the same kind, and it has something to do with hunting, and it seems that I should never fall into it

unless I let myself go. But it comes at last that I can't help it. I have to let myself go of my own will, too, that is the dreadful part of it."

"Try and tell me exactly," said Eochain; "no, don't be afraid. I can see what you are thinking, you fear lest even the recounting the symptoms may bring back the nightmare. I promise you it shall not."

"Trust him, Cecily," said Beatrix, "he is a master of sleep and dreams. He has cured my dear father that way."

"You are good, I know," responded Cecily. "I see flocks of good spirits around you. I do trust you, and I'll try to tell you as well as I can. I always have warnings before an attack of nightmare comes on, by moods and feelings that are quite unnatural to me. Sometimes a slight thing—a sight or sound—will rouse ideas. For instance, I see a hound running, and I think how glorious to run like that, and at once my mind is racing with the hound, my pulses bound, my breath comes quick. But I know what it all means now;—and I force myself to realise that the terror by night will assuredly come upon me, and then I lose all care for running and excitement, and just long to lie still and rest. And then sometimes it is thoughts not stirred by anything, but born of themselves, I suppose. I feel dull, and to amuse myself I imagine I am hunting—I don't know why, for I never cared for the sport—and then in fancy I am rushing along with the wind in my hair, and the fever in my blood, and the fresh air in my lungs, and I love the wild excitement even in fancy, and I get so excited that I love the kill too. I, who cannot bear to look at even the tiniest, most insignificant creature in pain, but it stirs me up to wilder and wilder excitement—I grow mad—and I love to see the blood flow—to see the quarry mangled and torn to pieces—I have a savage delight in its cries of pain—I want to throw myself upon it—to plunge my hands in its flowing blood, and to tear and to mangle it myself. All this, you know, is when I am awake and conscious, but it is a surging tide of madness that rushes along and carries me with it, till I can no more stop than I could stop if I were sliding down a mountain side on a snow-drift. But when it is over I am utterly exhausted, and oh! so ashamed of myself. Though it is all imagination and fancy, it looks as if it was real, and as if I had really been the cruel, savage monster I let myself imagine that I was. Then I know that an attack of nightmare is near, and that perhaps next time I shall lose consciousness altogether, and be plunged alive into that hell of visions with no power to check, or control, or get out. Then the only thing I can do is to crawl into some solitary place where I can sleep and suffer, and where whatever fury may possess me (for indeed I fear that some day I may actually go mad in one of these attacks), I may at least do no harm to any other."

"May I interrupt you for a moment," said Eochain. "You spoke of suffering in sleep; but in the waking premonition I gather that while the fancy is actually going on you exult and rejoice in it."

"I do—I do—while it is going on, it is the most glorious bliss in the world! How can I sit here and say so? But I am trying to tell you the truth absolutely, and so it is; but the dread before it comes on, and the shame after, are the torments of the damned. Perhaps In my nightmare dreams I may exult at the time in the same way. But you see I am unconscious. Then I have only the memory when I wake, and then there is the shame and the terror, and the feeling that I have been down in hell, and that I am fouled beyond all hope of recovery; yet there is sometimes also the memory of a wild excitement, of glorying in mad savagery, and the lust of blood, of giving myself up absolutely to being wholly animal in every thought and desire, and being proud of it, and there is sometimes, too, a great brutal animal man in the dreams, fierce and savage as myself, and I seem to be his willing slave, and to delight in arousing and satisfying all his

passions, and in goading him to fouler and coarser indulgence in them. But, as I say, it is the overpowering shame that is with me then, only a remote memory of the excitement."

"Yet now another question," said Eochain. "When the fit is coming on, when you have, as you say, a warning, do you not then look on these experiences with pleasure, and a wish to experience them again?"

"Oh, how could you know that? Yes, I do. The thought comes to me sometimes that there is a dream kingdom into which, when I am dull, and life looks all grey, I can enter and have all the joy and excitement and pleasure that seems to have been denied to me in life, and I think I will only just look in, and enjoy just one wild gallop for refreshment, and come back to the round of daily life again; and then before I know I am caught on the downward slope, and there's no stopping. Fancy will have its way. Sometimes I can resist, and then it looks as though life spread before me like a dull, level flat all grey and sombre, till I think I could not bear the monotony of it. But it's not always so it begins. Sometimes, even when I am tired and out of spirits, some inner voice seems to tell me to go and look for the dream kingdom, and I don't want to, I would much rather lie still and rest; but to get quit of the voice I say I will go, and then I feel I have promised, more than ever I felt the binding of a promise to a living being. I feel I must go, and by degrees I feel I want to, and then the rapture of the mad rush catches me, and there is no recovery till exhaustion. But when I lose my consciousness and fall really into sleep and night- mare, then I can tell you nothing, except the terrible memories when I wake, the shame and the disgust."

As she spoke there broke upon the silent air the sound of the trampling of a troop of horses in the distance, coming nearer, and a peal of a trumpet rang through the startled woodland. It was the Leslie's call, and a moment after came on their ears the stentorian shout.

"Ho, there! Grip fast! Grip fast! Ho, my black-a-vised sweetheart, art there? Nay, wench! I would pull you out of the pit of hell if I couldn't get you otherwise."

The galloping rush of the horses died away towards Alves Kirk as another trumpet peal rang out defiantly.

Eochain kept his eyes steadily fixed on Cecily's face. Never a muscle quivered, no sign of recognition passed. Only she said, "Some belated reveller, surely. I had not thought your peaceful roads were often troubled by such."

"Good," said Eochain to himself, "my spells are not needed there."

"I fear I shall not sleep to-night," said Cecily, "I was foolish to talk so much, and excite my brain. Never mind, I know the good spirits will take care of me here."

"Sleep shall come to you, my child," said Eochain. "Will you try to read the words on my ring."

He held out his right hand, on which was an engraved beryl stone. As she bent over it, trying to make out the words upon it, wave after wave of warm drowsy calmness flowed over brain and limbs.

"You are more than half asleep now," he said. "Retire to your cottage and rest and sleep soundly; in the morning all will be well with you."

"You are indeed a magician," she said softly and faintly. "I feel happier and better than for years."

So they parted, Beatrix going into the Dune to be near in case her father should need anything in the night, and Eochain back to the sacred circle to perform his nightly devotions.

CHAPTER XV

HOW LOVE DAWNED IN DALLAS CASTLE

The castle of Dallas lay in the flat country through which the little river Kellas and the higher waters of the Lossie meandered among peat mosses and heathery moors, and under the shade of graceful groups of birches. The flanking walls, square in form, and already grey and hichened, though the castle was comparatively new, swept round a considerable area; in the centre peered over them the battlemented tower, which formed its chief strength. Narrow lancet windows, irregularly placed, pierced the walls. The river had been turned from its course to form a moat, crossed by a draw- bridge, at the end of which a gloomy looking arch was protected by a portcullis. But on an afternoon two days after Beatrix had first beheld the castle under the escort of the two chivalrous Cummings, the drawbridge was down, the portcullis was raised, ~ and some men were busily at work repairing some dilapidations, and clearing out the moat. In the door- way stood the same figure who had stood on the battlements looking out on the sunset and the sea. He was now directing the men in their work. His bonnet with the chieftain's eagle plume surmounted a head covered with close-cropped, crisp chestnut curls, which in that day, when men habitually wore the hair rather long, was noticeable in itself, his close shaven face was sun-tanned and scored with keen, eager lines. The face of a poet in thought and fancy, but still more of a man of rapid decision and vigorous action, his figure indicated unusual strength and supple athletic capacity. The belted plaid of the red and green Cumming tartan that he wore was faded and somewhat frayed, his deerskin brogues showed signs of hard wear, but his dress was worn with the debonair grace of a man to whom it was habitual, and who had moved in Courts and among nobles. One could fancy him leading a dance in a stately hall, or racing with his dogs over the heather to pull down a wounded stag, or standing man to man in fierce fight when dirks flashed. Then would he stand for life or death, with palm up and the wrist low, to take the foeman in the groin, and the joy of fight would boil in his brain.

But just now it was building that filled his mind, till at length the job in hand was done, and he dismissed the men. "I shall lie alone here to-night again. Nay, good fellows, heed me not. When once this mouldy place is made habitable again we will have feasting and merrymaking to your hearts' content. Dallas shall be livelier than Altyre, I promise you. But to-night I have much to think of—good-night! good-night! Come again to-morrow, there is still much to do."

He made the sign of the cross in benediction, and muttered a Hail Mary as he turned within, and passing over a triangular courtyard, wherein some small Highland beasts were munching the hay, he ascended to a narrow window of the tower, and looked out to the north on the hill that rose towards distant Callifer. More and more steadily he fixed his eyes, as a limber mist seemed to float over the hillside, as though a sea fog were drifting up the valley. The chill sensation of fog came over him, too, as the lines of the hill grew dim, and then were blurred out of recognition. Still he sat and gazed, and on the mist came a round patch of light, or rather of a clearer grey than the rest, and in this he saw the figure of a woman walking. Rapidly she walked, and there was a flush on the fair face, and her red lips were parted as the breath came quickly with the exercise; her bright red-gold hair was stirred by the wind, and formed a golden cloud round her face; she swung her hood in her hand, and her wimple was loosened for air; her eyes gleamed with lambent green lights as she tripped lightly from stone to stone over the rough, uneven ground where no path lay. Then the picture disappeared, and the grey mist lay over all the hillside. His eyes ached and throbbed, and gradually the mist seemed to clear away, the hill came again into sight, with no human figure visible.

“That picture is persistent,” said Alasdair to himself. “But I never saw her like that before. I wonder— yes! it must be now. Old nurse used to say I had the second sight. She is veritably coming to me. Hey! but life is good once more.”

He turned into the Castle again, and looked round the room with some dissatisfaction. It had been his own living-room for the few days he had been staying at the Castle—good enough for him, so he had thought, but now he was to have a visitor it looked strangely rude and uncomfortable—the bare board on trestles that stood for a table, the rough settle, the deer-skin thrown over a heap of moss that served him for a couch. They were mean and unworthy. Hurriedly he dived at a bale that had been brought in by two of the clansmen that morning, and thrown carelessly into a corner till he should have need for it. Some plaids and skins, a dirk and targe, a claymore, and similar articles were hauled out and quickly draped about the room with refined taste, till the bare, mean chamber began to take on the aspect of a Highland chieftain’s hall. Then he ran down to a room on the ground floor that served him for a larder; a peat fire was smouldering in one corner, a pile of oatmeal bannocks and a stoup of milk were ready to his hand, fresh heather honey was in a jar. It was but short work to have a dainty if somewhat primitive meal laid out on the board now decked with a Cumming plaid and a spread of homespun napery sent to him by an old woman of the clan who had saved it for the home-coming of the Chief. Another settle was hauled down from an upstairs room, and the young Chief surveying his preparations was not displeased on the whole.

“She will be here,” he murmured low to himself, “the lady of my dreams, only twice seen in the flesh, and then she knew not I saw her, nor could she ever think ‘twas a Cumming under that strange garb. No matter! The way is long, she will be glad to rest, and to break bread even with me, mayhap.”

His mood was singularly humble. In his earlier days he had known women well, and in the gay and light society of the period he had been petted and made much of, though he had but little responded; but now, before the image of this twice-seen woman who had so inextricably wound herself into his dreams, his self-confidence vanished—he saw himself as merely the rude Highland chief, who could have no attraction for so rare and dainty a flower.

A step sounded on the drawbridge. His pulses raced almost painfully, and notwithstanding all his preparations he half wished he could retreat before he met her. Then he looked from the window and cursed himself for a fool, for it was but a serving-man in the Altyre livery, and bearing a note. He read it hastily. Then he said—

“Tell Sir Alexander Cumming of Altyre this from Alasdair Cumming, Chief of the Cummings of Dallas and of Kellas, we are no thralls or bondmen of Altyre, neither will we brook any interference. I, Alasdair, was the Tannist of this clan, and I have now come to take up mine own. If Sir Alexander speaks to me as a father, I will yield him all the reverence due from a son. If he speaks as the head Chief of all the Cummings, then I say if the Clan Cumming goes to fight I and my men will stand by him till the last of us lies dead on the field, be his cause good or evil. But otherwise I will tolerate no interference; the Cummings of Dallas in exercise of their ancient and undoubted right have freely chosen me, the Tannist, for their Chief, and I will abide by them and uphold their rights to the last. Such is my final word to the Chief of Altyre. Stay I A herald is a sacred person. Drink a flagon of wine ere your departure. Now go with what speed you may.”

He spoke hurriedly, once more bidding the youth haste lest night overtake him.

Partly his urgency might be due to the sight of a figure in green robe and mantle walking daintily across the level ground by the stepping-stones. And hastily the youth departed, for Alasdair Cumming was not a man to be trifled with; but on his homeward way he too had seen

the dainty figure in green, and had reported thereon to his gossip Master Urquhart, in Forres, telling him as a choice piece of scandal how ‘twas small wonder that Alasdair Cumming had taken up his abode in the deserted Castle of Dallas, where metal so attractive might be found—such quarry, in fact, as it was the wont of the Cummings to pursue with especial ardour. And Master Urquhart recognising the description of the lady, saw something to his own advantage in the story, and a creature of his own, jackal of a jackal, had stolen out from Forres along the Rafford road.

Alasdair was very conscious that his nerves had been on edge. The manifestation of second sight to the Highlander is often in itself exhausting, and the expectation of actually seeing the dream lady who, twice beheld in the flesh, and to whom he had never addressed one word, had yet haunted his visions with an extraordinary persistence, thrilled him till the tensity of nerve became almost unendurable. The message from Sir Alexander Cumming of Altyre, touching as it did his dignity and his responsibility as chosen Chief of the Dallas Cummings, fired the train; but the outburst of wrath calmed him. He sat in the window-seat looking to the north, leaning his chin on his hand, and gazing over the watery levels at the foot of the Castle away to the steep dark hill that lay beyond, watching the green-kirtled figure that appeared and disappeared as the path wound among the trees.

Beatrix walking that afternoon down the Glen of Dallas had passed over the stepping-stones. Roy and Alpin, again on sentry duty, saluted her gravely; but as she seemed to desire no help or company they stood aside with doffed bonnets, allowing her to pass. She looked with curiosity at the stern old keep. Eochain had told her somewhat of its history, and of the mysterious Cochrane who had built it, and the stories and legends and the great and hidden truths that he had built into its walls by the secrets of masonry. She longed to have just a peep at such a wonderful and curious place. Of course, if the solitary watcher were again on the battlements, she must turn back. But probably now he would be away, fighting, or hunting, or something. She was rejoiced to find that the battlements were deserted—so then she would go on. All the same, her heart was beating painfully. She had been told that Alasdair Cumming would do her much good, and she felt a curiosity to see him. Yet, would Father Ambrose approve? She had exorcised the vision of Father Ambrose from her mind, but she could not help thinking that somewhere or other, at some future time, very remote probably, Father Ambrose might be her guide, her friend, her confessor, perhaps,—that somehow, some time, she might actually see those eyes that had so burned upon her through the folds of his cowl. Should she confess to him the interest she felt in this young Alasdair Cumming?

Well, anyhow, he was not here—the Castle was obviously empty. If only the drawbridge were down and the portcullis raised, she might have a peep into its wonders. But under this there was certainly a half-acknowledged disappointment that the Castle’s lord was away—disappointment strangely succeeding to relief with which she saw that the battlements were untenanted. And the rapid beating of her heart and stringing of nerves and muscles that had caused her to walk stiffly, and with almost a tremble and a warm glow, gave way to a blank feeling of weariness, and a wish to sit down and rest for a moment.

She was approaching the gate of the Castle, when, as she turned round the last corner of the walls to come on to the drawbridge, a tall figure stood before her in a belted plaid, and wearing the eagle plume in the bonnet, which he doffed in courteous salutation.

“Welcome, fair lady, to the bare hall of a penniless laird! I knew you would come to-day.”

“Impossible!” said Beatrix gravely, and a trifle stiffly, masking the agitation that surged within her,—“impossible! I only knew myself within the last half-hour; indeed, had I known that you–”

She stopped in a little confusion, not knowing exactly how to finish the sentence.

"Nevertheless, I did know," he replied, "and that an hour ago—before you knew yourself, as it seems. And that you were expected I will prove to you, if you will but deign to come within, and trust yourself for a brief period of rest to a wild Cumming."

"Indeed I have good cause to bless the name of the wild Cummings," said Beatrix. "The best friend I have had in my life was he whom I think they call Eochain Beag."

"Oh! my Uncle Eochain," replied he. "Yes, you are right—the best, noblest fellow of all our race, as it seems to me. The very worst of a bad brood, some would tell you. Did he tell you of this ramshackle old keep of mine?"

"He did. He told me many stories of the Castle and made me long to see it; but indeed you must think very ill of me that I have thus forced myself on you without any word of invitation."

Alasdair raised his eyes and looked at her, and at that moment a strange trembling passed over both, though neither of them could have told why, and in a moment were woven those subtle chains, linking two lives indissolubly—each had come into the other's life, and for good or for ill were never to go out again. Yet not in the least did either of them realise this fact.

He stood with doffed bonnet, and in the silence a strange nervousness came over Beatrix—so clearly his eyes gave the invitation she had said was lacking, so plainly every fibre of him longed for her, yet was held under the severest restraint; and the thrill she felt was like that when she felt the eyes of Father Ambrose upon her in the Chanter's garden. She must say something—Or run away—or scream! The tension was too great.

"Tell me something of it," she said. "I came to explore—not thinking to find the Castle's lord."

"Not very much to tell; but such as it is, allow me to be your guide and expounder of mysteries." He spoke with a forced calm he was far from feeling. "Well, first of all, you see that device cut in the stone above the door?"

He pointed to a cutting on the keystone of the arch; it was like a diamond in the centre of which was a cross with equal arms, the ends of whose limbs touched the angles of the diamond.

"That" he said, "has many meanings. In the first place, it is Cochrane's mason-mark, whereby his work may be known; but secondly it indicates water. The figures upon it—you can't quite make them out from here, unless your sight is unusually keen—give the exact distance and direction from the door where it may be found. You would say, perhaps, it was superfluous in this valley of streams to indicate the location of water, but the fact is that most of the water about here is so foul with peat as to be undrinkable—that place holds a spring of the purest, clearest water in the whole of Morayshire. I need hardly say how important that is in time of war, or if the Castle is attacked. We have special ways of protecting our access to the well. But then, again, the Castle itself is built on the plan of that device, as I will show you, if you will do me so much honour."

He stood aside with a courtly bow to permit her to enter. Beatrix hesitated for a moment. Then some feeling stronger than herself overmastered her, and she passed under the arched doorway beneath the strange sign carved on the lintel; the triangular courtyard was before her, and the central tower set cornerwise with the round turret containing the winding stair occupying the nearest angle.

"What a curious arrangement!" she said. "I never saw a castle planned like this."

"There is, I believe, no other in Scotland," he answered. "Cochrane put all his knowledge into it—it is a discourse in stone that would take years to expound fully. I know only a very little of it, though it calls me master just now."

"Tell me," she said, after a pause.

“Look back,” he answered her.

The open door behind them framed with its sombre shadow a lovely picture. A little hill, crowned with birch and holly and rowan trees laden with their rich red fruit, rose just on the opposite side of the moat; its top, feathered with the graceful branches of the trees, was clear cut against the pale blue, faintly tinged with gold and rose, reflected from the rich sunset sky; behind the trees, on either side of this bill, the glen could be seen stretching far away.

“That is the fairy hill,” he said. “The door faces to the east, from which by tradition we Cummings were sprung; but the fairies stand to protect us from the dangers of earth, and there, you see, is the mystic rowan tree that guards against witchcraft.”

“I was once advised to hang a bough over my chamber door for a protection,” she told him.

“And was it successful?” His voice was eager, as though some personal interest lay behind.

“It was—quite, I suppose; at all events, I was never attacked as my poor dear father had been, and I escaped with most amazing luck out of deadly dangers. A dear old monk sent me warning.”

“Old enough to know all the charms and spells of witches. But surely it was singular knowledge for a monk.”

“I don’t know why I should call him old—I never saw his face; but he took an interest in me.”

“Oh, depend on it, he was old—a young monk would have thought such things were a trafficking with the Devil. But now look here! The buildings to our right are the stables; that wing points to the north, and Cochrane used to say appropriately contains the animals, the children of earth. The wing opposite contains the kitchens and such like; it points to the south, and is the home of fire. Now we will go up, if you don’t mind.”

“I should love to.”

They passed through a low door into the tower.

“Isn’t this a curious winding stair?” she said. “I never remember to have seen one just like it. And what is that queer-looking triangle cut over the window?”

“It is a curious stair—I believe it is unique. It has scores of meanings; my Uncle Eochain has told me that Cochrane would talk for hours about that stair. You see all the windows look out to the fairy hill, and each time you come round you see a little bit more over the top of it, so Cochrane used to say in life you go away by a long detour, and at last you come back to near the same point again, but you are a little bit higher up, you know more, and you see a bit farther out. Now see here,” he said, as he opened the door of his own living-room; “here is proof that I expected you, for you see I have prepared for a guest.”

Beatrix looked in amazement.

“You are a veritable magician!” she said.

“Oh no!—no magician, only an ordinary Highlandman, with a little bit of second sight. But pray sit down and rest. An oatmeal bannock and a draught of new milk will do you no harm after your walk, and then I will show you the view from the battlements. And when you wish to return, I trust you will accept the escort of my young clansmen and cousins, Roy and Alpin, who watch the march on this side. You see, we have always to be ready for a raid, though I think not that there is any present danger.”

Beatrix was glad enough to rest, for in fact she was somewhat weary with the walk and the excitement. The gipsy meal prepared by Alasdair was worthy of the reputation of a noted hunter, and she found herself with some surprise thus frankly accepting the hospitality of a man whom she met now for the first time, and conversing with him as though he were an old and valued friend.

With a sudden impulse she looked up at him, and their eyes met across the table. It was almost like an electric shock. Her breath came quick and her pulses raced, and the room grew dim for an instant—there seemed to her to be a rosy mist around his form; then with a deep breath she recovered herself, and found the grey kindly eyes still fixed on her, calm and steady. This was a man whom no emotion would ever touch, she thought—grave, kindly, learned. But what a grand figure of a man! He stood considerably over six feet, and was broad and muscular in proportion, without an ounce of superfluous flesh. The crisp curly hair and the bronzed handsome face were eminently attractive; and the eyes, though so steady, seemed to burn on her face. Wild thoughts surged through her brain, though she was outwardly calm; she was conscious that every fibre of her being yearned to this man, as never before in her life. All at once she felt the pressure of her life more than ever before. The mysterious attack upon her father now seemed as though from its very mystery it might be repeated at any moment, and who could say that he would come off so well again? Sir Norman Leslie and her ill-fated marriage loomed large before her—all the powers of Church and State combined to force her to this unholy alliance; there seemed to be no escape from the toils that were closing round her on every side. If only this strong man would take her in his arms, and soothe and pet her, till joy and confidence returned! She who hitherto had proudly trusted in herself now perceived her own strength as weakness, and towards this man she felt a trust she had never given before, save perhaps in very early childhood to her father.

Alasdair, however, appeared profoundly unconscious of these wild thoughts. Suave and gracious, he talked like a polished courtier, but without the least appearance of intimacy. From the little half-playful account of his second sight, whereby he had provided a rest and a meal for her, he went on to stories of Highland second sight and of witchcraft, and tales of the district, stories of sport and of adventure and old clan fights. She listened enthralled, and gradually, as she grew physically rested, her nerves became steady again, and together they went up the winding stair to the top of the tower, from whence they could see the peculiar arrangement of the building. Deep in the flat stones that covered the top of the keep was cut the five-pointed star, and from this as a centre the buildings formed a cross, the flanking walls in diamond shape joining point to point surrounding the whole.

There are the four elements," said Alasdair. "You see, the cattle are to the north—that is earth; and the kitchens, as I told you, to the south—that is fire. To the west a stream flows under the buildings and turns our water-mill—that is water; and to the east the buildings there are open to all the winds of heaven—that is air. And here on the floor the signet star of five points shows how the spirit dominates all the elements—that is the human sign, and shows man's superiority to the animal creation."

Thus for a while he discoursed, Beatrix listening with eager attention, till the fading light in the west warned them that it was time for her to return.

Alasdair blew a shrill whistle, and Roy and Alpin could be seen to spring from the heather and race like young deer over the intervening space. The Chief raised his bonnet in courteous salutation and farewell, and under the escort of the two chivalrous clansmen she retraced her steps, in a strange mood of exhilaration. They went with her all the way till she was almost at the margin of the haunted wood, then shouted a peculiar call, which was answered from the wood.

"The Cummings' signal," explained Roy. "It was answered by Master Eochain Beag. We may safely leave you here, lady,—you are safe under the protection of the Clan Cumming. For those who are honoured with the friendship of Master Eochain, and of our beloved Chief Alasdair Oge, the clan would lay down their lives. Fare you well, lady!"

In an instant they had disappeared—how she could not tell, but even their extraordinary knowledge of moor-craft did not discover a man who by his dress was a tinker, lying face down in the heather where it was deepest and watching the scene. Neither, though they had seen him, could they have told that he was an emissary of Master Urquhart of Forres.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MAGIC OF THE CIRCLE

As the days went on Sir Wilfred Dunbar grew rapidly stronger. His wounds were quite healed, thanks to the skilful dressing of Master Simon Tulloch, and afterwards the sedulous care of Eochain Beag. The effects of the shock and the loss of blood were also steadily repaired by the quiet and rest and the spell of sleep which came upon him in the Dune under Eochain's treatment. The long days and nights when he had slept or dozed and known nothing of his own surroundings or of the outer world had given nature a chance to build up again the battered house of life, and now in the warm days of late autumn known as St. Martin's Little Summer he was able to take his first walks abroad leaning on the arm of Cecily Ross, for he had insisted that Beatrix should take some exercise, and Eochain had guaranteed the paths down by Dallas to be safe.

It was going on for three weeks now since that notable day of the full moon when Beatrix had come there and when the Tower of Blervie had been besieged and overrun by Sir Norman Leslie and his men, yet it was known that he still lingered in the neighbourhood and made no secret of the fact that he was searching high and low to recover his wife—only always to the north side of the hill, for into the haunted and forbidden land his men would not follow him, even if his own superstitious fears would have allowed him to venture himself, and into the lands of Dallas no man might pass without the permission of that branch of the Cummings, unless he were prepared to force a passage at the point of the sword. True, he had Alasdair's leave to pass through Altyre, but Altyre was not Dallas, and who might be the overlord there he had no means of knowing.

So it was that the old familiar countryside was unsafe for the Lady Beatrix, and Sir Wilfred could not return to Blervie, and where Beatrix was there must Cecily Ross also abide; and so it came to pass that the little quartette—the two old men and the two girls—dwelt happily together, and Cecily took her share of nursing and taking care of Sir Wilfred, in whom there had grown up a curious liking for the strange, weird woman, with her mystic devotion and marvellous visions.

"Tell me, Mistress Ross," he said, as they walked together from Callifer towards the haunted wood, and looked westwards over the long ranges of the Altyre woods, hill behind hill touched with the glory of the fast setting sun,—"tell me, know you aught of witchcraft?"

The old man's mind was working on the problems that had exercised him for years, and to which he could still find no solution.

"Nay, Uncle Wilfred," she replied, for so he had taught her to call him; "I thank our dear Lord that he has kept me from all knowledge of so wicked a rebellion against His holy Name. Though, indeed, I dream sometimes in those nightmare visions which Uncle Eochain has promised to cure and drive away. No! don't ask me to recall them. And far off in my childhood I seem to remember something—"

"What was it?" said her companion eagerly. "'Tis no idle question, believe me. It pertains to what I am working at. You can help, I am sure. Your wonderful visions, the favour of the

Angels, or whatever they are, manifest to you—all this is the good and holy side, and witchcraft is the base and evil side, but they are the same thing. Tell me of your childhood."

She pressed her hand on her brow.

"If I could but remember!" she said, "but it all seems so faint and far away. I remember a home of luxury, and I know that both my parents died—this I have been told, for some money came to me then, and I was sent to a convent, and when I was there the visions began to come to me. I have a fancy that the nuns were proud of my having these visions, and they made me fast for long hours and days together, lying before the altar, in order that I might see. But then evil dreams began to come too, and then they told me I had no vocation, and I must go out into the world. Oh! and I remember a wonderful knight who came riding past one day, and I thought he was like St. Michael, and I thought how lovely it would be if he would take me and carry me away as his bride. Then, as I fasted and prayed before the altar, a great Angel came and laid a hand on my forehead and bade me remember nothing more, and it all seemed to fade, and I came out into the world; but I was promised that I should have the gift of healing, and that I should take on myself the burdens of others, and should be able to turn evil into good. You yourself, Uncle Wilfred, must have felt that our dear Lord gives healing through my hand when it was laid on some place that ached."

"That have I indeed. But tell me, Mistress Cecily, can your prayers heal at a distance?"

"Oh, indeed yes! I have imagined myself by the bedside of the sick and laying my hand on them, and they have told me afterwards that they have seen as it were an angel of light, and felt the healing influence."

"Why, this is the very projection whereof Theophrastus the Bombast wrote to me, and the plastic form. This is all I wanted. If works of mercy, why not works of cruelty? If an angel, why not a hare—or any other form? Mistress Cecily," he said aloud, for the preceding words had been muttered low to himself, "I thank you; you have solved the questions that have puzzled me for years, and in gratitude I hope we may be able to free you from those terrible dreams you speak of. I think I see now whence they come."

"God grant you may! Here comes Uncle Eochain."

"So it is—he has finished his devotions. Leave me with him for a little, my child. I must confer with him over what you have told me. You had better go and rest for a time—you have been over close in your attendance on the old man. Thanks to you, my Beatrix can get fresh air and exercise."

Cecily passed to the little cottage that was her present home, and Sir Wilfred in a few rapid sentences detailed to the Druid what she had told him, and his own conclusions.

"Yes, it is remarkable," said the latter,—"and even more so than you think. Cecily Ross the devout mystic seer and Elspet Simpson the Border witch are one and the same person—that I have known for some time. But that it is really two facets as it were of the same nature and powers, under the sway of different dominating moods, make it a problem of marvellous interest. Your wish may be now accomplished, old friend and fellow-student of the long ago! You can study a genuine witch at close quarters, and perhaps in doing so we may be able to heal an unfortunate lady of a dire sickness. This very afternoon we will begin our treatment, and you shall help."

