Storm

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Title: Storm
Date of first publication: 1925
Author: Henry James Halliwell Sutcliffe (1870-1932)
Date first posted: Dec. 6, 2020
Date last updated: Dec. 6, 2020
Faded Page eBook #20201214

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, John Routh & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at https://www.pgdpcanada.net

STORM

BY

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"SHAMELESS WAYNE," "RICROFT OF WITHENS,"
"WRACK OF DOOM," ETC.

FOURTH EDITION

London
John Long, Ltd.
12, 13 & 14 Norris Street, Haymarket

Made and
Printed in
Great Britain

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Storm

CHAPTER I

THE THREE GAUNT MEN

I

Hardcastle, Master of Logie, came swinging up the last of the stiff miles that climbed from Norbrigg market-town to the high uplands. October's mists had lain heavy on the lowlands, but here on the tops he strode into sunlight and clean, nipping air.

Grim and lean, toughened by many sorts of weather, Hardcastle paused to get breath again, and looked out across the lonely acres that stretched to the four quarters of a blue and amber sky. Ahead of him, bordering the roadway, he saw the straggling clumps of houses known as Weathersett. A brave, storm-battered village, keeping watch above the mines that once fed its people, it wore a comrade's look to Hardcastle. So did the barren pastures, roaming out and over between their grey stone fences to the gateways that gaped across the hill-tops.

His thoughts were busy with all that lay hidden in these broken lands—unfenced mines, their waters brimming deep—caves, wandered through in boyhood, that had set their spell of mystery and dread on all his after life. It was a haunted land, as all folk knew, and in its old mine-workings lurked trolls and ancient goblins.

His glance roamed down to another village—not reared high like Weathersett, but skulking in a lowland hollow on the far side of the benty waste. He forgot trolls and all their phantom kindred. They were unsubstantial, but the people who lived there in Garsykes village were flesh and blood and a standing menace to the country-side.

A strange look stole across Hardcastle's face. Contempt, antagonism, the shadow of some restless fear, followed each other as he stood watching Garsykes; for distrust of its folk had been in his mother's milk, and in the tales passed down for generations.

They had many by-names, like all tribes greatly feared. Men of the Wilderness, some called them; others the Broken People, or the Lost Company. Names of that sort were no more than wind in the reeds.

The stark truth remained that Garsykes village was the abiding-place of every rogue about the fells. Sheep stealers had foregathered there since time out of mind—men who had done murder on the high fells—lesser rogues who had snatched purses at village fairs, and come breathless from pursuit. Such pursuit ended always on the verge of Garsykes, for none but vagabonds dared enter.

Hardcastle remembered his father's downright struggle against the tribute these Lost Folk levied on the country-side. They were a small village then, but had grown big on what they fed on, till nowadays even strapping farmers paid toll for a safe home-coming.

Hardcastle swung down the road till a turning of the way showed him suddenly the whole, wide front of the highlands that stepped out to his own Logie country.

Pengables caught the mellow sunlight, and his rocks were softened till they showed like some misty castle seen in dreams. The brackens were on fire, and slender rowans crimsoned up to the wise, stalwart pines that fringed the moor.

This was a man's land, wide, free-striding, its shoulders pushing up to freedom and the sky. It had fathered and mothered his orphaned life. He knew its every dell and furrow, and from the heart of it a crisp, sweet breeze ran out in greeting.

He went down the lone track—past Drumly Ghyll, where Riding Nevison had leaped his horse from cliff to cliff in half-forgotten days—and came to the bend that showed Langerton below him, a hamlet clustered round its water-mill. He could almost hear the mill-wheel droning—a goblin that toiled underground, to his awed boyish fancy—a goblin still, though manhood had killed many pleasant, eerie fears of that sort.

Hardcastle, not knowing why, halted in his stride, and stood looking out across the waste. If the hills were brown and steadfast washed by rain and sun, below him lurked the mines, the bogs that sucked a man down, dragging at him till limb by limb the chill ooze chained him. And there were the Wilderness Men, whose enmity was a dread thing to earn.

A stab of fear took him unawares as if one of the Stealthy People had crept on him from behind. He shook it off, telling himself that the dread was

part of his heritage of Logie. A grown man must learn to shake off nursery tales.

The swart, russet face of the land, crowned by Pengables, stood friend to him as he went down the twisting road; and it was in his heart to clear these lusty acres of the scum that hindered them. It was in his heart still when he came past Mathison's pinfold, where in summer they gathered flocks for sheep washing.

Out of the pinfold came three gaunt men, and straddled across the road, barring it to him. They were unwashen, shifty folk to look at, and they asked tribute.

"I owe none," said Hardcastle, with rough contempt.

"We're Wilderness Folk," said Long Murgatroyd, the tallest of the three.

Again fear played about the Master of Logie, from long habit—played for an instant, and was gone.

"How much would content you?" he asked, as if willing to drive a sober bargain.

"As much as you've got," snarled Murgatroyd.

Hardcastle was beginning to see red, dancing lights between the gaunt men and himself, was ceasing to count the odds. "You shall have it."

The three leered at each other. "What did I tell you?" asked one of them. "Nobody dare touch the Master of Logie, we said. Oh, we'd best go wide of the Master, we snivelled. But he's frog-livered too, like the rest of his dalesmen."

Hardcastle backed quietly to the open gateway of the pinfold, and stood in front of it. He had room to swing his arms, and the three must come at him one at a time or not at all.

"Come, take all I've got of muscle," he said. "It's waiting for you."

The Lost Folk were happier when they fought in numbers against few; but now the biggest of the three saw, too, the red, dancing lights and made at Hardcastle. The bleak, well-matched fight went this way and that. Neither spared nor hoped to be spared. The world was narrowed to the limit of blows that thudded out into the breeze. Then Hardcastle swept his left arm round, as it might have been a hammer, and his man went down, and lay still, and cursed no more.

The Master of Logie had given tribute, enough and to spare. His face was wealed and broken, his body hammered out of shape. The men left were wondering how to take him—for the pinfold wall would not let both make at him together—when Hardcastle settled all doubts for them. Fury was on him now. He sprang forward before they guessed his purpose, gripped them with either hand and brought their heads together with a dizzy crash. He stood a moment looking at them as they lay beside Long Murgatroyd, and wondered at his strength. Then he went down the road, with a song at his heart. Whatever stoop to pride the dalesmen made each market day when they paid tribute, the pride of Logie went secure.

II

Hardcastle halted by and by, for a backward glance at the Wilderness, and still the glow of victory was with him. Battle was up in earnest now between Logie and the Broken Folk. There could be no withdrawal, whichever way it ended.

"A terrible land for thieves, Master," said a quiet voice at his elbow.

Hardcastle turned sharply, to find his own shepherd, Brant, beside him.

"Why, Stephen, you're wide of the home pastures—and you've a gun for company, instead of a stick and a grizzled collie."

Short, thick-set and sturdy, Brant had the eyes of those who journey on far hill-tops, living alone with sheep and dogs and weather.

"You've heard of Storm's doings lately?"

"News filters through, but I've little use for gossip—especially of friends."

"Aye, you were always partial to Storm, and I fair loved the dog myself. Best of his kind, he was—knew how to round ewes up the pastures like a marvel—till he fell from grace."

"We all do, Stephen, time and time."

"You're partial to him, as I said. But a dog that takes to worrying sheep, and feeding on 'em, is a cannibal—eats his own flesh-and-blood, as you might say."

"You trained him to be jealous, Brant?"

"Shepherds do. A dog that's any man's dog means as much as a bunch of windle-straws."

"Yet I could always whistle him from your side."

"Aye," growled the shepherd— "and see what comes of it. A sheep-stealer, he, and me with a gun in my hands. That's what is coming to Storm, for I've news of him this way."

"Then likely he's back in the Logie country by this time. Either way, bad luck to your shooting, Stephen."

"There seems bad luck to your riding, Master," said the shepherd dryly, "or you'd not be footing it from Norbrigg. It's not natural, like, to see you without feet in stirrups."

"The mare went lame, and I had to leave her."

"Was there no nag to be borrowed, then?"

"There was, but I sit astride my own horse, or none."

Brant looked over the wastes, then at the Master's face. Old days and new were nagging at him with their memories.

"Like yourself, and always a little bit liker as the years pass. What of Garsykes yonder?" he broke off.

"Well?" asked Hardcastle, blunt and hard.

"It's no way well. A festering sore I call'm, and our farmers tame as lice."

"Tamer. They haven't a bite at all."

A silence came to Brant. He had dared to speak of the Lost Folk, here in the broken lands, and suddenly he remembered boyhood's days. When he was spoiling for mischief, he was told he'd be tossed to the Wilderness Folk, and never come out again. In later years he had heard his elders speak of paying tribute to the Lost People—*lest worse befell*. And now the old stealthy menace seemed to creep about him as his glance sought the broken lands again.

"The devil take us, Master," grumbled Brant.

"It's likely he will, all in good time—but why just now?"

Brant scratched his wiry beard and pondered. Hill silences had taught him to be wary of speech when deep-hidden feelings sought outlet. "Because we're content to let this shame go on," he said at last. "It's hard to unravel, this fear of the Lost Folk. I'm small myself, but most of our men—

yeomen, and hinds, and what not—could make a meal of any two such lean swine as they breed Garsykes way."

"Yet they don't, Brant. They just unfasten their pockets and give tribute."

"They'll be asking tribute of you one day soon," said the shepherd, after another restless silence. "And what then?"

"*They've asked it*, Stephen. Hadn't you seen my face was a trifle out of shape?"

"Oh, I'd seen; but it was not my place to ask what private diversion you'd been finding Norbrigg way."

Hardcastle laughed outright at Brant's gravity, that hid a dry humour of its own. "I gave more than I took, Stephen."

"Then a bonny mess t'others must be in. Who were they, Master?"

"Long Murgatroyd and two I didn't know."

Fire kindled suddenly in the shepherd's eyes. "It *had* to come, and I'm glad its come. Garsykes gets past itself these days!"

"How many will stand for Logie, now the feud's up?"

"Me for one, and another here and there. I wouldn't count on many—but it's the staunch few that matter—and, Master, fear will reach you by and by. Never heed it though it will be cold as east wind before the snows come."

"Fear?" said Hardcastle, body and heart aglow with memory of blows taken and given for Logie's honour.

"Aye, just fear. I've heard my fore-elders talk of what happens to a man that thwarts the Lost Folk. And now I'll give you good-day. It's time I put a dollop of lead into Storm. It would rankle when my time came to go, if I'd left a sheep-killer rife about the fells."

III

For a mile or so after leaving Brant the glow of victory stayed with Hardcastle; and after that he thought that his feet began to tire. Soon he knew it was his heart that was tiring, and his spirit. Already fear was weaving unclean spells about him. What had his nurse told of the Lost Folk when they put their token on a man? What had ancient farmers told him? He was no longer his own master but thrall to terrors bred in the womb of generations.

Fancy began to play strange tricks. Hardened to life and weather he might be; but he was no match for the unseen hordes of fear that came about him. The sweat broke out on Hardcastle, fighting longer odds than three men against one. It was only shame of his fear that got some sort of manhood into him, and a rough courage that was friendless and utterly alone. He learned then what Brant had meant when he spoke of dread, cold as east wind with snow behind it.

"Aye," growled Hardcastle, "but Brant has his dog with him for comfort, and I've none."

He forgot that Brant's dog had taken lately to unlawful ways, till at a corner of the road he came face to face with Storm himself—an outlaw, every inch and line of him, standing at bay. His hide was matted and uncouth, for pursuit had given him little time to tend himself. His teeth were bared, and every man his foe.

They stood there for a moment, not knowing that the whole Dale's safety might rest on what came of this chance meeting.

"Storm," said Hardcastle, "I've no fear of your teeth, my lad."

The culprit only growled, till Hardcastle came to him and patted his tousled head. Then he yielded a little to old liking for this man who seemed honest, with no snare in wait for him.

"Best come home with me to Logie. Brant has a gun in his hand out yonder, and he's seeking you."

Storm glanced about him with restless eyes that looked for peril, and then sought Hardcastle's face again. If he had not learned the trick of human speech, he knew its meaning. He was asked to get into shelter of a decent homestead, after weeks of vagabond roaming. His limbs were full of aches, caught in the marshes when he lay hidden from foes too many for him. He was wearied-out, and there were good meals to be had at Logie, as he had learned in the prosperous times when Brant used to take him to the Master's kitchen. But he was afraid of houses these days.

"Come," said Hardcastle, with sharp command.

The sheep-slayer answered his bidding, and together they went down and up to the autumn land till they reached Logie Brigg. Its arch stretched wide and slender over the peat-brown waters of Wharfe River—the bridge that Clifford of Skipton had crossed long ago on his way to Flodden Field.

The Master of Logie could never cross the bridge but he halted for remembrance of what it meant to him—that old dream of Clifford, hale at sixty, going into unknown hardship across the Border. The Hardcastle of that day, with his men, had joined the march, and won renown; and to this last descendant of the race there was staunch, abiding glamour in the recollection. Hard, embittered, working grimly forward day by day, two beacon-lights showed through the gloom—love of Wharfe River, and memory of Clifford jangling over-bridge with singing Dalesmen.

He had no joy of these to-day, strive as he might to capture the song of Logie Brigg. Courage had taken the horsemen and the footmen over, in the brave days gone. Now he was here—a Hardcastle last of them all—eating into mind and heart—fear of the Lost Folk he despised. He had given too much to the battle at Mathison's pinfold and the back-rush of it left him weak and spent. The Lost Folk would strike soon or late—strike from behind—and it would be a dreary waiting time.

"Storm," he said, "there's not a penny to choose between us. We're both of us outlawed, and we fear every creak of a tree-branch."

The sheep-stealer would not have it so. He had the dog's instinct for what went homeward over Logie Brigg, unheard by Hardcastle—tramp of the feet of Flodden Men, returning to the house of Logie now it was in peril. He turned to see them pass; a great company. Then he drew closer still to Hardcastle, and licked his hands, and tried to lick his face.

"You're a dreamer, lad," said Hardcastle. "How can all be well—with *that* behind us? There's Brant with a gun for you—and for me the Wilderness."

Storm only came the closer. On the high fells he had learned the tracks of innocence and duty. In the lowlands he had garnered stealthy knowledge of many ways of hide-and-seek. Through clean days and muddy he had kept one gift safe.

They fell silent on the Brigg, these two. Wharfe River lapped against the sturdy arches she had tried, time and again, to batter down at flood-time. They heard rooks calling from peaceful sycamores, the cry of a plover not gone south as yet, the song of a farm-lad up the fields.

All this might be with him to the end of his days, thought Hardcastle. But it was likelier that all would go, before the Wilderness had done with him.

“We’d best be jogging,” he said, turning up hill, Storm close as a thistle-burr beside him.

Hardcastle was aware of the magic of this steep, winding roadway, faring up to his own gate between the woods of Logie. Wise, silent beeches reddened to their fall of leaf. A chestnut flung its crimson challenge to the death-in-winter soon to come. The sycamores were sending little clouds of leaves as playthings for the breeze. Over all, and through all, was the quick reek of autumn and the smell of wood-fires lazing up from Logie’s hearths.

Hardcastle was aware of it all, as of something that had stirred him once, in his wooing days, when a lass had painted all the country-side for him. That was far off, a memory bitten-down and ended. He was here with Storm, with thoughts of what the Lost Folk could do to him and his. The battle up-fell had put its marks on him. He was hungry and needing wine at his elbow.

For all that, when they passed through Logie’s gate and his old retriever growled at Storm—when the two of them were for each other’s throats, mad with sudden jealousy—Hardcastle took them by their collars, and shook them till they whimpered.

“There’s going to be war outside,” he said; “but, by God, I’ll have peace among my own.”

CHAPTER II

CAUSLEEN

A red sun was going down behind the rim of the far-off hills as Pedlar Donald came to the road-top overlooking Logie Woods, and beyond them the leagues of moorland roving up into the quiet and misty dusk.

He shifted the heavy pack from his shoulders, and laid it down awhile.

"Tired, father?" asked the girl beside him.

Donald Cameron answered nothing for awhile. He came from Highland glens and moors; and all the way south his yearning for the homeland had dragged at his feet as if they were shod with stone. He had bartered and sold in "foreign" lands, right down through the Scottish lowlands, and over the border into Northumberland and Durham. Now he could not be done with looking out and over these blue-purple hills—fold on fold of them, glamoured like his misty Highlands.

The girl had fallen silent, too. This land was setting its spell on her, as on Donald—the first friendly face they had found in exile. She had ached and sorrowed for the land left behind. And now it was with her—strength of the striding hills—the sun going down in fire of hope for the next morrow's rising—the wide, free liberty of this land of Logie.

"We've travelled the rough ways down from Inverness," said Donald, putting his arm about the girl, "and it's been hard for you."

"Nay, but for you." Her voice was soft and healing. "My feet are young to the roads."

"Was it worth while to say no to the price they offered us in Inverness? We could have had ease for the asking."

The soft voice grew full of quick and eager fire. "We could have bought ease—and we're better as we are."

Donald laughed quietly as he shouldered his pack and trudged down the hill. The lass was bone of his bone, and had no regrets. Sharing honest exile, they had learnt the strange alchemy of the Pedlar's Road that turns much bitterness to gold. A laugh by the wayside here, a vigil there with stricken folk—no taxes asked of their poverty, and none to deny them wind and weather—it was a big life, after all, open to the sky.

Only when they came to Logie Brigg, and Donald felt his knees grow weak again, so that he had to rest awhile, he doubted the wisdom of their days together. He was old and tiring fast. What of his girl if he died by the way? There was honour of the Road, and she would not lack many friends among the pedlars and the cheery tinkers and the men who poached fat hares by night. True—but there were perils for a maid who went alone.

"Child," he said, as they rested on the bridge and heard Wharfe River croon and swirl below them, "it's a vagabond's life, after all—and, Causleen, I'm weary."

"Your mother seems very near to us," said Donald, his head lifted as if he heard the pipes calling him up some far hill. "There was the night she was dying, and you a week-old baby in her arms—how clear it all returns—and she saw that I hated you."

"Hated?"

"Because you robbed me of a wife."

Storm the sheep-stealer had seen ghosts of armed men pass to and fro across the Brigg, no longer since than yesterday. These two were seeing the broken years behind them, the slow growing into a comradeship as strong as the hills that guarded Logie Brigg.

"She put you into my arms," went on the pedlar by and by, "and bade me christen you Causleen. I fear I was rough with you, lass." The old, whimsical humour showed in his tired eyes. "Your mother chided me gently—taught me how to hold you."

"Yes?"

"Again she bade me name you Causleen, because you'd be the Evening Star to me. She was near to death, and knew—what I came to know—that you'd be the light of my westering years."

A grief too deep for tears came to the girl. Some weakness in the pedlar's brave old voice—his looking backward, though all his sturdy gospel was to front the hills of each day—as they came—his hard endeavour to get the pack jauntily over his shoulders once again—all pointed the one way.

They crossed the bridge in silence, each knowing that they journeyed to a new life. It might be worse or better than the old. They did not know; but, either way, it was a stage nearer to the end of this life's climb.

As they went up the road, a light blinked out at them from Logie house across the last glow of twilight that lingered on the hills above.

“There’ll be a bed for the night up there,” said Donald,—“a bed for you with the maids.”

“And the hay-mow for you?”

“There’s worse lying. You needn’t fret, bairn. Smell of the hay is no bad company.”

“We were not born to it, father,” she said, her slim, young body shaken with passion—not for herself, but for him, fuller of courage than strength.

“Aye, but we were, for we’ve come to it, Causleen. Life’s made that way. The road we trudge, with its ups and downs—it’s the long, grey road we were meant to tread.”

Donald was himself again, and the girl’s mood yielded to this indomitable, half-laughing courage that would not be dismayed.

“Does the grey road end somewhere?” she asked, linking her arm in his to help him up the steep.

“I trust not. When my time comes to go, there’ll surely be other hills beyond the Brink—winding roads, and further rises, and gloaming skies. I’d be lonely without them, child.”

They came to the grey house on the hill, through a rain of beech-leaves slanting down the breeze. The pedlar’s glance, quick for big things and little, caught a glint of the after-light on a small, polished thing that lay on top of the gate.

“The Wilderness Folk told no lies as we passed through,” said Donald. “I had speech with two or three, and their talk was all of this.”

“What is it?” asked Causleen, peering down at the thing lying in the old man’s palm.

“Just a token—and I’m wondering what sort of man lives here at Logie. He’ll need to be dour and staunch, with no fear about him.”

“They were kind enough to us, those folk,” she said, shivering a little at the memory; “but they were evil. While we were selling from the pack, and till we got away into the hills, there was poison round us.”

“There was. It’s a pity, girl, we haven’t let life dull the Highland vision. We ought to be toughened by this time.”

Again she glanced at the little thing in his palm. “Does it go hard with the man they hate?”

“It goes so hard that I’d not change places with him for a wealth of money. Weather is weather; fight in the open is fight; but what they’re putting on the Master of Logie would chill me to the bone.”

A dog barked suddenly, then came at them with a low, running growl.

“Be quit of your nonsense, laddie,” said Donald. “I’ve been through worse fights than you can give.”

The dog smelt them round and about to learn more of these tattered strangers, then put his nose into the pedlar’s hand.

“His sort were always friendly to us,” laughed the girl—“but what of his master?”

“He’s here to answer for himself,” said Hardcastle of Logie, turning at his own door.

They saw a big, loose-built man, with a gun under his arm, and a brace of partridge in his left hand—a man, Donald judged, accustomed to live alone, resenting all intrusion.

“Come to heel, Roy,” snapped Hardcastle. “I’ve no use for a dog that makes easy love to strangers.”

Causleen’s pride took fire, and her glance met his with sharp hostility. “Dogs have clearer sight than their masters sometimes—and gentler breeding.”

“He’s getting old, and forgets that gentleness and breed are under the harrow these days. You’ve blundered into a hard country, and I tell you so.”

She turned from him with tired disdain. “Come away, father,” she said. “They are surly here in Yorkshire. He will not buy.”

“What have you to sell?” asked the Master of Logie, aloof and cold.

“Favours for the maids,” said the pedlar, his voice soft with persuasion. He was thinking of Causleen’s safe lodging for the night, as he opened his pack and praised its wares. She was too tired, poor wean, to journey further, though he was so used to weariness that a further tramp through the night was of small account. “Favours for the maids—a blue mob-cap that sits bonnie enough on a young girl’s hair, with her eyes bo-peeping under it.”

“No maids live at Logie. There’s a grey, old woman indoors—a good cook, and quiet about the house—but she’s past favours.”

“You’re wrong,” persisted Donald. “If a woman neared her end at ninety, she’d cry for the pedlar to dress her up for bridegroom death.”

“Not Rebecca,” said Hardcastle. “I chose her with great care—a nether-millstone of a woman, without a frill or a furbelow about her.”

“You know much of women?” asked Causleen.

“Enough to last me a lifetime.” Something cold and savage showed in his face for a moment, then was gone. “My housekeeper is like the walls of Logie—staunch and weathered.”

“She never loses temper?” The girl was measuring swords with this self-secure, blunt man who disdained all pedlars. “You never find her crying her heart out when you come home before she looks for you?”

“She loses temper,” said Hardcastle, with lazy unconcern. “Not every day, or every week, but when the time comes for outlet. I’m made that way myself. We treat it like the ding of storm about a house that’s outlived many such.”

“And she never weeps?”

“She forgot the way of it long since. Life’s salt enough for most of us as it is.”

“Let’s leave him with this wonder-woman, who never cries,” said the girl, with the same quiet mockery. “She wants nothing from us and the Master of Logie will not buy.”

Hardcastle stood watching them with grim humour. “He would, if you’d anything to sell he needed. Pedlars have to carry all things in their packs for the women. They seldom have the man of the house to reckon with.”

“Seldom,” Donald agreed; “but I’ve something to barter for a night’s lodging.”

“A wheedling tongue? That never carried far with me.”

“Something I found on your gate. Gossip blows down all winds to us tramping folk, and they say the Wilderness People grow busy.”

The Master was silent. For a moment Causleen, as she watched him, saw beyond the mask of his hard, impassive face—saw down into his heart, where fear was dwelling—grey, chilly fear, at war with his manhood and his lusty strength.

“They’ve left their token on me? Show it,” he said, with rough command.

“For the price of a night’s lodging.”

“Oh, you can have it, man.”

“Not so hasty. It must be good lodging for my girl, however it goes with me.”

The Master glowered down at them from under sullen brows. “I’ve power to take it without price of any sort.”

“You have—but not power to use your strength against an aged man. Your face tells me that.”

“Well, then, your price is granted—a good lodging for the night.”

“For both?” asked Causleen. “Father cares little what bed he finds—but I care for him.”

“Beggars seem to be choosers these days,” snapped Hardcastle, raw with trouble.

“It does seem so,” said Donald gently. “The beggars out there are riding on your gate already.”

He opened his palm, and the moonlight glinted on a flint arrow-head, smooth and polished.

Do as he would, something near panic took the Master. The men of Logie-side had paid tribute diligently—till yesterday, when at last it was asked of a Hardcastle and met with blunt refusal. The fight at the pinfold had marked him. He was lame and bruised, but that was the pleasant fruit of victory in single combat against three.

The thing he looked on now was a token hedged about with dread of the forefathers. Once, in the twilight days of the Logie country, a man of the caves had killed his enemy with it, or had slain a wild-fowl for daily food. Since then it had grown to be what it was to Hardcastle—a thing of stark terror, known to all since the Lost Folk first bit their way into an honest country. He would have been less than flesh-and-blood if he had not weakened to this harsh trial time.

“They find such in the caves behind their houses, they tell me,” said Donald.

“Aye, and lay them on the gates of honest men.” Hardcastle had come to grips with fear, as he had closed yesterday with the three men at the pinfold; but dread was a harder foe to meet. As he advanced it withdrew its phantom regiment, only to loose another on him from behind—quick, cold shapes that leaped on him and clung. This was the price asked of him for keeping Logie’s honour safe. He had given no tribute to the Lost Folk—would give none in the future—and already the creeping stealth of their revenge was with him.

“It’s a bleak thing to have at your door for ever, this hate of the Wilderness Men?” said Donald, watching him.

Hardcastle, whatever he was feeling, shut a trapdoor on it. His face was grim again, inscrutable. “A bleak thing, pedlar—but then I was reared on winter gales.”

Donald was aware, by some hidden gift that came to him at times, of much that was to come about the house of Logie. “This gale from the Wilderness is like to blow for a longish while.”

“Then I’ll have to weather it for a longish while, and so much for that.”

Something stirred in Causleen’s heart against her will. Hardcastle had given them a churlish welcome. He did not want them at his door, asked only to be rid of them; but resentment was dulled, because she had seen the sudden weakness of his fear, his hard recovery. She, too, had known the broken roads, the dread that walked by night. She, too, had made, day in and day out, her own hard recovery. They had this in common, she and the Master of Logie.

A clank of pattens sounded from the stable-yard, breaking a silence heavy with the sense of doom, and old Rebecca came into their midst, a lean, tall figure of a woman.

“Jacob, the farm-boy, said there was a pedlar here,” she croaked.

“There is,” said Donald, and in a twinkling unfastened his pack and laid its wares out in the moonlight that rode high and clear above the russet beeches.

Rebecca could not be done with handling them—took up an apron here, a piece of lace-work there, all as if her youth returned.

“I’m too old for such-like trash, pedlar, though God knows I like the feel of it.”

“Too old? I shouldn’t have guessed it,” purred Donald. “You’ve no mirror in the house, maybe, to cure you of that fancy.”

He put a mob-cap into her hands—a cunning thing of lavender, simple enough till a woman’s eye appraised all the little by-ways of its blandishment. Against her will, the years fell away from Rebecca. She hid her grey, scanty locks beneath the cap—donned a lavender apron to match it—and was away in dreamland, a lass of twenty waiting for her man.

It was a good dream while it lasted; but she wearied of it, and searched restlessly among the strewn litter of the pack till she chanced on odds and ends of baby-wear—a pair of shoes, the two of them small as the hollow of a man’s hand, and the little intricate clothes, with daft blue ribands, threaded in and out about them. All they meant crept round her, and tears unshed too long found outlet. Donald heard the great broken heart of life find voice. He was himself a broken man, and knew. Rebecca came out of that weakness with a temper raw as a file. “Pedlars are seldom fools,” she snapped, “but you’re the primest that ever stepped into Logie-side.”

“What have I done?” asked Donald.

“You’ve bared sorrow to the bone, when I thought I’d done with grief!”

Causleen, looking on, felt once again that the end of an old life, the beginning of a new, had come to them—to tired Donald, and herself. The moonlight, racing between dappled clouds, shone free above the beeches on Rebecca—on Hardcastle, grim and silent. From under Logie Bridge, far below them, Wharfe River sang her slumber-song as she swept between her high, grey arches. Roy, the old retriever that had snarled at them, was fidgetting about the Master, and whined as if he scented peril. All was stealthy trouble, though owls were hooting tranquilly across the woods, and rooks cawed fitfully through the soft storm of leaves that was baring their spring nests to sight.

“That’s the best cure,” said the pedlar gently—“the best for any sort of wound. Let fresh air into it, though the knife grits down to the bone.”

Rebecca stood there, tall and lean. In her eyes was a smouldering fire that Causleen and the pedlar understood.

“Maybe you’re no fool after all. I’ve let fresh air into a grief that was festering inward, and praise the dear God for that. They say you met three of the Lost Folk yesterday,” she went on, turning to Hardcastle after a restless silence.

“Three at the pinfold—yes. They took tribute.”

“Not of the sort they asked?”

“Not of the sort they asked,” snarled Hardcastle.

And now again Causleen knew that she had come into a haunted country and to a haunted house. They were sorrowing for their dead, slain foully, Rebecca and the Master—were tending some feud-fire kindled generations since—and the girl was wrapt away to the Highlands, where pipes were playing gallantly about the hills and moaning in the glens of slaughter. They played now about this house of Logie, but with a difference. Up yonder the strife was ended long since—the forlorn hopes that had tilted against merchantry, and bribes, and guile. They could only grieve for what could never come again. But here was a fight in the making. Hardcastle was resolute for some quarrel close at hand; and she had learned enough of the Lost Folk, as they went through their evil country, to know what the strife must mean in the coming days.

“Would you have the tale, pedlar?” said Rebecca. “I’ve need to excuse tears shed in sight of any stranger.”

“Aye, tell it.”

“I had a man of my own once—a straight lad to his height, and good at the wooing. We’d had a lover’s tiff, and me too proud to do aught but send word by roundabouts that he might come and be sorry for his lout’s ways.”

Rebecca fought with her grief again, and conquered it. The rooks cawed fitfully from overhead. A bat fluttered up and down the moonlit courtyard, and Wharfe River sang old ballads of the peaceful days under her time-worn bridge. But there was no peace, here at Logie—only the rasp of Rebecca’s voice as she went on with her tale.

“Instead of my man, there came news to the gate. Two of the Lost Folk had met him by the way, and asked tribute. He said he was Hardcastle’s man, and wouldn’t budge. And they killed him for it.”

“A good sort of death,” said Hardcastle, and Causleen saw grey fear creep round him while he spoke.

The russet gloaming, the quietness of wood and pastures, the silent front of Logie, grey with travail of the years—all made for the realities that live beneath the turmoil of each day’s duties. Rebecca seldom showed any of her heart. She bared it now.

“You chose to loosen your pack, pedlar,” she said, in harsh, even tones, “and you loosed the bygone years as well. Every night and all I go to the

gate, and keep tryst with my man that never came. I'd have kissed him free and full—would have worn my hands to the knuckle for him through our wedded days—but he couldn't come."

The woman in Causleen answered the break in Rebecca's voice. "How long ago was this?" she asked, with soft, Highland pity.

"I've forgotten. Forty years, maybe, but I've lost count."

Rebecca still wore the mob-cap and the apron, and the moonlight softened the harsh lines of face and body. It was only when she spoke again, after long silence, that she seemed old indeed.

"The Lost Folk killed him, and every night I get to the gate and say my prayers. For every kiss he might have had, I pray a blight on them. For every child that might have run about my knees I ask that two of their heathen brats may die in trouble. They robbed me; and before I die, God send word to the Wilderness Men that curses stick and sting."

"From what I've seen of the Wilderness Folk," said Donald, "they'll be dour enemies, stubborn and crafty."

"That's no news," snapped Hardcastle.

"Stubborn and dour they'll be—and I wish I'd a younger pair of arms to help you."

A hard, keen light showed in Rebecca's eyes. Her thin body quivered with sudden passion. "There will come a token on the gate, Master."

"It's here."

Hardcastle held out his palm, as Donald had done awhile since, and Rebecca gloated on the sight of the little, brown thing that meant the end of peace for all at Logie.

"Through the years I've wanted this. What will you do with it, Master?"

Hardcastle turned, with a hard laugh, and set the arrow-head on the drip-stone over his door.

"It stays here—a charm against all alms-giving on Logie roads."

CHAPTER III

THE END OF A JOURNEY

When Hardcastle had opened the door to Causleen and her father, and had thrown his gun and brace of partridge down on the long-settle in the hall, his hardness left him. These two were guests, whatever chance had driven them to the bleak roads where pedlars chaffered for a livelihood.

He brought them into a great, cosy room, aglow with its fire of pine-logs and fragrant with the smouldering peats that burned below. Causleen glanced about, with a woman's quickness to see all—the candles in their sconces, bringing mellow lights to birth on bees'-waxed panels—the orderly array of muskets, swords and pistols on the walls—and, over these, a pike with the red-rust on it of blood shed long ago.

Donald saw the pike only. "That was rieved from Scotland once," he said.

"No. It went north to Flodden, and returned to its own homestead."

Fire kindled in the pedlar's syes. "Scots' blood on it?" he challenged, the years slipping from him like a garment.

"Scots' blood—but it's been drying for the length of ten generations. Flodden was a fair fight, as my folk passed the tale down—a fight between the North-born folk. The Southrons came by land and sea; but it was the Logie Men that ran in at the edge of dusk, and settled that good battle."

"Jaimie the King was slain that day."

"Aye, he died well. There's none in Logie Dale but knows that he died well. We have the tale from our fathers."

The pedlar rose, though every bone in his body was aching for rest long-denied. "Come, Causleen," he said. "We've no traffic with folk who slew the king at Flodden."

There was nothing whimsical to Hardcastle in this passion that had survived the centuries. One of his own tenants—a hale farmer-man of seventy—climbed to the moor-top every morning of his life, to learn if the Scots came marching south, though raids of that sort were no more by this time than food for winter gossip by the hearth. Quarrels lived to a great age

here in Yorkshire, as on the far side of the Border; for their roots bit deep into strong, ancient soils.

"What is amiss with you, pedlar?" he asked, looking down on these wayfarers who had come to his gate—by chance, it seemed. In their faces he read tenacity, strength to endure, something valiant and at war with exile. "It was a fair and a bonnie fight, I tell you, and I'd have been proud to have been on either side that day."

"That may be," said Donald restively; "but it's no house for us to lodge in. Your welcome was cold at best—we'll have none of it."

He gathered dignity into his aching body, and had neared the door when a clatter of wooden pattens sounded down the passage, and Rebecca swept into the room like a gale from the north.

"Come talk to Geordie Wiseman, Master," she broke in, without leave asked or granted. "He's in the kitchen, roaring for strong ale."

"No great news, that. Geordie was born with that sort of roar."

"Aye, but I'd have you come. He says the Lost People have left an arrow on his gate, same as they've done on yours."

Again Causleen saw little, grey wrinkles creep about Hardcastle's battered face, saw him recover with stubborn strength.

"I'll come," he said, after a moment's silence, "if only to tell him it's nothing to make a cry about."

When he reached the kitchen, a tough, thick-set farmer was standing by the hearth, his hair drabbled with the sweat of abject dread, his knees shaking.

"They've put the token on us, Wiseman," said the Master. "It had to come, and better soon than late."

"What need had it to come? Three of the Wilderness Men asked tribute. Well, we've payed it for many a year, and the roads have been easy for us."

"A Hardcastle never payed it—and a Hardcastle never will."

"You can do what you like with your own skin; but I tell you, plain man to man, you'd no right to bring all your tenants into this. Better have given those three all you had in your pockets than us be murdered in our beds."

"As well have given them my soul."

"Your soul?" sneered Wiseman, chill with fear.

“Just that. If I’d bartered it to the Lost Folk, there’d have been the end of pride for me. And the end of pride is hell.”

“Then it’s hell either way, it seems; for you’ve brought it close to one and all of those who farm under you. You didn’t stop to think of that when they asked tribute?”

“I didn’t think at all, Wiseman. I just saw the three lousy rogues, straddling the road in front of me, and I hit them, true and hard.”

“You had your frolic—and soon they’ll be having theirs. You’ve no wife to think of, Master.”

“No,” said Hardcastle, recalling sharply the might-have-been that had ended long since.

“I’ve a wife and children myself, like many another they’ll have lain the token on. If your time at the pinfold came again, you’d remember it meant war about Logie-side?”

“I would,” said Hardcastle, as if a clean, lusty wind blew through him, driving out all dread—“and hit the three men true and hard again. Now, listen to me. I’ve brought you all into this trouble, and I’ll see you through it. Take my word as bond for that. You’re needing ale, Rebecca tells me.”

“A flood of it, just to get my balance straight.”

“You can have it by and by. Ale is food for men, but poison to this cry-baby fit that’s taken you.”

Geordie Wiseman shifted from foot to foot, and glowered at the Master. “We’re not all made of boulder-stone and whipcord. It would come easy to you to face the devil and his witch-hounds—but I’m a usual man, like most of my neighbours.”

“They’ve put the token on us, Geordie.”

“Aye, yammer at it. To be sure they have, and you fancy it a merry-making.”

“Listen to me. There’ll be merry-making by and by; but we’ve to mow a long swathe before then. I’m sick and weary of the Wilderness Folk—sick of the toll they’re levying on white-blooded men.”

“My blood’s red enough, Hardcastle of Logie. If you doubt it—why, here’s my coat off, and off goes yours.”

“That’s the spirit,” laughed Hardcastle. “You’re readier for what I have to tell you than you were awhile since.”

“Aye,” mocked Rebecca from the doorway—“readier than he was just now, when he rived the door of my kitchen wide, and stepped in with a face made of tallow. ‘We’ll all be murdered in our beds,’ says he. ‘Not me for one,’ says I. ‘I’ll be murdered standing, if at all—giving as good as I get while it lasts.’ That’s what I said to Geordie—and now he’s prancing up and down like a turkey-cock, with his coat half-off.”

Wiseman’s wrath against the Master found a new channel. “As for you, Rebecca, it’s plain you know less than a child what the token means, left on a man’s gate.”

“I know as much as my mother taught me, when I was knee-high. There’s little I need to learn about the Lost Folk.”

“And you’re blithe, are you, because the Master fought with three, and left them to stir up their blessed hornets’ nest?”

“Blithe, if you put it that way—though it’s a queer kind of joy. It’s time these wastrels were hunted out, like rats about a stable. They breed like rats, too, and soon they’ll be eating us out of house and home.”

“In league with the Master, as you always were.”

“Yes, Geordie. He’s man enough to hunt the Lost Folk from their burrows.”

And now a queer thing happened. The Master and Geordie crossed themselves by stealth, not knowing why. The Lost Folk had been a running sore about the country-side in far-off Catholic times, and no man can deny his ancestors.

“Popish mummery,” snapped Rebecca, and crossed herself as she spoke without knowing it.

There came a sudden, lusty knocking at the door, and Brant the shepherd followed his knock, bringing the strong, sweet tang of the uplands with him.

“Naught to be scared of, Geordie,” said Rebecca. “You fancied three hundred Wilderness Men were tramping in—or was it a thousand?”

Brant glanced at Wiseman with kindly tolerance. “You wear a scared look on your face, Geordie.”

“Haven’t you heard what’s gathering round us all?”

“I hear little up yonder, thanks be, save crying of the ewes, and stillness, and the wind. They’re better gossips than your village-folk down hereabouts.”

Rebecca had an old fondness for the shepherd, and the ale that Wiseman had clamoured for in vain was brought.

“It’s cold up yonder on the heights,” she said, filling a wide mug for him. “Dark and lonesome, too, after sundown, with ghosty Brown Men of the Heather and what not flitting by you. But *you* were never one to come with your knees a-wobble.”

“Meaning me?” said Geordie.

“Meaning you, or any other man that thinks he’s fitted with his proper cap.”

“What’s it all about, Master?” asked Brant. “Is Geordie just in his cups, with his tale of what’s gathering round us?”

“Half in and half out. He’s himself most days of the week,” said Hardcastle dryly. “There’s trouble brewing, though, as he says. An arrow-head was left on my gate last night, and on Geordie’s. It will come to yours when they’ve time to get up to your cottage on Gaunt Fell.”

“Let it come,” said Brant, his face hard and bright on the sudden. “I’ve wanted that for many a year.”

“You would,” Rebecca nodded. “I’ve heard you speak time and again in this same kitchen of their sheep-stealing tricks. Theft of a sheep to you is almost like what murder is to other folk.”

Wry humour came to Hardcastle. “What luck had you with Storm yesterday, after I left you up at Weathersett? Did you find the four-legged thief?”

“Not I,” growled Brant. “He’s just a slip of devildom, ravening up and down the pastures. There are times when I fancy he’s more than a sheep-dog that’s tasted flesh instead of guarding it—times when he seems to be Old Nick himself. Foxes at lambing-time? They’re honest, set side by side with Storm.”

“For all that, I’m finding a soft spot in my heart for the rogue.”

Brant took a long draught of ale, wiped the froth from his mouth, and set down his pewter mug. “Are you, Master? Then harden it. A sheep-slayer goes cursed from the minute he gets from his lair at dawn till daylight ends.”

“Yet you can’t take Storm. He’s hunted from the four quarters of the sky, day in, day out, and wins through. That’s the sort of dog I like—and the sort of man.”

Passion, with Brant, had the stillness of deep pools. His voice lost little of its quietness; but a hard note sounded in it. “It’s hard to tell what ewes mean to a shepherd. They’re like children, you might say. Happen it comes from mothering ’em from the day they first stand up on their four wambly legs—newborn and bleating at their dams. Happen it comes of tending ’em later on—blizzards and drifts and what all—comes of sleeping and waking for ’em. I couldn’t tell all that goes to the hate of a sheep-killer. But I know what every shepherd feels for every outlaw dog.”

“Just so,” said Hardcastle. “It’s for that reason I’m all for Storm—the lad with never a friend in the country-side.”

“It’s easy for you to lose a sheep here and there. What does it count if a few odd ewes are ravaged? Just a few pounds missing from your plenty. For me, it stands for murdered bairns—bairns I’ve reared and guarded better than their scant-wit mothers could.”

“There are good sheep-tenders in the Dale, but none quite like you. You do it all, Brant—the damned, lonely fight against Logie weather, and foot-rot, and marauders of all kinds—do it for love of silly sheep that to me are so much fleece and mutton.”

“They’re my life to me,” said the shepherd, “and I’m still wondering why you side with Storm. Best of his kind, he was once—knew how to round them up the pastures like a marvel. Then he fell from grace, as you might say, and he’s a hunted dog from this to Weathersett.”

“Aye, and you and all of mine will know soon what that sort of hunting means. I’ve a fellow-feeling for old Storm.”

Hardcastle turned his head sharply. He was still standing just inside the kitchen door, and behind him was the long passage that led into the hall. At the far end of the passage was a place under the stairway, half room, half cupboard, where logs and peats had been stored in earlier times. It held a fugitive now—a fugitive who was beating against the worm-eaten door in search of freedom.

“There’s queer noises in the house,” stuttered Geordie Wiseman. “I told you what would come of saying no to the Lost Folk.”

The shepherd had taken a second draught of ale. That, and the cosy warmth, ripened the dry humour that was never far to seek. “Queer noises in

your head, more like. If I'd slaked thirst as you've done Geordie—all day long, and every day—I would be hearing smith-hammers—but they'd be ringing in my own headpiece."

Down the passage came a running whine, that only Hardcastle and Wiseman heard. The Master stood silent, but Geordie began to bubble like a child lost in the dark.

"And now Barguest's come. D'ye hear him whining? I warned you what would come of it."

"Oh, be quit of your moonshine," growled Brant. "Such as you breed fears like maggots. What we're up against is enough for sober folk, without your doldrum fancies."

It was well for Logie and all its tenantry that Storm, as he came down the passage, heard Brant's voice, and checked his joy in liberty. Hardcastle felt a rough pressure at his knee, and, looking down, saw the sheep-thief's grizzled snout pushed out an inch or two into the lamplight. His hand went down, to cover even that from the shepherd's keen, revengeful eyes. Storm's nose was hot and dry, his body quivering; for he always pictured Brant these days as carrying a gun.

Hardcastle backed into the doorway, keeping the dog behind him. "Whatever comes, Brant, the Logie Men will fight the Wilderness."

"They have to, thanks be," said the shepherd fervently. "You've made that sure and safe."

"He has," whined Geordie Wiseman, "without asking leave of Logie Men. Let him be murdered, says I, if he fancies that sort of pastime—but what have I done?"

"Naught that I can rightly call to mind," said the shepherd pensively. "There's a tale that you were caught working once, between one barley-brew and the next—but you must have been younger then."

Hardcastle was glad of Rebecca's cackle of laughter, of Brant's absorption in his jest. He nodded a good-night, closed the kitchen door, and dragged Storm by his collar down the passage. The cupboard under the stair showed open to the lamplight. The door, with its broken lock, creaked fitfully as the draught swung it to and fro.

"You fool, to leave safe quarters," said the Master savagely.

Storm feared his wrath, but not as he feared Brant's. He was with a friend, and knew it. Quietly, without fuss or protest, he got into his lair,

turned three times according to ancient ritual of his breed, and settled into wary sleep.

"Storm," said the Master.

Two brown, faithful eyes opened, asking what was needed.

"It's no holiday to shelter a broken dog. I'm quit of you if you stir or whine till Brant has gone."

Storm understood. Bred in close intercourse with men, he had their speech. The brown eyes met Hardcastle's, loyal in answer, and the Master closed the door on him, knowing there was no need of the broken lock.

For the first time, since going to answer for his own part in the coming warfare, he remembered Pedlar Donald and his girl. The candles were burnt half down as he went into the big room, but the fire glowed warm and ruddy on the pike that once had gone to Flodden. There was an odd silence in the room, and Causleen knelt by the long-settle, where Donald stretched like a man dead and out of mind.

"What is it?" he asked sharply.

Causleen rose and faced him. Proud, even in bitter grief. "We are not welcome here," she said.

"I gave you shelter."

"Yes, grudgingly. We do not care for that—but now we have no choice."

Hardcastle crossed to the long-settle and stood looking down on Donald; and Causleen's eyes softened a little as she met his glance.

"The end of the journey?" he asked, with rough sympathy.

"I fear it. His heart beats, but it is fluttering out. Just after you went his strength left him, and he stumbled to the settle."

Two owls were hunting mice in Logie Wood. Their cries sounded loud and ghostly through the silence. A restless breeze was plucking at the windows.

"Oh, let the tears come," said Hardcastle impatiently, "You've need of ease."

CHAPTER IV

THE MORROW

Hardcastle had got to bed somewhere near midnight. There had been a farm-lad riding for the doctor, the galloping return of both, the verdict that Donald, with care, might live for a week or two. Old Rebecca had scolded life and destiny, but had managed with great deftness to make the pedlar warm and easy on the long-settle, with blankets under and over him. She had insisted, too, on sharing the watch with Causleen, after telling the Master there was nothing for a feckless mule to do by way of help.

"You ordered early breakfast. Best take a wink or two o' sleep while you've got the chance."

And now Hardcastle was seeking sleep, and finding little. When he dozed, it was to go in dreams through things suffered at the Lost Folks' hands long since, told and re-told till superstition had given them a bigger terror than their due. When he woke, it was to remember that he and his stood alone against them.

He counted his household in the waking hours. Indoors was Rebecca, and Roy, the old retriever—and out across his acres tenants who numbered a score, all told. Some of these had five sons, some three or less, and not all of them up-grown. And among them were a few of Geordie Wiseman's kidney, whiners and pay-for-safety folk at any price.

Then his mind roamed out to the crumpled, limestone wastes that stretched from Drumly Ghyll to grey Weathersett—the land where the Lost Folk had their dwelling, in a village bare to every wind of devilry that blew. They were stealthy, pitiless, spawn of the creeping things that hunt by night.

