

ways tell you everything, Granddad. I always have, haven't I?"

For answer Duncan drew the little figure to his side and held her tight, as though he feared some danger. After a little he said, brokenly and with effort:

"Aimee, lang, lang ago, when you was a wee bairn, I said to myself, 'Duncan,' says I, 'stay on the hills and rear that wee jewel away fra' all the sin o' the world, an' keep her untouched by evil, and when she's grown up she'll be a comfort to ye in yer auld age; she's all ye've got to cling to now or in the future.' So I just settles down ag'in, an' teaches ye to love me, and ye soon became the very light o' me e'en. Then, dearie, when ye began to prattle yer wee lubbies' talk, it nigh sent me daft wi' joy."

He paused again, and tears slowly trickled down his withered cheeks. Then he continued:

"Aweel, ye went on makin' sunshine fur me. An' later on the joy it was to see yer bonnie een light up when the auld man cam' hame tired to his bit dinner; an' to feel yer wee soft arms around my neck an' yer sweet voice a-singin' sae sweet about yon bit hame." A low moan came from under Duncan's arm, then—

"Oh, Granddad, why do you say all them things and be so sad? Isn't things always to go on the same as ever? An' if you're not happy here, why can't we go home agsin? I'm just langin' to see my birds and chicks again." Then she added:

"I couldn't help the man giving me that, Granddad. Oh, you know I couldn't." And Aimee burst into tears.

"I wasn't cross wi' ye, my ain wee birdie. O' course ye couldn't help it. Aweel, give yer auld granddad a kiss, and we'll just be gettin' on to Rose Cottage, an' see what the little woman's got fur supper; something tasty, I'll warrant."

Aimee kissed her grandfather, and smiled through her tears. It was an effort to do so, for the poor girl felt depressed with a vague unrest. A feeling that things would never be quite the same again oppressed her, and for the rest of the evening she sat quietly in the corner, watching her grandfather with a wistfulness that was quite pathetic. The same feeling, in a measure, was shared by Duncan, but he tried to put it from him, and his cheerfulness was restored, as Aimee, with her keener woman's instinct, knew. The knowledge made her unhappy, and for the first time in her life she went to bed and could not sleep.

When Duncan retired to his little room next to Aimee's all his cheerfulness vanished, and he dropped dejectedly into a chair, leaned his elbows on his knees, and buried his face in his hands. A sully half an hour passed before he changed his posture; then, with a drawn, anxious look, he rose and blew out the candle.

"I must think," he muttered to himself, "and save the bairn at any cost. Even if he was a single man he'd never wedder, nor would I let her if he would. But he's the devil himsel'—report ain't exaggerated about that." And to think I was so easy took in—me, a Scotchman, an' always reckoned sharp. He either didn't go to Wellington to catch the mail boat, or he came back from there, an' he's been skulkin' around after my ewe lamb, poor, wee, bonnie lamb."

Another long pause followed these reflections, and then he quietly removed his boots and threw himself on his bed without undressing. Next morning he awoke to find his beloved grandchild bending anxiously over him with a cup of tea in her hand.

"Hey, dearie, what's up?"

"Oh, Granddad, what is worrying you so? You've never undressed, an' I heard you up so late last night; but you mustn't speak till you've drunk this nice cup o' tea."

Duncan took the tea and drank it at a draught. As he set down the cup he drew Aimee over and kissed her.

"Aimee, tell me, are ye happy wi' me, dearie, an' content to go on the same as ever on the hills?"

"Happy? Content? Why, I'm langin' to go home again, Granddad; langin' ever so."

"Poor girl, she thought, she was, but in reality she was ready to make any sacrifice to please her grandfather. But then she loved him more than anything on earth. He had been all sufficient for her until now, and she thought he was still. She could not understand the strange feeling of unrest that possessed her. Duncan looked keenly at her as though he would read her very soul. She bore the scrutiny without flushing, and his appeared satisfied.

"I lay down wi' my clothes on; I was a bit worried like, thinkin' as ye wouldn't be happy up yonder again. An' now I've made up my mind to sell the sheep an' the wee bit house, and shift up country. How will ye like that, Aimee?"

"That'll be splendid, Granddad," and Aimee clapped her hands with affected glee. "When shall we go? But don't sell Humpty-Dumpty, please, Granddad." Humpty-Dumpty was her pet lamb, a name she had given it from one of the few picture books she had possessed when a child, and which were still prized.

"No," replied Duncan, "I won't sell it, nor the birds, nor Dodger. An' we'll have to keep Bosa; she's a good one, and yields a deal more milk than t'other one we sold."

CHAPTER IX.

THE NEW HOME.

Before going out with Aimee to call on his old friends, the Joneses, Duncan just remembered the note in his pocket. Drawing it out, he opened it, and slowly read aloud:

"My Dear Child,—Can I see you alone for a few minutes? I wish to give you a little keepsake in memory of our meeting on Port Hills. I will be at the cottage gate at eight o'clock to-morrow evening. I saw you in Cashel-street yesterday, and followed you, intending to speak, but remembered in time that your grandfather would not like it. I am sorry he does not like me, but I hope you do not share the unkind feeling towards your friend.—B.L."

The old man's hand shook with agitation as he crushed the paper; then he struck a match and burnt it. Just then Aimee came in with her hat on, and although she saw the burnt paper she said nothing.

"Ain't you ready, Granddad, dear? I've been waiting ever so long. Are we going to have dinner at the Joneses?" She tried to look interested as she perched herself on the side of the bed, and wondered what had been written on the burnt paper.