"What do you propose?" said Sir Wilfred. "I am ready to do anything I can to assist. I earnestly desire to help this poor girl, who has been so good to me and to my Beatrix, and I desire almost equally to study this extraordinary manifestation that has baffled me, and of which not even the sublime Theophrastus can give any very clear account."

“This girl,” replied Eochain, “is a curiously perfect example for study; her two existences are entirely separate. As Cecily, the religious mystic, she only knows Elspet Simpson as a horrible nightmare dream; as Elspet, the witch, she knows absolutely nothing whatsoever of Cecily Ross. I propose that she shall tell us all about the two existences, and her own history.”

“But surely that will drive her incurably mad, and fix the evil dreams into permanent waking life.”

“Don’t be disturbed, old friend, she will know nothing whatsoever about it; she will remember nothing, but of a restful sleep with beautiful dreams.”

“You are indeed a magician. Well, I am ready to play any part you assign to me.”

“You shall be my acolyte and serve my Mass, and the revelation shall come to us both together. There is my Church, and I need to invoke the powers of good to aid us in the work we are going to try. Here, to the west, is a couch of fern and moss where I often meditate. Rest you there while I prepare myself; then you shall aid me if you will.”

While they were talking they had passed through an opening into the haunted wood, and along a narrow pathway, till the great solemn stones stood before them. The trees were cleared away just enough to leave the outer ring rising from the close-cut sward; beyond this they stood tall and thick and close together, making an impenetrable fence that probably for centuries the people of the district had never dared to break through. The centre was marked by an inner ring of smaller stones, and only some ten or twelve feet diameter.

Eochain stood in the east, his back to the circle, and raised his long staff towards heaven, looking up as in rapt adoration; then he walked slowly round the outer ring, and, returning to the east, he turned and passed into the centre, where he sank on his knees, burying his face in his hands, as his arms rested on the altar stone in the midmost of the ring.

After some moments he rose and stood leaning on his staff, and looking steadily in the direction of the hut where Cecily slept. It was not long before she came out, walking slowly and steadily. Her eyes were fixed, yet she did not seem as one walking in sleep, but rather with a concentration of purpose.

“You called me,” she said.

“No! I did not call, but I wanted you, and you knew it. I want you to help me in an experiment.”

“Gladly. Tell me what I must do.”

“Nothing but consent to what I am going to try. I am going to put the spell of sleep on you, that you may tell me, if you can, all about those nightmare dreams that terrify you so. You are now in full and complete control of all your senses. Are you willing that I should know all the secrets of your life, and Sir Wilfred also? You may perhaps tell us things that you have yourself forgotten. But if you know of anything you had rather not disclose, I will do nothing.”

“You know I trust you entirely,” she answered.

“I know there is something mysterious in my life,—something horrible, as I think,—that I never could fathom; but I don’t think I want to, for whenever I have had a glimpse of it, it seemed so terrible that I shrank in fear. But I should be more glad than I can say for you to know. Perhaps you might help me. Only, I beg you, don’t tell me if it is very dreadful. Let me still forget.”

“I will bring you peace if I can. At all events, you may rely on me that nothing I do will increase your trouble, and I verily think I can mend it. Now you know the old carved stone that stands half-way between here and the Dune, tell me if you remember the central carving on it.”

“Of course I do. It is the shape of a silver mirror.”

“A mirror, yes! but not a silver one. Is it like this?”

From under his long robe he drew a concave disk set on a handle, and painted a deep glossy black, surrounded by a band about an inch broad of a vivid red.

“That is the very thing—what is it?”

“Sit down there, my child.” He pointed to a natural cushion of moss against the central altar stone facing to the east. Obediently she sat where he indicated, leaning against the stone. He stood beside her holding the disk.

This is the magic mirror of the Druids. Look into it without fear, you will see nothing but beautiful things in it.”

She gazed curiously into the slightly hollowed black circle as Eochain held it before her eyes, slightly moving it in a small circle.

“Oh, how wonderful! It is filling with mist like steam, and lovely colours, like rainbows in foam. There are angels there. I think they are clearing the mists away. Ah, yes! I see my old home. How strange! I had forgotten what it was like. I remember it all now. But, oh! it hurts my eyes.”

“Shut your eyes,” he said, and as her eyes closed and her head sank back against the stone, he laid the disk aside, and placing both his hands on her head, he drew them slowly down over her shoulders and along her arms, then horizontally across her brow, saying as he did so—“Sleep! sleep! sleep! When you wake you will remember nothing of what you now see. Do you hear me?”

“Yes,” came the answer very faintly.

“Can you see and tell me all that you see and hear?”

“Yes.”

“Good! I want you to go back and tell me of your youth, before these evil dreams began to come on you.”

A curious change seemed to come over the sleeping face—the deadly white pallor was irradiated with a flush of health, still strangely pale. It was the paleness of some wonderful tropical flower, and the masses of her black hair had a strange beauty of their own. She rose and paced slowly round the circle. Her eyes were open, but there seemed no sight in them, only an ecstatic upward gaze to heaven; her arms were crossed over her bosom.

“Where are you now?” said Eochain.

“I am in the great church. The dear nuns are all round me. I am going to offer myself to God. I know my father and mother are dead; I am all alone. But the sweet angel has told me that I am the chosen bride of the dear Lord, and that all my money will be given to the church to do His holy service. . . . Ah! there is a knight comes in—”

In an instant her expression changed from the ecstatic religious devotion; there passed over her expressive face an appearance of pure human love.

“Ah! who is he? is it St. Michael? he is like the holy saint on the east window. No! he is human! human! and, my God! how I want him. I long to crush myself against him, to twine myself round him, and absorb all his glorious strength, and let my own feminine nature be drawn in and blended with and become the complement of his magnificent virile life, till my life is lost in his. My heart is beating furiously, painfully, but I must give no sign; these simple nuns must never know. Every nerve is growing tenser and tenser. Ah, God! how he draws me! Suddenly it breaks with a throb—the nerves are all loose—I am faint and limp, but so happy. Two angels lay their hands on my head, and forgetfulness comes. He has gone. I hear the Mother Abbess say, ‘She has fainted.’

“I pray for him—but the fury of desire has passed. I will offer myself to God for him, and I shall be accepted as an atonement for all his sins. Happy thought!

“Now I am in the Convent garden; it is moonlight. I ought not to be here, but I am, and over the hedge I see him riding by. I try to hide, but I don’t want to. He has seen me, he is off his horse, he has crashed through the hedge. Oh, my God! I am in his arms. Heaven were well lost for this. I have no will Left. Norman, take me; body and soul I am all yours. I am enveloped in his tenderness, and in utter abandonment he gives himself up to my frantic caresses. Here is heaven indeed. Ah! all grows rosy,—then dark,—I know no more. . . . The nuns find me in a trance on the ground. I have forgotten everything. They say, ‘Behold the saint.’ But the angels have given me oblivion.

“I have nothing to confess, for I remember nothing. I don’t know how I came to be out there in the convent garden. I am preparing for my reception as a bride of Christ, but I have a strange and unappeasable hunger for I know not what. The time of the full moon is drawing near again. I am ill and weak; they send me out to walk on the hillside, to get fresh air and strength. I am walking there now. There is a strange man coming to meet me—a little old man—he carries a black stick—he is ugly, but he fascinates me. He says he is a doctor—Doctor Finn. He knows I am ill, but he can cure me. He can give me my lover. What can he mean? I am the bride of Christ. Yet if he can cure me, how glad I should be. I do want some strength. He says I should stay at a farm house near where he can attend me. Now I am back in the convent;—the Mother Abhess says I am to go to the farm house to get well and strong before my reception. How strange. This is the finger of God.

“Doctor Finn lays his hand on my head, his thumb pressed between my eyebrows. Instantly I remember my knight; all the details of our meeting in the garden come back with startling vividness. I want him—Oh, God! how I want him. Every fibre of my body aches for him. Dr. Finn asks me if I really want him. Really!—T would go through the pit of hell and brave the Devil for his sake. ‘No need to brave the Master,’ says he, ‘he is kind, but you must be initiated.’ And he tells me that at the full moon I must go to North Berwick, and then I shall have all my desire. I was Finn’s slave—”

“Stop,” said Eochain firmly, “that is no use to me. Go to North Berwick.”

As he spoke her expression changed—even the very appearance of her face, the alternation of the love-languid and love-hungry looks, that had succeeded to the devout calm of the religious enthusiast, now gave way to a species of frenzy—her gestures were wild and uncontrolled, though always graceful, her night-black eyes flashed with lambent fires, and her masses of straight black hair curled and twisted in elf locks, seeming almost to writhe like snakes. She paused in a wild dance, facing to the west and looking towards Sir Wilfred.

“I am there,” she cried, exultantly. “How the full moon shines. There are multitudes of us here. Women from everywhere.”

“How did you come?” said Eochain.

“I can’t tell. Dr. Finn brought me and two others; he said we sailed in a sieve. I don’t know; we seemed to be sailing in some thing—I don’t care how we came, it’s glorious to be here, I never felt alive before, I’ve been only half alive, torpid death—*now I know*—I’m tingling all over with joy and zest of life; so are all of us.”

“Stop! Are you really there? or do you only fancy you are?”

“How can I tell? It all seems real. We are in the old kirkyard. I can see and hear and touch the others—yet it’s all queer, like nothing I ever saw before. There are two girls stark naked, dancing with a goat, and an old woman astride of a broomstick, and a lot more capering over the graves,

and a queer little chap with horns playing on panpipes. Yet I fancy I see my body lying asleep in the farm house. Oh, what does it matter? It is life—full, glorious, splendid life. How my heart is racing, and every pulse tingling. I could run and jump and climb and fly now. I could race with a hound, and pull down a stag in his gallop. Ah I what a thing to do.

"Now there's a huge man, and he's got a wolf beside him. He is very dark, and his eyes glitter cruelly, but he draws me. I want to be drawn into him; I feel he can give me all I want. Finn leads me up to him. What joy! He is my master. He bids me bare my left breast, and he touches it with his finger. What a wild thrill right through my heart! I never felt real mad bliss before. Now he bids me take his wolf's head in my hands, and inhale his breath. Oh, glorious I I feel all the untiring strength, all the rapture and joy of life. Now I am his servant wholly. Hark to the wild crash of music! Oh, how we dance, racing and rushing in mad rapture! Now Finn tells me to set my foot on a shell, and to say some words."

"What are they?"

"I don't know, he made me forget them as soon as they were said. It's all gone. I find myself on the edge of a wood, and there is Norman coming to meet me. 'Ha! my black-a-vised sweetheart,' he says 'art come back to me. I knew you could not stop away. A nun, forsooth! nay, leave that to fools with water in their veins. You and I have good red blood, sweetheart, so couple we under the greenwood and breed savages like ourselves.'

"He has a hunter's camp in the woods, for he loves to hunt alone, only calling his men with his bugle when he needs them, and I think I am useful to him, for I am half gipsy. My father was a pure Romany, and my mother was a countess whom he enticed away from her husband, and her money it was that came to me. So I know all woodcraft by nature, and can tell him where the quarry lies, and I can cook for him, and we are very happy together. But I have grown so tired; we have been a week together and I feel worn out—so thirsty too. No, I cannot drink the fiery wines, I must have the pure water from the brook, and as I drink there are two bright angels beside me, and they lay their hands on my head, and bid me forget all that had passed, and they say than Finn can only have power over me at certain times, and that some day his power shall be broken altogether. There is mist and darkness coming over my eyes. I must sleep." She stopped. Eochain and Sir Wilfred were amazed at the change in her appearance, even more sudden and complete than before.

Her face was white with the whiteness of death, and her heavy masses of black hair hung straight and lifeless. Her eyes were like two openings into the darkest night; her limbs seemed as though utterly relaxed with fatigue. Eochain, advancing, laid his hand on the nape of her neck, as if he were pouring fresh vitality into her.

"Go on," he commanded. "Tell me more."

"I wake just outside the convent; the dear nuns are round me. They tell me I disappeared from the farm house. I must have wandered away in delirium. I have no memory of it. I suppose I was ill, and I tried to get home, and fainted just by the gates. I am so glad to be back. They tell me the Mother Abbess is very ill. I beg them to take me to her, for I know I could heal her, but they will not; they think I am too weak. So I pray before the altar. I can see her room, and I fancy myself going in and laying a cool hand on her, and saying that she should get up quite well.

"They say an angel came in and raised her up. I know the dear Lord let me do this for her.

"I am not to be received yet, though. They say our Lord has given me the power of healing, and I must go out into the world, and heal the sick as He ordained. I remember it was when I was at the farm house that the first of those evil nightmare dreams came on me, and my confessor

said I must take it as a mark of our Lord's special favour to his own bride that I was thus allowed to bear the burdens of others in my sleep, and to transmute evil to good.

"Scenes are passing rapidly—I cannot lay hold of any. It is like a dream of life, many that I heal, and more that I comfort and help.

"Now I am in a cottage where I have been praying with a dying woman. I cannot save her, and she longs to go. It is all over, and I go to the door to breathe the fresh air of heaven. The moon floats in the sky near her full. I hear the sound of a bugle. Heavens, what is it?—a familiar sound,—It is Norman's call I—What have I been playing at all this time? I must have fallen asleep when I went to the brook for a drink. 'Here am I, love. Have you been looking for me?' 'Aye, have I, sweetheart—you damned gipsy witch—hast bewitched me clean—I tell ye I can't do without you, lass.' 'And I can't live without you, Norman.' I put my foot on his as he stoops down from his great war-horse, and there in the face of all his troop he lifts me up to the pommel before him, and we gallop away into the night. How glorious it is to be together again

—his bugle woke me. I must have slept long, a heavy, dreamless sleep. We are now in a forest glade. Norman will not let me leave his tent; the tents of all his men are round about, and the horses grazing outside. I see Dr. Finn coming towards me. He tells me I must now do something for the Master, who has done much for me. I want to do so, and I ask what. He says, 'Not for nothing have you the spirit of a wolf; you must hurt and destroy his enemies.' 'And Norman's,' I ask. 'And Norman's, of course,' he says, 'only hurt and destroy, 'tis the Master's will, and for this he called you.'"

"Stop," said Eochain. "Ask Dr. Finn a question from me, and conjure him that he answer truly. In the names and letters of Samael and of Behemoth and in this sign," he traced a sign in the air with his staff. Cecily replied in a dreamy tone, as if half asleep—

"He says he must answer. A mightier than he compels."

"Very well, ask him if he or his Master have control of you always?"

"No; he says there were influences of a more powerful magic around me, that he could not overcome, but at the full moon he can call me, and perhaps can retain his influence for several moons; but as the moon wanes it fades, and at last it will vanish altogether."

"Ask again, when his influence fades, how is it you do not wake in his surroundings—has he charge of your dual life?"

"He replies, I am a valuable instrument for him and his Master, even for the interrupted times that he can control me, so he takes care that when I come to myself it shall be away from all that would jar, as I did after drinking from the brook; and when his influence can come back, he draws me where I can meet with Norman. He is a great magician, and he watches me always. He says that the other magic opposed to him will claim me at last, but first I shall kill and destroy that which I love best."

Cecily was drooping. The fire had gone from her eyes, and every muscle showed exhaustion. Eochain raised his arms over her head. "Sleep," he commanded. "But come not out from the shelter and the influence of the ring and the altar stone; sleep and rest for a short while, and be ready with renewed strength to tell me that which I require to know further."

Obediently she sank down on the mossy seat beside the central altar stone, and was wrapt in a deep, motionless slumber.

Eochain turned to Sir Wilfred—

"Here is a marvellous example for study," he said. "Saint or witch, she is one of the two, but which is the real woman I know not; both are artificial. The wild gipsy crossed with the wild Countess who ran away with him, would give a sensitive and half-mad nature to start with, and

on this the nuns have grafted their exalted visions and dreams, and Dr. Finn has grafted his deviltries. There is madness, but there is strange power also. She must rest awhile. To go through all these varied emotions in so short a time would tax the strongest brain. I think when we can resume this experiment we shall have revelations even more startling."

"A wonderful study for me," said Sir Wilfred, "and a close friend of my Beatrix, and a kind nurse to me in my illness. But I am anxious. Can we let her bide here safely with what we know now?"

"The question were rather, can we let her go safely, and of a truth I think not."

"Explain. Indeed I am somewhat fearful, for Beatrix taketh long, lonely walks in the Glen of Dallas, and I can give her nought to ride."

"Aye, the matter is tangled now, but we have the threads of it. See you, down on the north all is in the power of the Church, the Abbey lands and the power of the Bishop, and all directed to drive the Lady Beatrix to the arms of this Leslie, whom they regard as her lawful husband, and through these lands also doth he rage like a wild bull seeking her. He knows not where she is, and mayhap if he did know he would not dare to come, and if he did his men dare not follow. Danger lies with yonder girl, if his influence over her should wake again; yet I think I can prevent this so long as she is here; if she were away I could not. On the south is the land of my own clan and of my own branch of it. Once they wanted me to be declared Tannist, and I know that still they have kindly feeling for me. I thought that I had done with these family matters for good, but circumstances are too strong, and I have been compelled for your sake, old friend, and that of the Lady Beatrix, to recall myself to my clan, and I am sure that from my nephew Alasdair will come safety and joy to her. This I have seen in visions that never lie, and I persuaded him to take up the headship of the Dallas Cummings that there might be loyal men who would protect her against Leslie and the powers of the Church, for it is little the Cummings care for Bishop or Abbot."

"Eochain, you are magnificent. Once when we were boys I thought you were a sullen milksop. Forgive me the thought, it was short-lived."

A distant trumpet blast sounded from the direction of Forres.

"There is the Leslie scouring the country again," said Eochain. "I think if he ride till doomsday he will not catch the Lady Beatrix; but as he comes this way we shall see how far my influence can countervail his with this wild girl, for I have brought her to the mood in which she is most subject to him. The experiment will be more valuable even than I thought."

He was right in his judgment. It was the Leslie, lured out again by the report of Urquhart's jackal.

"If she be coming up from the Rafford way," he said to his followers, "then is she returning to Blervie Tower. On Dallas moors is no abiding place. The Cummings there are a broken clan, they have no leader; therefore, friend Urquhart, we have but to rush the Tower now, and my wife returns to her duties and to her loving lord. 'Tis plain she hath been visiting some of the Dunbar lot. Devil catch them! they swarm like rats about here. Now I think of it; she went to Pluscarden. Of course there are Dunbars there. Urquhart, you shall have a wedded pair in your house after all. Damn it! I would it were my black-a-vised sweetheart instead. Never mind; I'll get her too. The Leslie is not baulked so easily. Ten gold pieces for you, friend Urquhart, the day Ihold Elspet in my arms again, and I won't let her go so lightly next time."

CHAPTER XVII

A WITCH'S PACT WITH THE DEVIL

Half an hour had passed, and Cecily still slept profoundly. Eochain, watching her attentively, said to Sir Wilfred, "She is rested now, and we may go on with the experiment. You want to know something of the spells of witchcraft. She shall tell you. Come and stand beside me, and hold her hand while I wake her."

He leant over her and spoke slowly and impressively in her ear, "You are in North Berwick Kirkyard—your second visit. The dark man you spoke of is there instructing you. I want you to tell me faithfully all that he says.

He passed his hands rapidly in front of her with a serpentine motion, crossing them frequently. She stirred, drew a long breath, and began to speak deliberately and monotonously—

"He is there, standing on an old stone pulpit, and we are gathered round him, a great crowd of women, and a few men. Dr. Finn is there too. He says, 'My children, I welcome! all ye marked cross and perverse from birth. Ye seek power. So did I, and I won it. Yea, I hurled defiance at the Creator himself. I would have none of His mawkish heaven. When He bade us all bow down before His new creation, His pet humanity, I refused. Should I, Lucifer, the light-bearer, bow myself to these things of clay? And I was cast out of heaven. So much the better, for I revenged myself. I planted the seeds of my sovereignty even in His contemptible darlings. Oho! 'twas fine to see how they padded after me. So now I, even I, am Lord of the world, because I hate them, and ye, my children, ye hate them too. And ye would do my will, and torment and destroy the children of men. Therefore if ye believe on me and worship me, all power shall be yours. Hearken now? Come ye in thought, in fancy, to my kingdom. There are the shadow forms of all things that ever happen on this earth, and ye may manipulate them as ye will; and as ye form them there and call on me, so shall the things ye imagine take place on the earth. Imagine only hurt and harm to those who give allegiance to the Creator, and believe that I will carry it out for you, and it shall happen. And ye shall call me in the names of Samael and Behemoth, and if ye desire ceremonies that be pleasing to me, ye shall take any of those used by the poor puling slaves of the Creator, and ye shall reverse them to mark your contempt. When ye look upon one of his servants, know that from your eyes, and nostrils, and mouth, from your finger tips and from the points of your breasts, there go forth streams of influence that hurt and destroy, that bring sickness and trouble, that bow the will to yours; and if ye doubt not, and in your minds call on me by the words and names I have taught ye, then shall that one obey you, and follow you into his grave when ye will, and ye shall plague him with sickness, and with loss and distress, and as ye doubt not so shall your power be. And ye may make your own spells, for it is in the will, not the word, that the power dwelleth. Rejoice, my children, for I have given you power in my name to work evil on all the sons of men as you will. And in hurting and destroying, in pain and in death, ye shall find a delight, and a rapture, such as none of the Creator's servants can ever reach in any of the sickly, innocent pleasures. Ha! Come to me, my chosen!'

"He leaps from his pulpit with a wild yell and seizes me—I am carried off in a mad whirl."

She tore her hand from Sir Wilfred's and rushed furiously round the circle. Eochain raised his hand, and immediately her arms fell to her sides, and she paused, panting, by the heap of moss whence she had started. He passed his hand over her forehead.

"Pass from there," he said. "Now you are back with Norman in the camp with his men."

“I want especially to know,” said Sir Wilfred, “about her power over animals—how she controlled wolves and the like.”

“That you will soon hear, though I think it is not so much a taming as we have imagined. Meantime notice how the Father of Lies has told the truth, for what doth the Founder of your faith deem to be the worst of sins and the service of the Devil—is it not hatred, malice, jealousy, and all uncharitableness? And so saith the dark Master of our poor Cecily here, yet among Christians are such things scarce deemed to be sins at all. Now, listen!”

Cecily looked the wild gipsy girl, her eyes gleaming with eager life, her hair straying in tangled wisps half over her face—a faint hectic flush on her cheeks telling of strange fires within.

“This is life at last,” she said,—“the free life of the woods and the moors! I understand it all so well now—since the Master has taught me. I know the joy of the hunt, and the joy of the kill,—this morning I watched a weasel kill a rabbit,—the joy of the flesh torn through, the struggles and cries of the quarry, and the bright glorious blood leaping from the veins! . . . How the weasel loves the first taste of pure blood from the throat! I think of its rapture when I am in Norman’s arms—’tis the beasts of prey that teach us how to live. .

“Glorious! Glorious!—we are rushing along in a mad gallop after a splendid stag. My Norman has dropped his reins and sent a bolt that stopped him, and the dogs have pulled him down. As we gallop up, Norman draws his sharp hunting-knife for the *coup de grâce*. I too have sprung to the ground, and I am beside him. . . I hold my hand for the knife—he understands. ‘Ha! my sweetheart, wouldst deal him the death blow thyself? Thou shalt, then. Bravo! Thou art as savage as I, and never thought I to find a woman so. Faith! we are well matched—a mad pair, with red blood in our veins, begad! Better that than the lily-livered, snivelling saints. Ha! Grip fast! Grip fast!’ No need to encourage me!—I felt like the weasel on the rabbit as I plunged the knife in his heart, and then slit the big veins in his neck. I remembered the weasel, and the fierce desire comes on me to taste the hot blood as it flows. I dare not let Norman know—savage as he is—himself has said it—he has not yet learned all the life of the wild.—I cast myself into his arms in utter abandon.—‘Take me on your horse, Norman, to ride home! The glory of this morning and the chase is overpowering—hold me close as we gallop!’”

For a few moments she sank back on the moss-heap with closed eyes, her expression passing to the love-languid. Suddenly she started up, exclaiming—

“Sunrise—five o’clock! What is that? Light hoofs pattering round.—’Tis roe deer—what a chance for a hunt! Norman is sleeping sound—I can steal out, and have a run before any one is awake.—Oh! I must be as quiet as a cat out on the chase.”

Softly Cecily began to move, treading on tiptoe, cautiously stealing round the circle.

“Ha! there they are—a lovely herd! They have got the alarm—they are off and away! Now for it!—I shall taste the sweet savour of blood again. That fat buck is my quarry.

“Whoo! hoo—whoo!”

It was a long-drawn howl, the very cry of a wolf. Eochain and Sir Wilfred looked at each other—they had heard that cry before. She had bent forwards, running swiftly, and thrown off her footgear—now racing round the circle like a horse in a ring with long leaps, touching the ground only with her toes bunched together. Eochain pointed to the mark of her foot on a sandy patch—it was the spoor of a wolf.

She stopped still again, flushed and panting.

“Tell me,” commanded Eochain,—“stand still there, and tell me where you are—what you are doing.”

“Hunting! Hunting! Alive every fibre of me—gaining on the deer. Little by little I draw up on to them. I have marked the buck—he cannot avoid me. I edge round to get him clear of the others. There! He’s down!—my muzzle at his throat! Oh! life is good! Now . . . I must have a wash at the burn. Norman must not know, he knows I can imitate most animals, and he will think this is a wolf’s kill. Perhaps it is. His black-a-vised sweetheart will send her wolf to destroy his enemies. Ah! he is sleeping still, as I snuggle down beside him. ‘What! art there, sweetheart? Methought I heard a wolf cry. ’Twill be fine hunting—shall we track it?’ ‘Nay, Norman,’ I say. ‘You know the wolf is my familiar, the badge of my family, as the griffin is yours. Only mine is a real beast. We will not harm him—he’s too like you and me.’ ‘Faith! thou art right there, sweetheart!—he’s a true sportsman—shalt have thy pets.’ How delicious to drop asleep in his mighty arms, dreaming of the glory of the chase and the rapture of the kill, and the taste of warm blood on my lips makes his kisses all the sweeter.”

Again she sank to a lethargy. Eochain crossed over to Sir Wilfred.

“I deemed we should find more than a mere taming of wolves. Here you have the origin and source of all the witch-work, and as I conceive here you have also your own assailant. Now do you think, with what we now know, that it is safe to allow her to go forth, with the Lightsome Leslie rampaging over the countryside and calling for her, with her clear jealousy of the Lady Beatrix stirred up by him, and her will to hurt and destroy all who oppose him, and her power to do so? Nay! I think myself that the only safe way for us, and the only course that for her sake and in hope of curing we can adopt, is to keep her in her state of the ecstatic nun, and ward off so far as we may the ideas of Leslie and the witch and the wild animal, and the influence of Dr. Finn.”

“But is this possible? Remember, Leslie is near,—at any time when the moon is near its full she may hear his trumpet,—will not this break all your influence on her?”

As he spoke the blast of a trumpet sounded close as the Leslie’s troop rode up to the Tower, intent on searching for the Lady Beatrix, and the stentorian voice of the burly knight was heard shouting—“Ho, there I art there, my black-a-vised sweetheart?

“Ho, there! Gad! I heard your wolf’s cry, lass! Whether ’twas you that cried, or your familiar, or the Devil, I care not, so as you come to me. Grip fast! Grip fast!”

Cecily started up, listening eagerly. “Norman—Norman!” she murmured.

Eochain raised his hand with a commanding gesture over her head.

“You hear nothing,” he said. “There was no sound. I order you—forget that sound, forget what it means, forget whose call it is.”

Again the trumpet rang out.

“What was that?” she said dreamily. “No trumpet should sound here—Norman hath forbidden aught to disturb our rest.”

“You see,” said Eochain, “that even now, when the ideas of witchcraft are strongest on her, I have still power to inhibit these sounds from outside. Now, but once more, I must restore her to the condition of Cecily Ross, and wipe all these evil dreams off the tablets of her brain.”

He stooped over her and spoke low in her ear. “Awake again from these nightmare dreams I Among your friends the nuns you shall forget all the horrors you have been through.”

Gradually the wild look faded from her face, the flush died out of her cheeks, the mad tangle of her hair seemed to compose itself orderly, and a rapt expression came upon her, as though listening intently.

“Hark!” she said, “what lovely music! ’Tis the nuns singing ‘O Salutaris.’ There is a sweet-faced Sister leading me back to the convent. I have been delirious, it seems, in the cottage of a workman. I think I remember nursing his wife till she died. I am weak, and I seem to be

frightened of something. I wonder if those terrible nightmare dreams afflicted me?—mercifully I have forgotten them if they did. Ah! there come some of the nuns to greet their little sister Cecily—that was to be my name in religion, you know, if I had been allowed to be professed, because of my music. My own name, of course, was Elspet, and my father's name was Simpson—it is a great Gipsy name. My mother was a Ross; she dropped her title, though they say she had always a right to it; but the nuns used to call me Sister Cecily all the same. Dear things! they said they had missed my voice in the choir, and there was no one to play the organ as I used to play it. I used to make the thunder, and the wind, and the clattering of the hailstones in the Psalms. And they missed the fairy tales I told them about the flowers and the little people that lived in them, and they missed me when any one was ill. Oh I it is good to he so missed! And I am so glad to be back among them again, though I ought to be thankful that I am allowed to go out into the world and do our dear Lord's work in healing and comforting those who are sick and in trouble. I wonder if my confessor was right when he said that those terrible dreams that come over me are the evil things that might come upon others, and that I am allowed to bear them instead. If this be so, I ought rather to be thankful for the privilege, and not complain. But I am very thankful that this time I have forgotten all about it.

"There is a girl visiting at the convent just now, the Lady Beatrix Dunbar,—we loved each other directly we met. She is the dearest and sweetest creature I ever knew. They tell me she is proxy-married to a man she never saw. Poor girl! what a terrible fate! How rejoiced I am that I am the bride of our dear Lord and that such things can never disturb me! She lives far away up in the North, and has asked me to visit her. It will be lovely to go, though it is many days' riding; but the nuns say there is a convent of our Order in Elgin, and they will provide me with an escort, and will give me letters of commendation—they believe that it is a special call to me to go and heal the sick in the far North. But I see a fearful shadow overhanging my dear Beatrix. She will come through trials and afflictions, yet in the end she shall have great joy."