He would doze again, and nightmares led him into the caves he had explored in boyhood, because forbidden by the father who knew their peril. Once he had all but been caught there by a Wilderness Man, and had returned with a glow of adventure in his heart.

When he woke to restless tossing from one side to another, adventure loomed close ahead; but it had no glow about it. He recalled Geordie Wiseman's complaint that he brought trouble to many a hearth beside his own. It was true, and doubt took hold of him. What right had he to bring others into an affair so stark and hard to face?

He got up at last, weary of the phantoms that creep about a sleepless bed. Below-stairs he could hear Rebecca scolding and coaxing a lazy fire to burn; and when he came down a half-hour later, he heard still the murmur of coaxing and scolding, though she was at war with rashers crinkling on the fire. It was a heartening note—this chiding tongue of Rebecca's, the grey, hard woman who kept his house spotless-clean, and cooked and laboured for him as if she loved the work. She was rough and loyal, reared in the older days.

As he passed the room where Donald lay, he heard the pedlar chattering quietly, and went through the half-open door. Causleen's dark head was pillowed on the horse-blanket covering Donald. The sleep of dire exhaustion had found her as she knelt by the settle, and even Hardcastle, roughened long since against any lure of women, was moved to grudging pity. She was so slender, so helpless, and her loosened hair lay round her like a cloud of burnished night.

Then he glanced again at Donald. The pedlar's eyes were open, and he talked of glens—talked of Glencoe, and Bannockburn and far Culloden, of misty sorrows that for ever drenched the hills he loved. Again Hardcastle was stirred—not by pity now, but by shame. If this ancient man, his body crumpling into death, could live so bravely with the long-done battles, counting these heartsease and gain, what had the younger sort to do with fear?

Donald did not see him standing there, for his eyes were intent on wider scenes than this cramped room afforded him. To Hardcastle, as he listened, a wider country opened, too. The pedlar's body had forsaken him so utterly that heart and mind were free to roam at large. The very throb of Scottish battle-strength seemed gathered into this room at Logie—the skirl of pipes, the sobbing of women as their dead were brought home on their shields—the harsh challenge of men facing treachery in many hidden glens.

It seemed to Hardcastle that the pedlar was sharing five centuries of battle. So he was, maybe, for a man's dead come close when he nears the borderland, to welcome him across the little gap between them.

Donald lingered awhile with the feud fights of the clans, with the big battles and the small; but ever he returned to the tale of how Jaimie the King went down in splendour when the last, swirling fight at Flodden closed about him.

Then the pedlar's restless glance fell on the pike nailed above the mantel, and stayed there awhile, and roamed to the big man looking down at

him. For the first time he saw Hardcastle, and came sharply from the glens of mist.

"Small wonder I dreamed of Flodden and the king. There's a pike yonder with Scots' blood on it. What could there be but haunted sleep in such a room?"

He strove to rise, but all of him from waist to feet refused his bidding. It was terrible, piteous, to see the struggle of a proud man anxious to be gone from a house at enmity with his so long ago.

"I thank you for the lodging," he murmured, courteous to the last; "but we must go. Causleen, child, where are you? The mists are gathering over Ben Crummart, and winds are sobbing in the glens. We must be going."

Through the sleep of exhaustion Causleen heard the call. She was on her feet in a moment, laying the pedlar's head back and soothing him to quiet. The quickness of it, the eagerness that gave all and at once to this wayworn vagabond, brought a rough wonder to Hardcastle. But then she was a woman, and no doubt there was trickery of some kind under this show of great affection.

He longed to go, but could not. If Donald were to die now and here, he must not leave one slim girl to face the trouble, full of guile though she might be. He watched her put a hand on the old man's heart, and wrap the blankets round him; and still he could not go.

When she turned and saw him there, shame and pride took fire together. She glanced at the hair which ran loosened to her knees, and hated him for the surprise. She glanced, too, as Donald had done, at the pike above the mantel; her voice was cold and hard.

"We shall not trouble you for long."

A great anger flamed in Hardcastle. "Am I such a churl as that?"

"You were a churl last night."

"How should I know he was an ailing man? There'd have been no doubt of your welcome then."

"In our country all benighted guests are welcome; but you're a harsher folk in Yorkshire."

He glanced again at Donald. "Shall I send Rebecca to you?"

"There is no need."

The Master turned without a word. She chose to be at war with him, and he was content enough; better that than the pity she had roused. When a man began to pity any woman, he had one foot already in the marshes.

He had reached the door, and was closing it behind him, when she recalled him. “You, too, were ill last night. Have you recovered?”

“I’m in rude health, now as then.”

“Fear is a sickness.”

Hardcastle glowered down at her, and Causleen learned in that moment what the strength of his blow would have meant if she had carried a man’s shape.

“It may be. I never had much traffic with it.”

“Until yesterday. We brought the token, and I watched grey fear come to the Master of Logie as he touched it.”

Her rancour was less for herself than for the slight put on Donald, sick and old, who in his prime had known the glow of candlelight on a well-ordered table, the ruby in the wine of life. And now her father lay there, a pensioner on the bounty of this dour host—lay dying, with the Flodden pike sneering at him overhead, and all the room packed with ghosts of men who had boasted through the generations of what they had done aforetime to the Scots.

“Your Highland men have never known fear?” asked Hardcastle.

She faced him, slender and straight, her dark hair like a glory about her tattered pedlar’s clothes. “Only its name,” she said, with the same quiet mockery—“and that they had from the Southrons.”

“Then God help them for no more than beasts of the field. What courage could they learn, unless they came to grips with fear?”

Causleen remembered many journeys, with fortune at its worst and only the pedlar’s voice to rouse her from the depths. “Fear is a good whetstone, child,” he would say. “It breaks poor metal, but sharpens steel.” And now Hardcastle was giving her the same rough gospel.

“When did you learn so much?” she asked, half-defiant still.

“Last night—no longer since than that—while I thought of all the uproar I’d brought to Logie-side.”

He glanced once more at Donald, then turned and went down the passage. Rebecca was bustling into the sunlit breakfast-room with a tray that held many tempting odours for a hungry man. She fussed pleasantly about the Master's needs, as of old, but with a new solicitude.

"Storm-cocks were crying round Logie all the night," she said, breaking the silence at last—"or else I dreamed they were."

"You dreamed it, likely. This weather's not for breaking yet."

"Maybe not—but the Lost Folks' weather is."

"It had to break," said Hardcastle.

Again the silence fell between them—the silence that was more ultimate than speech. None knew better than these two the staunchness that would be asked for by and by, when the Wilderness loosed its spite against them, and only a few were left to stand against the pestilence that would sweep over Logie-side—the pestilence of dread.

"Donald is sinking fast, by the look of him," said the Master presently.

"He'll not quit the house till he dies. Not a doubt o' that; but he may sink very gradual. I've seen such cases."

"It was as well I didn't turn him away last night. He'd not have got far, poor devil."

"As well maybe," grumbled Rebecca, "though I've no stomach for tending him and the dark-eyed hussie for weeks on end. We've lived to ourselves till now, and I never relished foreigners."

"They're under my roof."

"Oh, they'll be looked after, Master. And, to be sure, it's as ill to slight the pedlar-sort as it is to kill a spider. Lucky they are, both o' the tribes, if you treat 'em kindly."

"Lucky?" said Hardcastle, getting up from table. "Donald found the token for me, if that spells luck."

"It does. We'll be rid of the Wilderness scum at last."

"At last—and may it be a long last," snapped the Master.

He had forgotten Storm the sheep-slayer—as he was forgetting many things in this new day of strife—until he passed the cupboard where he had housed the culprit over-night.

Storm was not there. He had watched for this moment, after the house-doors were opened, and had gone away to the hills by stealth. Hardcastle laughed soberly. One guest the less under his roof was one load taken from his shoulders; and the pack promised to be heavy by and by.

His own dog, Roy, was waiting for him in the hall—a big retriever, his coat sleek and gold-red as October on the brackens. His nut-brown eyes danced as he saw the gun under Hardcastle's arm, and clouded when the Master checked him.

"As far as the gate, lad. There's only you to guard Logie, and the Wilderness Folk are out at last."

A sharp regret came to Hardcastle as he shut the gate on Roy, a sense almost of foreboding. It did not seem good to be separate at such a time, from a friend of ten years' standing.

"Guard," he said. "The Lost Folk are out, I tell you."

Roy whimpered as he reared across the closed gate and licked Hardcastle's face. He was getting near to old age, as dogs count life; but the lure of a gun renewed his youth at all times.

Hardcastle turned as he went down Logie-lane. The dog had his forepaws on the gate still, and he barked a friendly, dolorous farewell. "Guard, lad," said the Master, "the Lost Folk are out, I tell you."

His errand lay over Logie Brigg, and up into the wooded roadway that climbed steeply to Langerton. Beyond Langerton were the Wilderness Folk, who were out against him to a man—lurking close at hand, maybe, in twos or threes. Hardcastle paid no heed. He had gone through the sweat of fear last night, and to-day sunrise was with him after that long battle. Dread, rooted generations deep, had been fought and thrown in the space of a night, he fancied.

At the bend of the road where it strode, over Crooning Water, a quiet, slender woman sat on the copestone of the bridge. She had a pile of picked willow-stems at her right hand, and was busy with a half-made basket lying in her lap. In all the Dale there was no more sequestered nook than this, none richer with the peace and mellowed glory of October. Crooning Water, escaped not long since from the prison-house of Drumly Ghyll—its rocks steep and dark and terrible—raced down with a bubbling song of liberty, and halted to play round the whirlpool delved by waters that had gone before and were one by now with the distant seas. A place of sanctuary, like an old kirk ready with its welcome for young, honest love.

The woman on the bridge glanced up at Hardcastle's approach, and into her eyes there leaped God knows what of devilry, appeal, regret. And he, for his part, stood looking at her with a wonder that for a moment was a boy's wonder, till he shut the gates on what had been.

"Still basket-weaving, Nita?" he asked gravely.

"And still weaving spells about the men of Logie-side."

She was provocative, inscrutable, as of old, this girl-woman whose grey eyes and flower-like face were all in keeping with the russet autumn peace.

"About all but one," said Hardcastle.

"And that one's here with me. He's here with me where we met first. Do you remember?"

Hardcastle remembered, in savage earnest. She had not changed in these five years, so far as slender beauty went, and the nameless charm that drew men to her—drew all men except one.

"I was a dreamer then—and younger."

"It's good to dream at times. I weave a good deal of dream-stuff into my baskets as I make them—and wonder what happens when a simple lass up-dale sets her arm under the handle. Queer thoughts will come to her."

"They will," said the Master, rough and stubborn—"but the thoughts will be good for your trade. *Never put all your eggs into one basket, for fear the withies break.* So they'll buy two, when next you come."

"You'll never forgive?" said Nita Langrish, her voice soft as Crooning Water's where it lapped the archway of the bridge below them.

"I've done better, Nita—I've forgotten."

She glanced up to learn if it was true. He stood there unyielding, utterly remote; and a great longing came to Nita to chain and hold this man who had put her out of his life.

"You wanted me for your wife once. Is it too late, Hardcastle of Logie?"

He looked down at her in frank astonishment.

"Are last year's nests too late?"

"I was a fool. Perhaps five years have taught me to be wise. And you're harsh these days. Is it love of me that's hardening you?"

"No, God be thanked. It's love of hardness for its own sake."

She let him go the length of the bridge and a little beyond, then called him back.

“You’re hardy, to come so near the Wilderness Folk, after what we’ve left on your gate.”

In spite of his boast not long ago, Hardcastle remembered how he had once cared for this bonnie slip of devildom, the sleepless nights he had gone through in that far-off time.

“Put what you will on my gate,” he said, “except those slim hands of yours.”

“Was it not enough to meet three of our men,” she asked, with dangerous quiet, “and send them bleeding home?”

“It was good while it lasted.”

“Yet you want me, too, for enemy.”

“You’re of the Wilderness these days, Nita.”

“Was I, a moment since? You would laugh if I told you what I was weaving into my baskets, before you came and spoiled it all.”

Hardcastle’s face was grim as the nether-millstone. “I’m past your sort of guile, Nita. No woman takes me twice in the same net.”

“But was it guile? Suppose, as I threaded the withies in and out, I was thinking of Logie—and its Master?”

“And of twenty other men, no doubt.”

He had struck home at last. She got to her feet, shaken by a storm of passion. “Fancies are no crime. I’d have lost every man in the dale for sake of Hardcastle of Logie—aye, and have burned their houses at a word from him.”

Hardcastle felt a touch of her old, bewildering power, but recovered sharply. “You had me at call once, and tore that dream to tatters.”

“You were too much at call. I’m of the sort that wearies unless a man’s escaping me.”

“You’re frank,” said Hardcastle, shrugging his wide shoulders. “It seems a long way off, Nita—the time when you would come and make a day hell or heaven for me. You chose your road.”

Now she had lost him; she recalled with bitter clearness the way of her playing with him long since, because he was so big and yet so downright drowned in love. All the might-have-been turned to venom, though she had caged her temper and was smiling in quiet mockery.

"Yes," she said—"as you chose your road yesterday. The Wilderness Men you taunted me with just now—I keep them at bay by promising favours to one and another, and by giving none. When danger gets too close, I set them at each other's throats—for your sake, until now."

"For my sake?"

"Men know so little." Her glance met his in search of weakness or relenting, and found none. "So now I shall set them all at *your* throat, Hardcastle of Logie, and they'll bring blithe hearts to the game. You know what follows the token left on a gate? There comes a shaft out of nowhere, aimed at Logie. Then a spell of quiet, and after that another shaft. You've heard the way of the Lost Folk?"

"I have," said the Master, his head lifted sharply. "And now the Lost Folk are to learn the way of Logie."

Nita warmed to the change in this man who had been easy going once, a slave to her whims. And with the warmth came a new bitterness that she had lost one who could show this spirit, walking alone as he did so near the Wilderness that soon would be eating into his courage like a cancer.

"You've a gun under your arm," she said. "That's for fear, I take it."

"No. It's for a chance shot at partridge on the way to Michael Draycott's. He fancies he's a day or two from death, and wants his will made out."

"Men do fancy that, if they've the toothache or their little finger smarts. And of course you're a magistrate these days." The grey eyes enticed and mocked him. "I had forgotten. I was back, somehow, in the times when we roamed Logie Woods together."

"They're gone," said the Master—"dead and mouldered out of sight by now."

"Are you a man at all, or just an oak-tree going on two feet about Logie-side?"

"A man?" echoed Hardcastle, with a quiet laugh. "That's in the proving."

With that he went up the road, and turned in at the gate that opened on Michael Draycott's pastures. Nita thought he would glance back once at least, drawn by old allegiance. She would have forgiven him much for the glance; but he went up the slope and out of sight, cocking the hammers of his gun. He was thinking already of partridge, not of the random days behind.

She seated herself again on the parapet and took up her basket-work; and none could have guessed, seeing her tranquil beauty, what thoughts she was weaving now into the plaited withies. Crooning Water lapped and gurgled. A curlew was plaining across the fells, and from some wayside tree a starling was mimicking his note. No other sound broke the fragrant peace till the scrunch of feet sounded down the highway and a stocky, undersized man swung round the bend. He stopped on seeing Nita and touched his cap with rough deference. Bonnie, a temptress who flouted and smiled on them by turns, Nita had a strange hold on the regard of the Wilderness Men, though few of their women were of like mind. The men held her in honour, too; and this was due, maybe, to the knowledge that more than once she had set them an example of cold-blooded savagery that none could equal.

"I met him of Logie up Draycott's pasture," said the man, a still look in his beady eyes. "Walked as if he owned all from this to hell hereafter. 'Got a gun with you. You're wise,' says I; 'but why do you go sporting without a dog?' and Hardcastle laughs. 'The dog's guarding Logie from such as you.' 'Then you're wise again,' says I, 'for Logie will ask for a lot of guarding by and by.' "

"Is he a fool altogether?" asked Nita, glancing up from her basket.

"I wouldn't say that—not by a long way."

"It looks like it. He's chosen to rouse the Wilderness round him, like a hive of bees. There can only be one end to that."

"That's true enough; but the ending mayn't be this year or next. Fight sinks the fool in Hardcastle. That's what our three Broken Men said when they came from the pinfold yesterday, and all the women laughing at them."

"Afraid of him already, are you?"

"I'm not myself. A darkish night, and me with just enough light to see where to crack his skull—and Hardcastle riding the lonely roads he's fond of ——"

"All in good time." Nita's voice was clear as a throstle's, her fingers busy with the willows. "Before an end comes to him that way, Jake, we'll

strike elsewhere."

"If you choose. You're wiser than the rest of us put together."

"We'll maim before we kill. Hardcastle is a fool altogether, I tell you so. He cares for his own, when wise folk care for themselves."

"There's few enough he cares for these days, I should have said."

"So he cares deeper for the few. There's one close friend the Master has —and this is what you'll do, Jake."

Then she told her mind to him; and he gaped in admiring wonder for a while, till she bade him get about his business of the day. And after that, in the hollow's tranquil silence, she threaded her withies in and out as she sat on the bridge—the bridge where Hardcastle had seen her first.

CHAPTER V

HEMLOCK

Hardcastle found no partridge in the long pasture that led to Draycott's farm; but a hare got up under his feet as he neared the gate. Most shots came easily to Hardcastle, but from boyhood's days a hare had roused always the same surprise, with its lopping stride that seemed slow and bulky, disguising a strong wind's speed.

He missed now with the first barrel—at simple range—and puss got into a scrub of hazels that climbed the hillside. When she ran through it, brown against the grey rocks above, she was out of range to all but the most sanguine fancy. Hardcastle gave her the left barrel at a venture, and his heart warmed as he saw her sprawl every way at once and lie still against the rocks.

When he went to pick her up and found her shot cleanly through the head, he took it for a good omen. Long hazards seemed to be his luck, and he needed many kinds of luck these days.

Old Michael Draycott was sitting up in the great four-poster bed when Hardcastle went in. The man's apple-red face was paler than its wont, but his eyes were keen and shrewd as ever.

"I'll know more than you before so very long," was Draycott's greeting.

"You know more already, Michael—the ways of sheep, and land tending, and things I learned from you as a lad."

"Aye, and I could still teach you summat about horses and dogs, though you'll differ as to that. But I wasn't thinking of such matters. Before long I'll take a journey no man knows t'other side of—and in a twinkling I'll be wiser than all Logie-side. I'm not afraid, you'll know—I'm just in a fret to be gone, and know what lies beyond, and be master of you all."

"You'll not be master yet, for you're not within sight of dying, Michael."

"You were always very free with your opinions. Why shouldn't I die, with all my bones a-tremble, and a wambling back and front of me?"

"Because your father lived to ninety, and you're a lad of sixty-five. He'd think shame of you to creep over the Border at your time of day."

“There’s sense in that,” Michael agreed, with a hard, wheezy laugh. “Come to think of it, there’s a good deal of sense. I never thought of it in that way.”

“I’ve left a hare in your porch, against the time you’re needing a sturdy meal.”

“It’ll have to hang for a week or more before it’s ripe, but thank you all the same,” said Michael, wistfully. “I own that the thought of it gets me back to this side o’ things again. You jug a hare, if it’s to be treated right, and run a pint of staunch port wine into the stour of it, and thank the God who made you for the dish.”

“So you needn’t make your will just yet?”

“Ah, but I must, though I’m feeling stronger every minute since you came. It’s this way, Master. I never wedded, as you know—thanks be for the escapement. All the kin I have is a nephew that’s gone oversea, and a niece that’s pretending to be a lady in London town. If I knew which I hated most, I’d will all I have to t’ other.”

“Then leave it over, Michael, till you’ve got your strength back.”

“Maybe I might. But I’ve one thing to say to you, Hardcastle of Logie. They put a token on my gate last night, because I was tenant to you.”

“That carries to us all,” said the Master, hard and wary on the sudden.

“Have you thought what it means?”

“Yes. I’m cold when I think of it—for myself, but more for you of Logie-side.”

“Now listen. I built this snug fortune o’ mine from naught at all, as you might say, and thrived on sheep and cattle, thinking of little else. But I wouldn’t have built it unless I’d payed tribute to the Lost Folk, same as my father did before me.”

“My own father never had that failing,” said Hardcastle, stating a fact and proud of it.

“The Wilderness was not so strong then. Staunch as he was, he’d have sung to another tune these days. They out-number us, I tell you.”

“He’d have sung to the same tune—but with a lustier voice because the odds were bigger.”

The apple-red was glowing again in Draycott's cheeks. His fancied ailments were forgotten. "So you take no shame to spread fire and murder through the country-side?"

"I take pride for holding my own ground."

"Aye, stubborn, like all you Hardcastles; but lord help me to guess where pride comes in."

"What do you pay in tribute now? Twice what it was in my father's time—and so on till you'd have been beggared, you tax-paying folk. That's where pride comes in, Michael. I'm glad to have set war between this and the Wilderness."

Michael Draycott was prone to coddle his fancied illnesses, but under the foible lay a heart quick to answer real trouble when it came. He got out of bed with a speed astonishing in a sick man no longer young, and stood there in his nightshirt, fronting Hardcastle.

"There'll not be many with you among the lazy men of Logie—but there'll be me for one. While I get my breeches on, will you pass word to the kitchen that I'm roaring for a meal?"

For the first time since they set a token on his gate, the Master laughed, from his heart upward. Michael had salted the coming days with humour, and it went with him as he halted at the kitchen door, and saw inside a red-haired lass who was baking an apple-pie.

"The master is crying out for breakfast, Susan."

She turned a scared face to him. "He was dying awhile since," she stammered.

"He was; but now he's alive again, like the rest of us. You'll get used to these recoveries when you've been longer in the house."

With that he was gone; and humour stayed with him as he went down the pasture and out into the highroad. Nita was finishing her basket when he reached the bridge that girdled Crooning Water, and she glanced at him with innocent, grey eyes.

"You are going home to Logie?" she asked. "You'll have news of a friend there."

Again old bitterness soured laughter and all else in Hardcastle. "The Wilderness teaches most trades, Nita. You're for telling the future nowadays—silver in your parlour, and promise of a dark lady coming?"

"I'm for telling the present. The friend is no lady, dark or fair—and he's waiting for you at the gate."

Hardcastle forgot her, forgot even the sharp, slender plough she had driven across his life, breaking it up. He came to Logie Brigg, and feet of the marching men sounded in his ears as he strode up the hill to Logie. In their day fight was easy—march, and camp, and straightforward ding of blows when battle came—but this modern warfare thrust on him was a stealthy matter, hard to wage. The old days were better.

And now Hardcastle heard not only the tread of feet, but song of the battle-men as they went to whatever chanced. They did not pick their road, as he was asking to choose it now, did not fall to dreaming of warfare that had been. The ruts and the hardships had been different then; but the call to conquer them was the same.

Hardcastle did not know himself in this mood. His fore-elders were intent about him—brave, brawny folk who compassed Logie, a regiment of fighting men. And so in great heart he climbed the hill, and came to his gate, and found a message scrawled in chalk.

Hemlock grows in the Wilderness.

That was all, till he tried to open the gate, and felt a weight against it. He put an impatient shoulder to the topmost bar, and there inside lay Roy, a dead thing with no joy of welcome. Froth of the death-throes flecked his jaws and his gold-brown hide. He had watched for the Master faithfully, and for reward lay here.

A silence came to Hardcastle, and a great sickness—sickness of heart, that is the worst to bear. He could not believe for awhile that this comrade had gone before his time. He had reared him as a puppy—a ball of golden fluff that played strange antics—had nursed him through distemper and trained him to the gun. As if he stood at the graveside of a familiar friend, long thoughts went racing down the years. He recalled the very smell of the heather when grouse swept cluttering up the moor, the crisp, frosty silence as they waited for the wild-duck to come over. They had roused all Logie-land together, good weather and foul, and had tramped home with happy weariness.

The trouble went deep. Roy had slept outside his bedroom door, had been the first to welcome him when he got up for the day's business, the last to wag his tail in token of good-night. And Roy had gone. His body was here—but what of the eager spirit, the loyalty that never faltered, the eyes

that spoke because the tongue was dumb? Many had failed Hardcastle in his time, but never Roy.

No longer since than yesterday, Roy had been with him up the pastures, and now he was away to some far land. What land? With the question came a swift, wayward hope that he had found moors out yonder, and birds rising to the gun, and wind among the brackens—a faith that they would rejoin each other later on, when his time came to die.

Nothing could ease grief of this sort but remembrance of the second token on his gate. Hemlock grew in the Wilderness, and they had poisoned the thing he loved best in the world—the friend that Nita, weaving her basket where the Brigg crossed Crooning Water, had told him would be waiting. And now little, crimson lines began to dance before his eyes, and widened swiftly till he saw nothing but a sheet of fiery red, and behind it the styes where the Lost Folk housed themselves. It was battle-sunrise, drinking up the fears of generations; and many never had known it, from Flodden's day to this.

Causleen, spent with watching by the long-settle where her father lay in deep sleep at last, had come out for a breath of this clean, upland air. She would go to the gate, and a little beyond, maybe—but not far away from the sick man who might need her at any moment.

She got no further than the gate. Her sympathy was quick for dogs; and, seeing Roy there in all his dead, silent disarray, she knelt beside him and hid a sudden rush of tears in the coat that had been warm yesterday, when he growled at her coming and afterwards gave friendship.

"He was so brave and bonnie—and he's gone," she said, glancing up between wet lashes.

"Roy needs no praise," growled Hardcastle, roughened by his loss. "If you'd known him as I did, you'd let your tongue be still."

Her pride took fire. From the first he had been surly and resentful of her coming. Yet her feet dragged, as she left him with his dead. She halted and glanced back; and there was Hardcastle, his shoulders bowed with sorrow.

"Ah, you cared for him," she said, her voice low with pity.

"Cared? He was all left to care for, except Logie."

CHAPTER VI

THE EWE-GATHERING

They were gathering their sheep from the fells under Pengables, to bring them down into the warmer lands below. To a stranger it would have seemed odd that so many shepherds, and master-farmers with their hinds, should have chosen the same day. The farmers, indeed, might have done the work at haphazard, choosing a time here and there as occasion served; but their shepherds lived nearer the fell-tops where true weather-lore was taught by countless little signs and tokens. And the shepherds had decreed that within eight-and-forty hours the wind hounds of the north would be driving snow before them.

The Logie country, if it guessed what was to come, made merry with the time left it. Quiet wisps of cloud lay bosomed on a sky of blue. The belt of woodland under Pengables—larches, pines and rowans, their feet set deep in the heather—glowed in the hot sun glare with rich array of russet and amber, and wide-flung crimson—the riot of it all subdued by the still majesty of the pines, who kept their burnished livery secure against all onset of the seasons.

All the land was filled with uproar—dogs barking their throats hoarse, sheep crying witless and forlorn, men cursing ewes and dogs and neighbour-folk in rich upland speech. When each shepherd had only his own ewes to look after, and his own dog to work them, they went silently about the business, save for a whistle or a quiet call. But now the dogs were mad with rivalry. The sudden busy-ness of these quiet fells was to them what market day in Shepperton meant to the shepherds when they went there once in a while and were amazed by the town's confusion.

Shepherd Brant, a great leader of dogs and ewes, began at last to get order out of havoc, and all was going well when Michael Draycott—he that was lying on his death-bed a fortnight since, till Hardcastle persuaded him to get out of it—came driving a flock of three-score down the lane the bracken-sledges took. They came plump into a company that Brant was shepherding along the track to Logie, and a bleak-witted cry went up to heaven from two hundred sheep that turned all ways at once.

Brant took command in earnest now. "Durn you, Michael, will you leave shepherding to shepherds. What's the use of you, quavering with a stick and walking as if your toes were on hot bricks? A figure of fun, I call you."

“I’ll leave it to you gladly, Brant,” chuckled Michael, the sweat dripping from his cheery face. “For my part I’ve had enough and to spare of the game.”

“Then get a hand into the collar of that fool-dog of yours, and see how mine has learned to work.”

Michael obeyed. Brant and he were old enough in friendship to make small account of plain speech between them, and the farmer watched the other’s dog at work with growing approbation—watched him as he drove some of the ewes in front, thrust others aside, getting his own and those that did not matter into two companies.

“A gift, I call it—a fair marvel,” he muttered, talking to the dog he held by the collar. “See ’em at it—Brant and his snod-haired collie. We’re a rough couple, lad, when it comes to rounding sheep up.”

The flocks were separate at last, and Brant’s dog padded up and down with restless question what was asked of him.

“Home to Logie,” said the shepherd, “I’ll follow soon.”

Michael grew wide-eyed with wonderment as he saw the ewes go down the slope, the collie shepherding a straggler now and then with quiet persuasion.

“He can do almost aught but talk, Brant.”

“And does it better for that lack,” said the shepherd, filling his pipe. “Dogs have the pull of us there. They work instead of talking. Lordie, it’s been a warm job, this.”

“Thanks to you shepherds. What fool’s tale did you come telling, about north wind and snow?” put in Geordie Wiseman, sauntering to join them from a neighbouring farm lane.

“Bide a day or two, and you’ll learn. For myself, I’m glad of a breathing-time, while Scamp yonder takes ’em home to Logie.”

“You haven’t a pup of his fathering, Brant?”

“I have, as it happens, but I’d never trust him to your lowland training,” growled Brant.

The shepherd fell into great moodiness, till Michael rallied him.

“What’s gone amiss?”

“Storm’s gone amiss,” snapped Brant. “Scamp does well enough—a good second of the twins I reared—but Storm was known from this to Carlisle for what he was—the best dog in the north for sheep. And now he’s tasted flesh, and no cure for him but the barrels of a gun.”

“A rare dog,” assented Wiseman, “but too clever, as you might say. He went past himself. You’ve not chanced on him yet, I take it?”

“Not I. I begin to fancy he’s savaging another man’s flocks by now.”

Storm, if they had known it, was watching them from above, where he lay coiled in a clump of bracken under Pengables. For a week and a day, since Hardcastle first gave him house-room, he had roamed at large, raiding and sleeping and skulking by turns; and, as he came warily across the moor this morning, the uproar from the fells below roused ancient memories. With slow craftiness, his body crouched to take advantage of such cover as rocks and heather gave him, he had wormed his way to the foot of Pengables, and now looked on, an outlaw, at the work speeding forward.

He had shared that work in other years, had heard men praise him, had seen his fellow-dogs give jealous homage to his fame. And now he lay here, with the blood of a late-slain ewe scarce dried on his rough muzzle. None praised him to-day. He had lost repute, and every hand was turned against him—even Brant’s, his old master; and across Storm’s hard, relentless eyes there stole a mist of grief. That weakness passed. The wolf-lust in him blazed afresh, kindled in the old-time of his ancestors. He remembered last night’s slaughter—the mad joy of killing, just for slaughter’s sake. He thought of the night to come. Then he turned three times in his bracken lair, and his head dropped on his forepaws. For he was full fed and sleepy.

Over the same moor that Storm had crossed, Hardcastle of Logie came from business he had at Nether Helstone. They liked to have him with them at the ewe-gathering, and he was later than he had meant; but for all that he halted when he reached the grim rockpile of Pengables, set four-square like a fortress on the hill-top. He, too, was looking down on a remembered scene, as Storm had done, and with a sense of utter loneliness.

He watched the wild gathering-scene below—the sheep scampering every way at once, the dogs half-crazied, the men who seemed, most of them, little surer of their wits. Then he saw order come from the bedevilment, till at last the whole of the wide fells below him took moving shape. There was no longer a waste of close-cropped pastures. It was hidden by long, swaying flocks that glided to their lowland shelter-fields.

As the grey sheep moved through the day's heat, the sweat of their fleeces rose to a sunlight that turned it into rainbow mist; and Hardcastle stood looking down on old, familiar country changed to fairyland. The spell of it was on him. He had not known what glamour lay about this simple Gathering Day.

He shook himself free of dreams, and glanced across the valley. Garsykes, the village of the Lost Folk, was sending wood-smoke up into the quiet sky as if it were a haunt of peace. Yet it had put a token on his gate, had killed old Roy already, and would burn Logie next, no doubt. It seemed destined that he should lose the few things left him nowadays to care for.

Here on the heights he learned suddenly what Roy's loss meant to him. First grief, when he found the dead body at his gate, had been tempered by the shock that stuns. Through the days that followed he had shut down the windows of his heart, lest he looked too closely through them. There were other dogs in plenty to be had. He must buy one to-morrow—or perhaps the morrow after. So he told himself; but now, as again he looked across at Garsykes, he hungered just for Roy. If all was in the losing, because he had battered three men of the Wilderness, he could have faced it better if Roy had been beside him. He had no fear now. But he had loneliness, that can bite like east wind into the marrow of a man.

The sheep-nibbled grass sloped sharply down on this side of Pengables, and when he reached the hill-foot—half running and half sliding, as fell-racers do—he was checked by a sudden growl from the brackens on his right. Storm's sleep these days was light as the triggers of pursuing guns. He was on his feet already, his teeth bared behind the tell-tale ruddy lips. Then, as he saw who the intruder was, he just stood and looked at him, his air ludicrously changed. The brown eyes grew full of deprecation, appeal, assurances that he was a mishandled and misjudged fugitive.

Hardcastle laughed quietly. "I believe no word of it, but you're safe from me. I give you my word for that. There's Brant down there."

Storm followed his pointing finger, then glanced at his face again.

"There's Brant down there—and more fool you to make an uproar when a friend comes by."

And now about these two there came sharp intuition, such as thrives in times of peril. Storm had always liked the smell of this man who had saved him twice—once, when he gave him shelter at Logie, and now when he might have betrayed him to Shepherd Brant below. He thrust his rough head

into the Master's hand—the head smeared by blood, and packed within by the Wilderness knew what of guile and wolf-lust—and of loyalty to his chosen man.

So then Hardcastle knew that in sober truth he had bought another dog—but not with money. He bade Storm keep close, and left him in his lair, and went swinging down the fells. Loneliness had gone, though in the peaceful days he would have sneered at any man who told him he could take cheer of heart from an outlaw such as Storm.

The last swaying companies of sheep went out of sight behind the shoulder of the track as he strode down. From time to time a man's voice sounded, or a collie's eager yelp, muffled by distance into softer melody. For the rest there was the intimate and friendly silence of a land ripe with autumn's big content.

That lasted till he neared the road where Shepherd Brant was gossiping with Michael Draycott and filling another pipe before he took the home-track to Logie. Then the jar of men's voices raised in quarrel killed all peace, and Hardcastle, glancing down, saw five of the Wilderness Folk confronting the two of Logie. He made light of the quarter-mile between himself and trouble, and Brant turned at sound of his coming.

"We've missed you," he grumbled; "but better late than never."

"What is it?"

"Nay, ask these lean swine from Garsykes."

The five were tongue-tied and loutish, till one of them—Jake Bramber, who had talked with Nita on the bridge and afterwards gone to Logie to feed old Roy with meat and hemlock—strutted his squat impudence up to Hardcastle.

"There's a dog called Storm," he said.

"There is," Hardcastle agreed, with bitter quiet.

"He's taken many sheep of ours. So I just asked Brant if he'd missed any ewes of his own this morning when he counted the tally. He owned to a score."

"Well?"

"Nay, you needn't be so high and mighty about it. They're in our pinfold yonder—tribute, as you might say, for what Storm's done to ours."

“There’s a pinfold over Logie way, and three sheep of yours tried to stop me there. Did I break all their bones, or only half? I’ve often wondered.”

And now the five men stared at Hardcastle, marvelling at his hardihood.

“There’s one of you killed a dog of mine,” said the Master, his eyes holding Jake’s, “and he’ll pay toll for that.”

“Seems as if times were changed,” growled the little man, strutting it still. “D’ye know what it means when the Lost Folk put an arrow on a gate?”

“We know,” said Hardcastle—“and, Brant, go down to their pinfold and bring back our ewes.”

CHAPTER VII

THE BATTLE OF THE FLEECE

Michael Draycott rubbed his hands together as he saw the five shrink back. They were not used to such frank and instant challenge. Hardcastle had reminded them, moreover, of what he had done to certain men of theirs; and they looked on with sullen wonder as Brant brought up the twenty ewes.

It was Jake Bramber who first spoke. “Leave us those ewes, and maybe we’ll call it quits.”

“Quits?”

“There’s been a long peace between you Logie Folk and ours. You wouldn’t break it for a matter of a few sheep?”

“He’s talking sense, Master,” quavered Geordie Wiseman. “Let him have ’em, and save us all from being murdered every night of our lives.”

A laugh went up; but Hardcastle was in no mood for merriment.

“There are two roads, Geordie,” he said sharply—“to Logie or the Wilderness. You’ve got to choose. If a tenant of mine gives any sort of tribute—aye, if it’s a penny to a brat of theirs—he crosses over to Garsykes. And may hell deal softly with him there.”

The five men drew further back from Hardcastle. More than his rugged strength, more than memory of the battered three who had returned they feared this man’s strength of spirit, revealed suddenly—feared the ring of his voice, the upright head and brawny shoulders.

“A hard man, you,” said Jake.

“Yes, a hard man, I, and God be thanked for that.”

“But an arrow-head left on a gate? It can weaken the hardest—by degrees. A blow in the dark say, or a boulder in the road when you and yours drive home o’ nights—and your women-folk not safe at any time——”

“I have no women-folk,” said Hardcastle—“except old Rebecca. And she’s a match for any two of you.”

Still Jake laboured to get the better of him. He knew that, if he could persuade the Master of Logie to buy peace at the small price of twenty ewes,

the Wilderness was free to go its way again, robbing the weak, never needing to tackle stronger folk than ale-silly drovers and the like.

"There's the house of Logie. They say no woman could ever be to Hardcastle what Logie is."

"That's true."

"We shall come to burn it, on near night."

"Thanks for the warning," said Hardcastle, and told Brant to get busy with the ewes.

Wiseman paused for a backward glance, and the Master gripped his arm. "I'll not hinder you either way—but, Geordie, you've to choose once for all."

So Geordie, as his way was, went with those who had prevailed in the last battle. And Brant went driving the stolen ewes before him, more thankful for them than for all the hundreds that had gone before in safety. And Michael Draycott laughed.

"I could scarce tell you why," he said, answering a question in the Master's glance. "Perhaps I was thinking of me on my death-bed, and the bonnier times you kicked me up to share."

Storm, the sheep-slayer, watched it all from his lair at the foot of Pengables. He saw the last of the ewes go in a rainbow-steam round the wide curve of the track, and with them Brant his enemy, and Hardcastle his friend—his friend from this till death ended loyalty for one unwanted dog.

The land grew quiet again, basking in the tranquil heat, until a whistle broke the silence. Storm knew the shepherd's call, the whistle of hale farm-lads when they climbed the pastures; but this had another note. It was shrill and sinister.

He waited. Broken dogs, like broken men, learn a patience that is not contentment—a patience wide-eyed to observe all details and quick to interpret them.

Nothing happened for awhile, till the whistle was repeated. And then Storm saw the doors of Garsykes open wide, and men pour out from them and run into the wide, green road the Logie Men had taken. He saw Jake point first at their empty pinfold, then down the track—heard the deep, evil roar that died as they went grimly in pursuit.

Storm understood it all, and a great song came into his blood. He was not concerned with his own needs now, but with Hardcastle's. As he went between the brackens and kept pace with the running folk below, he could see the men of Logie moving slowly, hidden as yet from the enemy, but with only a few hundred yards to spare. And they did not know their peril.

The song in Storm's blood had the gale's speed now. Like all great-hearted sinners, he was sick of skulking. Reason had nothing to do with the long, howling wail he gave—a wail like the cry of all the lost who had ever lived and died in Garsykes—but instinct told him he was serving Hardcastle.

Hardcastle himself glanced backward, to learn the meaning of it; and round the bend he saw a company of the Lost Folk, their shuffling run stopped for a moment by the eerie cry that still whined and sobbed from the bracken-lands above. He took advantage of their superstition—they fancied Guytrash was calling them to death—and glanced ahead again, down the track the sheep were taking over a grey, narrow bridge.

"Get the ewes over, Brant," he said quietly, as if he called him to supper up at Logie. "Get them over, man, and be quick. We two must hold the bridge."

Sixty years of weather on the heights had only toughened Brant's lean body and he warmed to this queer happening. He got the sheep across, and left them in Geordie Wiseman's charge.

"Your knees are all a-twitter, Geordie," he growled, "but there's use enough in you, maybe, to keep a few ewes from straying into what's to come."

"How will it end, shepherd?"

"As it will end. What can I tell you more than that?"

The Wilderness Men were still halting, for Storm's long-drawn howl had taken a deeper note. They looked for some ghostly death to overtake them, till Jake rallied their oozing pluck.

"It's naught. We live too near those durned old miners up at Weathersett, with their talk of trolls and weir-dogs——"

"Aye, but it's Guytrash calling us, all the same," broke in a lad of the company. "I heard him once, and my father hanged himself that night."

"The more fool he," laughed Jake. "He'd have been hanged any way, soon or late; but no man should run to meet a halter."

Hardcastle, fronting them at the bridge, knew that the odds must overmaster himself and Brant, once these folk came at them in dead earnest. They were thirty paces away as yet, irresolute for a moment that seemed endless, and Hardcastle's thoughts ran swiftly, like those of a drowning man. This end was better, after all, than the long-drawn-out stealthy warfare he had been prepared to meet. And Logie's honour would be safe. Yet he felt an odd, wistful regret for Brant the shepherd. The pity of it that Brant was old, with a heart reared on upland solitude. The fights he was trained to share were clean battles between a man and such weather as the skies chose to ding about his ears. But they were here together and must face it out.

Brant's thoughts were busy, too, in this long moment of inaction. The deep, running cry, that sounded ceaselessly through the brackens up above, was a cry known to him. It had roused him many a night as he slept in his hut, up yonder on the roof of the high fells, had got him out of doors with a gun in his hand to follow a useless hunt in the dark for a sheep-slayer who yapped and growled across the wastes. He knew Storm's voice now, as one knows the voice of his dearest enemy.

The ewes behind him knew it, and pressed together in a sweat of fright. Storm the sheep-slayer was among them once again—Storm, who had made nightmares of their slumber for time out of mind.

Then Hardcastle's voice sounded, rough and sturdy, as he answered Jake's gibe that no man should run to meet a halter.

"No man runs to meet my fists, I notice."

Still the Wilderness Men held back. Attack in daylight was a trade they had not learned, and they were clumsy at it.

Hardcastle's blood was red in him, as when he had stood above old Roy, slain foully by these people. The struggle could not last, he knew. Soon they would gather bastard courage from force of numbers, and there would be an end to him and Shepherd Brant. But joy was with him. There was a sharp memory of Logie, the house dearer to him than all else except his lands. Parting was hard, till he remembered that they would carry him there a true Hardcastle. Dead or alive, he asked for Logie's honour.

Up above this battle that could only have one end, Storm was pressing through the brackens. He had warned the Master, and afterwards had watched the score of grey-fleeced ewes. And the old wolf-call had reached him.

Storm went on his own business now. He went at speed, but craftily, and never left cover till he crossed the brook that, further down, ran under the bridge where Hardcastle fronted the Lost Folk. Then he turned downhill. He was in the open now, and the sheep that fool Geordie guarded turned face about as the slayer's hunting-note came down the lean, steep pasture-lands. They knew that Storm loved to chase them from behind before at last he leaped and fastened his teeth in wool and flesh. So they turned about, with bleating courage to resist, till the cry of the slayer came near and eager.

Geordie Wiseman pranced up and down, shouting that the ewes were all gone daft. Hardcastle and Brant turned to see the frenzied mob of sheep charge them from behind; and just in time they left the bridge. The sheep came skeltering over in resistless panic, drove through the Wilderness Folk and scattered them like chaff to one side and the other of the road. Fear of man was lost in the wilder dread of what pursued.

After them came Storm, at a tearing gallop that checked as he neared the Garsykes Men. The sheep were in front of him, a sure quarry later on; and here were enemies who had harried him up and down the country-side for many a day. He bit right and left with savage yelps. He paused to maul one here and there of those who had been stamped into the breeze-blown dust of the roadway. Then he passed, as a roaring gale might do, and followed the grey ewes—out and up, till he was hidden by a bluff of rock.

The Garsykes Men were broken. They forgot Hardcastle at the bridge, forgot all but superstition, and the look of Storm as he went by, with his fangs bared and his muzzle dripping red with blood of theirs. Terror-stricken as the sheep whose cries still came fitfully down-wind, they made for home, some limping as they went.

Hardcastle passed a hand across his eyes. A moment since he had been ready for the struggle that was to end all strife for him on this side of things; and now he was a free man again. It was unbelievable how sweet life was, with all its harsh ups-and-downs.

Brant came to his side, and together they stood looking down on the mean village in the hollow just below them. It was packed with women, and one of them—a plump, brazen hussy—sent a great laugh up.

"Good grief, our men come home," she cried—"*our men*."

The laughter spread, till the broken warriors rallied and made for their own women-folk with ready fists.

“It’s about time we went,” said Shepherd Brant. “If the men and the women both come out against us after their fratching’s done—why, God help us.”

They took a last look at this village that had conquered Logie-side for generations, and were turning homewards when a voice hailed them, and they saw the plump hussy breasting the rise of the pastures up from Garsykes.

“You’re Hardcastle of Logie?” she panted.

“Why, yes.”

“Then I’ve come to tell you two things. First, that you’ve a queer pluck of your own, to come so near us after we’ve put the token on Logie’s gate. A bit of a fool, I should call you.”

“Like most of us.”

She stood fronting them, her red arms folded across her ample breasts. “Aye, laugh while you can; for it’s no easy road you’ve chosen—’specially by night. Lord, what our men will put on you for this day’s work.”

She left them as quickly as she had come, and Brant’s face was sombre as Hardcastle and he crossed the bridge that would have seen their death if Storm had not run wild awhile since.

“I’ve lost twenty ewes. There’s no denying that,” he grumbled. “And Storm—that old, ancient devil—is with them up the pastures.”

“He saved you and me, Brant—saved us for Logie and the days to come.”

“You were always partial to him, as I’ve told you time and again. I’d rather have died than be saved by a ravisher of ewes.”

“Maybe—but I’d rather live, to put fear of Logie on these Garsyke swine.”

For a mile they went, Hardcastle and his shepherd, in sharp disagreement. Then Brant turned, with a dry chuckle.

“There’s sense in that. After the few hundred years they’ve been putting fear on Logie, it’s time we had our turn. But I cannot thole the thought o’ Storm, and never will.”

As they rounded the bend where Widow Dyke’s cottage stood snug and lonely, its garden-patch ablaze with red butterflies that feasted on the tall-

standing Michaelmas daisies, Nita Langrish met them in the road. A little, toddling chap had hold of her hand, and she was singing a song to him.

Now grow you big, and grow you tall,
Lad o' the Wilderness.
You'll give the Logie Folk a call
When nights are dark and drear and all,
Lad o' the Wilderness.

She ceased her singing, and stood fronting Hardcastle. Supple and eager, a thing radiant as the sunlit day, she brought harsh memories back. He had been in slavery once to this beguilement, before he learned what lay behind it.

"Whose brat have you with you?" he asked.

"Widow Mathison's." Nita's voice was clear and bell-like as of old, pleasant to hear. "You felled his uncle at the pinfold, and Murgatroyd has not recovered yet."

"That's welcome news."

She glanced at him with such hope of old dominion that Brant went forward, disgruntled and at war with life. If the Master liked to be fooled a second time, that was no concern of a shepherd who had kept his eyes on the hills, instead of letting them rove women's way.

"Have you forgotten Logie Woods?" asked Nita, tears in her grey, pleading eyes.

"Except in nightmare. Yes, I've forgotten those days, Nita."

"Bitter to the end?"

"Aye, and beyond."

She fell to crying; and, when that did not serve, she glanced at him through long, wet lashes. "If I cared for too many men—it was vanity, and no more. There was never a man but you."

Wrath came to Hardcastle—sudden, heedless tempest, like a north wind from far, broken hills. "I'll not say to any woman what's on my tongue for you. I gave you—all Logie and myself—gave you my heart to be held, or played with. Tales came of other men, and I laughed at them—till I found them true."

"It was vanity. No man but you ever took my lips—though many wanted to."

