

hands also were tied behind me. The red pulsing glow had vanished, but between me and the faintly-lit grey sky I could see a tall dark figure which moved purposefully about. Presently I found myself dragged to my feet and thrust rudely forward. I tried to unmake my captor understand that I could not walk; but as I could not speak, I could only do this by lying down and utterly refusing to proceed. Then my captor drew a lantern from behind a heather bush and flashed it upon my face.

As he did so I held up my foot and endeavoured by sign to show where and how it was hurt. But I was utterly unprepared for what my captor did next. He took me by the arms and laid me over his shoulders, pulling the plaid which he wore about my body as a kind of supporting belt. Then with slow steady strides he began to descend the hill. I suffered agonies lest we should both fall, and my ankle pained me till I nearly wept with sheer agony.

At last, with a fling of his foot, my captor threw aside a door, stepped down a short ladder, and I found myself stretched upon some straw. Then a candle was lit, and the flame, sinking to nothing and rising again, presently illuminated a little barn half-filled with sheaves and fodder. Upon a heap of the latter I was lying, with my head away from the door.

"So," said he who had brought me, "I have enticed ye, sirrah!"

I saw my man now—a tall old patriarch with abundant grizzled hair, his face clean-shaven and having a fringe of grey beard beneath the chin. His expression was stern, even fierce, and the eyes, under bushy eyebrows that were still raven-black, looked out undimmed by years and unsoftened by pity. It was a mediaeval almost a savage countenance; even so, I thought, might Rob Roy himself have looked in his wilder moments. I had to recur to my wounded foot to convince myself that I had left a nineteenth century railway station less than ten hours before.

Was it possible that this was the reason why my uncle did not visit his Galloway tenants? And did this one wish to square a deficiency in his rent by making an end of his landlord?

But the old man did not offer to touch me again, not even to release me from my bonds. He simply threw a few empty corn-sacks over me, removed my gag, picked up the lantern and went out with these words: "Bide ye there, my man, till I am ready for you!"

But whether he went to dig my grave or take his supper I could not make out; though the speculation was not without some elements of interest. At any rate he locked the door behind him, and I was left alone in the black blank darkness of the barn.

It was poor enough cheer, and I began to shiver with the cold of the moss hugs in my bones. Whether that exercise helped to loosen the bonds about my wrists I know not—perhaps they were hastily tied. At any rate it was not long before I had my hands loose. Then I could take the knotted handkerchief with its short cross-knuckle of bog-oak out of my mouth. But I could do no more to make myself easy. My foot and ankle were already terribly painful, and the latter, as I could feel with my hand, had swollen almost to double its usual size.

After that I cannot tell very well what happened for some time. It may seem impossible, but I think that I slept—at least, certain it is that the night passed somehow, between dozing and shivering. Hot flushes passed over me, with wafts of that terrible feeling of "falling away" which precedes fever.

When I awoke in the morning, it seemed that I saw a young girl sitting opposite me on the edge of an overturned bushel measure. She had her chin in the hollow of her palm. Yet my head was so whirled about with the trouble which was on me that I could not be sure, till she rose and came close to me with a pitying look in her eyes. Then I tried to think of something to say to her which might explain who I was, and how I came thither. For I began to be sure there had been some mistake.

However I could think of nothing but what day it was. So I said to her as she approached, in the most commonplace way possible, "I wish you a merry Christmas."

Yet all the time I knew very well that I was making a consummate fool of myself. The girl seemed checked at my words. She stopped, and then, touched perhaps by the ridiculous anomaly of my appearance and my commonplace greeting, she burst into a ringing peal of laughter. I think I laughed too a little, but I am not sure. When next I came to myself I was being supported upon clouds, or down, or at least by something equally pleasant and soft, whereat I opened my eyes and there was the girl, bending over me and trying to get some hot liquid down my throat out of a long thin-stemmed glass.