"Can you see the future?" said Eochain. "Look well and tell me—you have the second sight."

"Only very dimly and in symbol—the mists sweep over the visions of what is to come. Yet I do see a little. There is a monk who will give himself to win happiness and peace for her. Evil men and evil beasts hungering for her life, but the influence of the monk is round her.

Now I see a Castle in the middle of a loch. Where is it? I never saw aught like to it. It is a ruin—it is her home—but also it is her tomb. . . . I see myself too. I want to help her, but I cannot. I am doomed to kill what I love best—and terrible must be my expiation for my sins. Yet in the end I think I shall save Beatrix, and I think I shall win to peace myself. I see myself back here at last. . . . The mists close over—I can see no more.

"Rest now and sleep. Thus I banish all the visions." Eochain passed his hands lightly over her forehead. "Go to your cottage now and lie down; in half an hour you shall wake restored and invigorated, and remember nothing of all you have seen, save only the forms of angels and the strains of music and the calm peace of the convent."

Gravely and silently she passed from the circle, returning to the hut. It was hardly possible to imagine her the same person who had told and enacted all the terrible experiences so recently. The two old men went back to the Dune. Sir Wilfred, full of the new knowledge he had got, was eager to consult his books and find how far the writings of the authorities on witchcraft coincided with what he had heard and seen. The chance of studying at first hand the problem that had perplexed him for so many years and had baffled the most learned authorities from the very earliest times was an epoch in his life, and hardly even yet could he realise its importance.

At the Tower of Blervie the Leslie had again drawn a blank. No opposition was offered to him. The serving men and women were there as usual, and the work of the place went on mechanically, if somewhat perfunctorily; the horses and animals were tended. The boy Hubert opened the door to his impatient summons, and answered to his questions that nothing whatsoever had been heard of Sir Wilfred or of the Lady Beatrix. Oh yes! Sir Norman Leslie was free to go through the Tower if he so pleased. Hubert was in no mood to be forced to yield obedience where he had no power to resist. But in the Tower was no trace of her—indeed, it was plain that none but servants had been there since his last visit.

It was as he came out from the door, savage and disappointed, that the long-drawn howl of a wolf was heard from the haunted wood.

"There it is again!" he cried,—"either Elspet's hunting call, or the Devil himself. Sound the trumpet, confound you I Let her hear my answer, if she's there. Where the Devil is my trumpeter? Never a blast when I want it most! Urquhart, go in search of him, damn you!"

Several minutes elapsed before the trumpeter was found occupying his time with a buxom wench in one of the outer cottages round the Tower. The Leslie call rang out, and the knight's stentorian voice called for Elspet; but there was no response.

"Why not ride through the wood, and settle once for all if the lady be there?" said Urquhart, who as usual was close by Leslie's bridle.

"Friend Urquhart, I have said before that the good God made thee an ass, and methinks thine ears are growing! What! dost think that I, a christened man, am going to venture my nose right into the very home of the Devil and his imps? Nay, man! for aught of flesh and blood I care not, but these devils of old time no man may face. 'Tis not even the decent Christian Devil that my friends the monks are ever preaching about,—he'll catch me some time, they tell me,—and by all accounts he's a fine old sportsman! I might make his acquaintance, sooner or later; but these ill things centuries old—no! not I. Besides, there is nothing human in that wood, nor has there been for over a hundred years; and the last man that ventured there, though he was full of liquor at the time, was found afterwards in several pieces, so they tell me, and that was a hundred and twenty years ago. Who the deuce is that seeking you now, Urquhart?"

"'Tis the youth I sent to look for the Lady—for Dame Leslie, I mean. Give me leave! I will, I trust, bring you some word now."

"H'm—high time! I have been waiting for news over long."

Urquhart returned to his patron after a brief colloquy with an individual whose tattered garments and general appearance of dingy disreputability excited the disgust of Leslie.

"There is news at last, and reliable now. The Lady Leslie hath been seen this very afternoon walking down in the Dallas Glen, coming from the direction of Pluscarden."

"I guessed as much! Damn it! Urquhart, I'll harry the Priory, and pull their old crows' nests about their ears, and turn all the shaven crowns adrift, if they dare harbour my wife!"

"Needless to do that. The Bishop will do it for you at a word. But listen a moment. She was in company with a Highlander who wore a red and green tartan and an eagle feather in his bonnet."

"That must be a Cumming—none other would wear that garb in the Dallas Glen."

"My man deems it is Alasdair. Some of his gossips there say that Alasdair was the Tannist of Dallas, and hath now taken up the chiefship of that branch of the Cummings, and gone to live among them."

"Good Lord!—what—Alasdair! He's but a boy—far too young to be a Chief!"

"As for that, I cannot say. I hear he spoke with rare dignity when he took on himself to allow you to pass through the Altyre lands; and if he be Chief now of the Dallas Cummings, he has at least no ill will to you."

"Think you that he was in any ways a lover of my wife? Gad! if so, I'll kill him were he ten times a Cumming, and were he Chief of all the devils in hell."

"Nay—I am sure not, for I am told they parted with most dignified courtesy, though there were none to see, my man being in the heather. But in two days he was to meet her ladyship again and to show her the cairn on the witch's hill, which it seems she is most anxious to see."

"Ha! now we have something solid at last—in two days' time. Friend Urquhart, there are glimmerings of sense in thee after all. In two days' time thou with two men shalt get across the way and intercept her ladyship. I will be with all my troop on the Rafford road—and merrily will we ride to Forres."

"Why not ride down yourself to meet and rescue her?"

"Be not more of a fool than thou canst help. Because if once I or any other man rode with a troop into the Cummings' lands the whole drove of them would buzz round our ears like bees when boys stir their byke. Man I have ye lived all these years in Forres and not know the Cummings better than to try such a fool game? You yourself with two men might pass unnoticed; or if not, you have Alasdair's promise of safe-conduct, and you can easily mistake the marches of Dallas and Altyre. You ride on my service, and if at worst they kill you—well I 'tis no great loss, anyhow. Come away, man! never heed my joking. We'll crack a flask or two of Spanish wine over this."

While the Leslie's troop with much clatter and jangling were ambling down to Forres, Beatrix was just returning to the Dune, and ran gaily up to Eochain, who was pacing up and down outside in the last rays of the declining sum

"Hardly need I ask if thou hast fared well," said the old man,—"the roses on thy cheeks and the light in thine eyes tell."

"Yea, I have fared well. And, Uncle Eochain, I bring a message."

"A message for me? Nay, not likely! Who could remember Eochain Beag enough to send a message?"

"He who calls himself Alasdair Oge commends himself to you, and desires that you should know that Father Ambrose of Kinloss hath followed your counsel and acted thereon, and hath done that which although you spoke in enigmas he believes was what you desired him to do, and that he has taken up what you persuaded him it was his duty to do. And though he may not now see you personally, yet he desires you to know that great happiness hath come to him in so doing."

"It is well," said Eochain. "So, then, you have met Alasdair Oge, and you have spoken of Father Ambrose?"

"Several times I have met him. A nobler, gentler man never did I meet with; but to-day for the first time we spoke of Father Ambrose. Uncle Eochain, there is some sad mystery about that man. Alasdair Oge, as he desires to be called, spoke of him as one who had bartered his hopes of heaven for an earthly consideration, and who must atone by long and grievous penance for some strange sin—he bade me pray for him. Yet indeed I think he is good and true beyond most men, though in sooth I know naught of him."

"All this he is, yet I trow he may blame himself for what is no offence at all. Nevertheless, pray for him. A good woman's prayers can hurt no man—not even a monk," he added sotto voce.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRAPPING OF BEATRIX IN THE GLEN

Eochain was perfectly right. In the spell of sleep skilfully administered by him all memory of the wild scenes she had enacted in the stone circle was entirely wiped out from Cecily's brain. In fact, though the moon was nearing the full, she seemed far less weird, more normal and like other women than Sir Wilfred had ever known her—rather to his disappointment, it must be confessed, for he sought vainly for opportunities of further lights on witchcraft. Visions still came to her, but she spoke of them now rather as dreams, and possibly delusions, than as Divine revelations. To Beatrix also, as they walked out beyond Callifer to the east along the crest of the hill, she spoke much of the teachings of Master Martin Luther and the New Learning.

"Dost remember, Beatrix," she said, "when you came to stay at the convent in the South, the time when we first met, how I was preparing to be received, and how sad I was when they told me that it could not beat least not for a long time, and then, like an angel of goodness, you invited me to visit you?"

"It was you who were the angel to come, Cecily. I was in great trouble then, and you were a wonderful comfort and stay to me."

"Ay! I remember they told me then that you had been proxy-wedded to a man you had never seem I pitied you then, though I little knew all it meant—and thankful am I that these troubles can never come my way. I dimly remember a knight who came into the chapel one day. I think if I had not been vowed to the service of Christ—the bride of the Lord, as I have sometimes thought, and as indeed my confessor has told me—I could have loved him as ordinary maidens love and wed. But I am different somehow, I don't know how, and the knight melted into Saint Michael, and I forget now even what he looked like. But you, my poor child, it is terrible for you. Would that you were like me—or better, that you could go into some peaceful convent and be professed!"

"That is just what they will never allow me to be. I know my husband to be coarse and cruel,—he has many mistresses—they tell me even that he traffics with witches,—he hath no thought of me save for my lands, and for the sake of providing a legitimate heir for the Glen. Yet this, because of the ceremony and the vows I swore in ignorance, the Church would give him. They would forbid me to enter a convent even as a novice, even indeed as a refugee—that shelter may not be. They would forbid me to remain at home with my father, because all this would infringe the connubial rights of my husband, whom I may not leave; and if I were to take another man, however much I might love him, I were an adulteress and in mortal sin, and should burn for ever in hell. See you, Cecily, what a net they have woven round me, from which there is no escape."

"'Tis a wicked and unholy power, Beatrix, and not all the preaching of all the priests and monks in Scotland would persuade me that such was the will of God. 'Whom God hath joined together,' our Master said, not—whom the Church hath been paid to mumble some jargon over, careless whether it is God's union or not. See how He talked to the woman of Samaria, and offered her the living water; your priests would have burned her in this life, and gladly pushed her into everlasting hell in the next—' for he whom she then had was not her husband.' Oh! ye need Master Luther to come and shake the rotten buildings about the ears of the arrogant swarm who would sit in the seat of the Almighty and pretend to declare His will, while they falsify all the teaching of the Saviour, and make love itself a source of gain and power."

“Think you, then, Cecily, that this Master Luther would not uphold the sentence of the Church—that I must abide by the vows sworn at this proxy ceremony?”

“Uphold them, say you, Beatrix? Know you not that Master Luther hath counselled the priests and monks to take wives to themselves? Nay, he is himself now—though this is for the present a secret—betrothed to the noble Lady Catherine von Brora, who hath left her convent with six other maidens of high rank in consequence of Master Luther’s teaching.”

“It seems strange and terrible, Cecily, almost a blasphemy; yet, after all, the case is not quite the same as mine—this noble Lady Catherine is not married.”

“Nay! I know; but the vows of a nun are more solemn even than the vows of a wife, and the essence of the matter is that they were taken in ignorance, that the heart went not with them—therefore were they wicked vows, and such as it were a sin to keep, or to compel others to keep. So sayeth Master Luther, and he hath himself shown how truly he believeth what he saith; for he was ordained a priest, and he was a monk, yet hath he set it aside, for he saith these vows were not of God, they were evil, and he hath dressed himself as a knight, let his beard grow, and under the name of the Yunker George he abode ten months at Wartburg.”

“Cedily, your Master Luther interests me. I would I could believe in him—yet meseems he would destroy religion and the Church wholly.”

“No—no! That he doth not, but builds it up rather; he would retain all that the Master taught, but would uproot all that men for their own interests have grafted on. Thus he toucheth not the Sacraments nor the power of absolution, but he allows not men to sell the pardon of sins for money, nor to sell any other grace of God, indeed—and you know how the Pope and the Cardinals have made great revenues by such sales. So he alloweth not these wicked vows taken in ignorance to bind men and women, and you know how the Church hath got a vast army of servants by holding them to such vows. So too hath the Church usurped God’s own right to join men and women together, and they say the Church joins them, and thereout they get much money, and they care not whether God have joined that couple or no, for the Church hath the fees for the marriage, and maybe for a dispensation also, and break it ye cannot, save by paying much more money,—’tis your own case, Beatrix dear. But if God hath joined a couple and they pay not the Church, then forsooth they shall be excommunicated in this world and damned in the next. Yet the Master said, ‘Whom God hath joined let not man put asunder.’”

“But can these new teachings ever hold in Scotland, Cecily, think you? Methinks the old faith is too firmly fixed in the hearts of our people. Nor have we the same abuses here.”

“Ay! much of it will come—indeed, there are already some who hold to the New Learning. Ye have met Master David Lindsay, I think? He was ever with the King, and was at Linlithgow Church, before the sad day of Flodden, when an apparition came in, loudly calling for the king, and warning him against proceeding on his expedition against England, then vanishing away like a blink of the sun, or a whisk of the whirlwind. This David will come to high honour yet, and he hath said and writ that nuns should come forth from their convents and love and wed;—yet I hold not with this altogether, for some there be who are, as I, virgin by nature, who desire not man nor love, but only to serve the Lord, and for such there should be place; but the rash vows taken in ignorance should bind none, nor should the Church claim God’s own right to join those who love. Yet I seem to see in my visions that many a weary year, aye and many a century, will pass before men shall see the truth. The New Learning will come to this Scotland of ours, and a great Scotsman will bring it, but the ministers thereof will rivet the shackles of old customs more firmly than ever on the necks of the people. But this too will pass. Master Luther hath dealt its

death blow when he taught that it was God, and not Church nor man, that linked man and woman together."

"Cecily, we must speak more of this. You have taught me more than any I have ever hearkened to; but now you should go and rest, and my father needs me. To-morrow you shall take my place with him. I need another long walk down the valley.

Beatrix hesitated slightly, and blushed somewhat as she spoke, but Cecily marked it not. Slowly, with measured steps, she passed to her tiny cottage for her usual rest, but her sleep was uneasy and feverish, her face flushed, her breath came in quick pantings, and her lips withdrawn showed the gleaming white eye-teeth that were unusually long. She moaned and started, and the indrawn breath throbbed in her throat like a faint echo of the wolf cry. Eochain, finishing his evening devotions in the circle, heard it, and went at once to the hut. Cecily was sitting up on her couch, with her white fur hood drawn over her face, her hands resting on the coverlet. As she leaned on them, thrusting her head forward, her lips drawn almost to a snarl, Eochain raised his hand—"Peace, peace, perturbed spirit," he said. "Peace, I command. Have I not forbidden these dreams and visions. Now hearken to me. You see lying things. You hear delusive voices. Thus do I brush them away. Now you brain is blank—you hear and see nothing."

She sank back on her couch in the attitude of one in a profound sleep.

"Look again," he commanded. "You can see truly now that these lying dreams have passed."

"Oh I what a beautiful angel is keeping watch over me," she said; "and is that Our Lady crowned in the sky above?"

"That is Bridhe—the sweet Saint Bride," said Eochain. "Much the same I trow—yet I know not. Anyhow these twain shall watch thee—and see thou give entrance to no other shape."

Sir Wilfred waited for him outside, for he too had heard the wolf cry, though fortunately Beatrix had not.

"'Tis a contest between Finn and me just now," said Eochain. "The moon is near her full, and Finn nearly succeeded that time. She talks of religion and ecstatic visions and mysteries with the Lady Beatrix, and then must come the reaction; yet it is better she should talk, else would she brood, which were worse. I fear not for her so long as I am near at hand. I think I can always control her, and once the next ten days are past there will be but little risk; every attack I think will be less."

"It is well perhaps that the Leslie's trumpet did not sound at that moment."

"If it had, I fear in spite of me she would have been up and off, but now he may blow as he will she will not hear nor heed.

From early morning on the following day the peasants in the Laigh of Moray were startled by the appearance of various riders in hot haste who wore the insignia of the great religious houses, and some who bore the gold buckles of Leslie on his blue and silver livery. From Kinloss Abbey to the frowning keep of Spynie, that looked over the placid waters of the loch away to the distant Firth, mounted men galloped fast with letters from the Abbot to Bishop James Hepburn, who was maintaining an almost royal state in the great palace, that was more than half a fortress. There suddenly a trumpet was blown from the battlements, scaring the wildfowl in the reedy margin of the loch; and from the barracks to the north east, and from the great hall where the men at arms lounged, and threw dice, and swallowed huge flagons of Spanish wine in the Episcopal service, there sounded answering calls. Then there was bustle and a hurried lacing of jerkins, and donning of breastplates and morions, and mustering of spears and bill-men and bow-men in the huge courtyard. The Bishop sat in a massive carven chair, like a throne, in his private room in the great square keep, robed in a loose purple cassock, over which a heavy gold chain

supported his gold pectoral cross, a purple skull-cap was on his head, and his keen handsome face, framed with the long silvery hair, looked very picturesque. James Hepburn, Bishop of Moray, certainly maintained the dignity of his office. His grey goose-quill flying over a sheet of paper soon scrawled a missive, while a serving man stood obsequiously before him.

"These immediately to the Prior of Pluscarden," he said, as he pressed his great Episcopal signet on the wax. "I see my men are mustered in the Courtyard; it is well, let them remain under arms, but not ride till further word comes from my brother, the Abbot of Kinloss. Then they may ride past Pluscarden into the Glen of Dallas. Warn them that this may be their route."

The messenger saluted and departed. "Rebel maids must learn that the Church's arm is long," he murmured, as he sank back into his chair, and resumed his study of a beautiful Italian illuminated missal of the fourteenth century.

Through the streets of Forres, up to Master Urquhart's house, clattered two riders in the Leslie livery bearing a note addressed to Master Urquhart himself, which caused that worthy to furbish up his stained and battered jerkin and barrett cap and generally to make himself as presentable as circumstances rendered possible.

"Moving at last," he said to himself, "high time too, we are near come to our last gold piece. Well, if we fail to catch the lady, there is the Episcopal Command at one end of the Glen and our men at the other. That should sweep the Cummings out of the way. But I would not the Church should get the good of this, nor the profits neither, if I can help it. There's good money in it. Lord, what a to-do about a little foxy-haired green-eyed piece of goods. But my Lord of Leslie will have it so. Then I take it we may move at long last against the MacIntoshes, and glad shall *I* be, for there I may fill my empty exchequer."

So he sallied forth, and shortly after, with two men at his heels and his disreputable jackal lurking along at a safe distance not to be recognised, he was walking along the Rafford road.

It was shortly after the hour of noon that Beatrix started to walk down into the Dallas Glen, with somewhat of a regretful glance at the tower of Blervie, and a memory of her horses and serving men all useless now, and a little thought over the strangeness of the situation that she and her father could remain there, hidden from all who were searching for them, within a stone's throw of the tower that was their ancestral home, and within earshot of men riding out on purpose to find them.

Probably such a thing could happen only in Scotland in the sixteenth century. Locomotion was then exceedingly difficult, the roads were hardly passable except on horseback, and even such primitive tracks as existed in the cultivated lowlands were seldom found in the districts inhabited by the wild Highland clans. The superstitious dread of witchcraft, and more especially of the demons belonging to the old heathen remains, was intensely strong; in more than one locality the belief that the old heathen still lived and flourished in remote parts, and were known to carry off living men and women to be slaves or sacrifices to their gods, lingered almost to modern times. Several times in the Middle Ages had the town of Forres resolved to destroy the wood by Blervie Tower, and to put an end to its idol temple, but never could they find any one daring enough to undertake the work, and with the efflux of time the sinister stories had grown. Moreover, the Clan Cumming, since they knew of Eochain's return, and his dwelling in the haunted wood, and his desire to be unmolested there, had retailed and embellished the gruesome tales of the wood and its terrible demons with all the fervid imagination of the Celt.

Beatrix was now well acquainted with the paths down the Dallas Glen, since for a month past this had been her only walk beyond the short range of the crest of the hill. She had frequently met with Alasdair Cumming, and had been more fascinated than she cared to own even to herself

by the courteous chivalry of the young chief. Unlike most women of her time, she found a special attraction in cultured intellect. Courage and muscular strength, skill in games, and in the arts of war, were the common property of every man of any family or station; to possess them was no distinction. Beatrix was fastidious. She required that a man should be exceptional before he appealed to her, and no doubt Alasdair was exceptional. He had wide knowledge of men and affairs, and learning, which at that time was possessed by few save priests. He could talk easily and well on many topics; and despite the strangeness and unconventionality of their meeting and their acquaintance he treated her with marked deference. She wondered where and how he had gained his manners and his learning. She had never heard of any special distinction in Cumming of Altyre's second family; yet so it was, and her thoughts dwelt on him with a curious persistence. Then she fell to thinking of Cecily. A sweet, unselfish, saintly soul, so Beatrix held her, and of noble ideas too. Of Master Martin Luther she would fain have heard more, but she could not avoid thinking that both he, and Cecily who repeated his words, must have sadly misunderstood the doctrines of the Church; yet how she could not quite tell, for unquestionably the Church had been hard on her. She longed for Father Ambrose. He had spoken to Cecily and had more influence on her than any other Churchman. To Beatrix herself also, though she had never seen the face of the monk, the magnetic spell of his personality, the sensation of the hidden eyes and the soldierly stride under the black robe, remained a vital memory, specially vivid when she was with Alasdair Cumming—though why this should be was an insoluble problem.

She tried hard to fancy what Father Ambrose would say to her present perplexities; but try as she would she could not fancy him as bidding her obey the Church, and yield herself and her estates to the passion and greed of Leslie, nor could she fancy his disapproving of her friendship for Alasdair Cumming. It was a quaint fancy of hers, bred partly of a somewhat lonely life, partly from association with her father, and familiarity with his theories and studies, that led her to impersonate an ideal Father Ambrose, and hold converse with him as though he were a living director.

Musing thus she walked down the path leading to the Glen of Dallas, and did not see Master Simon Tulloch, who was hurriedly stumping up the road from the Abbey towards the Tower. Eochain, however, had spied him, and divining from his haste and from his look that he bore important tidings, had gone out from the wood to meet him, for Simon would by no means trust himself to enter those sinister shades, even in Eochain's company.

"You bring news, friend Simon?"

"For the Lord's sake, Master Eochain, keep the Lady Beatrix that she go not to Dallas Glen this day. All the forces of the Church, and of the Devil too, I trow, are searching for her."

"What mean you? Speak plainly, man."

"Last night it was rumoured at the Abbey that the Lady Beatrix was to take refuge with the Cummings of Dallas from him whom they call her lawful husband. Ye know, Master Eochain, how the Bishop and the Abbot, and even, they tell me, the Cardinal Legate himself, have been set on this marriage. I ween the Church will get some handsome pickings out of it. They seem to love the Lightsome Leslie better than most honest men do."

"For the Lord's sake get on, man. What is your story?

"Well, this morning there were great conferences, and the Sub-Dean was properly angry,—'All this cometh from letting Father Ambrose go,' saith he,—and the end was that the Abbot sent letters to the Bishop at Spynie; for ye know we have no men-at-arms at the Abbey, and the Bishop sends a troop of his own men to ride round by Pluscarden, and the Leslie's men are to ride into the Glen from the Rafford end, and some of the Leslie's men are to intercept the Lady

Beatrix, and if the Cummings should interpose to protect her, on a signal from the Leslie's trumpet the two troops are to gallop from the opposite ends and join near the Castle of Dallas, and sweep the Cummings before them away into the mountains, and carry off the lady."

"H'm! I trow Cummings are not so easily 'swept away, unless the clan have degenerated since I was young, neither do they so easily relinquish any woman whom they hold. Still, thy news is serious, friend. The clan are disorganised, they have only lately got their chief, they have no horses, and but scant supply of arms, and I know the Bishop's men are stout and well provided."

"Master Eochain, she must not go."

"Man alive, she's gone half an hour ago, and my old limbs could never overtake her."

"But mine can, by short cuts; even with a bit stick for a foot; and fast as she steps out, I warrant I overtake her. The Cummings will speed me on my way too, I have mended many a broken head among them, whether for fight or drink matters not—never was a Cumming yet but was good at both. But give me a line, Master Eochain that I may show the lady that I come from you, else *I* think she will give but small heed to old Simon Tulloch, if she be bent on her own will."

"That will I gladly, Master Simon."

Eochain took out his tablets and wrote a few lines, bidding Beatrix for her own safety's sake to return at once, and postpone her expedition; and Simon started off at a round pace, cutting across the heather and over the end of the hill above Rafford, bent to intercept Beatrix on what he knew to be her favourite path. Nor was it long before he sighted the slight, graceful figure stepping strongly and proudly along the path. Simon paused a moment in undisguised admiration; even at that distance there was no mistaking the thoroughbred air of every movement. He quickened his steps and shouted, but the wind was against him; she passed behind a little knoll of birch trees, and as he hurried forward he expected to see her emerge on the other side, but in vain. She did not reappear, and Simon stood still in wonder till he felt himself violently seized from behind and thrown roughly on the ground.

"What are you doing, fellow," he cried, as soon as he could catch his breath. "Dost not know me—Simon Tulloch—friendly to all the Cummings?"

"No doubt," said a voice in his ear, as a brawny knee was pressed on his shoulder, pinning him down, "And no friends of the Cummings pass here just now. They have their own games to answer for by themselves."

Simon saw that the man bore the Leslie cognisance on his leather jerkin, and felt for his dagger. But at that moment a trumpet sounded hard by, and the man with a surly oath let go of him and ran back along the path. Simon scrambled to his feet and looked anxiously all along the hillside for the dainty form of the Lady Beatrix, but nowhere could he see the least trace of her. She had passed behind that little knoll, but had never emerged the other side. Thoroughly mystified, Simon started off at his best pace down the hill, over boulders and bog and heather, making towards the Castle, with an indistinct idea that if he could only inform the chief of what had chanced all would be put right. He remembered having been sent for, some years ago, to Altyre, when the young Alasdair in some boyish scramble had broken a leg. He had been very friendly then, and Simon thought he might well now recall the incident and ask his help.

Beatrix meanwhile, with her pretty head full of musings on Alasdair Cumming, and on Father Ambrose, and on Martin Luther's teaching, and her own strange and seemingly inextricable perplexities, was walking down the southern face of the hill. During the last week or two the image of Alasdair had been very constantly in her mind. He was quite different from any man she had ever met; in fact she had not met very many, and in her secluded life with her scholar father they were necessarily restricted to a few types. Old men who had been fellow students

with her father, or fellow warriors in his fighting days; young men who were mostly Dunbar cousins, or their friends and comrades; a few churchmen, such as the Chanter, who, not being under monastic vows, were able to talk with a woman, or whose vows sat lightly on them, as was too often the way in those days; priests from Elgin, and a sprinkling of worthy burgesses from that town or from Forres. Such was practically all the society she knew, save in her rare visits to the south. Small wonder, then, that she was haunted by the dark, handsome face of the young chief, with close cropped curls, whose chestnut hue was so dark as to be nearly black, except when under the sun. She recalled the weary look in his keen eyes when at rest, that made his face look almost haggard, and the animation that sprang to it directly he spoke. Beatrix, brought up entirely by her father, was more than half a boy. She could ride and swim and fence, she knew all the points of venerie by heart, and could draw a bow or fly a hawk with any man in Morayshire. So all the instincts of sport that were in Alasdair, as in every Cumming, found a ready echo in her, and gave an additional charm to their unconventional intercourse, when he had shown her all the secrets of the wild life in the Glen, and the hiding-places of the clan, and how his men could start apparently out of the earth at the sound of his call. She caught herself longing even more than usual for their meeting to-day, and the long expedition they had planned to the witch's cave, high up on the opposite hills.

With a sudden rush two men were beside her, gripping her arms. She wrenched one hand free, and catching a dagger from her belt, struck fiercely at the wrist of him who held her left arm. Her face was white and furiously tense, her eyes flashed green sparkles, and her red lips, contracted almost to a line, showed the small, white, vicious teeth. Even so might a squirrel, driven into a corner, crouch at bay, ready to bite through any attacking hand. The sharp blade ripped the flesh, and the blood spouted over her kirtle. The man dropped her arm with a savage oath, but caught her again with the other hand.

"So, ho! wild cat!" he cried. "I wot your husband shall tame you."

She saw then that he wore the Leslie colours.

"Alasdair! help!" she called—she had always thought of him by this name, and forgot for the moment that she never called him so. But scarcely was the word out of her lips, and the men hearing gripped her tighter, when a blow like that from a smith's hammer, under the ear of him on the right hand, sent him to the ground like a log, and a muscular arm thrown from behind round the throat of the one on the left, who had the wounded hand, brought him backwards, limp as a strangled rabbit. Alasdair stood above them, his grey eyes darting fiery lightnings, and seeming to flash red with his fury. He blew two notes on a silver whistle that hung from a chain round his neck, and four stalwart Highlanders came up, apparently out of nowhere.

"Take these rascals neck and crop, and throw them over our marches—into a bog, or a burn, or where ye will, I care not."

Beatrix clung to him, her bright hair, loosened in the encounter, flowing free over the breast of his doublet. He wore no armour. He passed his arm round her, leading, almost carrying, her under the shade of the birch trees.

"Sweetheart, the scoundrels have frightened you, I fear. Brave little lass! how splendidly you hit. That brute will carry your mark to his death, I think. Why, she's trembling all over."

"With rage, then; not with fear, but how came you there so providentially. I know not what I should have done but for you. One poor maid's dagger is but little use against such; though it might have freed myself," she added with meaning.

"God forbid!" said Alasdair, crossing himself. "I was close by you ever since you passed our march, but I did not wish to intrude on your thoughts; I had word that some scoundrels from

Forres in the Leslie's pay were lurking too near, and I thought their intentions could not be honest."

As he spoke the trumpet sounded on the hill, answered by another faint and far away.

"The Leslie's call," said Alasdair, "but I know that the other roads will not be safe till they have retired again. Honour me once more at the castle, and we will wait till all is clear."

"Call me once more what you called me then, and I will come," she said, with a quaint, little, wilful air that was eminently fascinating—looking at him with her head on one side, like a very tame squirrel now."

"Sweetheart! wilt come?" he said, but with a queer catch in his voice as he said it.