She was weaving gossamer about him, this once again. Charm of the slender body, supple as the willows she wove into her baskets—lilt of her voice—the pleading in her eyes—were meshing him into her net.

He broke through. The new days had hardened him. Up yonder was threatened Logie; and here was Nita of the Wilderness, wanting him not for himself, but because he was the one man in the country-side she could not play with.

"You were singing a song to Widow Mathison's brat," he said.

"The feud with Logie's up again. It came out of the olden days, before I knew."

"Teach him a newer song. There'll be no Garsykes when the lad grows up."

Wrath had left him. Gruff and cold, sinewy with field-sports and hard riding, he would never again be the lover she had known. He was in the thick of peril, and seemed to have no fear. He was within reach of her hands and lips, and would not take them. And now fury came to her in turn, though it ran deep and out of sight.

"There are three things Hardcastle of Logie cared for," she said, counting them on slender fingers—"his house, his dog Roy, his pride. And Roy has gone the way of hemlock. So two are left him now."

"It was you sent one of yours to Roy?"

"And next I shall send one to fire your house," laughed Nita gently, counting the tally on her second finger. "Then there'll be stillness for a long while, till your pride takes fright and dies."

He grew only a little harder. She had killed his heart long since, and now had sent hemlock up to Roy. And she was glancing at him with softened eyes, was reaching out slim hands he would not take.

"I have the Lost Folk at call—could turn the storm from Logie, if—if you cared."

Hardcastle was no bondsman now to Garsykes Men—still less to thraldom of any woman who thought to glamour him from that side of the country.

"You're asking tribute, Nita," he said. "Logie gives none to the Wilderness."

CHAPTER VIII

THE GABBLE-RATCHET

Causleen was restless about the house of Logie. Her father dozed and roused himself by turns. Always in his waking moments he glanced at the pike that had gone to Flodden Field and back, and was eager to leave the roof that sheltered him. She watched the same pitiful struggle to rise and get his helpless limbs to ground, the same falling into stupor.

Near sunset of the day that followed the ewe-gathering, she drifted into Rebecca's kitchen, pride and weariness waging a private feud within her.

"It is always the same tale, Rebecca," she said. "My father is not well enough to go just yet, and we overstay our leave."

"Who told you that?" asked the other dryly, as she gimped the edge of an apple-pasty before she set it in the oven. "Not me for one."

"Nobody told me—in so many words."

Rebecca glanced up. The harsh face that was worth a couple of watch-dogs to the house—as Hardcastle's jest had it—was softened now.

"We're a stiff folk here, the Master and me. It's old habit to snap at foreigners—but once in a while the snap doesn't mean so much. You're very welcome to stay on."

"If you'll let us pay," said Causleen, fire smouldering in her eyes. "We're not beggar-folk, but pedlars—giving for what we get."

"All in a fine tantrum, are you? As if Logie couldn't give a lodging to a couple of far-spent wanderers."

"We haven't money, but I could help you—to wash up in the kitchen, and clean the upstairs rooms—"

"You could," broke in Rebecca, "if I'd let you. You seem not to know that it's joy and pride to me to serve the Master. He's worth the while."

"So we must go?"

"So you must stay, seeing how it is with Donald. You've enough to do, and so have I; and that should keep us two from worriting."

“Why is the Master so hard?” asked Causleen, watching Rebecca stand away from the hiss of the opened oven-door before she put the pasty in.

“He met a fool-lass once, and thought her all made up of what never could be in this world. Women aren’t shaped out of rainbow-dreams, as the Master fancied. So he took a fall—and a long, steep fall it was.”

Tired as she was, Causleen’s interest was roused. Woman-like, she saw Hardcastle’s gruffness softened a little now that romance was its excuse.

“Was she bonnie, Rebecca?”

“Aye, like a bird you’d like to ’tice from its twig. The devil uses that sort sometimes. And now there’ll be no heir to Logie.”

“He’ll never marry?”

“Not he, unless the time of miracles came back. I’ve no patience with life, I tell you. Here’s a man as likely-set-up as one here and there—might pick as he chose—and he lets himself go bachelor all his days because a lass fooled him once.”

“He never thinks of the men before him? Seven hundred years the Hardcastles have been settled here, he told us.”

“Aye, he thinks of them, I fancy. They nag at him, and small wonder. It’s a shame and a crying pity that he should let the race die out, for sake of such as Nita Langrish.”

“What was she like?”

“Like nothing honest—a face that put even women in mind of flowers and such trash—and great, grey eyes—and a heart as dry as Ghyll Beck after a droughty summer. But she did one good turn to Logie. I’ll own to that.”

Rebecca had not paused in her work. Like a mill-wheel, she could chatter without hindrance to the day’s labour.

“They go far back, the Hardcastles,” she went on, spreading dough on the baking-board and rolling it with quiet, unhurried hands. “Yeomen, they, and content with yeoman’s pride. Then they bought a croft here, a farmhouse there, till they got to be big in the land.”

Causleen began to understand many things about Hardcastle, now she held the key. His grim hostility to women was explained. So, too, was the rugged, inborn dignity that could meet all men frankly, yet hold them at a little distance. In days gone by, she had known Highland lairds who had shown just this will-proud front to clansmen of the misty homeland.

“And then?” she added, like a child impatient for the end of a nursery-tale.

“There come breaks in a line as long as Hardcastle’s—a spendthrift, a drunkard, one silly in his wits—there must be breaks. The Lord Almighty favours none, and long-settled folk must take their chances with the rest.”

Rebecca was of the homeland, too, to Donald’s girl. The Lord Almighty favoured none, as all men knew who had lived with mountains and the storm.

“She did a good turn to Logie, this Nita Langrish?” asked Causleen.

“She did. The Master was all for guns and fishing, and letting a farm go here and there while he played at life. If the likes of her had married him, she’d have pushed him down to dear-knows-what of mortgages and ruin. But they quarrelled, thanks be, and the Master went hard as a flint. I watched him close and proper, I promise you, those first months after they parted. It bit deep, and might have taken him into any sort of devilment; but instead it stiffened him.”

“Soured and roughened him,” flashed Causleen, remembering how Donald and she had come to Logie first.

“Maybe. I own that I’d like to hear him laugh about the house again—just once in the week, say—but then you can’t have everything in this world. Instead of squandering farms, he’s buying them.”

Rebecca, rolling the dough out as she talked, remembered suddenly the pasty already in the oven, and darted to its rescue.

“There, now,” she scolded, “it would have been burned in another minute. That comes of your gossip, when you know I like a quiet kitchen. Take those white cheeks of yours out of doors, girl. You’ve been cluttered up too long between four walls. Take ’em out, and leave me to my baking.”

Causleen was learning the difference between the bark and bite of those at Logie, and Rebecca’s glance was kindly. “There is father,” she said, glancing wistfully through the open door at the sunlit warmth outside.

“And me to see to him till you come back. I’m not old enough yet to make a song about tending my kitchen and one ailing man. Take jobs by turns, and one’s a rest from t’ other.”

So Causleen, with a sob of sheer relief, stepped out into the afternoon. She died by inches in such imprisonment as she had known at Logie, but her feet seemed shod with fairy-boskins now that she was free to roam a land

that reminded her at every turn of her lost Highlands. Through the russet sun-glow she went, up into the moors that knew no walls except the sky's. The heather was not as tall as in her own country, where she had waded knee deep through it; but the scent and the friendliness were the same. When a cock-grouse got up and whirred over rise and hollow of the untamed lands, she knew his challenge of *go-back, go-back*, for a note as cheery as Rebecca's when she had bidden her find an hour of freedom.

She left the moor at last, tempted by the lure of Logie Woods below, with their burnished colours glowing in the heat-haze; and once more, as she stepped into their cool shelter, the sense of home was with her. Underfoot the pale gold of fallen larch-leaves shimmered softly in the silver light that filtered through—a thick carpet, soft to tread. Ripe, nutty odours were abroad, and peace was sounding her elfin-trumpets through every brake and hollow. The wise big-hearted autumn was here, as in far Inverness—a northern autumn, that had fought for this tranquillity.

Causleen, in sheer content, followed the winding track, till it led her to a little, brawling stream, brown with moor-peat and ferned in every crevice of its banks with greenery for the water-pixies and their kind. She forgot every footsore step she had taken on the Pedlar's Road. Here was the twin-hollow to one in the homeland, where she had grown from child to woman, dreaming of Highland feuds, and Highland loves, and the glamour that would come one day when a man's eyes were steady and honest with her own, asking all she had to give.

She stood there, so quiet that a squirrel ran about her feet before he saw her and raced up a neighbouring fir-bole, pausing to wash fear away from his face before he glimpsed down on this intruder. As on Logie Brigg, no longer than two weeks ago, Causleen was aware now of the voice that spoke without any sort of speech—the little voice within that never lied. Not in the Highlands, but here in Logie-land, the man of her dreams would come.

So by and by she went down the rough bank of the stream, singing a Gaelic song that was in tune with the water's voice, and came at last to the brink of Wharfe River, where it flowed in dappled, sunlit quiet—a great-bosomed stream, wide between its banks. And now she lost remembrance of the Highlands. They had rivers there in plenty, but none like this water that said so little and so much as it swirled by—lonely, majestic, unafraid.

She, who had learned in babyhood the language of many waters, big and little, could make nothing of Wharfe's speech. Soft as its murmur was, there

were undernotes that baffled her—eerie cries below the flood, and now and then a roaming whine, as if a fox pursued its prey by night.

A breeze was stealing now across the warm shelter of the woods—a moaning breeze, gentle and very cold. The rock-doves, crooning overhead, grew silent. Chatter of beast and bird ceased in Logie Woods. They knew what was coming to them from the north and something of their trepidation began to settle on Causleen. Such dreams as she had been weaving a moment since seemed empty, foolish, and their warmth had gone with the woodland glow.

Wharfe River, as she followed it, lost its breadth of flow; its tranquil temper. The under-cries grew louder as it swept through the narrows under grey-brown scuds of foam; and ever as the waters hurried down, the rocks on either bank set closer teeth on them.

Causleen, glancing across this place of tumbled strife, saw a man's figure come down the wood on the far bank; and a smile of self-derision played about her lips. How bravely she had dreamed of a lover—and what a wakening, to find Hardcastle of Logie—Hardcastle the churl, who grudged Donald and herself each hour they spent under his roof. But at least he was on the other bank, and there was no bridge for him to cross. She was glad of that.

Then she saw him gather himself together, and run a little way, and leap; and he was on her side now of Wharfe River, laughing up at her astonished face.

"It saves the long way round by Logie Brigg," he said—"but it's no short cut for fools to take."

She came close to the bank and glanced down, curious to learn how one leap could bridge a river; and under her she saw the whole tumult of the upper stream caged into a yard's span, with Wharfe going silent, fast and deep between its prison walls. She saw, too, that Hardcastle had jumped from the low to the higher bank, and that the rock he leaped from was wet with spray.

"You took a mad risk," she said, shivering as she watched the strong, remorseless flood go by.

"I said it was no short cut for fools. But Wharfe couldn't drown me if she tried. There's too long caring goes between us."

"*Wharfe River.* The name sings to me since I heard it first."

“And Wharfe sings—many songs. I’ve known her for thirty years, and never stale of listening. Soft as a girl one day, and the next a beldame, riving all her banks to pieces. A woman, all of her.”

“Why—a woman?” asked Causleen, with quiet mockery.

“She changes her mind so lightly—croons to you, like the gentlest stream that ever lapped quiet banks—and you’re half believing it when the storm-waters come, roaring to pluck you down.”

“Was it only Wharfe taught you what you know of women?”

Malice prompted the gibe, but Causleen was bewildered by the answering fury. She had driven a needle-point into some deep-hidden nerve, and for a moment she fancied Hardcastle would strike her. He was alive with rage. She seemed to stand shelterless under a mountain tempest that was soon to break about her. She did not care. Better to flout him in the open here than be a tongue-tied and unwelcome guest at Logie.

As she had watched him gather himself for the slippery leap across the Strith, she watched him now. He got temper into hand, as if it were a mettled horse he rode. He conquered the pain of an old wound she had pricked to life. The face he turned to her at last was grey and quiet.

“Not only Wharfe,” he said.

The breeze came sobbing, cold and comfortless, through the woods of Logie, and the red leaves blew about them in their fall. Again old griefs came to Hardcastle, and again he laughed, as of old, to drive them off.

“Wharfe’s a woman, as I said. She drowned the heir of all these lands once—a stripling, and his greyhound checked him at the leap. And then his mother reared the Priory below; and Wharfe slips by the ruins to this day, gentle as a dove—penitent, you’d think, for what she did up here.”

Causleen’s interest was stirred, in spite of herself, by the boldness of his fancy, the sure, straightforward hold he had on the lore of other days. At their first coming, when Donald resented the pike hung on the wall at Logie, the Master spoke of Flodden as if he had shared the battle lately. Now he talked of what happened in the elder years, before the shock of Flodden came, as if they, too, were recent. To-day seemed one with all the yesterdays to this man who loved his country-side and knew its inner secrets.

The breeze blew shriller now. Raw and wet, it fluted through the glory of the woods, plucking a red leaf here and there in passing.

“Brant was right,” said Hardcastle, “though I fancied his weather-wisdom had gone astray this once.”

As he spoke, and while Causleen was thinking bitterly that the prophet of ill-weather was always on the safe side of life, a great crying sounded overhead—a harsh, tortured crying, as of human things in anguish.

“What is it?” she asked sharply.

“Rebecca would say it was The Gabble-Ratchet.”

The first crying overhead had passed into silence, but now another came, louder and more anguished.

“Brant was right,” Hardcastle repeated—“and it’s time we both got up to Logie.”

She found herself going with him up the steep rise of the woods—found herself yielding a hand to his when he reached down to help her across some slippery rock-face—and had no time to wonder that she let her pride be quiet. There was something in the wet, rising breeze, something in the Gabble-Ratchet uproar overhead not long since, that made for awe and need of a man’s hand, whether he was rich or poor in courtesy.

They went past Ghyll House, where a dog barked at them from behind a stable-door, and up into the pastures.

Brant was right, no doubt, as Hardcastle had said. On one side of them, Pengables thrust his big rock shoulders up into the red sundown and the warmth; on the other a grey mist came running, like the ewes that Storm had chased into the Wilderness a few days since.

And now again there sounded the crying from above, shrill and terrible, and Causleen looked up to see what seemed a ship go overhead with the speed of a hurricane behind. It was a long, slender ship, its slenderer prow driving into the sunlit warmth ahead, and it was chased by the breeze that was a wind by now, hurrying the grey mists in front of it. Then Causleen came out of the eeriness that Logie Woods had laid on her.

“It’s the wild-geese flighting south,” she said, shaking herself free of omens.

“It is,” said Hardcastle; “and so many of them come that we’ve time to get to Logie and no more. Lord Harry only knows what sort of storm is skelping down.”

They two knew what sort of storm it was, when they reached the long pasture that raked up into the Logie highroad. The wind came, and the snow, and biting hail—came ravening on the track of the wild-geese fleeing south—and soon there were no landmarks.

There was a foresters' hut, he remembered, at his left hand, where the field ran into the pinewoods. They could find shelter there, if anything could find it.

Hardcastle had known the pasture from childhood, but it was lost to him as if he trod foreign country. In the blackest night he could have found his way across it, but not through this scudding snow that swirled till it dizzied brain and sight—through the wind that bit and the hail that stung.

He was not making now for Logie. There was a foresters' hut at the far end of the pasture where it met the pinewoods. Once he could find it they could shelter till the snow had ended; for tempests as quick to come as this, out of a warm October's quiet, seldom lasted.

He could not find the hut—could find nothing but snow that was balling already under his feet—snow that would not let the sky come through. It was as if he tried to make way through a thicket, not of brambles, but of cotton-wool. Then a cry reached him. Whether it came from front or rear, he could not tell, but it was Causleen's voice.

"Where are you, child?" he snapped, impatient at his own failure.

A little sob ran in between one wind-gust and the next. It hurt him strangely. "Lost. I was tired—I could not keep pace."

She was lost indeed, though no more than ten paces from him. For the wind got up with a screech, and there seemed no space between the snowflakes. And over the din of it all there sounded, far overhead, the crying of belated wild-geese, hurrying south.

Even in that moment of harsh peril, Hardcastle laughed quietly. It was odd that he, of all men, should be asked to go seeking about for a woman lost in the snow. These five years past he had been striving to lose all women, except Rebecca.

Voice answering voice, they strove to find each other. Sometimes they came near, and again they called through the sundering distance. And then at last Hardcastle touched the rough pedlar's cloak she wore, and reached down, and got her hand into his.

“No more straying,” he said roughly, “till we get out of this damned weather.”

Her hand lay close in his. He did not know that his own gripped it till she winced. He knew only that he must get her free of this pasture that would put the snow-sleep on them if they stayed much longer.

Causleen’s hand seemed in some strange way to guide him. He moved quickly, like one who knew his way at last, and presently his knees came hard against a fence of stone. He had not guessed till now that bruised knees could be a joy.

“Keep your hand in mine,” he said, “while I feel my way by the wall.”

It was a weary enterprise, this feeling the way. The wind was a gale now, and Hardcastle’s hand followed the wall as a blind man’s might, with slow caution.

Together they trudged through the thickening snow till Hardcastle’s numbed fingers touched something that was not stone. He had found the rough trunk of the oak-tree that stood this side of the foresters’ hut.

“Wait,” he said, and clambered up the wall.

In this whiteness that was worse than midnight, he could not see where to plant his feet. And, as is the way of dry-built walls, the stones went under him with a roar like the wind’s note overhead.

“You are hurt?” came Causleen’s voice—tattered to bits by the wind as she tried to repeat the frightened question.

One foot was bruised by a coping-stone of the wall. He could attend to that later on.

“No,” he said. “I’ve made a gap for you to come through. That is all.”

He reached out both hands to draw her up the half-fallen wall; and, as she climbed the opening, the gale drove her full into Hardcastle’s arms. He held her fast, and so they came, he carrying her, along one side of the hut, and round the corner of it, and into shelter of its lee-wall.

Snow lay thick on either hand. Overhead the wind was yelping. But there was a clear space in front of them, and the relief from battering of the tempest was instant, as if they had stepped from winter into June.

“Now you will free me,” said Causleen, with quiet laughter.

Hardcastle had forgotten that he still held her in his arms. He was thinking how nearly they had tasted death while they tramped up and down a pasture known to him from boyhood. If he had not found the wall in time to guide himself by it, there would have been rejoicing out at Garsykes; but the Lost Folk had not done with him as yet.

The door stood half-open. Sometimes the foresters locked it, but oftener not; and Hardcastle took it for a good omen that it was ajar to-day. There would be no need to set a shoulder to it and break it inward. There was a ready welcome for them here.

So he thought, till he pushed the door wide-open, and was challenged roughly. As he had battled to win free of tempest, it seemed he would have to fight for this shelter of the hut. He put Donald's girl still further behind him and took a pace or two indoors.

"Down, you brute," he said. "Down, I tell you."

Then Hardcastle, to his amazement, heard the savage growling cease, and felt a rough snout pushed into his hand; and presently he came from the dimness of the hut into the grey gloom of the space that had snow overhead, and snow to left and right. He held Storm by the collar, because he knew his ways were sharp with strangers nowadays.

"We've the sheep-stealer safe. What shall we do with him?" he asked with grim banter.

Storm strained at his collar—to be at Causleen's throat, he fancied, until the girl ran forward, and took the great, rough muzzle into her hands, and kissed him with frank abandonment. The dog licked her face, and after that licked Hardcastle's. And the wind roared overhead; and here, on the lee side of the hut, was sanctuary for these three.

"To kiss a dog with his reputation up and down Logie-side," said Hardcastle, and laughed.

Causleen had not known that he could laugh in this easy, heart-free way. Till now he had seemed austere as destiny—relentless as the driven snow they sheltered from.

"It's not for the first time—is it, Storm?" she said.

Hardcastle, when they got indoors, knew his way about the hut—knew where to find the candles, the fuel, the demijohn of rum, hidden snugly under the slab that fronted the rough fireplace built of stone. A great blaze of wood and fir-cones was roaring up the chimney soon, and Causleen thanked

him for it. Their journey up the pasture had been short in time, but long in suffering, and she was sick with cold.

She almost cried to him to come back when she saw him open the door and go out, and was glad when he returned. It would have been lonely here without him.

Hardcastle had only gone to fill a kettle from the snowdrift, and soon this was purring on the fire. She loathed the smell of the brew he offered her by and by—rum piping-hot in one of the foresters' mugs—and turned her head away.

"I do not like it."

"Maybe not; but physic's better than your death of cold."

She loathed the taste of it, too, though presently she was glad of obedience to compulsion. This physic, nauseous enough, had a strange gift of bringing warmth and well-being. She no longer shivered. The strain of that rough journey through the tempest was eased and mellowed, and already half-forgotten.

The three of them took their fill of ease. The gale out of doors grew harsher. It raved and screeched, falling back on itself once every while in whining, baffled spite. And they knew that, outside their four walls, the snow was driving thick from Pengables out to Logie, burying sheep and men, making a jest of landmarks.

Hardcastle and the girl had fought the gale, and won. By no other road could they have found the joy in listening to its fury while they hugged the fireglow. But neither guessed what Storm was making of the respite. Like them, the sheep-stealer had battled through the tempest, and found refuge here; but for him it was only one of many nights, with danger lying in wait at every turn. Here he was safe and warm, and in his sleep he gave little, snoring cries of joy.

"When did you two grow friendly?" asked Hardcastle, stirring the dog lazily with one foot.

"It was the night we came to Logie. They called you into the kitchen, and while you were away the illness came on father. I could do nothing for him except watch beside him while he slept."

"I remember."

"Then I heard a dog's feet patter down the passage, and afterwards a lonely sobbing. And I found Storm in the cupboard under the stair, crying

his big heart out. I was lonely, too, and he knew it."

"You know much of dogs," said the Master, with grudging praise.

"I should like to know more—and less of my own kind."

"You're young, to be so hard."

A faint smile crossed her face. "And you?"

"Oh, I'm old as the hills. A man needs to be hard, or what's the use of him?"

As he turned to pile fresh logs on the fire, a lull came in the tempest, and Storm lifted his head sharply from his lazy, stretched-out paws. Some sound had stolen from the snow outside that only he could hear. He got up, whining and growling by turns as he laid his nose to a crack in the door. Then he yapped, and after that he howled; and Hardcastle, who had thought of opening the door to learn who came, thought better of it. He knew what the wolf-cry meant.

"Shame on you, lad," he said.

The fire went out of Storm. His tail drooped. He cringed about this new master of his choice; and, when no blow came, he settled himself by the hearth again and slept. But now he had muddled dreams for company.

CHAPTER IX

THE NIGHT WATCH

As the hours passed, the tempest gained in speed. Stout-built as it was, the foresters' hut shook with the gale's mishandling, and the din out of doors was as full of cries as if every warlock and hellhound had been loosed from Langstrothdale to Logie.

Causleen and Hardcastle sat on the rough benches built on each side of the hut. They faced each other across the fireglow, and between them Storm slept on, making the most of luxury.

"It would be fierce, but could not last at this time of the year," said Causleen, with grave, accusing anger. "You promised that."

"And could not keep the promise. I'm only the last fool who thought himself a prophet where Logie weather was concerned."

"If the snow has stopped—go see if the snow has stopped—I should not care for the wind, however hard it blew. We could get up to Logie somehow."

Her eyes were bright—too bright, to Hardcastle's thinking—and she seemed to have some stubborn feud with him.

"How can we, through the drifts? Be glad we're sheltered here."

"Are you a man at all? I bade you go and see if we could get to Logie."

To humour her, he went out and looked about him. There was a clear space still in front of the sheltered doorway, and little stir of wind. The hut lay in a little harbour of its own, secure; but a little space away the gale ravened through the snow as Storm at his reddest had never harried the grey ewes.

"The snow thickens," he said, coming in again.

"Then there is nothing we can do to get to Logie?"

"Not yet."

Quarrel showed in her eyes again. "A beggar-maid's honour is of no account. It would not be, to you."

He looked at her with puzzled question. To him, this was an adventure thrust on him by the tricky weather, and he would be glad to see the end of it.

"Your honour?"

"You are so dull, you men of Logie. It's not you I doubt. I trust you—dear God, as I'd trust an oak-tree, or a stone. But they will say——"

She faltered, ashamed of her thought, dismayed by their imprisonment, bitterly resentful.

"*They say*," snapped Hardcastle, "is the biggest fool in the Dale. He'll not hurt us much."

"You will not understand. Why did you bring me here?"

"Why? Would you rather be lying in the pasture?"

She was angered afresh by the knowledge that she owed her life to him, by the tolerant wonder in his face, as if he had a child's absurdities to answer.

"Yes. I would rather be lying there."

She faced him with frank enmity, and was silent for awhile.

"Have your Logie Women no nice sense of honour?" she went on. "Are they not taught that the least breath on it is worse than death?"

"They are," said the Master, stung into defence of his own—"and with it they're taught common-sense. Logie thinks none the worse of two folk because a blizzard keeps them safe indoors."

"If you had been a Hielandman, and I'd said to him half of what I've said to you——"

"Well?"

"He'd have been fighting the drifts outside by now."

The challenge was direct—out-facing if he did not take it up—and Hardcastle glanced at Storm, asleep still between them. The dog would be a sure guardian for her, if he failed. It was likely he would fail; but there was just a chance that he could win through to some other shelter.

He searched in the chest at the far side of the hut, where the woodmen kept their axes and sundry tools, and found a shovel. Then without a word

he went out, closing the door behind him, and paused a moment to frame a plan before he left the narrow belt of shelter.

The trees, instead of giving protection to the ground below, were gathering even deeper drifts than the naked pastures. In such a storm as this, their branches—full leaved almost as in summer—trapped the snow and held it till some fiercer wind-blast sent it scattering down. There was no chance on that side; but there was hope if he could work round to the wall that made one side of the hut. Once he reached that, its whole length would give him the same narrow strip of freedom from wind and snow that the hut was giving him now. Afterwards he might travel, on the lee side of this and other walls, until he reached some barn or other.

Whether the plan failed or carried, he told himself grimly, Causleen's good-repute would go white as the swirling storm. She would be found with a grizzled sheep-stealer for guardian, not with him; and maybe her restless pride would be content.

Out of his disdain for women—out of the slur she had put on all but Highland men—endurance came to him. Between himself and the wall he sought, a great bulk of snow lay at the corner of the hut, and he drove at it with his shovel. For the honour of Logie Men he must get through it, and give the pedlar's chit her answer.

The drift could not be more than a few yards thick, he knew, and he worked hopefully in a lull of the wind. Suddenly, from the white mass in front, came faint voices raised in protest, and he remembered what Storm had heard not long since. There were over-blown sheep in the drift here—part, maybe, of the flock that Storm had hunted yesterday—and work had a double zest.

The gale had given him respite in mockery. It swooped on him afresh with a whistling screech, so that he could scarcely stand to ply his shovel. Drenched from within by sweat, the snow fell icy on him from the branches overhead—fell on the track he was carving, foot by foot, towards the drifted ewes, and half undid his labour.

Still he toiled, though passionate desire for sleep had joined the company of his enemies. There seemed no heaven but one, here or hereafter—a bed in this snow he strove to master.

Causleen, after she had watched him go, felt the same loneliness, the same longing to call him back, as when—years ago, it seemed—he had gone to get a kettleful of snow. She was filled with a great unrest, a wonder that

she had chosen to drive him out. What had he done, except give her a roof there at Logie, and here in this warm hut?

Storm was uneasy, too. He got up and flicked a flea or two away from a hide that had known fouler quarters than the hut, and whined about the door. Then he glanced back at her.

She went to the door and opened it. As Hardcastle had done, she halted, watching the snow, listening to the gale that ceased for a moment and let a man's voice through—a harsh, fighting voice. While she stood, reluctant to plunge into the white hurricane, Storm showed the way to her. Already snow had drifted over the lane Hardcastle had carved; and they found him at the corner of the hut, battling forward for the last yard that would take him to the lee-wall's shelter.

Again the wind lulled, and Causleen was aghast to hear the deep, stubborn curses of this man she had sent out to battle. In simple earnest he was fighting the snow-sleep; but in fancy it was Garsykes and its devilry he fought. As he made forward, inch by inch, he cursed Nita Langrish, rained blows again on the three gaunt men who had met him at the pinfold; and Causleen could not remember afterwards how she and Storm got him safely back at last to the hut's shelter.

They got him back, and for a while he lay in a dazed sleep, past this world's ken. Then little by little he forced himself—by sheer will to fight on, it seemed—into wakefulness. He glanced at Causleen—at the fire she had replenished—at grey, old Storm, nosing his knee in quiet distress.

"How nightmare plays the devil with a man," he laughed. "I fancied I was shovelling snow."

He dozed again, and Causleen watched beside him. She had taunted him; but it seemed there was one man at least in Logie-side. And he might have died while going her errand.

The night wore on. Storm was asleep, too, but she sat wakeful, and listened to the dying tempest. The window of the hut was not blurred by snowflakes now. The wind no longer roared in glee; it wailed and sobbed, like a child left out in the dark. Strange noises sounded out of doors—soft, thick splashings that she knew by and by for melting snow shed by the forest trees—and across the window-space a keen, sharp radiance stole.

Dawn must be here, she thought. Yet anger against him, her fear of gossip, showed unworthy. She was here with the realities of the big, open

lands, and she smiled, recalling Hardcastle's rough "*They say* is the biggest fool in the Dale."

She turned to the window again, glad of the moonlight that meant the end of tempest; and, as she sat there, her whole body suddenly grew tense and her eyes wide with terror. She could not cry to Hardcastle for help. Tongue and limbs seemed chained.

Framed by the moonlight, a white, big face looked in at her—a face packed with evil—and then was gone. Hardcastle heard nothing, nor did Storm; but Causleen listened to the slushing scrunch of feet going over melted snow.

That sound ceased, and the door was opened warily till it stood open to the moonlight and the fireglow. And still Causleen could not stir, or cry a warning; and Storm snored on.

It was Hardcastle who woke. With a bound he was up. Murgatroyd, dazed for a moment by the unexpected greeting, turned just in time, and ran, and clashed the door behind him.

Hardcastle followed, Storm silent as he raced behind the Master. The two of them went forward, over slush of the melting snow, under the scudding Hunter's Moon; but Long Murgatroyd was part of the snowy wilderness by now, lost beyond the night's finding.

They came back unwillingly, and to Causleen it seemed that Hardcastle had never shown his true self till now. Smeared with sweat and weariness, limping on the foot bruised by the coping-stone, his eyes were bright as a lad's.

"We can get to Logie now," he said—"and it's time we went, after losing Long Murgatroyd. He may be dodging out to Garsykes, to bring the Wilderness on us."

Full moonlight shone on the fast melting snow as they went out. A warm breeze stole against their faces. Winter's journey to the Dale had been hurried, alike in coming and going, as if she feared her welcome.

At the corner of the hut, where the drift had been, there was no more than a slender bank of snow, with rivulets playing down its sides. A shovel lay in front of it, and for the first time Hardcastle recalled, with a sudden rush of memory, how he had struggled here in a wind that bit to the bone.

Storm's nose was buried already in the slush. He scented the oily reek that spoke of hunting-days, past and to come; and when he drew his head

back and glanced up at the Master, there was wistfulness in his brown eyes.

"Gone away," laughed Hardcastle. "You'd best come up to Logie, out of Brant's reach."

CHAPTER X

THE WEAVER OF BASKETS

I

Before the storm broke that drove Causleen and Hardcastle into shelter of the foresters' hut, Long Murgatroyd had been poaching up the moor. He knew all about the uses of a wire looped at both ends and set across the tracks the grouse took to their drinking-places; and he laughed as he gathered his spoils together and turned for home.

"They're Hardcastle's birds," he chuckled, "and they'll taste sweeter in the pot for that."

He had got half down the moor when the first of the tempest struck him, and he ran for the lower country as fast as his great legs would take him. He reached the first pasture only to be blinded by the swirl of snow, so that he had to creep forward, feeling his way. His hands touched stone at last, and he worked his way round to the lee side of a bield-wall, built two-sided to shelter ewes from the north wind and the bitter east. In the angle of this he dozed and shivered through the storm; and afterwards, when the moon shone out on thawing snow, he picked and slushed his way downhill to Garsykes.

His way lay past the foresters' hut, and as he went by he halted, astonished to see its window shining crimson out across the snow. Peering in, he saw Causleen there beside the hearth, and no one else. Drenched to the skin, hungry and shivering, Long Murgatroyd laughed—as he had laughed when he snared Hardcastle's birds on the moor. There was shelter here, and a log-fire, and a lass to share the warmth with him—a bonny lass, and a prime favourite up at Logie these last days, if all folk said was true.

He opened the door, to find Hardcastle rise in menace, to see Storm bristling at him in rage that seemed gigantic. He banged the door home and fled. By instinct of the hunted he knew they would catch him in this hindering broth of snow and water. So he doubled back into the wood. The snow made silence under his feet. The black firs hid him from the moon. He was lost utterly to Hardcastle and Storm.

Murgatroyd watched the moon pale in the dawning sky, and the sun leap ruddy to the top of old Pengables Hill, before he came in sight of Garsykes. It was a tedious way for one spent with fright and hunger, and he lumbered

down into the hollow, and looked about him at the closed doors of the village—especially at the inn-sign, "The Poacher's Rest," that swayed cracked and dirty in the breeze.

He went in at last, and a flaunting, big-breasted woman answered his call.

"Oh, ye, Long Murgatroyd!" she said, her arms akimbo. "What d'ye want?"

"A dollop of rum, and summat to eat."

Widow Mathison pointed to a row of figures on the door. "Nay, you'll ruin me. I'm for ever chalking up your slate till I'm tired of you and your debts."

Murgatroyd drew out a brace of grouse from some hidden pockets and slapped them on the table. "Keep 'em awhile, widow, till they're like to drop to bits. You relish 'em that way."

"Hardcastle's birds? Ay, they'll be toothsome."

She busied herself now, with entire goodwill, about the fire; and Murgatroyd looked up by and by from a steaming dish of eggs and bacon.

"You'd wipe out your chalks against me, widow, if I told you what I saw in Logie Woods. But, there, I'm not for telling."

"What did ye see?"

"Nay, another noggin o' rum wouldn't draw it from me. There was Hardcastle of Logie in the woodmen's hut."

"Was there?" asked the widow, filling his glass afresh.

Murgatroyd took a wide gulp at the measure, and drained it. He was cold and weary.

"Not if you filled it afresh—and thank you, widow, for it does drive the wet out o' one's bones."

"Hardcastle was in the hut," said the woman.

"Aye, he was, in front of a cosy fire, and the pedlar's lass with him, sitting on his knee. I saw 'em through the window as I went by."

Widow Mathison gave a screech of glee. "For a woman-hater, he frames fairish well."

“Fairish well,” agreed Murgatroyd, with a maudlin leer. “There she was, and there he was. You wouldn’t say aught could alter that—would you, now? I opened the door, and I listened—and dang me if they weren’t cooing like a pair o’ cushats. And she a pedlar’s brat. And him with his mucky pride.”

The door swung open, and a squat fellow entered, sallow-faced and touzled.

“There’s water in plenty hereabouts,” said the widow, after a shrewd glance at him; “but it seems to run to waste. One man could lead Jake Bramber to it, but twenty couldn’t make him wash.”

“I wasn’t thinking of water specially,” growled Jake.

“You wouldn’t be. It’s the itch i’ your throat that bothers you at this time o’ day. And there’s your tally, side by side with Murgatroyd’s. I’m tired of chalking up your owings.”

“That’s easy mended, widow. Stop chalking ’em.”

She bridled at his effrontery, but drew him a measure. Then, “Tell him, Murgatroyd,” she said.

Long Murgatroyd told him what he had seen in the foresters’ hut, and with repetition the tale gathered volume, till all the Garsykes swine had garbage to wallow in for many a day to come.

“Nita Langrish will laugh herself to bits when she hears this,” said Jake.

“I’m not so sure,” broke in the widow. “Nita may fool you men of Garsykes—*if* you’re men, which I begin to doubt—but Hardcastle escaped her. So she wants him. I’ve known her since she toddled, and that was always her way. Near died o’ crying for the moon, when she was three years old. It’s always the thing she hasn’t Nita longs for.”

“That’s true,” snarled Jake. “Awhile since she was making her baskets on the Brigg. ‘Jake,’ says she, ‘you’ve a way with dogs.’ ‘I have,’ says I. ‘It’s a birth-gift. They like as they love me, same as if I was one o’ them.’ And then she told me to put hemlock into a ball o’ meat and take it up to Logie. Hardcastle’s dog would be waiting for him at the gate, said Nita. So I went, and friendlied Roy. And I was a sick man, I tell you, coming home. To poison a dog—it doesn’t bide thinking of—but Nita made me do it.”

Long Murgatroyd rose suddenly to his big, shammocky height. He was shaken by a storm of passion.

“She’s the devil and all among us, with her basket-making and her eyes on all four sides at once to fool us. I’ve done with Nita.”

“No,” said the widow. “You’ve never done with such as Nita.”

And now feet began to patter up and down the cobbled street. Garsykes Folk were late to wake, for their work lay mainly with night-time tasks of poaching and robbery.

The woman beckoned Long Murgatroyd out of doors. He followed her with unsteady, shambling feet, and soon they had a company of unwashed folk about them, listening to the widow’s ribald laughter.

“There’s news from Logie,” she said. “Tell ’em, Murgatroyd, as you told it Jake.”

Long Murgatroyd propped himself against the wall, and looked about him with a clown’s solemnity.

“It’s about Hardcastle o’ Logie.”

“Damn him,” snarled a thin, wolfish man. “He goes abroad as if we’d put no token on him.”

“Don’t you worry, my lad,” said Murgatroyd. “We’ll know where to find him nowadays. He’ll not wander far from pedlar’s brat.”

So then he told them what he believed by now that he had seen in the foresters’ hut; and such a storm of applause greeted him that he left the friendly shelter of the wall behind him, and talked at large as he strutted to and fro across the street. No tale such as this had come to Garsykes for many a year, and for the moment they half-liked the Master of Logie, because he was a backslider like themselves.

When the tale was done, and the folk began to get about their ways, Nita Langrish came among them. Used as they were to her young beauty, going among them from day to day, they never ceased to marvel that such as she had grown out of Garsykes mire.

Fresh from her morning bath in a pool she knew of up the fells, gowned in soft grey that clung about her slender body, she stood like a creature from some other world among the tattered women of the village.

“Is there news from Logie?” she asked, in her pleasant voice. “They told me Hardcastle would be up the moor yesterday, so I persuaded one of ours to take an errand for me.”

“There’s not what you might call news from Logie,” laughed Widow Mathison, “but Murgatroyd here has word of Hardcastle.”

Long Murgatroyd faced her, and old hunger, old dismay found sudden vent. “He’s out of your reach, Nita,” he snarled.

“He always was,” said Nita gently, “after I sent him out.”

“Same as you’ve sent all of us, one by one?”

“When you tried to come too close.”

She stood there, soft as this morning that followed a night of grim tempest—a radiant thing, knowing herself mistress of them all.

“Well. Hardcastle’s tied to another apron-string. She’s a bonnie lass, too, as I glimpsed her in the woodmen’s hut. They made a picture, sitting by the fire as if they’d set up housekeeping together.”

A wild-rose flush leaped to Nita’s cheeks. “Who was it?” she asked.

“The pedlar’s lass. He’s chosen dark and trusty this time, as the saying is. None of your yellow-haired women again for him, says Hardcastle—and I don’t wonder.”

Nita took up the challenge. “You saw them in the hut?”

“Aye. I opened the door to creep in for shelter, and Hardcastle was there.”

“And you ran for your life? To be sure, you’d not forget what he did to you at the pinfold. None of your masters of Logie again for you, if you can help it—and I don’t wonder.”

Her mimicry, the quickness of her answer, raised such a storm of laughter against Murgatroyd that he gave up the contest; but presently he followed, as she went by the field-track that led to Logie Brigg, and overtook her.

“Nita, my lass,” he said, “you’ve got to stay and listen.”

“Have I?”

“Aye, like it or no, you have.”

In his face she saw the baffled hunger that she had brought to many men. His voice was rough and harsh, but there was pleading in it—a headstrong pleading that it was her life’s delight to thwart.

“Well?”

"It's this way. I'm sick and tired o' my days. Naught matters, save you—you and your devilments."

"I've baskets to weave. All up and down the Dale they're asking for Nita's baskets. There's no time to care for men."

He put out a savage hand, to draw her to him. She did not seem to spring aside, yet suddenly she stood far away, putting her smiling spells on him afresh.

"Nita," he said, sombre and hungry-eyed, "I'm not of the fanciful sort; but summat or somebody is whispering at my ear. One of us two is going to die of your devilry—and I don't care a tinker's damn which it is, so long as it comes soon."

Across Nita's young vigour, her joy in torturing men for pastime, a little, cold wind began to play. Long Murgatroyd was sobered. He was in dead earnest, and his big, uncouth face was lit as with some fire of prophecy.

Then her mood passed. "It will be you to die of it, I think," she said, and laughed at him as she took her way to Logie.

II

Rebecca was busy in her kitchen up at Logie on the afternoon of the great snowstorm. She was thinking how wise she had been to send Causleen "just to get a bit of colour into her cheeks" when the sky began to darken, till she could scarcely have seen to ply her rolling-pin but for the ruddy hearth-glow. Now and then she turned on the great, brindled cat curled up inside the fender

"You're a grand 'un for bringing bad weather," she said, "and that's why I named you Jonah. You never sit close to the fire but it means a storm."

The cat stretched himself, and licked his handsome fur, and dozed again. It was odd to him that human folk had so little knowledge of weather.

"Just Jonah, you—and an idle vagabones at that I've a mind to sweep you out of my kitchen with the thick end of a besom."

Jonah heard the threat without disturbance. He knew the way of Rebecca's weather, too.

She went on with her pastry-making. The Master had a big body to be filled, and a sweet tooth for pastry after he'd had his fill of strong meats. Men were all alike. Feed 'em and fill 'em, and they'd be lambs about a house. And Rebecca never guessed why her hand was light at the work—

and the pastry light, by that token. She had never a man to care for, except Hardcastle of Logie, and it was a joy to wear herself to the bone for him.

The wind got up and snarled, as it snarled by the Strith when Hardcastle and Causleen listened to the vanguard of the storm piping low through Logie Wood. And then there came the crying of the wild-geese, winging high above the house.

Rebecca dropped her rolling-pin, and went out into the wind-gusts and the greying light. She was at prayer, of her own sort.

"The Gabble-Rachet always brought me luck," she said. "It's that I live for."

Flight after flight went overhead, with ceaseless uproar. Rebecca was no longer the practical, deft-handed housekeeper at Logie. She was as Causleen and old Donald had seen her, when the pedlar showed baby-wear among the litter of his pack, and she went wild.

She thought of the lad who was to have married her in the far-off time, of his death because he would pay no toll to Garsykes. The man who killed him had died while the Gabble-Ratchet screeched overhead. Years afterwards his son broke his neck to the self-same music. Luck was in for her, and out for Garsykes, at such times.

She had crossed the stable-yard and gone into the field beyond, to get clearer sight of the wild-geese; and when the last of them had hurried by, she looked about her. There were signs in plenty of the storm to come. Just as the brindled cat had sought the fender, sheep were hurrying to cover of the wall. Rooks, feeding tranquilly an hour since in upland oat-stubble, sped homeward. In the high thorn-edge, storm-cocks, that love a tilt at harsh weather, cried lustily.

Rebecca looked far down the field, and saw a speck move up it. The speck took man's shape by and by. A scud of snow was following him up the hill, and by his shammocky stride she was sure he hailed from Garsykes. This puzzled her. An attack in force on Logie she could have understood, but it was not like the Wilderness Folk for one of them to come alone into a hostile country.

The snow-scud overtook and hid him for awhile. Then again she saw him plodding up, and she could distinguish now a bulky sack that swayed about his shoulders. With a grim face, and a grimmer heart, Rebecca waited. Jonah the cat, hugging the fire indoors, had claws to show in time of need. So had she.

The gale was up in earnest, and snow thickened fast about the man who hurried up the field. Soon he began to blunder this way and that through the blinding maze, and a sharp, bitter cry rang up-wind.

"Damn Nita Langrish. She sent me into this."

Rebecca laughed with eerie gentleness. The man came from Garsykes, as she had guessed, and Nita had sent him on an errand. Already he was hidden by the on-driving wall of snow, and so much for him. The wild-geese had flighted to-day, and Logie's luck was in.

So intent the woman was on nursing vengeance that the storm was on her, too, before she found a thought for her own safety. Though scarcely twenty yards from the gate that led into the stable-yard, it took long to find it; and afterwards, close to her own kitchen, wind and snow played blind-man's-buff with her before she found the door, and opened it, and had to use all her lean, hard strength to close it against the in-leaping storm.

Jonah still slept tranquilly inside the fender, dreaming of rats to be hunted in the stables when good weather came again. Rebecca's glance rested on him, lying plump and sleek there, and wrath descended on her. She snatched a besom up, and gave him the thick end of it with zest, as she had promised not long since in idle banter.

"That's what I give to vagabones," she said, and thwacked him again.

Jonah sprang to the top of the big chair beside the hearth, and spat at her. His fur was stiff, like an angry dog's, and he swept down a wild-cat's paw at her.

"Getting to be your own man again?" said Rebecca. "Well, it's time you did, now the rats creep up from Garsykes."

With that she took up her rolling-pin and went on with the pastry-making as quietly as if nothing had disturbed the work; but her thoughts were with the man she had watched creeping up the field. A glance at the window showed panes crusting ever thicker as the snow drove at them, and a hard smile played about her lips.

The brindled cat eyed her with wrath that cooled by slow degrees. He washed himself all over, as if to clear away the besom's touch, and stood on the chair-top in sullen dignity. Then suddenly he jumped to the floor and up to Rebecca's shoulder at a bound. They could never quarrel for long, these two.

“At your cantrips again,” said Rebecca calmly, “as if you were kitten-high—and resting all your great, idle weight on a woman that won’t put up with such-like nonsense.”

The cat stayed where he was, and presently Rebecca began to talk to him.

“There’s a Garsykes Man out yonder, Jonah. It must be cold lying. He’ll never taste kitchen-warmth again, or the crisp of an apple-pasty.”

Jonah purred against her withered cheek, and watched the rolling-pin go up and down.

“I can see him now as he came up the pasture. The snow overtook him, and he wambled like a drunken man, and dropped. There’ll be his burial-mound above him—a biggish mound by this time. So there’s another of the foul brood gone.”

From within-doors—loud as the wind was screaming at the windows—Rebecca heard a fretful cry steal down the passage.

“It’s the pedlar,” she grumbled. “Good sakes. I’d forgotten he was all on his lonesome—his legs forsaking him, and all.”

Donald was striving pitifully to rise when she reached the long-settle. “Where’s Causleen?” he pleaded. “I feel an old, old man, buried out of sight, when she’s not near.”

Rebecca wondered, too, where Causleen was. The Master was out in the storm, but he knew every barn and bield-wall of his country, and would find shelter somehow. Causleen was a stranger. It might be that she had met the same white death that the Garsykes Man had found. And she had sent her out.

“She’ll be here by and by,” she said, pity stirring at her gnarled old heart.

Donald’s glance wandered to the pike that had gone to Flodden Field and back, and again he tried to rise. “There was so much I had to tell her. You’re kind, and bid us stay at Logie—but there’s rust of Jaimie the King’s blood up there. I cannot eat or sleep within the house. Causleen knows I cannot—and she will not come.”

“Now I’m tucking the blankets round you,” said Rebecca, her hands deft and gentle, “and I’m telling you to get to sleep, or give me a reason t’ other way.”

Donald yielded to the warmth and rest; and in his dozing his heart leaped into his lips, and he told in few, poignant words what the years behind had meant to him.

"The long, grey roads—the footsore roads—selling Pedlar's Balsam to other folk—it's a weary life. There's no time for the pedlar to balsam his own feet."

And so they watched beside him through the night, Rebecca and the brindled cat. From time to time the woman crossed to the window, to see if there were any sign of the storm's abating. There was none, and her fears for Causleen increased. Yet she could do nothing, and fell asleep at last in the chair drawn up beside the settle.

