Old Soldier

by

Frederick Niven

Title: Old Soldier
Date of first publication: 1936
Author: Frederick John Niven (1878-1944)
Date first posted: Nov. 25, 2021
Date last updated: Nov. 25, 2021
Faded Page eBook #20211146

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

OLD SOLDIER

A NOVEL
BY

FREDERICK NIVEN

COLLINS
48 PALL MALL LONDON
1936

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
COLLINS CLEAR-TYPE PRESS: LONDON AND GLASGOW

To
PAULINE
this book, appropriately,
so much of silver
in it,
for her silver wedding
year
1911-1936

The author would have it understood not only that all the characters in this novel are imaginary and in no way intended as portraits of any person alive or dead but also that, though he has chosen to place the shop of the Mackenzie Brothers in Princes Street, Edinburgh, it is in vain to look for a prototype there—or anywhere. Those who are acquainted with the local scene may observe that he has kept the Scots Greys at their old headquarters by Jock's Lodge instead of moving with them to Redford on the edge of the Pentlands, a liberty no doubt permissible in a work of fiction.

CONTENTS

Old Soldier

CHAPTER ONE

GOOD-MORNING

Stewart Reid—"old" soldier—was wakened by the preliminary hiccup of the alarm clock. For the first duty of the day, stretching out an arm, he stopped its clatter. Sleep still in his eyes he yawned and sitting on the edge of his bed took up his pipe, which lay beside the clock, put a finger in the bowl and finding tobacco still there, if but a dottle, struck a match.

"Well," he murmured to himself, "we'll have our bit smoke for a start."

Even when pulling his shirt over his head he kept the pipe in his mouth.

"Me and the wife dinna sleep in the same bed any more than royalty," he once told Todd, of whom more anon—of whom much, indeed, anon. "I have a trick of throwing my arms about in my sleep and once I hit her a clout on the jaw."

He slept in a cot in the kitchen, Minnie (his wife) in the bedroom, and their two boys in a "concealed bed" in the parlour. When he was dressed he pulled up the blind. A fine morning, a bonny morning. The house-fronts opposite, weather-toned as old cliffs, had an ethereal radiance on them and the chimney-pots on the tall stacks glowed. As the kettle hummed on the stove he polished his boots, making them shine like bright ebony, and as he brushed he made a hissing sound between his teeth. He had been in the cavalry.

Tea ready, he carried a cup in to his wife, quick-stepping and shrilly whistling the notes of reveille.

"Here ye are, lass," he chanted. "Another day!"

A large and sonsy woman sat up with a swaying—in build and spread after the manner of a type seen in Rowlandson prints.

"Thank you," said she.

"Come on, weans, come on, laddies! Time to get up," Stewart boomed, passing from the bedroom.

The two boys had no morning staleness such as their father often felt. Their bare feet slapped in the sitting-room; their laughter sounded; they were at some pranks as they dressed. Anon they came charging into the kitchen in a race to see who would be first at the basin set in the sink for washing.

Stewart stood over the stove with a pensive gaze, watching the mealy commotion and puffing of the porridge, gently stirring with a wooden spurtle. Both boys had finished washing when Mrs. Reid came largely in.

"Is't to be an egg this morning or is't bacon?" she asked.

"Aw, bacon!" shouted Charley.

"Naw, eggs!" said Alec.

"Now, which have I to give you?" demanded the mother.

"He's only saying eggs because I said bacon," Charley declared.

"Is that right, Alec?"

Alec laughed.

"Aw, you weans!" she exclaimed.

"Split the difference," suggested Stewart. "Give us bacon and eggs."

"Here, do you think this is the establishment of a Carnegie?" his wife asked indignantly, not very quick in the uptake of her husband's humour at times.

Her father had been in a highland regiment stationed at the castle. On both sides little Charley and Alec had military ancestors—military folk theirs, even like many a proud shire family. When Reid, with a roll of his eye, *picked her up* on the Queen's Drive in the King's Park, Minnie was a parlourmaid in a "big house" in the Duddingston district.

Bacon and eggs were but for Sunday. The breakfast of bacon over, it was time for both Stewart and the lads to be gone. There were perfunctory morning kisses, then down the stairs they went, the father with a little chuck of his chest, indrawing of his abdomen, tensing of its muscles and slight out-thrust of buttocks. He made exit from the close on to the pavement, the boys skipping along beside him, schoolbags on back. Flash, flash, flash went Stewart's highly polished boots, highly polished and heavy, and Charley's and Alec's, reinforced with tackets, were loud as his on the paving-stones as they danced by his side. He held a hand of each, his arms swinging with theirs. At the corner it was:

“Ta-ta, Faither!”

“Ta-ta, Faither!”

“Ta-ta, boys!”

They went one way, hop-skip-and-jump, and he—with a step which, had some old sergeant been behind him, would have been highly satisfactory to that connoisseur of precision—went left, left, left in the other direction. Smoke came by then from all the chimneys of Auld Reekie, trickling up into the clear sky of that day for a veering wind to dispel.

With rhythmic tattoo of heels he crossed the bridges—South Bridge, North Bridge. All those upon the street were, like himself, definitely going somewhere for a week’s or a month’s wages: shop-assistants male and female, typists, clerks in insurance offices to their desks, budding architects, serving their articles, to their drawing-boards. As he wheeled into Princes Street he remembered, in that way of his of recalling apposite saws, witty or witless, “Yon’s no’ a street—it has houses only on one side of it!”

He continued upon the south pavement, past the draught pouring up the stairs from Waverley Station, past Waverley Market, crossed Waverley Bridge (near the corner of which Sir Walter Scott sits in stone, the city sparrows chirping round him) and continued upon the garden side, observing the drivers bringing their taxis into line in preparation for the exit of tourists from the hotel doors across the way. At the corner of the Mound the young men definitely going somewhere carried walking-sticks and gloves. He noted their carriage.

“When you see any of they young fellas,” he communed, “you ken how dozens more of the same sort will be walking, and the kind of hats they’ll be wearing, and the kind of sticks they’ll be carrying. If one has a crookt stick, all the others of the breed will have crookt sticks. Sometimes it’s hats with a broad brim and sometimes it’s hats the shape of a jordan. I wonder who gives them the advice?”

He dismissed the question as trivial and, *Bonny flowers*, he thought, looking over the railings. All his life he had liked to see growing things in gardens and in fields—especially in fields, as a matter of fact. When he was out for a Sunday walk with the family beyond the suburbs—Liberton way or past the Braid Hills—he could tell Minnie and the children the names of the crops, wheat and corn, rye and bearded barley. Even new green shoots in spring loam he could call by name, or differentiate across distance: *Yon’s tatties, yon’s cabbage, yon’s turmots*. “You should have been a farmer,” she

once told him, to which he responded: “I would have liked it fine, I think, but when you are bye thirty as the tree falls so it must lie. And *farmer*, says you! Farmhand. That would be all.”

Once or twice, no more, he had broached to her a subject that came into his head at times when passing a shipping-agent’s office in St. Andrew’s Street. If they could save their pennies how would it be, so he had suggested, to emigrate some day to what he called a Colony, meaning Dominion or Commonwealth? In the colonies, he believed, it was easier for a man to get his own bit of earth. But Minnie was all for having her foot upon her native heath, or pavements. No, she could never leave Home, and what was the use of discussing the matter? How could they ever save the price of passage anywhere? Mrs. Reid had a very direct nature, so instead of letting him plan or dream such a flitting, content in herself that it could never come to pass, she pshawed it aside on the two counts, which were, “Where would we get the price?” and, “I would never leave hame.”

Stewart’s brother, Tom, ten years his senior, was somewhere in Canada, having gone there long before the “great” war, when fares were far smaller. After he had been out two or three years he had sent the passage-money to the lass he had been courting for her to go out and marry him—and she went too. “She must have been *fond*!” said Minnie. She had a sister, Christina, her only sister, in Australia, and she must have been *fond*, Minnie petulantly considered, to allow her husband to go out there, refusing to remember, as she had refused to credit at the time, that Christina had been fully in accord with the decision to emigrate. She had also a brother, her only brother, in South Africa. And in some way that she could not explain—it was just that she felt so and there was an end of it—the infidelity of brother and sister to the land of their birth made it the more incumbent on her (almost hysterically incumbent on her when she gave more than a moment’s heed to Stewart’s emigration idea) to cleave to her country, their country.

Walking along, Stewart had his private and personal thoughts apart from those suggested by the sights on the way—young clerks with their walking-sticks, flowers in the gardens. He wondered if he had ordered his life wisely, wondered if he had been sensible in deciding to be a short-service man. Old Todd at the shop, the boss of his department in the basement, had been twenty-one years a soldier and seemed to be fairly comfortable.

Och, well, it was no use crying over spilt milk, granted the milk was spilt. He had been unable to stand the lack of privacy in the army (odd in so sociable a man, perhaps), always others round you, day and night. Besides, Minnie did not like the army—though the soldier’s buttons had once been

attraction to her, walking out with him. Besides, again, the marriage had been in a sense what in legal parlance and Scots law is called *subsequente copula*. They were trysted, as their folk knew: it was no secret; but there was a wean coming, which could not have been kept secret.

He had done the right thing, and he did not regret having done the right thing. If Minnie could get inside his head, know his thoughts as he strode to work, she might jump to the conclusion that he was sorry he had married her, but that would be a mistake.

"I wouldna be without her," he mused. "If it wasn't for her I wouldna have a bawbee the night after pay-day. A grand manager. I wish she had more to manage on."

He was lucky, he told himself, to have a job with the Mackenzies, especially in these days of what they called the Depression. They were good bosses. Making the best of it was his nature, and Minnie was contented enough, bar her *indisgestion*. When you are courting you never think of indigestion. No, and cuddling on the side of the Braids you never think of the weans with whooping-cough or measles ahead of you—and aye needing boots. Not that he would be without the children, either. There were moments when, looking at them, he would have a queer emotion: they were hers and his, part of both of them. But there was not much future for them by the news in the papers.

"It's a pity," he thought, "that we could not all live on a bit ground and grow our vegetables, have a pig and a cow and nobody bother us about clashes that are nothing to us."

Where the Mound sweeps down into Princes Street (with the National Gallery and the Royal Scottish Academy building crouched at its foot) he crossed to the north pavement, stepping off with his left, stepping on with his left and a fresh straightening of his back.

There were others beside himself on the way to the same destination, with that definite clip, that standardised smartness, left, left. Two of them were already at the door of *Mackenzie Brothers, Jewellers*, *Silversmiths and Watchmakers*. One of these was old Todd, the head polisher, another ex-soldier though most of his time he had been an officer's servant. A stocky man he was, well advanced in years, of amazing depth of chest and thew of leg. The other was Leng, a soldier of the last war, not a soldier by profession but merely by the ill-luck that came upon Europe in 1914. He had an aspect of cheerful anxiety, looked like a scholar who had had military training, lacked the stiffness of the ranks, had almost a stoop and yet an elastic vigour

of movement. Since 1919 he had shared the misfortune of many another, in all countries involved in that war, who had not gloriously died but, with the ignominy of the poverty that soon followed and dearth of employ, lived on.

Good-mornings were exchanged while through a small grill in the iron doorway a face was visible, or part of a face, nose and eyes—nose and eyes of the night-watchman, late of Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. Todd had been too old to take any sort of part in the "great" war but the night-watchman, somewhat younger, had done his bit in a recruiting office. They all came under the title, however, of auld soldiers. It was part of the Mackenzie tradition of patriotism to employ only ex-service men in their basement.

Pettigrew grinned out at them. It was like hard work to try to talk at that small thick glass pane with the grill over it because of the sound of the morning's traffic on Princes Street and of all the feet tapping by. One had to shout to be heard through the keyhole in the little door. In the middle of the night, when the long stretch of street was given over to the moon or to wet reflections of lights, a policeman on his beat might lean close on the outer side, the night-watchman leaning close within, and there would be short, shouted exchange of greetings as much surmised as clearly heard. At that hour in the morning, however, Pettigrew could only grin at them.

Soon these, the three old soldiers without and the one within, were joined by Kerr and Malcolm. Kerr—he was in his late twenties—had only come of age to be taken for gunfodder in 1918, when he joined up *for the duration*. The duration abruptly ended about the time he had become accustomed to accepting crabbed sergeants' abuse as levity. He had the face of one disgruntled by life but challenging it—bitterly.

Malcolm, a year or two his junior, had been too young to share the glory of war but was sharing the ingloriousness of post-war depression and very glad to have his job at the Mackenzies'. He was a lissome youth, like a dancing-master, with a self-effacing or escaping evasion of eyes. He had been, briefly, in service as a footman, but a misunderstanding with the still-room maid gave him a dislike for his chosen calling, or the calling his father had chosen for him. He came to the Mackenzies with an excellent reference as to willingness and honesty, the subject of gallantry hedged by his employer (who thought, perhaps, the maid as much to blame as he); and there he was.

There were the five of them, waiting. They waited for Mr. Rigby, who had charge of the keys and lived down the hill in the new town, somewhere

in the neighbourhood of Comely Bank. (Mrs. Rigby always spoke of her husband as Manager of Mackenzie Brothers, but the firm did not call him so. The Mackenzies spoke of him as their chief salesman, though that's a trifle.) Rigby loved health and cleanliness. He was a small and dapper man. About the time that Stewart Reid was fingering his pipe-bowl that morning to discover if there was enough of what he called *ammunition* in it for his awakening smoke—thrice that night he had sat up and had *two draws and a spit*—Mr. Rigby (in the trousers he would wear during the day but with a scarf in place of collar, a Norfolk jacket instead of morning-coat, running shoes on his feet) had, for his health's sake, been posting along through Stockbridge and up by the Water of Leith to St. Bernard's Well for his morning drink of what, to be first with derision, lest others might deride him, he always spoke of as his draft of rotten eggs. A genial little fellow he was who liked to get along amicably with others and yet retain his own individuality.

"Here he comes," said Todd and Stewart.

They looked along and up at the clock in the tall tower at the corner of North Bridge and Princes Street. Mr. Rigby was the most punctual of men. All the way up from his home people could set their watches by him, safely.

"Punctuality personified," said Kerr, with a different accent from that with which Todd or Leng or Reid, had one of these been the speaker, would have spoken. Only Malcolm, with a little chuckle, gave sign of having heard the remark.

"Good-morning to you all."

"Good-morning, Mr. Rigby," said they all.

CHAPTER TWO

SILVER-POLISHING

Mr. Rigby, unlocking the small door that was set in the shutter covering the entrance-way, thrust it inward and gave a wave of a little podgy hand to Pettigrew. The watchman, still grinning, and with a "Good-morning," bobbed out into Princes Street.

"Away hame to your supper now," Rigby said to him.

"Yes, sir," and Pettigrew grinned again, gave a time-expired salute to them all—a salute half-way between that of a soldier on parade and a railway porter taking a tip—and strutted off.

At the stepping of Rigby into the shop, life for the day had begun at Mackenzie Brothers. Kerr followed him with a manner of churlish importance; Malcolm lithely stepped in next. These were both main-floor employees, though never might they attend to customers, only pack and parcel and tidy up in the shop as directed.

Todd, chief porter, head of the basement staff, had the glances of the remaining two upon him. His army life, his officer's servant life, had taught him that it is not always the bombastic who are worthy. When he was grand his grandeur had fun in it, the old man was merely playing a part, pretending. He was chief below stairs and he brought a sterling and natural sense of humour to his position. Sometimes, in the morning, he imitated the parade-rasp of a liverish O.C. and snapped, "Get in, men!" a twinkle in his eyes. Sometimes he said, "The auld man goes next," with an upward twist to a corner of his mouth.

That morning it was, "The auld man goes next." His strong figure filled the little doorway that had been opened in the iron shutter. He chucked his chest, cleared his throat loudly so that Mr. Rigby, carefully hanging up his raincoat on a peg behind the little railed-in office, smiled. Todd was evidently playing at being the cashier, Mr. Begg, who had that trick of throat-clearing on arrival—unless customers were in the shop.

After auld Todd marched Stewart Reid and Leng. These three passed down into the basement where they divested themselves of their jackets and rolled up their shirt-sleeves. Each donned, then, a long white apron. Atop of his, Todd put on a large leather one. As he stumped away to the fire which

Pettigrew had left burning brightly—the night-watchman's final duty—under a great hanging pot full of water, Stewart and Leng went upstairs again. Morning orders for porters on view above were hats off, jackets off, shirt-sleeves rolled up, white aprons. They hurried to the front door beside which lay two cranks. In the entrance-way, near the floor, was a socket on either side.

"You take the wee one," said Stewart.

He knew, without feeling any antipathy to the young man thereby, knew by his voice and manner that Leng came from a social sphere different from his own. "I think the new young fella has come doon," he remarked once to Kerr and received the response, "Aw, he'll find his level and maybe gang doon further where he rightly belongs! Have you no pride in yourself to say a man has come *doon* to your level?" Reid had not been considering himself at all in relation to the subject, had only been thinking of the new man—whom he liked. There was what to one such as Kerr would seem a soft side in Stewart, who had a manner at times almost as of petting Edward Leng. Kerr, commenting on it to his assistant, Malcolm, called it toadying.

Leng lifted the opened door out of the narrower shutter and, inserting his crank in place, began to wind while Reid was winding up the heavier one that covered the broad plate-glass window. As they bowed to their task the full light of day went rippling along the glass tops of the counters. While yet the shutters were but ascending there dived in at the doorway young Tom Maxwell, second shop-assistant or (as Mrs. Rigby would say) assistant to the manager.

"A great lad, that," thought Stewart, "just plunging in at the nick of time," and looking after him he observed the celerity with which he hung his hat up on the peg next to that from which depended Mr. Rigby's belongings, the smartness with which he stepped to the rear of the shop where Rigby had opened an enormous safe that was visible from the front door.

Malcolm, wearing a white apron but with his jacket on (it was a place of various social strata in a city of various social strata), stood behind them. From top to bottom, resting upon niches on either side, so that the safe looked like Aladdin's cave, were trays of gleaming and smouldering jewels. Bending and rising at the cranking, Stewart thought, as he often thought when that safe was open, what a mint of money all that glow and glitter signified.

A faint scent brought his head up again. Miss Lennox, the typist, had arrived. She gave him a sidelong, glinting smile as always, a friendly lass, to

which he responded with a little bob upwards over the crank and a "Good-morning, miss." Looking after her as he bent there he considered that she walked like a fine filly with the nicest sway of croup and the neatest springy pasterns one could wish to see.

Auld Todd, below stairs, sitting on a stool before his polisher's table, knew by the sounds overhead that all was going on as usual and his two men working smartly at the morning's routine. The click-clack of the cranks continued without hitch. He heard the sound of Malcolm's feet as the trays were carried from safe to counters and slipped into place there, the beat of young Maxwell's feet upon the same employ.

The click-clack of the cranks ceased. A heavy step was overhead. Todd glanced at the clock that hung on a wall there for the aid of porters and polishers, so that they might not be behind-hand when ordered to finish this, that, or the other labour by a stated hour. Yes, Mr. Begg, the cashier, had arrived. Reid, with his crank in hand, would be leaping to attention at one side of the door, slamming his right heel against a rigid left—a fine soldier that man Reid, even if he was but a short-service one—and that young fellow who had recently come to them would be standing back with his hands to his sides and a slight inclination of his head. " 'Morning, men!" Mr. Begg would heartily explode, then, tramping along the shop, clearing his throat, pass into his railed-in office and hang up his hat.

Todd had begun upon the polishing of a large urn, rubbing the fleshy edge of his hand on a wet rouged chamois pad before him, caressing the urn with it, dipping a finger in a dish of water to moisten the pad afresh, all in practised motions, polishing, polishing. He looked again at the clock, listening for other sounds, but the only ones he heard were of Stewart and Leng coming downstairs, carrying the small but heavy door with the thick glass and the grill in it.

They had just, with a shuffle and a bumping, leant it against the wall down there, and Stewart had addressed it, "There, damn ye, stand there," when Mr. Rattray's impudent tread passed overhead. Rattray was a nephew of the boss—"a *poor fish* to have blood connection with the Mackenzies. A *nyaff*," Reid one day expressed his view. Todd, who was a very tolerant man, speaking good of all to the best of his ability, agreed that he was a poor fish and a nyaff.

The two porters put their leather aprons over the white cotton ones and sat down to the table they used. All three heard quick footsteps of two people entering together. These passed down the shop a little way, still

together, then the pattering tread of one went on alone and faded, diminuendo, to rear. Murray, the watchmaker—he had been in that establishment nearly twenty years—had slipped into his place in that glass-encircled coign half-way along the shop, putting his hat on a shelf under the counter; and the clockmaker had gone into his den to rear.

"That's Mr. Murray and Watty Barr come in now," observed Stewart.

"Aye, ye have a good ear. Ye ken the sounds as well as the auld man, and him here years for your months," said Todd.

"That's Mr. Robert," said Stewart a moment later.

"Right again!"

Robert Mackenzie's easy step went definitely over them. Mr. Robert was the boss's son. The firm was still known as *Mackenzie Brothers* but only the younger brother (James) remained. In style it was *Mackenzie Brothers*, in actuality it was *Mackenzie and Son*.

The disposal of these three here below was Todd to one side at the front of the basement where, to save electric light, he could have full benefit of the radiance coming through the pavement grating; and, to the other side, before a longer table with two little molehills of rouged chamois-leather upon it, Leng and Stewart Reid at the everlasting polishing, polishing with palm-edge and finger-tips, with ball of thumb and what palmists call the Mount of Venus at the thumb's base.

"Mr. Rigby," said Stewart, "stepped out and had a look at the silver stuff in the big window as we were rolling up the shutters. He says he thinks we'll soon have to be making or taking time to begin polishing the display-stuff again."

"Aye, as soon as ye end ye begin again, so ye'd better get on and finish the things ye left on the table last night with the chamois over them. They are all sold and to go out."

"When are they wanted for?"

"For the day."

"Aye, but going out on the night's delivery or earlier?" asked Stewart.

"I was given to understand by Mr. Rigby," replied Todd, "that they have to be delivered this forenoon."

"That will be a wee walk out for one of us this morning, Teddy," remarked Stewart, "and a bit smoke."

They were all silent and busy when steps came on the stairs. The basement door opened and closed and Mr. Murray, the watchmaker, entered cheerily.

"Good-morning, gentlemen, good-morning!" he chanted.

They gave friendly response, polishing on with dab upon the red pad and caress of palm over silver, clouding the metal with rouge and rubbing it bright alternately.

Murray, going to the fireplace, took a dipper of hot water from the great cauldron and poured it into the big wooden tub used for washing the polished articles.

"And what," he inquired, "is agitating the public mind this morning?"

"Oh," replied old Todd, "I have given up letting my mind be agitated. There's always something agitating in the papers. Todd is much too old to serve his King and Country and his two lads went in the last war, so he has nothing to lose if there's another. I just get on wi' my polishing."

"A man is as old as he feels," declared Murray, drying his hands on the roller-towel.

Todd being apparently indifferent to international vexations, he brought up, hopefully, a matter of parochial interest.

"What did you think," he began, "of the Lord Provost's speech on the subject of——"

He stopped there. The clocks upstairs were chiming with their various notes the hour of nine, and the city clocks also, and the clock down there in the basement was striking, when a slow, definite and heavy step announced the coming of the Boss.

"That's Mr. Mackenzie now," said Stewart.

"There's Mr. James," said Murray, and——

"There's Mr. James," said old Todd.

"Well," said Murray, "we'll discuss civic affairs at some other time. Good-morning, gentlemen," and off he hurried.

"A cheery auld bitch, he is," remarked Stewart.

"Stewart Reid," exclaimed Todd, "I have no objections to language myself! I learnt to hear plenty when I was a young soldier. But suppose Mr.

Begg happened to come down the stairs quietly and heard ye using language? And, forby, that remark was silly."

"Aye," agreed Stewart. "It would be a lecture—and maybe he wouldn't throw his old trousers at me so lightly, or his laddies' old knickerbockers."

Todd rose with a "Huh!" and going over to the fire refilled the tub with hot water, washed the urn upon which he had been at work, carefully brushing into the whorls and curlicues round its lip, carefully sponging its smoothness, and dried it. Then he set it upon a table in the centre of the basement. For a moment he stood over his two assistants, watching them work.

"Give me that salver a minute, Leng," he said. "You're doing fine, but give it to me. Come over to my table and I'll show ye."

He took the silver tray upon which Leng had been employed and with the younger man standing behind him stroked the edge of that great ham of a hand of his over it, saying, "See? See, like that. There, that will be fine. Ye can wash it off now."

"What do you think of this job of mine, Mr. Todd?" asked Stewart. (It was always *Mr.* Todd when he was in doubt.)

"The chief has to come over to you, eh?" demanded Todd in mock irritation, and rolling from his stool he switched on the light over his assistants' table for more certain scrutiny. Suddenly he rasped in that way of his—often it seemed he burlesqued the style and tone of drilling sergeants he had known when a young soldier: "Get off the stool and give your superior officer a seat!"

Reid rose, as he did so progging Leng in the midriff with an elbow. The old man sat down and applied some final, masterly smoothings of his practised hand. That finished he rose abruptly so that his shoulder came against Stewart's chin, intentionally. He tramped back to his own table chuckling.

"Wash it off," he said. "What would ye do without auld Todd to help ye? What are ye rubbing your jaw for, Stewart? Something wrong with it?"

Yes, indeed, they thought, what would they do without old Todd?

The washing-off was just completed when there was a nervous patter of feet directly over the heads of the two assistant polishers. The whistle plugging the end of a tube that protruded from the wall beside them sounded

sharply. Stewart swung round, withdrew the plug, shouted "Sir!" into the tube and quickly applied his ear to it.

"Yes, sir," said he, replaced the whistle and turned. "It's the boss himself. Mr. Todd has to take up the urn for Lady Eaglesham."

"Mr. Todd has to take it up, eh? Auld Todd has to take it up. Then auld Todd has to take off his leather apron," rumbled the old man.

When he was gone, Reid drew his pipe from his pocket.

"Well, we'll have time for two draws and a spit out," he remarked, stepping to a doorway that led to the cellars, had his two draws out there, and had just returned when Todd came back to the basement carrying the urn.

The old man put it down upon the central table.

"What's wrong with it?" asked Stewart.

"Nothing," replied Todd. "It's *what's wrong with him*? Oh, he's a good boss—I have no complaints to make of him, but we are all human. Give and take, give and take: it's a grand rule of life. We all have to be humoured, and some of us is in a position to be humoured. Here—see here: Mr. Rigby gave me twa-three silver lighters in my hand when I was coming down. We'll get on with them," and opening his big fist he dropped one before Reid, one before Leng, and carrying the other with him perched upon his stool again, leaving the urn untouched upon the table. "Aye," he went on, "the boss got his magnifying glass in his eye and went over every inch of that urn. 'This will never do, Todd,' says he, 'never do.' So," his voice and manner changed, "I telt him that was the worst of giving the job to Stewart Reid."

Reid looked across at him and met his bantering gaze.

"Well," said he, "whether you telt him that or no', what are you leaving it standing over there for?"

"I'm the officer in command," replied Todd. "Polish that lighter!"

Ten minutes later the whistle blew violently and Stewart swung round to answer the summons.

"Sir! Yes, sir. Mr. Todd——"

Todd stepped to the tube.

"Sir!" Then he clapped his ear to it. "Yes, sir; coming, sir. Just washing it off this minute."

He replaced the plug, marched to the centre table, took up the urn, and placed it in the tub. He sponged it with hot water, dried it, and departed in a smart and soldierly manner.

Stewart sat still, gazing before him, smiling. Leng, new to all this life, went on with his work, palming a lustre on the small lighter, thinking of his odd ups and downs since demobilisation, and how much more he liked these men than some he had met in other spheres, spheres in which there was a certain nicety in the use of the word *nice* when asking the question, "Are they *nice* people?" He had met those who were *nice* and nothing more, uninteresting, unlovable.

"He's a fine old man, Todd is," said Stewart. "He would never tell the boss I had done that job—never, never, even supposing I had done it. Not that the boss would likely ask him who did it. He's not like that. He's not a bad old chap, Mackenzie. We have had several indications that he doesn't like a clype, a tell-tale, nor encourage clyping."

Todd returned, tramped with a tread triumphant to his stool, sat down.

" 'Ah, that's a beautiful job now, Todd. Now you have done it,' he said, imitating James Mackenzie's manner. 'Nice and warm to the hand it was, boys.' 'Sorry to keep you waiting, sir,' I says, 'I was just washing it off,'—'So I can feel, Todd,' says he, putting the glass in his eye again. 'A beautiful job now. I compliment you.' "

Stewart progged Leng in the ribs with his elbow and bent his head over the table till he almost dabbed his nose in the rouge-pad, chuckling. But he came erect again and continued assiduously with his polishing of the small silver lighter because of the arrival of Mr. Begg. Nobody spoke till spoken to when Mr. Begg came down.

"I put a new nib in my pen this morning," the cashier announced, turning to Todd, "and I have inked my finger."

Reid jumped up and going to the fireplace brought over a dipper-full of hot water, turned on the tap to let a little cold water into the tub first, and then—

"Say when, sir," he requested, deferentially.

"Thank you, Reid," rumbled Mr. Begg. "Thank you—that's enough. I used to have a wee bit of pumice-stone, but I seem to have lost it."

"We dare not use pumice-stone," said Todd. "It roughens the hands. I've known it take the skin off, and we must keep our hands smooth. I might

suggest, sir, trying a wee rub of whiting."

"Oh, it's all right, Todd. I'm getting it off."

As he washed, Mr. Begg elevated his head. He was a man almost neckless, his head set close upon his shoulders. He sniffed.

"It's a strange thing to me," he declared, "how men can consent to slavery. Not once but often have I come down here and smelt tobacco!" He looked aslant at Stewart Reid. "It's sad to be enslaved by a pernicious habit."

Stewart, finding himself definitely addressed, polished on ardently and agreed.

"Yes, sir," he said, "yes, indeed, a man should be able, as the saying goes, to take it or leave it," and as he worked he managed to prog in the ribs his friend Teddy Leng.

"Pipes!" ejaculated Mr. Begg, paying no heed. "And I've also smelt cigarettes."

Stewart managed to prod Leng again at that. Cigarettes to him were almost as bad as no smoke at all. If ever he was forced to the cadging of one he would tear the paper from it and, putting the contents in his pipe-bowl, make the best he could of it that way.

Mr. Begg dried his hands and went away, clearing his throat violently. When the door slammed on his exit and his feet sounded on the stairs——

"I hope you men will pay heed to that," rumbled Todd. "Pipes is you, Stewart, and cigareetes is you, Teddy."

It was the first time he had addressed Leng as *Teddy*. When Mr. Rigby brought Edward Leng down to introduce him to the old man as the new porter and polisher, taking the place of one who had left, Todd had addressed him as *Mr.* The introduction over it had been *Leng*. But he had come to the same opinion of the newcomer that Reid had arrived at—so it was *Teddy*. He had an impression that Teddy would not be there long. He could not ask for any one more courteous to him, more rightly realising that he was O.C. of the basement—and an older man.