"Yea, I will gladly."

And side by side they walked down the hillside, seeing not Master Simon Tulloch, who was hurrying towards the castle, and hearing not the signals and answers that were interchanged from end to end of the Glen as Leslie and his clerical allies drew towards each other on the southern slope of Eildon hill.

CHAPTER XIX

LOVE AND FIGHT AT DALLAS CASTLE

They walked together down to the castle, but both were strangely silent. The rough encounter, and the obvious danger it revealed, like a sudden flash of lightning, had shown them to each other with a startling clearness. Alasdair remembered how in an unguarded moment he had called her "sweetheart," and hoped afterwards that she had not noticed it, till in sweet petulance she had insisted on making him call her the same again. He had held her in his arms for a moment, which he prolonged, and she seemed not anxious to terminate, as he led her into the tiny wood. Then how savagely she had struck at the cur who laid sacrilegious hands upon her. His heart acclaimed her exultantly, and gloried in her pluck, as he gloried in her warm softness to himself, yet of all this his face showed no sign; it was set in the same stern and somewhat weary lines it habitually wore in repose, as though from constant repression and concentration of will. Beatrix stepping along beside him thought too of that word "sweetheart" with a thrill that brought a flush to her sweet face, and of how she had longed to hear him say it again. Was he offended at her daring in bidding him repeat it? She could hardly think so, yet his face was stern and still.

Alasdair Cumming was to do much good for her, so Eochain had said, and so evidently her father also had thought. She looked at him again, and knew that she eared not if he did good or did ill to her, whatever he did that she joyed in, even to be hurt by him were a joy;—and he had called her "sweetheart," yea, even though he never said another word of kindness, that were enough to live upon, and to dream of for all her life.

So their thoughts drew near to each other, and revolved round each other, as they came up to the gateway now so familiar to Beatrix, with its quaint Rosicrucian emblem.

"Once more you will take shelter here," he said. "'Twill soon be safe, I think, for you to return. My men have watched the Leslie's troop of spears for over a fortnight past. They come and gallop along the roads, and blow trumpets, and shout, but about sundown they are always away. I think the attractions of a drink in Forres are strong."

"Do you really want me to return so speedily?"

“What I want matters not,” he said. “It is what is safe and good for you that matters. Pass in, and pardon me for one brief space while I alter the disposition of the men a trifle. I mean after this to have a dozen or so always on guard in the castle; they will relieve each other and watch day and night. I mean that they shall wear your favour, and be under your orders if ever I am called away, so that in any emergency, or without any emergency, whenever you list, you may come to the castle, and find always a devoted band who would go into hell for you if you asked them.”

“You spoil me! But what would your men say? Those who have been used to follow a war lord would scarce like to be ordered by a simple maid.”

“Trust me, there’s not a Cumming in the Glen but would be proud to be in your service. Pass in—sweetheart—” he lingered over the word as though loath to have done saying it, and for a moment their eyes met; then she passed into the castle, and Alasdair turned back on to the path towards the west.

Just rounding the castle wall he came upon Simon Tulloch.

“Give you good day, Master Alasdair,”—then the old man raised his eyes and met the eyes of the chief, “Good God in Heaven! what do you here? I thought to find Master Alasdair Cumming.”

“You have found him,” said Alasdair, “at your service, Master Simon. Alasdair, the son of Sir Alexander of Altyre am I, and now Chief of the Dallas branch of the Cummings by election as Tannist. In whatever other capacity you have known me, I charge you, now and for ever, hold your peace.”

He spoke sternly, and with a lowering of the straight brows and a wild gleam in the dark grey eyes, then changing instantly to a kindly tone and manner.

“You and I have known various scenes together, Master Tulloch, and you have learned the virtue of a still tongue. Part of my life is behind me, and another, and with God’s grace happier, time is dawning.”

“I understand,” quoth Simon. “But tell me, Master Alasdair, since so I may call you (and none could doubt ye for a Cumming whatever dress ye wore), tell me know ye aught of the Lady Beatrix Dunbar? Sore I fear foul play, and on your own lands too; up in yonder little wood.”

“Allis well, old friend, by the grace of God I was close by, and two scoundrels have ere this been thrown over our marches, I trow not over gently. I commanded not gentleness for them, nor are my men accustomed to handle gently those who come unbidden on our lands. If ye inquire for the lady, she is now within the castle, by her own good will and content, to wait till that ruffian who calls himself Leslie of the Glen hath gone back to his carouses, or whatever form of deviltry amuses his evenings.”

“I thank God for that,” said the other piously, doffing his bonnet as he spoke. “But in sooth she will now perchance have longer to wait than ye think for.”

“What mean you? Speak plainly!”

Why, just this, that the Church hath joined hands with the Leslie. God and the Devil on the same side for once, for the Church is determined to give him his wife, as they hold she is, and the Bishop’s men-at-arms are even now riding up by Pluscarden to meet with the Leslie’s men near the middle of the Glen, and sweep your men before them, and take the lady out of your hands. And, indeed, I leave to yourself to judge how far the Church will look with any favour on yourself.”

“Devilish little grace I’ll get from Bishop or Abbot, I trow; my offence is past forgiveness. But ‘tis well you told me. So they thought to sweep the Cummings out of their own Glen, did they?

Edward of England tried it, and half his men manure our lands, and we are here still. All the same, with a rush and a surprise—if we were unprepared—they might have stolen the lady from us. God's truth I every Cumming in broad Scotland would have joined to pull their old hornet's nest about their ears;—ay, and many friendly clans too, who love not shaven crowns, but it would have been too late. O Lord! God's blessing on you, Master Tulloch, for your news. Now I know. They shall have such a reception as they are little prepared for. Are Leslie's men and the Bishop's bound for the same bourne after death, think you? Well, we'll soon send a goodly company of them to find out. But now, I trow my good old Uncle Eochain and my lady's father, Sir Wilfred, will be sorely concerned at her absence. You must return at once, Master Simon, and reassure them."

"Master Alasdair, tell me, does Eochain Beag know who you are?"

"Ay, does he. 'Twas he who bade me come. Many a tough argument had we. I brought him to the faith of Christ and he brought me to the Dallas Cummings. Tell him that Alasdair Oge greets him, and follows his counsels whithersoever they lead. Tell him and Sir Wilfred that the Lady Beatrix is safe, and that Leslie of the Glen may seek her in vain, though all the powers of the whole Church, and of Heaven and Hell to boot, were ranged on his side; so long as a Cumming remains alive in the Glen, and even were the very last of us slain, I think her own poniard would save her from the Leslie."

"I will go, and pray Heaven I may reach the tower in safety."

"Never mind Heaven just now. I'll take surer means."

Three quick notes on his whistle, and two stalwart, red-headed giants rose from behind a whin-bush.

"Take Master Simon Tulloch, and give him safe conduct along the hollow way, and round by the back of Burdsyards, and so to Blervie. But have a care, the hillside is full of scoundrels who think to hunt Cummings like tods on the moor. We have a lesson to teach them; but not now. Keep out of sight—provoke no conflict. I would keep them on the hillside till I am ready for them. Now go, and send me Watty o' the Romach as ye pass. He learned his lessons at Flodden, and shall use them now."

The trio passed away to the westward, and Simon recognised in one of his conductors a man whose wounds and broken head he had often patched up after the broils in which the Cummings of Dallas Glen were not infrequently engaged.

"Ye are bidden to guard well the Lady Beatrix Dunbar," he said.

"Our Chief's lady is as sacred as the Chief himself," was all the reply, but it was all the reply that Simon needed. Spoken as it was, no assurance could be more convincing, for the loyalty of the Dallas men was as well known as their fierceness in fight and their unscrupulous thieving in foray. Beatrix went through the great gate of the castle into the triangular courtyard. She had become very familiar with the interior of this strange building, with its great central tower, and four cruciform arms, and the flanking walls that united their angles; the stables were on her right, and the house of the winds on her left. She climbed the winding stair to the room where she and Alasdair had often shared a simple meal, and talked of many things, and she recalled how she had longed to be in that little room again and with him; and now that only a few moments parted them, she would fain prolong those moments of anticipation, realising, as she did, how their meeting necessarily brought the inevitable parting so much the nearer.

Then he came, and she stood up to greet him. He had held her in his arms up there in the little wood, after he had sent the two knaves sprawling. Would he hold her so again? She was conscious of wishing that he would; but he merely bowed with that grace of movement that was

habitual to him, and sat down on a settle near to the great chair, that had now come to be regarded between them as her special seat of honour. His Lace was grave with thought: he wished to warn her, without alarming her, of the mustering of men-at-arms on the hill, and the possibility of her return to Blervie being cut off. She noticed his abstraction.

"Why so distraught?" she said, conscious of a little difficulty in the breathing that came quicker than it should. "I fear me I have come at a time inconvenient, when you have much else to do and think of. Send me away, or let me go on the battlements and muse, till my unworthy husband chooses to betake himself to more congenial amusement than wife-hunting."

"Little lass, the longer you stay the better pleased am I, and I think you know it; but now, mayhap, your visit may of necessity be longer than you thought or meant."

"Why, then, so much the better, so only that you be not tired of me." She spoke with evident sincerity, for her eyes gleamed and her lips laughed with joy. If fate prevented her leaving him for a while, fate was kind indeed. He noticed that she never troubled to ask the reason, yet he must tell her.

"It is more of a serious hunting this time. The Church has joined forces in defence of her own marriage rites—and fees. The Bishop's men-at-arms are out as well as Leslie's, and it looks as though this old tower might have to stand a siege."

"Oh, glorious! and you and I will hold it."

"Nay. I know not what it may come to. But meantime so large a force will not disperse as soon as we have seen the Leslie Command gallop off when drink time came. But for the present we will think not of this. You will be my guest for a little longer. I have sent to tell your father that he be not anxious, and I have scouts in all directions who will tell us every movement. We have time to spare, and we can sup a little more ceremoniously, if you will deign share my evening meal."

"Not only so. You shall give me the privilege to cook it. I would fain show you that it is not only the Cummings who can cook. I know you are apt to think so. There are plump birds in the larder, and a glowing turf fire smoulders in the kitchen. Please let me try my skill while you go and give what orders you will, and find out what the enemy are doing."

She put out her hand pleadingly. Alasdair took it and kissed it reverently, and she fled like a bright bird down the winding stair intent on her idea of preparing their meal. There was a delicious intimacy in it that set all her pulses dancing with joy.

Alasdair went on the battlements and bent his keen eyes on the hillside. Dotted all along he could make out pennons, though not their devices, and the westering sun gleamed on steel breastplates and morions, and the points of spears. One man after another came up and received his orders, and the time slipped rapidly away. At last a step sounded on the stair, and a long lean youth, who looked all wire and whipcord, bent the knee before him.

"Ho, Farquhar! What tidings?"

"Watty o' the Romach sent out three spies. They donned the MacIntosh tartan, and gave out that they were bound by an oath to slay the Cummings. Up yonder are three troops of the Bishop's men beside Leslie's Command. They design to descend at night, or at least after sunset, and attack the castle, but they are feared for the bogs and streams, and none know the way. So our three MacIntoshes are to find them a guide, and we think Tam Gow the Smith were as good as another: he knows the Glen."

"Excellent! Watty has done well. Go tell him I must have a cordon of men round the castle, but none may enter till I whistle twice. Bid Tam lead them down deviously, but ever on hard smooth ground, so that they think themselves safe, to the black island near the big peat bog. Watty will

have all our best men ready, and we will rush them there and teach them how to play with Cummings on their own ground. Now, go!"

Farquhar disappeared down the stair, lithe and noiseless as a wraith. Alasdair followed more slowly, and entered the room that served for a dining-hall, just meeting Beatrix carrying in triumph a couple of blackcock, exquisitely dressed, which she placed on the board already decked with bannocks and other cakes, and a pile of ripe bramble-berries and a dish of rosy apples. Her face was somewhat flushed with her cookery, and she was in high glee over the adventure.

"My Lord is served," she said. "Shall I minister to your wants? Methinks the hero should have a waiting damsel to tend on him."

"You shall sit here in your throne, for choicer feast never man partook of. See you those apples, sweetheart? Ye may know them. One of my men was down in the Thigh this morning and brought them up. I think, from your cousin the Chanter. They will have a sweet savour to me. I think of the Chanter's garden as a home of ancient peace."

Beatrix's memory went back to the Chanter's garden—recalling involuntarily the soldierly stride that seemed so inconsistent with the monkish habit of Father Ambrose. Altogether it was a merry meal. Alasdair was in great spirits, and told many stories of the old fights and loves and romances of the Cummings,—many tales, too, of his own youth and adventures; and Beatrix capped them with stories she had heard from Dunbar cousins, and weird fantasies picked up from her father of elves and witches and were-wolves. None would ever have imagined that these two, so gay and happy in each other's company, were in fact so strangely thrown together, and were even now expecting, almost with absolute certainty, the attack of a powerful enemy.

Beatrix was trying with some difficulty to recall her early memories of Alasdair. Long ago in her childhood there had been a handsome, petulant boy with whom she had played at robbers, or some such matter, when her father had gone to see Sir Alexander of Altyre on some affair of business; also, that she had found him over-presuming, and had gripped him by the shoulders and flung him in the burn by Altyre, and then challenged him to meet her with a rapier, which he would not do, saying that the claymore was the only weapon fit for a gentleman. But that boy must have been about her own age. Alasdair looked full ten years older, and indeed must be at least that from the events he told her of in which he had borne a part. She asked about that boy, but he merely said—"That must have been my brother, much younger than I. I was in France at that time."

Now and then, as they dined, there came blasts of trumpets from the distant hillside, but they heeded them not. Then came a long period of silence, during which they had finished their repast, and Alasdair had uncorked a flagon of rare old wine. Sooth to say, it was part of the store of some Jewish pedlars, journeying from the port of Findhorn with wares to offer for sale to my Lord of Moray at Darnaway, and whom a band of Cummings had intercepted and relieved of their loads.

Alasdair filled their glasses.

"Confusion to Bishop and bridegroom, and long may the bonny bride bide here!"

She honoured the toast, just touching her lips to the glass, and Alasdair's eyes were caught by a ring she wore on the forefinger of the right hand.

"'Tis a marvellous stone," he said.

"A beryl, the stone that crowns the royal sceptre of Scotland. My father gave it me. It is a talisman against were-wolves, they say, and they who have the second sight can see strange visions in it."

Alasdair took the little strong white hand in his own sinewy brown one, and looked intently into the milky depths of the green opalescent stone, so full of strange fire,—f or he had the second sight, so his old nurse had told him, though the constant activity of a strenuous life had dulled the faculty. Beautiful and glowing pictures seemed to rise in the heart of it. But above all he saw Beatrix always with him, ever clinging to him, sharing good and ill fortune, happy and content to be with him. In the stone he could read the great love that had grown up in her heart for him; it was incredible, but it was true. His sweetheart—so in daring mood he had called her—and so she had loved to be called. Her life was now twined in his.

He raised the little hand to his lips, and felt the fingers close round his in answeri~g pressure, as the green eyes looked full into the grey ones, and darkening, softening mists came over both. His left arm stole round her and held her close. Her head leaned back on his shoulder, the dainty flower-like face was close to his, the red lips pouting with the kiss for which his own so hungered. And so in supreme happiness they clung together, while a wild blast from three trumpets sounding close by was almost unheeded for the moment. Then he started from her embrace. The hour had come when he must lead his clan; the soft dalliance of love must wait till safety was reassured.

"Sweetheart! my sweetheart! All mine at last. Promise me one thing now. By our new-found love I ask it, the first thing I have asked of you."

"What is it, Alasdair? Whatever you ask of me is granted already ere it be asked."

"This, my dearest love. I must go forth and lead my men. I think we have the enemy in the hollow of our hand, and I know, I feel, how you would fain go forth with me, and share the danger and the fun. But I ask you, bide within the castle till I return. It may be the roads will not be safe for your return to-night, 'tis already past sunset by an hour. But Dame Gow, Watty's wife, waits below, and will be proud to be your tiring woman; she hath a chamber prepared for you."

"Oh, Alasdair! may I not go with you? I will hinder you naught. I can hold sword or rapier, or fire a piece if you will. I will doff my petticoats and wear the belted plaid, or armour if you have a spare suit to fit me. You Cummings are not all giants, are you?"

"Your promise, sweetheart! Besides, I have a post for you;—you can help me far better here in the castle than if you were down with me yonder. See you now, all the enemy, Leslie's men, and all the three troops of the Bishop's, are herded together down on an island between the streams. You can see it from here: my own men have guided the guileless souls into a pretty trap, and there we shall deal with them. But it is possible they may have told off some few picked men to rush the castle while the main body hold us in fight. Should they try this, the only path they can come is by the fairy knoll, and over its shoulder for a moment a passing man would be clearly visible in the moonlight. Keep a steady watch on that point, and if so much as a man s head should appear, blow one long blast on this whistle, and that man's head and his shoulders will part company before he can reach the gate. There are watchmen on the top of the tower and warders at the gate, otherwise you and Dame Gow have the castle to yourselves. I trust your promise, sweetheart."

He handed her a whistle that hung with some accoutrements on the wall,—of a slightly deeper note than the one he used himself.

"'Tis a hard thing you have asked me, Alasdair, but you shall always know and feel that you can trust your little love. Now, one kiss only, and go. But haste you back with victory."

A moment he held her in his arms, a moment his lips rested on hers and felt her quick fluttering breath; then he was gone, and passed over the drawbridge, his clay-more in his hand, his great

leathern targe with three bosses and a central spike hung round his neck, and his eagle feather jauntily defiant, murmuring to himself as he went—"Well worth it! little sweetheart! Mine, all mine at last. Would she hate me if she knew? Nay, I think not."

Then blowing his whistle he ran rapidly down the path.

On the island between the streams the four companies of men-at-arms stood to attention, waiting the signal to advance. So far, they had seen no sign of the Cummings. Their guide had indeed done splendidly, for he had brought them in absolute safety over an easy track almost to the very walls of the castle, and that without alarming the clansmen,—the castle rose before them only some two hundred yards distant. The spot on which they were drawn up was an island, but they did not know this, so craftily had Tam Gow lead them. On their left, to the north, was a peat bog, water-logged from recent rains, wherein the incautious traveller might sink knee-deep. In front and behind were tributary streams of the Lossie, that, flowing under heather and whins, were not to be seen in the uncertain moonlight. They were posted on a bare space of gravel and short grass, divided by a tiny rill. Southward of this rill the Bishop's bowmen (English mercenaries, many of them) were on the right flank. In the centre were Leslie's men, all mounted and in full armour, between two mounted companies of the Bishop's forces. His bill-men and pike-men were on the extreme left. Leslie himself, on his powerful black stallion, was in the rear of his own men, with his jackal Urquhart beside him, as usual.

"Gad, Urquhart! I think we are right at last. I have certain knowledge that my wife was seen passing down the side of the hill by Rafford soon after midday, though where the devil she came from I cannot guess. She is not on the hillside, that I swear. She hath not emerged on the other side of the Glen, that the Bishop's men and the Prior of Pluscarden are ready to swear. Therefore she is within you castle walls, unless she be out on the moor, and I give her credit for too much sense to suppose that. Hence, and ass as you are, you will follow my reasoning thus far: she is within, and ere another hour have passed we shall pull her out; and if this oaf of a Cumming have touched so much as a finger of Dame Leslie's hand, why, damn it! I'll hang him as high as Haman, and you, too, Urquhart, if you grin like that. Then hey! for Forres and the bridal feast, and the bridal night at your house, Urquhart, and you shall find the liquor. Devil blast me! we shall all be drunk as swine. An it had been my black-a-vised sweetheart, I would have provided liquor myself for all to swim in, and filled thy own pouch with gold pieces. Sound the trumpets. Damn you! Call the men to attention. At the second blast, a shower of arrows to clear the ground, and then rush the castle. We shall surround it wholly, then face outwards and shoot any man who appears. The bill-men will open the gate for us, and so the game is won and done."

The trumpets blared out their first call, and, as if by magic, several ranks of men with the Cumming tartan, steel caps, and leathern targes, rose, as it were, out of the ground between them and the castle. The bowmen drew shaft to ear, but before they could loosen a string the men disappeared again as suddenly as they had risen, and with a wild yell two or three score leaped on them from behind, dragging them down, throttling them with bare hands, slashing and stabbing with dirk or broadsword, and cutting their bowstrings as fast as their keen blades could rip.

The mounted men, taken by surprise, wheeled their horses to the right to charge the foe who had so suddenly sprung upon them; but in their haste and confusion the manœuvre was badly executed, and as the right company of the Bishop's men attempted to jump the little rill, their horses crashed against each other, and many a stark man-at-arms went down tangled in the harness of his steed; others plunged among the scared and disorganised bowmen whom they

thought to deliver, and the wild Highlandmen, throwing themselves flat on the ground, hamstrung the horses and stabbed the riders low in the groin with the keen dirk or the skean-dhu.

Meantime the Leslie had seen how the fight went, and had held in his own men and the left company of the Bishop's forces, and at this instant, clear against the rising moon, was seen the eagle feather of Alasdair Cumming as he walked over the ground where the mysterious appearance of the clansmen had so startled and disorganised the attacking force. The trick, indeed, was excessively simple. Several small burns ran deep under the heather, entirely hidden by the rank growth, and in these the men crouched out of sight till the signal was given to draw the archer's fire, then they stepped on the banks, and on another signal stepped down again, while their comrades took the bewildered bowmen in the rear.

Now clear before them stood the Cumming chief, surrounded by his men in battle array, and, heedless of the fate of the right company and the unfortunate bowmen, Leslie gave the order to charge.

In the meantime, fired by the hope of a rich reward for himself, and partly being unwilling to be caught in the mêlée of a night-charge, and thus endanger his own precious skin, Master Urquhart left his patron's side and crept out from the companies, followed by two of his creatures. Chance favoured him, for seeking how to reach the castle he spied a lightly trodden path, that, as it happened, led over comfortably firm ground to the fairy knoll. As he passed the shoulder of this hill two arrows sang past his ear, causing him to crouch close to the ground at the very point where, according to Alasdair's directions, the head of an approaching enemy would be visible from the castle. Even so he might have been seen, but that just at that moment Beatrix, who till then had been watching intently, for a single instant let her mind wander to her beryl, and pressed her lips on the gleaming stone.

"Come on, lads," whispered Urquhart, "there are no Cummings here. All are the other side; while they fight we may get the prize and a rich reward. I used to play here as a boy when it was an open ruin, and methinks I know a way in that even the Cumming does not know. Softly now, there are stepping-stones here, and a masked door by that angle. Oh, rare luck, not even a door; they have never found this way. Now, six steps down, then turn to the right and along an underground passage, and you reach the stair. Lord, what are they at?"

It was a furious din that struck his ear. Prompt on the signal, the centre and left companies started to gallop, but had scarce got twenty yards when the foremost horse crashed down on his head, tumbling his rider like a sack of meal head-foremost on the soft moss. In another moment a dozen were sprawling among their struggling horses, those behind vainly trying to rein their steeds so as not to trample on the front rank. Then with yells of triumph the Cumming clansmen arose from the heather where they were hidden, and headed by their young chief dashed into the struggling mass. This was the noise that Urquhart had heard, and which for a moment drew Beatrix's attention off her watch on the fairy knoll. She was playing carelessly with Alasdair's dress dirk, worn only at Court and on occasions of ceremony, which he had been showing her during their dinner, and which be had changed for a more serviceable weapon. Gently the door opened, and a man first peeped cautiously round, then jumped into the room, raising his arm to sweep aside the tapestry that hung from the lintel.

Quick as a flash Beatrix flung the dirk,—a trick she had learned in childhood from her father,—and as the ruffian raised his arm the sharp point caught him, and, sped by the force of the throw and the heavy hilt, it found his heart, and he tumbled like a log on the stone floor, vomiting streams of blood. Urquhart immediately behind, and expecting to find men on guard,

stepped over his follower's body with his weapon bared. Beatrix caught a rapier from the wall and stood on guard.

"So! wild cat," he said.

"Touch not the cat, but a glove," she cried, crossing his sword. In an instant Urquhart's blade clattered against the wall and fell, as a lunge from the rapier pierced his shoulder and a second quick thrust grazed his cheek, snicking the point of an ear.

"Take up thy carrion and begone," she called to him, but he was already out of the room and bolting down the stair, followed by his remaining ruffian.

Dame Gow heard the clash of weapons, and came running, stumbling over the dead man on the floor.

"Faith, my lady, ye should have been born in Clan Chattan. Our cats scratch shrewdly when they meet with swine. See ye now, from this window the moon shows all clear. They who would attack us are away like a herd of roe deer when the wolf howls. See them fleeing up the hillside. I trow they'll not readily meddle with the Cummings again. But hearken ye, my bonny doo, my man hath just come in with a message from the chief: he is busied with the affairs of the clan, and seeing to the posting of the guards, and to the burial of some poor fellows of our own who have fallen, and he begs that you will now retire to rest, and he will himself bring his greetings in the morning."

"I promised him implicit obedience," said Beatrix, "and he shall not deem that I fail in my word, though I doubt I shall sleep but little this night."

"Aye, faith, 'tis not every day that ye kill one foul brute and wound another. God's truth, but I'm proud of ye. I would ye were daughter o' mine. Come away, my bonny wean, till I tuck ye up, that ye show your bonniest to the chief the morn. God bless him!"

In spite of her forebodings, Beatrix was no sooner put to bed by Dame Gow than she was sound asleep, wearied out with all the events and excitements of the day.

Waking at daybreak, she peeped from her window and saw Alasdair pacing up and down in front of the great gate, his drawn claymore over his shoulder as one on guard.

CHAPTER XX

THE WITCH'S CAVE

She watched him with great admiration, rejoicing in the strength and beauty of him, for indeed he was a splendid figure of a man in all his warlike accoutrements. He was considerably over six feet in height, broad and well-knit, with a supple grace of movement that partially masked his great stature and strength. "Little sweetheart," he had called her—but Beatrix herself was tall as women go, though her head only reached his shoulder. So absorbed was she in watching him as he paced to and fro that she forgot the scantiness of her own attire, and heard not Dame Gow's entry.

"Save us, my bonny wean! are ye afoot already; and it's real lovely ye look after your sleep, like a fresh rose-bud with snow around it. Wat ye that lawn that ye slept in belonged to the chief's mother, God rest her soul! Eh, sirs, but I would the chief could see ye now."

Beatrix blushed warmly as the kindly, talkative old dame proceeded with her tiring.

"The chief is early astir," she said.

"Early astir! Him! Deed, and it's no bed that the chief has seen the night. Ever since he dismissed the last of his men to rest he has himself kept guard over ye. Well I wat he thinks ye

more precious than any of his possessions. See ye now, I nursed Master Alasdair myself when he was a wee toddling bairn, after his mother died (rest her soul, she was a saint on earth, and is a saint in glory now), and never did I see him much taken with a woman before, though mightily were they taken with him, some of them, But deed, I wonder not he should be mad for ye. I would be so myself if I were twenty years younger and a man. My man tells me 'tis your husband that's hunting ye. Faith, from what Tam tells me ye are well quit of him."

"The Church calls him my husband, but indeed I think not so myself. Would the chief hold by the Church's rule, think ye, Dame Gow?"

Nay, for why then? The Cummings hold not much by the Church's rules anyway, or by any rules indeed except their own, and ye wat the chief's own mother—"

"You spoke of his mother as dead, Mistress Gow, but I know the Dame Cumming of Altyre."

"Eh, save the bairn, Dame Cumming of Altyre is not the chief's mother; fancy that ye should think o' such a thing. Why, her eldest is ten years younger than lie. Nay, his mother was Helen Grant, daughter to the Laird of Grant; handfasted were she and Alexander now of Altyre (his father was alive then), and married they were to have been if she bore him a boy. 'Twas an old custom, as ye may know, and the Cummings had adhered to it maybe longer than others. Well, her boy was born, and proudly she looked forward to showing him to Alexander, for he was away at some fighting or another, and ere he could win back she had died. I was with her, rest her sainted soul, and so I took the boy as she wished, and Alexander was proud to own him, and presented him to the Dallas Cummings as their Tannist; and later on, when he showed what was in him, they adopted him as such, but Alexander soon after married Janet Fraser of Philorth—bonnie Jennie they called her,—and she brought him two boys, and the present Dame has three. Never a daughter has Alexander of Altyre. But he will always acknowledge our chief as the best and the favourite, though there have been hot words between them, as indeed there will ever be where there are Cummings, so long as the world stands."

As she talked the garrulous old dame was busy attiring Beatrix, and when she had completed the task to her own satisfaction, she turned her around, saying—"There, my bonnie doo, now go your ways and greet the chief; its fine and pleased he'll be to see ye, that I warrant."

Beatrix ran rapidly down the stairs, just as Alasdair, who had turned in at the great gate and crossed the triangular courtyard, met her at the entrance to the Tower. Almost she sprang to his arms, so much had she been hungering to feel the protective strength of that warm embrace. He held her close with fierce passion, as though he would crush her very being into his, covering her sweet face with his eager kisses, and clinging to her joyfully-yielded lips. Then holding her at arm's length with his strong hands on her shoulders, his eyes devoured her beauty.

"Little sweetheart, you are as fresh as a wild rose. What other maiden in Scotland could look so, after smiting so shrewdly last night. I heard of your prowess from Dame Gow."

Beatrix shivered ever so slightly—the killing of a man looked a trifle gruesome in the cold light of morning; but Alasdair approved, and that was all that really mattered. There was a delicious feeling of intimacy in the morning meeting that was infinitely sweet.

"And you were watching all night, my hero. How weary you must be. See, now, I go to prepare your meal,—breakfast, supper,—what is it? Then you must go and rest. You see I have constituted myself your cook, while you do the fighting, and I shall take care of you; indeed, I am sure you need it. When all this danger is passed you shall cook a meal for me before I return."

Alasdair's face gloomed.

“Speak not of it, sweetheart. To-day is ours, yesterday and to-morrow are with the gods. They exist not. And to-day you are under my roof, and it is a gleam of light bright enough to illumine all a man’s life.”

“To me too. Alasdair, I want to think of nothing save that I am under your roof. I want to be nowhere’ else. Now spare me for half an hour, and come back to me.”