The day was up when she awoke. A glance at Donald showed him lying in childlike slumber, with Jonah curled up on the blankets; and Rebecca went out into the sunlight, scanning the lower slopes in search of the Master or Causleen. They did not come, though the thaw had opened out wide tracks of green between the drifts.

In her long time at Logie, Rebecca had never known a tempest so quick to come and go. A wind swift and bitter from the east had driven her indoors last night. Now a warm, playful breeze played against her face. The gold and crimson glory of the autumn woods reared itself above great scuds of snow that melted almost as they fell. And everywhere there was the cry of waters, big and little; for every dingle of the pastures was a running beck, and all the glens were rivers, bank-top high with snow-broth.

Rebecca heard the rooks come clamouring to their sycamores and ancient nests—heard a throstle pipe a stave or two, as if he scented spring after this wild October night—and knew then that the storm would not return for many days. Rooks and the thrushes were old in weather-lore.

Still the Master did not come, nor Causleen, and Rebecca wondered if the Gabble-Ratchet had brought luck to Logie, after all. The pedlar's girl meant little to her, but if Hardcastle was dead—if never again she would sew buttons on for him, or cook his meals, or bear with his gusty temper—it was near her time to be done with this world and its foolishness.

Rebecca glanced downhill again, and when still no sign of life showed between the brimming waters, her thoughts turned to the man from Garsykes who had been overtaken by the storm last night. She crossed the stable-yard and went down the field on the far side of it till she reached a pile of melting

snow. Out of the mound showed a man's two hands, limp and glistening-wet.

No spark of pity or horror touched Rebecca. With fierce, exultant patience she watched the snow-shroud crumble, till now his arms showed to the sunlight, then his lean neck with the mouldy kerchief tied about it.

Sun and south wind between them were busy with the melting, and presently the man's face showed. It had been a coarse face, lined with slyness; but snow and death had washed it, and it carried a strange look of peace.

The sack he had carried lay beside him. She opened it, and knew at last the object of his journey. It was filled with pine-logs, twigs and resin. These and the tinder-box in his pocket were enough to set Logie flaming from end to end of its grey gables.

The dead man could tell her nothing now; but he had told all yesterday when, baffled by the storm, he cursed Nita Langrish for bringing him into this. Rebecca pieced the tale together with shrewd vision. There was none from this to Langstrothdale who garnered news like Nita the basket-weaver. Men passed her as she sat on the bridge-wall, her fingers slender almost as the withies she plaited. They stayed for gossip with a maid known through the Dale to be a maddener of men, and she 'ticed their news from them.

Nita had learned, no doubt, that the Master was from home, and had sent up this poor, dead fool to fire the house. Rebecca stirred the body with her foot, in grudging pity. Then the peace in his face—the still unalterable peace—brought wrath and brimstone round her once again.

"You've found too soft an end," she grumbled—"too soft by half, my lad."

She was still standing there, the feud raw at her heart, when Causleen and the Master came up together from their vigil in the foresters' hut.

"You're safe, then, the pair of you," she said. "I was fearing for the pedlar's girl. She's not used to our rough country."

Causleen was ashamed of her own shame, as she heard Hardcastle tell how he had met her just in time—heard Rebecca's blunt thankfulness that they had found a hut to spend the night in, safe from the worst blizzard ever known on Logie-side. Why had her pride taken fire because Hardcastle had saved her life? Why had she stooped to think of gossip and dishonour, when these two saw the past night as a fight against weather—a fight won by Logie?

Then Causleen saw the muddled heap that yesterday had been a man—saw the wet face and hands, the pitiful, threadbare clothes.

“What is it?” she asked.

“One from Garsykes that’s dead,” said Rebecca tranquilly.

“Poor pedlar. What does he carry in that big pack of his?”

“Enough to burn Logie down from roof to cellar. But he’s dead. And the Master’s quick. It’s Logie’s turn this time.”

CHAPTER XI

VENOM

Nita Langrish, later in the day of Hardcastle's home-coming with the pedlar's girl, took her way up to Logie between the melting drifts. Straight and slim she went, and an old tinker who met her on the road stood and gaped at her.

"Begosh, I wish I was younger," he chuckled. "I'd go a-courting."

Nita laughed at him, as if her heart were light as his, and turned once—in vanity—to be sure that he was watching her go down the hill. Then she thought of Hardcastle, of what she had heard just now in Garsykes; and an evil mood got into her blood.

She came to Logie Brigg and looked down at Wharfe River, swirling in high flood between the slender arches. Half-frozen packs of snow were riding here and there above the peat-brown waves. Under her feet the fierce waters roared and sang their Viking call of kill and spare not.

It was all in tune with her heart, as she climbed the steep rise to Logie. The trees were so thick about the house that she could not see yet whether its walls gaped wide and blackened. The man she had sent to fire it had not returned with news. He had perished in the storm likely—after he'd done his work, she hoped.

When she topped the rise, and came to Logie's gate, blue wood-smoke was curling up from peaceful chimneys, and Rebecca stood there talking with Brant the shepherd.

"There's a friend of yours in the Long Pasture yonder." Rebecca's voice was grimly bantering. "The snow has cleaned his face for him, but I'd have known he came from Garsykes all the same. It couldn't take the rabbity smell o' the man away."

Again a little wind of dread stirred at Nita's heart, as it had chilled her when Long Murgatroyd had spoken of death for one or other of them.

"What friend of mine should be in any Logie field?" she asked.

"Aye, deny your own. It's like you, Nita. Won't you go and have a look at the man?"

"Why should I go?"

“He’s not much to look at, I own—but he died running an errand of yours. He sent a queer sort of cry up when the snow took him—cursed Nita Langrish for sending him to Logie—so that you must have heard it out to Garsykes, I’d have fancied.”

Nita faced her ancient adversary with cool devilry.

“I’m sorry he died before he fired Logie. He was always a fool, and clumsy.”

“You dare own to it?” snapped Rebecca.

The girl was uncanny in her self-assurance, her eager beauty. “Yes,” she said. “What has Nita the basket-weaver to fear, when all the men go daft about her?”

Rebecca reached a lean hand out across the gate—swift as Jonah the cat might have flicked a paw—but Nita was too quick for her. She drew back from all life’s onsets, with soft, elusive speed.

“All the men but one,” laughed Nita, from the middle of the roadway.

“Aye, all but the Master. You’ll never fool him twice.”

“The pedlar’s brat is doing that for me. Have they come home, the pair of them?”

“They have, thanks be.”

“*Thanks be?*”

Rebecca answered the girl’s scorn with tart assurance. “Why, yes. I sent that bairn of the pedlar’s out to get a breath o’ fresh air—the dear knows she needed it—and it would have lain on my conscience if she’d foundered in the snow. The Master happened on her, luckily.”

“Garsykes has learned as much. From all we hear, they made themselves snug enough for the night—blessed the snow for coming, I fancy.”

“The devil knotted thy whipcord of a tongue, Nita, but its lash doesn’t hurt us Logie Folk. We keep clean houses hereabout—and cleanish minds. What else was to be done, save shelter from such an audacious storm?”

“Well, they sheltered to some purpose. Murgatroyd saw them sitting by the hearth—she on his knee.”

“I’ve known Murgatroyd all his life,” broke in Rebecca, “and all his life he never spoke a true word unless he fell into it by accident. Get ye back to Garsykes, and feed your pigs on such-like trash.”

Shepherd Brant had been tugging at his beard, wroth kindling slowly till its fire was bright and steady.

"There's another man o' Logie doesn't heed your snares, Nita."

"You're old, shepherd. I'd mistake you for a grey rock if I didn't see you move from time to time. Have you shot Storm the sheep-slayer yet?"

"Not yet. When I do, it's a sign that Garsykes ends."

Then once again some little breeze of fear played about Nita, but she would not heed it.

"A gypsy woman came to our village, Brant, not so long since. She had the Sight."

"Oh, aye," growled the shepherd.

"She told us of Hardcastle and his fight against Garsykes."

"Gleaned that sort o' news from any man or child about the countryside. I'm acquainted with all the tricks of Romany—especially sheep-stealing."

"She said an ancient shepherd was seeking a dog named Storm, to kill him."

"It's true."

"That the shepherd would do his best to ruin Logie, by killing Logie's luck."

"She lied, like all the Romaneys."

"I tell you what she told me, shepherd," said Nita, her grey eyes quiet and candid. "And I told the gypsy woman that Garsykes would see to Logie's ruin."

She turned to go down the road again and halted with fearless insolence.

"When I'm selling my baskets up dale and down—how they'll laugh at the tale of how they shared the hut together—Hardcastle and she."

With that she went her way, singing the little eerie ballad she had sung to Widow Mathison's boy when Hardcastle met her in the road not long ago.

Now grow you big, and grow you tall,
Lad o' the Wilderness,
You'll give the Logie Folk a call,
When nights are dark and drear and all,
Lad o' the Wilderness.

Rebecca watched her go, and all her strength to endure grew tough and sinewy. They were few and lonely, here at Logie, now the feud was up; and Nita Langrish was a dismaying power about the land, with her beauty that put men in leading strings.

"That's meant for Logie's funeral song," she muttered, as they watched the retreating figure. "Well, shepherd, we're neither killed nor buried yet."

Nita, half down the steep bend of the road that led to Logie Brigg, saw Causleen come through the wicket-gate and out into the highway.

"Looking for the Master?" she asked gently.

Causleen knew little of the basket-weaver, except that she was an old love of Hardcastle's, and read no guile in the question, in the innocent, soft eyes.

"Yes. He has ridden for the doctor. My father is—is worse."

"It's as well, maybe." Nita's jealousy noted the quiver in the other's voice, but did not spare her sorrow. "He may never need hear about the woodmen's hut."

Causleen stood very still for a moment, looking at Nita Langrish. The blow was so sudden, the pain of it so like a knife-thrust driven home, that she was dizzy and bewildered. Then the quick, Highland fire leaped to her face, showing a wild beauty that angered Nita all afresh.

"He knows and understands," she said—"*as you could not*."

All that was said and left unsaid in those few words stung Nita like a lash. This peddling castaway could hold her own, and more than her own.

"Maybe not. But I can set the whole Dale rocking with the tale Long Murgatroyd brought home."

With that she laughed in Causleen's face and went her way. Half down the road, where it wound sheer and stark to Logie Brigg, she met Hardcastle, urging a hard-driven horse.

"Your light o' love is waiting for you," she said, curtseying in sheer mockery.

“One in a lifetime is enough for me, Nita,” he answered grimly, and rode on. He and his horse had travelled many a hilly mile in pursuit of a hard-worked doctor, and had not found him; and he was sorry, because Causleen was tired enough already, after last night’s storm, without this added trouble of the father who was near to death.

He came in sight of the wicket-gate, and slipped from saddle, and let his horse find its own way to stable. Causleen was at the gate, her back turned to the roadway, and Hardcastle was afraid, somehow, to listen to the girl’s wild sobbing. It startled and unmanned him. He longed to get away, yet could not leave her in this plight.

“I’ve done my best to find the doctor,” he said, putting a kindly hand on her shoulder, “but he’s away up Amerdale. Is Donald worse?”

She drew away, as if his touch scorched her. “He is better—just for awhile—and I ran out to see if you had brought the doctor. And a woman came instead—so pretty, and with so foul a tongue.”

Hardcastle remembered Nita’s mocking curtsey—recalled Long Murgatroyd’s intrusion into the foresters’ hut last night—and the riddle of it all grew plain. Nita’s tongue had been busy with the pedlar’s girl and he knew what it could do even to rough men. Something stirred at his heart—the heart frozen long since, so that it had forgotten how to suffer, joy or grief.

“Nobody cares what Nita says. She says, and goes on saying—and folk laugh.”

“Yes. Folk often laugh, when they should cry instead. It is not your fault that we had to shelter from the storm—yet how I loathe you for it, Hardcastle of Logie.”

She was on fire with pride, with contempt of Nita Langrish and her power to wound. And, dimly as yet, Hardcastle understood her passion. “What else was there to do but shelter?”

“Nothing; but that does not help us. It was not your fault that we came to your gate, father and I, and became your pensioners.”

“My guests,” said Hardcastle, with gruff kindliness.

“Threadbare guests, forced on you. And what can I do, with father as he is?”

“Stay on.”

Causleen remembered Nita's words, her laughter as she went down the road; and the poison festered, as if a snake had bitten her. How could she stay on, with all the country-side passing Nita's gossip to and fro? How could she leave, while her father lay between life and death, babbling of far Inverness and pipes that skirled about the moorland glens?

"I thank and loathe you," she said, and left him there—muddled, not for the first time in his life, by the ways of a maid with a man.

Hardcastle watched her till she was hidden by a shower of red, fast-falling leaves. He was impatient of some feeling that the girl had roused, some stirring at the heart he had hardened against intrusion. The Wilderness had put a slight on her, as it had striven to slight Logie. She was going in fear of the open, as he went sometimes where there was nothing doing and he had leisure to remember how strong and merciless was the hornets' nest he had roused at Garsykes.

Then suddenly he understood the bond between them. She was proud and weary. So was he.

CHAPTER XII

THE SHEEP-SLAYER

I

For a week the days went at Logie as if Garsykes had no feud with it. That was the way of the Wilderness Folk, and the nameless dreads that came at such waiting times began to patter up and down the house. Storm, after staying for a night and a day, had heard the wolf-call once again, and was gone. The Master rode much abroad, and would tire two horses out between dawn and gloaming. That was his way of stifling suspense. Rebecca's was to quarrel with the brindled cat who was her shadow and familiar.

Donald was neither better nor worse, though both by turns; and Causleen, whenever she met Hardcastle, baffled him by her chill aloofness. It seemed to him that she would rather have died in the snow than owe her life to him.

Near the end of the week, Brant the shepherd came at nightfall, and knocked at the kitchen door, and came stamping in, a gun under his arm and quiet good humour in his face.

"Draw me a mug of ale, Rebecca," he said, "for I've earned it."

"Aye, all men fancy that, at any hour o' day or night. What have you done, Stephen?"

"I've shot Storm at last. A son of Belial, I call him, and he skulked to the last—got away into the brackens, but his hind legs were trailing. I'd like to have found his carcase."

Something hidden in Rebecca leaped into fury: Storm was dear to her, as to Hardcastle, whatever his backslidings. Jonah and he had been comrades in old days, the cat sitting on his back and playing pranks with him. She had fed him by stealth, when the Master brought him home to the cupboard under the stair, had rated him for the life he was leading these days—finishing with a "there, you can't help it, like, and get sleep and victuals while you can."

"There's no ale for you to-night, Stephen," she said, gaunt and truculent.

"And why, if I might ask?"

“Because you come boasting you’ve shot the dog that saved you all at Garsykes. There were few of Logie’s Men, and many of theirs; and he scattered them for you, to some purpose.”

“But, woman, he kills sheep.”

“And saves men, it seems. The Master mightn’t be here—or you either—if it hadn’t been for Storm.”

The shepherd was nonplussed for a moment. “That’s true enough,” he muttered, plucking at his thin, wiry beard. “They were in a mind to kill us that day, with their women egging them on.”

“Yet you come here, snug as a toad in its hole, and tell me you’ve killed Storm. A queer way of showing thankfulness for what life there’s left in your old bones.”

“You don’t understand. You never could, not being a shepherd.”

“Without a heart in his body.”

“With a heart for ravished ewes. There’s a law among us, fixed as old Pengables. A dog turned wolf is hunted till he’s shot.”

“Well, there’s a law in my kitchen, too. No ale for the man that murdered Storm. I was talking to Jonah here about the uses of a besom when you stepped in—but I’m minded to thwack you instead.”

“I’m fairish dry, Rebecca,” said the shepherd, with sudden wistfulness.

“I hope as much. The drier you get, the better I’ll like it.”

They stood at bay, regarding each other with dour enmity, till Rebecca thought of Hardcastle, riding home from Norbrigg market and late to come.

“The Garsykes sort lie quiet,” she said, “and it’s getting hard to bear. I wish the Master would listen to sense, and not go taking his journeys as if naught had happened at the pinfold.”

“He’s made that way. An earthquake wouldn’t alter him.”

“Obstinate, like his father before him.”

“A rare plucked ’un, like his father. After all, if he’s got to be killed, he’s wise to seek it in the open. When my time comes, says I, give me God’s sky to turn my toes to, and curlews singing me to sleep.”

“Now that’s all nonsense, Brant. You live too lonely on the heights yonder, and your fancies breed like maggots. When my time comes, give me

a cosy hearth and the taste of a treacle-posset in my throat. That's how I'd say my last good-bye to Logie. And here we stand chattering, while the Master lies murdered, like Storm, somewhere 'twixt here and Norbrigg."

"Nay, now, you're running to meet trouble before it comes. And as for Storm, he wasn't murdered, I'd have you know. Justice was what he got, and if I'd my way, they'd tar such-like and hang 'em in chains at the cross-roads, same as human footpads."

"Oh, hold your whisht, Stephen. Cannot you see that I'm sick with wondering why the Master's late?"

"So will the pedlar's girl be, if all they say be true."

"When all they say is true, all the geese in the world will be dead—not one of 'em left to cackle. I was out in that blizzard, and ran fairish quick for shelter."

"So did I, and was near over-blown at that."

"And so did Master and Donald's girl. They were prisoned for the night; but it's only Garsykes way they think worse of them for that."

Brant fidgetted about the kitchen, warming himself at the fire one moment, then going to the door as if he listened for some cry of trouble out of doors. "I'm not easy in mind myself," he said at last. "Maybe I'll step out Norbrigg way and see what's happening to him. This gun of mine may come in useful."

"That's the man I thought you," snapped Rebecca. "Bide till you've had a pull at the ale, then get your best foot forward."

Hardcastle himself, an hour before, had ridden up from Norbrigg through the dusk that showed no more than a glimpse of the track ahead. It was only when he came through Weathersett village, perched high on top of the rise, that he rode into keen frosty moonlight. His glance roved over the broken lands, the grey roads that wound across them. The waiting time at Logie, for what Garsykes spite could do to him, seemed far-off. He was not between house-walls now, but in the open.

Tang of the frosty wind, smell of the uplands, got into his blood. He plucked his horse to a canter, then checked him as they went by the pinfold where he had answered three men's call for tribute. Again he looked out across the moonlit wastes, and down at the hollow where Garsykes village lurked. If the Lost Folk needed him, he was here, and glad of any onset after the quiet of these last days.

No onset came. The moonlight showed him only a grey-blue land of sleeping pastures, a glint of white where snow-drifts, still unmelted, hugged the walls. He felt thwarted of his due, somehow, and it seemed hard to get safe home again and wait for whatever devilry Garsykes had in mind. Then his mind yielded to the night's persuasion as his horse trotted forward soberly between the heather and the pines.

Moist, wayward spurts of wind rustled the fallen leaves. The undergrowth was stealthy with the feet of things that fled, of bigger things that hunted. A night-jar cried harshly in the thickest of the wood. From the slopes beyond came the rough call of a buck to his mate, telling her to get behind him while he met some peril threatening both.

The streams had their own eerie music, too. Fed by swift-melting snow, they sobbed and crooned and wailed as they raced to Wharfe River far below. And the wind would not be still.

Hardcastle rode through the haunted land with a song at his heart, such as nothing brought to him these days except night-time on the Logie roads. They said he would never marry, and he knew they said it. They lied, as usual, for he had wived these grim and tender lands handed down to him by generations whose voices lived about the house of Logie.

The dusk of the forest kept him company till he rode into the open, and saw the free, spacious road wind up to Logie under the scudding moonlight. It was good to be alive, with such a heritage.

Then suddenly his horse blundered. Before he had time to try to break his fall, he was thrown across the road and into the dark hollow bordering the wood. One half of him lay soft and wet; the other jarred on something lean and bony—something that rapped out stifled curses, and turned under him with writhing fury, and strove to get a grip about his throat.

They fought together in the hollow, he and his unseen adversary, till their hands grew slippery with mud and it was hard to get any sort of hold.

"From Garsykes, you?" gasped Hardcastle, feeling for the grip that should settle all. "Swine love the ditches."

No answer came. His enemy was striving, too, for the strangle-hold that constantly eluded him. The stealthy fight went on. The whole world was narrowed to this dark corner by the roadway, and the slime sucked and gurgled under the weight of their striving bodies.

Then Hardcastle found his chance, and took it. He got one arm under the man's thighs, the other round his shoulders, lifted him with savage strength,

and pitched him clear into the roadway.

When he clambered after him, the moonlight, clear and blue, showed him a lank figure getting up from the wet, grey road.

"So it's you, Long Murgatroyd," he said.

"Aye, it's me."

"Be damned to you, why did you hide in a muddy ditch if you wanted another fight?"

Murgatroyd, white-faced and spent, glanced at the rope swinging gently across the road, and the Master saw it for the first time.

"You've come as low as that?" The Master was shaken by passionate loathing. "As low as that, Murgatroyd?"

"Well, your blamed luck won't last for ever. Any but you would have been pitched on his head when his horse got into the rope—and I'd have finished you, need being. So now your going to finish me instead."

Hardcastle's riding-whip was lifted to cut the man across the face; but Murgatroyd was laughing at him in the moonlight—a wan laugh enough, yet full of dogged will to endure whatever came.

"Nita sent you on the errand?" he asked sharply.

"She did, in a way. We know what her tongue is—me and you, we know it. She said you were my master any day if it came to a fight. So I stepped up to kill you." Again he laughed. "I should have told her naught of the rope, you understand. There'd have been you ligging dead in the road, and happen she'd have given me a kiss or two for my pains. That's how it was. And I'm here, and want to be rid o' my life."

Hardcastle could make nothing of it. Wrath died in him. The man was rough as a savage, simple beyond belief. He had come up to kill, and, failing, expected no mercy from his enemy.

"Oh, damn you all ways, Murgatroyd," he said, and went to where his horse stood trembling, and felt its knees.

Murgatroyd looked on, with dazed wonder. "Broken are they?"

"Sound as a bell," growled Hardcastle, as he swung into the saddle.

Long Murgatroyd watched him out of sight. The Master of Logie was a fool, no doubt, to leave him ripe for further mischief; but in some queer way

he found a liking for him. He dealt fair with all about the country-side; and fairness appealed to this chastened mood of his.

"If only Nita would let him alone, he'd rather see Hardcastle live than die. *If only Nita would let him alone.*"

The words got into his muddled wits as he looked from the forest to the misty fells where Garsykes slept in the flooding moonlight. Some uncouth purpose stirred him. He went and unfastened the rope he had tied from tree to tree across the road. The knots were tight and his fingers clumsy; but at last he coiled it into a neat bundle, climbed the wall on his right, and lopped like a hare down the grey-blue pastures.

When he neared the little brig that crossed Crooning Water, a clear, sweet voice drifted up the breeze, singing a song.

There came a man to my house,
Love me well, said he;
There came a man to my house,
Nay, said I, I'm free.

Murgatroyd halted, swayed between longing and loathing. Then murder got into his heart again, as he turned the bend of the road.

Nita Langrish was sitting on the bridge-wall, threading her willows in and out.

"Making baskets by moonlight?" he asked.

"Finishing one for a lass up Dale that's courting. So it's only right to weave moonshine in between the withers."

"We're courting, Nita, you and me."

"It takes two for that," she said, and went on with her work as if she were alone.

A great madness came on Murgatroyd. She sat there in the moonlight so mocking and aloof, yet so enticing, that the helpless rage of years found tongue. He cursed the day she came into Garsykes first, cursed every meeting with her since, till his hoarse voice seemed like a flail about her. For a moment Nita was afraid—of him, and of the stark truth he spoke. Then she gathered her old dominion round her, her old self-will and vanity.

"You've been at the drinking again," she said, with gentle insolence.

"I have—drinking the dregs, like many another that's come your way. You draw your skirts away fro' Widow Mathison at the inn, same as if she

was dirt. But she's got what you've not—a heart in her feckless body."

Nita had finished her basket and stood, slim and straight, looking into the man's face with grey, childlike eyes as she waited for what he had to say.

"She has a lad of her own—dotes on him, and naught too much to do, mending and fending for him. *You* dote on yourself, Nita."

The man's voice had grown quiet, and Nita thought his madness ended, till he took the rope from under his arm and began to uncoil it with a leisurely sort of haste.

"To be sure," she said, "Garsykes will be smoked out soon, like a hornet's nest. Time was when it bred men, not windle-straws. And you're for trying how the noose will feel about your neck—when Logie gets you?"

"No," said Murgatroyd, "I'm for fitting it about yours, Nita, and hanging you to a branch of yond big sycamore."

She saw now the steady light of madness in his eyes, the purpose sure and downright. Fear unsteadied her again, but she remembered bygone years of blandishment. She came to him, and laid a hand on his sleeve.

"Could you hurt me? I'm such a little thing, and you're so big. You couldn't hurt me."

"Aye, but I could." The man's voice was low and harsh as he put her away from him and fingered the rope with restless fingers. "I could hurt you to some purpose. Sometimes I fancy there's naught I want any more."

She put both hands on his shoulders now. Her lips were close to his, and her breath was warm and soft.

"Naught else?" she asked.

The old, daft longing stole about him. Little, baffling webs were spun across his sullen will to make an end of Nita and her devilries. He reached out his arms to gather her to him—but she had stepped back and stood smiling at him in the moonlight.

"To-morrow, maybe, or the next day after," she said—"when you've forgotten about ropes and sycamores."

He watched her go. He was too heartsick even to curse her, or to follow.

"It's always to-morrow with her," he muttered, shivering in the breeze that whimpered down from Drumly Ghyll.

Then he leaned over the bridge, listening to the stream as it swirled in the deep pool below. The water called him. Every sob and gurgle enticed him to a death found easily. The plunge would be cold, into broth of melted snow, but after that—well, they said it was a quiet way of going out.

Yet he could not take the plunge. For ever Nita's voice was in his ear, with its promise of "to-morrow, maybe." She drew him from the waters. It was a lying promise, but she drew him. Reluctantly he turned his face towards Garsykes, and down the fell Nita's song came with the breeze.

There came a man to my house,
Love me well, said he;
There came a man to my house,
Nay, said I, I'm free.

Murgatroyd recalled the Master's farewell to him awhile since. Hardcastle's words had a way of sticking, he'd noticed.

"Damn you all ways, Nita Langrish," he said, and laughed heavily, and took the field-track up to Garsykes.

II

Hardcastle rode slowly home to Logie, after his encounter in the wayside ditch. For a week he had been restless, wondering what Garsykes meant to do with him. Now they had shot their bolt, and he survived. Never in his life had he known this keen, hard joy that was growing with the feud. Once they had tried to take him at the pinfold—and once a man had come to fire his house and been over-blown by snow. Now they had stretched a rope across the road to hinder him, and he was up in saddle again. Whatever the future had in store, he had given no tribute to Garsykes, and would give none.

At a bend of the road he met Shepherd Brant, who greeted him with taciturn relief.

"It's better to be quick than dead, Master."

"It is, Stephen," said Hardcastle, answering dryness with dryness.

"Rebecca was in such a rare taking about you—thinking you were murdered on the Norbrigg road—that I set off in search. Has it been raining in those parts?"

"Raining? No."

"I only wondered, seeing you dripping-wet."

"There was one from Garsykes in a ditch, and I had to get him out of it —by the scruff of his neck.

"Oh," said Brant, lighting his pipe. "And which of 'em was he like to look at, if I might ask?"

"He was very like Long Murgatroyd."

"And you maimed him for life, and so put him out o' harm's way?"

"The last I saw of him, he was standing like a dazed fool in the roadway —too soft for a man to hit."

"It was like you, Master," growled Brant, and touched his cap with chill respect as he turned for home.

Hardcastle only laughed as he rode forward. He knew Brant as he knew himself. If Stephen had seen Long Murgatroyd in the roadway, grey-faced and quavering, the shepherd would have understood.

They came by High Ghyll Wood, with the merry breeze in their faces, and the Master's horse was thinking only of oats in the near-by stable when he halted in his stride and shied at nothing, so far as Hardcastle could tell. His head was turned toward the wood, and a shiver ran down his sturdy flanks.

Then Hardcastle drew rein, and listened. There might be another ambush waiting for him before he got to Logie. A horse had quicker hearing than a man. And now he heard a far-off crying in the wood—the yelping cry of a beast in pain—and thought a fox had got into one of the foresters' many traps.

As he listened, he knew it was no fox in trouble, but a dog; and he had a soft heart for all that breed. Riding forward till he came to the gate near ahead, he tethered his horse to the trunk of a gnarled thorn-bush, and plunged into the wood.

The yelping cries were mingled now with fierce, tortured howls that guided him, step by step, to a clump of brackens where something lay and writhed, beating down the shelter it had sought in need. The moon shone clear through the leafless branches of the silver-birches overhead—shone on a dog's bloodshot eyes and hairy face.

"Why, Storm, what ails you?" asked Hardcastle.

For a moment the sheep-slayer knew him and strove to wriggle to his hand; then his wounds were rawed again by the wind. He yelped and

growled by turns when Hardcastle approached and felt down his body to find what limbs were broken; and suddenly a madness seized him. He bit at the hands that touched his wounds. All of him that was unmaimed was quick for attack. Hardcastle, to him, was Shepherd Brant, who had pursued him with a hate that would not let him rest—Brant, who had put gunshot into him at last.

Hardcastle had found the second ambush, after all, and one hard to meet. He strove with Storm, his hands bitten to the bone. This sheep-killer had come in time of need, when he scattered the Garsykes Men awhile since. There was a big debt owing by the house of Logie.

Then Storm's strength was spent. He let the Master shoulder him, a dead-weight of weariness, and carry him to the horse tethered to the thorn-tree. The horse neighed and fidgetted as Hardcastle lifted Storm to the saddle, and held him there.

"Get up to Logie," he said. "There are all jobs in a day, even for a thoroughbred."

III

Causleen, wandering restlessly about Logie House, heard Shepherd Brant come into the kitchen with news that he had shot Storm at last. She heard, too, Rebecca's talk of danger to the Master on his way from Norbrigg; and her restlessness increased.

Storm had found no more than his due, perhaps; but she had made a comrade of the shaggy culprit, and it seemed a cruel death for any dog. So little friendship came her way. She would miss his stealthy coming to the cupboard under the stair, her own stealthy journeys to the larder in search of a bone for him.

Then, struggle with the feeling as she might, she began to share Rebecca's fears for Hardcastle. Suppose, in sober fact, he was lying somewhere on the Norbrigg road? Suppose his big, hale body would never ride the hill-crests again, or taste the savour of keen moorland weather? She felt the pity of it, and with pity came remembrance of the tempest they had shared. But for him, she would have died in the snow. That would have mattered little, for herself; to her father it would have meant an end of the last consolation left him.

The pedlar was calling her now. His eyes were bright and eager when she knelt beside him and took his cold hands into hers.

"I'm seeing all the Highlands, child—not just Ben Crummock here, or Ben Ore there—but the good, wild sweep o' them all."

His voice was clear again, vibrant and youthful as when he went a-Maying.

"It's as if I was standing on a high mountain—seeing it all spread out below me—hearing the pipes sob up from Glencoe, and over Culloden Muir, and out from the Western Isles."

"Never heed their sobbing," she pleaded.

"I will, for it heartens me. Where I stand now—"

A tremor shook him, a dry, harsh coughing; but he was so nearly rid of his body that his high spirit stormed and conquered it afresh.

"Where I stand now the after-music sounds. The pipers come, leading our Highland dead—there's still a plaining and a sorrow, but the strathspey sounds."

Through blinding tears Causleen saw this courageous father, stalwart to the end, his vision clear as a boy's, his faith indomitable. She was losing him, and soon. Whenever one of her race neared the threshold of beyond, the pipers summoned them.

"They sorrowed here. They'll come by and by into all they fought for in the narrow glens, and up the braes—cannot you see them, girl?"

The pedlar strove to rise, because his vision was so urgent, and fell back, and moaned awhile in helplessness. Then he glanced at Causleen with quiet humour.

"Standing on a high hill, was I?" he muttered. "It was a good dream while it lasted."

Then his eyes clouded, and he slept; and Causleen, roaming the winding passages again, encountered Rebecca.

"He'll only come the one way home to Logie," muttered the woman. "He'll only come the one way now—stretched on a gate, with four men carrying him. It was so they brought my man home, forty odd years since, after *he* had said nay to the Garsykes sort."

Causleen, awed by the loneliness of corridors and stairs that seemed peopled with ghosts, followed Rebecca as she went to the door, and opened it, and stood listening.

“All’s quiet as yet,” said Rebecca, turning by and by; “but it’ll not be quiet for long. It’s a queer sort o’ shuffling noise they make—four men carrying a gate and something heavy stretched on it. Forty years since I heard it last! It seems like yesterday.”

The girl yielded to the other’s hard, quiet certainty that Hardcastle was dead—yielded to the wind’s sobbing in among the half-stripped branches of the sycamores outside. Again pity touched her—a deeper pity now. If the Master’s welcome at their first coming had been chilly, he had bettered it with every day that followed. She and her father had been nothing but a burden to him from the start, yet he had made them guests of honour in his own gruff fashion. There was the night, too, at the woodmen’s hut. She had railed at him for saving her; but now she understood. And it was too late.

Rebecca’s lean body grew intent on the sudden. She stepped out into the moonlight, and presently Causleen heard, too, the pit-a-pat of hoofs sound up the road.

“They’re bringing him on horseback, instead of a gate,” said Rebecca, in the same hard, quiet tone; “but it’s a dead man rides, and that I know.”

Causleen could think no less. The slow clink of hoofs suggested no living master, riding home to his own roof-tree and its cheer. Somewhere—in her heart or mind, she knew not which—there was a sense of bitter loss. Already, without guessing it, she had grown to lean on Hardcastle in these days of grief and home-sickness for the Highlands. And he was gone, all but the husk of him.

The hoof-beats sounded nearer now, and Rebecca’s stillness broke like thunder-weather. Forty years was cancelled. It was her own man coming, so she fancied. In a flash she went through the anguish of that far-off time—the dead lips making no answer to her kisses, the limp arms that would never again shield her from life’s tumults.

She dashed the tears away with a rough, skinny hand, and saw Causleen there.

“It’s not your fault, or the pedlar’s,” she snapped, old days and new mingling, with no gap between them—“but how dare he unfasten his pack and show me baby-wear?”

Causleen, young but tried by many footsore journeys, had learned insight into such moods as this. She understood the other’s wild clinging to past grief, as to a better thing than present joy.

“He did not know,” she pleaded softly.

“To be sure. He didn’t know. But he might as well have put a skewer through my heart.”

Then Rebecca forgot the girl. Standing straight to her lean height, she reached out her arms, and stood there calling to the man killed long since by the Lost Folk. She bade him come quickly, for she had wakened from a dream that he was dead—bade him step up and tarry no more—pretended he was here beside her, and closed her arms about the emptiness, crooning a girl’s love-welcome.

The slow pit-a-pat of hoofs had rounded the corner now, and Rebecca woke as from a trance.

“Get indoors, lass,” she said. “Dead men are no good sight for young eyes to see.”

Causleen answered nothing. She waited, sick with fear. Step by step the horse brought its burden nearer. There was no pride in her heart now, no memory of Hardcastle’s curt welcome—was it a few weeks ago, or years? She did not know—knew only that she would miss something that had come into her life to stay.

“The pity of it—oh, the pity,” she cried.

“I’d rather he died that fashion,” snapped Rebecca, peering out into the moonlight, “than in a bed he’d bought by giving tribute Garsykes way.”

She would not go to meet trouble, and Causleen dared not. So Hardcastle came leading his horse to the door, and was astonished to find two women there who gazed at him as if he came from under some tomb in the churchyard.

“Is it your ghost, Master?” quavered Rebecca.

“No, it’s my body—and damned tired at that.”

Causleen, before she could check the impulse, ran forward and touched his sleeve. Long watching beside her father had weakened her endurance. So had the suspense that brooded over Logie since the feud was up.

“Oh, thank God,” she said with a sudden rush of tears.

Hardcastle glanced at her in frank wonder. It was long since anyone had given him such a welcome home; yet only yesterday she had shunned him as if he had the plague. There was the scent of violets in her hair as it brushed his shoulder—a warm, wet fragrance, born of the night-time breeze—that

unsteadied him. He had thought himself past that sort of blandishment, since Nita and he shared courting-days; but his heart found a quicker beat.

She withdrew sharply, ashamed of her weakness and blaming him for it. "Rebecca was so sure that you were killed on the way home," she said. "I could not comfort her."

Rebecca herself was in a fine, gusty rage. She had gone through much in the last hour, and the relief from foreboding asked for outlet.

"I will say this, Master, though I let my tongue be still most times. Outrageous folk, men are. They'll go pleasuring to market, in spite o' Garsykes being out against 'em. They'll let their women moil and toil for 'em, and wait their coming—and, like as you might say for frolic, they'll come an hour late to supper."

Hardcastle could understand her wrath no better than Causleen's tears. It seemed to him simply that the two of them were daft. But then most women were.

"I was kept," he said.

"Aye, you were kept—and the best supper ever cooked is spoiling to a cinder. And you never stopped to think I should be picturing you dead on the roadway all this time."

The moon was racing through a scud of cloud, and Rebecca peered through the silver dusk.

"What have you got on your saddle?" she asked sharply.

"Storm, poor brute. He fell asleep on the journey, worn out with it all."

Rebecca's gusty mood pointed south-west now, instead of shrill nor'-east. "Then I'm glad you're late. Shepherd Brant was in my kitchen just now, boasting he'd put lead into Storm at last and that he'd die of it among the brackens."

"He came near it."

"Maybe; but a miss is as good as a mile. I sent Brant stamping out, with a flea in his big, hairy ear—and, as for Storm, poor lamb, we'll mend his legs for him."

The Master had lifted Storm already from saddle. The dog bit feebly at him, and writhed in pain; but his growling ceased when he found himself in the old quarters that had grown to be home and respite to him.

Rebecca ran in search of linen and a cunning ointment she bought from the gypsies who came peddling to her door, and then Causleen, wise with dogs, held the rough head while Hardcastle felt down the maimed hindquarters.

"There's nothing broken," he said, glancing up, "but Brant fired at close range, damn him. Storm's flesh has gaps in it."

The sheep-slayer had gone through evil days—hunger while they hunted him, and after it the straddling out in search of cover after Brant had left him with two legs to go on instead of four. So he let them do what they would with him, though Rebecca's ointment galled his wounds as she plied them with no gentle fingers. This was ease after hardship—three folk attentive on him, and a snug lodging for the night.

The cunning ointment, its bite sharp at first, began to soothe, and Storm dozed happily.

"Poor lamb, he's bettering now," said Rebecca, wiping her fingers on a scrap of linen.

Hardcastle laughed quietly. "There are lambs that were never born because he slew the ewes. But he's ours, Rebecca."

They stood together in the silence. Peril brooded like thunder-weather over the house of Logie. The wind, chattering and plucking at the casements, spoke of stealth, of nameless treacheries closing round about its walls. The pedlar was crying in his sleep for another glimpse of Ben Crummock before he died.

Do as they would, gloom spun its webs about them—little, clinging webs that hindered courage—till Jonah, the brindled cat, stalked down the passage. Storm's protest when they tended the wounds had roused Jonah from his sleep, and he came to learn what ailed an ancient comrade. His thick, handsome coat was all a-bristle, his eyes green and combative.

Jonah paid no heed to Rebecca, but stepped into the cupboard and glanced at the sheep-slayer, and mewed restlessly. Storm lifted his head drowsily and growled a welcome, and the brindled cat curled himself into the dog's shaggy neck and looked out on all intruders with defiance. Then they licked each other once or twice and fell into a deep slumber of content.

"Listen to him," said Rebecca, with a cackle of glee. "Listen to vagabones Jonah. He's purring as loud as an eight-day clock, Lord bless him."

Their eerie hour of dread was broken. Causleen glanced at the Master, and for the first time since they shared Logie's roof they laughed together. Then she grew wide-eyed and grave again.

"But your hands are raw!" she cried.

"Storm did not know me just at first. They'll heal," said Hardcastle.

CHAPTER XIII

WILL O' WISP

I

Near dusk of the quiet November day a man came into Widow Mathison's inn at Garsykes and called for a quart of home-brewed.

"Can you pay?" asked the widow, with her buxom, loose-lipped smile.

For answer the man took a handful of silver from his pocket and laid it on the table.

"That's right enough, and no offence meant. Time was when I chalked the tally up on my door—but I tired o' that."

"You would—from all I hear of Garsykes."

"Oh, they're free enough with their money when they have any. It's just that they seldom have."

The widow, after bustling to serve him, went on with her interrupted dusting of the china dogs on the mantel, till curiosity got the better of her.

"Have you travelled far, like?" she asked over her shoulder.

"Not so very," chuckled the stranger, "though I came near to going a very far way."

"You don't say, now."

"Aye, but I do say."

"And where might it be you nearly went?"

"Well, as you ask me—hell."

The stranger chuckled afresh as he buried his head in his pewter-pot. And Long Murgatroyd came striding in.

"Dry, Murgatroyd?" asked the widow.

"Like a kiln."

"I never knew a man so punctual, as you might say, to a thirst. Tend it, you do, as a woman tends her babby."

Long Murgatroyd was in one of his better moods, and gave as much as he took in the way of banter before settling himself in the corner by the ingle-nook. Then he glanced at the stranger.

"Where do you come from?" he asked.

"Bless me, the landlady was putting that same question to me a minute since."

"Aye," snapped the widow, "and all the answer I got for my trouble was that he'd nearly journeyed further than he relished—journeyed to——"

"You needn't be squeamish. Hell was what I said—if there *is* such a place."

Murgatroyd turned on him with a sudden snarl. "There is. I don't need to travel, for I'm in it."

The door was pushed open again, and two more Garsykes Men came in, bringing the smell of a soft, wet breeze across the stale sawdust of the tavern floor.

They in turn glanced curiously at the stranger, but he forestalled them.

"I'm going to be first with a question this time. Is it true that such as me is safe in Garsykes?"

"That all depends," said Murgatroyd, recovering his good humour. "Have you done aught again the law?"

"A tidy bit in my time."

"Such as?" growled one of the late comers.

"Well, the last thing I did, as I said, was to come nearer Kingdom Come than ever I'd been in my life. A running post-boy was due, not a hundred miles from where we're sitting, and I wanted what he'd got."

"That was no more than reasonable, as you might say."

"He'd got more than I bargained for—a pistol and a spirit of his own. I closed with him just in time—and here's the mark of the bullet where it grazed my neck."

They saw the red weal he turned to them, then glanced at the silver he had thrown on the table.

"Was that all you got for your trouble?" asked Murgatroyd. "You're not safe here, my lad, if you show the silver and keep the guineas hid."

The stranger got up, and clapped his empty pockets, and bade the men search him; but his rueful smile made it clear that he was hiding no ill-gotten gains.

"I was searching for the guineas when a man galloped over the hill—a big man—and spat a pistol at me as I ran. That bullet, too, touched me—on the leg this time. So I took cover, and headed straight for Garsykes."

The three men laughed, and so did Widow Mathison.

"You did right," said the widow. "By what you say, it was our masterful Man o' Logie rode at you; but even he durst not come seeking you in Garsykes. We're seeking him instead."

"Carried a pistol, did he?" grumbled Murgatroyd. "Well, there's one boast gone from Logie. The Master said he'd face us all with no more than his two fists and a stick to help him."

The stranger called for bread-and-cheese and another pot of ale.

"Why are you seeking him?" he asked lazily.

"Because he's too big for his boots, and always was. So now he's got all Garsykes against him."

"Then he's wise to carry a pistol, I should say."

"He swore he wouldn't."

"Aye, but I'd have found a quick change o' mind myself—if Garsykes pressed me."

Murgatroyd eyed him with sombre doubt. "What's you're name when you're at home, my lad? You seem to know a lot about Garsykes."

"I haven't a home. That's why I'm known as Will o' Wisp."

"The Master of Logie touched you with a bullet—and you sit grinning there as if he'd given you ale and crumpets."

"I never cry over spilled luck. That's what the road teaches a free-striding man. Besides, there was comfort met me on a little, grey brig o' stone." The man's eyes twinkled with random, inborn gaiety. "I never saw such a lass in my life—slim and like a posy, and she was weaving a basket."

Long Murgatroyd stirred restlessly, but his neighbour kicked him by stealth and whispered in his ear.

“That would be Nita,” said the widow—“Nita, the basket-maker, as we call her. Poor bairn, she was left an orphan——”

“That doesn’t trouble her now,” broke in Will o’ Wisp, with his heedless laugh. “She smiled so kindly as I went by that I asked the way to Garsykes. And it ended with my sitting on the brig beside her.”

“It does,” said Murgatroyd, heavily. “It always ends like that.”

Again his shin was kicked, and Widow Mathison took up the tale they were spinning round the stranger like a web.

“She’s of the better sort, you see, and our Garsykes Men are rough. No wonder that she smiled at the likes of you. I’d have done as much myself when I was younger.”

“The widow’s right. Nita’s too trim a lass for such as us. That’s why she looks over our heads when we think o’ courting.”

“You don’t court properly, then,” said Will o’ Wisp, with a wink of infinite zest and roguery. “There’s three ways of courting a pretty wench, and only three.”

“Oh, aye?”

“The first is, be sure of winning. So’s the second. And the third——”

“What’s the third?” prompted Widow Mathison.

“Be sure of winning,” Will o’ Wisp chuckled, and buried his face in the pewter-pot.

He was so pleased with the hum of laughter that answered his idle pleasantry—pleased to be safe among Lost Folk again after hunger and thirst among the righteous—and his tongue wagged freely.

They plied him with strong ale that night, and Murgatroyd, when he left him sleeping on the long-settle, went laughing out of the tavern door. He would watch another go through what he had suffered—would watch, and gloat.

Murgatroyd glanced up the grey fells, as he swayed unsteadily for a moment when the breeze found the ale in him. Then he strode up to his cottage under Scummer Rigg.

“Will o’ Wisp courts Will o’ Wisp,” he muttered, with a big, joyous hiccough. “The devilment there’ll be in Garsykes.”

II

About five of that November evening, Hardcastle had come to his house of Logie and heard a woman's voice as he stepped into the hall after stabling his horse.

"Now, Storm, be quiet," she chided. "You've had two weeks of nursing, and you're nearly well. I'll not have you snap at me. But then all sick folk are that way," she went on, coaxing and scolding in the same breath.

She was changing the sheep-slayer's bandages, and glanced up at Hardcastle with a smile of welcome.

"He's strong enough to need a male nurse now. Will you do the rest?"

Storm tried his fretful temper on the Master, but not for long. He did not whimper even as the ointment stung and galled before it soothed; for he knew that the days of his pamperdom were nearly over—and that Hardcastle knew it, too.

When he had licked himself for a while, then settled into sleep, Causleen and Hardcastle stood in the draughty hall, glancing at each other with the new understanding that had come by stealth to them during these last days.

"Donald—how is he?" he asked.

"A little nearer the end."

Hardcastle had driven pity out of his life, had bruised it with his heel at every turn. He was impatient to find it stirring faintly now.

"I wish Logie was a safer lodging for you. You've trouble enough of your own."

The note in his voice, the haunted look that showed in his eyes for a moment and was gone, told her of some encounter on the road to-night.

"Is it Long Murgatroyd again, with a rope across the highway?"

"What do you know of that?" he snapped.

"Oh, you hid the news well enough, but gossip brought it. What happened to-night as you rode from Norbrigg?"

"Nothing that mattered—for me. But for you and Donald——"

"It matters for all of us, or none," she broke in, her glance questioning and steady.

"No," he said roughly. "The end for Logie is sure, so far as I can see. But I'd hoped the house would last Donald's time. He's earned a peaceful end."

Causleen seemed ever to be finding some unexpected waywardness in Hardcastle. He waged the feud so quietly, with such contempt for his own safety, that she had thought him deaf to what was no news on Logie-side. He, too, was aware that his house was doomed, it seemed; yet he found time to think of Donald.

"What happened to-night?" she asked again. "I'd rather have the tale from you than wait for gossip."

So then he told her of his ride up-fell from Norbrigg, and how he found a post-boy holding his own with hardship against a footpad.

"I sent a bullet after him—and, the last I saw of the rogue, he was limping hard for Garsykes. It's only one more count in their tally against me."

"You could buy your house—at a price," she said.

"What price?" He was rough and hard on the instant—rough as Storm, sleeping his sickness off in the cupboard near at hand.

"You could give them tribute."