As soon as she saw that I was conscious she said, "Are you the excise officer from Port Mary who has been watching my great-uncle?"

"No," said I, "my name is Henry Grierson; I come from London. Where am I?"

But she sat up with a face of great horror.

"Not the excise man? Why, you are never Hal Grierson—my cousin?"

"That is my name," I said, steeled by the situation. "I came to look for a grandfather I never knew I possessed till a week or two ago! His name is John Arrol, and he lives at the Cothouse of Curlywee!"

The girl smiled a little. "This is the Cothouse of Curlywee, and my great-uncle mistook you for a gauger—an excise man. It is a mercy he did not kill you. But wait. I will bring him. He will be sorry."

By this time I had forgotten the pain in my head, and I was none so eager for the presence of my terrible relative.

"Please wait a moment. I want to ask your name," I said, looking up at her.

"My name is Elsa Arrol," she answered frankly and in a cultivated manner. "My father used to live here during the last years of his life, and when he died I had to leave school in Edinburgh and come to Curlywee to keep house for my great-uncle."

"Then you are my cousin?" I said with some eagerness.

"Yes, a cousin of a sort: not a first cousin."

And even then I was glad somehow of so much kinship.

"Will you shake hands with your new cousin before you go?" I said.

"I will do better," she answered, flitting down from the edge of the corn now where she had seated herself. "This is Christmas Day, and the cobwebs on the roof will serve for mistletoe."

And soft as a snowflake I was aware of a waft of perfumed air, and something that might have been a butterfly and might have been a pair of lips alighted to my forehead for a moment.

"There! You will think I am a bold madman, but you are ill and deserve a better greeting than a handshake after what you have gone through."

Again I was left alone, but not for long. I saw the fierce old man again in the doorway, his brow still gloomy, though it was no longer angry.

"This lass tells me you are not the Port Mary gauger," he said with a hard accent. "That you come from London. Is this true?"

"It is," said I briefly, for I thought of the knuckle of bog oak between my jaws.

"Then what might you be doing on my hill at midnight of a winter's night?"

"Well," I returned with some point, "it is in a way my hill also. At least if it be a part of the property of Curlywee left me by my uncle, the late Walter Arrol, of Higbgate."

"What!" he cried a little hoarsely. "Ye are never my Annie's boy—see Harry Grierson?"

"The same," I said, still curtly, for I wanted to see how he would extricate himself. He stood frowning awhile and stripping the piles from a head of corn.

"Ye will not misunderstand me if I confess that I am grieved for what has happened," he said, with a certain stern and manifest dignity of bearing which became him. "I am sorry, not because ye are now my landlord and I your tenant and debtor, but because I have made a mistake and showed but poor hospitality to the wayfaring

man."

"Say no more about it," I answered, "but give me a bed to lie down on and a pillow for my head, for I am very ill."

The old man lifted me in his arms like a child and carried me into his own room, where he laid me down. Then with a skill, patience, and tenderness I could not have believed possible he undressed me and laid me on his own bed. When this was done he called Elsa and she brought hot water to bathe my swollen ankle, now in girth well-nigh as thick as my thigh. He said not a word more about his rough treatment of me, nor did he mention his son, my late uncle, nor yet the quarrel which had separated them in life.

All that strange Christmas Day I was light-headed, and these two gave me brews of a certain herb-tee, famed in Galloway as a febrifuge. I dozed off to find my cousin Elsa still unwearily pouring hot water over my foot, or coming in with a new poultice of marshmallow leaves in her hands. I suppose I must have talked a great deal of nonsense. Indeed, Elsa told me afterwards that I made a great many very personal remarks upon her eyes and hair, which made her blush for shame before her great-uncle.

I found myself somewhat better, however, the next morning, and was able to join in the exercise of family worship, which my grandfather conducted at great length, reading two or three chapters of names and genealogies out of the historical books of the Old Testament, in a loud, harsh voice, as if he had a spite against them. Then reverently laying the great Bible aside, he stood up to pray. I noticed that as he did so he smoothed his grey badger's brush of hair down on top as if it were a part of the ceremony.