"I'll give the matter attention," Stewart promised. "In fact, I'll maybe stop smoking altogether and then I'll be safe."

Todd had no reply to that nonsense. He hardly heard it. Some private thought-links in his mind caused him to break forth with *When I was a*

young soldier—a preliminary that often came from him.

"When I was a young soldier there was the son of one of these titled families in my regiment," he began, "a gentleman ranker, ye ken—French people that had lost all in some upsets in France. Fine young soldier he was. But there was an understanding with the officers, and passed quietly by the non-coms to the ranks. He used to slip out in mufti whiles, dressed up to the nines, and if ye saw him coming or going when you was on sentry at the gate, you halted with your face to the wall till you heard him gang by behind you. That was just for fear of any inquiries at any time over the heads of the officers of the regiment. No; they could report, after due inquiries, that no sentry ever saw him go out the gate in mufti. Never!"

"Yes," said Stewart, "the army teaches a man to be *fly*."

"The army," began Todd in a mock grandiloquent voice, "teaches a man ——" but what he was going to say was left unsaid for the whistle sounded.

Stewart turned upon his stool.

"Sir!" He put his ear to the tube. "Yes, sir." He rose, loosening the cords of both aprons,

"Sorry, Teddy," he said, "I'm the one chosen to go out."

"Where are ye going?" asked Todd.

"The parcel is ready for me to take to Lady Eaglesham's. Well, I'll have a bit smoke now—and no old fool to deliver me a lecture on slavery. I shouldna call him that, I suppose. He sometimes throws a pair of trousers at me! Gave me a corduroy weskit once when he was growing over fat to get into it."

Away he went, leaving old Todd at the front of the basement to one side, and Teddy to the other, quietly polishing. A minute or two later they heard the crisp tramp of Stewart's heels going through the shop and then the sound, from in front of them, and above, of his quick-step over the grating.

CHAPTER THREE

PRINCES STREET

As Mr. Rigby handed Stewart the parcel for delivery to Lady Eaglesham he glanced at a clock.

"You need not come back here again before your——" he was going to say *lunch* but changed it to *denner*, aware that the porter's midday meal was not called lunch and was not pronounced *dinner*.

It was with a feeling of satisfaction with the tone of the regiment, so to speak—sergeant, lieutenant, old Jimmy Mackenzie and all—that Reid went on his way along flower-scented Princes Street. It was not such a bad job that gave one these little outings, and the fine morning he had noted when drawing up the blind in the flat in Drummond's Wynd had bloomed into a perfect forenoon of azure and white.

The people striding along as if with an object, striding along to the week's or the month's wages, were by that time in the minority in the street. The confirmed dalliers of life were abroad, also those who were having intermission of urgency, who had worked (and no doubt worked hard) for a season of loitering.

There were always at that time of year many tourists on Princes Street. Here was a picture they would remember: the blue sky, the high-piled clouds, snow-white, behind the castle, the twist of the Mound going up into the Middle Ages out of the Georgian overlaid with the present. Chiefly for them were the souvenir spoons with heads of Burns or Scott upon the handles. Most of the visitors seemed to be Americans. The men were, roughly, of two types—thin and with nervous movements, or large, rotund, slow and well-barbered, their observant eyes twinkling behind large spectacles. The women, many of them, had a kind of French look, Stewart considered to himself. It was the way they dressed, he decided. He wondered if his brother Tom in America—Canada to be precise, Nova Scotia to be particular—had turned into a big, slow-moving, corpulent man or was of the lean, nervous sort.

He felt pleasure that so many folk came to look at his city, stroll on that street (there were those who said it was the grandest street in the world even if it had houses only on one side), look up at the castle on its crags, or getting into taxis beckoned over for them by the commissionaires of hotels,

whirl off to Roslin or for a sight of the Forth Bridge from South Queensferry by the old Hawes Inn, or to that place of the bonny name—Hawthornden.

Aye, Edinburgh was a grand place, a kind of a centre of the world, as the saying goes. Down the High Street, past the corner of the wynd where he himself lived, went those tourists who preferred to walk, to walk slowly, even the old folks staring like bairns at a fair. Down by "John Knox's house" they went. They stepped in at the Canongate kirkyard to see the inscribed stone that Rabbie Burns had set up over some other poet called Fergusson. Stewart knew none of Fergusson's songs, only one or two of Burns', but he knew that was what they went in there for because his barber had told him. Dr. Gregory, who made the Gregory's Mixture Powders, was buried there too—or so a chemist had informed him once when he went to get a powder for Charley who had fyled his stomach somehow (maybe with eating over many sweeties) and was as sick as a dog. And away down to Holyrood they went to see the long-dead Queen's apartments—- Queen Mary of Scotland.

He had visited these rooms himself once during a week of annual holiday, he and Minnie and the boys—"upstairs, downstairs, and in my lady's chamber, as the saying goes," he had chanted when they came out. Minnie, he remembered, was horrified because she had heard some one say, loud and blunt, "This is the privy staircase." She had been wondering where it might be and how the folks managed in bygone times but had not dared to ask, of course. When, later, he was telling the watchmaker of his holidays and mentioned that, Mr. Murray, his eyes twinkling, had explained what the loud and blunt man meant. Stewart had listened with wide eyes, as though through them he listened, and had said, "Oh, I see. Well, we're aye learning." Often he wished he knew more, for his own sake and the sake of the boys.

Here was time slipping past, a year gone since that visit to Holyrood, and another week of holidays very near. The tourists reminded him of that as he walked along—the tourists and the scent of flowers coming over from the gardens. He and his could never afford to go far for holiday. They would often plan having a week away but when the time came it was just a tramcar ride down to Portobello, as the saying goes.

Stewart, however, was not affected with jealousy for those more happily situated financially. He was not jealous, for example, of old Todd who had saved and could go away with his wife for a week to lodgings in Rothesay on the Clyde, or to Kirkcaldy across the Firth of Forth. He was an emotional fellow, Stewart Reid, open to influences but chiefly genial influences. He might, by a certain emotion in him, have been visiting Edinburgh himself

that day, grandson of some old Scot who had emigrated to America or been evicted there, tingling to a strange excitement as of a sense of happy return in the blood.

At the corner of Castle Street he heard an American girl say, “Yes, it’s down this way where the people in the house opposite saw Sir Walter Scott’s hand, you remember, going on and on over the paper for hours.” They knew more about his city than he knew himself. He could never understand why Kerr should say, looking after the summer visitors, that he hated the English and American tourists. After all, they helped to pay his wages! Kerr seemed to dislike them even for that. If Stewart ever had a parcel to take to any of them at their hotels, with orders to deliver to them in person, they were always human with him, treated him as if he were a human being. Kerr always seemed to have ill-luck with them.

It came into his mind that Kerr hated Teddy Leng too and his eyebrows rose slightly at the dawning of a surmise: were these hatreds due to envy, jealousy? Would Kerr like to get these free tourists down in the basement, tied there by the need to make a living, and toss nasty sidelong remarks at them that they could take or leave? On more than one occasion he had heard the headpacker’s voice in sleek remarks that could be taken or not, as one was minded, for jibes at Teddy. No, he could never understand why Kerr scoffed at the tourists, holus-bolus.

He had discussed the matter with Leng and that young man had gone so far as to say that he was dubious of flags and bands and patriotic songs. Their patriotism, he had said, might be defined by some, were they honest with themselves, as hating one’s neighbour as greatly as one loved oneself—or even despitefully using those who proffered amity! Ted sometimes led further than Stewart felt he could follow.

“White heather! Good luck!”

It was as if the hawkers at the kerb’s edge at Hope Street corner called that after Reid as he turned there to go along Queensferry Street. Aye, it was a fine town to be in. He braced his shoulders and walked with a more definite clip. He had to coast the Dean Cemetery upon his way to Lady Eaglesham’s—Ravelston way—and there was caught by another emotion. Cemeteries dejected him. We had all to come to it some day and whiles, after a man has seen this and that, it does not matter very much. But, even so, cemeteries saddened him.

The extraordinary prettiness of the servant who opened the door to him at his journey’s end put graves out of his mind. He gave her a twinkle of eye

as she took the parcel from him, and blank though her face was—with a blankness that lots of servants, men and women, learn—just when he thought she was going to make no response, she responded to his twinkle, engagingly. He would wager she could be a saucy baggage once one was acquaint with her!

His parcel delivered, he turned about and marched smartly homeward by the crescents that were almost deserted at that time, with only butchers' boys and bakers' boys whistling on their way. In Heriot Row a family of tourists was strolling past a house, one of them with a guide-book in hand.

His early arrival at the flat in Drummond's Wynd perturbed Mrs. Reid.

"It's you!" she exclaimed, opening to him. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I had a parcel to deliver and wee Rigby said I need not go back afore denner."

"You're hame before the laddies," she complained, "and denner is not near ready."

"Well, dinna fash yourself," said he, "just because I'm hame early."

She could not help but *fash* herself. It had been one hitch after another that morning, her fingers all thumbs, and getting behind with everything. Dinner, nevertheless, was ready when Charley and Alec came cooeeing up the stairs. Stewart was troubled over his wife's fidgety condition. Perhaps she did not go out enough; perhaps she did not get enough fresh air.

"Next week," he said, as they sat down, she tired after her fussing and with *nae appetite*, "next week we'll have sea and country air."

"We get our holidays, too, next week," said Charley. "School skails for the summer."

"I know. I'm taking mine next week so that you can get a good start."

"Aw, where are we going?" the boys demanded.

"Your mother and me will talk it over," said Stewart.

"Where will we go, mother?" asked Alec.

"Oh, dinna deave me! Eat your denner and get off or you'll be late."

When the boys had gone, helter-skelter back to school, Stewart, thrusting his plate forward on the table, considered that holidays would be good for Minnie. For a joke, as he was thus thinking, he remarked—remarked merely,

as it were, *on the side*, for a bit of fun: “Well, if that’s my denner I’ve had it,” but did not add *as the saying goes*.

When he got back to the Mackenzie Brothers’ shop after dinner he was clearly depressed. The mercurial man had a melancholy mood on him. Teddy, who had eaten his lunch on a seat in Princes Street Gardens, noted it. Here was, he perceived, a change from the Stewart Reid of the morning.

Old Todd at his table, turning his head and lowering it to look over the tops of his spectacles (which he had to wear for what he called fiddling jobs) noticed that Leng was busy polishing but that Reid had fallen into a dwam, his hand arrested in its motions over a silver teapot, merely lying on it inert while he stared at the small red dome upon his table as though it were a crystal at which he gazed for a reading of the runes.

Stealthily the old man lifted one of the scrubbing-brushes from the side of his table and let drive with it so that it hit the base of the wall just behind these two. There was a wooden dado there and when the brush smote it the sound of the impact was like the crack of a revolver. Stewart and Leng jerked erect and looked towards Todd. He was polishing, polishing, and paying no heed to them.

“Todd, Todd, what did you do that for?” exclaimed Stewart, “You’ll stop my heart some day.”

“Do what?” demanded Todd. “Do what?” and then, chuckling softly, he added: “If ye stopped your work less often there would be less chance of getting your heart stopped. Have you the indigestion after your denner?”

He rose to wash off a rose-bowl he had been engaged upon; and as he came and went from the fire to the tub, with extreme solemnity and in a grandiose voice he said:

“I aye have just a light luncheon in the middle of the day. A man works better after a light meal. Aye, we have denner in the evening when we can take it leisurely and enjoyable. Now last night we had a horse-doover of assorted varieties, then soup—- bouillon—then a little bit of salmon with egg and parsley sauce——”

Stewart stopped work to listen to the old man with an attention as grave as that of the speaker over his narration.

“—— and then we had a bit of lamb and mint sauce.” He looked over his shoulder, for somebody had come down into the basement. It was Malcolm, the assistant packer. “—— and artichokes,” he went on.

“Jerusalem artichokes. And I had a small helping of queen-pudding. Do ye ken what queen-pudding is?”

“No, I canna say I do,” said Stewart Reid.

“Twelve eggs in it,” declared old Todd. “Twelve eggs. An after that we had a demi-tassy of café.”

The superior handymen and packers of the floor above did not understand Todd. They thought he was an old liar.

“Yes—I believe ye,” said Malcolm. “Did ye not take a pill after that?”

Todd looked at him sadly. That young man did not appreciate nonsense.

“Aye,” he replied, “a blue pill and a double strong seidlitz powder in the morning.”

Malcolm, having heard the end of this, delivered a message. Kerr had given it to him.

“Stewart and Leng are to get off their aprons and away upstairs,” said he, but did not add who had sent the order.

“What is it for?” asked Stewart.

“To go out somewhere,” Malcolm gave unenlightening reply.

Kerr met them when they mounted to the shop, which was crowded with customers. It was a little overaweing to Stewart with the rustle, the scents, the bearing of bodily comfort and the deportment of those who order but are never ordered.

“You are wanted,” said Kerr, “to go round to the box-makers. There is a basket of carriage-clock cases they have ready. And you had better take one of the sheets to put over them, lest they don’t cover them properly.”

It was pleasant to be out in the street again.

“We’ll take our time and walk slow, like the gentry,” suggested Stewart, as soon as they crossed the threshold. “It’s a bonny day. We’ll saunter and not hurry.”

“Yes, it’s a beautiful day.”

“I’ll fold this sheet and hang it over my arm the way Rigby hangs his coat, and they’ll take me for a toff,” said Stewart.

His bright eyes roved observant, near, far, left and right, though he marched with head rigidly set. Any one behind, seeing that rigidity, would

be amazed to discover how much he saw. He assessed, privately, the standing—the *poseetion*—of the men on the street by their carriage, their faces. He assessed their physical powers and frailties.

His roving eyes lit with pleasure at sight of some woman pretty by his standards. At that hour few were the girls whose glances met his. His rough clothes and heavy boots made him of little interest to those who did allow themselves any fugitive optical encounter in their promenading. He was obviously a *Tradesmen's Entrance* not a *Visitor's Entrance* person. Only a young woman walking quickly, carrying a Japanese holdall, an umbrella, a parcel, and a purse, caught his eye and merely gave a fraction of a smile in response to his twinkle when their glances met. "Some servant-lass," he thought, "going home to see her folk and hurrying for the train."

"See this young fella and young lady ahead," he said to Teddy.

"Which? Oh, those. Yes."

"They didna sleep in a bed last night."

"How do you know?"

"By their clothes. See the creases on her skirt and the creases on his back?"

"Yes, I do, but—"

"They came in on a night-train from the south. Third class. Dozed on the seats, maybe with a pillow at their backs and a rug over their knees. If this was Saturday morning instead of Friday afternoon I'd be sure I had them set—long week-end return ticket folk from the midlands, or maybe London."

"You should have been a detective, Stewart."

"Och, no. You can use your eyes without need to be a detective. If there's anything that I should have been that I couldna be it's a farmer."

They walked in silence some way.

"Was ye ever that depressed," said Stewart suddenly, his mind jogged no doubt by the creases in the clothes of these people, "that down in the mouth, that come night and time to go to bed you couldna be bothered taking off your clothes?"

"No, I can't say I ever felt depression that way," replied Leng. He looked curiously at his companion.

“Well, I have. Just taken off my boots and my jacket, flung the top blanket over my legs, and slept like that—a kind of feeling of, ‘Aw, what’s the use?’ ”

Leng had nothing to say. His thought was that there were deeps in Stewart Reid that none of the *nice* people he knew would ever credit, and that odd confession added to his feeling of liking for the man.

“I never get tired of that view down there,” said Teddy at the rise, when they came to George Street and the world to north below was suddenly visible, a surprise of a city descending to clumps of trees and the firth, and beyond that broad and glittering firth the fields of Fife making a quilted pattern under the dazzling blue and the high white clouds.

“Neither do I,” responded Stewart. “I like it. It’s bonny. There are folk over there now at work in the fields. My faither’s folk, I believe, were country folk.”

“They were?”

“Aye, I believe so. I often wish I kent my people away back, like the gentry. Well, we all come from Adam and Eve, as the saying goes.”

They arrived at the box-maker’s. A bell sprung on their entrance into the outer office. It would have been superfluous to have a clerk in that office; there was not enough book-keeping to be done. At the clang of the bell a pleasant-faced wench came hurriedly from the rear quarters. Stewart had advanced farther into the office than Leng and was almost at the inner door as she emerged.

“Oh!” she ejaculated with a start. “You gave me a fright, Mr. Reid!”

He beamed down at her.

“Did I give ye a fright?” said he. “Oh, you’ll get a worse one some day,” and he pinched her chin.

She blushed and ogled.

“You’ve come for the basket?” she asked. “It’s here, ready for ye—behind the counter.”

It was a large basket. Each took a handle and as they passed to the outer door the girl held it wide for their exit.

“Give my love to them all,” said Stewart, “and keep a wee bit for yourself.”

Out they went, the girl grinning after them. Turning into Hanover Street Stewart halted and——

"Wait till I chairge and light my pipe," he said, so they set down the basket.

Teddy Leng cursed himself for a snob, but carrying baskets through the streets of Edinburgh, he had to admit, did hurt. Going along George Street his glance was constant left and right. Reid, puffing on his short pipe, was watching him. He had his shrewdness and capacity for deduction.

"And if," he said, "you do see any of your aristocratic friends, Teddy, my lad, and they gang by without seeming to recognise you, then you can thank God that you had this job a while for to help you to separate the sheep from the goats."

Leng looked at him with an increase of the regard he already had come to feel for him.

"It was Kerr ordered us out on this," Stewart continued.

"Yes," said Leng, not understanding.

"He's a swine, Kerr is," remarked Stewart. "I don't believe Mr. Rigby told him to send us. It is really his job and Malcolm's—a job like this. It doesna pertain to us."

"Oh?"

"Aye. I've noticed that he likes if possible to make jobs for you that he kens you're not accustomed to. Damn it, I ken fine you're not accustomed to this, and you're taking it well, and we'll say no more about it."

"I don't mind it!"

"No—I ken that," replied Stewart dryly.

Turning into Princes Street again did Teddy feel he was a snob. There was no back door to the Mackenzie Brothers' premises. They had some difficulty among the crowds there, having often to insinuate their way and advance crab-like. A dandaical young man frowned severely upon them when he turned his head from admiring himself, as he walked, in the dim mirror of plate-glass at a furrier's.

"If he was to watch where he was going, the nyaff," said Stewart, "he would not have to look daggers at the basket and us."

They were almost at the entrance to the shop when a police-officer of some sort—or some civic guardian, for neither of them knew precisely the significance of his uniform (it was blue and braided, with frogs on it, and he wore a scooped cap) dashed forward, pointing a stick at them.

"You can't come along Princes Street carrying that!" he decreed. "Get away off to one of the side streets."

Stewart Reid drew himself to his full height, his neck tautening. His bright eyes flashed brighter with an inner fire.

"Pay attention!" he rasped. "We're going in here, three doors along. Pay attention!" and he and Teddy marched on with their basket in the sacrosanct street, the one who challenged them looking after them with annoyance.

As Stewart stepped in advance for the passage along the shop he glanced over his shoulder at Leng.

"That did ye good, eh?" he whispered. "That did us baith good!"

Through the polished glass of a large case beyond the counters, and between the sparkle of its silver contents, they saw the gleam of the bald head of Watty Barr, the clockmaker. He was lurking there, watching for their return, and beckoned to them. But Rigby stopped them.

"Who sent you out?" he inquired demurely.

"Malcolm brought down the order to us," replied Stewart, "that we were wanted, and when we came up Kerr sent us out."

"Oh. All right."

They carried the basket into Barr's workroom and descending again to the basement donned their leather aprons.

"Oh, it's you, lads," said Todd. "Well, ye had your smoke."

"Aye, I had my smoke."

"When I consider——" began Todd, making his voice guttural and resonant, like Mr. Begg's, "man born o' woman, and his flesh as grass, a weak-kneed critter, slave to a pernicious habit, I get a fair scunner!"

Stewart had only a small laugh in reply to that. That little excursion had not routed the melancholy with which he had returned after the dinner-hour. Back at his table again the sight of the small red dome there, at which he had been staring before the interruption, seemed to carry his thoughts to an earlier preoccupation. As he polished he turned to Leng.

“You’ll have heard the saying, *If that’s my denner I’ve had it?*” he asked, speaking hardly above a whisper.

“Yes, I’ve heard that,” said Teddy.

“Well, when I was hame the day, just for something to say——” he paused. He had begun wrongly. “Ye ken,” he started again, “the way a proverb or what-not, a bawdy story, or a bit joke, will come into your head? Well, when I was hame the day I says to the wife, just for something to say, ‘Well, if that’s my denner I’ve had it,’ says I. She fair turned on me. ‘If I was wanting a better denner I could get a better job,’ she says. Oh, man, on and on! If anybody was saying that to you, you would not take an umbrage at it, would you?”

Leng was in a quandary. He tried to look thoughtful, judicious, perpending.

“There are whiles,” declared Stewart, “when I say to myself that if I had known when I was single what I know now, I would have——”

He did not finish, for *crack* like the shot of a gun went a brush flung by old Todd against the wall beside them, and——

“Pay attention!” rasped the old man.

“Oh, what a stound you gave me!” exclaimed Stewart. “You near stopped my heart,” and then—“That reminds me,” said he, recovering, “you saying *Pay attention* there,” and he told Todd of the official on Princes Street, and had just come to the conclusion when the door at the basement’s rear, with no warning of descending footsteps, opened and closed as to a draught. They looked round. Nell Drummond, the charwoman, had arrived.

CHAPTER FOUR

FRIDAY NIGHT

An angular, active, light-stepping spinster advanced to the big table in the basement's centre and elevating sharp elbows removed her hat with a cheerful carol of, "Good-afternoon, gentlemen." Todd pivoted on his stool with a "Good-afternoon, miss," Teddy gave her a nod and a smile and Stewart, rising, made a little bobbing curtsey.

"Good-afternoon, Nell," said he. With an excess of smart and soldierly manner he tramped to the fireplace to discover if there was plenty of hot water for her.

Nell Drummond, rolling an eye at him and giggling, flipped away into one of the little whitewashed cellars under the pavement, whitewashed as an aid towards lighting them. Back she came with her pails and cloths, and setting these down addressed herself to Mr. Todd, but with quick, slanting glances at the other two.

"The men-folk here," said she, "treat me like perfect gentlemen. Mr. Rigby is aye that polite and Mr. Begg gives me a good-morning or a good-afternoon when I come in," she gulped for breath, having talked rapidly, "according as it's one of my morning or afternoon days here," she added, unnecessarily, thought Stewart, and wondered what she was going to haver about. "But that typist woman upstairs," she went on, "that Lennox woman, that Miss Lennox, she fancies herself. The airs she puts on! And the frocks she puts on! We're all Jock Tamson's bairns. I'd like to ken what wages she gets."

"I have no idea," rumbled Todd, bending his head and peering at her over his spectacles. "I would consider it beyond my pro-vince to inquire."

"She does not dress herself in they braw claes with her wages," said Nell, and turning on her heels with a flick of her skirt she poured water into one of the pails and departed.

"Did ye notice the flip of her tails when she turned?" asked Todd after the door had slapped shut. "She can put her annoyance even into that. Flag-wagging, I call it. Yon was an unpleasant remark of hers, a very unpleasant remark, about Miss Lennox no' having the wages to buy the frocks she wears."

“Maybe Mrs. Begg,” suggested Stewart, “throws the young lady typist a dress now and again.”

“Ha!” snorted Todd. “The way Mr. Begg throws his auld trousers at you? Na, na!”

“I’m only joking,” said Stewart, growing somewhat sensitive about his jokes not being realised as such.

“Aye, a very unpleasant remark,” repeated Todd, “and if you was to challenge her on what she meant by it she would be snuffy with you.”

He rose to wash off a golf-trophy and when that was done carried it upstairs. Hardly had he gone when there was a sharp blast on the whistle.

“Sir!” rolled Dick into the mouthpiece and then listened. In a voice that for once was of chagrin at an order, “All right,” he responded, “all right. I’ll be up.”

He removed his leathern apron, putting as much expressiveness into his motions—motions of weary disgust—as Nell had put of resentment of Miss Lennox into the flip of her skirts. Imitating Rattray’s voice on a low pitch, a husky whisper, said he: “ ‘Reid, oh, Reid, bring up a shovel of sawdust. There’s a lady’s lapdog has misbehaved itself in the shop here.’ Aye, auld soldier, auld soldier! Cleaning up after the ladies’ dogs!”

In the empty basement Leng sat with the faint murmur of the city and a sense as of being secluded, forgotten, in a big dug-out. Stewart, when alone there, knew that feeling of isolation, would grow remiss at his polishing and, staring in front of him blindly, dream and wonder. The man whose objection to army life was that it allowed no privacy—never any privacy—would listen to the sound of passing footsteps and have the queerest thoughts—no, not thoughts, emotions, emotions such as came to him when listening to certain music, music not martial.

When the door opened again Teddy expected it would be for the return of Reid, but it was Nell who had come down—with a little trill of laughter and an explanation.

“I’m wanting another washing-clout,” she explained, then halted on her way towards the cellars to lean against the wall beside him. “How do you like working here?” she asked.

“Very much indeed, it’s very interesting,” he replied.

“Are your folks conneckit with the Mackenzies?”

"No. Oh, no," he told her.

"You're no' accustomed to this kind of work, are you? I've never had a chance to ask all the time you've been here. This is the first time we've been alone down here," and she giggled.

"I've done many things in my life," he said.

At that moment Stewart came back. He saw Nell wheel away with another giggle and a little coy-like twist of her neck and flutter into the white caves under the pavement. As he advanced towards the table she plunged out again, swinging a cloth in her hand.

"I forgot my best washing-clout," she explained as she passed him.

Tying on his leather apron, Stewart looked after her and, when she was gone, with a little slap of the door, he wheeled on Teddy, solemn of aspect.

"You've been a good friend to me," he said, forgetful that his jokes were not always understood as such, "and I have been a friend to you. So, if there is any nonsense between you and her you'll let me ken and I might have a share. The married man would never be blamed by her when there was a single man to be catched."

Teddy's jaw dropped at the bizarre suggestion and then laughter filled his eyes. For a moment Stewart had thought that once again he would have to point out that he was only joking. He raised his head and bellowed. His "bit joke" had been appreciated. While he was still laughing old Todd came back, not empty-handed but with a tray full of what he called fiddling things, and on his heels was Kerr with a large box which he set upon the central table.

"Damn it!" he exclaimed. "I nearly put the box on the charwoman's hat! What does she leave it lying there for? She was saying to me just now, up in the back shop, that the porter Leng speaks gentry. Speaks gentry!" he scoffed.

There was an extraordinary silence, a silence it seemed created by three men, a wall of silence created between these three and an outsider. Kerr must have felt it and realised that Teddy had allies there, realised that there was a triple entente against him. He began to whistle, whistle and hum at his work, which was the filling of the box he had brought down with shavings.

Then came Struthers Rattray, that relative of the Mackenzies called *poor fish* and *nyaff* by Stewart. He had been on holiday and had just returned that morning. Very seldom did he come into the basement, but one of his duties

was to make tours of inspection through the premises, upstairs and down, just to see that all was clean and trig, in order. The door slammed behind him, and as he swung forward his elbow knocked against Teddy's coat that was hanging from one of the pegs there. In the violent motion of his arrival the coat swung wide, a book fell from it on to the floor, and as he branged on his toe struck it, sent it like a curling-stone or a hockey-puck across the cement.

"Sorry!" he said, and laughed.

He picked up the book and tossed it on to the table, then turned back to inspect it, took it in hand once more.

"Whose is this?" he asked.

"It's mine," said Teddy, rising.

"What are you doing with a book like that?" demanded Struthers Rattray. "You don't pretend to be able to read it, do you?"

"No, I don't pretend to. I was just reading it," replied Leng, "reading it at lunch-time."

"Where did you learn to read Latin?" inquired Rattray, with heavy stress on the *you*.

"At school."

Todd's head turned and he looked at the sneer on Rattray's face, then observed the carriage and manner of Leng, the porter, as he took up his book and went away to put it in his coat-pocket again. Rattray swung on to make his examination of what were known as the *outhouses*, the cellars, under the pavement, then came back again.

"Have you all had your summer holidays?" he said.

Stewart left it for Todd to reply.

"No, sir. Reid has still his to take. He goes next week."

"That man there," and Rattray wagged his head sidewise to indicate Teddy, who was seated again, blank of expression, "hasn't been here long enough, I suppose——"

"No, sir, he hasn't. Just Stewart Reid to go, down here—next week, sir."

The silence was deeper after Rattray's departure. Kerr broke it, saying, "Speaks gentry! Reads Latin!" and with his box under an arm he left them. The door clicked and the three old soldiers all sighed together.

Todd got up and walked very violently to the fire, violently smote a lump of coal with the poker, and vigorously plucked from the mantelshelf a bottle of ammonia but controlled himself when turning to trickle some of it into the hot water in the tub lest in his rage he used too much. Suddenly he stood back from the tub with his hands upon it.

"That man Kerr," said he, "is poor trash. He's the kind of man who likes to kick another when he's down."

The whistle blew.

"Sir! Yes, Mr. Rigby, certainly. All right, sir. Teddy, it's for you. You've to go round to the engravers for a ring he's doing. The lady is waiting."

Silence again, silence between old Todd and Stewart Reid, while Teddy divested himself of his aprons and put on his jacket, silence to the quiet shutting of the door and the sound of his departing steps on the stairs.

"What was all that about the book that Mr. Bloody Rattray sent kicking over the floor?" asked Stewart.

"It was unpleasant," said Todd, wheeling on his stool to which he had returned and looking steadily over his spectacles that he had flicked down upon his nose.

"It was that," agreed Stewart. "And did you not think the way he said *you*—'Where did *you* learn Latin?'—was nasty?"

"I did, and I also noticed that *pretend* as offensive. The way Teddy assured him that he did not pretend was just fine, I thought, but it was over the head of that poor nyaff, Rattray."

"It sounded to me as if he as good as said, 'What are you, you portering wurrm?' "

"Aye, quite. That was how it sounded to me."

"I'm glad to hear it. The wife tells me whiles I'm over-sensitive. I thought it was damned impertinence."

"Mr. Rattray was being impident to a man better than himself," declared Todd.

"Oh, I could see which was the better man."

"Aye, you could see that. Auld Todd has taken a great liking to Teddy. By the way, when I was upstairs Mr. Rigby got me to one side to tell me something. He says to me that Kerr presumes too much. He was very busy

this morning, it appears, when the clockmaker came to him, he telt me, to say he wanted somebody to gang round and bring a basket of cases. Now *upstairs* things like that, as you know, have to be attended to by Kerr and Malcolm unless they are urgently busy. It seems that Mr. Rigby told Watty he would see about it in a minute or two, but there was a lot of customers in the shop and Kerr offered to attend to it. Mr. Rigby has been trying to find out how it all happened. Watty is no' to blame. He thought that Kerr had meant that he and Malcolm would go for the cases without orders from Mr. Rigby, seeing they were wanted soon. But Kerr told Malcolm to send you and Teddy. Malcolm is what they call exonerated, for he has to do what his superior tells him, though maybe he had a bit laugh to himself to think that when him and Kerr could easily spare the time the downstairs porters were being sent out. Rigby says to me, 'I want it to be understood, Mr. Todd,' says he, 'that it is the orders of Mr. Mackenzie that I arrange these things. If you have any doubt about an order delivered by word of mouth like that, instead of spoken down the tube by me, come and ask me,' he says. He tells me he said something to Kerr about it and that Kerr was quite hoity-toity—said he thought it would give you both a chance to have a smoke! There's one thing I greatly dislike," said Todd, standing up to stretch and then looking into distance along the basement as though he were addressing an audience, "and that is making smallness in life. There's enough smallness we have to encounter without making it."