"And sell Logie's honour? I couldn't. Seven hundred years would rive open the graves down yonder, where dead Hardcastles lie. They'd rise and flout me."

Causleen's eyes glowed bright and clear. "It would be so easy," she said, tempting him, "to pay a little to them every now and then—and your house safe—and no ropes stretched across night-roads."

Hardcastle glowered down at her. "And no peace by day or night. Logie would know. Her timbers would creak and groan. She'd loose her ancient ghosts on me—and God knows every house has ghosts enough of that sort. You're mad to talk of giving tribute."

She had probed to the core of him, as she had meant; and a great need came to her, out of the weary years behind, to speak of the tribute asked of Donald and herself—which had been denied in face of odds as great as he was facing.

"Two pedlars came to your door," she said, with a flash of the old grievance. "You counted us as such, and no more."

"And shall never be forgiven."

“I’m tired and out of heart, and you have been kind—kinder than you need have been. And we still intrude.”

“No,” said Hardcastle.

That was all; but his denial had a new ring of truth about it, though she could find no reason for the change.

“We had lands of our own once,” she went on by and by—“lands and a house like yours. But they went.”

There was a tearless grief, too deep for Hardcastle to fathom, in those three words, “But they went.” Logie was going, unless a miracle arrived; but he would die with the house, when the last onset of the Garsykes Men prevailed. He had no such parting to face as Causleen had gone through—exile from a homestead whose every stone and draughty corridor was loved like a second self. Logie and he, when their time came, would face the Trump o’ Doom together.

“Tell me more,” he said.

While she halted, fearing that grief would get the better of her, Rebecca came down the passage with a martial tread. The brindled cat was on her shoulder, his fur raised in warlike challenge, too.

“Logie lands breed slack-come-by men these days, Master. Such a twitter as there’s been in my kitchen. You’d have fancied women were talking, though they wore breeks.”

“Who were they, Rebecca?”

“Phineas Rowbotham first, squealing that he was a man of peace. Bloodshed was a sin, said he, and why shouldn’t we pay our way with the Garsykes Folk—living, and letting live. I was dusting his jacket with a rolling-pin when another steps in with the same tale, and another. So I swept them out, and barred the door. Jonah spat at ’em from my shoulder, same as he’s sitting now. Jonah knows men’s flesh and blood from chicken-meat. Spat and growled at ’em, he did, as a man cat should.”

Causleen felt a sudden sense of home. Hardcastle had not the Highland speech, nor Rebecca; but they three were one in the spirit to endure. And Storm and the brindled cat were with them.

CHAPTER XIV

NITA

I

Garsykes was stirred to grim and crafty mirth during the next weeks. November had brought its little spell of summer between fall of the leaves and winter's onset. Primroses bloomed here and there in favoured nooks. The sun was constant, from dawn till nightfall, in a blue and happy sky, and birds began to think of courtship.

So did Will o' Wisp. In all his careless, vagabond life he had found none like Nita; and she smiled at him whenever they met by stream or coppice.

"Our men are rough and savage," she would say. "They frighten me."

Then Will o' Wisp would yield to the slender helplessness of this girl who showed him open favour. And all Garsykes laughed, to watch the stranger going the way of many men before him.

"She has him in her lap," growled Long Murgatroyd, sitting in the inn one afternoon among his cronies, "and the Lord knows which o' them I'd like to throttle first."

"Choose Nita," they answered, in snarling chorus.

"Happen I will," said Murgatroyd, and fell back into the sullen brooding that shadowed his every thought these days.

Will o' Wisp cared nothing at all for what they said of him in Garsykes. He cared only to be with Nita Langrish, to grow wilder each day for her elusive beauty.

On one of these windless, moist afternoons, near dusk, he came from the benty lands and found her at the bridge that spanned Crooning Water.

"That's a fine hare you're dangling in your hand," she said, with a welcoming smile.

"I was thinking to leave it at your door as I went by."

"I'd best come with you, then, as soon as I've finished my basket. Hares left at Garsykes doors don't stay there long."

“They wouldn’t,” agreed Will o’ Wisp, with a random laugh. “I should have thought of that.”

“You’d best keep it, after all. What do I know of the way to skin it?”

“I should have thought of that, too. I’ll bring it dressed for cooking—and don’t blame me if it looks like a plump, naked cat.”

She seemed to invite him to sit on the parapet beside her; but when he tried to put an arm about her, it grasped only empty space. Nita was on the far side of the bridge, as if by magic, threading her withies.

“They used to cut the willows for me,” she said by and by, her voice soft as the breeze that fluted down the stream. “And now I have to cut them myself. See how rough my hands are.”

They were held out to him—slim, shapely hands—and he was mad to take them. But Nita was already standing in the roadway, and laughed as she dangled the finished basket to and fro.

“This is for little Tabitha, up dale. Seventy odd and a spinster, she. The last I made was for a bride. I wonder what drollery will come to them both, when they take their baskets over-arm?”

Will o’ Wisp’s crisp good-humour failed him. The girl stood there, all of her but the grey eyes young as June about these winter highlands; but the eyes were old, unfathomable.

“What drollery should come?” he asked.

“You would not understand. I cannot help it, but I’ve a trick of weaving spells into my baskets. Whoever I make one for, I get a picture of her in my mind, and ply the willows in and out with a sort of prayer, you might say, that my basket will teach her just the daft contrary-wise of what she thought she was. And it comes true, Will o’ Wisp.”

Then suddenly the grey eyes were young again, and smiling into his. “Was I seeing far? It comes of foregathering with gypsies. One of them talked to me just now of Logie and its Master.”

“The man who tried to stop me with a bullet?”

“Do you bear no malice, Will o’ Wisp?”

“I should do,” he chuckled, “but, thanks be, I harbour none o’ that. I’ve seen too much of it in my time—eating into men like a plague.”

"You'd have had the post-boy's money in your pocket, but for Hardcastle. And what cause had he to interfere?"

"His bullet only flicked me. Next time I'll flick him, maybe, and settle that little account between us. But, as for malice, I wouldn't sour myself with it."

"You're not like the Garsykes sort. They'd gnaw at what Hardcastle did to you, as a dog gnaws at a bone, never letting it rest."

"More fools they. I'm a rogue by nature and choice—a light-hearted one—and fancied they'd be all like that in Garsykes."

"You fancied wrong, Will o' Wisp. Honour among thieves—Robin Hood and his merry men—you looked to find all that in Garsykes? You're young."

"And you're young," he broke in heedlessly. "You were talking of spells you wove into your baskets, Nita—as if baskets mattered. You've woven them round a man."

"Or half a man?" she mocked. "One who lets Hardcastle pistol him and daren't answer."

Will o' Wisp grew taut as a bow-string on the sudden. "*Dare not* never shadowed me since I was breeked. I've little to boast about except that."

They went together up the road, and turned into the track that led between lean, benty lands to Garsykes.

"If Hardcastle had done a wrong to me?" she asked.

He gripped her shoulder till she winced. "I'd kill him," he said simply.

"A man, are you, after all?"

"I was born one, as it happened."

"Oh, it's not so bad as to ask murder," said Nita, her voice gentle as a dove's. "Hardcastle slighted me—no more than that—took the heart out of my body and threw it away for frolic."

"Did he?" said Will o' Wisp.

"Not murder," she pleaded, her hand like velvet on his arm.

"That's as maybe."

So then she cried, and he fell to comforting her; and afterwards she set the width of the roadway between them as they went through Garsykes village.

Prying eyes looked out on them from Widow Mathison's inn, and Long Murgatroyd fetched a great laugh as he stood looking out of the window.

"There's another o' Nita's goes by. To-morrow he'll be where most of us have been in our time."

Murgatroyd spoke truth. On the next day Will o' Wisp was busy in the swampy hollow where Nita's willows grew. The Garsykes Men, when they got late abroad, did not pause for banter as they passed. They let the newcomer hang himself in Nita's silken toils, and so much for him.

So it went for many days, till Will o' Wisp began to lose his content with life as he found it. There were times when he came into the inn and sat silent on the settle, till at last the widow rallied him.

"You're getting heavy as Murgatroyd. What's amiss with your easy-go-lucky handling of things as they come?"

"How should I know? Draw me a quart of ale, and maybe that will cure me."

"Maybe it will—and likely it willun't. But Nita's good for my trade, and always was."

"I said naught about Nita."

"No. But you were thinking of her. Will o' Wisp, my lad, I've a liking for you, and I'm old enough to be your mother. Quit Nita Langrish, before she binds her spell too fast."

The rough sympathy was too much for him. He had gone through evil days—through beguilement that promised all, and gave nothing but the slant flight of a snipe as it raced down-wind.

"The spell's over me, fast and hard," he said, and laughed—but not with the old relish.

II

The next day Nita came home by way of the Long Spinney that raked down from Logie to the grey hill-fastness where her village lurked. Her step was buoyant. She had sold her baskets, and had another man in thrall at Garsykes. All was well with her, till a gunshot cracked from the spinney, and Hardcastle came presently down the lane between the thick-set firs and sycamores, dangling a hare.

At sight of him—big and careless, as if the world were his—Nita lost all content. There was one who had escaped her snare, and she coveted him.

"The man they call Will o' Wisp brought me just such a hare—and it was one of yours, I fancy."

"Did he? I'm taking mine to Logie."

"For the pedlar's brat to share?"

Hardcastle, as yet, knew nothing of his heart; but Nita read it in his stubborn quietness.

"What did you say to her, that day you met her on the road?" he asked.

"Something that brought burning to her cheeks. Do you think, because you're Hardcastle of Logie, you can share a hut for the night with a lass and hear no more about it—snowstorm or no?"

"There are times," he said slowly, "when I wonder why one or another of the Garsykes Men doesn't cut out that tongue of yours and nail it where the gamekeeper——"

"Nails vermin?" said Nita gently. "I witch them, Hardcastle of Logie."

Hardcastle longed to pass by, and could not. Surely what they said of her was false. She was so fresh and innocent, like a morning in mid-April.

"I witch them, Dick, and care for none—since you went out of my life."

Again she was witching him, too. All that was rough and a man in him had asked always for a frail thing like Nita to guard—something that would need his strength and lean on it.

"They were good days, and I lost them," she went on.

It was as if a net of cobwebs hindered him. She was close, and woe-begone, and pleading. Then he remembered how it had gone long since—his stormy, honest wooing—and the end of that good dream. He recalled the barren years, his loathing of all women for Nita's sake—Nita's, who had played him false.

"You're of Garsykes," he said, "and the new days are in."

"I might have been of Logie once. I was a fool. Have you no pity, Dick?" She put a hand on his sleeve. "You're built out of limestone rock—hard and unforgiving."

"Just hard, Nita."

“And buying acres here and there, to add to Logie?”

“I bought a farm yesterday—Nicholas Wade’s, who died in his bed at ninety. Yes, I’m buying acres.”

“Wouldn’t you save them, Dick? I’m of the Wilderness—and there are only six of yours that do not cringe to Garsykes. You’re almost alone against us now.”

“Maybe—but the six are staunch.”

Nita would have welcomed rage—his hands at her throat, for what she had done to him in days gone by—but she fretted at this cold hardihood that was so resolute.

“Have you no pity?” she asked again.

“I keep such for Logie these times.”

Then suddenly he found her hands in his, and the old beguilement was about him. She had tempted him before, when the feud was new and heady in his veins, and he had hope of saving Logie. Now he had no hope, except to face the last assault of Garsykes when it came, and die with the house whose every rafter-beam he loved. Six of his men had proved leal. The rest were chaff blowing down the winds of chance—folk cringing for daily bread to Garsykes, and paying toll as if they cared not for the shame of licking dirty boots.

All was in the losing. And here was Nita, her arms soft about him. What did it matter, if he took and claimed her, and earned restful days for Logie?

The fight was over almost before he knew it had begun. Pride played its own part. He would not yield, though twenty Garsykes came against him. But, deep under pride, lay some inner depth whose waters had not been stirred till now. Nita and her spells grew shadowy and weak. He was a free man again, and some new, undreamed-of world seemed to open out before him.

Nita stood at arm’s length now, wondering at the man’s stubbornness.

“So we’re both fools, it seems,” she said. “I lost Logie once for vanity—and now you’re losing it for pride.”

A twig snapped in the wood behind them, and Hardcastle turned sharply. He saw only a shaking of the pine-branches; but Nita had seen more.

“Afraid that one from Garsykes would club you from behind?” she mocked.

"Not afraid—but sure it would be from behind, if at all."

"How you loathe us, Dick—and how we loathe you in turn. Listen. I'm as you see me—not ugly, they say—and there's a mad-dog fury there in Garsykes. They want to burn your house to-morrow, and I will not let them."

"Why?" snapped Hardcastle.

"I hope to be mistress there. Would I let them burn a house I shared?"

"You'll never share it," he said bluntly, stung by her careless trust in her own beauty and its power.

Nita stood regarding him for a moment, then laughed—a little, eerie laugh that had an edge of steel. "I'll not let them burn the house for another reason now. It would be too easy a way out for its pride-sick master. You're glancing at the wood again? It was no Garsykes face that peeped between the branches."

"Whose was it, then?"

"Aye, whose? You'll learn soon enough—and, after all, it's only one more trouble to your load."

A silence followed, heavy and brooding as thunder-weather brewing up. Nita, used to swaying men by her lightest smile, had done all to bring Hardcastle into captivity again. She had failed, and the Master drew back a pace or two, appalled by what he saw in the girl's face and dove-like eyes.

"I shall teach them the way of better sport with Logie than burning it. You'd only die once in the flames. For weeks, maybe—or months—the Wilderness will let you go your ways. A mischance here and there, to let you know we're not asleep—the waiting for a blow that will surely come at last—do you think pride will carry any man through that?"

"Yes," said Hardcastle, and went up the pastures, swinging the hare he carried.

III

Nita turned at last, when he was out of sight, and went down the track to Garsykes. Heart she had none to be wounded, but vanity was touched to the quick. Hardcastle would never be moved by her spells from this to the Crack o' Doom, and with the knowledge came a passionate gust of hate.

It was in this mood that she encountered Will o' Wisp, lumbering to the inn on heavy feet.

“You’re not your own merry self,” she said. “What ails you?”

“Nita Langrish ails me. I get no rest for wanting of you.”

“Why do all the men go daft for the little basket-weaver? I never ask it, Will o’ Wisp.”

“Maybe,” he growled, “but the lord Harry knows you maze us. I could throttle you where we stand, Nita—just for love of doing it.”

“You couldn’t. I’d put a hand on your arm—like this—and I’d ask you to be gentle with little Nita. And, see, you could not hurt me.”

The man stood there, smiling foolishly, and lost to all but the girl’s low, pleading voice. And she began to play on his infirmities, as skilled fingers might touch a fiddle’s strings, till she brought him to her purpose. It was true that she had checked the Wilderness Men in their second plot to fire Logie. It had been true, till her meeting with Logie’s Master, that she had crooned happily to herself as she wove her baskets, and planned the long do-little time which should break Hardcastle’s spirit and his pride before they broke his body. But now she could not wait.

Vanity, restless and impatient, cried for solace to its wounds.

“Why do I fret you so, Will o’ Wisp?”

“That’s past my wits to say. Happen you know yourself, and happen you don’t.”

“There’s Hardcastle of Logie, and not one in Garsykes dares bring him down—for my sake.”

“For your sake?”

“Yes. You’re half-men, all of you, or we’d be rid of him. I met him up the pastures awhile since, and he—he was not kind. If I’d had you with me, Will o’ Wisp—but you were drinking strong ale, likely, instead of being at my side.”

“I was lad-mooning up and down the fields, sick of my fancy for you. And naught ever comes of it.”

“Lad-moon no more, Will. Be up and doing.”

“How?” he asked bluntly.

“You’re not his match in strength—but little folk are given nimble wits. He took a pistol to you once.”

“He did,” muttered Will, urged now by a rancour Nita had fostered diligently.

“And it’s turn and turn about in this life. Borrow Murgatroyd’s fowling-piece to-morrow——”

“And creep up to Logie with it?”

“There’s no need. All gossip comes to little Nita, and I can tell you the way home Hardcastle will be taking, near dusk. It lies yonder, where the track dips down from Pengables—and, when you’ve fired, Will o’ Wisp, you’ve no more to do than slip home to Garsykes for your welcome.”

“What sort of welcome?”

“You’d find me, for one. What I’d give the man who rid Logie-side of Hardcastle—but, then, you’re only half-man, maybe, like the rest.”

With that, Will o’ Wisp was in the toils again; and as they went down to Garsykes, the basket-weaver nestled close against him.

Hardcastle, meanwhile, had taken his own grim way to Logie—over the bridge of many memories and up the winding steep of the road. His gate, when he reached it, held memories, too, and he fingered the arrow-head left there as a token before the autumn trees were stripped. He kept it in his pocket nowadays, for luck.

A stable-lad, sweeping the lane, touched his forelock as Hardcastle came by.

“There’s been Farmer Draycott to see you, Master, but he couldn’t wait till you came back. You promised to go to Broken Firs to-morrow about repairs, and he stepped up to remind you.”

“I’d not forgotten,” said Hardcastle carelessly—“though it’s a long message for you to carry, William.”

The lad grinned sheepishly. “It did twist the few wits I’ve got; but I just kept on saying it over and over—not letting go in a manner o’ speaking, like as if I stuck to a rope.—And, Master——”

“Well?”

“I’d not go if I was you.”

Hardcastle glanced at him with gruff kindliness; for all Logie humoured this lad of the strong hands and the lame wits.

“You wouldn’t go?”

“Not if Guytrash yelped behind and druv me forrard. I’d choose Trash, I would, instead o’ Broken Firs. Why d’ye go, Master?”

“Because I said I’d go—so fret no more, William, and take this hare up to the kitchen.”

He missed the wistful, dog-like glance that followed him up the lane. He was thinking of Nita Langrish—of Causleen, who was a guest thrust on him against his will. Donald the pedlar wearied him, too, though he hated himself for the thought that pensioners lingered in their dying. Surely there was enough to face these days, without useless burdens to carry on one’s back! What did he owe Donald and his girl? Why were they here, when Logie asked for all his strength, and no weaklings in the house?

Yet, when he came under his own roof, he was aware of loneliness. Donald, as he glanced into the room, was sleeping tranquilly. Rebecca, far down the passage, seemed to be at war with Jonah, the brindled cat.

“A vagabones I call you, lapping cream all day and doing naught,” came the shrill voice.

Again Hardcastle wearied of it all. Peril, of the stealthy kind that he was fighting, had made his body lean and nagged at his spirit till it was raw with wounds. Something was absent—something he had come to look for on returning—and he grew restless and impatient.

Rebecca came down the passage by and by, Jonah perched on her shoulder after the last of their soon-over quarrels. With swift and savage intuition she knew what ailed the Master.

“The pedlar does well enough. Are you worrying about him?”

“No,” said Hardcastle, tall and sombre.

“As for his girl, she came in awhile since like a child o’ Belial. After she’d seen to Donald, she was frost and venom. She wouldn’t speak—I could have thoyled it better that road—but flounced about in her quiet, proud way, till I could have bitten her. Then she went out o’ doors—at this time o’ night, and with all Garsykes stirring for aught we know—and she’s not come back.”

Hardcastle turned to the rack, reached for a fowling-piece and looked to the priming. Then, without a word to Rebecca, he went into the soft November night and stood listening for the cry of one in trouble. None came. A sickle moon lay cradled in the tree-tops, shining on a land of misty

quiet; and in that moment Hardcastle learned something of the heart he had thought walled-up for ever.

He called, and silence answered. Crying louder and louder still, he went up and down the pastures, through the home-spinney and out into Chantry Meadow where the cowslips grew in spring. He began to weave pictures of Garsykes Men surrounding her from every corner of these empty wastes, and quickened pace, and went circling hither and thither like a man distraught. Gusty anger found him, passionate question why she had left Logie's shelter—fear reached him, of a kind unknown till now—and again his cry rang out—his heart's cry of *Causleen*.

A bunch of sheep, huddled under the wall, got up and ran bleak-witted past him. That was the only answer. And now his own littleness appalled Hardcastle. Measured by the striding loneliness of Logie-land, he seemed small and of no account. He must get back, and saddle a horse, and rouse the country-side. If they found Causleen safe—if they found her safe—his mind stayed there awhile, glad to believe it till he was half-way back to Logie.

Then his mind raced forward. If they found her dead, or worse, he'd gather his roving company into a band that would burn Garsykes from one end to the other of its styes. Hardcastle, the magistrate who once had scrupled to carry a gun against the Lost Folk, was growing fast these days.

He came to his own door, wrath and fear between them making havoc of him. And there stood Causleen, looking quietly out across the trees.

"Surely you heard me call?" snapped Hardcastle, with quick relief.

"I heard."

"Then why the devil, child, didn't you answer? I've been sick with fear for you."

"Is that true?" she asked. "There's no other could make you sick with fear of that sort?"

Hardcastle was no easy man to live with these days. His temper was brittle as a file, and here was the pedlar's girl, cross-questioning him after the turmoil he had gone through.

"I was a fool," he said.

"And why?"

"To get my heart into my mouth because——"

"Because, Hardcastle of Logie?"

“Rebecca told me you’d gone out alone, as if there were no Wilderness Men skulking round the house.”

“And you cared to go in search?”

“I was a fool,” said Hardcastle again.

She glanced at him once, in the light of the young, keen moon—and laughed at him with quiet derision—and went indoors, to find Rebecca waiting.

“Back, are you? Well, it’s time. The Master’s been daft about you—and Jonah sits atop o’ your shoulder now, instead o’ mine—so I’m getting jealous all ways. What made you go?”

“The owls were hooting in Logie Wood. They seemed to call me,” said Causleen, aloof and cold.

“Pack o’ nonsense. Why couldn’t you let the hullets get on with their decent hunting? It was the dratted voles and rats they were crying for. And now you’ll want supper, on top of my hard day’s work.”

“I—I could not eat, Rebecca. So you’re spared that trouble.”

Rebecca, noting the girl’s sudden pallor, was grimmer than before.

“Spared more from your pack o’ nonsense, am I? I’ll see to that. It’s a good, square meal you need, my lass.”

Causleen faced her with a dignity so aloof that it daunted even tough Rebecca. “I eat as little as may be of your Master’s food.”

With that she was gone up the windy stairway, like a Highland storm across her own far moors; and presently Hardcastle came in, dour and stubborn.

“William brought you the hare?” he asked, finding Rebecca still in the hall, chewing the cud of her defeat at Causleen’s hands.

“Aye, and more. He prayed me draw you back from going to Broken Firs to-morrow.”

“What of that? William’s wits were never strong.”

“But his far-sight is. Suppose he’s right, Master—and suppose you knew he was right—would you still go up to Michael Draycott’s?”

“What else should I do?”

A lean, hard smile wrinkled the woman's lips. "Aye," she said. "Aye. That's Logie, through and through."

CHAPTER XV

THE HINDERED VENTURE

I

Michael Draycott was waiting for him at the gate when Hardcastle came over the moor to Broken Firs the next afternoon, and he nodded a cheery greeting.

"You're on the very stroke of the time you promised, Master."

"I have to be, Michael. You're so often near dying that a minute beyond might be too late."

"Now, I willun't have that old joke thrown at me," chuckled the farmer. "Maybe I have my fancies, like one here and there; but I do get up from my death-bed wonderful regular."

"And then you want to dip into my pockets for repairs. It would pay me to keep you ill in bed."

"Not in the long run, when roofs began to gape and gates dropped all to bits. There'd be a tidier penny to pay then than now."

"Have it your own way, Michael, but remember I'm a poor man."

The ancient ritual went its way, as they moved from one corner to another of the trim farmstead—Hardcastle with shrewd reluctance, Michael with deep resolve to get all he wanted, and a little more.

The little more was broached as Hardcastle was leaving, after a wide-spread meal in the farmstead's parlour.

"Talking of mistals——" said Michael.

"We didn't happen to be."

"No, but we were thinking o' them. That one yonder would be all the better if it was doubled in size. The farm's prospering so, I've scarcely room for my beasts to turn about in."

"But, Michael, you're bound to die soon, in one of those bad turns of yours. You'd better be thinking of your latter end, instead of farm-buildings."

The man's weather-red face grew plump with laughter. "I'm not on such nodding-terms with death as I used to be, Master. There's summat in this durned feud with Garsykes that makes me want to live to a hundred and three."

"Six of us feel like that," said Hardcastle, glancing down to where Garsykes caught the last of the crimson sun-glow.

"Aye, and six o' that sort can be fifty or two-score when need asks. I couldn't have thought it—the way old bones grow young in these good times."

All they had shared of peril lay silent between them, but confessed, as they watched the last glow redden and die out across the Garsykes hollow, leaving it to a grey, disastrous sleep.

"I'll go agateards with you, Master," said Draycott by and by—"lest young blood gets the better of you, and you run single-handed into yond foul stye."

"There's no likelihood, Michael. I'm ready for them if they come to Logie, and it stands at that."

"Ah, but you're young. And youth can't bide to wait sometimes."

Michael went with him as far as the turn of the track, where the heather ran down to the pastures; and then he bade him a hale good-night and God-speed.

"I've a sick heifer needing me, Master—and, forgive me, I was thinking of the feud instead."

Hardcastle swung down the track. The sun had westered now about these higher slopes, and dusk overtook him as he reached the top of the sheep-track that wound to Logie. Across the frost-haze of the valley, lights twinkled out from Garsykes one by one, and he laughed grimly as he stood and watched them. Tired wayfarers might mistake them for stars of hope, might blunder out of the hill-top wastes into such welcome as waited for them there.

A harsh joy in feud came to him. The end of Logie was sure as anything could be in this world, but he would hold his good house to the last. There would be no surrender, and with a quick flash of humour he pictured Rebecca playing a besom heftily amid the flaming havoc of her kitchen. And Storm, maybe, after much red sheep-slaying, would kill a man or two of the Wilderness, and so die an honest dog.

The old days of peace and money-getting were remote as a dream remembered on waking to full life. Out there, behind the twinkling lamp-gleams, were men and women plotting now, no doubt, some crafty lighter blow before they came in force against the house.

Death had seemed, in those old days, an end to life, a sorrowful laying away of folk under green turf that stopped their ears for ever to the wheeling cries of moor-birds—closed their nostrils to savour of wind and sun and rain across the striding lands—ended all things and all joy.

Now, as he stood looking over the wandering valley mists, he seemed, for one bewildering moment, to see with clearer vision. For Logie's honour he had grappled with the three gaunt men who met him at the pinfold—was it weeks or years ago?—and since then death had shadowed him. Aye, but was death more than a stride from one life to another? What if, for men who had loved the homeland, there were wider moors beyond, and sweeter winds and lustier joy in strength?

The thought stayed with him. New horizons widened over widening hill-spaces. What if death were no wormy end of life, but a beginning of new days?

No breeze ruffled these upland wastes. Little frets of night-time life stirred among the gnarled heather and the bents. The land's soul was in a mood as deep and still as Hardcastle's, and a fine communion held between the Master who was a lover to his acres, the acres that loved him.

He roused himself at last, with another laugh at Garsykes and himself, and was turning to swing down the sheep-track when a cry broke sharp as a pistol-shot across the moor. It sounded close at hand. Then a second cry came—far-off, it seemed—and another. Hardcastle peered through the dark that had scarcely served to show him a yard of the track ahead. He could see nothing, but the cries rose to a shriek of terror, and he ran forward, this way and that, forgetting that the moor was thick with ambush. Twice he sucked a foot out from the bog, and once he blundered against a rock that cut deep.

Still the cries sounded, weaker now. The darkness baffled hearing, as well as sight, after a fashion of its own. Someone was dying, near at hand, and Hardcastle could not find him. The failing cries maddened his will to save—the will that would have gone through six-foot drifts to save sheep over-blown.

Then the grey haze lifted. A brave, young moon shone over Logie-land—over the misty hollow, and across to Garsykes—and, not twenty paces off,

Hardcastle saw a little lad, half of him buried in green slime. In his haste to get to him, the Master was all but lost himself; for his heavier weight crashed through the ooze that was less firm even than true bogland. He sank to his knees before touching firm ground on the sloping brink of the marsh, then reached forward and gripped the lad's upstretched arms; and never afterwards, in trying to recall what followed, could he remember anything but a struggle that seemed endless. Each tug, to drag the boy towards him, unsteadied his own foothold; and, when he had him in his arms, the fight to regain dry land again brought every muscle thick-standing and near to breaking-point.

They came to firm ground at last, and the boy clung about him with piteous cries.

"I want my mammy—oh, I want my mammy."

"Well, I can't be that—and, be damned to you, you're a wet sort of lad to father. Where d'ye hail from, laddie?"

"From Garsykes."

Hardcastle glanced across the narrow valley, and back again to the boy. Tired as he was, exasperated by the simple answer, the humour of it all appealed to him. Apart from peril of other marshes he might blunder into, how could he let this waif go lonely with his fright across the mile that would seem endless leagues to him—the mile that stretched between this and Garsykes?

There was nothing for it but to go—a fool, knowing the way of the Lost Folk and their mercies—into the midst of what they had in store for him. Rebel as he would against suicide of this sort, he could not thrust aside a lad who shivered as he clung to him.

So they two went across the moonlit wilderness, picking their way between the bogs and the broken grounds. It was not easy going. The light was enough to show them a safe way till clouds came over the moon's face now and then, and they were alone with darkness and the unfenced mines that lurked for heedless feet.

Hardcastle's temper grew rusty as a file. He was taking all these pains for one of Garsykes brats, and the brat was wet and clinging. He wearied of the lad's piteous crying for his mother, and cursed himself for inhumanity.

They plodded on, till they came half down the slope on his side of the stream. And now a great hubbub sounded from Garsykes, up above them,

and lanterns were bobbing to and fro. A woman's voice rose shrill into the stillness of the night.

"You've got to find my lad, or I'll know why!"

"Turning us out o' doors on a wild-goose chase," came the answer.

Hardcastle knew the voice for Long Murgatroyd's, and his surly protest was taken up by one and another.

"The lad will be at High Stellings, where you sent him an hour since. They'd never let him run a risk of dark o'er-taking him—open mines and what-all—so they're keeping him till morn."

"Aye. They're keeping him. So let's all get back to thy inn, widow, and chalk up more riches for thee on thy door."

"There'll be neither ale nor chalks till we've found Ned. I tell you he's lost on the moor. I know it in my bones. And, whisht ye, what was that?"

Far-off she had heard the lad's cry for his mammy, though they were deaf to its meaning.

"A peewit, widow—or a curlew, maybe. One of ours must be poaching up the fells, and started a wild-bird up."

But soon the oft-repeated cry, as it came nearer, was plain to all, and their lanterns went bobbing up and down, each man thinking he knew where to find the sound, and each baffled constantly by the utter darkness.

Hardcastle made for the nearest light, and found himself face to face with Long Murgatroyd, who gaped at him as at a ghost and turned his lantern from the Master to Ned's dripping figure. Then he gave a rough, unsteady chuckle.

"Here's the big and little of it come to Garsykes, neighbours. You've got your lad, widow, and we've got summat, too, we wanted."

The rest came crowding about Murgatroyd. The shivering waif had leaped at a bound into his mother's arms, and Hardcastle found himself alone, confronting half the men of Garsykes. With peril came a sharp, useless sort of vision for all that made up this wild happening. The half-circle of lanterns—the scowling faces, part in light and part in shadow—the dumb, do-nothing darkness of the waste lands—they were part of a scene he looked on at, as if it were no concern of his.

That for a moment. Then he gathered his strength, as a man might pull a bow-string tight. Most of these folk were deep in liquor, and all were

scathing with rancour that had grown by what it fed on since the day he paid no tribute.

"We'd best end Logie now," said Long Murgatroyd—"Logie and its mucky pride."

A wolfish growl answered him, though still some dread of Hardcastle held them. He had gone like "a ghost-guarded man" through these last weeks of all that Garsykes could bring to his undoing. They were many—but they lived in a country haunted by trolls and mine-goblins, and superstition was in their slackened fibres.

A breeze got up, quick and merry, from the top of swart Pengables Hill. The clouds overhead were riven apart, and the eager moon leaped through. It maddened the Garsykes Men afresh to see Hardcastle standing there straight to his height and waiting silently for what might follow.

Widow Mathison, still clutching her boy as if she feared to let him go again, ran suddenly in front of Hardcastle and loosened her tongue on the rabble.

"Where's your shame, you hulking wastrels? Do as you like to Hardcastle when you can catch him fair—but not when he's on this sort of errand. Ned's all I have, and can't you see by the drip of him that he's been saved fro' drowning?"

"What do we care?" muttered Long Murgatroyd. "Ned's no bairn of ours."

"That makes him the likelier lad," said the widow, tartly. "And now you can all pack home, for I willun't have you touch the man."

Appealed to singly, there were men here who would have been pricked by shame; but they were a mob out of hand, beast-like and robbed of what wits they ever had.

"Who's the widow to come hectoring it over us?" snarled one.

"Quit talking," shouted another. "Let drive at Hardcastle instead."

The Master stepped quietly in front of Widow Mathison, and they swayed and jostled, eager to attack, but held for a moment by brutish fear of his unconcern. In that moment the moon was snapped up by a scudding cloud, and Hardcastle took his luck as it came.

His one hope of defence was to attack. Without a pause he ran forward, lifting the stout stick he carried, and smashed the lanterns one by one. Then,

in the dark of his own making, he rained blows at random into the midst of the screaming throng.

Luck could not hold for long, he knew. Already the cloud was passing, and with clearer light would come the end for him. But meanwhile it was good to be alive, drawing healthy music from Garsykes skulls.

When the moon raced free again, it shone on a few fallen men, on others who yelped like wolves and came at him headlong. He glanced about him, ran nimbly to a corner where two field-walls protected him from rear attack, and waited for them. A man had to die once and some day. What better end could Logie ask of him?

II

Will o' Wisp, lurking beside the track that Hardcastle would take from Broken Firs, wearied of his job. It had been well enough, with Nita beside him, to do her bidding; but the silence and the night-time sobered him. What grudge had he, after all, against the Master of Logie? The man had taken a random shot at him, long ago, when he tried to rob the post-boy. That was all in the day's work of chance and mischance. But what of this lying in wait, cold-blooded, for a shot that could not miss its mark?

Will was a rogue by nature—and from choice because life offered more frolic along unlicensed roads. Yet decency, of his own sort, travelled all roads with him, like a faithful comrade, and the longer Hardcastle tarried in his coming, the chillier grew this enterprise of waiting to shoot a man as if he were a sitting rabbit.

What had he heard in the Garsykes tavern? That Nita played with men as cats play with mice—that the way of her with them all was one and the same—and the end a long sliding down the slope to hell. They did not mince matters in their talk, the Garsykes Folk, and Will o' Wisp thought of these things now.

Still Hardcastle did not come down the moor. Nita had pretended to know the way he would take to-night, the hour of his return. She was wrong, it seemed, and the rogue felt a stealthy gladness. The breeze sobbed and fluted through the naked spinney where he crouched. His gun lay chilly in half-frozen hands. Were they right when they spoke of the little basket-weaver as of a thing accursed?

He was too far on the Logie-side of the moor to hear the cries that had drawn Hardcastle from his home-track past the spinney; and at length he gave up the errand that had brought him here.

“Nita has hanged enough men in her garter,” he muttered, stretching his cramped limbs.

Then he went down and across the pastures, leaping a wall nimbly here and there, till he came near Garsykes and its tumult. He saw lanterns flitting like his namesake Will o’ Wisps about the pastures, heard Widow Mathison swing her tongue like a flail, and noisy voices answer to the lash.

It was all a mystery to him as he pressed forward, halting only when the clouds raced over from Pengables, hiding one step from the next. Through the stormy murk, as he listened, came a thunder-din of oaths, a pig-like screeching from men not used to bear pain silently.

The moon ran free again, and in the sharp, cold light he saw Hardcastle standing in the angle of two limestone walls, with half Garsykes yammering to be at him.

Will o’ Wisp had no liking for the village he had blundered into weeks ago. There were degrees of rascaldom, and his own feet went merrily on the margin of such deeps as Garsykes knew. Something in Hardcastle’s dour silence as he faced the rabble with uplifted cudgel—some liking, inborn in him, for a man meeting heavy odds, brought music into Will’s heart. Moreover, he was in mood to take sides with any man that Nita hated.

“What’s this, you Garsykes louts?” he asked.

They turned on him, ready to tear him to pieces instead of Hardcastle.

“Here’s Nita’s last favourite, Lord help him,” laughed Long Murgatroyd.

“He carries a fowling-piece, as it happens—and it’s loaded—and you’re a timid folk in Garsykes, unless all the luck’s in front of you. No, Murgatroyd, I wouldn’t stir a foot, if I was you. You’d find it a queer thing to be dead, with a charge of shot inside you instead of ale.”

Will o’ Wisp was himself. Free of Nita, free of cold-blooded murder up the moor, it tickled his fancy to be master of these folk—master too, of what would happen soon to Hardcastle.

He took his stand on a moonlit hillock, letting the polished barrel of his gun glint from one to another of the mob.

“I’m judge among you,” he said, with his heedless laugh.

“Are you, now?” growled Murgatroyd. “A likely man, you, to be judge of any folk.”

“I know ’em all so well, knowing myself,” chuckled Will. “There’s my loaded gun, too—and that helps a man to be a judge. What’s all this moil about, widow?”

Widow Mathison told him, instead, her mind about all Garsykes Men, born or unborn—with gusto, now that Hardcastle was safe. That made Will little the wiser till the lad broke from his mother’s grasp and then ran back again, afraid of what he had suffered on the fells.

“I fell into cold water, I did,” he whimpered, “and couldn’t get myself out. And a big man came and tugged at me, and brought me to my mammy.”

Will o’ Wisp understood now; and wrath kindled in his lazy mind.

“You’d kill Hardcastle for that?”

“Aye,” said Long Murgatroyd. “What do we care for the widow’s brat?”

Will o’ Wisp let his gun roam quietly from one to another of the company. And then he spoke.

“In all my days I never happened on as foul a stye as Garsykes. Hardcastle o’ Logie saved one of yours—and there’s something you never learned, it seems.”

“Oh, aye?” sneered Murgatroyd.

“There’s fairation. Be dummocked, there’s fairation.”

Still facing them, he made his way to Hardcastle and nodded cheerily. “I’m going Logie way myself,” he said, “so we might as well step up together. Three’s company sometimes, and I’m taking the gun as a parting gift from Garsykes.”

Hardcastle fell into step beside him, swinging his cudgel. A pluckier mob would have rushed the pair of them, knowing that Will’s fowling-piece could speak only once before they were trodden down. But each man thought of his own skin, and stood cursing stupidly, and watched them dip over and down the hill-crest.

The Master and Will o’ Wisp went in silence through the blue-grey, misty night, till Hardcastle turned suddenly.

“There’s no return to Garsykes for you, after this. I’m in your debt.”

“Nay. I’d meant to go. I’m not their sort of rogue, and never was.”

“There’s supper and a bed at Logie.”

"Bless you, I want no thanks. If there was danger to-night I'd come and gladly. But they'll let you alone for awhile. I know 'em."

Nothing Hardcastle could say persuaded the vagabond to change his mind, when they came to the hill that swept with a break-neck fall to Logie Brigg.

"I'm getting as far as I can from Nita Langrish," laughed Will. "She'd be weaving her spells about me to-morrow if I stayed as near as this."

With that he borrowed a fill of 'baccy for his pipe, bade Hardcastle a rollicking farewell, and went his ways into the everywhere that lay within the night-time forest and beyond.

Hardcastle chuckled quietly. After all, few strangers had come into Garsykes, and fared out the better in this world's gear. Will o' Wisp could boast of a good fowling-piece that was his by right of conquest.

Then the Master turned for home; and the steep of the road brought anguish to the knee that had blundered against a rock while he was rescuing the widow's lad. There had been no time to think of it till now.

For very pain he was forced to rest on Logie Brigg, and at these times life lies in wait for every man. Pride to keep Garsykes at bay was well enough. So was joy in the lusty strength that had cracked a crown or two to-night. Now these were gone. He halted on the bridge, as the pedlar and Causleen had done, before the trees were bare—weary, heartsick and body-sick, no flame alight on any beacon-hill ahead. It was as if he was a child again, seeking the mother who had slept these twenty years where the churchyard listened to the lap of waters round its graves.

Under him swirled Wharfe River, playmate and comrade and lover through the peaceful days; and now her voice stole kindly to his ear, talking of brave days to come. When all seemed in the losing, the river told him, it was time for the hale-souled sort to gather courage.

He limped up the hill to Logie with gaining hope, and found it easier for a lame man to climb than it had been to make the sharp descent that jarred every step. For all that, he was spent and tired when he came to his own gate —till he saw Causleen waiting for him there. The moon showed him a face pale and eager, framed by dark hair that was loose about it like a glory.

"You were in danger somewhere, and I could not help you." The Highland voice was low and troubled. "There was a crying up the waste lands—your feet blundered into marshes——"

“How should you know?” he broke in.

“The vision came,” she went on, with great simplicity. “I did not ask for it. It came.”

Hardcastle’s heart beat faster, for no reason that he knew of. Since Causleen’s first coming there had been recurring enmity between them broken by little rifts that let the sunlight through. He had not known till lately how he had begun to need and seek her comradeship. To-night he gained a deeper knowledge. Her welcome at the gate was the one thing he had craved, all the long way from Garsykes, and it was his.

“You’re glad I’m home again?”

She grew still and cold. “Glad? Yes. You have been kind to us—two pedlars tramping to your gate. The vision came, and I spent myself in sending help to you across the waste—help of the spirit—and, of course you’ll laugh at fancies—I spent myself, not for your sake, but because you’d shown us kindness—of your own rough sort. I wished to pay a debt.”

Logie’s Master had known mixed weather on the uplands, but never such a March-tide change from sun to bitter, east-wind spite. The pedlar’s girl was remote from him as the top of old Pengables Hill, with its head among the driving sleet.

“Is it Nita,” he asked clumsily, “and her chatter of the night we spent down yonder?”

“It is Nita.”

The man’s big, simple heart found room at last. Through these last weeks he had been groping forward to the light.

“Best marry me,” he said. “I’ve wanted it, Causleen.”

She answered nothing for awhile. Then sleet came stinging at his face again.

“I do not care for pity. Oh, you are clumsy in your kindness! Gossip has touched us, and you stoop to offer marriage to the beggar-maid. You are generous.”

“I want it,” he repeated doggedly.

“I’ve shame enough to bear as it is. Would I add to it? To sit each day at table, and look across at you, and know that I owed it all to pity—would that be happiness?”

She turned to go, then glanced at his knee as if she had not seen till now that it was bleeding through the torn cloth of his riding-breeches.

"You crashed against a rock," she said softly. "The vision showed me that, too. Can I wash and bind it for you?"

"It is of no account."

"You mean that Rebecca the paragon would have more skill? She is so wonderful."

Hardcastle could only wonder at her moods. She had seemed to care that he had taken a hurt, and now she was jealous of Rebecca. And again she had turned and was looking at him with wide, questioning eyes.

"You asked if it was Nita. It was—but not her gossip. Why do you lie to me, Hardcastle of Logie?"

With that she was gone in earnest, and Hardcastle limped slowly up the dappled moon-dusk of the road. Near home as he was, a late-found instinct prompted him to hold his cudgel in readiness for whatever the swaying shadows of the firs might hide. His left hand swung idly at his side, till suddenly a wet snout pushed against it and a friendly smell stole up in greeting.

"Back again, are you, Storm?" said the Master, with gruff banter. "Red from the feast, as usual?"

But the dog's grey muzzle was innocent of stains. For three days he had ravened, then had slept off the after-sickness, had lapped greedily at every stream he passed. No guile showed in the brown, humid eyes. He knew nothing of repentance, or need of it. It was just that his wander-lust was over, and somewhere deep in his being was the knowledge that danger threatened Logie. He was home again, and at his post.

"It was time you came," said Hardcastle. "Dogs I know, and horses I know—but women are beyond me."

Storm had the better of him; for a half-hour later Causleen found him in the cupboard under the stair, and brought him food, and made much of him before she bent above his tousled head.

"Oh, Storm," she said, and cried her heart out.

CHAPTER XVI

A ROPE-END AND A TREE

I

Hardcastle fretted during the next days, because the hurt to his knee yielded slowly even to Rebecca's skill with peat and simples and the right way of handling bandages. The fear was on him constantly that Garsykes would hear of his infirmity and rush to the attack before his strength returned to face it.

There was the pedlar, trusting to the shelter he had promised him—and Rebecca, old in service—and Causleen.

There was Causleen. She was aloof and chill whenever they met about the house. He could make nothing of her whims. Was it his fault that he had been asked to save her life, and was powerless to rescue her from the whip of Nita's tongue, except by marriage? And marriage she disdained. He tried to reason it all out, not understanding that reason was the last thing concerned with what had happened to Causleen and himself.

Always the worst of his fretting returned to her. If those louts from Garsykes came and he had only one knee to serve him, what would chance? His mind ran out to the unthinkable—for Causleen.

"Now, it's not a bit of good," said Rebecca on one of these afternoons, as she was bandaging his knee afresh, "not a bit of good to go about like a man that thinks the roof will fall because he's got a pain in his knee. Men are all alike, Lord help 'em—'specially when they're mending nicely, and ought to be giving a thanks-be, instead of glowering like a thunderstorm. It nags a bit, what I'm rubbing into the raw o' your wound? Well, there's healing goes with nags sometimes."

"You don't know," grumbled the Master. "I fall lame just when Logie needs me. There's you and Donald——"

"Aye, and there's Donald's lass. That's where your shoe pinches. Times were different when I was young."

She tied the bandage, sewed its edges up and bit the thread off with her strong, ancient teeth.

"Different?" asked Hardcastle, impatient of her ministry and all things.

“Aye. We never doubted Logie’s roof was safe. My lad doesn’t doubt it to this day. You’re young, Master, and I’m of the elder days, and I tell you what I know.”

Rebecca had no more to do with bandages and healing. She was wrapt into another world—grey and gaunt, a prophetess.

“War comes to Logie-side. The youngsters fight, and the old see far. D’ye think I go every night and morning to tryst my lad at the gate and get nothing for it? He died for Logie once—and it was forty years ago.”

Jonah the brindled cat, crept into the room and leaped to Rebecca’s shoulder. He was no hearthside lover now, but wild and bridling.

“Even Jonah seems to know there’s trouble coming,” went on Rebecca. “Well, let it come, and we’ll outface it as we’ve always done.”

“There were fewer men in Garyskes then,” said the Master gloomily —“and more who were staunch for Logie.”

Rebecca glanced at him, and even her free speech was checked. She read his heart, as he could not. The odds against him had not brought this black mood, but fear for Causleen had. Awhile since she had been jealous of the girl, resentful of the gaining fear that her own reign at Logie might be ended soon. Now she feared lest Causleen’s playing with the Master should ruin all. It was no time “for furbelows and cantrips,” and how could a man fight his best with half of him wondering if his lass cared?

“You’ve been fretting to give that knee o’ yours a taste of the fresh air,” she said grudgingly. “Have your way, then, for it’s mending fast. And, of course, you’ll go a mile if I tell you the half is enough and to spare.”

Hardcastle went more than the mile. He was unused to the prison of four walls for days on end, and the wine of the crisp November afternoon got into his blood with every step he took. In all the years behind he had seldom seen Logie-land in its full breadth and splendour as he saw it now. The striding acres, wind-blown and lonely—the last sunset glow on old Pengables—the sombre forest getting to its sleep—all were like ancient friends who brought a new, swift welcome. They might be in the losing, but they were his as yet, and wonderfully dear.

One moorland track lured him on to another, till he reached the beech-wood that stepped down to Scawgill Water. Life had done this and that for him, but had not killed the boy’s romance that would linger always in this silent place of mystery, with its grave, round-boled trees, its red-russet drift of leaves that crinkled to the tread. Squirrels had their tree-top nests here,

and badgers lived in the "earths" beside the stream. A great dreamer, in spite of his hardness, the Master still peopled the glen with all that country legend had to tell of water-nixies, trolls and goblins. It was so hushed a place, so instinct with underfret of the primeval life, that no man could linger here and fail to know its witchcraft.

A stifled cry sounded near at hand, and then a groaning, low and long-drawn-out. Hardcastle, startled out of his dreams, glanced sharply round. Long since a wandering tinker had come to a foul end here, and his ghost, they said, was restless time and time.