“For half an hour, sweetheart. I must interview some men who went for me to spy out what the enemy are doing, and what they intend. A novice from Kinloss, who preferred a roving life to a shaven crown, and followed me here when I came to take up the leadership of the Dallas Cummings, and who hath been at Spynie, has resumed his habit and gone to mingle with the Bishop’s men to learn their plans. He knows the Captain of the Bishop’s troop, and will feign to come from the Abbey. Farewell for the present, sweetheart. I shall return with news; meanwhile, I bless the danger that keeps you here.”

“Why, so do I,” she replied, as she kissed him again, and they parted.

Half an hour later the morning meal was spread by Beatrix’ own hands, and Alasdair came in with a weary and drawn look in his eyes from the strain of the past two days.

“But little news yet,” he said, as he drained a huge flagon of Spanish wine. “Some of my scouts are back, and they report confusion and anxiety in the enemy’s camp all night, and there be wild counsels, for the more the Leslie is crossed the more determined he groweth to get his own way; and Bishop Hepburn is not the man to stomach an affront. The Bothwell blood is hot, as I have good occasion to know. All seemingly agree that something must be done, but none know what.”

“Meanwhile, Alasdair, it is good for me. For I bide with you, and indeed I care for naught else. But what tale brings your novice in the priest’s frock? He was to bring the surest tidings.”

“Yea, so, but he hath not yet come in.

“Then shall your little sweetheart take charge of you. See, now, if I am your queen, as you say, you must e’en obey my orders, and they are now that you do lie down on that couch of skins where you have made me rest before now, and do sleep while I watch, and give you the word at the faintest indication of anything you should transact yourself. Come, now, set the example of obedience.”

With a pretty assumption of authority she led him to the couch, and scarce was he stretched thereon than exhausted nature claimed her due, and he was sound asleep.

Beatrix sitting close by his head, with eyes and ears and every sense alert, knew in herself that now at last life had realised itself to her in its fullness, and was very good.

But short was the space allowed the weary man to sleep. Dame Gow peeped in, and made a sign of benediction over the pair, and left as silently; then a step sounded in the courtyard. Beatrix rose quietly and stole on tiptoe to the window. A slim, close-shaven man in the Cumming tartan, carrying a bundle, was crossing the triangle. In an instant it flashed on her that this was the novice, and he was carrying his robe, which she had irreverently called the priest’s frock. She bent over Alasdair, stroking his hair gently as she kissed him.

“I fear you must wake, there comes one to see you.”

In a moment he was broad awake, and kissed her back.

“Good little sweetheart! No man need fear aught with you on watch. ‘Tis my novice,” he said, as he looked from the window. Then he ran hastily down the stairs to learn the news.

He was grave and anxious looking when he came back;

“We must take instant measures. The talk was of deforcement of the King’s authority in Consistorial matters, as vested in the Bishop. Of rapine in carrying off the wife of an Officer of

the King (save the mark, this of Leslie who skulked at Flodden, and brought not his command to help the King). I know not how the law on all this may be, but certain it is that messengers rode last night to the Sheriff, and to the Earl of Moray, and there is talk of other forces also. The Glen of Dallas will no longer be safe, neither can you return. There is but one possibility, we must make our expedition to the witch's cave a reality."

"But how, Alasdair? You can never leave your men, neither would I leave them. Every Cumming in the glen is dear to me now."

"I know it, Beatrix, my sweet! But know you not how readily we Highlandmen take to the mountains. Few could find the witch's cave; and with my men around on Cairn na Caileach none could reach it,—not a whole army. Give me twenty-four hours and there will not be a Cumming in the Glen. The Earl and the Sheriff and the Bishop and all the armies of Scotland may gallop through if they like, and break their horses' legs in our bogs and streams,—they will do us no harm. The only danger is from spies. I know there are some hidden around, but where or how many I know not. They know you to be here; they will watch for your exit. We must baffle them. If they know not where you are we may rest in peace."

"I shall rest in peace with you anywhere, Alasdair, my love. Only tell me what I must do."

"For the nonce, sweetheart, you must become a clansman of the Cummings. You must, as you said last night, in jest perchance then, don the belted plaid, but 'twill be an old and ragged one. Dame Gow shall clip your hair,—what a sin it seems. No hose, but an old pair of brogues to protect your feet; so will we walk out, two of the clansmen taking to the hills. They will certainly not recognise yell, and if they should know me they will think I am leaving you in the castle, and gladly let me go, thinking to take you easily. Some miles we must foot it over the heather to the base of the hills; there I have ponies ready just as we planned, and you shall ride up the greater part of the way. Then a short scramble and we are in safety, till I find a way to restore you to your father."

"May that day be long distant, unless you tire of me. I care not how long fate prevents my leaving you. But, truth, 'tis a splendid scheme. Come quickly. I am on fire till we start. Yet, no! You are wearied out Alasdair, you must rest."

"Nay, sweetheart! Time enough to rest when we reach the cave. My orders have gone out already; in less than an hour's time the clan will have begun to move to the hills. The word goes from mouth to mouth, and swift runners carry the signals. Watty is to bring me in some of the little Earl of Moray's cattle; they shall serve our needs while he raids our glen. So 'tis all fair. Now away with you, sweetheart, and change. Ha! there is Dame Gow. Now, mistress, ply your skill, and transform this dainty lady to a stripling boy of our clan."

"Save us, Master Alasdair, what mad frolic is this?"

"No frolic, i 'faith, but a very serious saving of our skins. The Sheriff and the Lord knows who are to raid the Glen, and in the meantime the Cummings take to the hills as they have often done before. The rascals seek my lady here, but while she prefers to bide with me, I trow it is not the part of a Cumming to give her up. So we are for the witch's cave, and you must make a boy of her, so that their spies know her not."

"And well I wat she'll make a bonny boy. Come away then, my wean; ye'll look braw in the belted plaid, I'll wager."

Alasdair, busied over his final arrangements and dispositions, hardly noted the flight of time, and scarcely at first recognised Beatrix in the tall, handsome boy who joined him at the castle gate, though 'tis true the knees were somewhat whiter than those of a boy of the clan might be expected to be, and Dame Gow, with a coquettish eye to effect, had draped the plaid a thought

high to show the shapely limb; and in answer to a shy remonstrance from Beatrix, she said—"Eh, sirs, and they'll just think ye are a callant that's outgrown his kilts. Wae's me, but an I had the time to get a little of the peat water, to give a bit colour to your leg—but eh! ne'er fash yourself about that. There's many a braw lad that's as white as ye are, and ne'er will they dream that ye are a lassie, with the kilts as short as you. Now go ye, and glad the eyes of the chief, for it's himself that thinks all the world of ye, for as little as he says."

And indeed she looked an exceedingly handsome boy, with the squirrel-coloured curls cropped, but still thick and abundant, as a boy's might be, tied with a scrap of ribbon over the ear, as boys often tied them in these days when they were going courting. An old and somewhat ragged plaid of the Cumming tartan was belted over a loose and light doublet, and caught with an unobtrusive brooch on the shoulder; a fox-skin sporan was hung round her waist, and a horn-handled dirk girded to her side; her feet were cased in good, serviceable deerskin brogues. The plaid folded across her shoulders and chest gave a look of breadth and strength, proportioned to her height; and though the shapely legs still looked somewhat slender, she might well pass for a slim, growing youth, not greatly to be distinguished, save by his good looks, from any other stripling of the clan.

Alasdair looked at her with unfeigned admiration, and one moment in the shadow of the gate he clasped her close, murmuring—

"That is the farewell to my sweetheart, till we reach the witch's cave. In the meantime—it is Donald Bean, my comrade."

A number of the clansmen were thronging into the courtyard. Rory among them whispered to Alasdair—"There be spies among us—not here, but lurking in the heather. We have killed two, but I doubt there be others."

Alasdair himself was dressed now as one of the humblest of the clansmen, and so, mingling with the throng, he and Beatrix passed out together, unnoticeable by the keenest eyes among the spies of the enemy.

Urquhart's jackal reported that a great throng of ragamuffin Cummings gathered in the castle courtyard and went off to the mountains, but there was no woman among them; that a woman, presumably the Lady Beatrix, had been seen in the castle after the crowd had departed, but where the chief was, none could tell. They had, in fact, seen Dame Gow, who, after the chief and Beatrix had left, made her few simple preparations, and wrapped in a tartan screen, as it was called, with a largish bundle in her hand, took her way through Forres to Altyre, where she found a cousin who took her on his horse across to Cairn na Cailleach.

Meantime two humble clansmen of the Cummings were walking southward across the glen, indistinguishable from any other pair of youths. Most of the boys and striplings of the clan went bare-legged and bare-footed, but it seemed the younger stripling, Donald Bean, felt. the rough heather more than usual, for his companion tore some strips off his plaid and wound them around the boy's legs above the deerskin brogues, forming a sort of makeshift hose.

Not without adventure, however, were they destined to reach the foot of the hills, for soon after they had passed the burn of Carrhatnich, a stranger wearing the Stuart tartan, and a silver brooch in his bonnet, emerged from behind a knoll and stood in front of them.

"Halt, in the King's name," he cried.

"Who are you, who make free with our King's name?" retorted Alasdair fiercely.

"I am James Stuart, henchman of the Earl of Moray, and in his name as lieutenant of the King, and in the name of the King I arrest you, Alasdair Cumming." Half a dozen in Stuart tartan were panting over the heather twenty yards behind.

The stripling's dirk flashed, and the stranger's blade gleamed as he made a pass that clashed on the dirk. Alasdair sprang in front of his companion, and caught the next thrust on his left arm wrapped round with his plaid. In an instant, before the weapon could be with-drawn from the tangling folds, his own sword in a rapid pass went clean through his assailant, just as the followers came in sight around the knoll, and seeing their leader dead, turned and fled.

"A vermin," said Alasdair. "He was at Flodden with Lord Moray, and was in the pay of the English. I caught him, and he never forgave me. He would have sold our King to England; this is his revenge on me. But it has miscarried!"

He was busy binding up his arm, that had been gashed with James Stuart's sword; but ere he could do so his companion's cool skilful fingers had taken the bandage and adjusted it over the wound. In doing so a tiny spot of blood showed on the light doublet.

"Good Heavens! You are wounded."

"Nay, only a scratch, 'tis nothing."

"Scratch or no, it must be bound. We can take no risks. Come, I shall be your surgeon. I have some skill of wounds."

The blood spot was below the right shoulder, and just above where the plaid crossed the breast. Rapidly Alasdair opened the doublet, and found the wound, which was but slight, yet needed stanching.

"Dame Gow taught me in my boyhood never to move without some linen for bandages and salves for healing. Often I have blessed her forethought, but never more than now."

The little wound had been dressed and bandaged, and Alasdair turning down the shirt, pressed a kiss that seemed an unusual mark of affection towards a stripling boy.

"Donald Bean, at your service, till we reach the witch's cave."

"Donald Bean again, now the wound is stanched and bound."

So on they fared till they reached the foot of the hills, and there, as Alasdair had ordered, a few of the clansmen waited with ponies, and right glad were the two weary travellers to mount and ride up the steep slopes to the base of a precipitous craig, that looked absolutely inaccessible; but by scrambling up a sort of crevice, that made what rock climbers call a chimney, it was possible to reach a ledge invisible from below which, running along the face of the craig, and with sundry awkward scrambles, led eventually at the top, which was a grassy slope of some dozen yards broad at the base of another craig, in which was the mouth of the witch's cave, so often talked of between Beatrix and Alasdair.

It was a fairly spacious hollow in the living rock, with two openings to the north and the west. Alasdair's men had been already on the spot and had provided some rude comforts, though for couch there was as yet naught but a heap of dried moss, covered with plaids and skins, and no table but a few boards set on trestles. However, a peat fire was burning outside, and a cauldron of broth sent forth a savoury smell that was very welcome after the long tramp. Two of the clansmen were in attendance to wait on them.

"You must feed first, my sweetheart, and then you shall rest and forget all your fatigues. It is Donald Bean no longer now; he has played his part, now it is my sweet."

Two smoking bowls were placed before them, to which they did ample justice.

"Why the witch's cave. Alasdair? Is there any story?"

"A very vague one. A woman once fled up here from Forres, they say, when the citizens wanted to burn her. She could made herself into a fox, or a wolf, and it was said she was in love with one of the Cummings, and killed his enemies. I was shown this cave by an old shepherd

when I was a boy, and dreamed then of some adventurous hiding here in time of danger. I didn't dream of hiding my sweetheart, though."

The sun had set, and the evening was closing in as they finished their meal, and a few brilliant stars already began to spangle the pale expanse of heaven that was rapidly darkening towards the zenith.

"Lie down and rest, my Beatrix," he said, "you are utterly safe here. I will watch, and these two brave friends are close within call, and a hundred of the clan are at the foot of the rock."

She looked at him, at the dark circles round his eyes, at the lips that drooped in spite of himself, and the lips set with the tense will that would not give way. His hand that grasped hers was hot, and shook somewhat. He was wearied out and feverish; in pain, too, from his wound, she judged.

"Not yet, my hero, my love. See you, the night is early yet, and I slept well last night. I am fresh as a bird. If you go to watch now you will but fall asleep, then where may we all be? You shall rest for an hour. I' heard Dame Gow say she would borrow a pony and be here e'er nightfall" (this, be it said, was a pure fiction of Beatrix' brain, but it served its turn). "She brings me a few necessaries. Now, if I am your Queen, obey my orders."

Still holding his hand she led him to the couch, and gently pressed him down, and spread the deerskin over him, as, resting her hand on his head, she sat on the ground beside him, crooning low an old lullaby. Weariness prevailed, and in two minutes he was sound asleep.

Beatrix rose softly, and went to the mouth of the cave, looking forth on the beauty of the gathering night, and the crowding stars momently increasing in number and brilliance, that came out over the dark, solemn shapes of the mountains, and away eastward toward the sea the first gleam of the moon now dwindled to half her full circle. Wondrous was the eerie hush of the starshine over the sleeping world, and Beatrix felt that Fate was indeed very good. The wild blood in her had waked and called, and her whole being responded. Now for the first time out in the absolute wild, alone with nature and with the man she loved, she felt as though her whole self expanded. All that was cramped and confined and artificial fell away like a garment; she could look all creation in the face with her own eyes.

A stir within the cave roused her from her musings. By the tiny lamp that was the only light she saw that Alasdair was tossing feverishly, and moaning in evident pain. She laid a soft, cool hand on his head, stroking the brow, and replaced the wounded arm tenderly in an easier position. With a long, deep sigh of content he passed again into calm slumber. For a while she sat by him crooning gently, then went forth again to the starlight and the rising moon, but shortly another weary moaning cry caught her watchful ear, and returning to the couch she saw that a fevered movement had displaced the bandage, and the arm had broken out bleeding afresh. She knew where the salves and bandages were in his pouch, and very quickly she had them replaced, while for utter weariness he was unconscious all the time. She put her arm under his head, letting him rest against her shoulder, and watched the drawn, haggard look pass from his face, but he shivered a little from the chill of exhaustion, and the loss of blood. And all this he had done for her. But for her and the unlucky entanglements of the Leslie, he might have remained happy in his surroundings, at the head of his devoted clan. Woman-like she exaggerated everything, not realising his toughness of fibre, his joy in fight and in effort, and his overmastering devotion to herself that made the fight all seem a piece of rollicking play to him, his services to her an honour and a privilege. She only was conscious of his present weakness and weariness. No sooner did she move than he grew restless again, and so terribly cold and lifeless. She must give him of her vitality somehow, who had given so much for her.

Closer she crept beside him, holding him ever fast in her arms as the warmth seemed to come back to his limbs, and his breath came deep and calm and even; and Beatrix, nestling close to him beneath the deerskin rug and his own great plaid, cherished him with the vigorous warmth of her own young blood—till she too fell sound asleep.

* * *

The sun was already high in the heaven when Alasdair awoke as from a dream of paradise.

"Ah! little sweetheart, art really there? I verily thought I had taken the journey to Tir nan Oge. Nay, then, now nor Church nor Crown nor Heaven nor Hell can ever tear us asunder more."

"But rest still," she murmured, as she nestled on his arm. "You are wounded and weary. 'Twill be days e'er you are fit to rise."

"Ah! little one, you know not much of the grit of a Cumming. Faith! my men would disown me if a night's rest cured not such a day as yesterday. Yet God be thanked for it, since it, and your sweet solicitude, have given you to me now and for ever. Say once more, sweetheart, that you have really come to me."

"Whom God liath joined, shall no man put asunder," she said solemnly, and with deep conviction.

He cast back the deerskin, and rose strong and vigorous as ever.

"Now for a plunge in Nature's shower-bath—the cascade that tumbles over the rocks round the corner, then hey, for breakfast! and the dawn of our new life—our new paradise, I will rather say. Why, Mistress Gow, how won you up here?"

"Deed, Master Alasdair, and think ye the Dame Gow is old and feeble and played out yet. I came by the same way that ye came yourselves, to take care of my bonny wean here. Now away wi' ye, Master Alasdair. Faith, I trow ye are just the same wild devil that ye ever were; there's naught will tame ye. Come away then, my bonny doo; the breakfast is a-preparing outside, and I have brought ye some apparel more suitable, and maybe more comfortable, too, than the belted plaid, well as it becomes ye. Come away."

CHAPTER XXI

HOW THE CUMMINGS TOOK TO THE HILLS

It was no unfamiliar experience of the Dallas Cummings to take to the hills. Lying, as their land did, on the edge of the lowlands, where the Sheriff and the Earl of Moray were supposed to preserve order, the wild and lawless clansmen were in constant risk of being punished for some of their forays. All the same, used as they were to the hills, thought and arrangement were needed to provide for the comfort of all the families, and for security in case of attack; and Alasdair was veritably a father to his people. In all that he did, Beatrix was a most efficient helper. She it was who saw that the women and the young children and the very old were taken care of and comfortably housed. Caves and old bothies and turf shelters they had occupied before were repaired and made habitable, the men doing the rough work, while the women lighted peat fires and disposed the poor stores of household goods they had brought with them, Beatrix often helping with her own hands. To all the clansmen she was a queen, more than amply she shared in their devotion to their chief; her beauty, her pluck and endurance, above all her obvious and proudly acknowledged love for the chief, appealed irresistibly to the romantic imagination of the

wild half-savage Sons of the mountains. To herself, it was almost as though her soul had passed into a new body altogether—the old life at Blervie Tower seemed so far away and dreamlike that it was scarcely credible that it should have been her own, rather it looked, whenever she thought of it at all, which was seldom, like the faint memory of some romance she had read but heeded very little. The wild hills and the wild clan, their joys and their dangers, their hopes and fears, were now her life. Since that night when the sudden fear had smitten her heart that Alasdair, her king, her love, was dying, and dying for her sake, and she had crept in under the deerskin to give him the vitality and warmth of her own sweet body, and had wakened in his arms to dreams of joy, she had been a part of him; her separate identity appeared a foolish fiction. The wild blood had awakened in her and called to the wild life of the moors and the mountains, till it seemed to her as if she could never really have lived any other life. The clan and all their traditions and customs were familiarly part of herself, and the lowland civilised life a dream.

There was always much to do, and both Beatrix and Alasdair found the day barely long enough. The disposition of the clansmen had to be arranged with care and forethought, for there were enemies on all sides; scouts and watchers had to be continually on the look out, a system of signals and calls different from those used down in their own glen had to be devised, their food had to be provided for. The herd of cattle driven in by Watty o' the Romach from the little Earl of Moray fed securely at the foot of the cliffs below the witch's cave, but these would only last a short while, it was but a small herd—others must be driven up. The lochs and streams yielded a plentiful supply of fish, and Beatrix could grill a dainty dish of loch trout for breakfast.

The moors also were full of game, and a fine fat stag gave variety to their bill of fare, to say nothing of the mountain hares, moorfowl, and grouse; and sacks of meal from the low-lying farms provided materials for bannocks. At last she had come to her own. Every detail of the life of the hills was a keen joy. The feel of the Cumming tartan folded over her breast was a delight, and the little knot of ribbon that tied her crisp short curls. She loved the dances on the heather to the skin of the pipes, and listened with a glow of pride to the stories of clan fights and of raids on the lowlands.

When memories of the old life did come back, and its pictures were vividly contrasted with the present, they served but to deepen her happiness. It came about in this way. Alasdair had been leading a foray against some farmers of the town of Forres who had plundered outlying cottages of the clan, and Beatrix ran down the hill below the cliffs to meet him on his return, for this time she had not gone with him, as there was a sick woman to be made comfortable. Alasdair was in great delight, the foray had been wholly successful. They had not only levied the usual contribution paid for protection given by the clan which had fallen into arrear, but had taken beasts and meal sacks and other matters in retribution for plundering, "to teach these rascal farmers," as Alasdair said, "not to interfere rashly with the Clan Cumming." One of the clansmen had brought a big bunch of white heather for Beatrix, another a plume of the soft and downy feathers under the wing of an eagle.

"Sweetheart," said Alasdair after the first greetings, "I have a message from Uncle Eochain. He hath always been in touch with the clan, and you know well how they have always adored him. So hath he heard of our taking to the hills, and of your safety, but both he and Sir Wilfred crave further news, and he thinks that you, too, would fain hear how it fares with them. To this end then have I sent trusty men of the clan to fetch up Master Simon Tulloch, who shall bring us all the news, and take our news and our greeting back to Blervie Tower."

"How good you are to me, Alasdair; but in truth since we have been here I have hardly cast a thought back on Blervie. Am I a very ungrateful wretch? Of course I love to hear that they are

well, but beyond that my life is here with the clan. But tell me, Alasdair, can Master Simon come in safety? I would not that any harm should chance to the dear old man."

"No harm can come possibly, sweetheart. My men will bring him round by Rafford, and through the hollow way where there are ponies waiting, so he shall ride up the steep part; and now that we have the windlass over the cliff we can draw him up into the witch's cave, and entertain him in a manner worthy of the Clan Cumming, and send him home with a wallet full of wonders to recount. The scouts tell me that a troop of the Earl of Moray's horse are encamped in our glen, somewhere betwixt the Black Burn and the Kellas, and the Bishop's men gallop through frequently, and your Lord of Leslie divides his time between riding up and down with his company of spears, and much cursing and blasphemy, and in the intervals drinking in Master Urquhart's house in Forres. He still lodgeth at the Abbey, where, as I gather, they are heartily sick of him, but dare not send him away.

"How chances it, I wonder," she said, "that such a man as he, who hath neither religion nor common decency, should be in high favour with the Church?"

"Know you not, sweet, that he hath an uncle a cardinal, who did much to procure the election of the present Pope, and who may himself be Pope one day. Rome is ruled by Cardinal Leslie. Furthermore, his mother was a Bothwell, and James Hepburn, Bishop of Moray, hath ever held that blood is thicker than water. The Abbot of Kinloss dare not cross Norman Leslie. But for these small matters he would have been excommunicated long since."

"He ought to have been excommunicated ages ago. But come up now and rest, dear one; you must be sore weary. I would I could have ridden with you. Poor old Marsaly is quite comfortable now. I made broth for her, and kept up the fire; the niece is with her now, so she'll do well."

"You are an angel, my Beatrix."

"Not a bit of it, Alasdair; a very unworthy daughter of the clan, I fear me. Nothing I can do is enough, after all the goodness of the clan to me. And I sorely wanted to be with you to-day. I believe I love a fight as much as any of you, Alasdair. I would give something to meet Master Urquhart again, and see how he liked the prick in the shoulder I gave him. It was worth a king's ransom to see him turn tail and run."

Alasdair put his arm tenderly round her, and together they walked up to the foot of the craigs, whence they climbed the rift to the witch's cave, now rendered much more habitable than it had been at first; for various packs of Jew merchants had been raided to supply stuffs and curtains, and even rude couches, and the primitive carpentry of the clansmen had provided shelters against the wind at the openings. Alasdair threw himself on a couch, and was asleep almost instantly, while Beatrix watched by his head alert for the faintest sound.

As she watched memory and fancy were busy. The sudden mention of Simon Tulloch had revived the fading pictures of Blervie and the old life. She remembered how Simon had come to her aid when her father had been so mysteriously attacked, and then carried off. How it had all happened was still a mystery to her. She remembered now the speculations as to possibilities of witchcraft, and the power of the Church in dealing with such matters, their visit to the Chanter's house, and her first sight of Father Ambrose in the Chanter's garden. What had become of the monk now, she wondered, and why was his personality still such a potent spell to move her? Whenever she thought of the scene by the old sundial, when the Father passed by with his soldierly stride, she seemed again to be conscious of those hidden eyes of which she had often dreamed, and to wonder what the face was like that she had never seen. How odd Cecily had been, too, that day. Of all the images in that old life she desired Cecily—the strange, weird girl, with the white face and midnight hair, had never seemed quite to belong to the decorous

conventional life of Blervie. Perhaps that was the reason of her romantic devotion to her friend. Perhaps it was just because Cecily seemed not to belong there that she missed her now. Cecily had disappeared before the ceremony of exorcism took place; Beatrix' dreams now strangely mixed Cecily with Leslie's hunting of herself. Then her mind pictured her escape, her finding of her father, Cecily's return, and then her meeting with Alasdair. *Then she knew*. All her life she had been a squirrel in a cage, a very comfortable cage certainly, wadded and lined with wool, warm and protected, plenty of nuts, and a delicate wheel to exercise in, along the familiar conventional track, but then there came a touch,—the door of the cage was open—she had peeped out half timidly—sniffed the open air—then the sudden rush of spearmen to take her and force her to the arms of her husband was the final push—the little squirrel that had stood hesitating by the cage door was emptied out unceremoniously on to the moss and the tree trunks—and was free.

Free! What mattered it that there was but a cave to sleep in, and that the wind blew shrewdly sometimes across the hills, the food might be scarce, and the softnesses of life unknown? It was life, it was freedom; the little, wild red thing had found her mate, and no more could return to the conventional bars, and the routine of the dull old wheel. She looked at Alasdair, and her heart swelled with pride in his strength and manhood as she thought of all the joys and labours they shared, how she had donned the belted plaid of the Cumming tartan, and marched by his side with the eagle plume in her bonnet, on a foray to drive in some cattle—or in light armour had ridden with him on the hardy little hill ponies when they were bound on some more distant expedition, or in her own robes, the queen and darling of the clan, she had gone among them like an angel of light, helping, nursing, comforting the worn and weary. Glorious! But what would Father Ambrose think of it? The thought would force itself 'on her mind. Somehow she felt he would not condemn.

Then came the long cry over the moors, and gently she laid her hand on Alasdair's head. It was the call of the clan announcing an arrival in peace and friendship. The men escorting Simon Tulloch had arrived at the foot of the craigs. Alasdair sprang up, the arras hung over the mouth of the cave was thrown back, the rope lowered by the windlass which they had rigged up to facilitate their own access to their stronghold, and in very short space the old man stumped into the cave with a low reverence to Beatrix and to the chief.

"God save your Ladyship!" he said. "Father! *pax vobiscum*. Pardon me, my tongue tripped over the rules of the Abbey. I should say—greeting to the chief."

Alasdair, standing behind Beatrix, had flashed a glance on him with a gesture commanding silence. But Beatrix had caught the first words, and instantly pictures rushed on her brain resolving long pent up and half-formed queries. The form of greeting she had so often heard addressed to monks of the Abbey brought up the Laigh of Moray and her very last ride down into the level lands when they went to the Chanter's house of Windyhills. That was where she had heard that greeting last—and addressed to She felt again the hidden eyes that so persistently haunted her, saw again the tall, soldierly form of him who had fought at Flodden, who had walked by her side through the terrors of the haunted wood at Callifer, who had stood with Eochain, one on each side of her, when she found her father again. Then the picture of her meeting with Alasdair, and how he seemed as an old friend, though she met him for the first time. Could monks come out as Master Luther had said? The thought rushed through her with the thrill of a great joy; yet she gave no outward sign, and greeted Master Tulloch calmly as though his tongue had made no slip.

“Welcome, Master Simon,” she said, “you find us here taken to the hills like robbers, as they say, but in fair comfort. And I bid you tell my father that though his intent (planned all for my good, as I well know, yet mistaken, as I know also), and all the powers of the Church behind, would make a Leslie of me, yet by my own choice I am and will remain a Cumming, and the clan hath received me with kindness and honour far beyond my dessert. Yet entreat for me my father’s forgiveness, if I seem to have gone against his wishes.”

“And indeed, my lady, no forgiveness need be asked, for ever hath it been Sir Wilfred’s chief desire that ye should be free from that brute and blackguard Leslie of the Glen, and well I wot both he and Master Eochain Beag will rejoice that ye have found a shelter among the Clan Cumming, for indeed ye could not in safety return to the Tower of Blervie, nor do I think ye can with safety bide much longer here.”

“What mean you, Master Simon?”

“Marry! this it is, that you shall not defy the Holy Church with impunity, and this is precisely what ye have set out to do, and the Cardinal Legate is most justly incensed, and hath called on the forces of both Church and State, the Bishop, and the Sheriff, and the Earl of Moray, and others beside. And furthermore hath made agreements with sundry of your hereditary foes among the clans to harry and destroy the Cummings of Dallas until the Lady Beatrix be given up. I hear that several families of the MacIntoshes, with their following, are already burning the heather for a raid on the Cummings.”

“This chimes well with a message I have but now received,” said Alasdair, “a cordial proposal for an alliance and an offer of hospitality from the Laird of Grant. As ye may perhaps know, my mother was his sister, and he enjoyeth now a large share of the old Cumming lands brought to his family a hundred years ago or more, when Sir John, the Sheriff of Inverness, married Bigla Cumming of Glencharnie. He is a powerful chief, and is high in favour at Court, and bears small love to the MacIntoshes. He offers me for the sake of our kinship and the old alliance of our families and for common protection against thieves (whereby, as I think, he signifies MacIntoshes), that we should occupy some of our old lands in Badenoch, with the Castle of Lochindorbh, which is not even yet wholly dismantled. As ye may know, ’tis but a short distance from Freuchie, and his son, my cousin James, whom they call Shemishnan-Creach, the boldest and strongest captain living, adds a message bidding us welcome, and guaranteeing our peaceable possession of the lands till we may return to our own. I pray you, Master Simon, tell this news to my Uncle Eochain, for I think it will greatly please him.”

“That truly will I, and I know it will greatly please Master Eochain, for often hath he said there should be an alliance between the Cummings and the Grants of Freuchie, and even himself thought of journeying down to try and bring it about.”