"Aye, you're right there," said Stewart.

With that Teddy Leng returned—returned to an impression that they had been talking about him and that affair with Rattray. He had a sense of friendliness down there in the basement. The place seemed, with just these two and none others, no ignominious dug-out but a happy haven. Much as Stewart had a way of recalling apposite saws and sayings, Edward had a way of recalling some bit of prose, or some couplet or so, in tune with a moment's emotion, and there came into his head, out of Shakespeare——

> "All places that the eye of heaven visits
> Are to a wise man ports and happy havens."

Ports and happy havens! The basement of Mackenzie Brothers, by reason of these two men, was that then—a happy haven—despite the recent visitors there, Rattray and Kerr. He would never forget old Todd and Stewart Reid if at a fair wind for his voyaging he left them there. He was brought from that reverie by a question from Stewart:

"Did you have a bit smoke?"

"No," said Teddy. "I'm beginning to feel ready for a meal instead of a smoke."

"Aye, the day is wearing on," said Todd. " 'The night cometh when no man can work,' " he declaimed, striking an attitude, "unless ye turn on the electric light."

The light of afternoon coming down from the street through the pavement gratings and the basement windows (that looked out on the whitewashed wall of the outhouses) was not sufficient. Electric lamps had for some time been lit over their tables and Todd then switched on another above the centre table. Before long Stewart was fumbling for his pipe under the two aprons, damning quietly to himself that he could not get into his waistcoat pocket because of having tied the strings of both too tight. Pipe and pouch at length in hand—"Time to chairge the old pipe ready for the road," he murmured.

"Time you men were redding up," Todd said.

They had just made their table tidy for the night when the whistle blew.

"We're ready for you both, Stewart," came Mr. Rigby's voice at the speaking-tube. "Shutters."

So upstairs they went to roll down the shutters, then back they came for the door that Stewart, in the morning, had ordered to stand there till wanted. He carried it up alone, proud of his strength—it was a heavy thing—and put it in place in the shutter of the entrance-way. That done, as he was passing the packing-counter, Mr. Rigby gave him the nod that meant the parcels were ready to be taken out. He went down to the basement for the last time that day to tell Leng that all was ready, and to say good-night to Todd.

"Good-night!"

"Good-night, men!"

With their big green baize bags in hand they ascended to the shop and stood demurely, almost with an air of contrition, awaiting final orders. It was Friday night, pay-night. The Mackenzie Brothers always paid their men on Friday night instead of on Saturday afternoons for the sake of the wives, if they were married, mothers or landladies if they were single, so that the week-end shopping could be done without a rush.

There was a pleasant feeling of an end of the day's labours up there. Malcolm and Tom Maxwell came and went between the counters and the great safe, putting the trays of finger-rings and ear-rings, of lockets and

bracelets, of match-boxes and scarf-pins, silver paper-cutters and the rest, away. Mr. Murray was carefully putting to bed in another safe his little trays of watches. Begg and Robert Mackenzie were in the counting-house, counting out the money, and also putting the pay of the staff into envelopes.

"Reid!"

"Yes, sir," and Stewart stepped smartly to the grilled office. Mr. Begg leant over his desk, his elbows on it, craning forward.

"You go on your holidays next week, Reid," he said.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Reid, I have been thinking. I know it is usual to give men the holiday-week's money before they go, but—er—how would it be, for your own good, if I kept it for you? You could have it on your return—the day of your return, the Monday. Not first Monday but next, that is. If ever I smell a coffee-bean on a man's breath I think it my duty to help him" (at the word *coffee-bean* the only sign of comprehension Stewart made was an increase of stony expression in his eyes that gazed into Mr. Begg's), "and with two weeks' money to go on holiday you might be tempted to spend it all and come back penniless."

Stewart believed the cashier meant well.

"It's a good idea," he said. "Not that it is at all likely I would be tempted to spend it on liquor."

"Ve-ry good, Stewart. There is your envelope, then, for the night."

"Thank you, sir."

Kerr had neatly folded with a paper-cutter the last small packet and was sealing it with wax held over a little jet of gaslight when Stewart turned back to the parcelling counter.

Two rows of parcels lay on the counter, and over these Stewart and Teddy bent, reading the addresses, popping the packets into their great bags.

"All right?" asked Mr. Rigby with his cherubic smile.

"All right," replied Stewart.

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

As they advanced to the door Pettigrew, the night-watchman, came stepping in and, passing them with a grin, murmured, "Good-morning!" to which grinning also they responded, "Good-night!"

They passed out into the street where the daylight was yet bright gold on the castle crags and on the roofs and chimneys of the old town, though the fashionable shoppers had long since gone home, the sight-seeing tourists were back in their hotels getting ready for dinner.

Just a step or two from the door Minnie, dressed with care, was awaiting her husband's exit. A precautionary measure this, because of what men are, as the saying goes. Every pay-night Stewart was met at the door. If ever for any reason Mrs. Reid was detained or prevented, Charley and Alec would be there, now and then peeping in to see if faither was coming. "Hallo, laddies!" he would say to them cheerfully. "There's the envelope for your mother." He really preferred, however, if such things must be—and perhaps it was wise, he admitted to himself—for Minnie to meet him instead of the callants, because when they came he could only take his weekly shilling of pocket-money and give them the rest to take home. When she came there was hope of—well, there she was that night and he would see soon if the wind blew south-west or north-east.

She looked much better than at midday. She was not flustered of manner but largely at ease. After his departure she had been ashamed of herself for taking umbrage at *If that's my denner I've had it*. She told herself she had said far too much, and much that she had said she had not meant. It was all due to that chimney not drawing well, and being behind with the meal, and to a touch of *indisgestion*. Stewart, she considered, had taken it rather well. He was assuredly, she thought, a fine husband for any woman—as men go. His weakness (if that word could be used) for having a dram when he had a few spare pence was but a little weakness. She was not the only woman, well she knew, who thought it advisable to have charge of the wages-envelope. The husbands of some wives, who did the same as she, did not take the arrangement as pleasantly as Stewart.

"Well, wife," he said engagingly, "there is the envelope. Have I just to run off to my rounds or are you going to stand your hand the night?"

She surrendered to him.

"I think I will," she said.

So they passed round the corner into a by-street and stepped into a public-house and swiftly into its bar-parlour, the saloon-bar. There Mrs. Reid

sat down, opened the envelope and gave him his “tobacco money”—his weekly shilling.

The barman came from the tap-room.

“Good-evening,” said he, “and what will it be to-night?”

“I’ll have a bottle of lemonade,” replied Minnie.

“And I’ll have—I wonder, now, if I’ll have a glass of beer or a wee drop of the hard stuff,” Stewart said. “The wife is standing her hand. It depends on what she says,” and he smiled upon her. “Both maybe,” he suggested.

Again she surrendered with a sidelong smile.

Stewart interpreted to the barman.

“Aye,” he remarked. “A glass of beer and a wee whisky, she says.”

“I dinna say it!” she exclaimed, laughing.

“But that’s what the smile meant, madam,” the barman pointed out.

They all laughed at that together and the order was put before them. Minnie paid.

Slowly Stewart quaffed the beer while she sipped the lemonade. Then, seeing she was finished, he abruptly tossed the whisky down his throat to keep the beer company.

“Well, I must get away from the neighbourhood here,” he said, leaping to his feet, “lest any of them see me and wonder why I’m not farther on my rounds.”

At the sound of their rising the barman hurried back from the busy tap-room. He put his hands on the counter and gave a little nod.

“Good-night to ye,” he said.

“Good-night.”

Stewart held the swing-door open for the exit of his wife.

“I’ll see you later, then,” he told her.

“All right, Stewart.”

He set off upon his rounds and with the beer and the whisky in him had the hope for more, was sorry he did not have any large parcel with him for delivery, because when one had a large parcel often it was not just taken in

at the door. The bearer would be asked to come in, to carry it here or there, and on such occasions there was sometimes the offer of a *refreshment*.

At last, on that evening, there was a ray of hope when, on the doorstep of the Rev. Dr. Churchkirk, having pressed the lower bell—the one marked *Tradesmen*—the door was opened and the servant to whom he handed the parcel inquired: "Is it from Mackenzie Brothers?"

"Yes, miss," said he.

"You have to step in."

He took off his cap. He scraped his feet on the door-mat effusively, though the night was dry.

"Thank you," he murmured.

The maid-servant closed the door.

"Will you just stand here," said she.

He stood there, subdued, because of the general sumptuousness of that interior. The carpet on which he stood had the resiliency of turf. Old polished brasses twinkled on the walls. Maybe there was going to be a tip instead of a drink, he thought. The servant returned and, entirely blank of countenance, asked him to follow her. He was ushered into a room the walls of which were of books, save one that was covered with pictures in gold frames. No one man, he decided, could ever read all those books and, even granted he had done so, what did he keep them for, having astoundingly read them? Often did Stewart wish he were educated; but no man, thought he, however desirous to get knowledge, get understanding, could ever, surely, even if he did nothing else but read, get all these inside his head.

In a great easy-chair, the back of which was turned towards the door, a man sat, "and you would have thought he was God Almighty," Dick said afterwards, giving details of the incident to Mr. Rigby.

"The man from Mackenzie Brothers," the servant announced in a chanting voice, standing at attention to one side of the door, just inside the room.

The man in the great saddle-bag chair did not look round. He just raised his head, a grand head in a way, with something about it that gave the impression that a sculptor had chisselled it. Arrogance was the outstanding characteristic on it. He raised that head but did not look round. Was he ill, or stiff-necked? Stewart wondered. No, he realised, it was only that there was no curiosity to see what the man from Mackenzie Brothers looked like.

“Inform your masters that I am not responsible for any debts incurred by my wife and daughters,” he carefully and bitingly enunciated. “Do you hear me?” he snapped before Stewart could reply.

“Yes, sir.”

“That is all,” said the cleric and rose to get a match from the mantelpiece to light a cigar.

The servant moved slightly and with a glance towards Stewart opened the door wide again as hint to him to wheel and go.

“Thank you, sir,” said Stewart, turned smartly and went.

The servant closed the door and slipping in front of him marched through the hallway. She opened the outer door, still expressionless. He made no attempt with any magnetic twinkle to draw an ogle or a smile from her. He stepped out, putting on his cap, out into the street, feeling crushed. Several blocks he trudged, lost in consideration of all that, from the pressing of the bell to the closing of the door behind him.

“I suppose he is what they call a Dignitary,” he muttered. “Never even lookit at me. Well, the Man from Mackenzie Brothers sees a variety of folk.”

He felt dashed in spirit, a very different man from the one who had come along Princes Street that morning with a pride, with a pleasure that he belonged to Auld Reekie, that fine city that folk from the ends of the earth, as the saying goes, came to see and admire.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOLIDAY

The delivery of Dr. Churchkirk's message to Mr. Rigby on Saturday morning did not obliterate that incident from Stewart's mind. On the Sunday he felt himself, to a certain extent, the man from Mackenzie Brothers, because the boys—washed and shining—had to be packed off to a mission-hall presided over by Mr. Begg, the cashier, who had given Reid no peace till he promised to send them there. It would do them no harm, he finally decided. They did not understand very well what it was all about, could never give any account of the proceedings that did not sound highly comic to their father.

In the afternoon they went with both parents to hear the band in Princes Street gardens. Stewart could march, nonchalant, through a throng; but Minnie was diffident in crowds, so they sat on a seat retired from the hub and up the slope a little way where at least the more triumphant passages of music came to them, almost giving her courage to go down to the bandstand and wander round it with the promenaders—almost, not quite. "We're fine here, where we are," she said.

Discussing vacation with Todd, Stewart had chosen that week for the sake of the boys.

"You see," he had explained, "school skails then for the summer and I like them to have a holiday feeling, rale holiday, to begin. The wife and me can take them out and about if I'm away from the shop. The rest of the two months they can play in the street, but I like them to start holidays as if they was holidays."

"Very good, we'll arrange that," Todd had promised.

Stewart and Minnie often planned to go away for a whole week, as the Todds did, but they had not the saving gift of the Todds, and had less out of which to save, so the end of that hope was——

"Aw, weel, we can make a good holiday with Auld Reekie for a centre. Plenty of wealthy tourists bide in it more than a week, in the grand hotels along Princes Street, and go out to a different place every day."

Though he had not wound the alarm on the Sunday night, Stewart woke at the usual time and all the preliminaries were over with the wonted

celerity, Charley and Alec shouting, “It’s the holidays!” as soon as they were roused.

Happily all sallied out, the little boys wearing for the occasion (as if it were a Sunday) their celluloid collars and with new laces in their boots, and Minnie resplendent in a dress that had come to her from her one-time mistress who never forgot her in spite of, or because of, the natural cause of losing her as a parlourmaid.

There had been a time when an acute observer might have surmised that theirs had been a marriage of necessity, observing something as of legal proprietorship in the woman and something as of invisible ball-and-chain in the man. Both, perhaps—during the period when he was still finding only casual labour—had the manner as of those with a grudge against Nature’s way of linking effects with causes. But that soon wore off and would never have existed, no doubt, had it not been for the hard times, the scarcity of employment. Reid had felt that luck was with him when he applied for, and obtained, the job with the Mackenzies.

A happy couple they must have appeared to be even to the most cynical as they emerged from Drummond’s Wynd, that Monday morning, to the street up which Prince Charles Stuart rode in the ’45, the grand ladies who lived in the tenements then watching him from the windows.

“Oh, where is the sangwidges?” Minnie suddenly screamed as they passed down an opening opposite St. Giles Church.

“I have them—I have them, in the tin box,” soothed Stewart. “I never hear the word *sangwidges* but I mind when the mother of my chum in the regiment came to the barracks to see him and says she, ‘You’re looking well. The army feeding agrees with you.’ Says he, afore he knew what he was saying, ‘It’s no’ the army feeding, mother,’ says he, ‘it’s the beer and sangwidges in the canteen.’ She looked awful taken aback, as if she was feared he would turn into a drouth.”

“Aye,” responded Minnie, “if mothers knew all about their sons in the army they might look melancholy whiles.”

That kept him silent and meditative—and hoping that she was not going to be in a mood for making remarks that might to his conscience seem like casting things up—till they came to the top of a long flight of steps, emerging from the old town, and looked down on the new, saw the undulations of sward, the paths twisting through like pieces of dropped string, the long ribands of flowers in the gardens.

There was something, despite their beauty, that irked Stewart in these beds. *Alignment*—that was it: alignment. The way some of the sergeants loved the big words they had to use! *Alignment*—he had grown weary of it. Even in the army hospitals there had to be alignment. The cots were aligned; the sheets had to be aligned over the chests of the men in them so that an inspecting matron or sister could stand at the end of a ward and see a straight line of sheet-tops all the way to the other end. In the cemeteries the dead soldiers were aligned, row after row, row after row, files of the dead—aligned! And *rootin* (routine): there was another weary word. Well, there was no *rootin* for a week.

"See and no' fall on the stairs," cautioned Minnie, for the boys were bouncing down ahead.

"You shouldna always be checking them," said Stewart. "You dinna want to make them timid. They may have need of all the spunk that is in them to get through life."

"We dinna want them to have a bloody nose," she replied. "See—there you are!" for Charley had fallen and was sitting on a step examining his knee.

"Aw, look at the blood!" exclaimed Alec.

There went the clean handkerchief she had started out with, before, as she said, they had got half-way to the Portobello car.

A policeman at the Register House noticed the family, and promptly mentally docketed: an auld soldier and his wife and laddies going for holidays. His glance met Stewart's.

"Grand morning," said Stewart.

"Aye, a grand morning."

A good omen, that exchange with the policeman: it was going to be a day of ease and friendliness, and there (for another good omen) was the Portobello car just as if waiting for them, the conductor ready to ring the bell, with a hand up signing to them to climb on.

"Up you go, boys!"

Up they went with clatter of tackets. Stewart caught his wife's elbow and up she went too, he close behind. As they came to the top of the steps the car started, the boys teetered one against the other and Minnie came near falling. Reid deflected her stagger towards a seat. Down she dropped, laughing and saying, "Well, we've started." The boys dashed on to the front, but the

mother and father sat at the back so that he could have his *bit smoke* without any one behind to be annoyed by it. Mrs. Reid's expression was of exhilaration as she looked left and right, saw Royal Terrace swerving away to left and the old town visible, to right, below. As they drew near the barracks the "auld soldier," despite his weariness over *alignment* and *rootin*, raised his head and tautened his muscles. The dragoons were at their morning drill in the big square, at the gate little boys and older girls watching, and the sentry was pacing on that strip of stones where Stewart's heels had rung many times.

The boys suddenly came dashing to the back of the car.

"Faither, look, what's he been doing?" Charley demanded.

There was a soldier perched on top of a cart full of rushes that came along the road.

"Cutting rushes," said Stewart.

"What with? What does he cut them with?"

"An auld sabre."

"Where does he cut them?"

"Over in the King's Park."

"Has he a richt to go and cut rushes there?"

"Yes. Soldiers have the right to do anything."

"What does he cut them for? Oh, look!"

Stewart was looking—he was looking over the wall at the riding-school quarters. Yes, there were some rookies in slacks and shirts.

"Aw, did that one fall off?" shouted both boys together, forgetting all about the rushes.

"I didna see. We went past too quick."

"Daddy, can I be a soldier when I grow up?"

"Can ye be? Maybe you'll have to be whether you wish or not!"

On spun the car.

"Can you taste the salt on your lips?" asked Minnie.

"Aye, I can," said he.

“We’re on our holidays,” she murmured and sat closer to him, pressing an arm against the back of his. A moment later she opened her purse and handed him a shilling as the conductor mounted to them. And when he had gone—“Keep the change,” she advised. “You’ll need it and more ere the day is over.”

They got off at Bath Street and soon, ahead, was a disturbance in the air and a sound, as well as the taste, of the sea. At a little shop near the end of that street Stewart halted. The boys had charged on, missing the shop because of breakers ahead, and by their motions they were already surveying the length of the waterfront.

“They wee boats in the window there,” said he, “if we was to get one we could keep it till the end of their holidays—the last twa-three days—and afore they went back to school again they could gang down to the pond in Inverleith Park and sail it. I’d like them to begin and end the holidays with a feeling of holiday.”

She pondered the matter.

“They would break it afore then,” she prophesied.

“We could get the lassie in the shop to put it in a box,” he suggested.

“Aye, and they would be speiring at me all the time, ‘Oh, mither, what’s in the box? Oh, mither, what’s in the box?’ ”

He was momentarily downcast.

“It’s a good idea,” she admitted. “We’ll keep it in mind for later. As I said, if they had it now it would be broken long before their two months holiday came near an end.”

“That’s right too,” he agreed, and had a pride in her acumen.

She was a grand manager. Even that system of relinquishing his pay envelope to her and getting his shilling for the week, galling though it seemed at times—especially if Kerr or Malcolm saw her or the boys meeting him at the door, and smirked—had much to be said for it. They would all be in the Poorhouse if it was not for her.

He was holding her arm when they emerged from that street on to the Esplanade to join the whooping callants. Formerly it was looked upon as rale fast for a woman to have a man holding her arm in the street. When they *walked out* he used to crook his arm and she put a hand in the crook; but one saw lots of men, these days, holding the elbow of the woman they walked

with. She liked it, too. She liked to feel Stewart's hand there as they came out to the sweep of the wind—on holiday.

Their chief anxiety on the waterfront was to keep the boys looking at the waves instead of at the shop-windows.

"Aw, see the wee castle with a slit in the top! That's a money-box."

"Aw, see the bucket and spade!"

"Aw, see the boats! Price sixpence, faither. And there's one for threepence."

Then, of their own accord, they were suddenly attracted the other way.

"Faither and mither, look at the donkeys!"

A string of them, small, sturdy, and shaggy, stood in the sand beside a lad who sat with his gaze on the esplanade.

"A donkey-ride for the laddies," he suggested, rising and pointing at them. "A donkey, a donkey!"

"He's crying ye a donkey," remarked Stewart to his wife.

"No, he's—aw, you!" for his fun penetrated.

"He wants to give me a ride," said little Alec. "Faither, the man wants to give me a ride."

"Maybe on the way back," said his mother.

"Could we not give them a ride now," asked Stewart, "for a start? What does the paymaster say?"

"Aw, you!" she exclaimed again, rolling an eye at him.

The boys had their ride, Charley hanging on as for dear life, Alec slipping sideways and the donkey-man plunging beside him in the sand, thrusting him into place.

Then all sat down together, the children to compare their impressions of a donkey-ride and Minnie and Stewart to watch the waves, listen to their rhythmic sullen thud on the hard-packed sand.

"You should build castles," said she.

"How do you do that?" asked Alec.

"You remember," she said.

"Oh, aye."

But the castle-building stopped just when their mother was about to cheer them by saying they were grand architects.

"Look at them along there," said Charley. "They got a bucket to help them—that wee fella and lassie—and a spade. They fill it with sand and then coup it, and there's the castle."

"Aye," agreed Stewart, "that is so, but Charley Reid and Alec Reid can make better ones without a bucket!"

The pride of that thought restrained them from a demand for one of the buckets and one of the spades they had seen in the window of the boats and money-box. It must have been near noon when they announced that they were hungry.

"We'll away up to a seat to eat our sangwidges. We'll get sand in them here," said Minnie.

There were more people on the promenade than when they arrived, but they found a vacant seat; and the sandwiches had just been devoured to the last crumb, Minnie was looking into her purse thoughtfully, wondering if they might take the boys along to where the shops were and give them a bottle of lemonade, when a man passing by caught Stewart's glance and, bowing, took off his hat. Stewart bobbed up a little way in his seat and touched his cap.

"Well, are you taking a holiday?" asked the newcomer.

"We're just having a day down here," replied Stewart.

"This your family?"

Stewart rose.

"Aye," said he. "This is my wife, Mr.—er—Mr.—I forget."

"Miller."

"Aye, aye. Mr. Miller, this is my wife. This is Mrs. Reid."

Mrs. Reid bowed.

"And this is Charley and Alec."

"How do you do, Charley and Alec?"

"Say How-do-you-do? to the gentleman."

They thought it over, then said, "How do you do?" to their boots.

“Well,” said Mr. Miller, “I’m just taking a week’s holidays. But it is the afternoon and the evenings that are best down here. This is as good as the Riviera and what they call the Côte d’Azur that you see in the picture papers. I just sit on a seat here for a week’s holidays—Saturday and Sundays it’s a treat—watching the silly fools go by. Good-day to ye.”

“Who is he?” asked Minnie when he was out of earshot.

“He’s the barber I gang to.”

“Oh, what a man! Did you ever hear the like?”

“Takes his enjoyment *watching the silly fools go by*!” said Stewart and chuckled. “There’s lots of folk, I think, take their fun laughing at their neighbours, and dinna ken how comic they are themselves if one was minded to laugh at folks.”

“Here’s a man with limonade,” whispered Alec, leaning against his mother’s knees and looking up into her face.

She gazed down at him. She took off his cap and smoothed back a rebellious lock of hair, then set the cap on his head again.

“A man with limonade!” Charles hissed at her.

The man had trundled his little pushcart closer.

“Two bottles, if you please,” said Minnie.

“Do you not want one for yourself?” asked Stewart.

“I’ll have a bottle later, maybe. You wouldna care for one?”

“No—not for limonade. I’ll perhaps have a refreshment in the evening.”

On his way back the lemonade-vendor collected the empty bottles.

With afternoon more people began to arrive—families, courting couples, groups of young men, lassies in pairs; and what with the salt breeze, perhaps, and a sense of freedom, two of these attracted Stewart’s eyes and brought a little light into them somewhat like that in the eyes of a gourmet observing a fine platter. They came along the Esplanade in step, their hands thrust into the pockets of their sports coats, tightening them thereby over their adolescent curves. They walked in perfect step like little feminine soldiers, their chins in air. Sitting there beside his wife Stewart had the thought that if he was a young soldier once again, and sitting there with his pal (the pal of the *sangwidge* story) he would be saying, “What about these?”

As they went past Minnie's gaze followed them.

"Impident young jades!" she commented, turning to her husband.

"Aye," said he, coming back as from a dream of the careless past to a married and settled present.

A group of young men was milling along. Each carried a walking-stick or cane. They were of a different type from those he had observed on the Friday morning as he went to work. Their canes, their sticks, they did not handle as though accustomed to them: these were but appendages for holidays and Sundays. They fenced with them as they walked; they tried to trip each other up with them. Just as they came level with the Reid family on its form one of them posed, left hand on hip, right behind him holding his stick on which he leant, canted back extravagantly. He crossed his legs; he struck an attitude for the amusement of his companions, and *crack* went the stick, broken in two by his weight. Wild applause from his friends as he lurched and recovered and a whoop of joy from Charley and Alec. Down to the beach he jumped and thrust a little way into the sand there the top half of his stick. The lower half he sent spinning in air far off. The whole group then sat upon the form next to the one occupied by the Reids to await the desired sequel. At last it came. Two other young men approached and——

"Look!" one exclaimed. "Somebody has left his walking-stick there!"

Leaping on to the sand he pulled up that trap for the innocent. Cheers, loud cheers and hilarity on the seat next to that occupied by the Stewart Reids. Chagrined, the lad threw away the broken stick.

"Put it up again," one of those on the seat shouted to him.

He hesitated, then did so and rejoined his partner.

"We'll not wait to see if it happens again," said Minnie. "I suppose it is the sea air. I'm that sleepy. By the time we get hame——"

"Aye, maybe we had better be getting hame," responded Stewart.

There was objection from the boys, but the promise of supper on return finished that. They moved slowly, dawdling, leisurely, back to the main street. A car was not in sight but a public-house was and Stewart remembered that when the boys had their lemonade he had half-promised himself a *refreshment* later. "Aw, never heed," he told himself and the sight of a car looming along towards them prevented vacillation.

As they turned into the close in Drummond's Wynd, when the gulch of it was in grey-blue shadow and the yellow chimney-pots aloft were gilded on

their western curves with the sunset, he considered that it had been a grand first day of holidays. In the entrance they met one of their neighbours on the stairhead, who giggled a welcome in passing.

"Been out for the day with the laddies?" she asked.

Minnie replied with a formal little laugh and an, "Aye—oh, aye," and up the stairs they went. She had her doubts of that neighbour, Mrs. Kennedy. Kennedy was employed in some capacity by one of the railway companies but as what Mrs. Reid did not know, for she avoided stairhead conferences in which the information might have been provided in some aside. She knew only that his duties kept him on nightshift and that he sallied out about half-past five every evening, carrying a gleaming dinner-pail, and clumped home every morning about six o'clock. Sometimes, after he had gone, a girl and boy would come up to the Kennedy flat, often the same girl and usually a different boy, and stay a while. The little honorarium she accepted for that hospitality kept Mrs. Kennedy in gin. One of her favourite phrases was, "It's only human nature after all." Yes, Minnie had her suspicions of that neighbour because of having seen (chancing to be on the stairs at the time) some of these entrances of youth—oddly furtive, it seemed to her. She doubted if Mrs. Kennedy was *quite dacent*. Stewart always pooh-poohed that doubt when she expressed it. He pooh-poohed because he was not suspicious, because he was certain that she was not *quite dacent* and did not want to be at the expense of a flitting. For Minnie would certainly want to remove had she been sure. What good would that do? They might go further and fare worse. Mrs. Kennedy did them no harm.

After he was in bed that night he suddenly emitted a guffaw of laughter.

"What are you laughing at?" his wife called to him, she lying in her bed not asleep but thinking upon the happiness of the day and still seeming to hear the waves pound the sand. "Is't yon lads with the broken stick?"

"No," he replied, "I was thinking about the barber."

CHAPTER SIX

JENNY VEEVE

For Tuesday, Minnie had a plan: they would have a sail on the Forth. She had often wanted to go right down to North Berwick and on round the Bass Rock but decided on the sail up-firth instead. It must give one a grand view of the Forth Bridge and, forby, she would not like to set out for the Bass Rock and not get to it, for she was not courting disappointment—plenty of setbacks in life without doing that!—and if it was stormy in the North Sea the boat sometimes stopped at North Berwick and the officers would walk round among the passengers saying, "No, no Bass Rock the day. You'll just have to put in your time here." Or so a neighbour had told her.

They walked all the way to Leith, by Leith Walk, for the exercise; and as they passed in among the docks a policeman there knew before they spoke, by the festive and expectant manner of all, parents and bairns, what they were about to ask.

"Straight on for the pleasure-boats," said he.

The slapping of the water there, and the breeze blowing out of Fife from north-west, gave Stewart a quotation from one of the few poets he knew.

"What's that again, about 'The boat rocks at the Pier o' Leith, Fu' loud the wind blaws frae the Ferry?' Oh, aye, I mind," and he chanted quietly to his wife:

" 'Go fetch to me a pint of wine,
And fill it in a silver tassie:
That I may drink, before I go,
A service to my bonnie lassie.' "

"Well, you'll have no service to your bonnie lassie this early in the day, I hope," said Minnie.

"I'm not suggesting it! I was only minded of that. I had no refreshment yesterday. We get the tickets here. Will you take them?"

"No, I'll give you the money—and see you let me have the change for I've to give you this ten shillings. Ask if weans is half-price."

They shepherded the boys up the gangway to the waiting steamer and as Stewart presented the tickets, and she put into her bag the change he had

duly handed to her—"Can we sit anywhere or have we to gang forward?" she asked of the purser.

"Anywhere, madam," he replied. "The boat is yours."

That answer gave them a very happy feeling.

"Did you hear what he said, mither?" asked Charley. "He said the boat was ours!"

"Yes, but he was only joking, son. See, here's some forms across the deck."

Only a few people were aboard but as they seated themselves others arrived. They waited there, content after their walk, watching the newcomers come up the gangway. A stevedore on the wharf, a blue-jerseyed sailor on board, glanced up at the bridge to which a man in uniform, gold-braided, had mounted and whence he was looking fore and aft, meditatively.

"That's the captain," said Stewart.

"Aye, that will be the captain," said Minnie.

"He's looking to see if there's enough folk on board to start," Charley suggested.

"Oh, he starts at the appointed time irrespective of passengers," his father told him.

"Here's some more coming," said Alec. "Oh, she dropped her bag. Oh, she's seen it—she's picked it up."

"All right. Gangway!" a voice hailed.

The whistle blew a small blast.

"Now we're away!" said Stewart.

Yes, they were away. The ropes were cast off, the whistle gave another, a longer, blast, and with the pulsing of the engines music arose as though the engineers below had started it.

"Oh, we have a band!" exclaimed Minnie.

"Aye. Did you not see them getting ready? Didn't you hear the fiddler tuning up?"