The pigeons ceased their crooning in the tree-tops. A cold and slender wind, prying to the bone, chilled Hardcastle. Far down Logie Dale a farm-dog yapped and barked, and a roaming fox took up the challenge.

Hardcastle glanced about him, and up a clearing of the wood saw a body swinging from a tree. All the boy in him took fright; but the man bade him go and see what this ghost of a suicide dead fifty years ago was made of.

The gloaming filtered through leafless branches and showed him a gaunt, six-foot body turning and twisting on a rope. The body still groaned, but with lessening vigour; and there was something pitiful in the feet that trod helplessly on air, seeking firm ground.

Hardcastle got out a knife and ripped the cord across. The body tottered and swayed for an instant, and afterwards it needed all his strength to check it in its fall and lower it into the withered brackens, Then he loosed the frowsy shirt and watched the dull purple steal from the man's face, giving way to a pallor as of death.

The slow return of life was terrible to be alone with, and Hardcastle welcomed the plea for water that came by and by. The stream lay below them, and he had no vessel of any kind; so he shouldered the half-lifeless body, carried it to the bank and ladled water in his palms as best he could.

"That's better," gurgled the man, when at last his choking throat contrived to swallow a few drops.

The farm-dog and the yapping fox had roused every house about the fells by now. From Pengables to Crake Beacon, dogs gave tongue, loud across the still night-air. And close at hand, in answer, came a scampering of wild things through the undergrowth. Field voles twittered, and overhead the flitter-mice cried thinly as they vanned to and fro.

In the midst of this stealthy terror of the woodland folk, the man propped against the stream's bank began to drink greedily and to good purpose, till

Hardcastle denied him more. Then they two looked at each other, in the light of a moon that shone wanly through the naked tree-tops.

"It's you, Hardcastle o' Logie?"

"Yes, Long Murgatroyd—and the devil of a time you've given me."

"That's good news." The man's slow-witted hatred, nursed in health, leaped out in this hour of weakness and release from death; "but it's naught to what's waiting for you up at Logie."

A madness came on Hardcastle. The sweat of trouble he had given this lout, dangling between earth and sky awhile since, asked for a word or two in another key. His hands were itching for the throat that he had saved.

"You were minded to spare the hangman trouble later on," he said at last, "and so am I. But I'll leave you to it."

Murgatroyd began to laugh, and could not check himself for awhile. Then he put a hand to his throat, and laughed again, as a dotard might.

"I came near to hanging myself in Nita's garter, as that terrible pranksome fellow, Will o' Wisp, would say. And so did you, Hardcastle. What could I do but laugh? We might have been swinging together—me on one tree, and Logie's high-almighty on its neighbour. We'd have made a bonnie picture—with Nita coming to look on."

The farm-dogs yelped and barked across the wastes. Fear gained on the little people of the wood. The breeze sobbed and whimpered, and would not be still. And Hardcastle feared greatly, too—lest he could keep his hands no longer from Long Murgatroyd.

"Are you fit to be left, if I take your rope home with me?" he snapped.

Murgatroyd was recovering fast. "You needn't take it. She maddened me so with her come-and-kiss, and her stand you off, and all the sick damnation of it, that I fancied a rope's end more than Nita. That's gone."

"Gone, has it?" asked Hardcastle, with a sick kind of wonder.

"Aye. I'll get my arms about her, soon or late. I promised her no less. So you run home to Logie, if there's any Logie standing."

"It's stood against the Garsykes swine for years out of mind. I'm not for hurrying, Murgatroyd."

Deep, sullen hatred showed in the man's face, mottled with returning life. To Hardcastle it was as if he looked down into the pit of hell, seeing a

lost man who would not be saved at any cost of trouble from helping hands above.

"Nita wanted me to go with them to-night," said Murgatroyd; "but I told her I'd rather hang myself in a wood than do her bidding."

The man fell into cackling laughter again, then shivered as memory of the rope returned.

"We'd have been a bonnie couple, swinging side by side; but 'twas not to be, it seems."

II

Hardcastle left him there, and swung up the fields to Logie. His pace quickened with every stride, for Murgatroyd's tale of peril to the house had found its mark. If it were true that an attack was planned, he might already be too late; and he thought ceaselessly of his home—and of Causleen.

When he topped the rise that looked down on Logie, he glanced eagerly up-dale. Prepared to see flames leaping high into the dusk, he saw only a steady lamplight glow that shone from the window over the porch—Causleen's window—and instead of men's frenzied shouts he heard only a farm-lad's song as he went about the business of the mistals.

The relief was so quick, so urgent, that a sudden "God be thanked" escaped him. Murgatroyd had lied. He should have known as much, and saved himself the sick suspense of his journey up the fell.

"For why should God specially be thanked?" asked a quiet voice at his elbow.

Brant the shepherd, a silent man in all his ways, had come noiselessly to the Master's side, and was tugging at his wispy beard.

"Confound you, Stephen, you startled me. They said the Garsykes Men had come to Logie."

"Well, they haven't, to all appearance; but they come to my sheepfold as if there was no law in the land. I stepped down to talk about it with you, Master."

"The ewes must take their chance, as we all do these days."

"Aye, they mean little to you, and always did. Time was when you sheltered Storm, though he was a red-jawed outlaw dog. Well, I got Storm at last."

Hardcastle found the grim humour that gave salt and savour to these harsh days. “You got Storm, poor beast,” he said, thinking of the cupboard under the stair at Logie—thinking, too, of Causleen and her way with the backslider.

“He’ll trouble me no more—but durned if these Garsykes Men aren’t worse than a kennel-full of such as Storm. They grow outrageous—fair outrageous.”

The Master was glad of the chance given him to speak his mind. “There are six of us leal to the old house, Stephen. The rest are paying tribute.”

“Damn ’em, yes.”

“Get away before Logie goes. I brought you into this, thinking we’d win through. There’s no need for you to stay.”

“No,” said Brant—“except that we’re twin and marrow in our love o’ Logie. Where you bide, I bide.”

Hardcastle glanced over to the light that shone from Causleen’s window. All was in the losing, and his wits were keen to save her from the last, foul uproar.

“Could we get the pedlar and his girl to your hut on the moor? It’s cold up yonder at this time o’ year, but there are worse things than cold.”

“We could. The bracken-sledge would bump old Donald a bit by the way, but we’d pad him well with hay-trusses.”

“I’ll have the sledge out to-morrow, with the old grey horse to draw it. He’s only eating his head off in the stable.”

“Not so fast, Master,” put in Brant dryly. “That hut o’ mine is well enough for a rough shepherd, but I’ll fettle it up before a maid can pretend to be suited with it.”

“It’s no time to ask whether the maid’s pleased or not,” snapped the other. “You know what may happen any moment if she stays.”

Brant was silent as they crossed the last pasture-field. He knew many things—not least of them the reason that made Hardcastle gloomy and prone to caution nowadays. It would be better for them all if Causleen were out of Garsykes’ reach, and the Master’s mind relieved of the sapping dread lest hurt should come to her.

“I’ll be ready,” he said, opening the back-gate of Logie for Hardcastle to pass through. “Then, after we’re free of what you might call encumbrances,

we'll set about putting the fear of hell into the Lost Folk."

Hardcastle regained his old self at a bound, for no reason that he guessed. "What's in that feud-sick mind of yours, Brant?"

"To gather my stolen ewes from Garsykes. Six of us are staunch, and six have dogs to round 'em up and back to Logie. We've fowling-pieces, too."

"But cannot use them, Brant. You should know that I'm a magistrate."

Humour answered veiled humour. "To be sure we can't—save for killing vermin. That's allowed by law."

A great burden had slipped from the Master's shoulders. He was free somehow, to carry a careless heart and fight Logie to the last edge of what might come.

"To-morrow, after we've got the pedlar safe up-moor?"

"The sooner the better. Who told you they were coming against Logie to-night?"

"Long Murgatroyd."

"He'd be a liar if he stood on the brink o' Kingdom Come."

"That's where he did stand—dangled, I should say—when I found him."

"Oh, aye?" asked Brant, with slow curiosity.

"There are things men don't think of twice, if they can help it. Come indoors, and tell Rebecca that winds are dry and thirsty on the heights."

"They are," said the shepherd, with conviction, "and from this to Hawes Water there's no ale as ripe as Logie's."

They parted in the stable-yard, and Hardcastle, coming to the grey, moonlit front of the house, glanced at the room over the porch. The light still shone from it, and Causleen, kneeling on the window-seat, looked down at him. The lamp-glow behind her ran out to meet the silver-gold, soft moonlight. And both were tender with her beauty.

"Oh, I've waited for you," she said, her voice soft as one of her own Highland burns in summer.

A great joy blazed up in Hardcastle, as if boyhood found its spring again. "You've waited?" he asked sharply.

"Yes. Rebecca is beyond herself with grief. She sees you lying dead somewhere on the fells, and sits and croons, saying she ought never to have

let you out of her sight—with your wounded knee, and all the mad wolves hunting you."

"Let them hunt," said Hardcastle, his dreams shattered suddenly by her chill laugh of contempt.

"I will comfort Rebecca, while you go to father. He has been asking for you."

"Is that mockery, too?"

"None of it is mockery. And Rebecca need not have feared. There's a mad wolf glaring up at me—bigger than any of the Garsykes breed."

Hardcastle conquered his gusty rage. She was a woman, and his guest. If the new dreams had to go—well, the old ones had gone, and soon Logie would be ended, too. Nothing mattered.

"Donald asks for me?" he questioned.

"I said it—and we of the Highlands do not lie, as you of Logie do."

The Master limped into his own house, forgetting the fret of the knee that had broken Rebecca's bandages by now. A yelp of welcome sounded the moment he set foot indoors, and Storm left his hiding-place and pressed close against him, clamoring for attention.

Hardcastle held up a warning hand. "Kennel, lad. There's Brant in the house."

Storm's tail fell limp. His whole body seemed to shrink and lessen as he crept back to the cupboard. He had learned that Brant was a word of evil meaning.

"Poor devil," muttered Hardcastle, "there's not much left for him in life, though he saved three of us. Brant or another will get him soon."

He went into the room where Donald lay on the settle, his body tethered by weakness, but his eyes bright and eager.

"I wanted you," said the pedlar. "Sit ye down in the chair here, and I'll let some of my long thoughts out. They burden me."

His glance roved from Hardcastle to the pike that hung above the mantel, and back again.

"I'll not grudge you that any longer," he went on. "They tell me of your stand against the Lost Folk, and I care for a man who can make music out of odds. I would that, here in Yorkshire, you had the pipes to hearten you."

His mind wandered to the glens of home, to unforgotten pibrochs and his long fight with poverty—wandered to the gorsy braes that he had roamed with Causleen's mother. Then he spoke again, smiling gently.

"When one is chained as I am, there is nothing to be done, except grow wise. If a man can fight one sort of honest battle, he can fight all. I wanted you to know that—that your guests have not turned vagabonds for choice, or for lack of struggle."

Hardcastle, wrenched out of old ruts by war and heartache, found a fine simplicity. He understood all that Donald left unsaid, the grace and manliness of it.

"My guests are very welcome," he said, diffident and gruff. "They should know as much by this time."

"We have fought, Causleen and I. There were no pipes with us, no press of foemen waiting for attack. There was only poverty—a dumb enemy, cold and crafty, that lay in wait."

Again Donald's glance wandered to the Flodden pike.

"Be gentle with an old man who sees before and after, and must ease his mind. There are cairns in my country, reared to Hielandmen who died with the broadsword in their hands. There's not one to speak of those who fought poverty, the hardest foe of all."

Then his restless mind went wandering down the centuries. He told of Macbeth and Duncan—of Glencoe and its narrow shambles—of Prestonpans and Derby Town and red Culloden Moor—as of staunch, forthright matters he had shared. And, whether he lived or died in far-off tumults, there was constantly the joy of well-worth-while, the thud of blows, the heartening wonder of the pipes, playing men up the further hills.

It was only when he came to the tale of his journey from the Highlands that the song went out of his voice, the light from his eyes. Hardcastle grew ashamed of his own wealth and ease, as he listened to the slow recountal of trinkets sold here, to earn a bed for the night—of fortunes told in an alien country to win the price of a wayside meal. The tale was so simply told that he, too, felt footsore and heartsore as he listened. Donald roused himself at last from his journeys down the years. The quiet, beguiling smile crept once more across the grey creases of his face.

"Have I wearied you with my chatter—as I tire you because I'm so long in dying?"

“We shall get you strong again——”

“No,” broke in Donald. “Something tells me the end is even nearer than you think—a tame end to a life that has dreamed so much of ancient battles.”

Hardcastle humoured his mood, garrulous but constantly returning to the one clouded purpose. For pride’s sake he needed to explain how Causleen and he came to be travelling the roads, and presently his mind grew clear.

“We had ever been Stuart men in the old days—losing, and hoping, and fighting—till little was left me when my time came to be laird in the dreadful days of honour and peace. That little went, and Causleen had to make her choice. There was a rich wooer came. A great name he had, and nothing against him but the one thing that damned all.”

“Go on, Donald.”

“You will not understand. How should you? The Stuarts were discrowned and out of mind long since, you’d say; but in the Highlands they can never be discrowned. And the wooer who came was of a clan that had sold the old allegiance for gold—just for guinea-pieces to jangle in a purse.”

The fire of youth kindled in Donald’s voice. Consuming wrath was in his eyes. And Hardcastle understood better than the pedlar guessed; for Logie moorlands knew the way of staunchness to their own allegiance.

“I left the choice to Causleen, though I’d rather have seen the child in her shroud than linked to him. ‘He can save the house for us with his gold,’ I said, to prove her. And, ‘He cannot,’ said she, ‘for there’s Stuart blood on it. A hundred years is not enough to cleanse it.’ So we took the roads together, she and I.”

His eyes closed for awhile. One purpose was achieved; but another clamoured for fulfilment, and he had little time to spare. He was alert again.

“She took the roads as bravely as she took her choice—but soon she will be travelling alone.”

There was question in the pedlar’s glance—a pleading that was command almost. And out of doors a breeze plucked and rattled at the windows, as if to deepen fear of what the lone highways had in store for Causleen.

Hardcastle watched the lamplight flicker in the draught, looked on the old, familiar furnishings with new vision—the bell-mouthed blunder-busses of his father’s time, the pewter polished to dim lustre by what was known to

Rebecca as “elbow grease”—the pike that had given every son of Logie pause when he was minded to be less than the men who marched to Flodden long ago.

He knew what Donald hoped for, and with wry humour he recalled the way of Causleen since he saved her from the snow—her avoidance of him, or mockery such as she had showered on him from her window when he came by to-night.

“You would have me guard her? Nothing but marriage could give me that right.”

“I have watched you, and the laid-by folk see much. It seemed that you cared, and hope grew apace. That is why I tell you what her proper station is. My girl would not shame Logie’s pride.”

There was something wistful in the pedlar’s eagerness, his dignity. He longed for Causleen’s safety, but would not cringe for it.

“She will have none of me, Donald—so how can I ease your mind? I’ll ask no woman twice.”

A great joy shone in the pedlar’s face. He had had no inkling, till now, that Hardcastle had forestalled his keen desire.

“Second thoughts are sometimes best—especially a maid’s. She thought you offered marriage out of pity, maybe.”

“Yes. I could not persuade her from it.”

“You will,” said Donald softly, and drew a long breath of thankfulness, and dozed awhile.

When he roused himself, his hold on this world seemed gone. He looked out before him as if no house-walls and no leagues of foreign country hid the wild glens of Inverness. He was home again.

“I had two dreams,” he said, his voice clear and lusty. “One was to know Causleen safe, and that comes true. The other was a sick man’s fancy. I dreamed”—he tried to lift himself, and failed—“dreamed that I died a warrior, instead of Pedlar Donald.”

With that his eyes closed, and Rebecca, coming to see how it went with him, stood beside the settle, her grim face softened.

“Sleeps like a babby, poor soul—and it would be as well if he died in it, instead of living to be bumped on a bracken-sledge to-morrow. Brant sits

snug by my hearth, and tells me you're for turning the old man out o' doors."

"The Garsykes Men are coming. He's safer up the moor."

"His brat is safer, you mean. Why don't you want to tuck me, too, on the sledge, if Logie is no place for women? D'ye think that, because I've a face like a hatchet, to scare men with, I've a heart after the same pattern? Ask the lad that keeps tryst with me at the gate, every night and all."

She lowered the lamp, took another look at Donald as if he were an ailing first-born of her own, and together they went out into the draughty hall.

Storm yapped and whimpered from his cupboard, and Hardcastle went in to quiet him, thinking only of the dog's peril, not of Logie's.

"There's Brant near by," he said.

Storm would not be satisfied. He bared his teeth and growled till Hardcastle cuffed him. Then the sheep-slayer shivered and lay down—but not for fear of Brant—and whined, as the rising breeze about the house sobbed from the lost Garsykes lands.

When Hardcastle had fastened him in, with a biscuit or two for company, he went with Rebecca to the kitchen. They found Brant sitting by the hearth, a stoup of ale beside him.

"Getting mellow, Stephen?"

"Mellowish, as you might say."

"There's naught else to do these days, while the waiting-time is on."

"He talks of sleeping here to-night," said Rebecca, harking back to her grievance, "says he wants to be ready for the sledge-journey you've planned. If you want to kill poor Donald outright—well, bump him to his death on the bracken-track."

Hardcastle, a little afraid of his henchwoman in times of ease, was the master now. "War has come. Will you put that into your mind once for all?"

"I'm not likely to forget it."

"They're coming one day to fire Logie. D'ye think we want to be crippled by thought of Donald, lying helpless? If he had his choice, would he be burned in his bed—or risk death on the bracken road, with God's winds about him?"

“God’s winds blow snell and cruel these days Indoors or out, there’s little to choose, and men like Brant come trapesing in to beg a night’s lodging. He’s killed Storm, he tells us, and should be content with that, without adding murder of poor Donald to his Judgment tally.”

“Killing of Storm won’t worrit me, when my time comes,” chuckled Brant. “There’ll be a few score ewes to back me up—ewes that might have gone into his jaws if it hadn’t been for a lucky shot o’ mine. As for Donald, I’m with the Master. He’s a better chance on the uplands than tied to his bed at Logie.”

“Aye, talk at me, now you’re two to one. Beat an old woman down. But when you’ve killed a lone pedlar—one that’s shared Logie’s salt—don’t run to my apron for comfort. I’ll give you none.”

“We shouldn’t look for it,” said the Master dryly.

Rebecca, taut as a bow-string, was at war with herself and every living thing about her, because peril did not come. The lad who had trysted her at the gate these forty years, had told her yesterday of havoc brewing up. And instead there was a wet breeze sobbing round the house, and Brant with the ale-froth about his stubbly beard and Hardcastle, dour and tall and thinking of Causleen. She knew that he was thinking of her, and heard children, of his getting, shout in play. Forlorn, alone and jealous, she sought for a grievance, and found it speedily.

“Your knee’s dripping, Master, and so much for my bandages. A careless man at all times, you.”

She went to the cupboard near the hearth, and got out a store of lint, and herbs that staunched the bleeding. The Master was hers for a little while, before Causleen stole him from her.

“It hurts, as I rub it in?”

“Like the devil, Rebecca. But have your way.”

A bark sounded down the gusty corridor, and Brant cocked a hairy ear.

“If Storm wasn’t dead, I’d have sworn I heard him.”

“His ghost barked,” said Rebecca. “No wonder he’s haunting you from this to the end of all. Are you sure you killed him?”

“Aye, I’m sure of that. And, as for his ghost, it needn’t trouble me.”

Rebecca finished her task, and gave the bandage a rough, ill-tempered pat. “There! If fire and slaughter’s coming, it’s as well to have two legs to

stand on instead of one. Men are feckless, left to themselves."

And now a silence crept about the house, and into the hearts of these three. They longed for the wind to rattle at the casements; but it, too, had fallen dumb. Logie was a house aware—its every stone and rafter-beam—of a peril sinister and urgent.

The brindled cat, catching the stealthy unrest of the house, had gone to Storm for comfort, only to find his ancient ally prisoned for the night. He wandered back to the kitchen now, and sprang to the table. His eyes were big, his fur stiff and ruffled, as if he waited for rats to come to Logie.

Rebecca glanced at him. "You, Jonah? Drat you for another male that's stepped into my kitchen, looking warlike—and finding no sort of battle."

She swept him from the table, with a sudden gust of spite, and the cat, gathering himself up, showed teeth and claws and spat at her.

Then Rebecca laughed and cried, and gathered the great cat into her arms.

"I didn't mean it, Jonah—but my heart's just breaking with the trouble of it all."

CHAPTER XVII

FLAME

That night they waited in Garsykes village till the moon dipped over Scummer Rigg and grey-black gloom shrouded heath and pasture-land. Then every man who had strength to carry a burden reached out for his well-filled sack.

Long Murgatroyd came up the hill with his shammocky stride just as they were shouldering the sacks. He stood awhile in the lamp-glow streaming from the tavern windows, and they drew away from him as if he had the plague. There was something unearthly in his white, drawn face, in the laugh that broke his silence.

"So I'm in time, after all? It's better pastime, this, than hanging yourself in Nita's garter."

The man still felt raw of a hempen cord about his neck—the cord that Hardcastle had loosed not long ago. Yet he laughed again, as he glanced from one to another. Once he had lain in wait for Hardcastle, and twice the Master had given him his life. The memory bit and rankled.

"Logie flares red as hell to-night," he said. "Let's make a start!"

They went out into a dark that could be felt, soon as the inn's friendly gleam was left behind. It reared itself against them like a wall, so that they feared almost to break themselves against it. Then, as their eyes grew used to it a little, they picked their way across lean fields, over marshes yielding to the tread, through woods of pine and larch whose rustling blackness put slack fear into their limbs. But they dreaded more the open highway that gave them a ready way to Logie. Deep in the bones and fibre of the Lost Folk lurked distrust of roads where honest men might be encountered.

It was when they came to Logie Brigg that superstition gathered thick about them. They huddled together, a lack-luster mob, on their side of the crossing. It was a saying centuries old in Garsykes that luck never came of hindering a Hardcastle. They might rob or take tribute of Logie's tenants, but must not touch its master.

"Bleating ewes, are you?" snarled Murgatroyd. "There's all us—and up yonder only Hardcastle and two women, and an aged man who may be quick or stiff by now. And you bleat."

A rough voice answered him through the murk of the windy night, over the song of Wharfe River as she raced below.

"It was you brought the trouble to Garsykes, when you were fool enough to wait for Hardcastle at the pinfold. There's been naught but ill-luck since."

The jostling mob, glad of a scapegoat for its panic, turned on Murgatroyd.

"Aye, be you first to cross the bridge—if you dare, mad Murgatroyd!"

His madness came on him in earnest. The broken years of his slavery to Nita, came to a head. Better any happening up at Logie than Nita's laughter if they left the house standing and came back with the tale.

He forced his way through the press. Shammocky no longer, but grim and straight and broad he led his Legion of the Lost between the grey, narrow walls of Logie Brigg. And all men followed him, afraid of the gaunt figure striding through the gloom.

They came to the gate of Logie, where Donald had found their token in the autumn days. Above them the house lay dark and hushed. Starlings cheeped and scolded in the ivied wall, but no other challenge answered their intrusion.

Murgatroyd gave a low chuckle—bleak and terrible as when he had jested after looking over the brink of death.

"We're not expected, though I blabbed to Hardcastle. He fancied, seemingly, that a liar never can speak truth."

Then, with savage zest, he planned the night-surprise, giving them no time for a second panic. He would lead one half to the main door, while the rest stole through the stable-yard and attacked the kitchen-entry.

"Sharp and ready does it, and any man would be a fool to fall soft now. He'd have Long Murgatroyd to reckon with."

Overwhelming weight of numbers was with them. So was the slumber of a house that did not look for them to-night. But Murgatroyd's gruff threat was the steadying note.

Those chosen for the rear attack crept pad-footed round the yard, and piled their sacks against the kitchen door with frantic haste till the woodwork was hidden by a bulging load of fuel. They littered the stone porch with what bags were left, and fired them.

The blaze was so fierce and instant that they leaped back into the cool dark of the night, and waited for those in Logie to be burned in their beds, or to come through the flames for what waited them. And the first that those within-doors heard of trouble was Storm's frenzied barking as he hurled himself against his cupboard-door, to break it through for Logie's sake.

The Master lay for a moment between sleep and waking. One window of his room opened on the stable-yard, and below he heard the restless tread of feet, the crackling of flame. Grey, pungent smoke was drifting in already across his bed, and he sprang up with an odd sense of readiness—and of relief. What they had waited for was here at last, to be met and grappled with.

Brant, too, had heard the uproar, and they met at the stairway head and ran down together to the kitchen. Hardcastle was in shirt and breeches, donned hastily, and the shepherd made a queer figure, his beard splayed above the top of a woollen nightshirt that reached to his unlaced boots.

They glanced at each other in the light of the smouldering kitchen-fire.

"You've a fowling-piece, Master?" murmured Brant. "Better have chosen a likelier gun. From what I'd heard, I fancied they were coming—this night or the next."

He broke off to listen to the roar of flame outside, to watch the door blister and gape open in wide rents.

"I borrowed a blunderbuss before I got up to bed," he went on, in the same low voice, "and loaded it. It would make you laugh to know what I crammed into its muzzle—pebbles and rusty nails, and all kinds of winsome odds and ends."

The door they were watching gaped wider, and great joy came to them, born of the house they loved. Without were fire and all the scum of Garsykes. Within were two leal men.

"The odds are with us, Stephen," said Hardcastle, breaking a silence that seemed long. "When the door's down, they'll be in the glare, and we in darkness."

"You're getting quick at the uptake," grunted Brant.

A light step sounded close behind them, and Causleen stood there, her hair rippling in a dusky cloud about her night-gear.

"Oh, go back, child," said the Master. "There's trouble."

“I’ve faced many kinds. Shall I tell you why I stay, Hardcastle of Logie?”

He was daunted by her courage, by the smouldering anger in her face. Causleen did not seem to hear Brant, or gaping door.

“I stay to see if you’re better at the fighting than the wooing. A laggard in one is a laggard at both, they say.”

It was no time for warfare of the tongue, and Hardcastle turned sharply to carry her out of harm’s way. He turned again, for the thick, nail-studded door had crashed inward with a swirl of flame and dancing faggot-embers.

Nothing chanced for awhile save fire that drove him back, and stench of tar and resin. Storm’s barking rang like a wolf-cry through the house, till suddenly it ceased, and Rebecca stood among them, the dog bristling by her side.

“Here’s a queer upset in my kitchen,” she said, glancing from the blazing doorway to the men’s faces. “I wakened late, I own, but I’d sense to go and loose Storm first. He might have been burned alive, poor lamb.”

Brant and the sheep-slayer eyed each other with slow wonder, as folk who had not looked for the meeting and did not relish it. Then, with peril waiting close at hand for both, the shepherd’s full-fed wrath blazed out.

“I shot you, Storm. I shot you, d’ye hear, for killing ewes of mine. And you’re alive!”

Storm left Rebecca and showed bared teeth to Brant. He was no outlaw here at Logie, but ripe and ready for what was coming to the house he guarded.

“So much for you, Brant,” said Rebecca, with a cackle of wild laughter. “A word from the Master, and he’ll have his jaws in your lean throat.”

The flames of the blazing door were lessening now, for kitchen and porch alike were floored with stone and offered no fresh fuel; and the moment came that Hardcastle had looked for. The Garsykes Men, when no uproar sounded from within—though the besieged should be between two fires by now—grew restless and afraid of some ambush waiting in the dark of the stable-yard. A common impulse swayed them to dash over the live embers into the house before the first shock of surprise was over.

As they came into the ruddy murk of the porch, Hardcastle aimed point-blank at them. A wild-beast howl followed from men not used to bearing

pain. Then the porch was empty, save for the foremost of the Garsykes Folk, whose legs were full of shot.

Outside there was a rough stampede of men who fought each other in their panic to get out of gun-reach. And Brant the shepherd suddenly went mad with the blood-lust. Robbed of his chance to fire a shot, he pushed Hardcastle aside, trod over the fallen body and ran out with a grim oath in his heart.

The night was black, impenetrable. Sight aided him nothing, but hearing did. On the high uplands Brant had learned to see with his ears when need pressed. The fleeing mob, not far down the road as yet, was making noise enough to rouse dead men on their gibbets, and Brant's blunderbuss bellowed like a stag gone mad at rutting-time.

A livid shriek of anguish followed, and those in Logie's kitchen waited for Brant to return in triumph.

"Hark to them," said Rebecca, rubbing her hands together. "They came to Logie, as my lad told me at the gate—and they go as he fore-warned me. By the marrow, how they squeal!"

Causleen thought of her father. He had been asleep when she glanced in on her way to the kitchen; but the uproar must have roused him, and it was terrible to picture him lying there, alone and helpless, waiting for he knew not what.

The Master's thoughts were with his shepherd, who did not return. "Brant's long in coming," he muttered restlessly, and had taken a step toward the porch when he halted, checked by the strangest tumult that had come to Logie on this night of crashing din.

He heard a bellow of mingled rage and fear, and knew the voice for Long Murgatroyd's. He heard, too, the muffled oaths of other men. He sprang to Causleen's side and put her behind him; and now the sharp stench of fire wisped and eddied down the passage.

"Go back," he muttered, hearing her steps close following his.

She would not, and they ran down the long corridor together till they reached the open door of the room where Donald lay. And on the threshold they stood as in a nightmare, aghast at what they saw.

Long Murgatroyd and a press of Garsykes Men were in the room, their faces lit by a fire they had piled in the middle of it. The lamp-glow, stealing through the room where Donald slept, had shown them an easier way of

entry than burning down the main door. They had crashed through the window, tossed down their sacks pell-mell and lit them. If they had seen the sleeping man, they took him for dead or helpless and had not heeded.

So much was plain to Causleen and Hardcastle, looking on with the nightmare grip about them still. But the pedlar slept no longer. He was awake and on his feet. His face caught the fireglow as wrinkled parchment might—little lines of crimson criss-crossing its ancient pallor—but the body they had thought chained was alert and strong, willowy with youth.

Donald had gone to sleep content. His girl would be safe in Hardcastle's hands, and he was free to let dreams take him down the roads of old romance, when those of his race plied claymores and heard the battle-din. He woke to see an ill-kempt company lighting a fire at the far end of the room; and suddenly life raced into his palsied limbs.

Peril to Logie was mingled in his thoughts with far-off combats up the glens at home. He stood there, supple and thin and dominant, gathering the dreams come true at last. And the Garsykes mob gaped at this dead man who faced them without any weapon but his consuming joy in battle.

Long Murgatroyd was twitching from one foot to the other. The men behind him were bound as by a spell. So was Hardcastle, who was aware of deeper things than he had known till now. The Garsykes Folk saw only Donald. That was plain, and the pedlar must have his will of this last moment, till there was need to intervene.

Donald glanced about, as if in search of something that had shared his tedious days in this same room. And still Murgatroyd and those behind were held in thrall. The fire they had kindled blazed and smoked by turns in the sleepy draught, till Murgatroyd kicked it into flame.

"The wood's wet," he muttered, "and be damned to the fools that gathered it."

"Aye, wet with blood," shrilled Donald.

With that, strength came to him. His glance, roving again about the walls, found the thing he sought. With speed incredible he leaped to get the pike into his hands—the pike that had gone to Flodden and returned.

He swung it gently to and fro for one swift moment, as if he doubted which of its three blades to ply. Then, with a Gaelic battle-shout, he leaped forward, through and over the fire's reek, whirling the axe-edge high above his old, grey head.

Long Murgatroyd got his skull away from the blow; but the axe clove his shoulder till it gritted on the bone.

"I'm done, lads," he growled, swaying to his fall. "Get about this madman risen from the dead."

No voice answered him. The Garsykes Men had gone the way they came taking still dread for company. Alone with one who whirled his axe to strike again, Murgatroyd gathered what strength was left him, and ran screaming out into the night.

A great light shone in Donald's face. There was strength in his body still, and a pibroch in his soul; and, when Causleen ran to him across the dwindling fire, he turned happily.

"It was so they fought in the old days gone. I'm glad you saw me make an end that way."

He toyed with the pike lovingly. He praised Logie for keeping its edges grouted and sharp through the centuries for this night's work of his. Then his strength fell away, a borrowed joy. The pike dropped from his grasp, clattering into the embers that Hardcastle was stamping out.

"Your hands, child," he whispered.

She guided him to the long-settle that had been his bed for many weary days, and her tears rained on the blankets she gathered round the motionless body. Donald opened his eyes once—glad, tender eyes, at peace with this world and the next—and he found voice, as he had got strength awhile since to lift the pike.

"Causleen, little Evening Star, you've lit the roads for me. And now—dear God, there's sunrise on the hills."

The pedlar lay quiet awhile. All that was of this world clamoured round him. He was saying good-bye to the broken roads he loved. There would be no to-morrows, with curlews wailing over summer hills and dusk cradling in purple hollows of the moor—no journeys on blistered feet through the tang of winter gales. He ached for the northland he must leave, and his spirit shrank from the last Crossing because the world was full of lovesome things. Surely he would see once again the shimmer of buttercups glowing like grace of old allegiance across the ripening meadows, would hear the storm-cock pipe defiance to the gale. Just once again he must smell, too, the reek of clover-hay as it came home on creaking wagons between the briar-rose banks.

“It grows dark,” he murmured suddenly. “And now the light shines through—and, child, there’s your mother beckoning from the braes. She’s just as young and bonnie—as bonnie——”

It was so the warrior died, and Hardcastle stood with bowed head till Causleen’s first storm of grief was ended. A strange gentleness came to him, a softening of the ice-cold years, as he covered Donald’s face and drew the girl away.

They stood facing each other in the dim lamplight. A chill breeze blew through the broken casement, tossing to and fro the reek of the stamped-out fire. On the floor the pike lay in a little pool of crimson, darkening fast. Yet nothing prevailed against the austere and tranquil presence that filled this room of death.

“Causleen,” he said, by and by, “you need not be lonely.”

She was feeling like a child lost in mid-winter moors. No words could have reached her heart as his simple, “you need not be lonely,” did. He was changed, as she was, by this alchemy of death, into finer metal.

Then, longing to believe in him, she took a step away. “It is not the time or place to—to doubt you.”

“It is the place to tell me why you doubt.” His glance went to the death-bed. “Could I be false, with your father lying there?”

“You could not—no—and yet it seems so mean a thing to talk of here.”

“It divides us, and *he* did not want that.”

“I am ashamed either way,” she said, her brave eyes meeting his—“of you, or of myself for doubting.”

Little by little he drew the tale from her. She had come to the wood between Logie and the slope to Wharfe River, weeks ago, and seen him with Nita’s arms stretched out to him.

Hardcastle understood now all that had baffled him these late days. He recalled each detail of that half-forgotten scene—Nita’s alluring eagerness, the sharp crack of a twig, his glance backward to learn if one of the Lost Folk was stealing on him from behind.

“You saw us there,” he said, “and she was an old love of mine. What else could you have thought?”

His quietness seemed to rebuke her. All these weeks she had been the silent accuser, he the shameless culprit. Was he a liar through and through,

under his mask of gruff honesty?

"We shared the woodmen's hut for a night," he went on, "and afterwards there was trouble. I asked to clear that for you."

"From pity." It was her turn now to glance at the silent figure on the settle. "We never cared for charity, he and I."

"I did not offer charity," he said, direct and forthright. "While I was persuading you to that, Nita wove her devilry into it all."

"What devilry?" she asked, her eyes grave and questioning.

He glanced from the shattered casement to Donald's death-bed, and his face hardened.

"She offered me escape from what has come to Logie—and I would not take it."

Causleen's heart was free at last, as she watched this man whom she had flouted. He showed greater than his height in the dim lamp-glow that made flickering lights and shadows through the room. His voice though hushed in deference to what lay yonder, was vibrant in its simple candour. He loved her—loved her for herself.

A gusty weariness came about her, a need to lean on the man who had caused her sleepless nights and tears as salt as the nether brine-pits.

"I was afraid—till now," she whispered, and put her hands into his as if she gave a kingdom.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE RESTLESS DAWN

As they stood there, a stifled bark sounded from the doorway. Storm, his grizzled hide quivering with eagerness, came sidling in. Fire and gunshot and the night's swift happenings had opened the windows through which dogs and horses see things hidden from most men.

He knew that death was in the room, and cringed his way to Donald's side. He crouched for a while, his head on the still body, and whimpered like a child; for the pedlar and he had shared many an hour of friendship when life was wrong with both.

Then the sheep-slayer rose and shook himself. There was no cringeing now, no sorrow. Self-reliant, strong of body and of courage, he came to Hardcastle, who knew less than he what was soon to happen on Logie-side. He looked at the Master with brown, candid eyes—a lingering glance of sheer affection—and put two hairy paws on his shoulders while he licked his face. And afterwards he said good-bye to Causleen, and turned once at the broken casement before passing out into the night.

"Poor devil," muttered Hardcastle. "I'd whistle him back, if Brant was not about the house."

"Brant would not shoot him, after all we've shared with Storm?"

"In cold blood. Logie might go, and all of us, if Stephen's ewes were safe."

"It is a hard country," said Causleen, clinging to his sleeve with sharpening dread.

And now Rebecca came running to the door, and stood like one turned to stone when she saw these two together. The kingdom of her days at Logie was ended. That was plain.

"What is it?" asked the Master.

"Naught that matters now; but, for my part, I'd have chosen a likelier time for sweethearting. My kitchen asking a week o' days to redd it up again—fire and brimstone on this side o' the house—and you two fancying you're cushat-doves high up in a mating tree. I've no patience."

"What is it?" asked Hardcastle again.

“Naught that would trouble you if I told it. You’re past caring how an old woman fares, though she’s skin and bone for your sake—wearing her life out, cooking and scrubbing. And, ‘What is it?’ asks the Master. It’s this, if you must know. Brant’s not come back, and I’m tired of guarding my kitchen with a rolling-pin against yond lean swine from Garsykes. If Brant’s gone, some o’ them are lurking in the stable-yard.”

Hardcastle put Causleen from him gently. The new peril was harsh enough, but he was quick these days to face unexpected happenings.

“Stay here, child,” he said sharply.

She stayed for one snatched moment to stoop above her father and give his soul a God-speed. Then she followed Hardcastle, and he felt a hand steal into his.

“Oh, get back, child,” he said. “There’s trouble.”

“So my place is with you.”

She would not be denied; and when they came into the kitchen, Brant the shepherd was crossing the doorway.

“Spared us the need to go in search of you, have you, Stephen?” snapped Rebecca. “You look moiled, and fuzzy in your wits.”

“So you’d look,” grumbled Brant, “if you had forgotten there were two ends to a blunderbuss—one that spat at the Garsykes sort, and t’ other that knocked me heels over head with the back-kick. I struck against a rock in falling, and lay silly for a time.”

“Well, it would be no new feeling to you, Brant.”

“If I had a tongue like thine, Rebecca, I’d do two things—tie a double knot in it, then cut it at the root.”

“Hark to him, Jonah,” shrilled the old woman, gaunt and fiery. “Comes bringing his saucy ways to Logie’s kitchen, where you and me live.”

The brindled cat knew his mistress, her every look and change of voice. His fur had been scorched, moreover, at some time of the wild onset, and he was in evil temper. He stalked up and down about Brant’s knees, growling as a dog might.

“Going Storm’s way, are you?” said the shepherd. “You’ll be for the wild lands soon, and a dollop of lead to teach you poacher’s shrift.”

Causleen looked on, wide-eyed and troubled. In her Highland glens they had sung of far-off battles. She had been suckled in the faith that warriors returned from victory with glad faces and shouts of triumph. Yet here at Logie, safe through heavy odds, Rebecca and the shepherd were snarling at each other, as if all was lost. It was her first taste of battle and its aftermath.

"While I was getting up from my dazement, Master," said Brant by and by, "I heard another screech and running of the Garsykes Men, and made shift to follow with the butt-end of the blunderbuss. But they outran me, like. So I stepped in here, to ask what had happened."

"All the world, Stephen—and what's beyond it."

And now Causleen heard the note of victory at last—heard it in his voice. All that was Hardcastle was hers, and she was his. She thought of the father lying yonder. He would be content.

Hardcastle, going to the porch to hear if there were any lurking Wilderness Folk about the courtyard, lifted a foot instinctively as he crossed the threshold. He remembered the body that had fallen in answer to his charge of shot.

"Aye, he *was* there," said Rebecca dryly; "but I took leave to shift him into the stable-yard. We'll hoist him over the Long Pasture wall to-morrow—and the Garsykes sort will steal up to take him off. They're like rats in that way, too—attentive to their burials."

Dawn crept grey and misty over Logie. And as they stood in Rebecca's kitchen—a silent company, waiting for they knew not what—the old house grew restless. It knew itself secure for a little while. There was safety as yet, the rout of the Lost Folk. Yet one of their dead lay just outside the porch, pleading for reprisals.

Logie was no senseless block of stone and mortar. It had sheltered Hardcastles through seven hundred years of weather. Its heart and spirit had grown with the growing generations that romped and married and died within the kingdom of its stubborn loyalty. It had watched lusty fathers lick their sons into manhood's shape—listened to the muffled tread of bearers as they carried one and another of the race to burial—heard women groaning in the child-birth, lest there should be none to reign in Logie-side.

And to-night Logie did not know what would chance. It had felt the pain of its flaming door, had been aware of the oaths of prowling men who threatened walls and rafter-beams. Every nerve and sinew had been racked by battle, and the end was not yet. The stir of unguessed dreads to come

roamed its corridors, and sorrow piped through every casement. For Logie had found life strong and sweet of savour, and was loath to die.

CHAPTER XIX

GARSYKES

Nita made sport of the Garsykes Men when they returned from Logie in the spitting rain of dawn. Slim, and fresh as if she came out of the new day's heart, she waited for them in the village. And first there came a slack-set company of twenty, glancing behind them constantly.

"Is Logie fired?" asked Nita softly.

"Aye, we blazed the door through," came an answering growl.

The twenty men went their way, and presently another company lumbered over the hill and down. Most of them went lame, pitted by what Shepherd Brant had crammed into his blunderbuss.

"What have they done to you, there at Logie?"

Nita knew now that all had miscarried, and they snarled in answer to her spite. For a moment they had in mind to rive her limb from limb; and, knowing the danger, she faced them with outstretched hands and a pleading smile that might have been a child's.

"Why should you hurt your little basket-weaver?"

"Because we're plugged with lead and rusty nails," grunted a shammocky rogue whose right arm hung limp.

"Aye," said another. "It was you that sent us up to Logie."

They were round her now like wolves. Foiled and wounded, they longed to spring on this new prey, yet could not. Nita had queened it over Garsykes so long that old experience did not fail her now. She wove little, wanton spells about them—then pleaded again with frail, helpless hands—till the old witchcraft stirred about them. The grumbling oaths grew muffled, and Nita, seeing them half-cowed already, laughed with stinging mockery.

"I sent you up to Logie, thinking you were men. Thirty of you went against Hardcastle and could not take him."

The snarling uproar rose afresh, but she held the lash now and wielded it.

"You were to bring him—alive, if might be—to little Nita, so she could teach him many ways of humbling pride. And all you bring is—your tattered

selves."

Widow Mathison had joined them—plump and touzled, just as she had left her bed at sound of the uproar, except for a cloak thrown over her nightwear.

"All Garsykes couldn't lay hands on one man up yonder?" she asked, rocking to and fro with laughter. "If Hardcastle was minded that way, I'd risk a second wedding. The more I see of our sort, the deeper I fall into love with Logie's Master."

"Hardcastle's got a bonnier wench up there," said the shammocky rogue, striving to rally his wilting fellows—"bonnier than Nita, if it comes to that."

The chance shaft found its mark. The girl stood silent for a moment, gathering years behind and years to come into her hands. When she spoke at last, they drew away as from some instant menace in their midst; and each poor fool began to scratch at his wounds afresh and to long for ale.

"They couldn't bring Hardcastle to Garsykes—thirty of our strong men could not. But little Nita can."

Her voice was bitter quiet. She did not seem to see the frowsy press of men about her. Aloof, hard as mid-winter on the barren uplands, she saw Hardcastle taken in toils of her devising—and not Hardcastle alone.

"What will you do?" asked the rogue with the splintered arm.

"Aye, what will I do? Let him wait, first of all, till he's sick with fear for another. Then I'll put fire of hell into him before ever he comes to our village in the hills—and afterwards——"

A man's full-throated curses broke across the dawn's stillness, and Long Murgatroyd came lurching up, his arms thrown about two comrades who steadied him on either side. They had clapped rough bandages about the wound that Donald's pike had given, and he had thought his end was come till now, in the grey dawn, he saw Nita.

"A rare warrior, you," she said, her bitterness let loose afresh.

The will to live returned to Murgatroyd. Hardihood came back though his wound dripped and snarled.

"Aye," he said—"and I'll wive you, soon or late."

His face was so white and livid in the dawn-light, that Nita drew back with a sense of sharp foreboding. Twice she had felt this same dread of Murgatroyd, but it was keener now. Then she rallied her courage.

“When Garsykes is ended, you’ll wive me, maybe. Can you wait as long?” she mocked.

“I can bide,” he said, and limped bravely on till he was out of sight. Then his head drooped. “Get me home, mates,” he muttered. “I’m sick and wambly. Get me home.”

Nita stayed on, alone with the grey mists that eddied over from Pengables. She thought of Logie, secure after long warfare against odds—of Hardcastle, who was another’s now—and no winter’s spite, packed with hurricane and sleet, had ever blown so cold, so merciless, as the storm in her own heart.

An old man of the village passed, and glanced at the silent figure.

“At your dreams, little Nita?” he asked, with grandfatherly indulgence of a favourite.

“At my dreams, Tanty.”

“It’s well to be young while you can,” said he, and went by on rheumy knees.

Still Nita halted. She had spun as many webs in her time as she had woven baskets, but none as strong as these she was binding into a net for Hardcastle. Like a figure of doom she stood, the wet mists hurrying by.

For two weeks and a day thereafter there was peace round Logie. No attack came on the house, no ambush waited in the roads when dusk crept down. Farm-servants carried Donald to the kirkyard under the hill, and none molested the mourners in going or returning.

Then came afterwards the quiet, half-awed return to usual life that follows death in any house. Rebecca and the brindled cat got to their friendship’s bickerings. The Master rode abroad on business of his lands, or brought game home for the larder. And, as if the skies were in league with peace, the long warmth-in-winter held.

Causleen began to fret—not for the father who had ended bravely and in happiness—but for Hardcastle. He grew lean and gaunt, ate as if he must, with no relish for what lay on his plate, and left the wine scarce tasted. Try as she might, she could get no answer to the riddle of his moodiness, until, one morning near November’s end, he strode restlessly about the breakfast chamber, and came to a sharp halt before her.

“Causleen,” he said. “I want you to go up to Shepherd Brant’s. It’s a rough lodging—but it’s safe.”

And now she understood; and, for very gladness, she made pretence of doubt.

“Tired of me already?”

“Don’t jest, child.” He was hard, peremptory. “You must go to-day.”

“And if I will not?”

“I shall set you on pony-back and take you there.”

“What is amiss with you?” she asked—knowing, but longing for the spoken word.

“Fear,” said Hardcastle.

“Fear?” she echoed.

Again he paced up and down, and again came to her side. “I’ve a lifetime’s knowledge of Garsykes, and I tell you we’re in the thick of danger. Whenever their silence comes——”

“It means another firing of the house?”

“Or worse, now that you’re here at Logie. Will you not understand?”

“If they took me from you? If you fought till you could do no more, and they took me?”

“I should run mad.”

He was fierce, possessive, as he drew her to him, and she was content. The lean years of her trudging days—weather, and blistered feet, and scorn of men for the peddling-sort—were forgotten. Deeper than his love of Logie—deeper than his love of life for its own good, stalwart sake—lay fear for her.

“You’ll go up to Brant’s?” he said by and by, half between entreaty and command.

“How can I—now that you care? My place is with you.”

Then she cried happily against his sleeve, and he could make no further headway with persuasion. The next day it was the same. Whenever, out of his stifling dread for her, he tried to get her out of Logie and up into the trackless hills, she glanced away.

“They’re rough quarters, I know,” he would begin.

“That does not trouble me,” she would answer gently.

“And, of course, there’ll be only an old shepherd-man up there, and you’d want another woman with you. Rebecca can go.”