When he had finished praying my grandfather stood awhile, and then sat down beside me.

"Elsa," he said, "will you betake yourself to the kitchen for a space? I have something to say to this young man that is only for a man and a kinsman to hear."

My cousin obediently vanished. I never heard so lightly a footfall.

"Now, sir," said the old man, "you have been brought up in another school, and may misunderstand. But I must 'e'en tak' the risk of that. Did your uncle give you any religious training?"

"He never mentioned the subject to me, sir!" I said. For my uncle, though a good man, had been neither churchgoer nor church lover.

"Are you a true Presbyterian, then? Or are ye one of the worshippers of the Scarlet Woman that sitteth upon the Seven Hills?"

"I have not really thought much about it," I replied. "I am a Christian—I believe I may say that—though indeed I have no claims to be thought better than my neighbours—indeed the contrary!"

"Then," said the old man, frowning. "I fear ye are no better than a heathen man and a publican."

"But," I cried, "was there not one born this Christmas Day who was partial to the company of publicans and sinners?"

"I thought I had him there, but he evaded me."

"That is in the New Testament!" he retorted, somewhat disparagingly. "You will not understand, but listen. I am an old Cameronian, as my fathers were before me. No one of us has ever owned an uncoventanted King. Arrols not a few have gone to prison and to judgment because we wouldn't bow the knee to tyranny in the land and preley in the Kirk. I had never paid a King's cess or tax till the law distracted upon my goods. And I have continued to bake my bread and brew my drink as my fathers did before me. And who shall say me nay? Not any gauger that ever tapped a barrel!"

"I certainly had no intention of doing so, but all the same it seemed a curious thing to have smuggling and illicit distilling thus put, as it were, upon a religious basis. The old man continued:

"Therefore it was that I mistook ye for the spy of the Queen's Excise. I had watched the pair craiter nosing about the hill-tops for a day or two. I fear I used you somewhat roughly in my haste. For that I ask your pardon."

I hastened to assure him that I never bore a grudge. He thrust out his hand at the word.

"No more do I," he said; quickly adding, however, "that is, no after it is satisfied!"

It was thus that I spent my Christmas Day in the Cothouse of Curlywee. It was three weeks more before I could leave my chair, and a month before I was able to return south to business. So that it was well my uncle had left competent men in charge. During this time, not unaccountably I saw a good deal of my cousin. I thought her every day more charming, as she certainly grew more beautiful. As for my grandfather, he used to lie out upon the brae-faces with a long spy-glass, looking for the "excise man from Port Mary." But that gentleman showed the excellence of his judgment by obstinately staying away.

When at last I set out over the moor towards the station, I rode upon a strong sheltie. Elsa came with me part of the way, to "convey me off the ground," as she said.

At our parting-place I asked her a certain question, which at first she refused to answer directly. Afterwards she stated that she had conscientious scruples about the marriage of cousins and other near relatives. However, I am not without the strongest reasons for hoping that these objections are not insuperable, and that they will be overcome by next Christmas Eve. Already I have observed tokens of wavering. But in any case we will not tell my grandfather till the last moment, for where he will get a housekeeper to dwell alone in the Cothouse of Curlywee is more than either of us can tell. Meantime I am grateful for all that my Christmas Eve search for a grandfather has brought me, and still more for what it promises to bring.

(The End.)

**Mathematically Correct.**

She was rather proud of her waist, and intimated that he couldn't guess the measure of it.

"I can give it within the fraction of an inch," he replied.

"And he did."

"Someone must have told you!" she exclaimed.

"Wrong!" he answered.

"Then how did you guess it?" she asked.

"I didn't guess it," he said. "I happen to know the length of my arm."

Then, with one exception, everyone laughed. The one exception blushed.

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