"No. I was looking at the folk coming aboard. I didna hear him."

Stewart gazed pensively at her, then gave his attention also to the band.

Just forward of the bridge three young men played, one a harp, one a violin, one a cornet. What with the pulse of the engines, the slap and hiss of the water, Leith dropping behind, and the music, there was a fine sense of ecstasy for all. So strong was it that they sat still as effigies to contain their exuberance. The music stopped.

"Yes, that's Fife over there," said Stewart in reply to an inquiry, with a tug at his sleeve, from Charley. "That's the smoke of Kirkcaldy away back there—the lang toon, ye ken, it's called, and beyond is Dysart, Buckhaven, Leven and Largo."

"That's where Robinson Crusoe was born," shouted Charley. "Largo, Largo!"

"I dinna think that can be right," said his mother.

"It is so—the teacher telt me. But that wasna his name."

"That wasna his name? Then how was it him?"

"I dinna ken, but that's what the teacher telt me."

"You see how Edinburgh's kind of backing away and rising up," said Stewart.

"Backing away and rising up!" scoffed Minnie. "I see what you mean but of course that's because we're leaving it."

He had no reply to that, the music, having begun again, transporting him beyond mundane tangles. A jig was being played and he looked round.

"If anybody gets up to do a step," said he, "you and me, Minnie, might ____"

"No, no!" she interrupted. "No, dinna, dinna!"

But the waters of the firth were choppy and the invitation to the jig was not taken by any on board.

"I hope I'm not going to be sick," remarked Minnie.

"O Goad, I hope not," replied Stewart. "You don't feel sick, do you?"

"No, I don't just feel sick but I might be."

The violinist came round with a shell, holding it out to the passengers.

"Have you a penny?" asked Minnie.

"I gave you the change."

“Well, here’s a penny you can put in it.”

When the collector had passed by Charley bumped up closer to his mother and with suppressed giggles whispered to her.

“What is’t?” she asked.

He giggled and whispered more.

“Called your father *sir*, did he? Well, I should think he would—a penny for twa pieces of music!” Anon she had to complain: “He’s coming round for a collection again.”

“Aye, so I see,” said Stewart, “and the fella that plays the cornet is having a bit smoke.”

“He canna play the cornet and smoke,” Minnie pointed out.

“The one with the hairp could play and smoke,” said Charley.

“And so could the yin with the fiddle,” Alec opined. “Couldn’t he, faither?”

“Aye, I suppose they could both of them play and smoke,” replied Dick, laughing.

“I think we’d better give them another penny, for the look of things,” said Minnie. “Here you are.”

She slipped a coin into her husband’s hand and he popped it into the shell. The violinist rejoined his companions, the cornet-player nipped out his cigarette and put it behind his ear, the harpist resettled himself on his folding stool.

“They’re queer looking lads,” observed Minnie. “They look kind of dissipated to me.”

Stewart, head on side, studied them but they were playing again and their morals did not matter. They gave a medley of Scots songs and, that over, there was but a brief pause before they played again. When once more the music stopped the young man with the cornet, shell in hand, began another round of the trippers.

“We’ll have to give them another penny,” said Stewart, “but it’s worth it. A pleasure like this comes but once a year. It’s bonny, bonny. You dinna feel sick, do you?”

“No, only with them coming round so often. I think it’s an imposeetion. Here’s another penny.”

Stewart dropped the coin into the shell, but there was no music as they went under the Forth Bridge. Perhaps the little orchestra felt that the bridge sufficed, without accompaniment. As they approached, it seemed to grow, to rise, to soar. Stewart's attempt to convey his impression of a receding and climbing Edinburgh having brought only an explanation of what, of course, he knew, made him enjoy without any comment upon it that astounding effect of soaring of the bridge. He was so taken up with it that he paid no attention to what a deck-hand was telling a group of people about the lengths of span, and about the amount of sway that the lofty structure could stand.

"And that is all it has swayed! Well! Plenty to spare."

"Plenty to spare."

"It's like lace," said Stewart.

"Like what?" asked his wife.

"Iron lace," he replied quickly.

"The boat seems awful wee now," said Charley.

Stewart smiled down on him.

The orchestra struck up again and as soon as the music ceased the violinist approached with the shell. The harp-player, Stewart conjectured, could not leave his instrument for fear it tumbled over.

"This is ower-much of a good thing," whispered Minnie. "If we give again we'll have given them fourpence!"

Stewart was thinking so also, considering to himself that he might have to go another day without refreshment because of these three with their shell. When it was held jauntily under his nose he looked up at the fiddler.

"Do you take me for a millionaire?" he demanded.

The man moved on dreamily, with no expression, even facial, of annoyance. At an impulse Stewart caught him by the elbow. The violinist stopped, half-turned, still expressionless.

"Do you ken the music of *Jenny Veeve*?" Stewart asked.

"Yes, sir."

Stewart took from his trouser-pocket a penny—a penny out of his week's dole—and dropped it into the shell.

“Give us *Jenny Veeve*, young fella my lad,” said he.

The young fellow his lad just nodded and passed on to his collecting with the shell while, in response to a pitying look from Minnie, Stewart said, “Well, it only amounts to a penny from each of us.”

His gaze was on the fiddler when he rejoined his two fellows. He saw him say a word or two to them. The harpist rearranged himself on his little folding stool. The cornet-player shook his cornet and lifted it to his lips. The fiddler raised his bow.

“Oh Jenny Veeve, sweet Jenny Veeve . . .”

It was worth the fourpence itself, threepence out of domestic accounts and a penny out of the week’s pocket-money. Stewart looked over the side, dreaming, watching the fan of water from the boat’s bow spread away and all the little bursting bubbles on its frilled edge. He began to croon and Minnie began to croon, and soon all the people on board were singing—singing, crooning, wailing—“O Genevieve, sweet Genevieve . . .”

That Tuesday was a grand day. When he got to bed Stewart felt as if the mattress was gently undulating. The pulse of the engines continued in his ears, and the music. He hummed to himself, his hands clasped behind his head as he lay on his back, “O Jenny Veeve, sweet Jenny Veeve.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

HOLIDAYS CONTINUE

Wednesday was washing-day. So, while the boys played with other holidaying boys of the neighbourhood (Charley in the game called *Release*, which took the players in and out of closes and over walls and roofs: Alec, not of an age for that, in another game the domain of which was just from one side of the street to the other), Stewart helped at the tub, scouring clothes on the board, turning the mangle. They had dinner in an odour of soap-suds, clothes hanging over their heads from drying-poles that could be lowered to load and then hauled up close to the ceiling. Outside the kitchen window from a protruding pole other washed clothes fluttered like bunting of vulgar celebration.

In the afternoon they walked round the King's Park, on the Queen's Drive. They saw, turning from the Canongate towards the park gates, a kilted sentry pacing before Holyrood, his white spats twinkling. They heard sheep bleat, as if they were in the country, though Edinburgh was encircling them. They saw the willows of Duddingston Loch flicker from green to silver in a wind. They sat down awhile so that Charley and Alec might watch some children flying a kite—and promised them one before the holidays were past. They looked at the louping-stone and the antique jougs outside the old church of Duddingston.

"Well, I suppose in some ways times improve," said Stewart as they considered the jougs. "They dinna put law-breakers to stand out for all to see now, with their heads through iron collars like them."

A while later he spoke again.

"It makes me think of the old days to take this walk," he said.

The remark was drawn from him (the boys still watching, with all their minds, the kite-flying) as he pondered on the louping-stone, and the jougs for malefactors, and a sight of ivied Craigmillar where as everybody knew, Queen Mary lived for a time, and on the inn at which, or so most believed, Bonnie Prince Charlie had slept a night—either the night before, or the night after, the battle of Prestonpans.

"Do you regret the old days?" came a pensive inquiry from Minnie who sat beside him, also meditating.

“Oh, I suppose things improve,” he replied,

She seemed perturbed at that, staring at him forlornly. How was she to know it was the days of Scotland, not their own old days he pondered?

“Do you ken where we are?” she asked.

It was his turn to be perturbed.

“In the King’s Park,” he said, “on the Queen’s Drive,” and then abruptly he realised her meaning. Here was where they had first met, on a sunny Sunday afternoon. “And I’m walking out again with my queen,” he added quietly.

“Aw, you were awful late in saying it,” she remarked, “but I must admit when you do say it, you say it handsome.”

When the boys had had enough of watching the kite-flying, and they all moved on, little Alec soon began to be tired, feeling the walk long. So his father carried him pick-a-back—and thus they returned to the gates again where the eternal sentry, in smart and soldierly manner, was going through all the ordered motions with his rifle, with swaying sporran and white spats, before the brooding palace. They trudged up the Canongate, past the old kirk and the tolbooth, past Playhouse Close and “John Knox’s house” with the chiselled legend on it, *Lufe God above al and yi nychbour yiself*, which Charley had to read aloud, lagging behind there, though often had he spelt it out before.

“We have to be bedded early the night,” said Minnie as they mounted the stairs in Drummond’s Wynd, “for we have to be up early.”

“Where are we going the morn?” asked Charley alertly and Alec sleepily.

“Musselburgh,” she told them.

“When will we have a kite to fly?” Charley wanted to know. “Will you get us one to-morrow?”

“The shops won’t be open in time,” she replied.

“If there’s a kite in a shop in Musselburgh will you buy it for us?”

“We’ll see.”

For that outing the sandwiches were cut the night before and put under an upturned bowl, and the alarm was set—set for an earlier hour, too, than when Stewart was but the man from Mackenzie Brothers. They were on the

street that Thursday (half the week's holidays gone), heading for the Register House even before those were abroad who walk through the morning obviously going somewhere for a week's or a month's wage. They were travelling on the same car-route that had taken them to Portobello but they were going farther, to Joppa and beyond, to Musselburgh.

"Joppa!" exclaimed Stewart as the two boys clattered on the stair to the top deck of the car and he caught Minnie by the elbow to give her a little upward heave. "I never read the name but I mind when Mr. Murray blew down the tube one day—let's sit at the back, Minnie, so I can have a bit smoke without bothering the folk if any others get on. You're supposed to sit at the back if you're smoking. Aye, you laddies can go to the front seats. As I was saying, Mr. Murray blew down the tube and says he, 'Will you get on your jacket and cap, Reid?' When I got upstairs, says he, 'I want you to go to the Holy Land. It's a roundabout route too. Aye, Joppa. You take the car to South America—you gang by Portobello,' says he. Always the same, Mr. Murray is, always the same—on the outside of him, anyhow. Cheery, aye cheery."

Then abruptly he dismissed from his mind the interior of the shop. He was not the man from the Mackenzies' that day.

As the tramcar started he saw a servant in a hotel near the corner shaking a mat and, she looking up, he caught her eye, forgetting in the freedom of that day that he was an old soldier and not a young one. He dropped her a small ogle and then, remembering Minnie, looked away but in doing so arranged his moustache with two quick flicks of a hand.

"Musselburgh, please!" he chanted cheerily as the conductor came up the steps. "We twa and the twa boys forward there."

Morning light lay in an exquisite gold tone on roofs and towers, touched the top of the Calton Hill with an early serenity and as the car trundled on there was Holyrood down below sitting squat and old with memories, the older Salisbury Crags beyond. The knob of the summit of Arthur's Seat was in a serene light against a serene sky. After the car had stopped by Jock's Lodge, Stewart straightened in his seat and squared his shoulders. He might have been sitting a charger. For there was the wall of Piershill Barracks again. The gates were wide open. The sentry paced on the old strip of stones and, turning right about, tramped back again.

"We used," Stewart muttered, "to call it the squirrel on the wheel, whiles, when we were weary of it."

His quick eye noted new horse-dung by the roadside. He rose a little to look over the wall towards that circle of hoof-pounded earth where the rough-riders instructed the recruits.

"I mind," said he, "when my pal got made a rough-rider—with the spurs on his arm. I asked him once how he was getting on at it, how he liked it, and says he, 'I'll tell you, Stewart, but I'll tell nobody else. Whiles there's horses I get there to handle that make me need twa drinks before I can tackle them.' "

Minnie sighed. She recalled a wrangle, a bicker, nearly a quarrel, they once had when he asked her on a Wednesday for the advance of his Saturday's shilling. What, she wanted to know, had the other gone on so soon? Beer, he had told her; and he had drawn erect and with something of a parade-rasp had addressed her: "My good woman, do you ken that after a man's constitution has grown accustomed to it, it is practically a necessity? It is a necessity that I'm learning—learning—to do without." But she dismissed lugubrious memories. Stewart was improving—life was improving.

Both were happy that day. As the car halted at the corner of Bath Street the boys came running back to say, "This is where we got off on Monday." Even in Portobello, as they swung towards Joppa, those on the street were of the early-bird variety. Connoisseur of shutters, Stewart looked down at a man rolling one up there, but a minute or two later he saw a more arresting sight. Down Brunstane Road, so that the tram had to stop to let them go by, came cavalry-men riding, riding bare-back, officers and men, their tunics open showing their shirts, slacks on their legs. Pensively Stewart watched them pass, listened to the frou-frou, the click of hoof, the tinkle of a champed bit, the occasional snort and nicker. A maid at a window of a villa there, he noted, was trying to catch the eyes of one—of any—of the young men; but they paid no heed to her.

"Bonny horses," he remarked, "bonny horses."

And then—"It's a hell of a thing, war!" he burst out. "To think what they lads may come to, minding of a morning like this!"

The car ran on. At the next corner, turning, craning on his seat, he had a glimpse of them all at the full gallop on the empty sands, leaving a broad trail of hoof-marks behind for the rising tide to fill. They veered outward and went splashing into the water.

"It's grand to be a soldier!" said Charley.

“Oh, grand,” replied his father in an accent that even the boy knew was of the ironic. “The sights you see!”

His face was suddenly that of one ten years older at memories of sights he had seen. He was lost awhile, thereafter, for Minnie and the children, in profound memories and meditations upon these memories. Not the buzz of the car and the sound of waves was all he heard. He heard the retching of men gassed; he saw them—the phlegm from their mouths as if they were mad dogs. “But if they dinna all disarm,” he pondered, “what is to be done about it?” He stared, unblinking, at unforgotten battlefields, or battlefields unforgotten by him. He had got through with little scathe, just a *touch* of gas that was so slight the doctors said it was a *tendency to bronchitis* and thus he was not a disability man—but he was something of a sentimentalist: his own good luck did not suffice him. To be blinded at twenty-five, he thought, was dreadful; he had known men blinded at that age.

A volley of gulls squabbling down to some find they had made off-shore drew him from his meditations. And there was Musselburgh ahead—and, in a toy shop window, a kite. The boys saw it even before Stewart had shepherded the family to the pavement.

“Oh, look!” shouted Charley. “You said you might buy—”

“Now bide there, you boys, till we come out,” said Minnie. “We’ll go in, your faither and me, and see the price.”

Outside the brothers waited, in anxiety, in hope—and then an arm stretched into the window and the kite was removed.

“Where will we fly it? Where will we fly it?” they duetted as the father and mother came out, the kite under Stewart’s arm.

“Now, see, see, I’ll carry it till we come to a good place,” he said. “You two are just like a pair of pups jumping round me now. I think I know a good place.”

He led them out of Musselburgh into country roads, the smell of hawthorn and of clover.

“Do you see this auld wall?” he asked on the way. “I was passing by here once and I saw a gentleman pointing to this stone here, saying to the man with him that it was a bit of a Roman bath. The Romans, ye ken, were here; and they were great for having baths. When was the Romans here, Charley, you that’s at the school?”

“Oh, I havena come to that, daddy.”

“You must have begun far back in time if you havena come to the Romans yet,” opined Stewart, and leading on by a road along the edges of which chestnut trees made a duskiness he brought them to a field that had the appearance of communal proprietorship, goalposts for football standing in it and a worn streak at another place that suggested a cricket-pitch. “I think we could fly the kite here,” said he, “without anybody telling us we’re on private property.”

By the time the boys were tired of it the shadows of the trees nearby had considerably lengthened. They sat under one of these trees, beside a path that seemed to be a right-of-way, and ate their sandwiches. Charley and Alec were at one in the opinion that there “werena muckle sangwidges the day.”

“There’s just the same number as you had on Monday,” their mother assured them.

All were hungry, ravenously, when in the late afternoon they came down the slopes into Musselburgh again. Here was Thursday, the week’s holiday half gone, but by canny spending they had money to spare and so could go into a tea-shop or a restaurant for a meal. They chose one, without telling themselves why they did so, in which they would feel least embarrassed. But many other people came in before they had finished the meal, and being surrounded by so great a number of witnesses Minnie lost the self-assurance she had just managed to achieve. She was unaccustomed to eating in public. In an attempt to regain her mental balance she thrust her plate of pudding a few inches from her on the table.

“Do you not like it?” asked Stewart—who had been wondering if he could decently ask for a second helping.

The waitress, observing the motion, came over solicitously to ask if there was anything wrong with that pudding.

“I just don’t care for it,” replied Minnie, feeling very nervous and trying to look dignified.

“Is there something else you’d like instead?”

“No, thank you. I’ve had enough,” and Minnie raised her head with a little backward tilt and either closed her eyes or looked so definitely downward that the effect was of closed lids.

The waitress glanced at Stewart, wondering if there had been some little marital hitch, then went away realising that whatever was wrong—if anything—she could not aid.

The whispered conference they had afterwards as to whether they should leave a tip under the plate, adding to the sense of unaccustomedness, made Minnie come out into the street again with a sense of relief, of escape.

Her manner was extraordinarily stately—regal—homeward bound on the car. Stewart diagnosed that she had one of her spells upon her which public appearances frequently induced—and he left it at that. She recovered of such spells most speedily, he had discovered, if not asked if there was anything wrong with her. It was not, in fact, till they were back again in the High Street, turning the corner into Drummond's Wynd—where playing children were raising sharp, shrill echoes—that she wholly recovered, lost the manner that was half-way between one of grandeur and one of pique.

As they mounted the stairs they came on their neighbour, Mrs. Kennedy, standing at the window-landing, looking out. The odour of gin clung about her—indeed, it was the odour made them aware that she was there, ahead of them. She was looking out, not at a cat-fight or anything of that sort, but at the sunset colours. From that window one could see them, over the roofs, like fire between the turrets and the serrated chimney-stacks of a fragment of the old city, and have a glimpse also, through the cañon of a side street of the crumbling of that glory.

"Good-evening," said Mrs. Kennedy.

"Good-evening," they responded.

"I'm just watching the sunset," she explained, waving a hand limply towards it. "Nature—ah—human nature!"

"Aye, it's bonny," agreed Minnie, somewhat stately of bearing.

"Bonny indeed," said Stewart.

When they got into the flat he set down on a chair and addressed himself.

"Well," said he, "we'll loosen our laces and have a bit wash," then, bent over his boots, he chuckled. "*Human* nature!" he exclaimed, and chuckled again.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HOLIDAYS END

No plans had been made for the Friday, and in the morning Minnie declared herself hardly rested from all the gadding about.

"I canna understand," she said, "how folk can spend their life in a constant round of pleasure. I feel, for myself, I need a day to rest."

Charley and Alec wailingly informed her that they wanted no rest. They wanted to go into the King's Park again and sail the kite. That, she replied would be fine, and their faither could go with them.

"I do not envy the tourists at all," she went on. "A body needs to have time to sit down and think of what she's seeing. There was the Portobello sands and the donkey rides, then there was the boat-sail to the bridge and the folk all singing to the music on the way back, and then there was all the walk round the Queen's Drive. This," she ended, "has been a full week."

But the boys were ramping to go out with their kite.

"I'll cut you each a piece," she promised, "and you can go and sail the kite and just come home when you are ready for supper." Then she turned to Stewart. "Aw, but you dinna want to sit and watch the kite! Let the laddies go alone and you take a walk. I was reading in the papers the other day that it's good for a man to get away alone whiles—and you ken I've heard you complain of the army that a fella always had others round him, talking, talking, and arguing. No privacy. I could make up a piece for you and give you this week's shilling now—so you could have a refreshment—though you'll no' get the envelope till Monday."

"I've enough money left," he said.

Thus it was that slowly, easily, smoking his pipe, Stewart walked down the Mound. He crossed Princes Street at quick-step, with a distant view of Leng and Malcolm putting out the sun-blinds, and did not slacken till he was well over the hill-crest at George Street. By Canonmills and Tanfield, past the scent from the Botanical Gardens and through Wardie to Granton, he strolled, no green bag with him. From Granton he coasted the estuary eastward towards Cramond.

The tide was far out. The edge of the firth was a thin white wavering line, frothing beyond an expanse of wet sand, across which a woman was walking with intent. Ever and again she stopped to probe with a stick, picked up something and tossed it into a basket which she held. She was too far away for Stewart to see what she was about though her motions were clear. He sat down on a bent-tufted hillock to watch her. Splashing through the water she kilted her skirts higher. He rose and walked on slowly, Cramondwards, parallel with her, his head turning; and every now and again, out there, she seemed to be observing him observing her.

"The saucy jade!" thought he, as she kilted still higher her coats, with a kind of flaunt, her white legs flickering.

If he were a younger man he would give her a wave of his hand; but supposing—were he to wave—that she responded and drawing nearer, coming up to him, showed the face of a witch? He recalled a grim old sergeant who married surely the plainest woman ever seen and, when somebody dared to insinuate that she was plain, instead of knocking the speaker down laughed and replied, "I can leave her alone with an easy mind." Old service jokes, old service stories: they seemed to lose their zest. He paid no more attention to the woman out there, whatever she was howking for in the wet sands, but trudged on, up and down, over the sandy hillocks.

There was another side to *the service*. There poured through his mind this and that of a soldier's life. Since seeing his regiment exercising on Portobello sands thoughts of the army had been much with him. Incidents he had imagined forgotten—hoped forgotten—returned as he walked alone, on holiday, all manner of them: He recalled hearing, from an infantry regiment that lay near them in Flanders, of a sergeant of the mean sort who needed always to have a *down* on somebody. No private in peace time knew when his life would not be hell because of that man. Then the war came and in the first action they executed him. Ahead of his men, he had looked over his shoulder (it had all been described to Stewart) and his face showed a sudden realisation, as he saw the expression on theirs, that next minute he would be gone. He recalled the tanks. The tanks were a great consolation, wallowing along beside one; but they could not pick their way through fields strewn with the dead—and the wounded, even if half of these were their own wounded. The drivers did their best, but they were not stretcher-bearers and they had their orders. "Don't you know there's a war on?" was one of the slogans. And when there is a war on Pity has to keep in its place.

With these dismal thoughts he came to the River Cramond and sat down to eat the *piece* he had brought with him and watch the tide come in. Some bonny walks there were, thought he, in Cramond Woods, though the water flowing through them looked stained after passing the mills and there was a foreign odour among the leafy denes. On the road coming down to the river there appeared a lad, a lass, and an elderly man. They apparently did not see him sitting there as they passed down to a jetty where a small boat joggled and tugged at a painter's end. Into the boat got all three, lad and lass astern, man at the oars. That must be the ferryman, Stewart decided, watching him row the few yards across. The two young people disembarked there. *Weel pitten-on* folk, they were, a well attired pair, the young man wearing tweeds of the kind from which one could whiff peat-reek on a wet day, and carrying what looked to Stewart like a new ash stick, and the girl in what Minnie called tailor-mades, wearing brogues. Out of the boat, they walked away smartly on a path among trees as if setting out on a rare tramp. The ferryman came back with slow-dipping blades.

Stewart rose. Here was Friday and all week he had not had a *refreshment*. So up he went to the inn.

There was another man in the bar-room, lost in meditation, gazing at a half-emptied glass of beer. Only by a slow movement of eyes he showed himself aware of Stewart's entrance. When Reid, glass in hand, sat down the moody one nodded to him.

"What regiment, might I ask?" he inquired.

Stewart told him, with a sharp look, and added, "And yours?"

Yes, another old soldier. They fell into talk, or it might more rightly be said Stewart listened to a monologue, the title of which was Women Workers and Women in Business.

"Aye, there seem to be more than ever," Stewart agreed when the lecture seemed at an end.

"I think I have evolved the reason," said the lecturer. "I believe it is because they don't go on the tiddley. You see, a man will go on the tiddley. And even presuming that he does his work better, that—going on the tiddley—handicaps him. He will go on the tiddley," repeated the domestic or political economist, quaffing from his glass. Then—"Where do you work? What are you doing?" he asked.

"Oh, portering, portering."

"Where?"

"In Edinburghy."

The lack of particularity in that reply made the inquirer frown.

"They tell me," said he, after a pause, returning to the subject of his causerie, "that in Dundee, now, there are about seven women to a man." The dolorous accent changed to one of levity. "A fellow should be able to get a harem there."

"Aye, he should be able to do that," replied Stewart, rising. "Well, it's a pleasure to have met you. Good-day to ye."

Something in his manner made the stranger wonder if Stewart had a sense of superiority, imagined that his had been a more illustrious regiment. No—it was only that Stewart objected to curiosity. What did it matter where he worked? Wiping his moustache with a clean kerchief from the washing-day he set off, enjoying the ruffle of the buxom trees and the rising music of larks in that domed blue day. Stepping well he wheeled anon into the Queensferry Road.

Years before they had come to Barnton Station on a day of holiday—Minnie and he, Charley and the baby—and gone down the road he had just left, to the firth at Cramond. Recalling that day he thought much of the boys as he swung along, wondering what was ahead of them. Unless they showed themselves specially clever at school—able to catch some of these scholarships or bursaries he read about—what chance had they? There were people who said that education was of no use, that those who were educated were no better off than lots with less book-learning. He doubted the truth of that. They always would have their book-learning for a comfort if no more. It must be grand to have one's head full of knowledge of this and that. Not that he would have them able to read Latin (like Teddy Leng) or old Greek—which were what they called dead languages, though he had heard that knowledge of them helped a man with his own language which was founded on these old tongues. But he would like them to get wide general knowledge. It was all on their own shoulders. He could not help them. He could give them no *send-off*. He had had none himself—but things were easier in the former days. Maybe folk were right who said machinery was one of the main causes of the bad times for the world.

"It's a fair problem every way you look at it," he muttered—and wished again that he was educated so that he could understand at least a bit further into articles he read in the papers about the straits that people everywhere had got into.

There were times when it seemed that those like himself, in all countries, were kept in the dark about affairs and were the dupes of a few long-headed financiers who wanted to get all the money in their hands. And there were others besides the financiers who might work their evil: the men who were mad for a feeling of Power.

"If we are not at the mercy of knaves we are at the mercy of lunatics, it seems," he thought. "Aye, and we let ourselves be at their mercy too, in every country. And then there are the folks with shares in the munition factories. No wars, no dividends from munitions of war! Goad, these are bonny roses in that garden," and he slackened pace to look at them over a trimmed hedge.

Quickening pace as he walked on again his thoughts went back to the boys. Would it be the army for them? He hoped not. Mr. Murray told him one day of a lady, a customer, who was talking to the boss. She had been deploring the peace conferences. "If armies and navies have to be abolished," she had wailed, "what are we to do with our sons?"—a lady she, Mr. Murray had explained, married into one of these families that had given, as they say, for generations, its sons to the army, the navy, and the church.

"No, no, no," he muttered, considering that even if one got through war unscathed oneself one had memories of others who had not, who had got through very badly. Often in the middle of the night, half-awake, half-asleep, it would seem as if they were still crying out for God to help them and let them die. He would get up and have a bit smoke, pondering what it was all for. Aye, the laddies: he hoped they would not have too bad a time for the duration of their lives.

As he was drawing near to Edinburgh again a tramp halted him.

"Could ye spare a copper, mister?"

Stewart hesitated. He had to work hard for coppers.

"What regiment?" asked the tramp.

"What do you mean by *What regiment*? I dinna understand you."

"Aw, I ken an auld soldier when I see him!"

"To hell with that!" exclaimed Stewart. "But here's tuppence to ye—and good luck."

When he came to pavements from the country roads his heels rang out sharply with the ring of heels that have made their pace and their rhythm some while. Passing between fine houses, approaching the Dean Bridge, he

felt for once envy of those who lived in such grand homes. Their summer holidays were not but of a week, and when they went away their houses were all refurbished for them. There were the boards up in front of some of them: *Alterations by MacNiven and Bruce—Painters and Decorators.* He wondered if a discount was granted on the bill for allowing these boards to be put there. On Telford's high bridge he marched on and coming again to Princes Street took a tangent across to its gardens and through the gardens sauntered.

The steady trudge of his country walk was over. He walked slowly up the Mound, crossed the Lawnmarket where Hume the historian lived and Samuel Johnson once rolled his enormous bulk into an entry accompanied by the lean Boswell who was to make him immortal—though Stewart Reid had never heard of either. Through Mr. Murray he knew how the street had its name. It was not that there had been lawns there once but that there had been the booths of the linen sellers, the *lawn* venders. Though he had never heard of Hume, of Johnson, of Boswell, the walls and the stones did tell him, in a vague fashion, that here was a wonderful old city.

With a certain pride in belonging to Auld Reekie, so full of ghosts, he turned down Drummond's Wynd. Charley and Alec, homing with their kite, were ahead of him. Well, what an extraordinary thing, he considered: While he had been on that long walk, all manner of diverse thoughts in his mind, the laddies had been kite-sailing—all that time! They ascended the stairs together and found Minnie had been out on her Friday's shopping and had brought home a finnan-haddie for supper.

"Did you have a refreshment to-day?" she asked.

"Aye, I had a refreshment at Cramond and I gave tuppence to a tramp on the Queensferry Road."

"Well, we've done fine," she said. "We've done very well, very well indeed, for the expenses of the holidays. I was thinking we might finish by all going to the Pitchers to-morrow."

They went to the Pictures—first house—on the Saturday evening. There were topical newsreels—which were chiefly of reviewing troops and saluting flags in various countries. There was a talking and musical cartoon.

"They must make hundreds and hundreds of drawings for that," Minnie surmised. "Thousands, maybe, each one just a wee bit different from the one afore it. I suppose when it hurts the eyes it is because they did not do some close enough."

“Aye,” said he, “but the thing that I marvel at is how the movements and the music fit. The drawings keep time to the tune, you see.”

What to think of the chief and starred attraction of the evening they did not know. Minnie would have blushed had they not been in the dark. There were some bonny pictures in it, Stewart thought. He preferred them to the story. Little Alec, leaning against him, fell asleep. As they came out into the night that had deepened while they were in there, said Stewart to Charley:

“Well, how did you enjoy it?”

“There was ower-much kissing in it,” replied Charley. “They was aye kissing.”

That criticism carried Stewart and Minnie homeward several blocks with occasional appreciative chuckles. On the way they paused here and there to see if there were any bargains of produce going cheap, the week near an end. But——

“I’m not greatly impressed,” said Minnie, looking at the *knock-down* prices; so home they went.

Sunday had a certain element of *rootin* about it, with the boys going off to Mr. Begg’s mission-hall. Even in the afternoon there was a touch of *rootin* as they paraded to the gardens to hear the band play. They found a seat well back from the crowded hub.

“We can hear fine here,” said Minnie.

It was happy music and the colour of the flowerbeds and of the dresses was good to see. So was the grand rock standing there with the afternoon sunlight on the western windows so that it looked as if the place was on fire within—as Stewart commented, leaning back on the form and looking upward.