“He shall come and visit us at Lochindorbh. But. now I pray you, Master Simon, tell us more of the affairs of Blervie and Callifer, and of our friends there.”

“What I have told ye cometh from the Abbey, which, as well ye know, is the centre of all the gossip of the Laigh.”

“Nay, man, what should I know of your Abbey; get on with thy tale,” said Alasdair, impatiently.

Beatrix smiled. His secret was no secret to her now. “I crave pardon! An old man will forget at times. This missive is from Master Eochain Beag.”

Alasdair took it and read eagerly. The fantastic script of the old man, as though he were trying to draw serpents, was a little modified, but it was still quaint. It ran thus—

“Dear Nephew,—With much joy I learn that thou hast changed thy habit, and now livest as befits a Cumming. Ere long I hope to visit thee. I rejoice further that the clan have given hospitality and protection to the daughter of my old and true friend, Wilfred Dunbar. I know how thou, nephew, hast loved her, and I know no other lady whom I would more gladly see taken into our clan. Sir Wilfred is now wholly recovered, and would return to his own house of Blervie were it safe for him to do so. But as thou knowest, the times are troublous. Mistress Cecily Ross still abides with us, and is most sedulous in caring for the comfort and welfare of two old men. She is gentle and saintly. But for three days, when the moon was but little past her full, I verily thought that Elspet Simpson must, in spite of me, rejoin Sir Norman Leslie. I conquered, but it was after a hard struggle. Greatly I fear for the future. Yet I am told that Sir Norman must very shortly return to his own house of the Glen, and postpone for this season his vengeance on the MacIntoshes. He sought two things—to punish them, and to capture the Lady Beatrix, who is now by God’s grace under thy protection. He hath accomplished neither, but hath drunk himself into wild savagery in Forres, and honest men had best stand clear of him. Adieu, my good nephew, from your loving

“UNCLE EOCHAIN.”

“Carry my duty to my revered uncle,” said Alasdair to Simon, “and say to him that in Lochindorbh I shall expect to welcome him, and shall look to his aid and experience in ruling the clan, and there my lady and I will entertain him royally, being, as he is of right, the chief, though he refused to take it, and I trust he will bring with him Mistress Cecily Ross.”

“Yea, entreat him,” said Beatrix, “that he brings my dear Cecily with him, and say to her that my spirit pines for her. Convey also my loving greetings to my father, and tell him of my welfare. Soon I trust he may be able to return to his own home at Blervie.”

“That, my lady, may well be soon, for if, as I hear is likely, Sir Norman Leslie taketh his departure, there will be no more occasion for all these wild men-at-arms who have so troubled our peaceful land of late, and if your ladyship is away in Badenoch there will be no searching for you in the Laigh of Moray, for all which things we may give thanks to the God of all good.”

“Aye, Master Tulloch, ye may well give thanks that I shall be removed from troubling the fair land. Methinks I have ever been far more of the wild hawk than the domestic dove, but I have striven to conceal it. Farewell, Master Tulloch, ye have been more than good to me in the past, and when these troubles are gone, as ere long they will be, I shall hope to see you often, and that the clan may profit by your skill and your ministrations when there are broken heads among us. I fear that will be as long as there is a Cumming left alive.”

She gave a merry glance at Alasdair as she spoke, and Master Tulloch with a low salutation took his leave and was lowered to the foot of the cliffs, and once more taken in charge by his guides to be conducted back to the Laigh, and to his work at the Abbey of Kinloss.

Beatrix leaned back on the great pile of cushions, looking somewhat quizzically at Alasdair.

“Have I found you out, my hero, surprised your secret. Who could ever have deemed that those great limbs had been hidden under a monk’s frock? This is better than Kinloss, I trow.”

Alasdair looked gloomy and perturbed. This was the moment that he had dreaded for long. The revelation that he had continually put off.

“Can you ever forgive me, Beatrix! I had hoped I had left the old life entirely behind me, and that I might begin again.”

“Forgive, Alasdair! Nay, what is there to forgive?”

I have done you a grievous wrong, Beatrix. You know now that I am, or rather that I was, Father Ambrose of Kinloss, through the slip of that old man's tongue. Can you love any longer one who has broken his vows

"How can you speak of a wrong, Alasdair. I am a daughter of the clan now, and I know its stories. Do we not both love the memory of your sainted mother, though you never knew her, any more than I did."

"But that was different. My dear mother would have been married had she lived. I often have words with my father. As you know, we agree not over well, but he is a true, loyal man, better by far than I. Beatrix, do you realise that there is not a priest in all Scotland, or in Europe maybe, who would dare join our hands."

"And you think I care, Alasdair! I heed the mumbling of priests as little as any Cumming in Badenoch. The Leslie, who calls himself my husband, and his precious Cardinal uncle, may frighten all the priests in Christendom, but that doesn't alter matters. Do you know, Alasdair, my father taught me many things women do not know usually, and a little bit of law among them, and I know that in this realm of Scotland, at any rate, it is the consent that makes the marriage, and nothing else is needed."

"*Consensus facit connubium*. Yes, you are right there, Beatrix, and a learned clerk in Padua expounded to me once that the Sacrament of the Eucharist was administered only by a priest, the Sacrament of Baptism by any one, priest or layman, or woman it may be, but the Sacrament of Marriage was self-administered by the parties to themselves and each other, in the exchange of consent. The priest merely gave the blessing of the Church, and the witnesses were merely for proof, but neither were really necessary."

"Then are you and I our own priests, Alasdair. That is what Uncle Eochain would say, and no need to heed Pope or Cardinal."

Her exultant delight was ringing through her voice, but Alasdair's face gathered gloom again.

"You are sweet and true, my Beatrix; nevertheless I know I have done you a grievous wrong. For consider only—in the eyes of the Church, that you and I both believe in, and belong to, I am a monk under the solemnest vows, and you a married woman, our coupling can be nothing but the deadliest sin."

"I pray you understand, Alasdair, how little 1 heed' all this. To me it is nothing but a light wind blowing over the brae, hardly enough to lift my hair. The one real thing I know—you are my mate—until you weary of me, and then I will go seek the rest of the clan who have crossed over the dark valley, and wait for you there. But now—at times I fear that something terrible must be impending. I am too happy. You and I have both sworn vows. Oh, yes! I know; but Master Luther hath shown us how wicked such vows are, and how right it is to break wicked vows taken in ignorance."

"I heed not Master Luther, Beatrix, a heretic, excommunicate and condemned. I must needs believe the Church, and the Church says that for broken vows such as ours the end is Hell. Yet truly for myself I say, if Hell be the price for winning you, it is well worth it. Right gladly now would I go down to the pit chanting God's praises, if I but knew that your sweet soul passed upwards to His glory."

"Yea so, and no otherwise, think I of you, Alasdair, my lord and my love. So banish now those dark, gloomy looks, and if the Church refuse her blessing, the blame must rest with Cardinal Leslie, and with those who bind burdens impossible to be borne and lay them on the shoulders of men. Now, come! tell me all about that wonderful Lochindorbh, which is to be our home for the present, as it seems."

Alasdair leant back on the cushions with a long sigh of profound satisfaction. The discovery which he had dreaded, and which he thought was to blow all his dreams of happiness into the air, had come and passed; and lo! he and his sweetheart were more than ever one. No secrets were between them now, and no more doubt could ever enter."

"Lochindorbh," he said, "the old home of our race, you will love every stone of it, sweetheart. An old castle—so old no man knows when it was built. It stands in the middle of a Loch, and the walls rise straight from the water. All the armies of England and Scotland could not get into it. The Danes besieged it a thousand years ago or so, and couldn't get in, and both sides were wearied out, and then the Cumming's daughter fell in love with the Dane king's son, and they eloped together, just when the chief and the King had agreed to make peace and marry their balms together. And so the Cumming chief pursued them, and overtook them by the Findhorn banks, but the lovers thought he had come to part, them, and the young Dane pricked the sides of the horse they rode, and he reared and jumped, but fell short, and sank in the river, that was in full spate at the time. They lie at Glenferness, under the Lovers' Cairn. Edward the First of England, and his grandson after him, besieged Lochindorbh, but the English only took it at last by treachery. That is another love story."

"Tell it me, Alasdair," she was nestling close to his side, and her squirrel-coloured head lay on his shoulder, where, as he was used to say, it belonged. "We shall make another love story ourselves to haunt those old walls, and perhaps some day another lover will tell it to his lady, and will wonder if any loved in the old time as well as they two will be loving then."

He turned and kissed her parted lips, a long indrawn kiss, that never could be quite satisfied, and went on with his story.

"It was the wife of the Cumming this time. She fell in love with a handsome officer in Edward's own guard. He swam the loch at first to talk to her below her window, and afterwards he came in a boat. At last they say she managed to get the key of the postern gate, and gave it to him that he might come into the castle by night unknown, and they fled together, but not before he had given the key to a comrade, who admitted the enemy privily by night, and that was the way that Lochindorbh was finally taken, and Cochrane who built our own castle, of Dallas was engaged to dismantle it, but there is still enough of it left to give us good shelter."

"I think we do not need much room, Alasdair, we are never very far apart, about enough for one fat man." They both laughed merrily. "And was that how your people lost Lochindorbh?"

"In a way I suppose it was. The castle was deserted after that, and the Earl of Moray held some of our lands as the King's Lieutenant, but some still remained in our possession, and Bigla was the last heiress of them all. The Earl wanted badly to get hold of her lands, and promised her in exchange all the lands she could see from a certain point. She rode to meet him there, and one of her followers carried the title deeds, but with instructions, if she were not satisfied with the Earl's good faith, she was to wave a red handkerchief, and the man who carried the title deeds was to ride for his life to Freuchie and deposit them there. The Earl, in fact, met her in a dense wood from which she could see but a few yards, so the red handkerchief was waved and the deeds were carried safe to Freuchie. Bigla afterwards married Sir John Grant, the Sheriff of Inverness, and so the Cumming lands, and Freuchie itself, passed to her son, and have been in the hands of the Grants ever since. That was a hundred years ago, but the Grants of Freuchie are proud of their Cumming descent, and they are especially good to me, because my mother was one of them!"

"I shall love them all for your sake. They are kinsmen of mine, too. There have been many Dunbar-Grant marriages, you know. Is not Sir John, the present Laird, called the Bard?"

“He is, and well deserves the name: true man and true poet, if ever there was one. He married one of the Rothes Leslies,—a good family they are, not like your unworthy Lord. His son, James, is a warrior. I think he has a touch of imagination, too, but it doesn’t find much outlet.”

“Alasdair, it is all too delightful. What times we will have in that old castle. I shall people it with all the ghosts you have told me of. I am all impatience till we start.”

“‘Twill not be long, then, sweetheart. My acceptance of Sir John’s offer hath already gone. Our scouts go across the hills to-night. In two days we shall start ourselves.”

Far into the night they sat talking and planning, seeing to the departure of the scouts, arranging for the transfer of their own belongings. The bulk of the clan were to remain on the hills, but they would move to hills nearer to the Spey. The few who were their own special attendants would be quartered close round the loch, and in constant touch with the main body. So with thought and care all was planned out, supplemented with many old yarns and legends, till the shades of sleep fell on Alasdair and Beatrix, happy and content with their life and with each other, as might be a pair of wild kestrels out on the craigs.

CHAPTER XXII

LIFE AT LOCHINDORBH

Fore some time but little occurred that was worth recounting. The migration to Lochindorbh was accomplished without any special incident, for none of those who were bent to harry the clan knew of the move until it had been some time completed. Their route lay through the wild hills away from the glen of Dallas, to the south-west, where none but Cummings or Grants were to be found, and in the rugged districts of Badenoch the Church had but little power or influence. The castle itself, though dismantled and largely demolished, yet contained within the circling walls that rose sheer from the loch, enough of the old buildings to make a habitable shelter for Alasdair and Beatrix, with a fair-sized banqueting hall where they could entertain friends and dependants, and quarters for their serving-men. Dame Gow was installed as Beatrix’s bower-woman, and seemed to grow continually more devoted to her lady, whom she regarded as the most fitting mate that Providence had ever planned for a Cumming. This being in her view the highest destiny to which any woman could possibly aspire, especially when it was a mate for her own nursling and particular darling, Alasdair. Most of the clansmen who had farms in the Glen of Dallas remained there, and as the chief and Beatrix, for whom Church and State were especially hunting, were gone, they were left undisturbed. Others removed to farms in the Grants’ country. The younger men, warriors who wished to wet their spears and prove their manhood, and older men, too, who looked on fighting as the only trade, haply because it was the only one they knew, adhered to the chief, and quartered themselves close round the loch or within the flanking walls that surrounded the castle. To arrange and settle all these was a matter of time. It was like a shipload of colonists settling down in a new country, and the approach of winter made it very desirable that all details should be completed as quickly as possible.

In the Laigh, too, things settled down into comparative peace. Sir Norman Leslie being convinced that Beatrix had gone from the Dallas Glen, whatever had become of her, and that there were no Cummings left there, had reluctantly for the time abandoned his pursuit. And since he had matters that required his attention at his own house of the Glen, though he by no means abandoned his projects of vengeance against the MacIntoshes, he rode away, grumbling heavily,

not, however without solemnly charging Master Urquhart of Forres to search high and low for Elspet Simpson.

"I need the wench in the MacIntosh country," he said. "Indeed, I cannot ride there without her. Damn her! But when I seek my wife I must leave her behind. Then there'll be trouble, I warrant."

"But if your lady hath made a flitting with the Cumming? Such things have been before now."

"Good Lord, Urquhart! What a fool you be! Of course, it may be so. Women have confoundedly bad taste; but what matters it? I must kill him. No great loss that. And I shall get her lands all the same, and she shall bear me an heir to the Glen. I'll look out that that's all right. No lovers can get in there. And by that time I shall have my black-a-vised sweetheart back with me again. Confound you, Urquhart, don't meddle with things you don't understand. Damned little you could meddle with at that rate, eh!"

So growling he rode off; and not many days later the Bishop's men, and the Earl of Moray's men, and the Sheriff's men, and all the spearmen that had been riding about the Glen of Dallas, having no one's injuries to redress, and no runaway bride to catch, were quietly withdrawn. Only some bands of MacIntoshes who had been promised pay and plunder for attacking their old hereditary foes of the House of Cumming, still lurked about the neighbourhood, but dared not venture into Badenoch. Kinloss Abbey, relieved of the irksome presence of Sir Norman Leslie, resumed its wonted calm under the wise sway of Abbot Chrystal, and the Sub-Dean Robert Reid, now returned from his important mission, and gravely annoyed at the absence of Father Ambrose, for whom he had a special favour on account of memories of Flodden. But Father Ambrose was gone, and none knew where. He had started under the Abbot's orders for Strathisla, had been diverted by the Bishop's orders (whereat the Abbot chafed somewhat), and none knew whither he was gone. He had not arrived at Strathisla, nor been heard of in any other place. He must have fallen in with enemies, and been set upon and murdered. Such was the opinion at Kinloss.

With the restoration of quiet and peace Sir Wilfred Dunbar was able to return to his own good house at Blervie, where for a time Mistress Cecily Ross came often to see him, and tended him like a daughter, indeed in many ways more of a daughter than Beatrix had been, for always the wild had lurked somewhere in her blood, and made certain slight yet marked friction with her scholar father, whom, in spite of his training of her, to which she owed so much of her character, she never quite understood. Cecily, however, seemed instinctively to comprehend every mood of the old man, and the fascination of studying a real live witch at close quarters was irresistible to him. So he watched her without her knowledge, and she tended and honestly loved him, and the queer pair got on very well. Her home was still for the most part in the same little hut beside the old stone circle, under the care of Eochain Beag, but sometimes she stayed at the Tower, where Beatrix's bower-maiden still remained, and took charge of Mistress Cecily as of old.

Master Simon Tulloch had returned, as Alasdair had said, with a wallet full of wonders; but remembering how much the wisdom of a wise man lies in holding his tongue, he said nothing to any human soul either at the Abbey or at Blervie Tower, of his recognition of Father Ambrose. So he passed by all the wonder and the comments as to the Father's fate with a stolid stare, as of one who has not even a theory to propound. Often, however, he went up to the Tower, and regaled them there with tales of the witch's cave, to which the boy Hubert listened with open mouth, and to Sir Wilfred and Eochain he would tell much of the Grants' invitation, and of his own knowledge of Badenoch.

Time and again Mistress Cecily Ross, by Eochain's desire, went to the Convent in Elgin on a visit, where her glorious voice and her knowledge of music made her always welcome. But he never failed to recall her before the full moon. The girl herself grew calmer, her nightmare dreams were (or seemed to be) passing away, and she was even growing to look more normal.

At Lochindorbh the first months of the sojourn of Beatrix and Alasdair within its ancient walls belong rather to the story of Clan Grant, and may be read in the chronicles of that family, if ever they are unearthed from the muniment-room at Freuchie, where they have lain unheeded for several hundred years. Much is there told of the help given by Alasdair to the Clan Grant in repelling the raids of rival clans, and in consolidating their own authority in their district. Not very much of Beatrix, though she is mentioned with great honour. In particular, there is a long account of a hard-fought fight on Dava Moor against a strong force of raiders of the Macintoshes. Beatrix was there at Alasdair's side, and for the first time saw the fierce hand-to-hand struggle of men in dead earnest, bent to kill,—heard for the first time the hiss of the claymores, the yells of the slogans of the clans, and the wild squeal of the pipes. Left to herself, she would have been fighting among the foremost, for the mad excitement was in her blood. But Alasdair, more even than usually careful of her, because of a certain secret she had whispered in his ear not long since, had placed her behind him, with a ring of the biggest and strongest of the Cummings as a body-guard around. Once, however, it chanced that a gigantic and desperate MacIntosh forced through the guard, and springing at Alasdair clung round his neck, and would have borne him to the ground, had not Beatrix, with a remembrance of her old skill, flung her dirk with unerring aim, and pierced his heart. That dirk hung for over a hundred years in the great hall at Freuchie, and may perchance be there yet, but the story of it has been forgotten.

Sir John the Bard made a poem of that battle, whereat the MacIntoshes were thoroughly worsted; and his son, Shemish nan Creach, bade his piper compose a pibroch in honour of the big fight. It is still played by old pipers on Badenoch, and is called, "The Lady's Salute," but there are very few who know it; yet it is a fine old tune, the tramp of armed men: the whiz of the claymores, the fierce struggles, the cries of the wounded, are all in that wild music which peals out with a terrible intensity, but ever and anon it sinks quaintly into the veriest love coo that ever was breathed by Highland lass on the moors among the heather in courting time.

For weeks after this battle heavy snow wreaths lay over Badenoch, though the weather was open and mild on the Laigh, and the proposed visit of Eochain Beag to Alasdair and Beatrix had to be deferred. The intercourse between Lochindorbh and Freuchie was constant and intimate. Some of the letters that passed from one house to the other on every possible subject on earth were long preserved among the archives of Freuchie,—possibly they are there still. The correspondence between Beatrix and the Poet Laird of Grant is especially interesting, showing the high culture and ripe understanding which she had attained under her father's tuition, and the deliciously ideal friendship that had grown up between the old man and the girl.

But at last the snow melted, the flooded burns and rivers rushed down in spate; then the earth dried again, and word came that Eochain proposed to walk across the hills from Blervie to Lochindorbh. Nothing else would serve the vigorous old Druid, who scorned riding-horses and serving-men and all the paraphernalia of wealth and rank. Mistress Cecily Ross, however, so the message came, would ride on her own horse with her serving-man and the Lady Beatrix's bower-maid to attend her. Alasdair ordered an escort of Cummings to meet her at the march and convoy her safe over the hills; though, indeed, there was nothing now to fear, for the glens were quiet, and since the battle of Dava Moor there had been no MacIntoshes, nor any other hostile clan, in the whole of the Spey valley, from the Romach to Kinrara, where the Clanquhele hold the hills.

It was a warm and delighted greeting the old man received. The moment the tall sturdy figure with the black robe and long white beard, looking like a palmer new come from the Holy Land, appeared descending the hill to the shore of the loch, Alasdair himself put off in the boat with four strong rowers to bring him over to the castle, and Beatrix stood at the great gate to welcome him. The old Laird of Grant and his stalwart son were within, eager to greet the man of whom they had heard so much, “the Apostate” of the old days when Sir John Grant was young, since then the mysterious and learned traveller of whom weird tales were told; then the darling of the clan come back to them, but wholly refusing to take any position among them; above all, the uncle of Alasdair, who had so entirely now won their hearts and their confidence.

But that night after the Grants had gone back to Freuchie, and Beatrix had retired,- the two men sat long talking, and Alasdair could not fail to see that there was great anxiety on his uncle’s mind.

“I am much troubled for Cecily,” he said at length, after a long pause, wherein he seemed debating how far he ought to speak. “I fear, in spite of all my care, the evil fit hath again taken her, and she became Elspet Simpson. You know, perhaps, that I sent her at times to the holy sisters at Elgin, deeming thus to accustom her gradually to remain always in the person of Cecily, even when away from me. But ever I took care to recall her at the dangerous time of the full moon. The last time, however, when I recalled her, she came not, the moon was within five days of her full. I sent to Elgin and found that she had left, ostensibly to return to Blervie, but had not come;—then I heard that a strange woman had presented herself at the Chanter’s house, seeking to confess to Father Ambrose. The Chanter himself had gone out to see her, and had recognised the woman who went there last autumn with his cousin the Lady Beatrix Dunbar. He further sent a message to the Abbey, but the woman came no more. Then I heard of her round about the Abbey of Kinloss, asking of the lay-brethren and labourers there for news of Sir Norman Leslie. Still, I could get no definite trace of her whereabouts; but two days after the full moon I heard that the people of Forres had seen the tracks of a wolf in the’ new fallen snow, and had organised a wolf-hunt with clubs and sticks and torches. All night they hunted, but found nothing, and some there were who spoke not obscurely of witchcraft. But next morning I came on our poor Cecily worn out and faint with exhaustion on the road, just where the path turns up to the tower. Nothing in the world knew she, but spoke of the terrible dreams that had come on her again, and how she started at once to get to me as the only protection, and had sunk exhausted by the roadside. All the rest had passed from her mind.”

“A strange tale,” said Alasdair. “Do you indeed credit that a human being can put on the form of a wild animal?”

“In part it must be true. Since you and I spoke last together I have had opportunities of studying this strange girl closely, and the result has entirely confirmed the teachings of the ancient sages of that faith which they call Druidic. See, now, I will explain if I can, but it is very difficult. With the ordinary person like ourselves, moods and feelings are ever subtly blended, like the tints of the face; but with these strange beings they are sharply divided like the patches of red and white on the face of a guisard in a masquerade. Thus I have heard that it is of great merit in a woman that she have strong sex-passions, yet with marked modesty, and purity, and restraint. ‘Cold to the world, but warm to me,’ says her lover,—and these qualities are intimately blended and form an ideal character. Yet in Cecily they are entirely distinct,—as we know her, she is a mystic visionary, cold as ice, chaste as snow, but the other side is there, only absolutely dormant,—as Elspet Simpson she becomes a sex-mad wanton. Again, most women have a vein of cruelty coupled with a divine compassion, and the two are intimately blended, but Cecily is

incapable of even a cruel thought. Elspet rejoices in all forms of savagery and wanton bloodshed and cruelty, and the giving of pain for its own sake. Now, as love is a power for good, so is hate and cruelty an equal power for evil, and hence the power of the witch.

"Consider now that people grow to look like what they think themselves, so do we see men resemble the animals whose dispositions are akin to them: dogs, pigs, monkeys, and the like, and if a man strongly think himself a hero, he will look one. The stronger the thought, the more marked will be the resemblance. In such a case as we have imagined, the concentration of the thoughts and feelings wholly on certain lines amounts to madness, and gives the strength of madness. Elspet is mad, and both her body and her fancy have the strength of madness. The lust of cruelty and bloodshed comes strongly upon her: she thinks of a wolf; she longs to gratify her desires as a wolf; she fancies herself a wolf—madness gives her the physical strength of a wolf, and her mad imaginings are stronger than anything you or I, sane men, can picture; she imitates a wolf, and actually appears to be like a wolf, or indeed to an ignorant peasant's imagination actually to be a wolf. On her last escapade I heard that two children in Forres had been found literally torn and mangled by a wolf's fangs."

Alasdair had listened with absorbed attention to the old man's discourse.

"It sounds a wild story, like one of those romances of dwarfs and giants. Is it conceivable that it can be true?"

"I have myself seen Cecily become Elspet, and Elspet become a wolf," and therewith the old man betook himself to his chamber, leaving Alasdair greatly bewildered.

And the next day Cecily came, and the big ferry-boat went over to fetch her, and her horses and serving-man; Alasdair was out when she arrived, and Beatrix greeted her with all the old warmth and delight.

"Such a strange vision, Beatrix darling, as I came in sight of your wonderful castle. The bright angels I always see guarding and caring for you, but this time they were bearing you up in their arms, and two were holding a sheltering rosy veil over you; but behind there were terrible storm-clouds, that seemed to have demon faces in them, and persistently a man racing as if for his life with some cruel and savage beast, and I thought I saw myself mourning disconsolate over some hideous mangled heap."

"Cecily dear, what a fearful vision, not like your usual dreams of beauty."

"But all was fair round you, my Beatrix, and even in my dream I delighted that it should be so. The angels carried you away from all the horrors. So you are really married, Beatrix. How strange it seems!"

"Well, I suppose most would say not really, Cecily. The Church devotes me to Sir Norman Leslie, and would refuse to couple me to any other; besides—well, never mind that; at any rate, we have to do without the Church's blessing, and so far we have done very well. Thanks to your Master Luther. I see how wicked it may be to keep vows that ought never to have been taken, and that the Church would hold us to."

"But, Beatrix, Master Luther never sanctioned the breaking of marriage vows."

"He sanctioned the breaking of far more solemn ones, taken to God at God's own altar—if they were vows that should not be taken, binding men to impossible and unnatural lives. He had no occasion to speak of the marriage vows as yet, but of course that must follow naturally as the greater includes the less." Unconsciously she was repeating Cecily's own words and arguments.

"I know not. You are beyond me now, as you know love and marriage come not into my life, pledged as I am to Our Lord. But I am longing to see this wonderful Alasdair of yours, Beatrix, in whom Uncle Eochain told me I should find an old friend, though how or when I have seen him

he would not say, nor can I guess." Then Eochain Beag came in, and Beatrix and Cecily were instantly all anxiety to provide for the comfort of the old man. Soon he was comfortably ensconced in a huge chair beside the ample fire.

"Come now, and resolve our doubts, O man of wisdom," said Beatrix merrily; "Cecily hath expounded to me the new learning of Master Luther, and partly I agree to it. Yet now she saith that though ye may break solemn vows taken before God at the altar, if they be too hard to keep, yet may ye not break the marriage vows taken, to a man which to me seem not so solemn or sacred, and often may be even more hard to keep, and more likely to be taken in ignorance. It affecteth Alasdair and me, though, as you know, uncle, I heed these scholastic questions but little."

"There is much to commend in Luther's doctrine," replied Eochain. "But also I think there is much danger therein. His arguments in favour of monks and priests being no longer bound by their vows of seclusion and celibacy were good and sound, yet their soundness depended rather on the present corruption of the Church than their own merit; and if inconvenient pledges can thus be broken, I see not where faith can hold any longer among men, or where we can stop, and for marriage vows I say the same. In our ancient faith, which men now call Druidic, the Ard-druid had always the power to dispense any vow, and such power I understand is possessed now by the Pope, but in the corrupt Church is used only for money. If the vows be unbreakable there is much misery; if the parties may themselves dispense themselves, or if any power save the head of the religion of the country may dispense them, then I foresee the time must come when the sanctity of the home will disappear, when divorce will become common, notwithstanding that the founder of Christendom forbade it, and marriage in this country will become a thing of no account. This was, indeed, foretold by some of our old seers, as among the troubles that would fall on Scotland when our Druidic worship had ceased from the land. All this, however, concerns you not, my child, as I think. For I hold that whatever the Church for its own purposes may decree, no consent was ever given by you to your union with Leslie, and were he not as high in favour at Rome as he is, a decree of nullity must be granted. As matters stand, unless there be such a degree, or Providence in mercy should will the death of Leslie, your union with Alasdair is, I well wot, good in sight of God, yet it cannot be legal by the laws of Scotland."

"But what matters it, uncle? I care not, and Alasdair cares not, and the clan cares not, and the Grants care not; there are no priests in the hills, nor do we desire any, and who is there that matters?"

"Truly, none now; yet ye might have children to whom it might be of moment."

Beatrix blushed brightly.

"Yea, then," she said; "but what of Alasdair's own vows?"

"What vows?" said Cecily. "I knew not that he too was a rebel."

"Here he is to answer for himself," said Beatrix, as Alasdair entered. Cecily sprang up to greet him, then stood stock-still as though petrified.

"Father Ambrose!" she cried in amazement and more than half in dismay. This sudden and dramatic illustration of Luther's doctrine startled her beyond the power of further speech.

"The very same," said Alasdair, as he ungirded his claymore and hung it on the wall, unbraced his pistols, and threw himself on a couch. "The same that heard your confession and gave you good advice in the Chanter's chapel; the same who found he had taken vows in over much of a hurry that he could not ever hope to keep, and took his courage in both hands and came out, by the advice of my good Uncle Eochain there, thinking, however, only to do my duty as chief of my clan. But Providence sent an angel in my way, in such manner, moreover, as to give me no

choice. He who would refuse an angel were an ass, and such an ass the Gracious Providence allowed me no chance to be. Am I not right, sweetheart?"

Beatrix blushed again; she remembered the deerskin in the witch's cave, but she said nothing.

"Truly," said Eochain, "I think ye were not made for a monk, nephew."

"Yea, but that under certain conditions was I. The trouble was, the conditions were not fulfilled. Ye might not think it, but I have been from my earliest recollections a man of emotions, and the religious emotions were strong, but the love of fun and fighting was stronger. So went I as a page to Buccleugh, though my father desired me to enter the Church, wishing, I think, to get me out of the way when his family were growing up. Then it was I first met the King, and I loved him from the moment I saw him, and I think he loved me too. But women I never loved, though oft-times the King rallied me; and there were many fair women at Court, and they were not cold, for everyone had her lover; but I cared not for this playing at love, though I blamed not. I loved better to fly a hawk at a heron, than to run mazes after some Court beauty who wanted to be caught in some secluded place. And so said I one day to the King. 'Ay, Alasdair,' said he, 'so think I, and methinks there's a dainty little heron will stoop to my lure ere long, but be mum, man. I understood not then what he meant, though his glance was merry, and I knew there was some game afoot; but later, when I saw the lovely Lady Heron at Court, I knew. There was no woman in my life then. Better, perhaps, for me if there had been. So when my King was slain, the world was at an end, and the religious emotions woke, and the cloister was the only refuge. I rushed to Melrose as soon as my wounds were healed, passed my novitiate, and was transferred to Kinloss. There, as I worked in the Chanter's garden, my fate met me. My lady there walked through."