"After all, Aimee, I don't think we'll go to Papanui to-day; I ain't feeling so well," and the old man passed his hand wearily across his brow. "I think as we'll be gettin' hame again, and fix up the bit place fur auction; then we'll come back and have a longer spell on our way up country."

An idea had suddenly occurred to Aimee since receiving Langstone's note that she would like to learn to read and write. Previously she had not favoured the idea when her grandfather had suggested it, but now a great longing to learn possessed her.

"Granddad, won't you lie down if you don't feel well? You didn't have any sleep last night, you know; and then, if you feel better, this afternoon 'plains we could go an' peep into one o' them big schools where all the children are learning to read and write."

"Aye, we can do that, lassie; but I'll no lie down just now. I've got some business to see to, so I'll leave you with Mrs. Miller for an hour or two," and, kissing her tenderly, he left the house.

When he returned he did not forget Aimee's wish, and after the mid-day dinner the two proceeded along the Belt, which brought them to Richmond, and, turning into the Stannmore road, they found themselves close to the Public School. The couple attracted much attention. The fair young girl, just budding into womanhood, although unconscious of the fact, with her short curls and large, limpid eyes looking out from under beautifully marked brows, and the old Tam-o'-shanter; the old man, tall, gaunt, with a nose like an eagle's, and piercing, deep-set eyes under shaggy white brows, pursed up lips, and clean-shaven, rugged face, on every feature of which individuality was strongly stamped. Stealing into the school-yard, they entered the porch and peeped in. At first they were unobserved, but after a few minutes one of the teachers came forward and inquired their business.

"I'm only fur lettin' the wee bairn have a peep, meen; we're down for a bit holiday, ye ken, an' an' she's never seen inside a school afore."

The young lady smiled, and, taking Aimee by the hand, led her into the school, and offered the old man a chair. Aimee was delighted with the singing, but the lessons tried her a little. They confused her mind, and she was glad to be once more outside in the free, cool air.

"Well, Aimee, so ye've been in school, an' how do ye like it?"

"Not much, Granddad; it's too craney-up. I don't want to go to school, but I do want to learn to read and write."

"That 'minds me, Aimee, that we've just got time to walk to High-street, an' buy ye some lesson books."

They crossed the Stannmore Bridge, and turned to the right along Avon-side, then crossed the East Belt into Armagh-street. For the time being they appeared to have forgotten their depression, and chatted gaily to each other until they turned into Colombo-street. Then, all at once, Aimee stood still, her eyes riveted on a man who was walking on the opposite side of the street.

Duncan was a few yards ahead before he noticed that Aimee was not at his side, and he turned round in some alarm. Just then Aimee recollected herself, and hastened up to him.

"Ye musn't lag, Aimee, ye might get lost, dearie. What were ye lookin' at sae scared like?"

"I—at least, the people make me sort of silly, Granddad, and I forget what I'm doing."

It was the first time she had equivocated when asked a question, and it was solely for her grandfather's sake that she did so. She would much rather have discussed the subject of her thoughts with him; indeed, she was longing to do so, but dared not.

"Aweel, we're not fur off the shop now," said Duncan, as he took hold of the girl's arm.

They soon reached the shop, and, to the old man's surprise, Aimee showed very little interest in the purchases. After paying for the books, Duncan said:

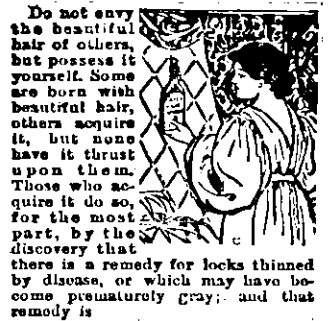
"Come along, lassie. Poor wee bairn, she's tired out," and, tucking the little brown hand under his arm, they made their way back to Rose Cottage.

Christmas had come and gone, and the Hills knew the old man and the girl no more. They were now settled far up country, in an out-of-the-way place called Salt Water Creek, and had already resumed their usual occupations. Duncan had a large piece of ground under cultivation, and Aimee had her pets and flower garden, which had been a source of pride to the previous tenant. Roses covered the picturesque little cottage, hung over the doors, and peeped lovingly into Aimee's bedroom window, while huge boxes of mignonette adorned the sills. Apparently there had been done to make the girl's life happy all that a loving heart and willing hands could do. There was even a pony, which Duncan had bought with a view to bringing in his products to the city, and which Aimee was learning to ride. It had been offered to Duncan for a few pounds, and he decided to buy it and teach Aimee to ride. Later on he intended to get a spring cart, but not just yet, for he had crippled himself a little through his change of residence. And so matters continued for three months.

Election Curiosities.

Two curiosities are recorded by the London papers in connection with the recent election. In the annual election of one-third of the members of the Chiswick Urban District Council, Mr. E. Stone and Mr. Arthur Buckingham, the two candidates for the vacancy in the Old Chiswick Ward, entered into an agreement not to canvass the electors, either personally or by agent; not to print or cause to be printed, or cause to be exhibited in any house or window, any window-card or bill seeking votes; and not to use on the polling-day any vehicle for the conveyance of voters to the poll. The penalty for any breach of this agreement was the payment by the offender of the whole of the election expenses of the other, the agreement to be null and void in the event of any other candidate being nominated for the ward. No other candidate was nominated, and the conditions of the agreement were faithfully observed. Mr. Stone was returned by 304 votes to 120.

In the West Ward and Finchley, Messrs. Bennett and Harveyson tied for second place on the poll with 355 votes each. Mr. Harveyson was the sitting member. The retiring officer declined to give his casting vote, and the two names were written down and put in a policeman's helmet. The one drawn, by a police-sergeant, was the slip of paper bearing Mr. Bennett's name, and Mr. Bennett was declared elected.



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