“It is only the sun on the windows,” Minnie explained.

“I ken that. I didn’t really mean you would think it was on fire. I only mean it looks like fire inside. Don’t you think it’s bonny, the light like that on the panes of glass?”

“Yes, it’s bonny,” she agreed. “It has been a maist memorable week of holidays,” she added.

“Aye. And I had only one refreshment,” said Stewart.

They laughed together.

That night the alarm clock was again set and when it sprung in the morning the man from Mackenzie Brothers woke, stretched, and shut it off in the wonted way.

CHAPTER NINE

THE SUN-BLINDS GO UP

Splendid though the holidays had been, it was not unpleasant to be back —welcomed by Todd and Leng. The first order, because of the day's brilliance, was, "Reid, would you and Leng put out the sun-blinds."

When the blinds had been put up, mitigating the glare in the shop for the comfort of customers, the electric lights over the polishers' tables had to be lit at times so that they might be sure the work they were employed upon would give satisfaction if by chance examined through a microscope.

Old Todd was pleased to have Reid there again. He looked upon him as somewhat of a rogue, or at least one with capacity for roguery, but likeable withal. There was always the fact that Stewart appreciated his sort of nonsense. He was in nonsensical mood that morning, a mood for telling stories of a kind that Kerr referred to as Damned Lies and that Teddy smiled over on the way home to his lodging, finding them in the category of Folk Imagination. Stewart had never heard of folk imagination but delighted in these bravura pieces as much as Leng.

"I must tell you, Stewart, of a visit I paid to the auld barracks as a member, long ago, of the regiment. I went for to pay my compliments to the new colonel. I went down yesterday. I arrived at the gate wearing my silk hat, my frock coat, my white weskit, my spats, and I carried my Manilla cane with the gold heid. And the sentry cries out," his voice bellowed martial through the basement, " 'Turn out the guard!' "

Teddy, polishing, smiled joyfully as he listened. Stewart ceased polishing the coffee-pot, the putting of a lustre upon which had been his first task, to give full attention.

"Out turns the guard for auld Todd and—"

The whistle blew. A doting expression vanished from Stewart's face on hearing the summons.

"Reid to go out," he announced.

Mr. Murray was in need of an outsize watch-glass. On a piece of paper he traced its circumference and away marched Stewart to the glass-supply company's place in Pilrig. As he strode back, the watch-glass wrapped in

tissue-paper safely in a waistcoat pocket, he was suddenly halted by a man who stepped before him, blocking his way with a profane expression of delight at seeing him. Stewart stared, acknowledged that he too was damned, and there they stood shaking hands vigorously. Here was his old pal, he of the *beer and sangwidges* at the canteen story.

"I thought, David, you were in Glasgow," said Stewart.

"So I am or—well, so I am," replied David. "But I had to come through to my wee brother's marriage. Saw him off in the train this morning on the honeymoon. We've time for a dram, Stewart, you and me, before I have to catch my train back to Glasgow."

The encounter having occurred at the very door of a public-house they had but to right-wheel and enter.

"A rum ration and over the top, I suppose," suggested David.

"All right."

Stewart, when *Here's to you* was pronounced over the noggin, put hand in pocket and shuffled a shilling from his pay-envelope (that Mr. Begg had handed to him as he passed through the shop after putting out the sun-blinds with Teddy) in readiness to stand his treat in return. That second noggin tossed down with a *Here's luck*——

"Come and see me off," said ex-rough-rider David.

Stewart felt he could not well say nay to that. Feebly he began, "I'm on duty, on a message, but——"

"But there are extenuating circumstances."

"Aye, indeed."

After all, thought he, it is but a step or two aside into the station. "I can see him off and hurry back with the glass," he considered.

"My bag is at the left-luggage office," said David among the rattle of trucks on the platforms. "I'll have to run to get it."

There was a queue there and the result was that they saw the train for Glasgow go out beyond a gate that was abruptly slammed in their faces by the ticket-inspector.

"Just lost it!" exclaimed David. "Well, no matter. It was good to see you. When is the next train?"

"In just an hour," the ticket-checker told him.

"Well," said Stewart, thinking of his job, of Minnie and the boys and the difficulty of getting employment, "I doubt I'll have to leave you, for ye ken that——" he tried to be jocose about his inability to tarry, "England expects that every man will do his duty."

"And Scotland kens they will," answered David. "So I won't detain you. But the final duty for us is a wee *doch-an-doris*—a quick one afore we part."

The doors of the station buffet winked to them as some one made exit.

"We'll go in the buffet," said David. As they sat down to their *doch-an-doris* there he launched into a dissertation on pubs and pubs. "I prefer," said he, "to come into a place like this instead of an ordinary pub, for you do not see here the disgusting sights you have to witness where they fill a man drunk and then heave him out on his hinderlands. That's a sight that makes my blood gorge."

"Makes your blood gorge," replied Stewart.

"Aye, indeed. In England, in London, they treat folk better. There is something sanctimonious about ower-many publicans in Scotland. It is one of the most disgusting sights in Scotland, to my mind—the heaving out of customers when they have spent their money."

"It is indeed," Stewart agreed. "But of course women will get all the jobs if the men will go on the tiddley."

What did he say that for? he wondered. As David did not seem to think it inappropriate he went on: "Even supposing he does his work better, going on the tiddley handicaps him."

His old pal had quaffed the wee *doch-an-doris*.

"One on me now before we part," said Stewart.

"All right."

Their glasses recharged, emptied and set down with an air of definite finality, David demanded another—a little quick one—on him.

"I feel that way," he said. "You know how it is at a marriage—or a funeral."

Stewart held up a hand in the *stop* signal. Across the table from him David held up his hand similarly, renouncing his desire for another, and then they rose, their heads almost bumping together as they stooped over the table in that action.

The platform barrier was open again, the ticket-checker like a sentry beside it.

"You'll catch this one," said he.

"Well, it's fine to have encountered you. Remember me to them all—everybody!"

"I will that. Ta-ta, David."

Very smartly Stewart returned to the Mackenzie Brothers. Mr. Murray, employed on a fiddling repair to a very small watch, looked up aware that some one who had entered the shop had stopped before his enclosure. And —"My Goad!" he gasped, for Stewart had the watch-glass for which he had been sent in his right eye-socket, monocle fashion, and was gazing at Mr. Murray, very jocose. In some places, in some lands, in some cities, no doubt such a procedure on the part of a porter would be looked upon simply as evidence of natural gaiety, not to be censured, not to be attributed, necessarily, to Drink. But here was Edinburgh—and Princes Street.

"Give me that glass and for Goad's sake get downstairs," hissed Mr. Murray.

Stewart elevated an eyebrow, dropping the glass into his palm, tendered it to Murray—and *got* downstairs. Watty Barr was there, at the long trestle-table near the door, dismembering a clock. Kerr had apparently just descended.

"How is the old soldier to-day?" he was inquiring as Stewart entered.

"Very well, thank ye for spiering," Todd replied with dignity.

"And how's the temporary gentleman?" Kerr asked next, with a curling lip.

"Very well indeed, thank you," replied Leng, accepting the title, however intended, lightly, and thus, if the intention was unpleasant, nullifying it.

Stewart carefully removed his jacket, put on his two aprons and slipped unobtrusively into his place in the corner. Sedately he took up the coffee-pot again and doucely set to work. Mr. Murray's fussy step was on the stairs. He came pattering to the washtub, chirping cordially, "And what is agitating the public mind this lovely summer day?"

"We are just polishing," said Todd.

"There is trouble brewing in Europe," declared Murray, but in a cheerful tone. There was always a dancing gaiety in his eyes; one never knew when

he was serious, if ever.

"There's aye trouble in Europe," observed Kerr.

Malcolm, by the way, was also there preparing whiting at the central table. This was simply forced upon the Mackenzie Brothers, despite the fact that they were the most honourable of men. Nobody would believe—no butlers, no employers of butlers—that the silver arriving from the shop was cleaned so beautifully with only plain whiting and sometimes rouge. They demanded the *special whiting your staff uses*, so every now and again Malcolm had to take a lump of ordinary whiting, break it up with a hammer, with a bottle for rolling-pin roll it into powder which he wrapped up in packets that were labelled with the legend *Mackenzie Brothers Prepared Whiting*. That was the nearest to guile that James Mackenzie ever came—and, after all, as he told himself, it was, it was truly, prepared whiting, and specially prepared for those who would not take his word for it that that was all his staff did with the blocks of whiting, and do it for themselves. The price put on the packets was merely protective, so as to prevent people from thinking it could be no good and going elsewhere to buy.

"Yes," said Murray, musing on the trouble in Europe as he washed his hands, "we never learn. We are mostly fools, we human beings. We go to our churches and read that we should love our enemies—a hard job I admit—and come out of our churches to hate even them that have not despitefully used us. Individuals and nations—it is all the same, hating the neighbour."

"I sometimes think," remarked Leng, "that if all over the world all the people—those whom the politicians and the writers on sociology call the proletariat—were to laugh at the order *shoulder arms* it would be well for the world."

Stewart did not understand some of these words but vaguely felt that Teddy was a friend.

"Ah, but it is verra nice," said Todd, "verra nice to learn to do things with a click—in a smart and soldierly manner."

"I know," Teddy replied, "but we can do things with a click apart from—well, from having the silver-polishers of one country murdering the silver-polishers of another because they've been told to."

"That's true," admitted Todd (old soldier and father of soldiers killed), in a dolorous tone.

"You speak like a socialist—or a communist," said Kerr to Teddy. "I thought gentry were all conservative!"

No one paid attention to that.

“What does Stewart, sitting there half-chowed in the corner, think of it all?” asked Malcolm.

“Half-chowed!” exclaimed Stewart. “Half-chowed! What do you mean?”

Todd looked at him suspiciously. There was a slight thickness in his utterance. With a glassy glitter in his eyes he rose.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he began, “I will recite for you *The Chairge of the Light-Headed Brigade at Ballyhoo* that my old pal in the army made up.”

Watty Barr left his table in the rear and drew near, smiling; Kerr, his box sufficiently filled with shavings, stood by, awaiting developments; Malcolm stopped plying his bottle-roller over the whiting, and Murray, drying his hands slowly, twinkled.

“Half a league, half a league,
Half a moment and I’ll tell ye.
Cannon to right of them——”

Stewart waved a hand towards the street,

“Cannon to left of them——”

he waved a hand to rear of the basement,

“Cannon in front of them——”

and he took one step forward, pointing. Then he turned and indicated the wall.

“Cannon ahint them
As right well they knew.
But what did they do?”

He drew himself erect, paused, looked round from man to man.

“Did they lay down their tools?” he bellowed, giving another pause for effect while all those in the basement looked on and wondered.

“No, the lightheaded fools.
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.
Into the valley of Ballyhoo
Rode the six hundredweight.”

There was a blast upon the whistle to which Teddy promptly attended.

“Sir!” he shouted, clapped his ear to the mouthpiece, then his mouth to it again. “Stewart Reid?” he inquired. “Oh, Reid is—Reid is—would I do instead, sir?” and back went his ear to the tube, anxiety showing on his face. Then—“Very good,” said he, his tone suggesting that it was very bad. “Stewart, you’re wanted upstairs. Mr. Mackenzie wishes to speak to you.”

“O dear, O dear!” sighed Mr. Murray.

Watty tittered.

“Ah-ha!” said Kerr.

“Get your cock and a bull story ready,” Malcolm advised. “You’ll need it, Stewart.”

Stewart, who had sat down again, rose and lurched slightly.

“Come with me, Mr. Murray,” he said, turning to him. “Just give me the touch of your shoulder to the boss’s door. Just the touch of your shoulder as we walk will see me through. I may stagger in a walk but I can stand fine at attention.”

Murray, the gaiety still in his eyes but with a doubtful shake of his head, squared his shoulders and Stewart stood beside him.

“Away we go,” said Stewart.

“No, no, no!” rasped Todd. “That’s only going to give it away. Don’t try that old soldier’s trick. You have got to see this through yourself, Stewart. Here, a minute,” and opening a drawer under his table he took a comb and brush from it. Very seriously he put a parting in Stewart’s tousled hair, smoothed it down. “There!” he said. “It’s wonderful the difference that makes.”

“Well, good luck to you all,” said Stewart, and marched away upstairs very straight—perhaps a shade too straight—but with no evident divagation in his steps, not requiring, after all, any touch of a shoulder to steady him.

CHAPTER TEN

THE SUN-BLINDS COME DOWN

Mr. Begg, the moment after Stewart had gone demurely downstairs, had raised his head and sniffed. Then he scurried to Mr. Mackenzie's room, his eyes popping from their sockets.

Mackenzie thought there must have been a robbery. He was dictating a letter to Miss Lennox, she of whom (or of whose clothes) Nell Drummond had made a remark of a sort that old Todd deplored.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

"Oh, Mr. James, I feel you ought to know. That porter Reid came in just now from some errand he has been out on and as he passed me I could smell him *fair stoving* with liquor."

Mackenzie was annoyed. The matter seemed trifling compared with the magnitude of what might have been expected from the expression on the cashier's face. It was not a robbery, only a smell of liquor that he came to report. Besides, there was a part of Mr. Mackenzie that retained the old schoolboy's dislike for a clype, a tell-tale, though of course perhaps Begg should clype in a case of this kind. Besides again—he did not care to be called *Mr. James* by Begg. Auld Todd and Mr. Murray were the only ones entitled to address him so: he liked them to call him *Mr. James*. They were the only remaining employees who had been in the shop when his elder brother was alive.

"Rum, I think, it was, by the specially disgusting smell," Mr. Begg continued.

"Probably," replied James Mackenzie. "They had it during the war to help them to keep warm—and for other reasons. The German soldiers, I understand, were given ether. You can blow down for him to come up and see me."

He continued the dictation of the interrupted letter, then looked here and there over his desk with a little whispering whistle, a mannerism his secretary knew as part of him.

"Thank you," he said. "That will be all just now."

Miss Lennox went silkenly away, leaving the door, as he liked it to be, ajar.

"Was you wanting to see me, sir?" came a rich voice in the doorway.

"Yes, come in, Reid."

Stewart stepped into the boss's room and stood at attention, stood steady, but his eyes were unduly brilliant, even for him, and his face was ruddy. Still—he had been on holiday, and perhaps was sunburnt, thought Mackenzie. But, *poof*!—yes, alcohol, rum.

"You have been drinking in business hours, have you, Reid?" he asked.

"I would never dream of telling a lie to you, sir," replied Stewart, fixing his boss's eyes with a stony stare. "It's maist regrettable," he added.

Somehow Mr. Mackenzie wanted to laugh, but he agreed.

"Most regrettable," he said. "Have you any explanation to offer?"

"Yes, sir, indeed I have, sir," said Stewart. "You see, sir, we meant well."

"You meant well? Who meant well? Who are the *we*?"

"Maister Begg and me."

"Mr. Begg! What has Mr. Begg got to do with it?"

"Well, sir, you see, when I was going on my holidays he very kindly said to me, 'Reid,' he says to me, 'do you not think it might be advisable for me to keep your pay-envelope for the holiday week till you come back? Then,' says he, 'you wouldna be tempted to overspend on your holiday,' or words to that effect, sir. I thanked him kindly. I realised that he was thinking for my good. You understand me, sir?" for there was, to his mind, an unintelligent look on Mr. Mackenzie's face as he listened.

Mackenzie, instead of but holding chin in hand, elbow on table—the attitude in which he had sat during that preamble—grasped the whole lower part of his face and looked downward at his table. That expression as of anxious desire for complete understanding in Stewart's eyes made him wish to laugh again.

"Well, sir, he gave me the pay-envelope this morning and—I'm being honest with you—I had but one solitary refreshment all through the holidays and when I was out this morning I just took a shilling from it for my week's allowance. You see, my wife aye gives me a shilling for the week—my ain pocket-money, like. On Saturday nights . . ." Stewart felt he was losing his

way but continued, “I go shopping with her. On baith the Friday and the Saturday nights she goes shopping, but on Saturdays I go with her. And she’ll say to me, ‘That’s a nice haddock,’ or it might be, ‘There is a nice bit of brawn,’ she’ll say. You understand me, sir?” he asked, not understanding himself very well.

“I understand you, but I miss the point.”

Stewart realised that he was truly wandering.

“I’m explaining this in full to you, sir,” he said, trying to recover a sense of direction, “so that you’ll see just how the matter stands.”

“But you should really not take any liquor in business hours,” said Mr. Mackenzie.

“I ken that, sir,” replied Stewart. Then began invention—the *cock and a bull story*, as Malcolm would say. “But you see my wee brother was being married the day and I didna like to ask the day off after having had my holidays. But when I was out I saw by the time that they would just be getting in the train so I ran in to say good-bye, and ye ken how it is, sir, at a marriage or a funeral. He wanted me to have a dram in the buff-fet and I telt him it was against my principles in my employer’s time; I says to him, ‘I am on duty,’ I says. ‘England expects that every man will do his duty.’ And then I happened to feel the envelope in my pocket so I asked him to have one with me, for auld time’s sake. We were soldiers together.”

“Your little brother and you?”

“No, sir, my old pal and me.”

“Well, it’s all rather confusing, Reid. Please don’t let it happen again. I suppose there was a marriage?”

“Indeed, yes, sir. I would never invent a marriage to you, sir. There are excrutiating circumstances.”

“Quite, quite,” said Mackenzie, “there are,” anxious to be rid of him, and observing he could stand straight. “Well, it is nearly lunch-time. You go home and have a good meal now.”

“Thank you kindly, sir. There’s nothing else you would like?”

“No, no.”

“Thank you, sir, and I’ll apologise for you to Mr. Begg.”

He clicked his heels and departed, leaving his boss to wonder what he meant by *I'll apologise for you to Mr. Begg*.

"I wonder," mused Mackenzie, "how much some of these old soldiers are aware of how they manage us. Apologise for me to Mr. Begg," and he chuckled. "Perhaps he knew that it was the cashier who peached on him. No, there was some thought in his muddled mind about Begg giving him last week's pay-envelope this morning. He's a bit of a rogue, I suspect, but likeable. I hope I don't have to discharge him."

It was a sad lunch-hour not only for Stewart but for old Todd.

On the Sunday Teddy Leng had met Mr. Todd really and truly arrayed in silk hat and frock coat (with a Malacca, not a Manilla, cane!), for there was always a basis of truth even to the noblest of his efforts. The old man, in his best manner—which was one of rugged urbanity—had introduced his wife, whom he had met in a shooting-box in the Highlands where he had gone with his officer one twelfth of August many years before. She had been a cook, and though to be sure she might not make many, or any, queen-puddings with twelve eggs for her husband and herself she had by no means forgotten her culinary skill. Many of the reports of his meals that Todd gave to his assistants were entirely accurate. There had been an odd lull after the introduction, Mrs. Todd relying upon deportment rather than upon speech—her recipe when in doubt being Say Nothing, Just Be Stately. So stately did she stand that Teddy had one of these fits of inability to find anything to say. She put him out. She dulled his mind. "It is a great pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Todd," he had at last succeeded in uttering. "I have heard of you often. I understand you are to be congratulated on your gifts as a cook." He had congratulated people in his own set during these past years on their cooking without giving any offence, but immediately he spoke he felt he had erred. Her dignity was intensified. "Oh, yes," she replied, frigid as ice, dry as desert sand. Then they had parted, she with a regal inclination of her head, Todd with a grateful high lifting of his silk hat in return for the almost obsequious bow that Teddy made, attempting to placate Mrs. Todd for whatever he had said or done amiss. Not a word had she spoken about the matter all Sunday to her husband but, brooding upon it alone, on Monday forenoon she had to rate him when he came home at midday for telling the folk at the shop that she had been in service.

"Never, never," Todd assured her. "All I have done is to tell them of the beautiful meals you give me, such as this."

"You never told them I was a cook?"

"Never, never."

She was entirely mollified.

"I wish I'd spoken about it yesterday," she said, "as soon as it happened. I've been worrying about it ever since."

At the flat in Drummond's Wynd, Mrs. Reid was less easily smoothed.

"There's the pay-envelope, Minnie," said Stewart, "and I have borrowed a shilling out of it. I'll do without the usual at the end of the week."

She slipped the money into her hand.

"You have borrowed a shilling!" she exclaimed. "There's two shillings short here."

"Now, now, fair do," said he. "If I hadna been on holiday I would have had that envelope on Friday—and got my shilling out of it. So I took a shilling out to-day and borrowed another. Here's Monday—Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday: four days, you might say, and you have it back."

"That's two shillings you have had this week, this morning!"

He glanced at Charley, glanced at Alec, and back at her; but she did not take the hint.

"What have you done with it?" she demanded.

"Aw, there's a sixpence to you," he said, taking the coin from his pocket and dropping it on the table. "That's only half—only half!—a shilling I'll be owing you till Friday. You can give me sixpence then and we'll be square. Damit, I only had one refreshment all last week."

"You needn't swear afore the laddies!"

"No, dinna sweir, faither," pled Charley.

"Dinna sweir, faither," pled Alec.

"You're like the man in the story," she went on, "who walkit past the public-house, and then says he, 'Well done, Resolution. We'll have one for Resolution,' and back he goes into the public-house!"

"So I'm like him, am I? Then I'll keep the sixpence," and picking it up he put it back in his pocket.

Socially it was a quiet, a lugubrious afternoon in the basement, Stewart polishing, and considering, "If I had kent when I was a bachelor what I ken

now——” and Todd (though he had got over his small domestic trouble very well) feeling old, thinking to himself that he had been over twenty years in the employ of Mackenzie Brothers. Soon he would have been there twenty-one years—as long as he had been in the old army. It was time he retired from civil life as from military. He felt tired. Only he and Mr. Murray had the right to call the boss Mr. James. He wondered if, for old time’s sake, there would be a little pension.

The whistle blew. Stewart was so lost in grey reverie that he did not spin round upon his stool to answer it. Leng attended to it.

“We’re to take in the sun-blinds,” he said. “Mr. Rigby says the day has darkened over.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

PASSING STORM

Somewhat as Mrs. Todd had brooded all Monday forenoon on the inference to be deducted from Teddy Leng's remark—and sole remark—when they were introduced, did Mrs. Reid brood all afternoon on the inferences to be deduced from her husband not only taking a shilling (his legitimate shilling, no doubt—she realised that) from the pay-envelope, but borrowing another, helping himself to an advance.

What could he want two shillings for, in one day? It is well known to the Mrs. Reids that what men want money for is to pander to their appetites, that they are like children who plead pennies for sweeties, but with less innocent, childish tastes. Their pennies are for Drink, for Drink and——

Women? The horrible thought came to her mind. For the protection of the weaker vessels of her *sect*, as she was apt to say in one of her slips of the tongue of which she was always aware as soon as she had spoken, for the protection of her sex, and for the care of children they bore (as she had read in articles on magazine pages), the marriage laws were devised by the best sort of men in their moments least base. And she had to say that Stewart had played the game when their pre-marital effusiveness had had its natural result.

Minnie was not an extremist. She had once read in "the papers" a letter which said that women had all the pain and men all the fun, or words to that effect, and had fairly considered that men did not devise the system and also that the pronouncement was not true. The fun, if not the pain, was shared—or such had been her experience.

No, Stewart would not be wanting money to run after women. She dismissed that thought but the dismissing of it made the earlier one come up again stronger than before. Two shillings—two shillings—all in one day for Drink! He was, to be fair to him, more florid than drunk at *denner-time*, but she must get to the core of this two-shilling matter.

On his return at night she could hardly wait till he had finished supper for the trial-scene.

"I've been wondering, Stewart," she began, "referring to that little matter at denner-time, what you wanted so much money for this morning?"

“For strong drink,” he replied so pat and vigorous that she could not but suspect he was not telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

“Well, you have no shame in saying it!” she exclaimed. “And with the laddies here!”

“I’m not the only one who has no shame in talking before the laddies.”

“Oh, that’s the kind of mood you are in,” said she.

“Aye—och, aye,” and he felt for his pipe.

“Was ye drinking in business hours?” she asked.

“I was indeed.”

“And did your employer ken?”

“He did indeed, and with entire sympathy and understanding—which is more than some have.”

“You went into the shop in the morning under the influence?”

“Whoever telt you that was misinformed,” replied Stewart.

“Nobody telt me. I’m asking you.”

“Oh, you are asking of me. Then the answer is No.”

“Then how did Mr. Mackenzie ken you had been drinking?”

“Because of an auld wife, an interfering meddling busybody called Mr. Thomas Arthur Begg, I believe. I could see him when I went by lift his head and take a smell at me as if I was a bunch of violets. I can put two and two together.”

Charley, who had been solemn so far, his spirits subdued by the bickering voices of his parents, whooped with joy at the conception of his father as a bunch of violets. Alec giggled without full understanding.

“You telt me you didna go in the shop under the influence and in the next breath you acknowledge you did,” she cried out plaintively.

“I did *nut* tell you I didna go in the shop——”

“You did!”

“I must apologise for contradicting you, but you are getting it all wrang. I telt you I didna go in first thing this morning under what you call *the*

influence. I was out in the forenoon and it happened then. If you are going to cross-question like a lawyer you might try to keep a clear head."

"And Mr. Mackenzie gave you a lecture?" she inquired.

"He did."

"A fine man you are! You might lose your job and where would your wife and laddies be then?"

"My wife would be lecturing me and the laddies listening," said he.

"Explain yourself," she demanded. "Explain the twa shillings in one morning—or one forenoon, seeing that I have to watch myself."

"I have no need to explain myself, but for the sake of preventing a touch of your indigestion I will do so. I had to go out to run an errand and I met an auld friend."

"Aye, and his name was John Barleycorn."

"No. His name was David Scott."

"What was he doing in Edinburgh? I thought he was in Glasgow—where he couldna lead you into temptation."

"He was here to see his brother get married, and surely to Goad ye ken that for a marriage or a funeral——"

"You needna be profane and call on your Maker. Here, you children, get awa to bed instead of sitting there listening to your faither's blasphemy. Did ye go to the marriage?" she asked Stewart as the boys, looking with wide eyes over their shoulders, crept away.

"No, but I helped him to drown his sorrows over the thought of his wee brother married and settled and under a woman's thumb."

"Did he say his brother had to get married?"

"No. He spoke with great respect of the lass."

Mrs. Reid looked at her husband long and coldly. Then she rose.

"Well, I'm going to bed now," she said.

"Good-night to you, then. I hope you sleep well. They say that twa-three hours afore midnight are better than sax after it."

She went to bed, nor did she come back later, as Stewart expected she would, with a fresh supply of pondered ammunition. He sat there alone, thinking and feeling very sorry for himself. But anon he was sorry for

Minnie, sorry for the boys (they had a look on their faces as they went away as if they found the home insecure), sorry for the whole blasted world, he told himself. Everything was tapsalteerie. Everything was vexation of spirit. Domestic life, like national life and like international affairs that he had heard Mr. Murray and the others discuss in the shop, was a tangle. Things ought to go easy enough, and they did not. There was aye some stramash.

He smoked till smoking lost its charm. The city without became quiet. The town clocks had the place to themselves. He drew the blind and peered out to see what manner of night it was. An empty street, blank windows, blank windows opposite with the blinds drawn as if for a funeral, and no lights in any of them. That was not very solacing. There was a sudden horrible hubbub of cats and then the slow chiming of an hour through the sky.

Immediately upon the chime there appeared in a close opposite a girl who looked up the street, down the street, then waved and skipped back into the entrance-way. Funny, at that time of night! He saw a young man hurrying along, heard his heels hammer, then watched him change to tiptoe in the last few yards and pass into the entry where the lass had gone.

Stewart dropped the blind and tried his pipe again, sitting in the easy-chair with his heels on a small one, puffing away and thinking of the conversations of that day at Mackenzie Brothers. He thought of the talk about trouble brewing in Europe and tried to remember the word that Teddy had used, *prole—prole* something, and recalled the view that there was plenty of adventure for youth without silver-polishers in one country murdering silver-polishers in another. He had an impression, as if out of the very air, out of the still night, that ordinary uneducated men like himself were in the clutch of powers beyond their knowledge.

All this trouble with Minnie, now—it might have been prevented from blazing so high if it had been properly handled. It was as if some warped power put them at loggerheads, just the way that the nations blazed up one against the other, as if there was some leering and fanning evil influence behind these clashes.

Then he wondered what was to be the end of Todd's ridiculous story of the visit to the barracks on Sunday, the interrupted story that had begun with the turning out of the guard for the old man in his silk hat and with his cane. He chuckled. He thought, next moment, of David's disgust at the smug ways of publicans who threw out their clients when they were filled up to the rowdy state and had spent all their money.

Sounds in the quiet outside, though quiet sounds, made him rise and again lift the blind. There was the lass opposite on the pavement, the lad with her. She was holding up a finger in a sign for silence. They kissed. She ran into the close and the lad took two or three steps away on tiptoe. As he did so a light sprang up in a window beside him. He stopped and bending there peeped in at the edge of its blind.

"Well, I'll be damned!" exclaimed Stewart.

The light went out. At once the young man tiptoed a few more yards, then walked normally. The beat of his heels echoed loud.

"The night life of a great city," remarked Stewart in a ponderous, chanting fashion, such as he adopted when reading headings in the papers.

There was another sudden outburst of cat-screams. Down the lamp-lit street streaked a string of cats, flattened over their coursing shadows. He dropped the blind and looked at his cot. Then, taking off his loosened boots, he sat on its edge in his shirt-sleeves, wound the clock, set the alarm, but could not be bothered to undress, just drew the top cover over himself and putting out the gas stretched with a sigh.

The next he knew of was the warning cough of the alarm. With its first metallic whirr he reached out to stop its clatter, noticed he was in his shirt-sleeves, recalled the past night and how he had been so bored that he had not troubled to undress. He had but to throw the quilt from him and rise, "like a dog," thought he, "that sleeps in its fur."

He went through the morning's routine, *masked* the tea for Minnie and carried her cup in to her, whistling reveille and putting all the good cheer he could into his voice as he chanted, "Another morning, lass."

She opened her eyes. She looked up into his. They twinkled over her, pleading for good cheer.

"You are an awful handful, Stewart," she said, "but I'm fond of ye." She took the cup from him. "A woman shouldna tell a man that, I suppose. I think you have the making of a bad old man in you if you wasna watched—if you hadna me to look after you. But you are rale good to me."

Here was a better day! He went up the High Street as smartly as though its slope, in the direction he was going, was downhill instead of up. The morning air was good in the hill-top city. A light wind was blowing out of the north-west from over the Grampians, over the Sidlaws, over the Forth, bringing a country flavour and freshness into the streets.

He liked to vary his approaches to work, going sometimes by the South and North Bridges, sometimes this way. There were also two or three choices of approach to the Mound. That morning he went through a court off the Lawnmarket and when the view of the new town opened before him he called it *bonny* to himself. He seemed to be the most cheerful of all who waited at the Mackenzie Brothers for the coming of Mr. Rigby.

CHAPTER TWELVE

A GROUP IN A DOORWAY

That morning Kerr had his hoity-toity manner. Malcolm was insipid.