“And what would you do here without her?”

“Fend for myself.”

“If we can persuade Rebecca to it, I will go,” she said, her glance inscrutable and grave.

And now, as time dragged slowly by, Hardcastle learned much of the ways of women, and more and more he was reminded of the slant, drooping flight of plover when their nests are threatened.

Rebecca’s mind had been his own—to get the girl into safety—till Causleen’s heart to endure had captured her grim liking. If the Master must find a wife—and it was time there was an heir to Logie—he might go further and fare worse.

“I cannot thoyle it, Jonah,” she would grumble to the brindled cat, “but I’ve got to. Me and you watching the Master’s goings out and his comings in—slaves, as you might say, to his will—and a slip of a lass making all as if it had never been. But she’s hill-born, with a spirit of her own. That’s so much to be thankful for.”

When the second week was nearing its end, Hardcastle grew so weary of the peace brooding like thunder-weather over Logie, so sick with dread for Causleen, that he strode into Logie like a hurricane.

Rebecca was in the hall, as it chanced, plying her broom as if it were a flail she wielded against the Garsykes Men.

“What is it, Master?” she asked, standing in a dust-storm of her own making.

“It’s this, Rebecca. You take her to Brant’s hut to-morrow of your own will, or by mine.”

“Afraid they’ll burn the roof over your head? They’ve tried it twice—and we’ll teach ’em that the third time pays for all.”

“Are you a fool altogether, woman? There’s Causleen in the house.”

“Aye, it’s her place. She’d be a poor sort o’ wife for Logie, if she left you at the pinch.”

Hardcastle was in no mood for argument. He told her—simply and with command—that she must take Causleen to Brant’s hut to-morrow. And

Rebecca grew submissive on the sudden.

"It's as well she should be away," she admitted, "if only for your peace of mind."

The next day, however, when Hardcastle came down to breakfast, he was met by Causleen with news that Rebecca could not stir from her bed and sent word to the Master that she was "twisted with rheumatics."

"She has chosen the worst time she could," snapped Hardcastle. "If the woman must have luxuries of that sort let her have them when you're safely up at Brant's, the two of you."

Causleen fingered the spray of crimson-berried hawthorn she had gathered for the breakfast-table in place of flowers. She put it into the jar, turned it this way and that till she was satisfied, then glanced up at Hardcastle.

"You can only be hurt through me nowadays. You care as much as that?"

"Yes. They can rob me of more than Logie now."

"Garsykes knows. Gossip would tell them where you had hidden me—and what could two women and Brant do against them when they came—to rob you of me, and me of you?"

A great cavern opened in the man's heart. All that was in her eyes, in the simple, candid words, broke into deeps that had not been stirred till now.

"I was sending you out of my reach?" he said, aghast at his own folly.

She came to him of her own accord, and crept close into his arms. "I could not bear it. I—I have only you—and we must be together."

Hardcastle laughed by and by, soberly. "You'll have to take charge of my wits," he said. "They were never strong."

Late that afternoon, Rebecca's ailment left her as if by magic; and Hardcastle, returning from a journey up the far moors, encountered her at the gate.

"Tied to your bed no longer?" he asked dryly.

"I can shift rheumatics as well as one here and there, when the Master's got rid of his own ailment. But every talk of going to Shepherd Brant's will make me bedridden, and so I warn you."

They fell silent presently, yielding to the twilight quiet of the place. Here the flint arrow-head had waited on the gate-top for Hardcastle's return when

October russeted the woods. Here Rebecca had communed with her dead lover through forty years of constancy to feud. They seemed to listen to the rustle of unsubstantial feet.

"The pedlar's girl should be proud to be among us now," said Rebecca, her voice low and crooning. "All the years Logie has bided—and vengeance in her hand at last."

The Master could not rid himself of dread for Causleen. Fast as he beat down one attack, another fear came shadowy at him from behind.

"Garsykes swarms with its scum, and we are few," he growled. "Who made you a prophet?"

A step sounded up the road, and Hardcastle, turning with quick instinct to defend himself, saw Michael Draycott, his wide, cheery face less full of colour than its wont.

"You, Michael? You look peaky, man."

"Well, it's this way. I found my best heifer dead this morning—a fine little roan she was—and a scrawled token by her side. *Hemlock grows in the Wilderness.* That was the message."

"A mucky folk," said Rebecca tranquilly. "They were bred mucky. They couldn't help it, maybe."

"As they'd put that on me, I knew naught else would happen to the homestead for a bit; so I stepped up to spend the night at Logie, by your leave."

"You've heard of something planned?"

"Not I; but they've let you alone so long that it stands to reason there's mischief brewing."

Rebecca was her bustling self again. "You're no sort of laggard, Michael. For a man so death-shy you do very well—and there's a game-pie in the oven."

They kept watch together that night, the Master and Draycott, with a jug of October ale between them. They sipped it sparingly, for it was potent, and they kept wide ears for any sound outside the four stout walls that sheltered them.

Causleen, about the middle of the watch, woke from an evil dream, and shuddered as she lay in the darkness. A rat scampered across the ceiling. In

the silence its feet sounded like the tramp of hurrying men, and she lifted herself in panic.

She conquered that. Fear, they had taught her in babyhood, was a shameful thing to harbour. But with the conquering came blinding loneliness, a reaching out for the dead father whose voice she would not hear again. They were kind at Logie, but it was a house of dread. If only her father were laying below-stairs there, his eyes kindling with welcome though his body was outworn. If only he were living. But he lay in the wet earth down yonder, dust to dust.

A man's tread came down the passage, and halted at her door. She did not know what peril was at hand, but roused herself to meet it.

"Who is it?" she asked sharply.

"Who should it be?"

The relief was instant. No voice she had heard till now had been so strong, so welcome.

"All's well with Logie?"

"Yes," said Hardcastle. "All's well."

She heard his step go down the corridor, lessening into silence, and a new world came to dawn, after the nightmare that had been. Outside Logie's walls were skulking folk; but within their six-foot bulk was a man after her own heart.

Twice that night she heard him come to her door again, and halt and repeat his quiet "All's well," and her heart warmed to his gruff strength, as she fell into a dreamless sleep.

Dawn was filtering through the shutters when she woke, and her first thought was that Hardcastle would be hungry after his long watch. Dressing hastily she went down, stirred by a simple thrill of joy in the hope that Rebecca would not be astir as yet. Her own hands should prepare the Master's breakfast.

Smiling gravely at her eagerness, she stepped into the kitchen, and was chilled, somehow, by what she saw. The fire was dead and grey. Michael Draycott sat wakeful, the candle by his side guttering in the thin, peevish draught, and pointed to Hardcastle, who lay back in his hooded chair, so fast asleep that it seemed he would never wake again.

“Speak soft, and don’t ye rouse him,” whispered Michael. “He kept up till the first streak o’ dawn came.”

“Are you lying to me, Michael? Is—is he dead? I would rather hear the truth.”

“You’ll never get less from me. He’s as live as three men put together—or will be, when he wakens from this strong sleep of his.”

She glanced about, half between relief and dread. “I came to give him breakfast.”

“Give him sleep instead. It’s worth more than all the eggs and bacon ever reared in Logie Dale.”

He unbarred the door and beckoned her out into the nipping air that was like balm after the indoors warmth.

“I’m glad I stepped up last night,” he said, “though naught’s happened to Logie, after all. You’re a sensible sort of lass, I fancy.”

He was so downright that Causleen could only laugh—a wan little laugh plucked out from hardship.

“A sensible lass, and not as hard as Rebecca. Well, then, I’ve a warning for you. The Master, as I told you, held his head up to the very minute dawn stepped in. That meant no Garsykes sort would come. Daylight and they were never friends.”

“Yes, Michael?”

“Then he fell back in his chair, and sleep came on him like a wolf. He’s doing too much these days.”

“Is that news to me? The grey cobwebs run across his face. Sometimes he falters in his stride as he comes up Logie-lane, for very weariness.”

“Aye, and he’ll break, one day soon, if he’s not looked after. He never rests by day—riding, or shooting, or what not—and he seldom sleeps o’ nights, by the look of him. No man born o’ woman can carry it for long.”

Causleen remembered the weeks gone by. Her pride had resented Hardcastle’s aloofness, his fits of moodiness. Now she understood, and lifted a child’s penitent face.

“What would you have me do?” she asked.

The man’s big, shy heart found room to speak. “I’d have you marry him as soon as maybe. Rebecca tells me you’re both minded that way.—And,

there, I've frightened you. An old man had no right to say as much."

"Yes," she said. "Tell me——"

"It's you that's three parts of his trouble."

"Then I can go, Michael."

"He'd only follow, and bring you back. He's got to that pass, he'd rather Logie went than you."

They stood together in the stable-yard. Starlings were making a sleepy din among the ivy, and over old Pengables the red of dawn pushed through the mists. The day seemed full of grey foreboding, but Causleen did not ask what was to come. Michael's blunt simplicity made it sure that he was speaking truth. "*He'd rather Logie went than you*"—the words were like a throstle's song in spring.

"Then I will stay," she said, and smiled on him, and went indoors.

Rebecca had come down, prepared to light the fire and scold her way through household tasks, but even she stood mute at sight of the Master. In all her days she had not seen a living man so dead to sound or motion. There was only the gentle breathing to tell her he was more than the husk of what had been.

She started as Causleen entered, then rasped at the girl to cover her own disquiet.

"Now, don't you faint away, or any o' those maidish cantrips. There's a time and season for 'em, and it isn't now. Fancied he was dead, I reckon? Well, he's quick. All the Hardcastles are made that way. Gluttons for sleep they always were and will be."

The brindled cat had learned Rebecca's mood at a glance and leaped to the top of a cupboard, where he sat with vain hope that he was safe. Rebecca, in sore and restless trouble, searched for outlet, and her roving glance fell on Jonah. With a twist of the long hearth-brush in her hands, she brought him down, and aimed a wild blow at him in his flight.

"That's for washing yourself like a dandy, same as if naught was amiss at Logie."

Then she lit the fire with vicious haste; and, when she looked up again, Causleen saw the slow, thin tears of age trickling down.

"I'm worrited, lass, and don't ye heed. They can come blazing Logie down every night and all, and welcome. It's when Garsykes willun't come,

and keeps us at full stretch, I get to my nagging."

The morning went by on leaden feet. Michael Draycott had gone to the work waiting for him at Broken Firs. The Master slept on, spent and in some far land that seemed neighbour to the grave. The wind stole whining from the moors and through the forest trees. There seemed little hope for Logie.

Causleen could bear it no longer. All trouble was easier to face in the frank open than prisoned by walls that harboured dread. So, when Rebecca had gone to the dairy for a moment, she stole to Hardcastle's side.

"Dick, do you hear me?" she whispered, longing to hear him answer, yet hoping he would sleep on, to find his strength.

No answer came, except the *clack-clack* of Rebecca's pattens on the dairy floor. So then she bent and kissed him, and went out—across the mistal-yard, and up the home pastures, and out into the moors that lay near to Garsykes. She needed the winds of God about her—needed, too, in some half-confessed fashion, to be sentry while the Master slept.

At Logie, Rebecca went on with her cooking and her scouring as if no inner voice was whispering of havoc, soft-footed, stealthy. All she had longed for—all she had prayed, through the lonely years that had gone since they killed her man—was gathering to a head. In her bones she knew it, as she knew "the rheumatics" that was twisting them out of all earthly shape.

It had never been Rebecca's habit to think that ten thousand such lean swine as the Garsykes Men could have their will of Logie; but a dark cloud of doubt lay between her and the further vision. There was thunder-weather brewing, and it must break before ever Logie came to safety and its own.

The teasing doubt stayed with her, till Jonah came in, a full-grown rat in his mouth, and layed it down before her—in propitiation, as it were.

"Now, bless you, lad," she cackled. "If I did dust you with a besom, it was for your good. Thwack the male sort, say I—thwack 'em true and often—and they thrive the better for it."

Jonah played with the half-dead rat for a while, then came purring and bridling against the woman's skirt.

"Oh, aye, you've done well, lad. There never was such a rat for bigness."

The more she praised him the thicker grew Jonah's fur, till Rebecca began to laugh shrilly at his antics. She was in a mood to read omens into little matters, and her spirits had risen with a bound. The Garsykes Men

were rats, and Jonah had just brought in the first fruits of some coming slaughter.

The rat began to stir fitfully, and Jonah, with a sudden, growling spring, was clawing him to bits when a shadow darkened the kitchen.

Rebecca glanced up to see a little figure standing in the porch, and her whole body stiffened, as a dog's might. Danger had passed by Logie through the night; but every instinct told her it was on the threshold now.

"I want no baskets, Nita—leastways, none of your weaving."

"Do not be always scolding little Nita," pleaded the girl. "She has no baskets to sell this morning—but she has news to give."

"I want no news, neither. Cannot you see I'm throng with my cooking?"

"My news is for the Master. Go tell him, Rebecca."

Hardcastle had been stirring in his sleep before she came, and her voice seemed to probe him like a knife. He got to his feet, as if attacked. Dishevelled by the night's vigil, gaunt with all that Garsykes had put on him since he said them nay, he stood glowering at this flower-fresh visitor.

"What news?" he asked.

"You are all so rough here. I meant it kindly—meant to warn you—but now I will not. Go find the pedlar's brat if you can."

He stepped forward, drew her indoors and held her there. "Where is she?"

"Have I fared very well at your hands, that I should tell you? Yet I was forgiving. I could not bear to think of her—where she is—and you to go mad when you heard it later."

"She's lying, the lile toad," said Rebecca, with grim brevity. "She never had heart to think like that, save for one—herself."

So Nita threw the mask off, and smiled at them. "I was lying when I said that I forgave. I came because I longed to torture Hardcastle of Logie."

"Where is she?"

"If you shake the life out of me, how can I tell you—even if I would?"

He let her go free, and presently she glanced at him, her grey eyes wide with malice.

“Our Garsykes Men are not good at the fighting, so they hatched another plan. If they could take what Hardcastle holds dearest, and keep her till he paid tribute at long last——”

She halted, watching the sweat break out on the man’s haggard face.

“Where is she?” he repeated.

“Not in Garsykes. You might rouse even your chicken-livered Logie Men to ride through us. She’s in the caves behind our village.”

A gulf seemed to open at Hardcastle’s feet. If this were true—he would not have it true—and through his dazed sickness sounded Nita’s voice, gentle as a dove’s.

“They are long caves and deep. You knew them as a boy?”

“Yes, by God,” he said, towering above her with still and awful menace, “and now I’m going to know them as a man.”

She halted for one last thrust. “It may be too late for paying tribute. They may be out of hand, now I’m not there to whip them into order.”

Then she was gone, swift as an east-wind that had struck to the bone and stayed for no reprisal. The Master halted for a moment, gathering his strength.

“You’ll not go?” said Rebecca, her lean arm clutching him.

“Where she goes, I go, woman. Have you no wits to guide you?”

Rebecca, fear as she might for him, was glad to see him take the Logie way—straight to the open, though he went alone. It was only when he had stepped into the crimson flare of dawn, flooding the porch, that again she drew him back.

“Your two hands, and your head up to the stars, won’t carry far these days. You’d be the better for a gun in your hands, and a candle or two in your pockets. Caves are darksome places.”

He had wit left enough to get a fowling-piece and see to the priming, while she thrust candles and a tinder-box into his pocket.

Then Rebecca listened to his running stride across the cobble-stones to the wind that rose in shrill and bitter menace. There was only Jonah of the men-folk left. He knew it, and sprang to her shoulder.

“Aye, drive your claws in,” she snapped. “We’re all that’s left of Logie, you and me.”

Her glance wandered forlornly round the kitchen till it encountered the dead rat by the hearth. Then her unalterable strength in hardship found its token.

“There’s luck coming, Jonah,” she said, and got about her household tasks again.

CHAPTER XX

SPITE'S VICTORY

Causleen, when she left Hardcastle asleep in the hooded chair at Logie, wandered nearer and nearer to the Garsykes country, till she halted at last on Trolls Hill and stood looking over the barren lands.

The wind, boisterous now, had scattered the mists, and in the keen, chilly sunlight Garsykes village showed clear across the hollow. She could hear voices in its street, and wondered if they were planning some new devilment. A woman's raucous laugh sounded. Was that in answer to the plotting?

Her courage ebbed low, after the night's useless vigil. There were so many of them. What chance had Logie in the last result? Surely Hardcastle had done enough, and might give up the unequal battle. He had only to pay tribute, like the rest, to buy his safety.

She trampled down the thought. If she had half-loved him, that road of freedom might have brought content. As it was, she could not bear that he should be less than the Master, whatever came. And yet the odds against him were pitiful, disastrous.

Still her glance was drawn to Garsykes, as if the very evil of the place had cast a spell on her; and she started when Nita Langrish stepped lightly up the track that led from Logie.

"Not afraid to be so near our thieves and cut-throats?" said Nita.

"Logie does not fear such. They came, and had their answer."

"Riding a tall horse, are you? Logie does not fear, says Hardcastle's wanton, as if she was an honest wife there."

The hot blood flamed in Causleen's face, and pallor followed. If a knife had been ready to her hand, there would have been murder done, here where the wind roared and fluted over Trolls Hill.

"Go," she said, "back to the styes that bred you!"

"I will go, little beggar on horseback. If you knew what errand I have been on—but, then, you do not know."

Nita stood poised on slender feet, like a wild deer of the hills, but tarried.

“I’m skilled in divination,” she went on, her voice reminding Causleen, in some haphazard way, of Jonah, the brindled cat when he was playing with a mouse. “Shall the basket-weaver tell you what is coming?”

In spite of herself, Causleen felt weak and a child in the other’s hands. The magic that had kept Garsykes Men in thrall was drawing her into its webs. She followed Nita’s finger as it pointed to the road below, where the track from Logie split in two—one grey lane going flat to Garsykes, the other winding steep and rocky to a cavern gaping open-mouthed across the green face of the pastures.

“Do you see where the tracks divide?” purred Nita. “A man will come to the two-ways by and by, and take the upper road. And you will follow.”

Causleen remembered Hardcastle asleep at Logie; and he was the one man in the world she would ever follow willingly.

“It is not true,” she said, with chill disdain.

The basket-weaver made no answer. But still she did not go, and her silence began to mesh Causleen again with unseen nets. Yonder was Garsykes, foul and a menace centuries old. And close at hand was Nita. She felt utterly alone, as if friendless leagues divided her from Logie and her man.

Strive as she would, panic—headlong, unreasoning panic—was stealing on her, though the sun shone and the free winds went bristling by.

Nita kept silence. She, of all living Garsykes Folk, had learned most of the black magic handed down the generations. It had been her joy to weave it into the baskets she sold, into the ill-starred deeds her men did by night and day—and Causleen was given into her hands. She would half slay her now with dread, then let her go to what they had planned for the pedlar’s girl and Hardcastle.

All that was brave and Highland-born in Causleen fought the terror stealing on her. What sort of wife would she be to Hardcastle, if she yielded now to this stealthy dread that came like formless mist about her?

There came a whimpering through the heather. She did not hear, till a wet nose was pressed into her hand; and afterwards a tongue red with sheep-slaying reached up and licked her face.

Then, as on a night gone by when Storm lay in the cupboard under Logie’s stair, she threw her arms about him.

“Storm, you’ve come,” she said, hugging his tousled body, thick with bracken-splinters that he carried from his past night’s lair.

Nita drew away. Dogs always distrusted her, and fear of the whole race —a dread half superstitious—had grown into her life. Yet even now she could not keep back the bitter gibe.

“He is a friend of the Master’s, too. Dear grief, Logie keeps odd company nowadays.”

Storm, homeless and tired of the wander-lust, had been sending long thoughts out to Logie as he sat on a spur of the moors and saw Causleen swing into sight across the Garsykes track. He had bounded down—slipping and turning a somersault or two on the way—and, now that he was in touch again with Logie, he was content. He growled at Nita by habit, and bared his teeth, then turned again to Causleen and yielded like a puppy to her daft endearments. She smelt of home to Storm.

Causleen was reliant and herself again. The coming of this four-footed Ishmael had broken the basket-weaver’s spells. Garsykes mattered no longer. Out there Hardcastle was sleeping himself into new vigour; and here was Storm, to guide her safe to the return.

“Logie always had staunch friends,” she said, her glance meeting Nita’s.

Nita made no answer, but glanced behind her; and presently her slight body quivered with eagerness.

“Did I lie, little wanton? A man comes up the Garsykes road. He’s a small figure yet—but, see, he grows bigger—and now he nears the two-ways that I told you of.”

Causleen was meshed again by webs. She could do no more than follow the pointing finger, and watch the man till she knew his limber stride, his way of carrying broad shoulders.

“He has come to the two-roads now,” said Nita softly—“and now he takes the higher track. Did I lie?”

Hardcastle, in the clear light, seemed so near that Causleen cried aloud to him, entreating his return. The wind drove her voice back.

“I sent him there—in search of you,” said Nita. “He thinks we have you in our caves.”

For one still moment Causleen paused. She knew the agony speeding Hardcastle to the black mouth that grinned across the pasture-lands. She

knew what leaped from her in answer.

"You sent him there?" she echoed.

"Yes—food for our Garsykes wolves."

Causleen, with sudden, blinding passion, called to the sheep-slayer "Storm, kill her. Fasten on her throat, Storm."

The dog was far down the slope already. He, too had seen the Master. Causleen might smell of home, but Hardcastle was Logie's self.

The pedlar's girl raced sure-footed between the wet, gnarled hummocks, crying as she ran with a warning that the gale caught and drove to tatters. She came to the parting of the ways, and followed without pause the grey track that wound upward to the caves.

Hardcastle's big figure, far ahead, halted for a brief welcome as Storm overtook him. As if she stood beside them, she knew what went to that greeting—the man's joy that he had a toothed and stubborn friend in this adventure, the dog's that he was with the chosen one.

"Come back," she cried again—so loud, it seemed to her, that not even the wind could hinder its sharp bidding.

Hardcastle did not hear. Like a man possessed he strode forward till he reached the cave's mouth. Then they were swallowed by the darkness, Storm and he, and Causleen knew at last what caring meant.

She neither wavered nor had fear. Where he went she would follow, by free-will and by right.

Nita watched it all from the benty lands above—saw Hardcastle and Storm go into the trap prepared. Then Causleen went, and was hidden by the dark. And after that, ten frowsy men got out from the rocks and closed about the entry.

The basket-weaver took her way to Garsykes, crooning a song of the Lost Folk—a low, stealthy ballad, ages old, that reeked of the marshes and the styes. And, as she came into the village, she found it packed with men and scolding women.

They snarled and jeered at her, and Long Murgatroyd's voice was lifted in sullen fury.

"Here comes Nita. She sent us to fire Logie, and then talked big about doing what we couldn't. She's laughed at us too long, the hussy."

She faced the answering uproar and laughed afresh at them. “Little Nita does what she promises,” she said, pointing to the caves above. “Hardcastle has gone in to find his wanton, and she’s with him there.”

They fell back then, muttering, and her tongue whipped them as of old.

“I’ve trapped them for you—and you whine and skulk here asking questions. They’d be out of the trap by now, if I hadn’t picked ten from among you to guard the caves—ten who shaped more like men than rabbits.”

“Art lying, Nita, as of old?” growled Murgatroyd.

Again she pointed to the black mouth that gashed the fells. And now in the keen light they saw ten of theirs moving to and fro about the cave-front, and a great shout went up.

In a moment they were racing pell-mell up the slope, save for Nita and Widow Mathison, who kept the Garsykes inn.

“You’re coming to see Logie’s end?” asked Nita, looking back after she had started to follow her men at leisure.

“No,” said the widow. “I’ve too much flesh on my bones to care for hill-climbing.”

A light shone in the basket-weaver’s eyes—the light of thunder skies that ripen to full-blooded tempest. Merciless, brooding long, her spite against Logie had come to victory. But more than that went to this mood of Nita’s. By mother’s milk and father’s training she had been taught that Garsykes had striven for centuries out of mind to tumble Logie’s pride to ground.

“Will you not come, widow?” she asked. “There’ll be such sport as was never seen.”

“I’m too fat, I tell you. I should sweat myself to death in climbing.”

“More’s the pity, for you’d look on at what men long dead in Garsykes hungered to see. It was left to little Nita to bring Logie down.”

Then she mocked the widow’s grossness, and went up the breast of the fells. And Widow Mathison got heavily to a spur of the rising ground that gave her a better outlook on the caves. She remembered how Hardcastle had brought her lad from the wet of the slimy marshes and given him back to her on a night not long gone by. Nothing could ever bridge that debt she owed him.

She listened to the roar of Garsykes voices, saw Nita going tireless up the slope; and the tears ran amain down the furrows of her plump, good-natured face.

“We could spare most on Logie-side,” she sobbed, “but not its Master.”

CHAPTER XXI

THE POOL

Hardcastle had gone into the black jaws of the cave without pause or thought of what ambushes might lie in wait. Causleen was here, and nothing mattered till he reached her. What he had suffered, since first he declined to give tribute, was child's play measured by the agony of question that drove him forward. Causleen was somewhere in the gloom ahead. He was sure of finding her—yes, but in what evil plight? With that thought came crimson bands of flame that danced ahead. Nita would have found vengeance sweet almost to cloying if she had been with him in this hour.

Storm pressed close against him as he went with lighted candle along the narrow track, turning his head constantly to escape the dripping limestone spears that menaced from the roof.

No wind stirred in the cavern. It was a breeze of his own making that flickered the candle-glow this way and that, throwing little, fantastic shadow-shapes of gnomes and pixies on the rough ground beneath his feet. He hurried forward, crying to Causleen, and a troop of voices answered the cry, breaking it into tangled echoes that mocked at him from roof and slimy walls.

It seemed to Hardcastle that a year went by before the mockery ceased, and another voice ran echoing through the cave.

"Oh, Dick, come back. Come back."

He fancied himself distraught. The voice sounded from behind—not from the shadowed track ahead, where fancy had painted havoc unbelievable.

Storm, whimpering with joy, left him suddenly, and again he asked himself if it was all a nightmare. Would he wake in his bed at Logie, with reek of smoke in his nostrils and knowledge that the Lost Folk were firing the house again? He longed to wake; for Causleen would be safe behind him, and all the flames in front.

As he stood bewildered, Storm's eager whine sounded close, and then he came with Causleen into the sputtering candlelight.

"They told me——" said Hardcastle, and could get no further.

“Yes, Nita lied—and I’m here—and, Dick, come back before they take us both.”

He saw a red gash across her cheek, and drew her to him. “Garskyes did that?” he snarled, wolfish as any of the Broken Folk.

“It was so dark when I followed you and Storm, and I blundered against something cold and hard—it seemed like a knife hanging from the roof—and I went slowly after that.”

She let herself shelter awhile in the roomy haven of his arms, then withdrew restlessly.

“There’s so little time if we’re to get away. Nita went to rouse the village, and they may be coming up already.”

Hardcastle brushed past her in the narrow track, bidding her follow slowly with Storm as he hurried to the cavern-mouth. He halted on the threshold. The steep, empty brink-field stretched in front. No sound came, except the hoarse cry of a hoodie crow wheeling overhead. So then he stepped into the open. Ten of the Wilderness People, lurking out of sight, sprang at him in a body, and only his preparedness for some such ambush saved him. With the alertness of one lighter and more supple in the build, he leaped back into the cave’s friendly dark.

One from Garsykes could not check his own forward rush, and followed willy-nilly. Hardcastle closed with him—the roof was high enough for a tall man to stand upright—and his grip was so prolonged and terrible that Causleen could hear the rogue’s bones crack one by one.

Then Hardcastle took the broken body, using it for shield, and went out a step or two and threw his burden among the nine who still remained.

“Firstfruits,” he said, and turned as a wild uproar rang across the slope.

The barren pasture was swarming now with men. There was no chance of escape in front, and again Hardcastle leaped back across the threshold. A soft hand found his, and a brave voice whispered in his ear.

“Hurt, Dick? Are you hurt at all?”

“No; but one of Garsykes is.”

Her hand withdrew. She feared Hardcastle of Logie—feared his exultation, the hard breathing, as of a wild-beast that fought for love of it.

Outside the cavern, not ten yards from them, a raucous din began, stilled presently by Nita’s voice.

"What is this?"

"It's what Hardcastle has left of Jake," came a quavering answer.

"You fools. I got him caged for you. I left ten to take one as he came out with the pedlar's brat, thinking they had a clear run to safety. And it's all miscarried at the start."

"You bade us take Hardcastle alive," growled another of the nine. "But for that, we could have stoned him to death as if he'd been a conie."

"An easy death, and I'd planned otherwise."

Again Causleen's hand crept into Hardcastle's. The bleak venom in Nita's voice, the lousy uproar of the mob so near them, put fierce gladness in her that Hardcastle had gone wild-beast, too.

The low, purring voice sounded again, daunting the uproar till it ceased.

"There was to be sport for Garsykes. If ten had taken one—alive, to watch the frolic—we'd have seen how he took it when I threw Causleen to our wolves."

Hardcastle, in the darkness of the cave, gripped Causleen to him; and it was a marvel to her that his fierceness broke no bones this time. The wet roof dripped on them. Their only hope lay in retreat along dank, ghost-haunted passages. Yet, deep under all, they tasted swift content.

"One of the ten is dead," Nita's voice was bitter as mid-winter now. "The nine left shall give us sport."

Still closer Causleen's hand crept into Hardcastle's. This was no puppet-game they played, of food and ease and the day's routine. It was full life together, with death yapping at a gate they would not yield.

A babel of question sounded from outside, asking Nita what should be done with the nine.

"We shall drive them into the cave—to take him there, if they can."

Hardcastle put Causleen behind him—roughly, and with haste—and stooped for his fowling-piece. And when Storm brushed against him, growling to be in the thick of what was coming, he forced him back to guard the mistress.

A squealing followed, and Hardcastle, looking out into the sunlight, saw the nine driven forward by their fellows till one by one they plunged into the cave.

Then he lifted his fowling-piece, and snapped the trigger.

The two Garsykes Men in front fell riddled with shot, blocking the narrow way, and those behind rushed out in panic, a prey for their own fellows. What fate befell them, Causleen could only guess; but their shrieks and the roar of ribald oaths were so appalling that she put both hands about her ears, striving to keep out the din.

A lull followed, and Hardcastle spoke no word, but stood listening to the mutterings of the enemy. Once he turned to put his hand on Causleen's shoulder, and once to quieten Storm, then returned to silent waiting.

Nita's voice sounded again, peremptory and clear.

"You've tasted blood, my braves, though it's not Logie's. And the taste of blood makes men even out of such poor stuff as you."

They growled at her, but Hardcastle knew that she had them at her bidding—knew, too, that she meant each word to reach the darkness of his prison, for sapping of his courage.

"D'ye think he of Logie is built of magic, instead of flesh and sinew? Is he a giant too big for all Garsykes to keep in a cave, once they've got him there?"

She mocked them, cajoled, tempted what red blood they shared between them to mount to fever heat; and Hardcastle, listening, admitted grimly that her tongue was a she-devil's.

"Ten failed me, and they'll walk Garsykes street no more. They lost you the sport I promised—but we still have Hardcastle."

"And his wanton," hiccoughed a rough voice.

"Long Murgatroyd spoke there," muttered Hardcastle, with still remembrance of meetings they had shared.

"And his wanton." Nita's laugh was soft and girlish. "It was not the honeymoon I'd planned, but it does well enough. We shall keep them there till the ghosts drive them mad—or till thirst and hunger teach them what a little thing love is. And their flesh will rot, Garsykes Men, till the water drips on their bare bones at last. And so much for Logie."

"I cannot bear it, Dick," pleaded Causleen. "She is so evil—so evil—and God does not strike her down."

"Are you ready, child?" asked Hardcastle, with great gentleness.

"Ready?"

"Nita spoke truth. There's no way out of this, except by the mouth they're guarding. We shall die, and I'd have it that way, if needs must—and if we're together."

"Say that again, Dick—*if we're together*—and, Dick, fear has gone."

Quiet absolute held outside, and Hardcastle's mind went back to many silences that Garsykes had put on him. Those waiting-times at Logie had seemed chill and harsh enough, but not as this was terrible. His own house had been about him then, the forest and the wind-sweet uplands, and he had liberty to come and go.

For a long while no stir of life sounded from without, till the frosty gloaming settled on what little he could see of the brink-field. Then again he fancied himself in a nightmare's grip, for the two whose bodies lay prone at the entry, blocking the lower half, began to move backward with rough, convulsive twists and turns.

The horror of it—this watching dead men come to life—yielded to stark common-sense as muffled curses stole inward and he guessed that some of the Garsykes sort had crept on hands and knees to draw out his victims. His re-loaded gun was useless, for the living sheltered behind the dead, and he could only wait till the cave-mouth was clear, and all the gloaming pasture empty save for Nita's voice.

"It is well done. I may tire of waiting till they die of the ghosts and hunger. The way must be free."

Hardcastle drew Causleen round the first bend of the cave-track. His wits were keen as a razor's edge, as he stilled Storm's yearning to be out and at the throats of the besiegers. If they could not live, they three, they must make preparations to die with seemliness.

"There's one chance left," he said. "When dark comes, I'll take Storm, and together we'll stampede them."

"And what of me?"

"You can win out in the confusion, and home to Logie."

"Yes, Dick. And what of you?"

"As if that mattered, child."

"But if—if it mattered everything?"

So they came near to bitter quarrel, there as they waited for the sunset glow to die across the hills that seemed lost to them for ever. Then Hardcastle had his way, taking Storm with him round the bend; and she had her way, following with mute-footed disobedience, till they came in sight of the cave's mouth.

A crimson that was not of dawn or sunset flared through the entry. The reek of a fire built of pine-wood and heather was blown indoors by a wet, gusty wind, and its heat drove inward, licking the cave-walls.

Across the flare and cackle, Hardcastle saw men dancing with women of the village in frank abandonment. Wild-beast laughter made the music for their feet, and all that had been in Garsykes, since the first cut-throat settled there, was loosened down the ladder of the centuries.

When for a moment they were tired of their devilry, Nita's voice rang clear and low across the spurting flames.

"Shall I sing of Logie to you? Hardcastle flouted me once, but it is my turn now."

With that she sang a ballad in the Garsykes tongue, that was a bastard child of the true Romany speech, and her people, fantastic in the fireglow, roared with applause when it was ended. They knew its meaning, though Hardcastle could only guess how foul and sinister it was.

Nita laughed at their plaudits, and was grave again. "Why did I want the cave cleared of its dead? Because every long while I shall persuade one of ours to go in and see how it fares with our true lovers. Ah, you back away at that, do you? Then two shall go—carrying one man's pluck between them—and they'll creep forward on unshod feet, making no sound. Hardcastle will not know when to look for them, and an hour will seem a month in yonder."

Do as he might, fear of the waiting-time ahead was creeping over Hardcastle like the tide of a quiet sea. Each word of Nita's reached him—as she meant it should—with an overmastering sense of prophecy and doom.

He took Causleen's hand in his, and together they went, with slow, nagging caution, along the twisting track, Storm following. To light a candle now was to waste what would be needed later on, and would make them a plain mark for pursuit. They had to feel like blind people for the rocky spears descending from the roof. They stumbled on rubble dropped from the same roof, and every now and then a bat brushed their faces with a sudden, silky dread.

Hardcastle halted often to ask Storm if he heard aught behind them, and the dog gave a gruff "all's well." Then, as a roar of waters sounded near ahead, Hardcastle remembered the far-off day when he had come, a boy, into this forbidden cave. The very thrill of it returned—part fear, most of it eager courage—as he lit his candle and went forward warily.

"It's a slippery crossing, child," he said, coming with her to a torrent that came from heaven knew where on the high moors and dipped into this underworld with foaming speed.

She crept closer to him as she looked at the sliding waters, at the rocky ledge above—scarce a foot's breadth—that was the only bridge.

"Courage," said Hardcastle. "It's a short way to go."

Her hand was brave in his as they made the crossing, with one slip that nearly hurled them into the bellowing flood below.

"That's good so far," he said. "We've put the stream between the Garsykes Men and us."

"And afterwards?"

"Death, I fancy; but we're together."

Her hand tightened its grip. He was altogether hers, and this evil road they took tested his caring at every turn.

Both forgot Storm, till a whimpering came from the far side of the stream. Fearless in a score of ways, the look of the narrow bridge, wet in the candlelight, daunted him. Time after time he tried to foot it and withdrew, afraid of the cauldron underneath.

Hardcastle gave the flickering candle to Causleen, and crossed the bridge again, and took Storm on his shoulders, telling him to cease wriggling unless he meant to overbalance both.

She watched that crossing, short as it was, as if its length reached through an eternity of suffering. Storm's bulk was no light burden for a man treading slippery rocks. At every step Hardcastle blundered and recovered—blundered so wildly over the last of the crossing that he had to take a sheer leap across the torrent, to land safely on the further brink.

He shook Storm from his shoulders, and cuffed him soundly. "There's no room here for fools, my lad," he grumbled. "Why could you not keep still?"

Storm pressed against him with mute penitence, and after the Master had stayed to get his breath again the three went forward. The ground underfoot

was so broken now that Hardcastle kept the candle burning, and by its light they saw presently that they had come to a place of skulls—human skulls, grinning from a tangled heap of bones. They lay in a circle to the right of the track, where it widened for a space, and they were no good sight for folk oppressed already with a sense of doom.

"How could they harm us?" said Hardcastle, with harsh levity. "They've been dead too long for that."

Yet, while he spoke, Storm began to shiver as with ague. His limbs refused their work, and his bristling hide was dank with sweat. Causleen, her Highland other-sight stirred suddenly, was next aware that they stood in an underworld of ghosts, till Hardcastle himself was shaken, remembering many legends that were rife about the moorside.

"Come away," he said, gripping Storm by the collar and dragging him by force beyond the peopled silence.

The candle burned more wanly now. The thick, dead air cumbered their going, and they were drenched as with intolerable heat, though the caves were damp and chill.

"Have we far to go?" asked Causleen faintly.

Hardcastle, seeing a low slab of rock that jutted into the track, guided her to it and kept his arm about her.

"I'd forgotten you needed rest," he said, with grave gentleness.

The cool air, now that no effort was asked, revived her weariness. "I have no fear, Dick—except that the journey may be too long for me."

"It's a long journey for us both. There's no hope at all of winning out, Causleen."

She touched his sleeve with a caress so soft, so all-revealing, that his hardihood was near to breaking. "Such dreams I've had—of us two, and Logie, and the summer days to come. And now they're over—but you are with me, Dick."

He dared not break the silence. So steadfastly her spirit marched with his, that he thought of the rough welcome he had given her when she first came to Logie. So close they stood together now, that suddenly death took new shape and substance. If there were to be no mating-days with Causleen up at Logie, they must find them in some world beyond.

“Where would you have me go? I am strong again,” she asked by and by.

Once more, saying no word, he took her by the hand, and they crept through the dank, lifeless air, over the broken ground. Here and there the light glinted on flint arrow-heads—fashioned, maybe, by the folk whose skulls had peered at them not long ago—and his thoughts raced back to the day when Pedlar Donald found the token on Logie’s gate.

He was sick with defeat. He had carried his head high above the Garsykes challenge, had gone through peril of the roads by night and day. And this was the finish of it all.

Causleen’s hand gripped his with instant sympathy, answering his mood. “Logie’s honour still goes safe,” she said.

“It still goes safe,” was all he answered.

The track wound downward now, till it turned sharply, and Causleen gave a stifled cry. They had come to the brink of a lake whose waters glinted smooth and glossy in the candlelight. The silence they had passed through seemed almost friendly, compared with the nether dumbness of this pool, deep beyond knowledge, windless, asleep with its living and its dead.

A strange beguiling came about them. Once again they knew what Nita had meant when she spoke of their death by hunger—or the ghosts. The pool called them, though the silence was unbroken. Hands reached out to draw them down, though they saw none. And Storm stood whimpering like a child.

Hardcastle, by sheer sweat of will, drew Causleen—and himself—from the alluring depths.

“It’s the end of our journey, when worst comes to worst,” he said.

“Tell me, Dick. It is better I should know—just all.”

“They’ll creep on us, soon or late. And they shall not have us, child. The pool is cleaner than the Garsykes sort.”

He led her over the broad causeway bordering the lake, and as they neared its end she looked down and recoiled. Hardcastle, following her glance, saw a stirring of the waters that gathered strength till wavelets licked the rock-track, and mounted till they broke across their feet. The flickering light showed them a great, sinewy back that threshed itself to fury. They glimpsed for a moment the face of something half fish, half devil, and Hardcastle himself recoiled now, drawing Causleen close against the wet

precipice. He was in the grip of a cavern that sheltered primeval ghosts and age-old, living things, and the heart went out of him for one sick moment.

Whatever monster lurked in the bottomless waters, it had plunged deep out of sight again, and the back-wash of its going drenched the three of them with chill, spumey spray. Storm cried piteously, till Hardcastle, with a rough oath, cuffed him into silence.

Their candle, held high above the spray, flickered and went out, and Hardcastle let it fall, knowing his tinder-box was drenched and useless.

"This is the end of all?" asked Causleen, reaching for his hand.

"The end. Nita will send her swine—be sure of that—and they might take you, child, after I was beyond aiming another blow. But it's in my heart to kill another Garsykes Man or two before we go."

Her grasp tightened. He had spoken quietly, without haste, as if he were reckoning the chances of the weather when they mowed the hay at Logie.

"I would not fear the pool, Dick—or the dark—if we'd not seen what lurked there."

"Better even that than Garsykes," he said.

She crept nearer to him, and they stood there on the brink of dread, waiting for death. The lake still lapped and gurgled at its rocks. Storm whined fitfully, afraid of things more terrible than his second-sight had ever glimpsed on the wildest moorland nights. He had seen Habatrot go by, and the Heather Dwarf, and the dog shaggy as himself—the dog known as Guytrash, that waited on lonely gates and frightened his own kin, who shuddered by and would have none of usual, honest fight.

Storm, as he shared this night watch with his chosen two, longed for the moor-winds and the sky. Nothing he had found there—the worst of it—was like this sick, clammy air, peopled with foul shapes of the underworld.

"What is beyond?" asked Causleen by and by. "Cannot we get further down the track?"

He knew that she was thinking of the pool's occupant, was dreading its return. One hand still held his fowling-piece above the wet. The other closed on hers with a grip quiet and resolute.

"A few yards would bring us to the end."

He humoured her, and they crept forward slowly round the bend that Hardcastle remembered from the far-off day when he had travelled the

cave's length. Then he had had candlelight to help. Now he had none; and from the very lack, hope came to him.

As he turned the bend, the darkness seemed to grow less heavy. He crept on, feeling the way with his one free hand, till a gentle glow began to steal between the rocks that hemmed them in; and with a bound his mind returned, as Storm's had done, to the free moor's overhead. So it had been when he set out on stark, mid-winter nights to cross the heath on foot—nothing at all to see in front at the start, but presently a gleam of grey that showed a filmy track ahead.

His grip on Causleen's hand tightened till she winced.

"What is it, Dick?"

"I do not know," he said, harsh in this moment of swift, unlooked for hope. He had had many such, and feared to lose it.

The track brought them soon to the rock-wall that had seemed impenetrable when Hardcastle, as a lad, had held his candle-flare to its wet face. The candle's flame had been stronger than the grey-blue gleams that broke now into the blank and utter darkness.

Down the wall's face they ran, these gleams, in soft, ever-moving rivulets that were narrow and broad by turns, criss-crossing like the hurry of a water-slide.

Fearing almost to put hope to the test, Hardcastle stretched out his hand into the grey-blue gleam where it ran widest. His hand passed through it. His eager fingers reached beyond the wall's fancied thickness and closed on it. He dragged an inch or two of rotted stone away, and turned with guarded triumph.

"We may outwit both Garsykes and the pool," he said.

CHAPTER XXII

THE END OF STORM

By her silence, by the sob that followed, Hardcastle learned the measure of Causleen's dread of what lay behind them. He learned, too, the depth of his fear for her—a terror that ate still at his heart and goaded him to effort. The very chance of release, the nearness of it, made him the more eager to win through with haste, lest Garsykes came at them just too soon.

"The cave drives us mad," said Causleen, light-headed for a moment between strain of fear and stress of hope. "How can there be little threads of light, stealing from outside—from God's good out of doors, Dick? It's night out there, except for the fire that Nita lit, far away. Surely it was far away. We've journeyed many a mile since then."

Hardcastle, seeing how it went with her, put a firm hand on hers. "Would you faint at journey's end? And where's your Highland pride?"

He loathed himself for saying it, though it brought her back from sickness.

"Here, Dick," she said, and was quiet awhile. "Here, Dick," she said again, her whole body quivering with release from dread. "There are Highland pipers stepping down the cave—and pride marches with them. But we two are mad to dream that light comes from out of doors. How could it? We watched the sun go down—years since—before Nita lit her fire."

Again he was compelled to rally her. She had gone through more than should be asked of any woman; but needs must that she kept weariness at bay.

"There's a wall to be broken down," he said sharply. "Take my gun, Causleen."

The command steadied her again. Obediently she took the fowling-piece and watched him tear at the rock-wall, getting his fingers in where the grey-blue light rippled at its widest. Piece after piece of wet-worn rock crumbled to his grasp, till he got his arm through at last.

Causleen saw a broader stream of light break softly through the dark. Storm, the sheep-slayer, was pressing his rough snout against her, and somehow he, like the Master, brought courage home again.

“How can the light break through?” she asked, as a child might.

Hardcastle glanced back from the sweat of his toil. “There’s a full moon on Logie-side, and we’re winning fast to it.”

“Oh, God be thanked,” said Causleen. “And shall we see the hills again, Dick, and hear the winds go by?”

“With luck, we shall,” said Hardcastle, riving at the wall-face afresh.

He was checked now by a thicker and less yielding slab of rock. Tug as he would, his grip was powerless to widen the breach, and again the sense of desperate haste returned. They were so near freedom, but behind them was all the stealth of Garsykes.

He felt about in the rubble at his feet till his hands closed on a round boulder-stone, and with this he hammered feverishly wherever a crack showed. He was steaming now with the effort, and the slender breeze that drifted in through the opening he had made, did little to relieve the cavern’s dank, lifeless air.

At last there was an answer to his toil. The cracks broadened suddenly, and the next hard blow brought a mass of splintered stones to ground.

Hardcastle went at it with fresh, dogged hope. Slow as the work was, he could get one shoulder through the opening now, and the thought came, across the dull confusion of his mind, that Causleen needed a narrower doorway out than he. Another fall like the last, and she could creep sideways into safety.

The thought was food and drink to his strength. Once she was safe, the worst was passed; and Storm and he, surely, could hold this narrow way till no pursuit could reach her.

Once more he fell to hammering wherever the blue-grey moonlight showed a crack, but the reward was long in coming; and, as he rested for a moment from sheer lack of breath, Storm broke the quiet with a low, purring growl.

No ghosts were troubling the sheep-slayer now, So much was plain. His hide was stiff, not with dread, but with eagerness to be at the throat of some menace threatening from behind.

Hardcastle quietened him with one sharp whisper, and took the gun from Causleen’s hands. Then he pushed his fowling-piece into the gloom, and waited.

Twice Storm growled, so low that Hardcastle could scarcely catch the note. And still they waited—bond-brothers, side by side—for what was coming through the stealthy dark.

Then Hardcastle felt a bulk of flesh steal against the muzzle of his gun, and plucked the trigger. The back-throw—not of the butt against his shoulder, but the answering uproar of the cave's low roof—drove him staggering back.

Two had come against them, it seemed. He heard Storm's eager yelp, a man's sudden scream of anguish, and an answering howl from Storm. And then there came a din of falling rocks, a rush of clean, cold wind that brought a flood of moonlight with it.

"Are you safe, Causleen?" he cried through his dizziness.

A low voice answered. "That was your first thought? Yes, I'm safe, Dick—doubly safe."

Her touch made light of hardship. Two more of Nita's men were blocking the cavern behind them with their dead, ill-kempt bodies, and there was time enough now to hack a way through for Causleen and himself.

When he turned to batter at the rock-face again, he found the work done already. The gunfire shock that had driven him back and roared loud as an earthquake in the narrow space, had probed into every crevice of a barrier near to falling long ago. The way now lay open to them, over broken rocks that showed fantastic in the moon-glow.