"And indeed, Alasdair," said Beatrix, "though I saw not your face, your eyes through your cowl might well have burned up the heart of any young maid they dwelt on."

"They expressed but little of my fire, sweetheart. But ye see from that moment I could not remain a monk. Hard though I fought with myself, I had to come out, thinking but to drag out a lone and loveless life in the world. Then Fate flung the very rarest jewel of her basket in my lap. So, come what may, I am the favoured of the gods. So ye see, uncle, being as I say a man of emotion, I was made for a monk—but equally I was made for love. The monastery had a hard try for me, but I had not known love, and when Love came he took me captive. Now enough of my own history, which hath little of interest in it. Listen to my news from Freuchie. The Leslie purposes in the spring seriously to ride against the MacIntoshes. He hath asked for leave to pass from Rothes up the Spey, which Sir John hath refused for our sakes, sworn foe though he is to all MacIntoshes; and though my father doth not love me, yet I trow he will now withdraw the permission to pass through Altyre, and so will Sir Norman have no help for it but to ride through the lands of Darnaway and up the Findhorn, where it is odds but he rouse the whole Clan MacIntosh, and not only old Farquhar, who dwells in his hill fastness with his seven sons. 'Tis no affair of mine, but I think if he come not back from that ride there are few would weep."

Cecily had been sitting motionless as an image, staring fixedly from her. Now she spoke.

"I see it all in vision!—he will die, but not by sword or spear, and she will weep sore who slays him. I see the monk in the dim old garden—prison bars are round him—the bars melt away! I see him avenging and bright as a warrior angel—I see him bathed in the sunshine of love. But ah! the mists of sorrow close round him! Long black robes trail to the ground and hide his bleeding feet—a crown of thorns is on his brow—he hath drained the cup of joy. Ah, Lord! must I be the instrument in all this? Let me save and not destroy!"

Eochain rose and laid his hand gently on her brow.

“Peace! peace!” he said. “I scatter these visions of fear. Angels are round you, or mayhap the gods of our old race—I have come to think they are much the same.”

“How beautiful!” murmured Cecily. “The great golden and rose-winged angels are cradling my Beatrix with their wings—she lies dreaming, I think, waiting for her lover. Ah! now I see no more.

She leant back rigid, with closed eyes and drawn face. Eochain held his hand over her head, saying sternly, “Wake! wake!” Gradually the set muscles relaxed, the eyes opened; she drew a long breath, and sat up with a sort of apologetic look.

“I fear the learned talk of you men sent me asleep—I crave pardon. Come, Beatrix! you promised to show me all your domain, and then to take me to catch fish in your loch, or to ride over the moor.

“Come! we will all go,” said Alasdair; and the party set forth exploring, and intent to show both Cecily and Eochain all the wonders of the wonderful Castle.

As they passed out, Alasdair and Eochain were a little behind, as Beatrix and Cecily in eager delight ran forward to examine the old buildings.

“Why said you, uncle, just now,” quoth Alasdair, “that the angels and the gods of the old race were perchance the same?”

“Much have I thought since our talks in the old circle, after you left Kinloss, and I have come to see that my father’s fat little tame priest at Altyre knew but little of the faith taught by his Master. I have looked also into our own old records and prophecies, and the more I have studied and thought the more clearly I have seen that our seers and wise men of old taught the same thing that Christ your Master taught. But the Church teaches mostly the conventional customs of the time, or the matters of which it makes merchandise.”

“The Church is the vehicle of Christ’s teaching,” replied Alasdair.

“In our ancient rites,” said the old Druid, “there came at Beltane a lumbering ox waggon into the sacred circle. In it was a huge chest of rough wood, and inside this another; innermost of all was a golden box within which was an enamel jewel—the holy serpent’s egg, it was called. Your Church is the’ ox waggon, a vehicle it is true, and it carries the Divine egg, yet no man can see that. But our wise men foretold that a new revelation should come, when what they foreshadowed should actually take place; and so it is, for even as the Ard-druid died symbolically once a year, so did Christ the Master actually die, and rise again, and fulfil all the prophecies. Nephew, I am a Christian of the pure faith of the Master.”

“Then I thank God,” said Alasdair simply. “For this cause did the Bishop send me to you when I left Kinloss.”

“And for this cause did I send you here, to father the clan and to rescue our dear lady from a grievous wolf set on by the Church, and sent her to be rescued by you, and to break the infamous bonds they bound round ye both. Now come, nephew! I see the horses are embarking—they are for a ride on the moor. Old as I am—yea, Druid priest as I am—I can still back a horse and love a gallop, though for a journey I would walk with my staff and naught else.”

Alasdair that night was moody and out of spirits. Like most men who are extra-sensitive, he was subject to moods, and it was sweet to see how perfectly Beatrix adapted herself to every change—his comrade in fight or in the chase; in council over the affairs of the clan her wise little head and her ready sympathy solved many a difficulty. Now she was loving and receptive, seeking only the cause of his gloom.

“Disaster hangs over us, sweetheart. I believe Cecily can see truly.”

“Nay, dear! she saw but Leslie’s death; and if that comes we can be wed, if you desire it—I own I care not myself. The sentence of the Church or the law can make no difference. Only if it please you, dear heart, I would do anything in the world to obtain it.”

“For your sake, Beatrix, I desire it—and,” he whispered low, “for our son’s”; and so saying he lifted her in his mighty arms as though she had been a child, and bore her to their chamber.

And day grew to day and week to week, and still no definite news. All the fortunes of the little group in Badenoch seemed to hinge on what Sir Norman Leslie should do. In the chronicles of Clan Grant, so far as known, this season is almost a blank—a few obscure clan fights, a few little MS. poems by Sir John in honour of Beatrix, a few missives to Shemish nan Creach from the Court on political matters, and foreshadowing his future greatness, that is all; yet there were, and perhaps are still, at Freuchie diaries, letters, and other papers, telling us much. Among other things is a treatise by Eochain, setting forth fully how the so-called Druidism of the British Islands was the forerunner of Christianity, and how he himself, the last of the Druids, became a sincere and convinced Christian. Archæologists and students of comparative religions would give much for a sight of this manuscript. Then we have reports brought by spies of Leslie’s preparations; notes kept by Beatrix of Cecily’s visions, bright and beautiful angels around herself, but otherwise increasing gloom and tragedy, with occasional lapses towards the old nightmare dreams, and notes scrawled in the margin by Eochain of how he had put the spell of sleep on her to counteract these.

One day, Beatrix and Cecily riding on Dava Moor, had passed an old Jew pedlar. They did not know that he was the same whose pack had been raided by the Clan Cumming, but he had seen them both before, and had heard certain inquiries in the town of Forres, and a sly gleam came into his little red eyes as he louted low; and that nigh a message passed to ‘a tramp who slunk along the road like a jackal, and Master Urquhart jingling a couple of guineas in his breeches pocket and wondering where their companions were to come from, or how a decent dinner could be paid for, heard news that caused him to broach a bottle of Spanish wine and troll a song by his window, whereat decent citizens hurried their daughters out of hearing as fast as they might.

When the June sun shone on the mountains, and the whins hung their golden blooms like jewels on the breasts of the Bens, ere yet the snows had wholly melted on their tops, Sir John Grant and his son were summoned to Inverness, and went attended by a goodly following of the clan. Shortly after came the news that Leslie had passed through the town of Forres and was taking the road across the fords of the Findhorn into the Earl of Moray’s land, taking advantage of the strong June moonlight to make forced marches up through the lands of Darnaway.

Then came a morning when there was grief and dismay at Lochindorbh, for Cecily was gone. Her room was empty, her bed unslept in. The watch had been somewhat careless; two warders whose duty it was to guard the gate had seen a black dog trot out in the direction of the boat-house, and had been overcome with sleep.

“Heaven guard all honest men!” said Eochain, when he heard it,—“that’s one of Finn’s spells. It’s a form of the spell of sleep, and produces delusion. The evil time is on her again. God grant we find and bring her back before she can join Leslie!”

Meantime it was abundantly plain that she had slipped out and taken the boat, which she could manipulate perfectly, and had rowed herself ashore and disappeared on the wild moors—nor, for all their searching, could Alasdair or any of his men find the least trace of her.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WHITE WOLF OUT TO KILL

The hot air of June hung heavily over the glens. For some time there had been great peace and quiet. No clan fights nor even cattle raids had disturbed the serenity of Badenoch. One day Alasdair rode down into Forres, chiefly to see that some people of the Dallas Cummings living on the outskirts of the town towards Burdsyards were diligent in their duty, but partly also to get whatever news there might be. Notwithstanding all his efforts and the inquiries of his scouts, not a trace of Cecily had been found, and he grew anxious. Eochain also was full of apprehension; her disappearance, coincident with the report of the Leslie's march through Forres, was disquieting.

Beatrix rode not with him now—indeed, she went seldom abroad, remaining for the most part in the care of Mistress Gow, sometimes fishing in the loch from the great flat-bottomed boat, or in long talks with Uncle Eochain, wherein every subject on earth seemed to come under review; and Alasdair, missing her sorely from his side, yet went about his daily avocations with a great joy, and feeling that the world was a far better place than ever he had thought in his younger days.

He was no stranger in the town of Forres. In his boyhood, before he joined the Buccleugh household, he had played many impish pranks on the worthy and respectable bailies and their stout and comely wives; later on, and before Flodden, he had more than once made a dash upon the town at the head of an unruly crowd of Dallas Cummings, and then, as at a later time, in the days of the famous Donald Caird, it had been a case of "Steek the aumbry, lock the kist," but also (for they loved him in spite of all), it had been "Dinna let the Shirra ken,"—and so now, as the handsome young giant took the causeway, and walked down the street with his swinging stride, having left his horse at the inn, and with his men at his heels, the bail ies and other honest folk got quietly within their doors; but many a sonsy wife had some secret little offering to press upon the Chief, and the lassies peering from door and window gazed after him with looks that promised warmer welcome if he chose to take it, and roused mighty indignation in the breasts of their rustic swains, who, however, kept discreetly out of the path of the Highlanders.

The news he heard was disquieting. From one and another he learned that Leslie had passed through the town, and Master Urquhart had joined him, and that a Jew pedlar had been brought by a noted rascal of the place who was Urquhart's creature, and was closeted for hours in Urquhart's house—that Leslie had taken a large company of his men into the Darnaway woods and was camped there many days, and there was word of a woman with him, said to be a witch. There had been tales of a witch about the neighbourhood, but none knew for certain; only Master Keir, who was a grand witch-finder, had dreamed he heard the cry of "Horse and Hattock!" and had seen a woman astride of a broomstick fleeing against a thundercloud over the town. There had been a number of citizens out some few weeks ago, or months it might be, at the time of the full moon, after a wolf, and some of them were sure it was a witch, but they caught her not, whereat they were sure the Devil must be at the bottom of it. One of the Earl of Moray's men, being full of liquor, had told how he had seen Leslie riding with a woman on his left hand, who, when he made the sign of the cross, shrank to the form of a hare and fled through the grass. But he was very drunk at the time. Still, if there were a witch about, the good folk of Forres would know all about it, and would render service to Heaven by sending her to Hell. Leslie, they believed, had ridden on the previous day, meaning to cross the Findhorn somewhere above

Glenferness, and so, passing northwestward of Altyre, where he was not allowed to enter, would reach the MacIntosh country by devious routes. Some Forres men had wished to go and warn the MacIntoshes, for the ill-will they bore to Leslie, but the others would not permit them, for the memory of MacIntosh raids was still fresh in their memories.

All these things caused Alasdair great anxiety. He could not doubt now that Cecily had joined Leslie, and it seemed hopeless to attempt to rescue her. His men could deal with Leslie's troop, especially with the help of the Grants. But even if he could reach them, it would be in the heart of the MacIntosh country, among his own hereditary and inveterate foes. It would be impossible for him to meet and engage Leslie without rousing the Chief of Moy, and bringing the whole clan about his ears, when without question both he and Leslie would be swept away, and the fiercest clan fight and blood feud known for centuries would be started.

True, he might rouse the whole of Clan-Chattan to punish the lawless depredations of the MacIntoshes. But this would take time, and the Leslie would have accomplished his errand and ridden away. As a fact, the assembling of Clan-Chattan for this purpose took place some years later, as is well known to students of Highland history. Leslie, left to himself, might avoid Moy and reach the Dune where Farquhar dwelt with his seven sons, execute his vengeance on them, and ride away before his presence in the MacIntosh country was known. He had Cecily with him, and Alasdair recalled the account of Finn's spells, and believed in Cecily's power to produce delusions. He might certainly get killed in the fight with Farquhar, who was a noted warrior. In this case all would be well; but he might not—and if not he would surely next ride down into Badenoch in search of Beatrix, and with Cecily in her insane mood to guide him, and the Grants away, none could foresee what might happen, and further than this Beatrix' present delicate state of health gave extra anxiety.

No wonder that as he rode homeward he was heavy and perturbed. One course of action alone presented itself to his mind as feasible. He could establish some communication with the Grants at Inverness, and his scouts, working through Altyre, could get some information along the MacIntosh boundaries. He might thus get to know what chanced to the Leslie troop. If they were successful against Farquhar, there was but one road by which they could ride from his Dune to Lochindorbh. Along this road Alasdair and his men would lie in wait, and would stop them there. Perhaps they might take Uncle Eochain with them, who would know and be able to neutralise any witch spells that might be practised by Cecily, and he might even be able, in spite of Sir Norman Leslie, to bring her back to her sane and normal self. This plan promised well, and he had just developed it in his mind as he rode down the last slope to Lochindorbh, where his heart thrilled with a great tenderness as he saw Beatrix with Uncle Eochain in the great flat-bottomed boat fishing in the loch, and waiting for his return.

Not a hint of all his anxiety did Alasdair allow to escape in his blithe, cheery greeting; not a word of the disquieting news he had heard was in his boyishly humorous account off his visit to Forres, of the audaciously amorous glances of the women, and the sullen timidity or smouldering hostility of the men, the boisterous welcome of his own people, and the reluctance with which those who had to pay blackmail disgorged their hoarded coins, at all of which Beatrix laughed merrily. But Alasdair and Eochain sat long that night discussing the situation. There were dangers all round, and unknown dangers, which are always the worst to face, and clearly the most dangerous element lay in Cecily. Without her Leslie might fail to find Beatrix, or might fail to penetrate into Badenoch. She knew where they were and could guide him. Moreover, none could tell, not even Eochain, precisely what spells she had acquired from Finn, or the exact extent and validity of her compact with the powers of evil. Certain it was that the wolf nature

that came at times upon her was very real and terrible; and even supposing that Leslie were vanquished or killed by Farquhar or his men, there was still the chance that Cecily alone, in the wolfish nature of Elspet, might make her way to Lochindorbh. That she should then attack Beatrix, whom in her sane self she loved so well, was more than probable. That Eochain, even if he were immediately at hand, should be able to stop and control her in the full tide of her madness, was doubtful.

On the whole, the only thing to do seemed to be to carry out Alasdair's scheme, and to wait on events, Alasdair undertaking the task of stopping Leslie, if his victorious troop were to ride down into Badenoch, and Eochain promised never under any condition to quit his post as Beatrix's guard, never to lose sight of her, and thus to wait for what fortune might bring.

After days of anxious waiting, a scout came down who had scaled the hills lying between Findhorn and Spey, and crouched in a burn-course under the heather, and who reported that he had seen a gallant company of spearmen ride past, accoutred in the Leslie colours, and bearing the gold buckle. At their head was Sir Norman himself and a wonderful white woman rode beside him. The scout reported he had to turn his head, for her loveliness would cause him to forget his errand, forget whence he came—forget almost his Christianity; but he wrenched himself away. And thereafter, hiding in the heather, he came on another man, whom he recognised as a miserable creature in the pay of Master Urquhart of Forres. Him he seized, and by dint of threats to wring his neck, coupled with tempting bribes, he extracted some information. They had, it appeared, slipped unheeded through the MacIntosh country, and that so far Moy knew naught of them. Farquhar's Dune was only just over the next hill in front of them, and the inhabitants were quite unsuspicious. Two of Urquhart's men were watching there, with orders to light the heather if there were the least sign of Farquhar's people knowing anything. It was to be a sudden assault on unprepared men, and butchery without sparing age or sex. Much of Leslie's success was attributed to the woman who was with him; all obstacles seemed to melt before her. She was the Leslie's star of fortune without doubt. Having learned this much the scout had come away. Questioned if he had ever seen the woman before, he was sure he had not. In a certain sense she resembled Mistress Ross, who had stayed at Lochindorbh, but quite different, far more beautiful, but wicked, and, the man had told him, cruel beyond measure, delighting in pain and bloodshed.

It was clear now that the time brooked no delay. Alasdair gathered his men and rode out to the point he had selected, the only one by which a troop coming from Farquhar's Dune could conveniently reach Lochindorbh. Signals were arranged so that he might be able to return to the castle, and not let Beatrix be aware of his absence more than was absolutely necessary. He wished to spare her every cause of anxiety.

The scout was right. Sir Norman Leslie and his men had ridden up the last hill that overlooked Farquhar's Dune, and were quite unperceived and unnoticed by any of the MacIntoshes. The dark gipsy girl rode beside Sir Norman, a Highland bonnet of white velvet on her night-black hair, with an eagle plume fastened by the golden buckle of Leslie. White fur was round her throat, her black eyes burned with strange fire in her white face, and her red lips looked like a splash of blood.

"Say now, Norman, if I have not guided well There's something in gipsy cunning after all, is there not? Confess now."

"There's the Devil's own witchcraft in it, an I mistake not. Gad! sweetheart, art a very witch. Thou hast cast spells on me, and I trow thou hast cast spells on all this false brood of MacIntoshes. They drowse, and let their foes ride through their very midst. Eh! by the Lord, but

we'll carouse when this is over. Thou art savage as I, my wench. Blood stings thee to excess of passion. Eh! the Devil take it! Blood and wine till we are well-nigh mad—then rolled in one another's arms, we love as tigers in the jungle, and can never have enough. Gad! 'tis life, this. But now, how win we inside of yonder Dune? Tell me that, thou witch wife, for faith I see not."

"Leave it to me, Norman. Let me only get forward and go in. Wait you till you hear the signal—a wolf's cry. You know it. My hunting cry. Then rush the Dune. Don't let your trumpets sound till you are inside, then kill! and kill! and kill! Norman, you will let me kill too, won't you?"

"You fierce little Devil! Yes, I know how killing whips you up, even as it does me. By Gad! but we shall be mad ere we are out of this. Oh, but it is worth ten years of life to have you with me again. We know each other, we two. Now away with you."

She slipped from her horse, and glided like a grey shadow over the heather, so that those nearest to Sir Norman scarce marked that she was gone, only they saw that her horse was riderless. Leslie beckoned up Urquhart to ride beside him.

"See here, Urquhart! We are near the close of this business, for by Gad my sweetheart will find us a way in, and we shall bring fire and sword on this damned crew, and teach them to interfere with Leslies, and then we will have such feasting, and drinking, and lovemaking as shall stir even thy froggy blood, for indeed I hold thee but half a man. Yet thou hast been a faithful beast, and I will fill thy pouch with gold pieces even as I promised thee. But when that is done there is a work more difficult to do, and it must be done by thee. I ride from here to claim my wife, who lieth now at Lochindorbh. The Cumming thinks to stop me at the Pass. He is a fool. I have three times his men, and well armed, and in hard condition. Besides we fight down hill, he will have to fight up. We could smash him with half his men. But what I have to say now is this. For the time I have to leave my black-a-vised sweetheart behind. She must not come near my wife till all is made safe. Gad! she'd savage an archangel if she got jealous. You'll have to keep her, Urquhart. Damn it! I wish you joy of the job. But I'll pay you well. I have paid you well—the Devil catch you!"

Meantime in Farquhar's Dune there was feasting and merriment. It was a rude makeshift fortification, timber beams and earth for flanking walls, a rough stone building where Farquhar himself and his seven sons held a sort of state, turf hovels around. A crooning song with a twangling accompaniment sounded outside, and a boy reported that a singing gipsy sought leave to entertain the noble chief at the board.

"Bring her in and welcome," roared old Farquhar. "She'll help us be merry."

Men and women sat or lay about the smoke-grimed hall, a butt of Spanish wine newly broached was in their midst, and flagons and horns were filled as fast as they were emptied. A sleepy, lazy song, to the dreamy tinkling of a rebec, came on their ears, and the loud voices of the revellers sank, their wine cups fell unheeded from their grasp as they listened spell-bound. The music talked to the dreamy, music-loving Celts, telling them of the heather, and the hill, the tinkle of the burns, the cry of the wild fowl, the myriad scents of the moorland, 'of the girls' lips they had kissed in dreamy heather-scented dells. Softly the song ended with no definite end. Old Farquhar raised his drinking horn.

"Come, lass! sit here and pledge me. Nay, sit on my knee. Lord, but thou art a morsel for a chief, none other shall touch thee. Gipsy or no, art the handsomest wench ever came to the Dune."

The gipsy sat on his knee, her arm round his neck, stroking his great shaggy head.

"Sing again, wench!" She caressed him softly, and raising his drinking horn she drank a long draught. Then she sang a lilting song, that spoke of youth and joy, of love and sunshine, and the rough warriors melted, and sat dreaming as they followed the tune below their breath, and Farquhar hardly noticed when the gipsy slid off his knees, and a grey shadow passed through the hall. Till the wild howl of a wolf in the outer court startled them all to sudden sobriety, but too late. Two guards sprang to the gate, left carelessly open, but with a savage growl and yelp something rushed on them, the blow of an impact of a huge animal body sent one reeling to the ground, the other felt the rip of claws and teeth as half his face, his shoulder and arm were torn open, gashed, and mangled. Then a wild rush of men, shouts and cries, "Grip fast! Grip fast!" the blare of trumpets, and the Dune was in the hands of its foes. Farquhar swung himself out, a stalwart old giant with a giant's strength, and threw the two who tried to seize him pell-mell into a corner. In vain. Before he could reach his great claymore, flung down beside him for ease in his feasting, the Leslie gripped him. Both were huge men, but Leslie was armed.

"Villainous old fox, wouldst dare to raid on the Leslies. Let this teach thee."

"Coward! at least come out and fight like a man."

"Never, old rascal! Die like a dog!"

A swift downward stroke and the keen dirk drank eagerly the life-blood of the old man, and Leslie spurned with his foot a huddled heap on the floor.

What followed was not good to see, even for savage men used to savage sights. It was no fight. It was simply a brutal massacre of unarmed men, and the women who were feasting with them, and other women and children who had been driven in by the spearsmen in their rush for the enclosure. The banqueting hall became a very shambles. Rough and brutal as they were, even the savage spearsmen shuddered to see the Gipsy with fierce hands and teeth tear away the quivering life from the body of a woman on whom she had thrown herself in the mad lust of blood. Madly they seized the flagons and drained great draughts of the fiery Spanish wine, and shouting their slogan, "Grip fast," they reeled forth drunkenly from the terrible slaughter-house which they had made of old Farquhar's hall, leaving it in flames behind them.

Leslie seized the Gipsy girl in his mighty arms and carried her bodily to a cottage that stood near to their camp. It was a place of the unfortunate MacIntoshes, and had evidently been built in expectation of hostile raiding, for the windows had iron stanchions, and the door was of stout old oak. Possibly the Leslie in the exultation over his executed vengeance was disposed to be luxurious, so, at any rate, thought his followers, as they carried thither under his directions all the best of his camp furniture, and many flagons of the best old Spanish wine, Malmsey, and Sack, and others, wherewith he caroused till a late hour with the Gipsy girl, and Master Urquhart and some of his choicest boon convives, while the full moon looked down in reproach on the scene of drunken revelry. Next morning the Gipsy still lay sleeping heavily when the sun was already high in the heavens, like a tired-out animal. At length she turned and moaned for drink, but half-awake. Urquhart, rousing himself heavily from a couch in the next room, brought a horn of wine; she knocked it from his hand.

"Water, you fool! hast no sense."

Obediently he brought a large goblet of pure cold water, which she drained thirstily, turned over, and slept again. An hour later she sprang up and called. "Norman!" Urquhart appeared at the door.

"Sir Norman has ridden forth to reconnoitre. He bade me assure your ladyship that he would soon return. Meantime to ask you to take some food, and tarry not for him."

She looked at him inquiringly, then in angry incredulity—

“Liar! Clumsy liar! He never rode forth without me. Never in his life did he leave a message like that for me. You, who are his jackal, his doer of all dirty work, might know him better than that.”

Her eyes blazed with indignation. She rushed to the window and looked out.

“Where is the camp? All gone this morning, and no word to me. I will see for myself. Out of my way, you scurvy fool!”

She ran to the door. It was locked. The iron gratings of the window would scarce let a cat through.

“So I am a prisoner, and you my gaoler. Pitiful cur, hand over the key.”

Urquhart stood irresolute for a moment. If he released her the Leslie would probably slay him at best; if he saved his life, he would lose his reward, for the sake of which he had walked through such leagues of filth at the Leslie’s bidding. But on the other hand, to face this she-fury was more than he dared, sooner face a tigress robbed of her young. Probably even then if he had stood his ground firmly, and lied convincingly, he might have held her. As it was, in his terror he did the worst thing he could.

“Patience! my lady,” he said. “My Lord indeed gave me such a word to say to you. But in sooth he will soon return, he has but gone to claim his wife.”

Then her wrath blazed like the white heat of the levin bolt—

His wife! say you—His wife! Low, mean hound, the fires of hell blast you for that word. An he have a wife, I will slay him and her too with my own hand. What! that he, Norman Leslie, who has known me, should seek a wife. Ha! Samael! Behemoth! aid me.”

To Urquhart’s senses, partly perchance bemused with the wines of last night, and on edge with terror, it seemed that she grew taller than mortal, and a lambent blue flame played round her, while a dark sinister shadow gloomed behind her. Her midnight hair crackled and curled with lurid sparks, and her eyes flamed like a panther’s in the dark. No more could he remember, for one buffet as it were from a beast’s paw knocked him senseless on the ground, the key was snatched from the pocket of his jerkin. When found afterwards his arm was broken and mauled, but he was still living; the door stood open, and from the threshold went the spoor as of a wolf, marked in blood. A small child missed in the massacre and left alive had seen a wonderful white woman run from the cottage, oh! so fast! crying as she emerged, “Tell them the white wolf is out to kill, but kills not carrion like that.” Then she cast up her head and sniffed the morning wind, and ran three circles, then gave a long wailing cry and ran away towards the hills. So said the child, when some MacIntoshes attracted by the smoke of the blazing Dune came up to see what was the matter. A dropped surcoat with the three buckles settled beyond all question who was the doer of the deed, and no time was wasted in useless laments; but the fiery cross went forth that day to call the clan to bring fire and sword against the perpetrators of the outrage. For old Farquhar, though an outlaw, and even more of a thief and raider than most of his family, was beloved in the glens for a genial old rascal, and every MacIntosh was indignant.

Meanwhile Leslie, neither knowing of nor caring for the vengeance brewing behind him, was riding rapidly over the moors, making for the Pass, at the foot of which he knew that Alasdair was waiting for him, and he chuckled at the idea of how his men would wipe out the Cummings. Yet had he known, he might have been more anxious than merry, for Alasdair knew all the ground by heart, and was not waiting at the foot of the Pass, but a little farther in, where the path they had to traverse rose slightly between two great cliffs. Here they ambushed on ground where a dozen determined men might stop an army. But knowing not of this, Leslie chuckled, and

chuckled also as he thought of Master Urquhart, his jackal, and the butt of his humour, left in the lonely hut to face the Gipsy's fury. Bolts and bars were strong, however, and he chuckled.

On a knoll beside the path there stood an old, old woman, her grey hair fluttered in the wind, her rags scarcely held together.

"Hail! Sir Norman Leslie!" she cried in a thin, piping voice. "Ye ride for a wife."

"By Gad! that I do, Beldame! what of it?',

"Ye shall not win unless ye hearken to me; there lies an ambush in your path."

"That, too, I know, and we shall wipe them out."

"That ye will not do, unless ye hearken to me. The winding-sheet clingeth around thy breast and covers thy mouth, and thy wraith hath haunted these moors this many a day. Come ye aside, and I can show thee how thou mayest attain, for I bear thee goodwill."

Leslie had all the superstitions of his time and class. He signalled to his men to halt, which they gladly did, for the day was hot and the ride had been long and fast, and followed the old wife to a lonely hut lying off the road, wondering as he did so why her form seemed familiar, and why there was a suggestion of a wolf about her.

Alasdair's ambush was but two miles farther on. A low whistle and the chirk of a crow from the hilltop warned him that the Leslie was approaching, and had halted. Alasdair had been there himself now for two days. He was growing anxious to have this fight over and to return to Beatrix, for her white drawn face had haunted him, and the fire seemed gone out of the green eyes. He was very confident of the result of the fight; his dispositions had been planned with a skill that left nothing to chance. But this halt was inexplicable. Covering himself with a long plaid, whose colours were so exactly those of the heather that at a dozen yards distance he was indistinguishable, he Lay down on the moor and crawled forward to reconnoitre. On and on he crept. Now the Leslie troop were in full sight, many of them sprawling on the ground; the dregs of the fiery wine of last night were in them still, and few of them had the head of their chief, who could swallow three or four flagons with no apparent effect. Alasdair skirted the company unperceived; he saw that Leslie himself was not there. The lonely hut was some few hundred yards before him. He lay still and watched. Suddenly a wild yell of panic fear came down the wind, and an ugly sound of mingled yelp and snarl: he looked at the men, they sprawled and lounged contentedly as though they had heard nothing. Then there came the long wailing cry of a beast in utter pain, the howl of a caged wolf, when anger has died and only hopeless misery is left. Something leaped from the window, a great grey body, and ran round the house, crouching close to the ground, with long padding steps. He could not see very clearly, there seemed a sort of heavy mist, but surely it was, it must be, a large white wolf. He ran to the cottage, careless for the moment of cover or disguise, and looked in through the window. The ghastliness of the sight staggered even his trained nerves, for there on the floor, still covered with what remained of his bravery of apparel, lay a torn and mangled mass, all that was left of Norman Leslie of the Glen. In an instant his memories of the Border, and Elspet Simpson, Eochain's account of his experiments in the stone circle, Cecily's flight, the witch woman who had been seen with the Leslie, focused themselves in his brain into a horrible certainty. He had abandoned her; she had followed him. Here was her vengeance: the were-wolf was now loose on the mountains, loose, and, Heaven help all true men! making for Lochindorbh.