"Hallo, Stewart," he said. "Are you going to get chowed to-day again?"

"Chowed!" exclaimed Stewart. "I dinna ken what you mean."

Teddy was apparently lost in thought. Auld Todd came stumping along, bracing his shoulders too definitely, as though trying to assure himself that he was as fit as ever in his life.

"Here he comes!"

Yes, there came Mr. Rigby. He gave them his cherubic morning smile and put his key in the lock on the very stroke of the appointed hour.

Half an hour later, down in the basement, the three polishers polished in silence. Todd seemed to be subdued. Stewart wondered what he was thinking of as he worked. There was a blast on the whistle: Reid to go out on an errand for Mr. Begg. He was gone only minutes when he came down again. Leng and the old man looked round wondering who had descended and come no farther than the hat-pegs at the stairfoot.

"What is it?" asked Todd.

Slowly Stewart advanced tying on his aprons.

"Do you know what I'm going to tell you?" said he, a pet phrase of his towards opening conversation.

"How can I know afore you tell me?" inquired Todd, his usual response to that pet phrase.

The fancy to try his skill at a tall story had come to Stewart.

"Maybe you'll not believe this," he began, "but when I got upstairs Mr. Begg says to me, says he, 'Oh, would you take this letter round to the Temperance Society office,' and I just minded how he telt me once he had seen me going into a pub and that it would be against his principles to go into such a place. Says I to him, says I, 'Is it a letter from the firm?' and says he, 'Why, no,' says he——"

"Get on with your story," said Todd. "What's halting you?"

"Well, he seemed kind of taken aback but he says, 'No,' says he, 'it's a personal letter.' So I says to him, 'If it was a firm's letter,' I says, 'I would do as you say seeing I am employed here, but it is against my principles to go into the Temperance Society's premises.' "

"Aye. And what did he say? Get on with it. Have you no invention?"

" 'Well done,' says he. 'I shouldna ask a man to do anything against his principles.' "

Having made all that explanation for the brevity of his absence, Stewart sat down on his stool and they went on with their work, he very solemn, Leng smiling, Todd chuckling.

"Malcolm went by just as I got up," Stewart whispered to Edward a few minutes later, "and so, as he was going out, Mr. Begg gave him a letter he wanted to have posted at once, seeing it was urgent."

"To a Temperance Society?" asked Teddy.

"Och, no! I dinna ken where to. But I thought I would try my hand at a bit of friction with the old man."

Leng chuckled—perhaps as much over *friction* as anything else.

Old Todd cleared his throat violently, but it was not as a reminder that they must work while talking, nor as a protest against whispers. He was not even pondering Reid's nonsense. He was off; he was gone from there; he was thinking of the past.

Here was his seventieth anniversary and his mind moved from this to that and the other by a series of links, some gay, some melancholy. He thought of his two sons who had died in the last war. He thought of his wife's opinion of that war: "Oh, dreadful, all these blowings up instead of gentlemanly fighting. And the poison-gases and one thing and another." Well, that was war with civilised races. He considered that, frankly, candidly, as little gentlemanly had some other wars been with rifles and artillery against assegais and old unwieldy flint-locks.

He wished that Stewart had not given them that recitation. It haunted him, daft though it sounded, not only by reason of its daftness. It haunted him because of its content of sense. He strove to oust it from his mind with memories of Maryhill Barracks, Piershill, "the Curragh," London (the Big Smoke), Aldershot, the veld, but there was much in these memories—especially of the veld—to open the doors of his mind to it again. He heaved

a sigh, smudged more rouge upon the edge of his great hand and caressed a rare lustre upon the Communion Cup he was polishing.

He was getting old. Age was preparing to wean him away from all that had once seemed splendid and important. He had begun to use a new refrain when any one strove to involve him in a debate: "Anything ye like." He was as a man coming home from a conference, that has seemed witty or wise, suddenly arrested by the old moon racing through a hollow of the clouds, or by the wind talking in a dark wood, and thinking the gathering was piffling and pitiable.

The whistle blew again, bringing him back to the present and calling Stewart and Teddy upstairs to put out the sun-blinds. These were no ordinary blinds on a roller which could be cranked up and down as the weather and Rigby ordered. They were super-sun-blinds kept in a basket. For aid in putting them up there were two sets of steps, like tall stools, such as are used in some libraries. They had brass eyes along one side and along the top of the window were brass hooks, over which, standing on the steps, the porters dropped the eyes. They had to be *put up* and *taken down* literally; and the work had to be done in smart and soldierly manner so that there would be but a short period with too much dusk in the shop while the canvas hung straight down over the window. They were tautened out and held in place to a projecting frame overhead by a row of ties like reefing ropes on their outer edge.

That morning Stewart and Teddy did the first part of the work very briskly, climbing up and down on their steps, slipping the eyes over the hooks; and they were at work on the second part, with the little step-ladders advanced on to the pavement, tying the tapes, when Stewart had to draw his companion's attention to something.

"Teddy!" he said, urgent, but not too high for the tone of that street and that shop.

Teddy jumped to the conclusion that something must have gone wrong with the *rootin*, thought he must have missed one of the tapes and was perhaps tying his end with a crooked crease in it.

"What is it?" he asked.

Stewart wagged a hand towards the kerb.

"Friend of yours over there," said he, "trying to catch your eye—there, in that grand motor-car."

But at that moment a man in the car stepped out and advanced on Leng.

“It is you, Teddy!” he exclaimed. “So this is what you are doing to keep the wolf from the door——”

Stewart went on, alone, with the work, moving his ladder along, jumping up and down, tying tapes.

“Just a minute,” said Teddy to his friend, “till I finish helping with this job.”

“All right, all right,” said Stewart. “I can do it myself.”

He completed the task, smart and soldierly, and then carried in both ladders and the empty basket.

“Where’s your assistant?” asked Kerr as Stewart, thus laden, walked past the packing-counter. “Have you to carry the whole lot of things for him?”

“Mind your ain business!” snapped Stewart. When he put on his leather apron again and sat down in his corner——

“Where’s Teddy?” asked Todd.

“Up on the street talking to a friend who saw him from a grand car going by. I have a feeling we’ll no’ have him here very much longer.”

“Well, that’s life,” said Todd. “We come, and we go. That’s life. Aye—yes, indeed.”

Just then Teddy joined them and took his place at the table, but Stewart asked him not a word about his friend. It was none of his business, he considered.

“Better be charging my pipe with ammunition,” he remarked. “It’s near denner-time.”

For both Stewart and Todd that dinner-time was happy as far as connubial concord was concerned. Minnie was herself again. She had evidently decided to let bygones—relative to an advance, willy-nilly, of the weekly shilling—be bygones, but she had *nae appetite*.

“You’re not—you’re not worrying about anything?” asked Stewart.

“No, no. I have really nothing to worry about. But I have my indisgestion pain, or something. And the pain makes me squamish.”

“You’d better see the doctor. You get that pain ower often.”

“Doctor!” she said. “No. I shouldna upset myself over things while I’m at my meals. I was reading in the paper that it prevents right nourishment to

worry while you are eating."

"I think you should see a doctor," he declared.

"Well, we'll no' bother just now. We'll wait and see, as the saying goes."

Old Todd had a special surprise repast prepared for his seventieth anniversary. On the way back to the shop he rehearsed the nonsense with which he would enliven the afternoon for his men: "After the horse-doovers we had cockaleekie soup à la mode, roast chicken, Brussels sprouts, spinach, and pommes fritz. Then there was apple-charlotte and apetty tassy of café, black, and a fragment of gorgonzola from a kebbock of it we have laid in. And—and, men, listen—there was seventy little candles round the table." The men would cry out, "Well, you don't look it!" aware that the nonsense about the candles was his way of telling them his age. Stewart, especially, was very gleg in the uptake of such communications.

Perhaps he had really eaten too much. Back at his stool he had the impression ever and again, by a darkening before his eyes, that rain had broken in Princes Street, but giving ear he heard no sound of it on the pavement and there was no order to take in the blinds. Getting old! It was time he retired. Surely Mr. Mackenzie would give him a pension. Nearly a quarter of a century he had been in their employ—he and Mr. Murray the only ones who could say naturally *Mr. James* instead of *Mr. Mackenzie*. When the cashier said it, it was really presumptuous. He had come to the firm in the week that Robert Mackenzie took sick and went home to die.

Yes, he was old and a pension would be good. He cleared his throat preparatory to beginning on the announcement that was to mount up to the seventy candles, but he did not speak. The basement blurred again and he was about to switch on the electric light when it seemed to him that Stewart and Teddy, sitting on their stools, were spinning round and round him. He stumbled to his feet and raised a hand in a gesture like the ancient Roman salute.

"What's the matter with him?" whispered Stewart.

"Pay attention, men!" rumbled the old man. "Help auld Todd up to the air."

They rushed to him, each catching an elbow. Leaning back against them he ambulated to the door. Somehow they got it open and shuffled him up the stairs, and upset all the tradition of Mackenzie Brothers: three porters, with their leathern rouge-stained aprons on, in the shop. Still Todd's hand was raised in that historic salute. It seemed to have been smitten into rigidity

while held upright; it was like the arm of an Indian fakir penitentially stiffened so.

"Oh, dear, what's all this?" came Mr. Begg's voice from his railed-in counting-house.

Murray, forgetting in that astounding moment to take the magnifying glass from his eye, raised his head from the watch upon which he had been tinkering and stared at the trio with only the slightest flick of the usual twinkle. The jaw of Kerr at the parcelling counter dropped. Then he grunted and sneered.

"Pretending he's ill," he said, turning to Malcolm.

Rigby, who had just bowed out a customer and was coming to their counter with her purchase, heard the remark and on his cherubic face there was for once a scowl of disgust as he wheeled away, anxiously, to discover what was wrong. Maxwell, his assistant, nearly upset a tray of gold and silver card-cases that he was slipping out from under the show-case to lay upon the top, and the lady to whom he was attending—having looked over her shoulder to see the cause of the young man's gasp—shuddered aside in horror.

There they stood at the door, Stewart to one side, solicitous, Teddy to the other, anxious, old Todd in centre—to the eyes of those passing on the street apparently saluting the Castle Rock in the ancient salute of the Romans.

"My Goad, man, what's the matter with your airm?" said Stewart.

Todd dropped his arm and drew a deep breath.

"I feel better," he said.

Leng, realising that they blocked the entrance, and seeing a change of colour, for the better, on Todd's face, retired then as Mr. Rigby, looking extraordinarily solemn, hurried to them.

"What ails you, Mr. Todd?" he asked.

"I am not well," replied old Todd.

Behind them was Robert Mackenzie, a faint smile at his mouth-corners blending with a look of perturbation.

"Better get him home, Mr. Rigby," he advised. "Send him home. Stewart Reid can go with him. Take off his aprons, Reid, take off his aprons, and pop down and get his hat and coat."

Having given these orders he turned back.

“What’s the matter with him?” spluttered Mr. Begg.

“I expect he’s had too much dinner,” said Rattray, who had just arrived from the rear and stood beside the cashier observing the unprecedented scene. “He told my cousin this morning it was his seventieth birthday and he was sad to think that some day he would have to sever his connection with the firm for good and all—as he said, go on the retired list.”

Kerr, though a member of that portion of the staff supposed only to speak when spoken to, dared to make a comment.

“Auld soldier!” he stressed.

Stewart dived into the basement.

“I’ve to take the auld man hame,” he said to Teddy as he hung up Todd’s aprons and his own. “Three fine fools we must have looked at the door there!”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CLOCK-WINDING

The following morning—Wednesday—was squally. The gusts that whistled through the hill-top city had a marine tang, reminding tourists looking out on Princes Street from their hotel windows of steamer-decks, Atlantic crossings. The summer-bleached pavements were spattered with rain.

"We'll not be called on to put out the sun-blinds this morning," said Stewart in an aside to Leng, waiting at the door with Kerr and Malcolm and watching for the stocky figure of Todd.

Rigby, wearing his waterproof, came neatly round the corner.

"The old man not here?" was his salutation.

"I've no doubt he'll be well enough to come in on Friday for his pay," remarked Kerr.

No one made any response to that except Malcolm who gave a little cackling laugh which may have been of applause or of sycophancy.

"If he's not in on Friday," said Rigby, as he slipped his key into the lock, "Stewart can take his envelope to him and see how he is."

"Or Mrs. Reid can," suggested Kerr—to which none of them paid any attention.

As soon as the shutters were rolled up Rigby halted Stewart on his way downstairs to give him a tray-load of silver, and as he settled down to work

———

"I cannot abide folk that aye have nasty comments to make," he said. "Aye the unpleasant! There's a kind of folk that say little else. You cannot guess what it will be; all ye ken is that it will be unpleasant. Poisoners, I call them. If there is anything I despise it is taking a delight in jeering at others, taking pleasure in it. Whose is this fairy step?"

The fairy was Nell Drummond.

"Good-morning, gentlemen," she trilled, removing her hat.

Stewart jumped up to get hot water for her as she pranced into the outhouses for pails and cloths. The night-watchman always swept the place

and burnt the dust as his last duty, so she had no sweeping to do.

"Where's Maister Todd?" she asked, halting beside their table, pails in hand.

"He's off ill," replied Stewart.

"I was wondering. I kent he had his holidays already. I'm sorry to hear that. What's the matter?"

"We havena heard yet. He felt bad yesterday and had to go hame."

Affirming again her regret, and saying that he was always rale polite to her, Nell Drummond departed with mops, clouts, and pails, and had just gone—they must have met on the stairs—when Watty Barr descended with a clock to disembowel at the trestle-table. There was no talk from any, all three intent on the work in hand; but at last Barr's labour—which left the odour of paraffin in the place—was done.

"This is clock-winding day, Stewart," he called over his shoulder as he went away, "and I have a couple of repairing jobs to carry. I'll need your assistance."

"Now?"

"Aye—or in a wee while."

"I'll be ready for you. Whistle down when you want me," and Stewart rose, slowly untying his apron-strings. "My Goad!" he went on, meditatively. "What do you think of folk that canna wind their own clocks? I can wind my own clock and set the alarm too! Wind the clocks; wind the clocks! When I got this job first and heard Watty say he was going out to do that I thought he was joking."

He drew on his jacket, charged his pipe, filled to the brim the big cauldron and the kettles, and stoked the fire with a final, "There, that's that to keep you going," and then Watty's footsteps sounded overhead and the whistle blew.

"All ready, Stewart."

"All right. Well, take care of yourself while I'm out, Teddy," advised Stewart, "and no hanky-panky business with Nell Drummond when she comes down to fill her pail with fresh water."

He finished speaking in a singing voice. Clock-winding day was often a whimsical one. He went off laughing at the expression he had successfully

brought on Leng's face, laughing till he coughed, stood at the door till the cough was spent and then with a, "Mind what I say!" he departed.

Yes, it was in its way—the clock-winding—a jocular job. To crescents and terraces, to houses hidden behind high walls, these two went that gusty forenoon on which the pavements were alternately splashed with rain-drops and blown dry.

After the clocks that they carried were set in place, Stewart continued with Watty on his rounds lest there might be some timepiece to carry back, with a murmur or a hitch, a tell-tale tick, some malady that could not be mended on the spot by the visiting physician of clocks. Grand butlers they saw of veneered aspect who could unbend suddenly and make pawky remarks with no more than a faint twinkle—an odd breed, a cross, in appearance, most of these, between actors, or shaven lawyers, and ostlers. Venerable housekeepers they saw, whose deportment was as of foster-grandmothers to all in the house. Doors were opened by blank-faced pretty wenches who dropped their masks of blankness at sight of them.

It always delighted Watty to look at Stewart's eyes when some specially comely lass opened to them, or one of roguish aspect. Reid had the skill, or the gift, or the misfortune, of being able with no more than a *Good-morning*, and a little oblique glitter, to achieve an effect as of delivering himself of some amorous or even bawdy remark. The girls, it would appear, as well as Watty, had that impression. Some of them would ogle back and giggle, and Barr would stand, tittering to himself, with his ear to a clock, winding it carefully. Then, imitating the carriage of a manservant, he would move off through the house, Stewart, cap in hand, waiting at ease in the hall lest wanted.

There were more than twinkles and a suggestive greeting at one house: they had to descend to the servants' quarters there, for Watty to wind and take the pulse of a kitchen clock, and of course Stewart followed him. The cook was young and inveigling. She giggled from one to the other so that Stewart realised he could congratulate her on her bonny eyes. Watty, up on a table, standing on a newspaper, grinned into the wall-clock. There was some adjustment to make to it and he had the tools with which to put it to rights. As he was thus employed in at the door peeped two girls, one fair-haired, one dark.

"Hallo, lassies!" said Stewart, brightening afresh. "He's just up there making sure that you'll ken the time to give the folks their denner, and—

which is mair important—to save you being behind-hand when you go out to meet your jo."

"How do you know we have joes?" asked one of them.

"I have but to look at you for to ken that," replied Stewart. "Oh, stop your tickling, Jock!"

The corridor echoed with their laughter at that sally.

"Are you a married man?" the girl asked him.

"Me? What way do you ask?"

"You have a burnt smell."

That caused both the speaker and her friend to bob out of sight as though to hide blushes. Watty shut the clock and prepared to descend.

"Now be decent and dinna watch him coming down," counselled Stewart.

Out in the corridor was renewed giggling. As Barr descended from the table the two girls peeped in again and then scurried away. After them went Watty and Stewart, the cook hurrying to the kitchen door to watch, her mirth sounding behind them. Brunette dived into a room to left and Blonde, showing lithe legs, into a room to right. Watty pursued the dark one, Stewart the fair, but the room into which she had swirled seemed to be empty.

"Where are you, you hussy?" he cried out, and pried behind the half-open door. "Are you up the chimney or under the sofy?" he asked.

No reply. Not a giggle. Not a sound. There was another door in the room and he was about to open it when a bell rang and——

"Come on, come on," called Watty, out in the passage.

When Stewart joined him there he was clinging to the waist of his brunette, both laughing as they wrestled and she saying, "Let me go, let me go!" Barr planted a kiss on her cheek and let her go. She dashed away from them, charging up a narrow stairway urgently. The cook was still watching, doubled with laughter. His fair tormentor having eluded him in that odd warren below-stairs, Stewart made a pretence of galloping back to the kitchen, but the cook fled and slammed the door.

"Well, we'll go," said Watty. "There is no one to show us out." And as they closed the door behind them and went up the area steps—"It's a great game, clock-winding for the gentry," he said.

"Aye, it's a great game," agreed Stewart. "It kind of renews your youth."

Away they went hilariously to the next place of call. There they became sober upon the doorstep, Stewart so circumspect of aspect that Watty suddenly began to grin, looking at him.

"Take that *I canna help it* look off your face, Stewart," he implored, "or I'll have the giggles like a lassie."

From crescents and terraces they passed to detached homes behind gates and walls over which the seed-pods of laburnums thinly crackled, joggled together in the veering winds, their brief yellow show long since over. In the feel of that summer day there were hints of a time coming when the roses would resign to the Michaelmas daisies. Full-blown their wet petals dropped on the lawns. Barr looked, at his watch.

"We'll have to pull up our socks," said he, "or we'll not get through before denner."

So they paced on smartly, splashed now and then (though the rain had stopped) by the overhanging trees, still wet, in some sudden volley of wind. Just before lunch-time they got back to the shop and briskly entered.

"Reid!"

"Yes, Mr. Rigby?" and he stepped to the counter where Rigby was putting away a tray of rings.

"If Mr. Todd should be away some time, and Watty wants you to go out with him, see me first. Malcolm could have gone this morning instead of you."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Rigby, if I——"

"Oh, it's all right. I know you usually go on the clock-winding, but there's a lot of polishing that has to be done to-day and there have been several errands to attend to while you were out. I've just sent Malcolm on a message now so that Leng could get on with the silver."

"Yes, Mr. Rigby."

The afternoon flew. There was indeed much to be done and it could not be scamped lest Mr. Mackenzie, aware that his chief polisher (the best in Princes Street, he was wont to say) was away ill, did specially, carefully, microscopically personally visé the things brought up from the basement. Stewart found he had not his pipe charged when it was time to roll down the

shutters. He wondered why there was no call on the tube and then raised his head, listening.

"They're winding them down," said he. "Mr. Rigby must have put Kerr and Malcolm to the job. Aye, I can hear both being wounded down together."

As he rose to wash off the salver on which he had been at work, Mr. Rigby came down.

"Oh, you've got that finished," said he. "I've put Kerr and Malcolm to the shutters to-night. We certainly miss auld Todd."

Yes, they missed old Todd—and they were an hour later than usual of leaving on their rounds that night.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CASUIST

On Thursday morning Stewart was first at the door. Inside Pettigrew, awaiting his liberty, grinned through the grill-covered lozenge of glass. Next arrived Teddy, then Malcolm, then Kerr. No Todd!

The very sight of Kerr seemed to disgust Stewart. The man's carriage, his walk, told all that he disliked in him. He would begin soon to hate that hater as much as the hater apparently hated everybody, if he were not careful. He could hardly respond to the *good-morning* that Kerr dropped to them all. But, as it had been the day before, when he was watching for Todd while speaking to Teddy, so it was that morning: while feeling dislike for Kerr—the way he put his feet down, the way he held his head, the way he wore his hat—he was gazing beyond for Todd. If he did not arrive that day he would go down to his home and ask for him whether the boss gave orders for inquiry to be made or not.

"Here he comes!" he exclaimed.

"Who?" asked Kerr. "Oh, Todd. So he didn't have the effrontery to bide away till pay-day after all."

"My Goad!" muttered Stewart, and spat on the pavement contrary to civic ideas of health and decency, spat as do some Moors when an unbeliever passes or casts his shadow on them.

Mr. Rigby turned the corner just as old Todd came level with it and they advanced together, in step, Rigby obviously asking the old man how he felt, and nodding his head with satisfaction as Todd replied to his anxious inquiries.

Kerr turned to Stewart and Leng.

"Well, I'm glad he's back," he said. "You fellows won't be getting behind with your work to-day and shelving jobs that are yours on to me and Malcolm."

"Aw, hell!" said Stewart, and spat again.

Then, to his astonishment, Kerr was before him, before them all, in asking Todd how he was—and without tone or manner of cynicism or scepticism.

“That’s the stuff,” he declared, when the old man cheerily responded that he felt fine. “And what was the matter? Did you have a doctor?”

“No, I didna have a doctor,” replied Todd, answering the second question.

As Rigby put key in lock Stewart murmured, as one shamefaced for feeling, “I was kind of worrying about you. I was coming to ask after you the night, after my rounds, if you didn’t show up.”

Todd laid his great hand on Stewart’s shoulder for a moment, to let him feel the strength of it.

“Thank you,” he said, and then, “there’s life in the old dog yet,” he chanted as he dipped in after Rigby at the door.

The heave of his chest, the cant of his back, the squaring of his shoulders were more of determination to be well than unconscious evidence of a feeling of well-being.

“Life in the old dog yet,” he chanted again as he marched through the shop.

He had to be cheery to prove it. The fact was that he was adread of a stroke. He believed he had been near to one on the Tuesday when his assistants spun round and round him in a red haze and he suddenly realised that the day had not truly darkened but that he was losing hold of it.

When the morning’s routine was over and they all sat before their rouged pads, dipping finger in water, dabbing pad, rubbing tureen and coffee-pot and golf-trophy like masseurs gone wrong, Mr. Begg descended, bustling, a small new fragment of pumice-stone in his hand, purchased against emergency to get ink off his fingers. Thumbprints on ledgers or day-books were shocking to him.

Stewart, as usual, was extremely attentive, jumping up and running to the fireplace to ladle hot water for the cashier. Leng looked on, slightly amused. In that twittering eagerness there always seemed to him a hint of mockery—a hint of derision, parody of what might be fitting—travesty. But then, in the army, he had often felt inclined to laugh at what he saw as not merely *smart and soldierly* but as ludicrous.

Old Todd also watched Reid, watched, as he polished, with head lowered and atilt for a fair view over his spectacles which were intended only for close work.

“Good, good. Thank you, Reid. That’s fine,” said Begg. He turned to Todd. “And how do you feel to-day?” he asked.

“Oh, there’s life in the old dog yet,” said Todd. “I feel quite a bit better to-day, thank you.”

“I’m glad to hear it. What do you fancy was the matter?”

“Just a kind of a turn I had, sir.”

“You’ll have to diet, Todd. Diet,” and away he went, muttering, “Diet, I’m thinking. You are not as young as you used to be.”

As soon as the door had slapped on the cashier’s departure, Todd cleared his throat violently in a way that his men knew was preparatory to speech, whimsical speech.

“Pee-hee!” he boomed. “Pee-hee!”

This has to be explained. The sweeps of Edinburgh work in duet, gaffer and boy. First they go into a room, the chimney of which has to be cleaned. They drape sacking over what they call the vent, the fireplace. Then the sweep departs to discover, if he does not know already, how access is obtained to the roof and with his steel-bristled, ball-weighted brush and coil of rope he clambers to the stack. There he puts his head to a chimney-top and, hand cupped to mouth, “Pee-hee!” he intones down it, then listens. If he is at the right one two sharp taps with a poker on the grate below advise him. Having given these taps the assistant drops the corner of the sacking again and up and down the chimney goes the weighted brush at end of its rope. So *Pee-hee* has come to mean an attempt to get in touch, to establish a connection.

“Pee-hee!” boomed old Todd again. “Have you got a pair of trousers about you, Mr. Begg? Or an old weskit? The autumn will soon be here, ye ken.”

Perfect understanding and amicability existed between these two.

“I dinna ken what you mean by your *pee-hee*,” said Stewart.

“Oh, no! ‘Have you got a new—— ’ ”

At that moment Mr. Murray entered to ask if old Todd was better, having heard from Rigby that he was back again, and *to have a look at you myself*, said he. He thought the old man looked not over-well but (on a principle of encouragement) did not say so, assured him he appeared in excellent health

and then, for a change of subject, inquired what was agitating the public mind that morning.

Exchange of views on the current agitation led him to commence an oration, with Watty Barr and Malcolm, both coming downstairs for something or other, as additional audience. His voice became somewhat declamatory, in the manner of park-orator. He had been putting two and two together, he said, and he believed that not only financiers with interests in munitions were at the back of the world's apprehensive state. There was an undercurrent as of religious war, he declared, even in peace time. And to say one did not want war while one was wagging flags was contradictory. There was an element of hating one's neighbour in a certain sort of patriotism. A sense of affection for place, one's own corner, was fine, but internationalism, he announced, was what was wanted rather than nationalism.

"It is my opinion——" he declaimed, then paused, wondering if Todd was not interested in his views.

The old man had rolled from his stool and was marching into the store-room to rear. He was actually trying to live up to his statement that there was life in the old dog yet. He returned carrying a box that he placed before the speaker.

"Aw, get away wi' ye!" said Murray, and hurried off.

"It is good to have Mr. Todd back," Stewart whispered to Teddy.

Crash went a brush on the wall, and——"Pay attention!" rasped their sergeant. "Less of that whispering over there in the corner."

Watty snapped out his light over the trestle table and went away laughing. Malcolm departed with some packets of prepared whiting. The three were alone again.

"Did I ever tell you men," Todd began, "of the time when I was a young soldier and Wolseley came to review us? White gloves on his hands. Pipe-clayed. Aye, that was a fine body of men, and grand horses, and we thought all was going well when he rides round to the back of us and runs his hand over the croup of my horse and looks at his glove. A speck of soot must have fallen on the horse and he had got it smeared across the white. 'Filthy,' he says, 'filthy!' Aw, well, it was a grand training for the silver-polishing where you run a chance of having your work looked at every inch through a magnifying glass for the wee-est scratch."

"Did you ever put pipe-clay on the fetlocks of your horse?" asked Stewart.

"Never, never!" replied Todd in grand accents. "Never heard of such a thing in my time. The fetlocks were aye so clean that there was no need for any tricks like that."

"Aye—I believe you," said Stewart.

Very cheery seemed Todd all day but Reid had eyes in his head.

"He's not feeling his best," he remarked to Teddy when the old man went upstairs with a gleaming tray-load. "He's not feeling his best. Did you see the auld soldier trick he did when he got off the stool there—taking his handkerchief and holding it between his hands and passing it over his head to straighten himself up?"

"Yes, I saw," said Teddy, and went on with his polishing, thinking that he would never forget his days there, if his luck changed and he left the place for work more congenial and remunerative such as his education and training fitted him for, never forget.

On the Friday there was less forcing of vigour by the old man. His colour had improved. He was neither too florid (as he had been on the Tuesday, when he disconcerted Mackenzie Brothers and the passers-by on the proud street—standing at the door with upraised hand as one taking an oath, or beseeching mercy, or crying out *Ave, imperator, morituri te salutant*!); nor of a grey hue as he had been on the Thursday when he returned to work. He seemed sufficiently recovered for Stewart to rally him on that escapade upstairs.

"It is a wonder that Mr. Mackenzie did not have us all court-martialled," said he, "up there with our leather aprons on."

"Aye, it was contrary to regulations but when a man believes he's at death's door the regulations—of civilian life, anyhow—don't seem important."

"All the same," continued Stewart, "I was real worried about you. I thought you was a corp myself when I had you in the taxi-cab that Mr. Robert got for to send you home in. When I got you to your close-entrance, out of the cab, I didn't think you was fit to get up the stairs alone."

"I didn't want to frighten Mrs. Todd, coming home with assistance in the middle of the afternoon," the old man explained.

"Well, I stayed down, as ye telt me, but I waited till I heard you go in and the door shut. By Goad, I was feared you had gone home to die!"

"I thought so too, but the doctor says I'll pull through."

“Oh, you had the doctor,” said Stewart, then suddenly realised that here was an example of *as the saying goes*, and laughed.

There was silence for a while save for the light dabbing of their hands on the wet rouge-pads as they alternately smudged and brightened the silverware while the day brightened and darkened outside as the clouds and the sun decreed, and the feet of people went past over the gratings, or paused there—Todd back again and everything as usual.

The call to roll down the shutters took them by surprise.

“Goad!” ejaculated Stewart, turning from the tube. “Shutters! ‘The bright sunny day, it soon fades away,’ as the song says.”

As he and Teddy were returning along the shop from that duty Rigby nodded to them.

“All ready,” he said.

So they had just to go below, hang up their aprons, don their jackets and give *good-night* to Todd. Then they went up and stood with the air of moral rectitude before the packing-counter, absently watching Kerr take his evening walk to the door and back again—the evening walk that always reminded Leng of detective stories, stories about *swell crooks*. Often, in fact, Kerr took that walk, with a finger under the bevelled edge of the counter, as if employed upon some inane rite. Jewel-thieves, it would appear, often pursued their calling in couples. One would enter a shop and examine rings, scarf-pins, or baubles of price, find nothing to please him—or perhaps even buy something not very expensive—and depart leaving what, with sleight of hand, he had filched under the bevel of the counter, affixed there by a small piece of wax. The idea was that if the article was missed, and he was followed and arrested, all would be well for him. The confederate’s duty was to call later and remove the stolen article.

“Leng!”

“Yes, sir,” and Edward stepped to the cashier’s office to receive his envelope.

“Reid!”

“Yes, sir.”