Hardcastle, exultant, was reaching for her hand, to guide her through the wreckage, when he remembered Storm and whistled sharply.

A snout was pushed against his knee, and he reached down to pat the dog's rough hide.

"You're as drenched with sweat as I am, lad," he said.

So Storm was, though he had no speech to tell them that the sweat ran crimson. He had killed his man, but in the doing had taken a knife-wound that raked half down his body.

"Don't whimper. Storm," murmured Causleen. "The cave's full of ghosts, I know, but we're free of it."

The sheep-slayer whimpered no more. With extreme pain he followed them across the broken way, till they reached smooth going again. Storm

was not sure that they were free, and to the last edge of his strength he meant to guard these two.

Hardcastle saw now a wide arch of moonlight close ahead. He could hazard no guess as to the corner of Logie-land that it opened on. He did not care, for beyond it lay the free sky and the fells; and whatever battle waited would not be clogged by prison walls.

Before they had covered half the short way to liberty, Causleen's hand gripped his with sudden dread. Behind them was a rumble, as of thunder, followed by a cracking and a rending overhead. Hardcastle, it seemed, when he first made space enough to get a shoulder through the barrier, had loosened the frail keystone of the roof, and they were stifled by the dust and uproar of the falling rocks behind.

He drew Causleen sharply back and through the moonlit opening, and Storm had scarcely struggled after them when a second tumult sounded from the cave behind, and a pile of shattered rocks came crashing to the very mouth by which they had escaped.

Then Hardcastle, his arm round Causleen still, drew a deep breath and glanced in silence at the moonlight flooding all the land in front. He had not known how sweet and all-sufficing a night wind could be, had never tasted until now the fullest joy in sight—sight to see the strong free spaces of his own good country-side.

For awhile he did not care to ask where they were standing. It was enough to remember the cave's unclean nightmare, and to wash in this swift moorland air.

"The joy of it," sobbed Causleen, her head against his sleeve.

And now he remembered that joy was apt to be short-lived, with Garsykes as close neighbour. For aught he knew, Nita and the men who watched the bonfire at the other entry might be close at hand. The track through the cavern, long as it was, twisted so constantly that it might have led them back within a stone's throw of the start.

He glanced this way and that, listening. No sound came, save the wind's voice, till a screech-owl hooted from somewhere far below. A raven's sleepy croak answered. That was all.

They stood on a spur of pasture-land that dipped sharply down in front, and Hardcastle went forward in search of landmarks. Moonlight is apt to play strange tricks with the most familiar hills and cloughs; but he could not

mistake the ravine that gaped below, black with shadow under the radiance that lit its upper banks.

He saw where it narrowed at Nevison's Leap, and where it broadened to the mist-white flats. And, beyond again, Pengables Hill looked out at him with the gaze of an old and proven friend.

"We're in Drumly Ghyll, sweetheart," he said, "and a clear road home for us."

A yelp of pain sounded from behind—so sharp, so strong with anguish, that joy in freedom went from them. They turned to see Storm dragging himself forward, wincing at every step, and Hardcastle ran back.

The sheep-slayer paused a moment, to gather his failing strength. Then he got his forepaws up to the Master's shoulders, with a farewell that gushed crimson, licked his face once and then fell back.

"Oh, the good brute," said Hardcastle, with a grim, sudden oath. "His hunting days are over."

"He's not dead?" Causleen pleaded, knowing the futility of what she asked.

He did not hear, and her own sorrow was checked for a moment at sight of his. In silence and in grief he stood looking down at this lost comrade who had been with him through the long, unequal fight of Logie against the Wilderness.

"We can't leave him here to the corbie-crows," he growled at last—"or for the Garsykes sort to mock at."

Causleen's tears were running fast as she knelt beside the gaunt, still body. "Storm, come back," she whispered. "You're too brave and dear to die like this. We need you, Storm."

Hardcastle watched her in gloomy silence, till thought of all she had gone through overmastered him with a sharp rush of pity. He lifted her with a strength that was persuasion, too, and held her close.

"I'd rather have it this way, child. He died for Logie—not at Brant's hands."

She smiled wanly through her tears. "He had his faults—but I—I shall miss him. He used to come to the cupboard under the stair—so wise and penitent, Dick, so loyal—and now he'll never come again."

He put her from him, with the same gentle strength, and shouldered what was left of Storm. Then he went down into Drumly Ghyll, and presently returned.

"What have you done with him?" she asked piteously.

"He lies deep in Cobblers' Gully, safe from crows and foxes."

"Poor Storm," she said, and was silent. Then, "Did you send a prayer with him?" she asked.

"What do I know of praying? He's gone, and part of me went with him, somehow."

They said no more as they went down together through the midnight of Drumly Ghyll—its high walls closing round them like another cave of dread—and out into the moonlit lowlands. It was only when they came near to Logie Bridge and all its memories that Causleen broke down again, remembering Storm.

"He lies so lonely, Dick, up there."

"Storm hadn't much of a life on this side. He was glad to go, maybe."

So then Causleen knew that a prayer had gone with the dead dog into Cobblers' Gully.

They went together up the steep, winding road to Logie—its guardian beeches comely in their winter's nakedness—and at the bend they encountered Rebecca—the brindled cat snarling on her shoulder.

"Is it your ghost, Master?" she quavered.

"A fairly solid ghost, Rebecca."

"Then God be thanked, say I."

She was old, and shaken by her vigil. Her hair was driven by the breeze into grey, wispish threads; but her eyes, even in the tempering moonlight, showed like pools of living fire.

"I feared there'd be no home-coming for you two," she said, the tang returning to her voice already—"especially when Brant and Michael Draycott came back with the tale of what they'd seen."

"What should they know about the cave?" asked Hardcastle, with tired wonder.

“What I chose to tell Brant when he stumped into my kitchen, a half-hour after you’d gone, and grumbled that Storm had taken another ewe of his in the night. ‘I wouldn’t worrit about that,’ says I. ‘Garsykes has taken the Master, and I’m nigh out o’ my wits.’ That sobered the shepherd.”

She touched Hardcastle, to make sure that he was in the flesh before her, then told, in tart, brief speech, how Shepherd Brant had gone to raise Logie-side against the Wilderness—how all its strapping yeomen, except Michael Draycott, were at Skipton market—how Michael and Brant had stolen down to the Garsykes hollow, to see if they could put a fight up, and had found a company of devils dancing with Nita round a fire at the cave’s mouth.

Tired as he was, needing food and drink, and sleep’s forgetting of the cave, the Master warmed to Rebecca’s tale. There were two men at least who had cared to rouse the Dale for him and all that Logie stood for.

“They came back here,” said Rebecca, “for bite and sup before they left again to meet the Logie Men as they rode home from market. I wouldn’t daunt their spirit by telling ’em there was a full moon, and our men by that token would come late, with a plenty of good ale inside them.”

“That same full moon, Rebecca,” said Hardcastle, with chastened humour, “showed us the way out.”

She listened, her lean, old body tense with eagerness, as he told what had chanced. Then she was no longer the woman who had waited, every fear on edge, for news that could only be evil, so it had seemed through the long waiting-time.

The Master was home again, tall and limber, though his coat was drenched with blood. His old laugh was in the front of hardship. He was glad, with a clean, hard joy, to have brought Causleen safe to Logie, after all, through moil of the Garsykes Men. And Rebecca was glad with him—fiercely glad that the Wilderness had been outwitted once again.

Every sorrow she had known, since her own man died for Logie forty years ago, returned now to this grey henchwoman of the house—the wedded days she should have had, the bairns that might have been—and hate of Garsykes swept through her like a tempest.

Then she saw the Master and Causleen glance at each other with such silent, all-sufficing knowledge that jealousy chilled her to the bone. Why should they come in their young, insolent strength, and flaunt their caring in her face?

The brindled cat was in ill-humour, too. All day he had wandered from house to stable-yard in search of his boon-comrade, Storm, and now the friendly reek of him stole out from Hardcastle's drenched coat. Jonah leaped from Rebecca's shoulder, and purred and growled by turns, reaching up to sniff the scent that was Storm's, but with a cold, dismaying difference. Then the cat neither growled nor purred. All the life seemed to dwindle in him. The fur, stiff with battle, fell limp and draggled, and he mewed with piteous appeal.

"Gone away, Jonah," said Hardcastle, a queer break in his voice. "Storm's sleeping up the fells."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE QUIET WEDDING

The Garsykes Folk had grown tired of guarding the cave mouth. For a night, and half the next day, Nita's tongue had whipped them into watchfulness; and when they were growing out of hand at last, she made light of what Hardcastle could do to them.

"Get you in first, Long Murgatroyd," she gibed. "What with the ghosts and the silence, we've tamed Hardcastle by this time. You needn't fear."

Murgatroyd fetched a laugh up, big as his body. "If you'll come with me," he said.

The devil in her warmed to what she would find, somewhere along the track in yonder. To see Hardcastle distraught with fear and hunger—to have him cringe to her for the means of safety—that was the dream she had woven into her baskets for many a month gone by.

She took Murgatroyd's hand, with a light and eager smile, and together they went into the cavern whose every winding was known to the rabble that followed with shrill, raucous jests.

They had candles in plenty, to scare the ghosts away; but somehow their laughter grew afraid of itself, and died out in eerie echoes, passed on from the wet spear-points of rock that came straight, like arrows, from the roof above. Then the whole cavern was filled with rolling murmurs that passed on their oaths into the everywhere beyond; but Nita kept them trudging forward.

They crossed the torrent. No trace of life showed, no sign of struggle. And now they reached the lake, and Nita paused at its brink, looking down into its unstirred waters. Were Hardcastle and the pedlar's brat lying there, she wondered? But, if that had chanced, why had two Garsykes Men not returned—the two she had sent with knives to kill Hardcastle and torture Causleen?

One question was answered speedily, as she and Murgatroyd turned the bend of the track and saw two huddled shapes blocking their way. Murgatroyd roared with sudden terror, but Nita, laughing at him, held her candle low above the dismaying sight.

The man shot by Hardcastle at close quarters showed less ghastly than his fellow, for the charge had gone through him like a single bullet; but the other lay face up to the roof, and Storm's fury was plain about his tortured throat.

"What is it?" growled the men behind, catching panic from Murgatroyd's bellow of affright.

"Two of ours that could well be spared," said Nita, and stepped on the fallen, and went forward for a pace or two.

"What is it?" came the uneasy question again as they heard a sharp cry escape her.

"The end of Logie. Come see it."

They gathered courage from the exultation; and those who could press into the new cavern, formed to the left hand of the track, lifted a score of candles to what had been the end of their rock-fastness. The straight-faced barrier they had known was now a mad confusion of rocks broken into shapes fantastic, terrible.

"That's their marriage-bed," said Nita, her voice childest in its gentleness—"Hardcastle's and his wanton's. Did I say there'd be an end of Logie?"

"The man was always a bit of a fool," growled Murgatroyd, recovering from his panic. "I reckon he loosed his fowling-piece on one o' the two we trod on. A toddling Garsykes kid could have told him what it 'ud do to pent-in walls."

When Nita, treading on light feet, led her men back through the cave, and out into the sweet upland air of afternoon, she took them straight to Widow Mathison's inn, and left them there.

"Drink your fill, now Logie's gone," she said, and went up into the fells.

Near dusk she returned, and called them out from the ale that had merried them—called them into the cobbled street.

"Is Nita wise?" she asked softly. "Did she promise Logie's end?"

They roared an answer, and suddenly she fell to dancing for their pleasure. The last crimson of the sunset flared down and over from Pengables Hill, and lit her slender paces and her slender limbs. As her fingers wove dark magic into the baskets she sold down and up the Dale, her whole body now snared and enticed the men she loathed.

Then once more she left them, going fleet-footed as a deer up the darkening fells, and came to her cottage where the little fir-wood rustled in the breeze. She slept as a tired child might, and soon after dawn went to her bath in the pool within the wood. Then she took the fell-track to Logie, and came to the open door of Rebecca's kitchen, and stood there, darkening the wintry sunlight.

"The Master has not returned?" she asked softly.

Rebecca had looked for some such visit, and glanced up from dusting the china dogs on the chimney-shelf. "Not yet. But what is that to you?"

"He followed the pedlar's girl into the cave, they tell me, and neither will come back, I fear."

"Well, there's still me and the brindled cat left, and we'll see to Logie. Tell Garsykes from me, you basket-weaving trollop, that I'll comb 'em with the thick end of a besom if they try their pranks."

Nita could make nothing of the woman, so hard, so unmoved by the Master's fate. "Have you no fear?"

"Aye, for such as you, once my fingers get about you. You'd best be gone."

Nita tarried only for one last shaft before she fled from the other's truculence. "The Master's gone. And old Rebecca's wits have gone. It's the rarest day that Garsykes ever saw."

"Maybe," muttered Rebecca, as she got to her dusting again.

She knew how, after their safe return from the cave, Hardcastle had left Causleen in her care while he went up the moonlit road to join Shepherd Brant in his waiting for the Logie yeomen to return from market. She knew how he had probed under their lazy tribute-giving by plain recital of what had happened in the cave, and had pledged them to guard Logie whenever he himself had need to tide abroad.

And now the Master had ridden over-hill to Skipton, on an errand that she guessed; and Causleen herself lay in the room above, in a dead sleep of weariness that was saving life and reason after the hell she had passed through in the cavern.

"You're the one spoil-sport among us, my brindled cat," she snapped, as Jonah mewed about her skirts. "I loved old Storm myself; but he's gone, and you can't mew him back."

For an hour she went about her work, then grew as restless as Jonah himself. It was time the Master was home again, and he tarried. What if, at the end of his rough journey through the cave, his horse had thrown him somewhere between this and Skipton? Life, as she knew it, had that apeish way of letting folk go safe through harsh odds, only to crack thin skulls against a moorland boulder as they rode quietly home.

Keenly as Rebecca listened for the tip-tap of hoofs up the road, Causleen heard it first. She wakened from a sleep befogged by peddling days, and memories of the harsh greeting she had found once at Logie—sleep threaded through and through by flame-red memories of Garsykes and its cavern.

Far down the road she heard the music of her man's returning—*clickety-clack*, faint at first as the tread of elfin feet. Where had he been, risking his life in these disastrous days? And was he wounded by a stealthy blow aimed at him by some foul lout from Garsykes lurking in the heather?

Need to know how it fared with him drew her from her bed. She put the frayed cloak about her—the cloak that had been blue as hope once, but now was like a Jacob's coat, painted by many kinds of weather—and went down the stair, and out to Logie's gate.

She was in time to open it for Hardcastle, in time to see the light in his eyes as he got from the saddle, and told his horse to find his own way to stable.

"Where have you been?" she asked, fingering his sleeve.

"To Skipton-in-Craven," said Hardcastle. "I had business there."

She touched his sleeve no longer. "And left me here—alone, except for Rebecca and a farm-lad? At such a time—after all we'd shared, and with Garsykes near—*You went on business?*"

"I left a body-guard. Some of our Logie Men are in the woods—and two by Logie Brigg, to let none from Garsykes through—except Nita, if she's a mind to come."

She took a further step away. "You might have stayed, for all that—just to be near me, Dick."

"I went over-hill for the right to keep you near."

She had known him taciturn and hard, known the laughter that came rarely and was far away from joy; but now he was a riddle, as he took her hands and would not let them go.

"You left me so soon—for what?" asked Causleen wearily.

His heart spoke now. By all he said and left unsaid she knew at last the caring that had come at the end of their uphill, stormy wooing. Garsykes might be broken, once for all, he told her; but the old, stealthy siege of Logie might be renewed by slow degrees. Either way, they'd meet the coming weather as man and wife. The licence would be ready in three days' time, and it was no far ride to Skipton Kirk.

"That was your business?" she asked, her voice brave and vibrant. "And I chided you—and so, Dick, do what you will with me."

When his will was made plain, however, that on the fourth day from now they would be married, she was submissive no longer, but pleaded for delay. She had no clothes for her wedding, and would shame him in his own market-town unless he gave her time.

"Wear the old cloak over all," said Hardcastle, "and I'll be content enough."

So there came a day when Rebecca watched them ride out from Logie. The Master had not said what their errand was, but she knew; and she scolded Jonah till he spat at her. And then she gathered him into her arms, and cried, and cried.

"Love of a man sees far, when you've mothered his cantrips since he was a babby," she said by and by, with a smile utterly forlorn. "And jealousy sees far. But it's hell's own spite when the two keep company."

Causleen and Hardcastle guessed nothing of all this, as they rode, in wonder and in silence, over the hill to Skipton. They guessed nothing of it as they rode home again, drawing rein to glance at the pride of that one word, *Desormais*, carved high above the grey, stubborn castle-gateway.

Long as he had known it—and he rode seldom from Skipton without a glance at the message overhead—Hardcastle had taken it as a symbol of his own grim fight for Logie. Now that was changed. He had a wife beside him, and the feud with Garsykes grew doubly worth the while.

He glanced at the carved challenge, and made English of it for her. "*Henceforth*, sweetheart," he said, and laughed quietly as a conqueror might.

In silence they rode past the castle walls and up into the grey, solitary fells. The track twisted this way and that to lessen the steepness of the climb, till they breasted the last of the hill and passed through the rocky gap that was the gateway of the homeland watered by Wharfe River.

They drew rein, and could only marvel at the land stretched wide below them. The winter's sun shone warm and mellow over the far spaces, grey-blue with haze. Every striding league of heath, each gully where leafless rowans waited for the spring, showed to Hardcastle like the map of his own heart. Pride—big hearted, eager pride—leaped out as he pointed down the slope.

"We own most of it, wife. Is it a good bridal-gift?"

Her eyes filled with tears. He gave all he had, for her to share. And he named her wife. She had not guessed how all-sufficing the name was, how real and warm and safe. And somehow, across the chill upland breeze, a summer fragrance blew, as of clove-pinks and ladslove in a wayside garden.

All they had gone through together returned—the stealthy siege of Logie, the stark, long peril in the cave—and she drew a sharp breath of thanksgiving that this was the end of nightmare.

"Life is sweet to hold, Dick," she said, smiling through her tears.

They rode in another silence, rich with speech, down the slack of Storner Bank. And now the wood-reek from Logie's chimneys eddied up, so near that they could smell its savour.

"We're home," said Hardcastle, drawing his horse nearer hers.

Then, as they rounded the bend, he pulled up sharply. Nita Langrish, a bundle of withies over her shoulder, was standing in the roadway, her glance fixed on Logie. So intent she was on thoughts of the dead Master who had flouted her—hidden deep with the pedlar's brat under the rocks in Garsykes cave—that she heard no sound of hoofs behind.

Nita had had her will of them both, and stood there as in a trance. Vengeance was sweet. She was minded to taste it to the full, looking down at masterless Logie. Every curling wisp of smoke rose from a hearth Hardcastle would never know again. No son of his would grow to claim the heritage. Logie and its seven hundred years ended with old Rebecca and a brindled cat; and so much for pride.

A man's cry of warning roused her, and she turned to see Hardcastle's cob rearing scarcely a yard away, his fore-feet perilously close.

Nita leaped aside, then stood gazing at these two who were buried in the cave out yonder—these two, who seemed to ride on horseback through the sunlight and the free moorland wind.

Hardcastle glanced once at her. It was not his way to fight with women; but a sullen loathing came.

"We're dead in Garsykes cavern," he said. "It's only our ghosts that ride."

"Only your ghosts?" asked Nita eagerly, snatching at a straw in this torrent of dread that raced over her.

"And Storm's," said Hardcastle. "He died with us, and runs close behind, I fancy."

With that they rode on, and Hardcastle's grim smile died out as he glanced at Causleen's face.

"You're tired, wife," he said gently.

"I was not tired at all until—until she stood there—stood on the threshold of our home-coming."

A shadow crept, too, about Hardcastle and stayed with him as they came indoors, Causleen and he, and found Rebecca waiting for them.

"Step forrard," said Rebecca. "It was time you married, Hardcastle of Logie."

"How did you know?" he asked, wondering that there was no need to break the news.

Gaunt and straight, Rebecca stood facing them with a hard, roving glance. "How did I know, asks he, when I've given my life to watching his ins-and-outs? How could I help but know?"

On one side of the threshold Nita had met them. On the other stood this henchwoman, grief and jealousy showing in her sombre eyes. Against their will, a sense of doom crept out from Logie's storied walls, chilling their eager wedlock.

"I kept young for you, Master," went on Rebecca, "till you found a bride for Logie. And now I'll let myself grow old."

"I'd have told you our errand——"

She cut short his troubled words. "You would, but for thinking of old Rebecca. The blow would fall softer, you fancied, if you brought a full-fledged wife, instead of letting me wait all day for a promised one. Men, poor lambs, are not good at breaking news, and never were."

Her tart humour swept him like a moorland breeze through the gloom she had brought about these two.

"I've the bridal-supper ready, and near spoilt. You were always late to your vituals, Master."

She sat on in the kitchen, after all was served and she had left them to their meal; and she missed Jonah sorely. The cat had been with her till the moment when she went to greet the bridal-pair, and now had vanished like her own joy in serving Hardcastle. All had gone, it seemed, and she yielded to loneliness utter and complete.

She threw her apron over her head, and rocked to and fro. Grief had its way with her. The years behind gathered their hardships to a head, and tears broke through at last.

Then by and by she heard the kettle singing on the hob, and made a hefty brew of tea. And after that she went in search of Jonah.

They heard her tramping forlornly upstairs and down, and Causleen's hand reached out to Hardcastle's across their wedding-table.

"She's old and sorry, Dick—and we've so much."

Hardcastle found a quick new tenderness for this wife of his. She knew, as he did, that Rebecca was bone and fibre of his house—one by this time with its thick-set walls, the people who lived here aforetime—one to be cherished like a heritage.

Together they went in search and found Rebecca standing at the cupboard under the stair. The door was open, and her candle showed the brindled cat spitting and growling from the lair he had shared with Storm on many a day gone by.

The candlelight showed something else to Causleen, her vision sharpened by this wild home-coming—showed her the shape of Storm, the sheep-slayer, with a long, brown-red gash across his filmy hide—Storm, who was dead, returned to Logie and the Master.

Hardcastle had made a bitter jest to Nita of Storm's following them, a ghost. And Storm was here.

"What d'ye see," asked Rebecca—"what d'ye see, beyond that dratted cat o' mine?"

"A leal friend, Rebecca."

And with that she put a hand in Hardcastle's, ready for whatever weather came to Logie. The end of the stark battle was not yet.

CHAPTER XXIV

A GAOL DELIVERY

The Wilderness Folk were aghast, in the days that followed, to see dead Hardcastle riding with Causleen, man and wife, across the uplands. Flesh and blood they could not be, for all Garsykes knew that they were buried in the cave. Yet flesh and blood they were, glad of each other and the hills.

Old superstition bred and festered in the Garsykes hovels. It was ill-luck and always had been, to run counter to a Hardcastle, whatever toll they took of those farming under him. Strange tales were bandied to and fro in Widow Mathison's inn by greybeards of this Lost Village under the hills—tales of the ancient days, when one and another from Garsykes had held up a Master of Logie on the road and brought confusion on the settlement.

"They've the luck, these damned Hardcastles," the tale would finish always. "It's no use trying to meddle with Logie any more."

Nita Langrish had shared their gospel for awhile. Then she had rallied from the shock of seeing Hardcastle ride home with the pedlar's girl—the bridal-look about their faces, and both on horseback instead of lying under piled rocks yonder.

Each time she met them afterwards, her purpose hardened. She lay awake o' nights no longer, wondering how they had won free of the cavern. It was enough to know that the pedlar's brat was mistress now at Logie—reigning where she might have taken pride of place, instead of weaving baskets for up-Dale folk to buy. Through the weeks and months she waited, striving to put some sort of courage into her slack-set people, and telling them always that dead men of theirs cried out for vengeance against Logie. Memory of these deaths, and the way of them was too sharp at first; but fear lessened by degrees, and Nita fanned the dull embers of resentment into life.

As winter stepped through March gales to springtime, and the fells were white with lambs newborn, Hardcastle took a lusty hold of life. The lean years had gone out of mind. The only thought he gave Garsykes was a warning to Causleen not to roam abroad without him.

She had little need. On horseback or afoot they were together constantly; and, as he taught her the lore of ancient lands and storied bridle-tracks, she

lit his heritage with new, fresh wonder, as of dawn after a long night's tempest.

Closer they came together, and closer, as the spring advanced and cowslips nodded in the meadow-grass. Sometimes Hardcastle would fall silent, afraid almost of his joy in living; and her hand would slip through his arm.

"What is it, Dick?" she would ask.

"Half of me has come back," he would answer, smiling down at her —"the half that's been missing all these years."

Rebecca, too, was in better heart. Jealousy yielded by degrees to a new, enthralling hope. As she baked, and scrubbed, and churned, a little song would creep into her mind, and stay there. Logie might have an heir at last. And she would dandle him on knees hard-worn in Logie's service.

When June was well in, and the meadows growing strong for the scything-time, Shepherd Brant stumped into Rebecca's kitchen one morning and sat him down.

"Well?" she snapped. "What's wrong this time? I'd as little expect to see thee without thy shadow, Brant, as without a grievance."

"What's wrong? Why, Garsykes. It's humming like a hornets' nest again, they say."

"I guessed as much. Jonah gives me less of his company these days, and sits a lot in the under-stairs cupboard. So I know Storm's there."

"You and your ghosts, woman. I've no patience. Dead men can walk—I've seen a few in my time—but it's a heathen fancy that the four-footed sort have spirits."

"Some o' the four-footed have a bigger spirit than some o' the two-legged, and have a properer right to walk. But, then, you were always against Storm, poor martyr," she added, re-opening their ancient feud. "It wasn't enough that he died for the Master."

"For a sheep-killer he died fairish well. I'll own to as much as that," broke in the other, tugging at his scanty beard. "But, as for his ghost coming back to guard the house—I thought you'd better wits than that Rebecca."

Hardcastle, hearing his shepherd's voice, had come down the passage; and, standing in the doorway, he laughed suddenly. They were so much a

part of Logie, these two, with their friendly enmity and their strife of tongues.

"It's no time for laughing, if all I hear be true," said Brant, getting to his feet with a grim salute. "The Wilderness Folk are ripe for any sort of mischief."

"Aye, but it will get no further than their tongues. I'm glad you're here, though, Stephen. I've to ride over the tops to Norbrigg, and shall go easier in mind."

"Don't ye go, Master."

"That's what I've been dinning at him," shrilled Rebecca. "When a man takes a wife to himself, he's no right to go pleasuring abroad, with the Garsykes muck at large."

"They're broken men, I tell you. You with a gun, Brant, and Rebecca with her rolling-pin—you're enough to hold the house."

"And you're taking the mistress into it?"

"Taking her to the hill-winds. She's stifled in these Logie woods."

With that he went down the corridor, buoyant and heedless. A stable-lad was holding the two horses, and Causleen waited for him.

"Brant's here," he said, as he mounted her. "It's as well, with Rebecca thinking fire and slaughter is brewing up."

She laughed with him. Laughter was in their hearts, and joy rode pick-a-back behind them down the winding lane. The bird-cherry trees were in blossom, their white tassels dusting the sleepy air with fragrance. From every bush—from the high sycamores whose leaves drowsed in the summer's heat—birds were wild with song. Thrushes piped high. Blackbirds sent out their mellower note, and all the small fry joined in this wild din of June.

"Causleen," said Hardcastle, his voice softened by the wonder of their days together, "I was surly when you came at first. Dear God, if I had missed you."

"That was not meant. Was there ever a wind that blew but brought us closer?"

It was in this mood—sure of each other, with a high pride in wedlock—that they reached the gate opening on the Norbrigg road. On the top bar lay a

flint arrow, brown and smooth in the sun-glare, and Hardcastle checked himself as he stooped to unhasp the gate.

His glance sought Causleen's. Both were thinking of the first token found by Pedlar Donald, of all that followed. They were thinking, too, with sharp revulsion, of the arrow-heads that littered the floor of Garsykes Cave.

For a moment their nightmare journey through the cavern clouded the sunlight, chilled the eager breath of summer. Then Hardcastle put the token into his pocket, as he had put the earlier one, and said not a word as they rode up into the hills. It was only when they drew rein to breathe their horses, and Garsykes showed below them, that he broke the silence.

"We'll go through no second waiting-time, wife," he said—"waiting for what the Wilderness is pleased to do."

"Yes, Dick?"

"Brant would have found the Logie Men ready enough to muster, if we'd been lost that day. They'll *have* to muster now, and we'll make an end of the swine-styes yonder, once for all."

From the strength of their great caring, from the very heart of her bridal pride, joy quickened in Causleen. Better war, savage and instant, than to go through another stealthy siege at the hands of Garsykes.

"Break them outright, Dick," she said. "For my sake, break them."

They rode up and further up into the wide-flung spaces of the fells. No woodland birds sang here. That lowland litany of joy was out of hearing. Instead, there came the wheeling cries of hawk and plover, red-shank and snipe and hoodie-crow—battle-music, swift as a pibroch, keen as the thin, nipping wind that fought the glaring sun-heat.

Past Lone Rigg Cross they went—which marked the graves of a lad found dead in some far-off winter's gale—and up raking Skircarl Rise, till they drew rein again to give their sweating nags a rest.

They were on the roof-top of the Dale now, Moorland and gaunt pastures, gashed by wild ravines, raked to the further mountains, grey-blue in the distant, shimmering haze—a haze so drifting that it was hard to know Pen-y-Gent's long, sloping crest or Ingleborough's bluff, upstanding bulk.

"A good land, to live or die for," said Hardcastle, all his love for this far-striding homeland finding voice.

Reluctant to go, they gathered the reins at last and were moving forward at a lagging pace when a traveller came up from the Norbrigg side, over the steep brink of the hill. He was so tall and lean, so quick and yet so stumbling in his stride, that they wondered who he was, and how he came there. The one moving thing on this lone, empty road, he seemed forlorn, and yet gigantic.

The man stopped as he neared them and touched a greasy cap. “D’ye know a place called Garsykes?” he asked. “It should be somewhere near by now.”

“Yes,” said Hardcastle, with grim humour, “I know a place called Garsykes. Do you want to get there?”

“I do, quick as my legs will take me.”

Hardcastle pointed the way for him, where the lazy track curved down to the lowlands and the curling smoke below. Then he took the arrow-head from his pocket and tossed it into the man’s hand.

“Tell them it comes from Logie,” he said, and rode forward with Causleen.

The man stared after them for a moment, then fell again into the lopping stride that carries tired legs far. Between the heather and the benty lands he went, and came to Garsykes’ cobbled street, and dropped heavily on to the stone bench outside the inn.

Long Murgatroyd was sitting there with a quart mug at his elbow, and he glanced curiously at the newcomer.

“And where might you be from?” he asked.

The stranger sat bunched-up, his sombre eyes staring straight in front of him. “From York,” he said. “There’s been a gaol delivery—and I’m one of the delivered.”

“Take a pull at my mug, lad. You’ve walked a tidy bit too far, by the look o’ you. There, that’s better. And what did they gaol you for, if a body might ask?”

A sullen grin wrinkled the man’s face. “They said it was for robbery on the highroad; but I knew better. It was for letting myself be fool enough to be catched at it.”

Murgatroyd nodded with rough friendliness. “Garsykes is just the spot for you. You can do as you like, all up and down the country-side, and

nobody dare catch you at it."

"I heard as much in gaol. So I stepped over and down, and here I am."

Murgatroyd stirred uneasily as a little snatch of song drifted down the street, and Nita Langrish came picking her way daintily through the garbage and the litter.

She stopped at the sight of the stranger. Hope never died in her that one day a strong man would come from over the hill and help her lead her wastrels up to Logie for the last, big fight.

Murgatroyd watched her trying to weave filmy spells about this new arrival—watched with the old, half-slumbering lust to take her beauty by the throat and end it—with the old, indolent zest, too, in seeing yet another fall into her toils.

The stranger was past blandishment. All that York gaol had done to him, all the road-sores under his feet and the drumming anguish in his brain, seemed doubled now that the need to keep going no longer spurred him on.

He fumbled for his pipe and moleskin pouch, and with them drew from his pocket a flint arrow-head that tinkled on the cobble-stones. He did not heed, but Nita saw it lying there and drew back as from a thing she feared.

"Where did you find it?" she asked, her voice harsh and shrill.

"That?" said the vagabond, glancing down. "I'd forgotten it. It was given me by a big chap, striding a big horse. He told me to carry it to Garsykes."

He lit his pipe with shaking fingers, pulled fiercely at it for awhile, then threw it down and lay back on the bench. The sweat dripped from him. His lean body was shaken as with palsy, and his face was red and ashen-grey by turns.

"I'm not done yet," he stammered, groping for the pipe that was his first and last stand-by. "What sort of fool should I be to give in just when I'm free of gaol?"

Long Murgatroyd snarled at Nita, the basket-weaver. "I told you how it would go," he said, "when you sent three of us to take Hardcastle at the pinfold. And now here's the token back. He knows he's weathered the worst of us."

"No," said Nita sharply. "There'll be worse to come—for Logie."

The lean-limbed stranger roused himself. Fever glowed in his eyes and his voice was hoarse and wolfish. "There's always worse to come," he said,

and fell back, the sweat pouring down his haggard face.

CHAPTER XXV

THE PLAGUE

Hardcastle had sent his challenge to Garsykes by the tramping man who met them on the Norbrigg road, and was quick to follow the new venture. The next day he rode with Causleen from farm to farm, and found his tenantry alert for battle. A changed mood had come to them. They knew how nearly these two had been lost for ever to Logie-side. They warmed to the hardihood of their escape from the Garsykes cavern, to their bridal-gallop over to Skipton and back and the keen, young mating look they carried. And shame was on them to remember how they had paid tribute to the skulking folk out yonder.

The last farm they came to was Michael Draycott's, and they found him in the patch of garden fronting the house. He was leaning on a stick—a sick man and an old, till Hardcastle rallied him.

"Dying again, Michael?"

"Well, I wouldn't say as much as that—though I fancied last night the end had come. My innards were that wambly you'd scarce believe till I settled them with a dose of barley-brew. And now I'm getting about again."

"Suppose all Logie was for marching straight through Garsykes street? How long should we have to wait till you got well, Michael?"

"A matter of three minutes—or maybe two."

"You're always the same, Michael."

"Well, I couldn't be different, so long as I'm inside my body—like a bird in a cage, as you might say. Do we bring guns with us, Master?"

The other's face hardened. "We do—and we fire Garsykes from end to end. There's to be no quarter."

"That's well thought out," said Michael. "Their thatched roofs will be like tinder in this heat that's come to the moor. Years out of mind I've wanted that sort of clearance, and I hope we start to-morrow."

"Would God we could," said Hardcastle, with stormy recollection of the cave—"but we've to make our preparations."

"Well, there's no harm in giving them a taste of what they put on us. You sent Garsykes the token. Now they can wait, asking each other what's to come. *And naught will come*, till they fair get the dithers."

Michael's words stayed with Hardcastle, while he conquered his own impatience during the next days. Nothing was overlooked in his preparations for attack. He would have less than fifty to lead against a village that swarmed with men entrenched in their own walls. The more need, he told himself, to see that each of his had his weapons in good order and knew how to use them.

It was tedious work, but he remembered Causleen's appeal. "Break them outright, Dick," she had said. "For my sake, break them." And he had checked his first impulse, to attack at once. There must be no mistake, no hot-headed leaping against odds that might smother them. The Lost Folk should be broken, as she asked.

He drilled his men, mapped out each detail of the coming fight. Aloof from any care except to make an end of Garsykes—pitiless, save for the women and children harbouring there—he lived for the one purpose.

While they drilled, the men growing restless to be into Garsykes street, the sun blazed each day from a sky that showed nowhere any cloud of mercy.

"It's drying their thatches nicely," Michael Draycott would growl, with a glance across the valley. "Let's pray that no rain comes before the Master lets us loose."

And now a rumour spread through the Logie country. First it was whispered that a stranger had come into Garsykes and died there of the plague. That was sinister enough, but soon news followed of further deaths, till dread took hold of all folk—a colder and a stealthier dread than ever Garsykes brought on Logie until now.

Hardcastle drilled his men relentlessly, to keep their minds from brooding. The thicker the rumours spread, the less he credited them. The Lost Folk, learning somehow of the coming onslaught, had spread the news themselves, and under its cover were preparing an attack in force. This was what he told his people, and by night they doubled the number of their scouts about the hills.

None was eager now, except the Master, to press through Garsykes street; for the very name of plague set each looking at another for the tell-tale blotches to appear.

Then a morning came when Hardcastle, looking across the valley, saw a black shape hovering in the molten sky. It was joined presently by another, and yet another, and suddenly he understood.

"We can ease our drilling, Michael," he said. "Garsykes has not lied this once—for the corbie-crows are waiting."

Garsykes—those still alive in it—saw the same three crows poised above its sweltering street. Rumour at its wildest could have pictured no scene more stark with horror; for the stranger who had brought Hardcastle's challenge had brought gaol-fever, too, and it had spread like flame throughout a village ready to receive it.

The sun beat down from the shelterless fells till the cobbles of the street were hot to tread. Each festering refuse heap bred flies beyond number, and in the roadway lay the body of a man that none dared touch. Gaol-fever, quick to strike, had taken him as he neared home, and he had found no strength to journey further. It was for him the corbies watched.

As though havoc were not doing enough with them, the Lost Folk let in another adversary—cringing and abject fear—fear that slackened the muscles and slew their will to live. Every other house was tenanted by dead or dying, and those free of the plague as yet were journeying up the fells with bundles slung over-shoulder. It was better to go anywhere than stay in Garsykes, where plague stalked silent through the buzzing flies.

The last fugitive to seek the hills was Widow Mathison, and Nita was at her cottage-door as she came past with her boy.

"Afraid, like the rest?" mocked the basket-weaver.

"Not for myself. I'd have stood by my tavern to the last, but there's the little lad to think of. Hardcastle o' Logie saved him from the bog, and 'twould be a shame to let him die of Garsykes fever. You don't like Hardcastle's name, I notice. He's had the laugh of us at the end of all."

With flaunting, half-frightened derision, she gripped her boy's hand, and together they went up the track of flight that many Garsykes Folk had taken—the track marked here and there, as they sped further up the wilds, by some dying man who raved in anguish, or by a dead woman with a baby crying at her breasts for food.

Nita looked down on the steamy haze of Garsykes. Up here, where her cottage nestled in a dingle of the highlands, the breeze blew clear and free. Death might ride as he would through a village she despised and loathed—but how could he touch little Nita, who wove baskets for the Dale? She

glanced far out to Logie, its grey chimneys pushing up above the lush, green woodlands. Hardcastle and his bride were there, and already she was weaving snares for them, supple as the willows that were her stock-in-trade, when a heavy tread sounded close at hand.

She saw Long Murgatroyd lurching and swaying up the road—saw him steady himself as he neared her.

"There were three of us left in Garsykes," said Murgatroyd. "And now there's only two."

"How is that?" asked Nita, humouring a man in liquor.

"I stepped into the widow's for a drink of ale—hoping she'd forget what she'd chalked on the inside o' the door against me. And there wasn't a widow there. So I helped myself."

"No need to tell me that," said Nita.

"The widow's gone up-fell, like the rest of the living folk. And now there's only you and me—and the still ones down yonder. We've got all Garsykes to ourselves, Nita, and the fever couldn't touch us if it tried."

Even as he spoke, he fell to shivering, and Nita glanced at him with startled eyes. The widow's ale had less to do with his wild talk and wilder bearing than she had fancied. Doubt grew into certainty that the plague was on him, and yet she could not stir. She could only watch the dreadful twisting of his body, till the shivering passed.

"Now we'll set up together, and own all Garsykes," said Murgatroyd. "It will take us a bit to shift the dead, but they'll not hinder—and the fever can't touch us——"

His voice wandered out in senseless mutterings. Then, as he saw her recoil, a false strength came on him. She had played with him, flouted him; but he had known she would be his one day.

Before she knew his purpose, he had crushed her into his arms and kissed her, scarce knowing what he did. Fighting like a wild-cat, tooth and claw, she got away from his fast-waning strength, and fled up the hills, and out to the hidden pool where she was used to bathe o' mornings.

She stripped with haste and plunged into the peat-brown depths, and scarce dared leave them when her limbs grew chill and cramped. And in her heart, deep down, was a haunting fear that not all the waters, welling sweet from out these pastured uplands, could cleanse that bridal-kiss of plague.

Long Murgatroyd tottered in pursuit, then came near to falling. He forgot Nita, forgot all but the instinct of a wounded beast to seek its lair. Somehow he got to his cottage, and went in, and shut the door. A great sweat broke over him, and afterwards a chill that nipped him to the bone. He raked the grey peats on the hearth into a glow, and fed them with sticks and fir-cones till the chimney roared and bellowed.

Still he could find no warmth, though his brain was hot as a furnace. He piled more wood on, and more, till the blazing heap fell over and down, and licked his clothes, and ran here and there about the coarse matting on the floor.

Rebecca, up at Logie, had found no ease that day. Scrub as she would, bake, or quarrel with the brindled cat, nothing helped to stifle her restlessness. Old griefs tugged at her memory, and would not be still. Jealousy of Logie's mistress rankled with new bitterness.

She was drawn out of doors at last. The workaday present galled and fretted. Nothing would serve but communion with her lover, such as she found only at the gate down yonder—the lover who could not rest in his grave because his death at Garsykes' hands went unrequited.

Before ever she reached the gate, a scud of thin, harsh smoke came down the rising breeze. She glanced in question across the valley that hid Wharfe River, flaring under Logie Brigg—glanced up at old Pengables, swarthy against the molten sky, and down again to the hollow where Garsykes lay.

Rebecca caught her breath. Things hoped for, till the heart grows sick, are not to be believed at first. Yet soon she had to credit what was doing yonder. She leaned a shoulder down for Jonah, and the cat leaped nimbly up, spitting and growling at the wisps of smoke.

"D'ye see it, lad?" she asked, pointing a skinny finger.

Where Garsykes lay, a running sheet of fire blazed up into the sun-glare. It stayed for a moment to swallow a cottage, then passed nimbly forward to the next. The thatched roofs, one by one, broke upward in a shower of wind-blown flame. And all about the land there was the startled din of moor-birds, wheeling and crying, afraid for their nestlings on the heights.

"Now God be thanked," said Rebecca, young, happy vigour in her voice.

Then she fell into a trance. Forty years her man had waited, coming to the gate each night to ask if Garsykes swine still roamed the land. And now she felt a hand steal into hers, content at last. And she woke, as from a marriage-bed, with throstles singing up the new-found dawn.

“I’m coming soon, my lad,”—her voice was soft and girlish—“after I’ve settled two young lovers into Logie. They don’t need Rebecca now.”

CHAPTER XXVI

"LOGIE'S DOUBLY SAFE"

The weather broke that year in the middle of the hay-harvest, and Hardcastle, riding with Causleen to see what the past night's rain had done with the biggest of the upland meadows, knew that his men could not get busy with it yet, though the sun shone hot from a quiet and fleecy sky.

So they gave themselves a holiday, and rode by many a heather lane till they came at last to the moor-crest guarded by Pengables' rocks.

A soft wind blew. Over the striding fells shadow and sunlight chased each other like big children let loose for play. They looked across to Weathersett, grim even in this tender summer-time. And presently, against their will, they glanced down at the hollow where Garsykes once had stood.

The sunlight was merciless with the foul, unkempt horror of this dead village that festered in its grave. The ravens and the crows had taken their toll long since of what lay in the street, and had gone to richer hunting-grounds. No sound came from the fire-swept, broken walls that leaned against each other like drunkards tottering in a wild embrace.

It was Causleen who broke the silence. "It will lie like that for ever, Dick," she said, with a shudder. "They call it the plague-pit already, and none dare enter."

Hardcastle roused himself from some harsh unrest. There was an end of Garsykes, that had troubled Logie-side for centuries out of mind. Yet he was not content.

"I planned to take our Logie Men, and make an end," he answered moodily. "There was the night when Murgatroyd found us snow-bound in the hut. If only for taking your name on their filthy tongues, I wish it had been mine to kill and burn."

"You must not—Dick, you must not think of it," she pleaded, her voice awed and shaken. "Is it not enough—all that lies there? And you are safe."

Still in a black mood, his glance wandered to the hollow of the fells where Nita's cottage sent up a tranquil stream of smoke.

"*She* survives," he said grimly. "When first the rumour spread that she had taken the plague and come through it, I fancied they had seen a ghost.

Few take it and live on."

Causleen shivered. The day's warmth, the joy of their wedded lives—the news that had trembled on her lips as they drew rein on top of swart Pengables and the thought of what these wide-flung acres meant to Hardcastle—all went by. It was as if they stepped together from eager sunlight into a pine-wood where the breeze blew chill and shrewish and there was darkness overhead.

"How dare she stay so near—how dare she, Dick, with Garsykes festering below? Has she no wit to understand that ghosts of the dead will creep up to her cottage-door? She was their evil spirit."

"Let her be," broke in Hardcastle. "She goes abroad with her face hidden when she sells her baskets these days. They say her wits are gone."

"Pray God they are," said Causleen, bitter with remembrance of the day when Nita had named her light-of-love and wanton. "She needs forgetfulness."

They rode down the fells together, man and wife; but cold was on them, as if Garsykes still had power to spin webs of dread about their feet. All that had been gathered close—the slow months, while the Lost Folk were doing their worst with Logie—the stealthy peril of the caves, and their winning through into moonlit liberty of Drumly Ghyll—and, after that, the plague and fire that had swept Garsykes into a death that could not sleep.

Causleen longed to give her man the news she had for him, and could not, though their horses whinnied from sheer joy of the sunlight and the roving breeze that blew from everywhere, packed with lane-side sweets of elder-bloom and honeysuckle.

As they rounded the corner of the road, where it turned sharply down to Crooning Water, they saw a shrouded figure sitting on the grey parapet. The slender fingers, browned by sun and wind, were nimble at the basket-weaving, as of old, and Nita was singing as she worked—singing one of the eerie ballads handed down in Garsykes to keep warm their hate of Logie.

They drew rein, Hardcastle and Causleen, appalled by this venom that had survived her recovery from the plague—survived the havoc of a village left derelict till time ended.

The basket-weaver ceased her song. She drew the hood down from her face, and laughed with dreadful mockery.

And now they saw what the plague had done with her. Her body was lissome as of old, her eyes full of nameless witchery; but the shrunken face was grey and livid—a dread, unsightly face best hidden from all passers-by.

"My beauty's gone, Hardcastle of Logie," she said, defiant to the last, "and there's no Garsykes left. But I still sell baskets up the Dale."

"Oh, come away," pleaded Causleen. "Dick, come away."

Hardcastle sat there in saddle for a moment, with sharp recollection of other days, when Nita's face was a mask of eager beauty, tempting men. Then without a word he rode on, Causleen beside him.

Again the chill was on them, as if they had plunged into a pine-wood where no free air could roam or wildflowers grow.

"*She still sells baskets up the Dale*," said Causleen, awed and troubled. "You heard her, Dick? It was a threat."

They had come to Logie Brigg, and drew rein there, listening to Wharfe River as she lapped and played about the grey arches underneath. And suddenly, as if the river sent up a message to him in plain words, Hardcastle knew that he was home at last.

"An idle threat," he said, his voice buoyant and secure. "Garsykes is ended at long last."

They went together up the steep, winding road, ablaze with sunlight and choired by singing birds, and came to the gate of many memories. Twice the Garsykes token had been laid on the topmost bar. Rebecca had trysted her dead lover here, every night through forty weary years. And remembrance of this tryst gave Causleen heart to speak at last.

"Logie and the lands are so much to you," she said, the words tripping over one another in their haste—"and Rebecca could never be done with mourning that——"

"Yes, wife? She was always good at the doldrums."

"That Logie had no heir—and, Dick——"

A great light came into Hardcastle's face. From under lowered eyelids she watched it glow and deepen like dawn above Pengables Hill. He was older and younger both, and his voice a conqueror's.

"Now Logie's doubly safe," he said.

From the grey-boled sycamores above them, Logie's guardian rooks rose in a great, chattering cloud. They and their fore-elders had nested here for generations out of mind; and it seemed as if they, too, understood.

THE END

JOHN LONG, LTD., PUBLISHERS, LONDON, ENGLAND, 1925
Printed in Great Britain at the Athenæum Printing Works, Redhill

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Page numbers have been removed due to a non-page layout.

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