The spoor lay straight from the cottage door; his eyes followed it, and far away up the hill he saw a figure—a wolf—no! a woman. He must have been mistaken, then; yet if this was Cedlly, and Cecily in the person of Elspet Simpson, there was deadly danger, but there was this of hope in it, he could outrun a woman! Though a wolf would distance him, he could overtake her before

she could reach Lochindorbh, stop her, and hand her over to Uncle Eochain, who would restrain her in some way and prevent mischief. He was a splendid runner, and in perfect training. Leslie's men would not now attempt the Pass; even if they did, his own company could deal with them. Nothing now mattered, but to overtake Cecily. He swung off easily with his long stride in pursuit; the heather was short and running easy; he was gaining on her continually. As he drew nearer and nearer he saw her more and more plainly.

The wolf story was a fable,—that was Cecily beyond a doubt; mad, possibly, but a woman, and no wolf. Yet she was taking the difficult way over the hills instead of the Pass. The air was insufferably hot. Still he raced on, quickening his pace, but not drawing up so fast as he had hoped; she seemed to go quicker too. He was gaining a little as he neared the crest of the hill, and saw her beginning the descent. The sweat was pouring from his body, his eyes were growing dim, his sinews felt as though they must crack with the fatigue. But he drew a deep breath, shut his teeth hard, and yet more forced his pace. She was only a hundred yards before him now, running easily as though merely in play. Faster and faster he urged his muscles, holding back his labouring breath lest he should pant and fall. One great bound—now he was running beside her. Tense as the string of a cross bow, his arm was round her, and for a moment swept her from her feet.

"Cecily! Thank God I've caught you!"

"Fool!" A buffet as from a hammer smote his head. He felt something rip and tear his leg, and fell stunned to the ground.

"Fool! The white wolf is out to kill."

These were the last words he heard before darkness closed over his eyes and unconsciousness on his brain.

CHAPTER XXIV

A WITCH HUNT

All through that night of the massacre in Farquhar's Dune and the brutal carouse of Leslie and his men, Eochain Beag had been troubled by ghastly dreams. Gifted as he was by race and heredity with the second sight, he had cultivated the powers to a very high pitch by the methods practised among the priests of that old faith that worshipped in the stone circles. In his dreams that night he knew of the were-wolf waiting, ever waiting, in its lair, ready to rush forth and kill He saw Norman Leslie with the winding sheet slowly rising, till it covered his chin; then he saw the werewolf ranging the desolate hillsides, and to his ear came the wild cry, "The white wolf is out to kill."

When he woke he thought over his dreams. The were-wolf beyond doubt was Cecily. If Sir Norman was dead, howsoever killed, she would likely be wholly mad, and in her insane jealousy her vengeance would fall on Beatrix. She would be certain to head for Lochindorbh, from whence she had started to join Leslie. Stay, though; would she? She had never been there in the Elspet personality, and in that condition she entirely forgot all that she knew as Cecily. She would therefore much more likely make for Blervie, and perhaps attack old Sir Wilfred again. It was a disquieting thought, for she knew the secret entrance to the tower, but it was impossible to warn Sir Wilfred. Not for one moment must he leave his charge of Beatrix, and there was no one to send. If only Alasdair were at home, he might go himself, failing any other. One hope remained—on the way to Blervie were many streams, and if a were-wolf once gets thoroughly

plunged in water the wolfish nature will depart for the time. The country people thought that crossing a running stream would break the spell, but Eochain knew that though this would stop many witches of small power, nothing but complete immersion would force the were-wolf to resume her proper form.

Occupied with these thoughts, he barely noticed the glad and proud expression of Mistress Gow and of Beatrix' bower-maid, till a faint little wailing cry struck a triumphant chord of joy into his heart. He knew now that all their wishes were fulfilled.

"A lovely boy, master!" said Mistress Gow,—"born at six o'clock precisely—and a Cumming every inch of him. Bless the dear long head!—as like as two peas to his father when I took him away from his dead mother's arms and nursed him. And my lady looks so sweet—like one of the blessed angels! Who would think now that ever she had worn the belted plaid, and ridden with Master Alasdair, and handled the dirk like a man, too! Little I thought that ever I should see a woman that was a proper mate for my boy, but she's that, and more."

Eochain held up his hand—the garrulous old woman would have talked till next morning. Then he went forth and took the small boat and rowed himself over the loch to the western shore, and wandered away into the woods, praising God in deep thankfulness, but with a queer ritual of his own, compounded of immemorial pagan forms, but adapted to the Christianity he had come to believe in. Then he yielded himself to visions. He seemed to see that the old life was changing and passing away—all familiar things had come to their termination. He, the last of the Druids, had been able to see how Christ the Master had come to fulfil all the great teachings of their Order—how the Church was a vehicle, but like their old ox wain, a vehicle that concealed the jewel within, which some day the traditions of the Druid faith might reveal. Alasdair the soldier and monk had come out of the cloister, had realised that hasty vows made against nature were better broken than kept; but the old man seemed to see a further and painful step for him to higher lessons yet. He had won the ideal of loyalty to his King, he had won the ideal of religious devotion, he had won the ideal of love, the three sacred rays of the Druids united to the one central spiritual sun of Divine, selfless love, wherein all three were absorbed. Beatrix, again, had dared to break free from a cramping and dead convention. She had learned her lesson, and won to the highest happiness that mortal woman can reach—what more for her? So all around them he saw the forces of destruction and dissolution gathering. The were-wolf was loose on the hills—what might that betide? And the were-wolf herself, the witch, the child of the Devil, mad with blood-lust and sex, was a saint warped and disguised, and obsessed by powers of evil, that had laid hold of her unwitting. He had fought hard for her soul—he had striven (himself, and the angels only knew how strenuously) to cast out the Devil and restore her to her own self. Just now he seemed to be beaten, but none could tell. Would this were-wolf be the instrument of destruction and of breaking up the present order of things? He cast his eyes on the far mountains of the MacIntosh country, and there he seemed to see the preparations for war, fire and sword, the heather on fire, the gathering of the clan for vengeance. Northward again he looked, and over the town of Forres there brooded a shadow as of superstition and cruelty—the spirit that will torture and mutilate savagely that which it fears, from the sheer mad impulse of fright. He thought of the stories of witch-hunts, and his eyes grew grave.

Then, like the rolling away of mists, the visions closed.

Over Lochindorbh he felt the spirit of peace and goodness like an influence or emanation—that which to poor Cecily's eyes formulated itself as angels in rose or gold or green. Then he thought of Beatrix with her boy beside her—surely now she had attained the very fulness of joy! Did the future hold trouble and sorrow for her, as was the common lot of mortals? The visions were

closed—his sight could tell him nothing. With one final brief prayer, he turned and passed back to the loch. The sun was now climbing high in the heavens. He knew that Beatrix would have asked for him, and would look for him to sit beside her and admire the boy, and tell her old yarns of his mighty ancestors, whom he was to grow up to resemble. Full of these thoughts, he rowed himself back over the loch, and banishing all his forebodings and his visions, he delighted himself with the light he got from the sweet, thin pale face that beamed upon him, and the tiny red morsel nestled against her breast; and for over an hour he sat there, charming her ears with old Cumming legends, till she grew weary, and he saw the green eyes closing. Then he went to the window and looked over the lone hillside.

Some moving speck was coursing over the purple heather. Eochain strained his eyes to see more clearly. A cold fear came over him as he remembered the werewolf loose on the hills. This shape was certainly heading downward towards the Castle. Now it was lost among some trees, then it emerged clearer. It was a wild beast of some kind, large and white. Nay, it was a woman running close to the ground. Involuntarily he thought of Cecily as she ran round the old stone circle in the form of Elspet Simpson. Even his clear and trained eyes began to be glamoured—he saw a great white wolf, and only with effort could he force himself to see a woman. On his ear came a long-drawn howl, remembered only too well—and was it fancy, or did the howl actually fashion itself into the words, “The white wolf is out to kill”? Rapidly he counselled with himself what to do. There was no man left in the Castle. All were away with Alasdair at the foot of the pass, waiting to stop Leslie, who lay dead and mangled in the hut on the hillside. One of the boats was at the boat-house on the farther side, ready for Alasdair, so that there might be no delay in his getting back to Beatrix—the very plan his love had devised might be the means of disaster, for Cecily could work the boat as well as a man.

Nearer and nearer came that fleeing white phantom—now looking like a woman cowering close to the ground, now to his bewildered eyes like a white wolf, with paws and muzzle dabbled with blood, louping in that long awkward canter of a wolf which is faster than a horse’s gallop and practically tireless. She came down the hill to the boat-house, but apparently she saw it not, or did not recognise it, for she plunged into the loch and swam towards the postern gate. For some moments Eochain stood dazed, the glamour still on him, then suddenly realising the danger, and that the postern was open in the entire security they felt, and in order that nothing might even for a moment delay Alasdair on his return, he ran as fast as he could across the room and down the stair and through the enclosed space within the wide flanking walls. Too late! She had landed, and was coming quickly over the open among the ruins of the demolished buildings, drenched and dripping, the water running from her hair, from her dress, making runnels and pools as she came—but it was Cecily, sane, soft, and gentle, as ever they had known her. He recalled the traditions, as he had known them, of the effect of water on a were-wolf—the same wave that washed away the bloodstains from paw and muzzle washed away the wolf nature, for the time at any rate.

She looked wholly dazed, and ran up to him with the frank impulsiveness of a child.

“Oh, Uncle Eochain! I am so glad to see you! A terrible thing happened to me. I had a fearful nightmare, one of those awful dreams—the very worst I ever had, I think—and somehow I must have walked in my sleep, and got out. I suppose they were not guarding the postern properly, and I must have fallen into the water, and waked myself. I just remember struggling and sinking, and then I was wide awake, and found myself swimming in the loch. Isn’t it lucky that I swim so easily? Of course I made for the postern at once, and fortunately found it open. I have been so

seared since that I might have alarmed dear Beatrix. She wasn't frightened about me—was she, Uncle Eochain?"

"She knew nothing," said Eochain, lying glibly, for conscience' sake,—"and we don't want her to know, so keep a still tongue in your head. Her boy was born this morning. Now get away, and get some dry things on. Mistress Gow, or the bower-maid, or some one, will rub you down."

In his agitation he spoke as though she were a tired horse, and Cecily never noticed it. Eochain accompanied her into the Castle, summoned Mistress Gow, and found means unperceived to convey to her to say nothing to Cecily of her disappearance. This instruction the old woman punctually fulfilled, garrulously enlarging on Beatrix and the birth of the baby, and how close she had to be in attendance, till Cecily, warmed and dried, was taken in to see Beatrix, whom Eochain had already told to keep absolute silence. If only Cecily could be kept from knowing anything of her lapse into the witch personality, all might yet be well. Eochain, of course, did not yet know the terrible events of the last few days, nor how Alasdair was lying stunned and wounded on the heather at that moment.

All, however, was safe at present, and time passed happily in baby-worship and in the exchange of multifarious confidences.

When the sun was sinking low in the west, as Eochain was pacing to and fro in the wide open space inside the flanking walls, the boat grated against the landing by the portal, and Alasdair came in, supported between two of his men. The company whom he had deposited in ambush, after waiting long for him, had grown anxious. Wattie o' the Romach had sent scouts on to see what was wrong. They had found Leslie's troop in full flight, back the way they had come, carrying with them the ghastly remains of their late leader; but of Alasdair there was not a trace. They separated widely, therefore, examining all the ground as they came, till they found him under the whin bush where the blow of the were-wolf's paw had left him. A dash of cold water and a few simple restoratives revived him—he was only stunned, and not seriously hurt. Ten minutes' rapid exchange of words put him and Eochain in full possession of the situation, and Eochain went in to tell Beatrix of Alasdair's return safe and sound—only a knock on the head that doesn't signify much to a Cumming, those long heads of theirs are thick. Beatrix was all agog to see him and show him the boy.

"Safe and sound am I, sweetheart," he said, after the youngster had been duly admired and given back to Dame Gow. "A crack on the head more or less is no matter."

"You should have had me with you, Alasdair, to throw my dagger. I warrant I would have felled the varlet ere ever his foul blow got in on your head. But tell me, what of my rascal husband, as he calls himself?"

"Dead, Beatrix," he replied, crossing himself as he remembered the ghastly mangled heap in the hut. "He will trouble us no more.

"Why, then, if you will, Alasdair—"

He understood.

"Uncle Eochain, and you, Dame Gow, in your presence I declare that the Lady Beatrix Dunbar is my wedded wife."

"And Alasdair my wedded husband," she smiled. "Do you feel any different, Alasdair? I can't say I do."

Eochain had been writing as they spoke—now he handed them a paper. Beatrix was propped up in Cecily's arms to sign it. Alasdair and the two witnesses added their names. It was nearly thirty years later when that certificate turned up again, when a patent of nobility was applied for

and granted to the small red speck of humanity who now howled vigorously in Dame Gow's motherly arms.

Alasdair and Eochain went out arm in arm.

"We shall still need all our care," said the latter. "Poor Cecily is not really recovered yet, though I think I can hold her now; but the madness is still upon her. The shock of the cold water, or may be some other more subtle influence, has for the time banished the evil, but it must recur. Also I heard just now that the people of Forres have heard the story of Leslie's attack on the MacIntoshes, which seems to have been more grizly than either you or I know of, and that the woman with him was a witch, and they are to go out in force witch-hunting. I think I can keep Cecily by the spell of sleep, but we must hold her also with bolts and bars if necessary. I have seen a Forres witch-hunt in my young days, and not for the wealth of all Scotland would I willingly see another. The savagery that I was told of Leslie's butchery of the MacIntoshes is faint compared with the zeal of worthy burgesses, maddened by terror, doing a helpless woman to death."

"The Lord help us!" said Alasdair,—"that must not be. We will double the guards, and none shall go in or out of the Castle. By Our Lady's grace, but if the Forres witch-hunters come here on their foul errand they shall have a warm reception! They have had some experience of the Dallas Cummings before now. But by the Lord! before they should touch a hair of our Cecily, I would burn their rubbishy little Burgh, and every man and woman in it. All will be safe to-night, and tomorrow the men will all be in again, and we will make perfectly secure. There is another thing, too—after that slaying of Farquhar and his sons, all the MacIntoshes will be up, and it will go hard with Leslie's men; they will retreat the way they came, through Forres, so we may expect to hear of some clan raids on the Burgh, and if the fools are out witch-hunting the Burgh may be burned without my having to take any trouble about it. Well, now, there is no more to see about to-night. My head still rings a bit from that pat that Cecily gave me. I tell you, uncle, the wench smites shrewdly!—I think a horn of Spanish wine before we go to rest will do no harm."

Long they talked that night, but at last sleep came over them, and perhaps it was natural that both should dream vividly of witch hunting, of savage cruelty perpetrated on poor old women after the fashion of the time, and of bloody clan raids and burning of towns.

In the morning they looked at each other in blank dismay. All their confidence was premature, their precautions too late. Cecily was gone, and a note left on her window-sill explained.

"DEAREST AND KINDEST FRIENDS,—You would save me in spite of myself I know. But I know all now. A few chance words that I overheard gave me the clue. I could not help it. I listened, and partly from talk of the men and maids, but chiefly from yourselves, bit by bit I learned it all. I know that my dreams are not fancy, but a too horrible reality. I know what I was to Sir Norman Leslie, and I know that I killed him. I know that I go mad and become a wolf, and I know only too well that for such women as I there is nothing but death. Dear friends! I go from you, lest in my madness I do you a worse mischief. I feel the madness coming over me again. Farewell! Pray only for me that death may come to me swiftly, and if it be Heaven's will, as painlessly as possible. God bless my Beatrix, and give you all many happy days. These few last words from your loving and unfortunate

"CECILY."

The two men were stricken dumb with the horror of it. The were-wolf was loose on the hills, as they had dreaded; but far worse even than this, their poor Cecily was lost, and the superstitious folk of Forres, mad with their terror of a witch, were out in their masses with clubs and

pitchforks, and Heaven knows what else, hunting for her life. Something must be done, but what? Clearly Beatrix must know nothing. Clearly also no time was to be lost. Alasdair's men were straggling in now; some of them had been all night searching for their chief on the hills. One of them brought in word that the whole town of Forres was seething with excitement. A witch, a were-wolf, the Devil himself, had been seen. Master Keir knew all about it. He was guiding and marshalling them. There was to be such a witch hunt as never was known in Forres before, and when the witch was caught she was to be put in a barrel full of spikes and rolled down the Cluny Hill, and there was to be a stake and a bonfire at the bottom. Several citizens had already sent quantities of tar. Oh! be sure it would be the rarest sport.

"Look here," said Alasdair. "This must not be! I know all about it. 'Tis no witch they hunt; 'tis an innocent woman, an old friend of mine, who hath saved my life. These vermin of Forres do it to spite me and the Dallas Cummings. 'Tis Master Urquhart hath set them on." Here he spoke at a venture, knowing the opinion they held of Urquhart in the Glen of Dallas. The word went home. "We allow no witch hunt," they shouted.

"Half of our men will stay here to guard the castle, lest these fools come this way, the other half will go over the hills and intercept this mad crowd. Bring the witch under strict guard here, but whip off the curs in any case.

They departed to execute his orders.

"She will head for Blervie now, beyond a doubt," said Eochain. "Give me your fastest and surest-horse, Alasdair. I will ride thither, and endeavour to check them."

"Take anything in the stables. You know them all. I will ride myself through Altyre, and bring all I can get of my father's men. Then on through Forres, and so I will join you at Blervic, and between us we shall get these frantic idiots in a net. Surround them and hold them till we can rescue our Cecily, and bring her home."

Alasdair went in to say good-bye to Beatrix before he rode.

"Once more I must ride, my Beatrix! The last time, as I hope, before we ride together again."

"Joyful, Alasdair! if it may be so. I know not; my dreams were dark last night. I felt dimly something impending. But this I say, Alasdair! I have lain long here thinking, and I have wanted to say this to you. Bear with roe, dear. Sometime or other we must part, for a time at least. You know death conies to all, and we cannot avoid it. But whenever it comes we two can always know that all that is best and sweetest in life has come to us. We never can know in this world anything better than we have known, because in all the world there can be nothing better. And I feel that I am sure in the future, wherever and whatever it may be, we shall still be together. Whichever of us goes first to that far shore will wait patiently till the other is ready to follow. Kiss me once, Alasdair. Whatever comes, we have known the best that mortals could know. So think of me as one to whom you have brought perfect happiness."

A long close embrace and he was gone. With foreboding at his heart, Eochain rode hard straight across Dallas Glen to reach Blervie as quickly as might be, while Alasdair struck through the Altyre woods, sending scouts out on either side to gather in men. The estrangement between him and his father had been largely healed by the good offices of the Laird of Grant, and Sir Alexander was willing to help him as far as he reasonably could. Moreover, he hated the witch-hunting superstitions of the time, and was ready enough to do anything to counteract them. Alasdair, therefore, clattered through Forres with a fairly large company behind him, as the moon, little past her full, rose slowly to the east behind the distant Broch, finding the little town well-nigh empty.

Away behind the Cluny Hills they rode. Before them Blervie Tower stood dark and stern, silhouetted against the clear obscure of the summer night. A rosy flush was in the northern sky, throwing up in pale tints of grey and blue the masses of Wyvis, and the hills that stretched away to the westward, till the flush of morning almost met the flush of sunset. It was a calm and peaceful night, and the Cummings trotted gently, with loose rein, having ridden hard through the heat of the day, and surrendered themselves to the influences of the hour and the season. The pale cold moonlight slept on the Laigh of Moray, and outlined in silver the distant hills that looked so dark where their bases merged into the Altyre woods. Beneath that flood of silver light, as on a chessboard, various forces were moving, pregnant with great events in the distant future. In the old Tower of Blervie Sir Wilfred sat, still studying his old manuscripts, and trying to decipher magical formulæ, trying hard to find a reasonable and possible explanation for what had been going on under his very eyes, and of which he was partially aware. The moon looked in at his chamber window from over the shoulder of the great Dune of Callifer. It was not yet a year since he had been attacked and almost killed by the were-wolf in this very room. And that great Dune held the secrets of this, and many another mysterious event, and would be the grave of many more.

Away on the Passes leading from the MacIntosh country into Badenoch the Leslie company had found and taken up the body of their chief. They were sore perplexed what to do. Not obscurely they were aware that the whole MacIntosh clan were agog to avenge the assault on Farquhar's Dune. Here and there behind them rose the smoke of burning heather, telling its own tale plainly. They were only just emerging from the MacIntosh country—to return the way they came, as they had at first attempted, would have been annihilation. Through Altyre, which lay handy enough, they were forbidden to pass. The only possible route lay down the Spey valley, and so back to their own country, for most of them were from the Rothes district. Then one of their scouts suggested to the Captain that the castle of Lochindorbh lay on their way, dismantled and empty, as he believed. It was many years since he had been there, but it was still a good serviceable castle, where at least they might rest for a night or two, and be safe from any foemen. "On then, in Heaven's name! guide us there, for indeed we are sore bestead." And not far behind them through the hills, closer than they had any idea of, came the bands of the MacIntoshes, gathering from various directions over the hills, and all intent to catch and exterminate the Leslie company and avenge old Farquhar's death.

Between Forres and Rafford also there came a wild and tumultuous assembly. Master Keir, at the head of half the rabble of Forres, with clubs and pitchforks, torches, knives, every kind of implement, men and women howling in mad fury that was more than half blind terror. The white wolf had verily been seen, fleeing before them up into the woods on Monaughty, or some said heading down into the Glen of Dallas. Anyhow she had been in sight, and they could not fail to find the tracks. Then some cried out again, "See, there's the wolf," and plainly the wolf was visible running before them, but limping; a paw was wounded, she was weary and ran lame. "If only she crosses running water she must take her own shape again." "Nay, fool! she cannot cross running water. The Kellas is before her; she must turn." "There she is now—panting up the hill. On, boys, we have her—we can't miss her now." Then a woman's shrill voice, "Eh! but we'll have a rare bonfire to-night," and another, "Gad! but we'll have some sport with her first. Oh, 'tis the rarest game to bait a witch. Give me but my old kitchen poker red-hot, I'll tickle her up, I warrant ye."

“Nay, wench! a kitchen spit is the thing; there’s no fun with a witch till ye draw her blood. But tak’ ye heed that ye don’t kill her before we get to the bonfire, or ye miss the choicest of the sport.”

“There she is now, against the sky on the crest of the hill—rush in, men! ye can’t miss her now.”

“Oh, the devil, where is she? Clean disappeared. Nay, ’tis impossible. Separate, men! Search every inch of the ground—she can’t have gone. Master Keir, did ye chance to see the Devil? Has he carried her away?”

So then it happened that Alasdair and his men, as they reached the summit of the hill, came on a large company of the worthy citizens of Forres hunting about hither and thither, like a pack of terriers, all over the level swampy grounds at the top.

Sternly he bade them disperse and go home’ to their Burgh in peace, and sullenly and reluctantly the half-mad folk obeyed. There was in truth no resisting the stalwart and well-armed Highlanders, and a disorderly rabble ran pell-mell down the slopes by Rafford, never halting nor looking back till they got safe within their own houses. But of Cecily there was no trace. Alasdair, returning from chasing the Forres rabble, met Eochain who from the safe shelter of his haunted wood had watched the mob. He had seen the white wolf pass up the hill, and had stood ready to rescue her, but she avoided the old familiar path to the Druid circle, and ran on eastward; then suddenly he lost her, and knew nothing but the raving crew of witch-hunters. Long they searched and looked, while the placid moon scaled higher and higher in the Heavens until Alasdair’s men drove them home like frightened sheep. Then all at once a light broke on Eochain—“The Dune!” he cried; “that is where she has gone. Of course, she knew the secret of the opening. But she must have come back to her own self. As Elspet she never knew.”

Eagerly they ran over the intervening space, and Eochain swung up the door. There, sure enough, on the couch that had been Sir Wilfred’s, lay poor Cecily, conscious, and in all her sane self, but worn out and dying. She smiled on them as they entered.

“Thank God you have come,” she said; “I had made up my mind I was to die alone. I know all now, and all is well. I came to myself in time to get in here and close the door. Then I saw the fair angels round me, and the hosts of the Devil taking flight, Finn and all his evil crew. They have held me captive for long, but their power is broken now. Were there but a priest to absolve me, I should die happy.”

“Unworthy as I am, I am a priest,” said Alasdair. “We are told the unworthiness of the minister hinders not the Sacrament. But however it be, so far as my poor words have power, dear sister! part in peace. I absolve you in the Name of the most High, The Infinite Supreme.” He laid his hand on her head, and that moment, with a long sigh, her spirit left the body.

The two men reverently uncovered and passed out of the Dune, closing the massive stone over the entrance.

“Her most fitting-resting place,” said Eochain. “I have striven hard for a year to save the soul of a witch. If my weak efforts had aught to do with her winning to peace at last, may this be my thank-offering for my own attainment to the faith of the Master.”

“And my thank-offering,” said Alasdair, “for a year of joy far beyond mortal deserts.”

Even as he was speaking, though he knew it not, the joy passed out of his life, and the eternal shadows closed down.

Far away on Dava Moor the fleeing Leslies were striving to reach Lochindorbh, deserted, as they thought, and the fierce detachments of the MacIntoshes, gathering from all points of their wide territory, were fast gaining on them. Already down the glen came the wild slogan, “Loch

Moidheidh! Loch Moidheidh!" The Leslies made a gallant effort to rally, and shouted back, "Grip Fast," while they made all haste they could to gain the shelter of Lochindorbh, impregnable though a ruin. But as they reached the last slope leading down to the shore, the detachment of Clan Cumming left to guard the castle were upon them. Fierce and desperate was that fight, for the Leslies, caught between two hostile clans, could only sell their lives as dearly as possible, and down on the struggling masses of men swept the wild and furious MacIntoshes. The shores of the loch were wild confusion, the pealing of the war pipes, the shouts of slogans and rallying calls, the shrieks of the wounded and dying, the whiz of the cross-bow bolts through the air, made an utter Pandemonium under the calm cold moonlight.

Beatrix, sleeping with her boy beside her, was wakened by the din. Well she knew the slogans of the clans, and heard the "Grip Fast" with much apprehension, relieved somewhat when the joyous shout of the Cummings overpowered it. A cross-bow shaft whizzed through the window and buried itself in the opposite wall. She sat up and listened, hoping to hear Alasdair's battle-cry. Then a second shaft, following the first, struck her temple and she fell back dead, without a moan or sigh. Dame Gow coming in to take care of her charge, found her lying peaceful as though asleep, with the baby sleeping beside her. Hurriedly she caught up the boy and fled. Unperceived in the confusion, she got a boat and crossed the loch, and took her way down the Spey to some of her own people. She doubted not that Alasdair had been killed in the savage fight, and to her faithful old soul but one duty seemed clear and prominent, to save the boy by all means.

Thus it chanced that when Alasdair and Eochain came down from Blervie to Lochindorbh the following day, there lay a guard of dead men of three clans around the castle, keeping watch and ward over a dead women who lay within, and the silence of death lay over all.

So Cecily slept her last sleep in the Dune of Callifer, and many long years after, when the Dune was demolished for the sake of the stones, wherewith the farmers around built their dykes, they were astonished to find a heap of bleached human bones lying within, and great was the speculation of the learned on the subject.

Beatrix sleeps at Lochindorbh, waiting, as one believes, and as she ever hoped, for her beloved Alasdair to join her. But Alasdair and Eochain pass for the time out of all mortal ken. It is supposed they went together on pilgrimage. And as years went on Robert Reid, the Sub-Dean, became Abbot of Kinloss, and the best and greatest, as he was the last of all the Abbots, and he sought earnestly for Alasdair, whom he loved greatly for the sake of help given to his father on the field of Flodden. And so men say it came about that, after years had passed by, there grew up a tiny hermitage in the woods above Burgle, where dwelt two anchorites, accounted of rare sanctity; yet never would they join the Church, or associate themselves with any Order, but professed to follow the pure faith of the Master as He had taught it. And the elder died, and the younger laid him in the grave behind their little cell. And some years later, as the news of the world filtered through, came tidings of a Cumming who had done bravely in the service of the lovely and unfortunate Queen Mary, and been knighted on the field. And then the old Hermit raised his dim eyes and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."

THE END

EPILOGUE

TO WHERE BEYOND THESE VOICES THERE IS PEACE

This tale now merges into history. The identity of the young knight may be easily traced by anyone familiar with the history of the time, and all know how that last raid of the MacIntoshes was the occasion of the organising of Clan Chattan, and the final breaking of the power of the most dreaded raiders and reivers of the north. Sir Wilfred Dunbar died without issue, and the tower of Blervie passed to a cousin, whose descendants held it for long, preserving only very dim traditions of the Wizard Laird. The end of Kinloss Abbey and the preaching of Luther's doctrines in Scotland is known to all.

How far the forecasts of poor Cecily and of Eochain Beag will be fulfilled, is yet to be seen.

Farquhar Cumming, the second son of Sir Alexander of Altyre, became Chief of the Dallas Cummings; but the friction between Dallas and Altyre was never healed, but grew more intense, till the Chief of Dallas renounced the name of Cumming altogether; and for many generations his descendants bore the name of Farquharson.

Any reader who cares to follow the story further will find it all in the records of the town of Forres, in the Muniment room at Freuchie (now Castle Grant), or in the records of Kinloss, or of the Altyre Cummings at Gordonstown. But the key to much that is hard to follow and understand, will be found in the story of Alasdair Cumming and his uncle, and their gallant fight for the soul of a witch.