As Stewart took hold of his envelope Mr. Begg’s thumb and forefinger tightened upon his end.

"You have been here a year," said he, "and the arrangement was for an increase if you were satisfactory. You will find it in there." Still he held it. "An increase of four shillings a week," he added. "It was my duty, Stewart, to remind Mr. James of the date and I hope you appreciate the fact that he has overlooked that little matter when some—ah—alleged relative of yours was married."

Young Mackenzie often went into the cage to help the cashier on pay-days and there he stood looking on at this scene, finding it comical. He would tell his father over dinner that night: "Mr. Begg could simply not resist the opportunity to deliver a little homily to Reid," and his father, he knew, would laugh and reply with a remark that there was something about that man Stewart Reid.

"Thank you, sir," said Stewart, "and will you please apologise to Mr. Mackenzie—I mean, will you please convey to him my thanks, sir."

Out in the street Stewart wondered why his wife was not waiting for him. No, no Minnie in sight, no boys even. He was worried. Going his rounds he hoped nothing was wrong at home. But, his last parcel delivered, along with his worry was the thought that perhaps he might have a little pocket-money beyond his shilling.

"I could tell her," he mused, "that I have had a rise of three shillings."

He decided to do so and taking out the envelope found that the gum had not been well affixed. It opened with a crisp snap and he abstracted a shilling happily.

"Aye," he thought, "a rise of three shillings a week I've had. That will be enough."

That little matter of extra secret pocket-money settled he wondered again why no one had met him and hurried on homeward, climbed the stairs, three steps to a stride, and felt high relief when Minnie opened to his knock and he saw the boys behind her, intact.

"What kept you?" he asked, as though it was actually all to his pleasure that he was met on Friday nights.

"I havena been well," she said. "I had awful pain when it was time to come to meet you. It was that bad the laddies would not go and leave me."

Yes, she looked ill. Her face was peaked.

"It's gone now," she added. "But I'm like a body after the teeth-ache."

“You should see a doctor,” he told her.

“No.”

“Did you try a pinch of baking-soda—as much as would lie on a sixpenny-piece?”

“Baking-soda! I’ve tried as much as would lie on a pound-note this day,” she declared.

Yes, she showed she had been in pain. The fellow was a rank sentimentalist. As he looked at her he retracted his decision regarding an increase of weekly allowance—a secret addition to it. He felt in his pocket and covertly slipped back into its envelope the shilling he had abstracted.

“Well,” said he, “there’s the pay-envelope for you. I see it’s sprung open. Count it.”

She counted.

“There’s four shillings too much,” she ejaculated.

“No, I have had a rise of four shillings a week.”

“You have! Oh, that helps the afterpains! Well, let me see now: it’s saxpence I’ve to give you the night.”

“No, no. I kept the shilling.”

“Oh, take another shilling,” she said. “We’ll say nothing about the one you borrowed. Wash your hands and I’ll serve you your supper.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE SPEAKING-TUBE

The summer was nearly gone. Charley and Alec had been given their boat and trudged every day with it (and *sangwidges*) to the Inverleith Park to sail it on the pond there. The last week of their holidays had thus, like the first, the true quality of holiday that their father desired for them.

Few of the tourists remained, those tourists that Kerr miserably disliked, hated indeed, for reasons inexplicable, obscure, to Stewart Reid's apprehension but, in Teddy's consideration of the fellow ascribable to meagre envy. Down in the basement Kerr retailed with a venomous satisfaction the remarks the last of them made, and somehow he seemed to hear, or recall—cherish, in fact, it might be said—only those that were conducive towards his delighted contempt. He could not repeat these stories without trying to imitate the accents of the speakers—English or American—and did so with an ineptness that gave all who heard (even Malcolm, who was only slightly contaminated by Kerr, not a born understudy to him) an additional grue, a scunner. For, according to the chief packer, no Englishman spoke in unaffected accents and no American otherwise than through the nose. What use to hope for an end to bloody and maiming war, Teddy often thought, while there were Kerrs uncounted in all lands, no doubt?

The boys went back to school. The last tourist went home and on Princes Street there sounded no more the chant of *White heather! Good luck!* One day Stewart Reid and Teddy Leng had a sudden fear that Todd was going to have another turn, for looking over his shoulder into the unlit cavern of the long basement behind him said he, "That's funny!"

"What is it?" demanded Stewart.

"I thought I heard somebody wrapping up a parcel in tissue-paper, but there's nobody there."

Stewart looked with piercing concern at the old man but as his aspect was normal gave ear, and Teddy too, stopping his work, listened.

"There!" exclaimed Todd.

"It's the leaves," Stewart explained. "It's the leaves. They are scurrying all over the street, blown out of the gardens."

"So it is!" said Todd.

The sun-blinds were taken down that day for the last time that year and sent away to the cleaners, while across the road, from where Sir Walter Scott sat in stone with his dog to where the bones of De Quincey lay, the gardeners swept up the leaves with great twiggy besoms and trundled the summer away in wheelbarrows. Yet a little while and by four of the afternoon the electric lights were lit in the shop, gleaming in the glass of cases, glinting on the cake-baskets and coffee-pots and other lustrous exhibits in the shelves and glowing on the counters with a surface radiance (like that on glare-ice) over the sparkle of diamond-rings and the changing fires of the opals.

In the basement the lights shone all day over the polishers' benches. Stewart got his winter cough and decided—as each year at that time—that he really would have to stop smoking, for the first draws on his pipe started the *hoast*. Again, as each year at that time, he decided that the smoking did not harm, perhaps, indeed, helped him, and that the cough was caused entirely by the haar—that mist that sifts into the streets off the North Sea, particles of grey, larynx-tickling moisture.

Away out in the suburbs, trudging along dark roads in the evening to deliver parcels, he could see the mists, if he walked quickly, eddy away on either side. The lamps dotted along the kerbs atop their posts had each a halo round them such as the moon has on nights when folks look up and say, *A rainy moon*. But in that weather no moon, even when it was full, was visible, only a strange suffusion of wan radiance from it in the upper dankness beyond the street lamps.

Leng took only a little walk at midday, when the porters were free for an hour, the weather too raw for sitting on a bench in the gardens. Most of the lunch-time he spent in the basement beside the fire, eating his sandwiches and studying his books, books that he was additionally careful to keep secret since the little arrogant insolence of Rattray over one of them. Rigby, who stayed in the shop when Murray, Watty Barr, and Maxwell were out, seeing him come in one day gave him a nod and told him—"After the lunch-hour, Leng, I'll have something for you to take out."

Stewart arrived and Teddy, closing his books—a copy of Don Quixote in the original and a Spanish dictionary—glanced at the clock.

"You're early," he said.

"It's *tooming* with rain," replied Stewart, "I came at the double and I'm soaked as it is."

Slowly, with time to spare, he took off his wet coat, his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, put on his aprons, all with leisurely movements, and then he stood with his back to the fire, feeling its warmth, listening to the rain that could be heard tapping an irregular tattoo on the gratings.

"It minds me," he remarked, "of the auld wife dying and hearing the rain on the roof and gurgling in the rones along the roof. And says she, 'Oh, what a nicht to be fleeing through the air!' "

The heavy tramp of Todd was on the stairs and then there he was.

"What a day!" he exclaimed as the door slapped shut behind him. "Auld Todd had to hire a gondola and the gondolier sang to him all the way" (Todd had a wireless set) "*O sole mio*."

He prepared for the afternoon's work.

"Well," said he to Teddy, "are you not going to get off your jacket and put on your aprons? Have you mutinied?"

"No, not exactly. Mr. Rigby said he would want me to go out after the dinner-hour. I wonder if he expects me to go up or if he'll whistle for me?"

"Better ask if he's ready," Todd advised, "and be on the safe side."

"All right," and before Todd and Stewart could take into their consciousness what he was about he had plucked the whistle-plug from the speaking-tube and blown into it.

At the other end was another whistle, but never in the history of the Mackenzie Brothers had it sounded. It sounded then. So forcibly did Leng blow that even down there the blast in the shop could be heard—shrill, impatient, revolutionary.

"Oh, my Goad, what have you done!" exclaimed Stewart.

Todd gave a laugh of consternation.

"This is what is called *lèse-majesté*," he rumbled. "You canna do that, lad!"

"He's done it! And do you hear all the feet running? You can even hear the maister," said Stewart, half-way between horror and delight.

Teddy had his ear to the tube but no voice answered his summons. There was just that running aloft as in alarm at a day of reckoning, or of judgment,

or of social upheaval.

Above, Mr. Mackenzie having run out of his private room stood transfixed. Mr. Begg stepped from his cage, his eyes goggling. Robert Mackenzie, returning from lunch, halted in the doorway, astounded and slightly amused. Murray, just back from dinner and settled in his glass house, raised his head and stared left and right, untwinkling. Maxwell tried to hide his spontaneous joy. Rattray, putting his umbrella in the stand beside the entrance, drew erect, indignant, considering that somebody should be sacked for that. Kerr and Malcolm looked one to the other for assurance that their ears had heard it. Mr. Rigby was frozen stiff in the act of feeling his necktie's knot to be sure it was trig. Watty Barr, at the door of his upstairs workshop, stood giggling, peering out; and Miss Lennox at the table in her screened niche nearby, where she lived with her typewriter, held her india-rubber poised in air.

Rigby—surely not merely chief salesman but manager (as his wife said) at that moment—was the first to move, and he moved to the stairs. Out of the shop his sense of humour stirred. He was trying to look solemn as he walked into the basement but the very grim, the over-grim, set of his neat, small jaws denied that solemnity. Upstairs he had been all for law and order; below he was a neutral. But——

"Who blew up that tube?" he asked.

"I did, Mr. Rigby," said Teddy.

Rigby succumbed and began to laugh. Todd laughed. Stewart laughed till he coughed.

"What was the idea? You've made an awful steer upstairs. We all thought it was the Angel Gabriel with a whistle instead of a trumpet."

"I wondered if you were ready for me to go out," explained Leng explicitly.

A beatific smile spread on Rigby's rosy face.

"When you leave here," said he, "you will go down to history in the Mackenzie Brothers as the Man Who Blew Up The Tube." A pause and then, "Yes, I'm ready. You'll need your coat. It's raining."

Rigby and Teddy departed and the two old soldiers sat down to their polishing with occasional little chuckles.

"Mr. Todd," said Stewart, "do you ken what I'm going to say?"

"How can I ken——"

"I'm going to say that I've a notion Teddy will not be here long."

"I shouldna be surprised and Mr. Rigby, I take it, is of the same opinion. You heard what he said—*when you leave here*. He's expecting it too."

It must have been an hour later when Teddy returned. Malcolm had descended just before him for a packing-box; Watty was at work on a clock under the light at the rear table. All his *smelly jobs* had to be done down there, such jobs as raised odours of paraffin. Todd was scrubbing, with whiting, water, and a dash of ammonia, the convoluted support of a rococo epergne, Stewart was palming a small silver match-box.

"Mr. Rigby," said Teddy, "tells me that if to-morrow is a fine day we'll have to clean the windows, Stewart."

"We will? Well, I must just see if we have enough ammonia. I hope you have left some in that bottle, Mr. Todd. That's the stuff to shift the dirt."

"Spirits are good, methylated spirits," said Watty Barr.

"Get Stewart to breathe on the glass, Teddy," suggested Malcolm. "He can breathe and you can rub with the shammy. Between you, you'll make a fine job of it."

"Here, what's all this about me breathing on the window? A little less of that!" said Stewart.

It was, however, a cheerful indignation, for much depends not only on who makes a remark but on the tone in which it is made.

Teddy sat down and Todd planted before him a tall flower-vase, itself like a flower with slender soaring stalk bursting atop into silver petals.

"That will keep you busy a while," he prophesied, and went back to his epergne.

"Still raining I hear," said Stewart.

"Pouring."

"You'll mind on this place when you leave us. You are leaving, are you?"

"Well, I may be—some day."

"I hope for your ain sake you do," said Stewart. "For myself—I'll not like to sit here with a strange body beside me. There's one thing—I hope

you dinna leave till after the Christmas and New Year weeks. There's some fun, going the rounds then. Some of the folks keep whisky that is whisky and they give us a warmer whiles. It goes down as smooth as milk, but it would clean the windows all right."

"You wouldn't suggest to apply it direct, I suppose, just to use it for breathing—oh, Lord!" for a brush crashed against the wall beside them.

"Pay attention, men! Less whispering in the corner there and more work. Leng!"

"Yes, Mr. Todd?"

"Pick up the brush that fell there and put it on my table."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"MY KIMMER AND ME"

Reid pondered upon many themes, wondered even at times over some mysteries, as he worked, so deep in thought or reverie that he could not always give himself alertly to talk that sprang up round him. Perhaps young Maxwell would come downstairs to wash, and linger a few minutes, especially if Watty Barr and Malcolm were there. They shared his interests —or interest—in life. They had, in common, football, not the playing of it but the watching of others playing it. And furthermore, there were prize competitions in certain papers relating to the game. It was not for nothing that Maxwell would sound Watty and Malcolm for their opinions on future possibilities regarding the component units of football teams and of football leagues. The word *league* signified, to these three, Football Leagues, as to Mr. Murray it signified League of Nations—and to Stewart Reid his recitation of "Half a league, half a league, half a moment and I'll tell ye. . . ."

Stewart went to football matches no longer and did not even read the football editions to keep himself posted upon the players. He polished and dreamt through such discussions. As for Mr. Murray's talk, it was often too far over his head for him to reach up and grasp it. And when the watchmaker resorted to irony Stewart was lost despite his quickness to perceive a joke. His natural directness made him slow to understand when any one by saying This meant That—the opposite. The voice had very definitely to be ironic as well as the remark. If it were not so he was puzzled, trying to find whither the disquisition was heading.

Who was to be the new centre-forward for Queen's Park Rangers, who was to match Aston Villa?—why, precisely, this or that was happening in Europe, what was at the back of the apparent move towards the self-destruction of Europe—the monologues of Kerr, over some box he was packing, monologues regarding the man whose name was on the label, generally to the effect of, "Who's he? He's nobody! He's a jumped-up—I ken how he made his money!"—there were times when Stewart, with a distant manner, paid no heed to any of these matters, and not because he was *half-chowed* in the corner, not because some hospitable customer had given orders that when the man from Mackenzies brought the parcels he was to be given a *snort* and the servant had given two.

Sometimes, polishing silently, he was not either meditating or wondering—but worrying. He worried a great deal over the future of his boys. He worried over Minnie's recurrent pains that she refused to take to a doctor. Or he might, as for escape, go dreaming over the past and recall a man in his regiment who had the finest baritone voice he had ever heard and sang *Jenny Veeve* to bring the tears even to a soldier's eyes!

Now and then, when there were long silences of all three, Todd would break out with, "Aye, yes indeed," unaware he had spoken. Stewart wondered what the old man was saying *aye* about. It would strike him that when he lay awake in the night he would mutter *No* instead of *Aye*. Funny this business of talking to oneself! There was a young recruit he recalled, a mystery of a young man—as much mystery in the regiment as Teddy Leng, sitting there beside him, in Mackenzie Brothers—who would lounge in the billiard-room and reading-room at Piershill, hearing the balls click on the table, no doubt, but not watching the game, now and then muttering, "No—no!" The others would glance at him, and wonder what he had joined the army for and what he was ordering, or beseeching, away with that *No, no*! Todd's *Aye, yes indeed*, had a less anguished accent, in fact, had not an anguished accent at all, but was uttered in a tone as of easy acceptance of something, or of arrival at a satisfactory conclusion to the matters he meditated over.

Silently they worked, these three, Teddy, who was soon (as everybody in Mackenzie Brothers, except Rattray and Kerr, felt inevitable) to go, on a turn of the tide for him—to Peru, to be precise, his knowledge of Spanish taking him there; Stewart Reid, who was also—he most unexpectedly for all—to go soon, overseas as well; old Todd who, later, would be superannuated. Each, sundered, would remember the others often, remember that basement, the cauldron and the kettles over the fire, the speaking-tube—and the day that Teddy blew up it—the sound of the footsteps; and each would wonder how the others fared.

Silence in the basement—save for the sound of their dabs and palmings, the crackle of the fire, the ticking of the clock, the tapping, drumming, shuffling of footsteps going by, and muted honkings.

After all, after all, Stewart considered, he did not mean it when he said, "If I had kent when I was single what I ken now I'd——" and the rest, did not mean it. One was apt to be excessive at moments of exasperation, say more than one deeply felt, talk wildly. Minnie, he mused at his polishing, meant much to him. Once upon a time there had been an element of ignominy—not very drastic, perhaps, but definitely existent and irksome—

in the domestic arrangement for him to be waylaid at the door on Friday evenings by her or by the boys. The ignominy departed. There came in place of it a quality almost as of a happy outing. Ever since he had had that increase in wages it had been so. Minnie *stood her hand* without having to be asked. He actually began to look forward to the Friday meetings on the pavement, to sitting with his wife in that room off the public bar, with the divan in it and the round tables lustrous with furniture-polish and the further polish of swobbed overflowings of beer.

She had resolutely refused to go to a doctor but he had succeeded in getting her to have a glass of stout instead of lemonade. He believed in alcoholic remedies—stout for anæmia or any sort of females' lassitude, gin for the kidneys and bladder, brandy for the belly-ache, beer in summer for coolness, whisky for all times, for all reasons. So she had her Friday's stout and he a "glass and a nip," and then, "Well, I must run on my rounds. See you later."

As for Minnie: she preferred the dark evenings, waiting for him. There was a man inside the shop, generally making up parcels when she strolled past, a man with a sneering mouth who would nudge with his elbow the young fellow standing beside him and make some remark to him. They would peek at her and go on with their work, smiling, evidently talking in whispers. In winter, when the shop was brightly lit, they could not see her if she strolled past a little way out on the pavement, but she could see Stewart and the young fellow—what was his name? Aye, Teddy—when they came up to the counter with their green bags. She never liked to stand on the street anywhere, summer or winter, always kept moving to and fro if she arrived too early. Men going past would sometimes turn their heads if she stood waiting for her husband, and look at her. Even if she did not meet the assessing stare in their eyes she had a very uncomfortable feeling on such occasions. She would look straight before her, sulky of expression, thinking, "A slap on the cheek is what they want!"

To both, on all counts, winter evenings were pleasanter. When the castle and the castle rock were no longer as the summer visitors saw them, clean-cut with the flood-lights of the August sun on them—somewhat theatrical, perhaps, as if for a medieval play—when rock and castle, Crown Tower and War Memorial, and skyline of the Lawnmarket's and the High Street's turrets, gables and chimneys, were but as a thickening and darkening of the ambient greyness through which, aslant, a million snowflakes scudded, it was good to meet Minnie at the door. It was good, taking her arm, and leaning back to the blizzard, to let the snell wind drive them into that couthie

interior round the corner and to sit with her there, like *my kimmer and me* of the old ballad, over a glass and a nip and the weekly stout.

But, pounding and polishing in the basement, he wished she would see a doctor. The whistle blew.

"Shutters, Reid."

"Yes, Mr. Rigby."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

COFFEE-BEANS

There were two parcels, both cumbersome, to deliver that night at a house in the neighbourhood of Dean Bridge, and Rigby suggested, as each could carry only one, that they go there first.

"I've told Kerr to apportion the small packets for you men in such a way that you can make that house your starting-place with them—one, one way, the other, the other. You understand me?" When he did not express himself to his own satisfaction he would end with that question.

"Entirely," Stewart assured him.

So away they went, heavily weighted, along that street on which shop-assistants, clerks and typists were going home, through a thin rain just beginning to fall, with steps of release and carriage less dutiful than the morning's. Faces went past them, lit and shadowed by the conflicting lights and dusks and, only partially free themselves, they overtook others who were trudging their way.

They hurried along, dropping into single file and coming together again, insinuating their way with their loads round people and umbrellas. They dodged to the less-thronged George Street where their steps (Stewart's tacketty, Teddy's rubber-heeled) echoed back to them, with a suggestion of emptiness, from broad dim-lit entrances, and the street lamps laid spectral gleams and eerie shadows on cornices over unlit windows. Coasting the leafless enclosure of Charlotte Square gardens they took a short-cut past the wet gleam of a tall church into the rainy radiance of Queensferry Street.

Arrived at their destination, Stewart pressed the button marked *Tradesmen*. The door was opened wide to them as though they were expected guests.

"Go in there—go in there," said the butler, pointing to a door. "Put the things down there and wait."

"Certainly, Mr. Steele," replied Stewart, able to call the man by name because he had once been brought down to the basement by Rigby and introduced to old Todd that he might look on during an operation in polishing a salver in the hope of being able to instruct his staff how to do it.

Steele gave a little smile of pleasure and a nod at being remembered by a man from Mackenzie Brothers whose name he did not know.

Having put down their parcels they waited. The butler, following them anon, pointed to a small alcove, a recess to one side, where was a table with a cloth on it.

"Sit down there," said he.

Wondering, they obeyed. Having got them seated and out of the way he behaved as though they were gone from his mind. Stewart's eyes, though he sat erect with neck rigid, looked left and right. He observed a counter along one wall and in that wall a speaking-tube such as was in the Mackenzie Brothers. A footman came hurrying in just when Steele, rubbing his palms together and making motions of wringing his hands, seemed to be getting into a pother—perhaps over his assistant's dilatoriness. He then stepped to the tube and blew down it.

Stewart sat more erect, watching all, fascinated. He heard a rattling in the wall, which the flicking back of a panel explained. There was a little lift with dishes on it that had come up from the nether regions. But what were they sitting there for? Why had they been ordered to wait? To the end of that little room was a second counter and in the wall above it another panel—the first serving-hatch that Stewart had seen. With intense interest he sat there, stiffly noting the *rootin* of feeding the gentry. No one knows, thought he, what life holds for one. Half an hour earlier he had but a vision of tramping the terraces and crescents, ringing bells, delivering a packet, saluting and tramping on. And there he was sniffing enticing odours!

Mr. Steele had departed and a second or two later he looked in at them from the other side of the serving-hatch, appearing against a dull amber glow in the room beyond. The dishes were thrust through to him by the footman who, the panel closed again, hurried away with flying coat-tails and glint of two brass-buttons on them.

"He'll have a button-stick to keep them bright like that," remarked Stewart.

"What are we here for?" asked Teddy.

"Oh, just for to look on at the show," replied Stewart.

The butler returning, however, they knew what they were there for when he set soup before them and held out a basket of rolls. A moment later he went back to the speaking-tube and blew down it again. Up came more food and was whisked expeditiously away. Course by course, as the people of the

house were fed, were Stewart and Teddy fed without a word. That seemed to be a Silence Room, or a room only for whispers.

"I must tell Mr. Todd about this," murmured Stewart. "This has got all but his queen-puddings with twelve eggs licked. Christmas comes but once a year and when it comes it brings good cheer. What was I telling you? I hoped you'd stay to the New Year. I wonder if this is just the butler's idea or if he has been telt to do it by his boss."

Though he did not like to be grasping a further wonder began to form in his mind: was there to be a dram *forby*?

"Maybe," he whispered, when the two men-servants were out of the room, "we'll finish up with a bottle of champagne and we'll go round delivering the parcels singing!"

There was no dram. When the hushed proceedings—that went, although with occasional brief fluster, very featly—were over, Mr. Steele looked down at them pleasantly.

"Well," he said, "you've had your dinner."

Stewart did not know what to say. He plumped for jollity.

"Aye," said he, "if that's my denner I've had it," and then hastily added, lest he might not be understood, might have given offence, "I've never had such a meal in all my life."

Mr. Steele slapped him on the shoulder.

"No, I should think not," he said. "Well, I won't keep you from delivering the rest of your things. Just wait till I see if they've crossed the hall." He looked out. "All right." He accompanied them to the front door. "Good-night, men."

"Good-night, and thank you."

Suddenly Stewart wheeled.

"And a merry Christmas to you when it comes," he said.

"Thank you. The same to you."

The door shut soundlessly behind them. The raw night touched them as if a wet sponge was rubbed on their faces. Snow was falling again, the sort of wet snow that is gone as soon as it alights. The pavements, despite all the white flicker past the street lamps, were black, reflections of the lights in

them as if in deep, dark water. But into the chill of that night Stewart brought the warmth and comfort of his record dinner.

"Well, that was a denner!" he exclaimed. "We'll get on with our rounds. Good-night to you, Teddy."

"Good-night, Stewart."

In opposite directions they marched away, left—left—left, in quick step, each very conscious of hearing the steps of the other dying away—and then gone.

Drams, however, were not lacking. Often (the season for giving of gifts drawing near) they had to go on rounds in the afternoons as well as in the evening, and Stewart procured a small bag of coffee-beans. His studied view was that a coffee-bean is better than a cachou which but adds the odour of violets or geraniums, or what-not, to that of Scotch, making a disgusting blend, whereas a coffee-bean (or so he fondly imagined) kills the odour of whisky but diffuses none of its own. When, back from one of these Christmas-week errands to a hospitable destination, he found that his eyelids drooped he took that as a sign that a coffee-bean was expedient, rustled one from the bag and popped it secretly into his mouth. But Kerr had his eye on him, dourly. So had Malcolm, but with levity. So had Watty Barr, giggling.

"Are you chowed?" asked Malcolm, studying him.

"Chowed!" exclaimed Stewart indignantly. "How could I be chowed? I'm not a drinkomaniac. But I might as well be for you'll be saying I am anyhow—jealous of me getting out on deliveries at this time of year and you held indoors by Kerr, packing. I might just as well be chowed as not. As well—as the saying goes—do a thing as be blamed for it."

"A pernicious gospel," observed Mr. Murray, coming down just in time to hear that.

Mr. Rigby followed him. Instead of blowing down the tube and ordering Todd to come upstairs he had descended for a talk.

"There are some perfect nuisances in the world," he said for preliminary. "Here's a lady wanting some one to go to her house and give the servants a lesson in polishing, and chooses this week to do it! You are the best polisher in Princes Street, Mr. Todd. Do you think you could spare a forenoon or an afternoon?"

"Whatever the O.C. says, auld Todd does."

“Well, there’s no time like the present. Could you get it over and done with to-day? You could take some whiting and some rouge and——”

“Aye, aye. And I’ll show them how to make a pad. I’ll take some prepared whiting and my orange stick for getting in the crevices, in case they havena one.”

“Good. Then I’ll go up and tell her we’re sending the best exponent of silver-polishing in Princes Street—right away.”

Just as Todd was departing, all his requisites wrapped up——

“Men!” he rasped. “Pay attention! Carry on, carry on in the absence of auld Todd just as if he was sitting there. You’ll not have him always. Carry on!”

Away he stumped, aged, but tremendously vigorous.

“He’ll live to be a hundred,” Stewart declared. “He has the strength of an ox.”

It was late in the day when Todd came back and found Teddy at work alone.

“Where’s Reid?”

“He was called out for some hurried delivery.”

“Has he been gone long?”

“I don’t know—about an hour, I should think.”

“You can get a long way in an hour,” remarked Todd.

“He’s to go there and back,” Teddy pointed out, laughing, “wherever he’s gone.”

Todd, unwrapping his parcel at the central table, laughed also.

“Eh, you’re an auld soldier yourself,” he said. “Aye hang together, aye hang together, and try and begowk the auld man. Here he comes.”

Leisurely Stewart removed his coat and jacket, leisurely donned his two aprons, turning his back on them to abstract another coffee-bean from the bag and slip it into his mouth, for he had utterly crunched up one as he passed Mr. Begg’s cage.

“Where was you?” demanded Todd.

Stewart decided once again to emulate his sergeant in a Tall Story.

"I was at Mistress MacIntyre's, away out near the Braids," he said. "Yon's a nice housekeeper she has. 'Oh, come in,' says she. 'We're just waiting for these things.'—'Aye,' says I, 'I ran all the way,' says I."

"Did you not take a car? Did you not get carfare these busy days?"

"Oh, yes," said Stewart, "but that's what I telt her. I thought it would please her, you see. She had to look at the things afore I left. 'Splendid,' she says, but she made no move to give me my Christmas, so I says, 'Well, I'm glad you have satisfaction,' I says, 'and I make bold to wish you a merry Christmas, ma'am,' and gave her a funny look, ye ken. She's a cagey auld lady, yon housekeeper, when you get her started. She rolls an eye at me and asks if I would care for a dram. I telt her it was seldom I indulged, but at this season——"

"Um!" said Todd.

"She asked if I would have a bottle of beer or a glass of whisky. 'It's a difficult choice,' says I. 'Madam,' says I, 'a merry Christmas and a happy New Year.' She's gleg in the uptake. Says she, 'You mean you could take both? Well, you shall have them.' "

So saying he sat down on his stool, leaving both Todd and Leng to wonder if there was fact or fiction.

Upstairs Begg was at the door of Mr. Mackenzie's room.

"Could I speak to you a minute, Mr. James?"

"Is it important, Begg? Is it urgent?"

"Well, for the credit of the house, sir. That man Reid has just come in. I don't mean to suggest he's the worse of liquor but I smelt his breath as he passed me."

"Oh, yes, yes. What a trouble these old soldiers are! People will give them a drink at this time of year. All right. I'll tell Mr. Rigby to have a look at him and see if he's competent to deliver the parcels to-night."

"But I don't mean to say he's the worse of liquor, Mr. James. I would never say that. I mean, I just—I mean I smelt a coffee-bean on his breath," and Mr. Begg, having done his duty, departed.

From away back in James Mackenzie's life, when he was as young as Robert, then in the shop there, he remembered going into the basement one evening and overhearing the tail-end of a discussion among the men. Lord, how many had been down there, coming and going, and only old Todd

remaining! “Well, some says chewing a pinch of tea, and some says a coffee-bean, and some says a rummle of salt in your mouth,” he had heard.

Other memories he had—not of his boyhood in the shop. How he abhorred clypes! There are families in which there is a give and take of reticence, among the offspring, regarding slips from the mandates of parents. In his family there had been four young—Daniel (oldest of the original Mackenzie Brothers, dead long years), Alice (who had become Mrs. Rattray), Robert (gone close upon twenty years), and himself; and Daniel, who was the senior, had a sense of loyalty—or what-not—that caused him not only to report all transgressions by his brothers (Alice, being a female, was exempt), but to watch for transgressions to report. James knew well the reason for his dislike of clypes. He needed no psycho-analyst to analyse him and ascribe it to any other reason wide of the mark. Similarly, when he cut the string on a parcel, he knew why he did so. The odd punishment meted out to him for venial sins of boyhood, reported by Daniel, had been to unknot knotted string—and he could not get away to play till he had done so. Once he had substituted another piece for the knotted one, but Daniel had chanced to observe that deceit and had reported it, and he had not been allowed to play all that day. Very foolish he called himself when, up in years, he still cut string vigorously—careful man in most ways. Very foolish, he was willing to admit, he might be for being more annoyed with Begg than with Stewart Reid in this instance. A coffee-bean!

He rose and passed into the shop beyond the glowing cases, and remained standing there, between the two counters, as though in abstracted meditation. It was near closing-time. There were the porters rolling down the shutters. Well, Stewart could surely not be drunk, however greatly odorous of Araby! Bent over the crank that he turned and turned, his white apron neatly caught up to one side, he showed no inclination to dive upon his head. Mr. Mackenzie smiled as he recalled a local test to prove sobriety—capacity, or incapacity, to say fluently, *The Leith police dismisseth us*. It was a test objected to by sedate grammarians on the ground of its own drunkenness. He recalled also the story of a certain citizen (probably apocryphal, he thought) whose lawyer pled for him, when he was arrested as drunk and incapable, that he was indubitably not incapable and could hardly be called drunk having been competent, on the evidence of witnesses, sitting on the edge of the kerb to hail a taxi.

Well, the shutters were rolled down, the porters came smartly towards him. They went by in an alert and soldierly manner—or was it *smart* and soldierly? Yes, *smart and soldierly* was the phrase. He returned to his own

room to get his hat and coat and umbrella and go home. No staffs like the boss to be *hanging round*, right up to closing-time. He marched through the shop.

"Good-night."

"Good-night, sir . . . good-night, sir. . . ."

"See you later, Bob."

"Yes, dad."

Mr. Mackenzie ducked low through the little doorway in the shutter of the entrance-way, out into the windy street.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

CHRISTMAS WEEK

It was not only the bracing nip of frost in the air, not only the sight of sprigs of mistletoe and holly (these obvious reminders of the approach of the festive and friendly season) in shop-windows and in hallways of houses into which he had glimpses on his rounds, that gave Stewart, always open to intimations of festivity and friendliness, a feeling of elation. The word *telepathy* he had never heard. Had he done so, and had it been explained to him, he would have ejaculated that he had experienced it. He shared the happiness, in those crisp days, of the chattering groups of Princes Street, laughing in and out of doorways. Bonhomie was in the air.

The essential spirit of those days was brought into the Mackenzie Brothers' shop by people in quest of gifts for their friends. Answering the whistle, and hearing, "Reid to go out," he emerged from the lower regions to a hum of voices, had a moment's hesitation, as though he did, after all, share Minnie's shyness before crowds, and then was aware of good-will on earth. There was Rigby, who had called him up, carefully drawing a tray of baubles out of a counter and laying it atop for the inspection of two red-cheeked girls with rich pelts over their shoulders. There was young Maxwell holding up between extended hands, as if he were going to play cat's cradle with it, a long slender chain for the admiration of a very pretty lady. Robert Mackenzie was opening one of the show-cases, a family beside him, it seemed, to take out a cake-basket for their closer examination. Rattray, who felt it demeaning for some reason to serve in the shop, was attending to a customer very badly, because of that manner of his by which he strove to suggest that he was not really accustomed to such work. Mr. Murray, who in normal times was only called to the counters from his watch-repairing when some one wanted either to buy a watch or to have one mended, was peering through his glass at the diminutive price-ticket wired to an emerald ring.

Stewart waited demurely at the parcel-counter.

"There's two packets here to go out," murmured Kerr, "but you had better wait and see Mr. Rigby. A customer nobbled him just after he blew down for you, and there may be more."

Mr. Begg, looking from his cage and seeing Malcolm, a tray of cigarette-cases in his hands, suddenly halted by another customer, and hearing him

make explanation that he was not a salesman, for the sake of the firm and of duty bobbed out.

"Just a minute," said he. "Take a seat, madam, and I'll get some one ____"

He looked this way and that, flustered, and wondered (to judge by the way he peered to rear through the glass cases) if he should run off to Mr. James's room and tell him the shop was *thrang*. There were times, such times as these, when Mr. Mackenzie would briefly appear and make a sale or two to relieve pressure.

"It's good to see them busy," Stewart whispered.

"It's a damned nuisance," Kerr muttered, "all these Christmas gifts!"

"Just a minute, Reid!" said Mr. Rigby, between the departing bow to one customer and the welcoming bow to another.

So Stewart stood there feeling, vicariously, the joy of buying presents. But more distributors of good-will coming in, Rigby, pattering past, unruffled, gave an order.

"Better just get off with those two parcels, Stewart," he said.

From that outing Stewart returned with a tip of a shilling, and next day there was half a crown from a house in Restalrig and a florin at a house in Merchiston, and on the Friday Mr. Begg, handing him his envelope said, "There's a little *Christmas* for you from the firm in that." The "little Christmas" was a pound note: good people to work for, the Mackenzies! He had fallen on his feet, he felt, when he got that job. "One pound, five shillings and sixpence of found money, as the saying goes, this week!"

He wanted urgently—like those who came there with bright eyes—to buy a present or two. He had even, truth to tell, despite his idea of propriety and of behaviour befitting a man from Mackenzie Brothers, lingered on doorsteps a noticeable moment and said, meaningfully, "A merry Christmas —and a happy new year when it comes." It would be fine if the laddies could have a pair of skates—each, he considered. To be sure one could skate and the other watch, time about, but—och, no, that would be miserable! So he presented his hope to Minnie, sitting on the plush divan round the corner that evening.

She dashed him a moment by expressing herself as feart of the boys going skating. While she had been in service in that house near Duddingston

Loch she had always been worried, when the skaters came there, in case some one might be *drownded*.

"I wouldna stress the danger to them," Stewart counselled, "if we get them skates. The pond in Inverleith Park should be safe enough, anyhow, where they went with their boat in the summer. And, anyhow, we don't want to make them feart of things. They may need all the courage they have to get through."

"You dinna want them to go through the ice," said she.

"No, but through life I do," he replied.

"That's true, no doubt, but we dinna want them to be reckless."

"I'm not so sure! Anyhow, there's always somebody—the police or the park-men—put up a board, *Dangerous*, if there's any bad place. I skated once on a loch, when I was a callant, that had holes all over it, and wee boards near each one——"

"Aye, and you would keep on going nearer and nearer to see how close you could get without falling in! I know you."

When Minnie was highly nervous and fidgety it seemed to him always a sign that she was not well.

"Is there anything you would like?" he asked. She did not understand.

"I have it," she answered. "I have my stout."

"Oh, I mean for a Christmas or New Year present. I'd like you to have one of those furs like what I see women wearing who come into the shop. I saw a customer fastening one the other day. The mouth of the animal opened and shut—like a letter-clip, you ken, to bite on the fur anywhere she liked and hold it in place."

"Where would I get that? I'm no Cinderella."

"Well, if you didn't mind a second-handed one," he began, and reminded her of the *found money* that they had that week. "I've been looking in the pawnshop windows and they whiles have sales of the unredeemed things ——"

"Unredeemed is a good word for stuff from a pawnshop sale," said she.

But he persisted.

"There is a toque," he said, "I think you might care for——"

“No, no!” and she laughed. “A toque is a bunnet. You’re talking of a fur for the neck.”

“Well, I ken one when I see it, anyhow, and——”

“I could not abide to wear second-handed clothes,” she exclaimed. “There might be something smittle in them. You never know who’s been wearing them. I might get some horrible disease.”

“Well, we’ll wait. I may get some more tips yet. This is only Christmas week and it’s not boxing day they bother about much. In the new year I often get an extra shilling or two.”

On the following Monday, as he was putting his parcels into the big baize bag, Mr. Begg called him.

“Before you go, Stewart!” he hailed.

“Yes, sir.” His parcels all in the bag he stepped over to the cage.

“After you go your rounds you might slip into my house,” said Mr. Begg. “There’s a parcel for you. I’ll not be home myself—I’ve to go out to address a Band of Hope meeting, but my wife and the servant both know where the parcel is.”

“Thank you, Mr. Begg.”

It was late when he got home. The boys had long been abed. Surprise awaited him when he opened the parcel. There was an old Norfolk jacket of Begg’s; there was a pair of felt slippers with a hole in the heel that had been neatly darned; there was a fox collar—with the head on, two little glass eyes glinting: and the mouth opened and shut as a catch.

“Well, well, well!” he ejaculated. “Maybe wishing is as good as prayer. And you’ll not be saying that Mrs. Begg has any dreadful disease to pass on to you.”

Minnie took the fur and cast it round her neck.

“You have enough with your tips to buy skates for both the children,” she pointed out. “This is going to be a grand Christmas holidays for them. I cannot understand why you speak so contemptuous of Mr. Begg.”

“Aye,” he rumbled. He had not always thought it expedient to tell her, precisely, when voicing contempt for the cashier, why he held that contempt.

“But you will warn them,” she added, “not to be foolhardy if the ice isna sound.”

"Och, aye, I'll tell them. But the police won't let them on if it's dangerous."

"I'll go out the morn's morning, then, with them and buy two pairs while the frost holds."

Stewart dreamt that night that Alec was drowning and that Charley was trying to save him and fell in too. The police were dragging for the bodies when he woke.

"Goad!" he said and sitting up struck a match to see the time. Three o'clock. "We'll have a bit smoke after that," he told himself.

But the sense of impending calamity stayed with him, from his dream no doubt, thought he. It intruded on the air of general bonhomie that he had felt as it were in the crisp air of those days. Aye, life could be grand, and folk could be friendly, but calamity came: such was the intruding melancholy thought that haunted him.

At a late hour he was crunching along on a walk of cinders beyond Fettes College in a region where villas ceased and there were stretches of darkness accentuated by lamps at distance from each other, high garden-walls, and houses standing back from the roads behind them with vacancies of night in between, beyond railings. These dark patches darkened his mind again with dismal inferences, brought back to him that feeling of apprehension that he had routed earlier by telling himself it was due to his dream. He tried to cheer up by considering that another shilling had been added, that evening, to the tale of tips.

When he drew near to each street lamp he could see the sparkle of frost on the railings, glinting pin-points. Another night of this—and it was getting colder—and the ponds and lochs would all be bearing. Minnie's dread of skating fatalities that she read about in the papers he pshawed aside but there remained with him, determinedly, that sense of approaching trouble. It was not for the boys he worried, trying to put a name on this melancholy that settled on him. They would be all right. He had a sudden dread that something was wrong with his wife. He hoped she was not anxious about him being late. She ought to know that at this season he must be late. He pictured her in the little flat in Drummond's Wynd. It was almost as if he saw her, saw her face gleam before him in that dim-lit road.

He turned a corner, knowing all the shortcuts homeward, and there ahead of him were two soldiers. Perhaps, on a crowded street, they could straighten up by an effort of will, but there was no doubt they were both

what he called, when wanting to be polite, *intosticated*, and——"Aha!" said he to himself. "Aha!" because he had been reading that the men recruited for the army were of a much better type than of old. The army was no longer, he read, a shelter for wastrels. Not very courteous to himself, that sort of remark—to say nothing of old Todd! Sober men they wanted, young men with testimonials, credentials, *characters*. Yes, in peace time that is all very well, but what about war? he had thought, frowning over these pronouncements regarding the New Soldiers. They had to be fed rum then to keep them warm. Many a good man had come out of the last war a drouth, and rum his tipple. Aha, he must tell Todd about this, Todd who was hurt as he, seeing these articles about a better type of men in the army.

As he passed these, one lurched against him and instead of apologising damned him and asked if he could not see where he was going.

Stewart wheeled.

"It's you that canna see where you're going," said he. "How can you see when you're blind drunk? Where's the testimonials from your Sunday School teacher for to get into the airmy now?"

The dragoon closed on him.

"None of that," Reid exclaimed, "I'll jump on your spurs—and I'll jump hard—and you'll gang back to barracks with the heels of your boots torn off you."

The dragoon backed away.

"Oh, an old soldier, eh?" he muttered.

"Aye," said Stewart, "an auld soldier—and as good, or as bad, as the new!"

He went on his way. That little episode, however, only momentarily took from him his gloom of foreboding. It felt a long and weary trudge homeward. Princes Street had its late paraders very different from those of the forenoon. In High Street, up in the old town, there were the sights and sounds usual at that hour and that season. He hardly observed or heard. That dark apprehension hastened him onward.

He mounted the winding stairs in Drummond's Wynd three steps to a stride, and on the landing found the door of the flat open. He entered, and there before him was Mrs. Kennedy and behind her the two boys, up at that hour, with great staring eyes in their faces that were peaked, *shilpit* with youthful dread and the need of sleep. He did not notice then, otherwise

occupied, two pairs of skates, brand new though they glittered, lying on the dresser's end; and the boys had forgotten them.

"What——" he began.

"She's taken bad. We have the doctor here," said Mrs. Kennedy.

The doctor came out of the bedroom.

"I'm glad to see you," he said. "Your wife must be got to the infirmary at once. It is essential to operate to-night. She has acute appendicitis."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE ROUTINE OF LIFE

Stewart decided he had luck with him, snatching a passing disengaged taxi out of the traffic, no further off than the corner of South Bridge, with an urgent wave of his hand. The driver was somewhat astonished on hearing the address to which he had to go and showed his amazement. Taxis are not often called to Drummond's Wynd.

"It's to take my wife to the Infirmary—urgent," said Stewart. "Oh, you need not be feart, feart," he repeated in reply to a look of doubt shot at him. "It is nothing catching and the doctor is waiting to go with her. Appendiceetis, that's what it is."

He got into the cab and was relieved by the celerity with which they spun along to the Wynd. But it was, the doctor admitted, when they got Minnie to the infirmary, worse than he thought: a ruptured appendix.

Affairs on their arrival were so expeditiously carried out that Stewart was trudging home, informed that he might call in the morning, in an amazingly short space of time by the clock but time that seemed long to him because of the doctor's insistence upon the need for prompt attention. All the way he was haunted by his wife's face, drawn with pain; but, she being in safe hands, he had to think of the boys and hoped that they would be comforted by Mrs. Kennedy and both asleep when he returned.

Alec was—of exhaustion. But Charley was awake and weeping because of Mrs. Kennedy, a lady kind but mawkish, whose tear-ducts had been weakened by gin, her favourite tipple. No doubt it had been bitter to Minnie that she had been forced to call on the help of that neighbour, suspect of turpitude, when seized by the pains. Mrs. Kennedy had left the front door open after sobbing the patient, the doctor, and Stewart adieu, so that she might hear if any visitors came to her flat, and awaiting Stewart's return she had slipped across the landing once and again for another little sip of comfort. Stewart, entering, found her sitting there with an arm round Charley.

"The poor mitherless bairn!" she crooned.

"Now, now, Mrs. Kennedy!" he exclaimed, in the kitchen doorway. "You are too previous. She's fine now. The laddies will see her in a day or two—a

week or so. Charley, off to bed."

He lifted Alec from the chair where he was folded, fast asleep, without waking him and carried him to the concealed bed, took off his boots, undressed him, the boy hardly waking in the process.

"Your mother is fine," he said to Charley, "in good hands"; and to himself he thought, "An awful way, that, to be going on with a bit bairn. She's fair ginned up."

He went back to the kitchen to thank his neighbour for having called the doctor and sat up with the boys. To ask her for details of when and how Minnie had been taken so ill as to call for help he vetoed at sight of her. Any responses, he considered, would be confused, so he confined himself to thanks.

"Dinna call me Mrs. Kennedy," said she, rising. "Call me Kate."

"Aye, all right," he replied, "and again I must thank you kindly."

"God help us all," she chanted, moving to the door.

He opened it for her, watched her carry her gin successfully across the landing.

"God help us all," she devoutedly voiced again, and executing a little skip, as if for good cheer, closed her door.

Stewart closed his, making an end of all that. He returned to the kitchen. There his eyes fell on the skates. So Minnie, he made a deduction, must have been out that afternoon. Perhaps her seizure was on her return from making that purchase. In the morning, he decided, he would assure the boys all was well and send them off with a packet of sandwiches to the pond. Skating would keep them busy, keep their minds occupied and save them from fretting over their mother's absence. They would not reach the park till ten or so, thought he, and probably would not leave till dusk. He had only one key to the flat and could not entrust them with that but they could sit on the stairs an hour or two till he got home. He must get to bed and to sleep if possible, to be rested for the morning's duties.

When the alarm's ring called him he stretched, yawned and, but half awake, thought of the first domestic routine, the lighting of the fire to boil the kettle, the taking in of tea to his wife. Suddenly, coming full awake, he realised she was not there.

"Goad!" he said, sitting on the edge of the cot. "It's queer to think of her in a bed a mile away, operated on."

He had been himself under ether and chloroform during the war and thought how her tongue would be thick and the water she drank would taste of the anæsthetic's sweet, clinging odour. Dressed, he went in to waken Charley and Alec and begin his reassuring of them that all was well with their mother.

"It is really," he declared, "a good thing it happened. She has been having pains off and on for a while and—you understand—now she's been taken in time."

Consoling them, he almost consoled himself, almost believed what he had but fervently hoped. He cut their sandwiches, while the porridge was cooking, wrapped them in paper and succeeded, by the time breakfast was over, in making the boys accept her absence, all agog for the skating. They hopped, skipped, and jumped, one on either side of him, down the Mound and at the corner of Frederick Street he told them to have a good day—"See and enjoy yourselves. Your mother is fine. You can tell her all about the skating when she gets back from the infirmary."

No one knew by his aspect as he joined the group at the doorway of Mackenzie Brothers that he was worried. Indeed he was worried. No sooner had he seen the boys dancing away up the little incline towards George Street than all the consolation he had given them—and, manufacturing it for them, almost believed—ebbed. He recalled the doctor's gravity.

Todd was shocked at his news. Hunched on his stool, a silver bowl between his knees, he carefully drew down his spectacles with the back of a rouged thumb and stared up over their tops at him.

"And what did the doctor say it is?" he asked.

"Rupture."

"Rupture? Oh, well, that's not to be worried about. It's worse with a woman than a man, I believe; but I've known, when I was a young soldier, many a horseman operated on for a double-rupture—or hernia, as they call it —and riding again——"

"No, the appendix is ruptured. It's the appendix, it seems, that's been her trouble this while back."

"Oh! Well, you got her to the infirmary all right. But what about your young lads?"

"I had them up and washed and gave them their breakfast. They're all right. It seems she went out with them after denner and got them each a pair

of skates. There's no use having them sit and greet in the empty house because she's taken ill. I telt them she would be all right at the infirmary, and got them some sangwidges cut. They came down with me carrying their new skates and I had them laughing afore I left them. They'll not be back till four or five, maybe, and they can wait on the stairs till I get hame."

"Aye," sighed Todd.

"I'm to be at the infirmary this morning to see how she is."

"You'd better be getting away, then."

"Thank you, Mr. Todd. That was what I telt you for. Will I ask leave of absence from Mr. Rigby?"

"No need," rasped the old man. "I give you leave of absence on my ain responsibility. Gang awa'!"

A change seemed to have come over Edinburgh as Stewart marched up the steps by the side of the Mound, his breath, that sharp day, like thin smoke. The sounds of the city were slightly muffled. Little aware of his surroundings he marched on by George IVth Bridge and past the corner of Candlemakers' Row and the Greyfriars, straightening his back as he passed in at the gates of the infirmary as though they were of barracks.

There seem to be about all infirmaries, as well as blessed suggestion (despite Cain and others) of man being his brother's keeper, hints of the end. The sound of the traffic murmuring at their tiers of windows is, to the ears of some, as that of Styx flowing by, whether they know that river's name or not. All the wards are Silence Rooms, a strange silence lurking in them. In the waiting-rooms there is a silence also. Even the chairs might be rigidly waiting word about cases.

A lady who was, as Stewart would say, *kindness itself*, though with something of a feminine smart and soldierly manner, told him that his wife's condition was unchanged and that he could not see her, "at least not just now."

"Is she in pain still?"

"Oh, no."

"Is she deleerious?"

"No."

"She's comfortable, is she?" he asked.

"Yes. She is asleep. Are you on the phone?"

"No."

The nurse looked at him oddly.

"Well, you had better come back to-night," she suggested, "after your day's work is over."

"Thank you, ma'am. You'll tell her I was asking for her, when she wakens."

"Certainly I'll tell her."

He hurried down through the shadow of the high dome of the University, past its dusky archway, through streets in which the traffic was still as if muffled and, on climbing the stairs in Drummond's Wynd, opened the door to the utter stillness of the flat—*She* in the infirmary and the boys away skating. Loneliness lurked there as stoic anxiety in the waiting-room at the hospital. All the sounds he made with teapot and tea-caddy were unwontedly loud, harsh impacts, as on an eternal quiet. He could not eat. He drank a cup of strong tea and had a smoke instead.

When he returned to the shop Mr. Rigby had an eye on him and beckoned.

"I'm sorry to hear the news from Todd," he said. "How was she?"

"Sleeping, sir. I couldna see her. I've to go back after work."

"I see. Well, we'll hope for the best. Anything I can do for you, Reid—let me know," and Rigby nodded definitely to signify that he meant what he said.

Down in the basement Teddy and Todd pivoted on their stools.

"How is she?" they asked.

"They wouldna let me see her. She was asleep and should not be awakened, of course. I'm to call again when I'm through with my work. They asked me if I was on the phone."

"So you gave them the number of Mackenzie Brothers?"

"Never thought to do that!"

"Oh, you should have done so."

"Goad, I never thought of it. And they might not care, upstairs, for them to call me up here."

Todd rose, took off his leather apron, and marched away. Stewart removed his coat and jacket and donned his aprons. The old man returned just as Reid was sitting down in his corner beside Leng.

"Mr. Mackenzie is not in yet from his luncheon," said Todd, "but I asked Mr. Robert. You can phone from here if you like, any time, and you can give them this number for them to call you."

"Well, that's rale kind. I'll not phone from here the day, seeing it was arranged I was to call to-night, but it would be well to give then the number —seeing they asked for it—for to-morrow."

"Not that we need look for any turn for the worse," remarked Todd, "but just——"

"Aye."

That night Mr. Rigby sent Malcolm out on rounds in place of Stewart so that he could go straight to the infirmary when the shop closed. It was a different young woman he saw that time. She had to go away to make inquiries and came back to tell him that the patient could not yet be disturbed. His messages of the morning, she assured him, would of course have been given her. She had come round for a while but was asleep again.

Stewart took a piece of paper from his waistcoat, in the action diffusing an odour of old rank tobacco-dottle, for in that pocket he kept his pipe.

"This is a phone number," he explained. "They have given me leave to have a call at the place of business where I work, if I am wanted like in a hurry—if she wakens and cries on me."

"Thank you. We'll keep a note of it."

"She's going on all right?" he asked.

"As well as could be expected."

When he came out again a steady snow was falling, whitening the trees —the bare trees, bordering the road up from the Meadows—and the railings, and making the light of the street lamps seem to shudder. The boys were in the street when he turned the corner of Drummond's Wynd. They had been waiting on the stairs but the snow had brought them out again to make slides on the pavement. Aye, there they were—shouting and sliding, which was all for the best as the saying goes. At sight of their father they dashed at him.

"Did you see ma mither?" shouted Charley.

"Oh, faither, I can skate fine already," said Alec.

Going up the stairs he assured them again that their mother was getting on fine and that on the morrow he would tell her they had had grand skating.

"Now you go and wash while I'm getting the supper," he said. "You're as black as the chimney!"

Their day of exercise in the open had made them sleepy, and soon after the evening meal was finished he ordered—

"Come on, lads, it's the foot-bath night. Tuesday night's foot-bath, Saturday night's whole bath, ye ken. We'll have to tell your mother when she gets back that we didna forget the *rootin*."

After the foot-baths they were both ready for bed without protest.

He sat alone, his pipe in his hand, picturing Minnie in the ward. He could picture wards easily. He had twice himself been in hospital-cots. The aligned beds he saw, the coverlets always kept smoothed out, the sheets folded back just so. He hoped that if she was restless, and got the blankets all fankled up, the nurse that came to straighten them would not talk sharply to her.

There was a knock at the door and he opened to Mrs. Kennedy.

"Good-evening, Mr. Reid. I just came to ask how she is?"

"Come in."

"No, I'll not come in. I'm expecting a—a young niece of mines up the night—my niece and her lad. It's all human nature, ye ken," and she sniffed.

"The operation was successful," said Stewart, "but I canna see her yet. She's not to be disturbed."

"Oh, well, we can aye remember her in our prayers. I'll spier again the morn. Good-night to you."

"Good-night, and thank you." He closed the door. "She's not drunk as yet, anyhow," he thought, turning back to his chair in the kitchen.

There he sat spending a great number of matches on his pipe that he allowed to go out constantly, coughing each time he lit it, now and then muttering, "Aye, aye!" or "No, no!" over his thoughts—or his thought, might be a better word, for in a way all of them, though they had a superficial disparity, were, at the core, that his wife was ill and among strangers in a hospital ward.

He considered that there should be an early rise next morning to get the boys out with him to their skating. He rose, drew the blind and looked out. The snow was falling with quiet insistence. The street was empty. Then from an entry across the road (the one from which he had once seen a girl come and beckon to a waiting lad in the wee sma' hours) a man emerged, paused, turned up coat-collar and, hunching shoulders, hurried up the street leaving a print of his boots black on the whiteness, black prints quickly obliterated by that dense snowfall.

He dropped the corner of the blind in place.

"I hope it doesna thaw the ice, for Goad kens how the laddies are to be amused if they canna go skating," he thought. "It's a pity the holidays are not over."

But the morning was crisp again, frosty. Feet going by outside went with a crunching and squealing. So, after breakfast, the boys accompanied him again to the corner of Frederick Street. As he left them there Kerr made up on him.

"How's the wife this morning, Stewart?" were his first words.

"I haven't had word yet, haven't been there yet. I called in last night but she wasn't to be disturbed. They said she was going on as well as could be expected. They're to phone the shop if necessary, but I'm going up whether they phone or not to see how she is, about ten o'clock. I'll just get the rootin done in nice time."

"It must be a worry for you," said Kerr.

"Aye, it's that." Stewart had never known him so friendly.

Todd, Teddy, and Malcolm were waiting at the door as he drew near. All three spoke together: "How's the wife, Stewart?"

"I have no news this morning. Last night she was sleeping. Oh, while there's life there's hope," he added, plunging for a proverb, feeling somewhat mute, void of original speech in his trouble.

Over his work that morning he was as one in a dream. He longed for a blast on the whistle and Rigby's voice either to tell him there was word that she was better or to call him up to the telephone. Several times, unaware, his hand lay motionless on the enormous soup-tureen cover he was at work upon as he thought of Minnie—then lying in a ward—walking round Queen's Drive in the King's Park years past on a Sunday morning; sitting on the boat from Leith for the Forth Bridge that summer, crooning *Jenny Veeve*.

That was a happy holiday they had! All manner of mental snapshots of her he shuffled in his mind, and then back his thoughts went to the infirmary—aligned beds. And suddenly he saw, in his imagined picture, two nurses carry in a screen and put it round her cot. He had seen that done in hospitals where he had lain. His hand rested inert on the curve of the massive silver lid, but no brush smote the wall to bring him to attention.

He glanced at the clock: a quarter to ten. Todd spoke suddenly.

"What way," he said, "do you not go up to the infirmary and ask for her? I don't know the hours for visitors but I should think in the case of an operation you could ask at any time, though you might not be allowed in the ward."

"They have the phone number if I'm wanted," replied Stewart, "but I planned to go up at ten again whether they phoned or not."

"Off you go, then. I'll take the responsibility. Just up you go and walk out smartly, or you could tell Mr. Rigby or Mr. Robert that your sergeant gave you permission."

"I'll go," said Stewart.

Todd heard the clap of the basement door, listened to the sound of his ascending feet. They heard him pass smartly through the shop and with a click-click cross the grating.

"I don't think Stewart realises," said Todd to Leng, "the seriousness of his wife's condition."

"Don't you?"

"No, I doubt it. I was talking to Mrs. Todd about it. She tells me ordinary appendiceetis is nothing nowadays with the skill that surgeons have. But ruptured appendix is different. If Mrs. Reid pulls through to-day then she'll be fairly safe, my wife tells me. She heard of somebody that had it and the doctors were worried till the three days was past. I understand it's not the operation that's grave but whether the poison in the system from the bursting of the appendix can be eleeminated."

Teddy nodded and nodded.

"I don't know what he would do without her," added Todd after a pause.

"He buckled-to to-day," Teddy pointed out, "and yesterday—got the boys cheered up and away to skate."

“Aye, but it’s not only the boys. It’s himself. He’s a man who needs a woman to look after him, or a sergeant! Don’t misunderstand me. I’ve got a great liking for Stewart Reid, but I feel that he has a lot of the runagate in him. She recognises that, I’m of the opinion, and accepts him as he is and keeps him straight.”

“He’ll probably keep straight for the sake of the children,” said Teddy, “if——”

“More or less. But he has a convivial turn.”

Silence again as they worked. Then Rigby came down and paced in that even, deliberate, mincing way of his to the old man’s table, solemn of aspect.

“There’s a telephone-call for Stewart,” he said, “asking him to go to the infirmary at once. I suppose that’s where he went a wee while ago?”

“Yes. I gave him permission. He’ll be there now. What did they say?”

“Just could Mr. Reid come to the infirmary immediately, and I said he was on his way. I just came down to make sure if I was right.”

“Aye. I wonder what that means? I wonder if it means there is improvement——”

“I hope so,” replied Rigby. He looked at his hands. “May as well have a wash while I’m down here,” he added. He washed slowly and having dried on a towel held his hands to the blaze of the fire. “Well, it is fine healthy weather,” he remarked. “Good to be alive these days. I came up that hill this morning all the way breathing deep through my nostrils. Sends the blood coursing.”

“Grand! I like a touch of frost myself.”

“Well, I’ll away up,” said Rigby, and paced evenly upstairs.

Selling a lady a bracelet but half an hour later he glanced up because of feet in the doorway. Stewart had returned. At sight of his face Rigby had to hesitate a moment before replying to an inquiry the customer made.

Reid passed down the stairs. He opened and closed the door quietly. Todd and Leng looked over their shoulders to see who came. Without taking off his coat he walked to the old man’s table. Todd looked up at him, chin on chest, over his spectacles, a small silver lighter in the palm of his left hand.

“Well, what’s the news?” said he. “How is——” and he stopped.

Stewart lifted his two hands and made a circular movement in air, but did not speak.

“Oh, man, Stewart, I’m sorry to hear that!” exclaimed Todd, to whom no word had been said.

Stewart made a grim effort to recover his lost speech, and succeeded.

“I just came back to ask leave of absence,” said he in a voice that seemed not his own at all, the rich thickness out of it, a voice harsh as a file.

Todd took off his spectacles. Setting them on the table he stood up, and laying his enormous right hand, heedless of the wet rouge on it, on Stewart’s shoulder, said he:

“Now, Stewart, pay attention. Wait till I get off my leather apron and I’ll go up and see Mr. Mackenzie with you. Auld Todd will see you through.”

CHAPTER TWENTY

"WHITE HEATHER! GOOD LUCK!"

"Roslin! Roslin!"

"Forth Bridge!"

These calls came down to the polishers in the basement of Mackenzie Brothers shop—Todd at his table to one side of the door leading to the outhouses under the pavement, and to the other side, at their table, Stewart Reid and one Mackinnon (late of the Gordon Highlanders) who had taken the place of Teddy, Leng's luck having turned and he having flown.

Historically that combination of Stewart and Mackinnon was fitting enough. Their predecessors in their regiments are in Lady Butler's picture in which the Greys charge out of the canvas upon us and, clinging to the stirrup-leathers of each dragoon, a kilted infantryman, a Gordon Highlander, leaps along—pictorial record of an incident in a war in which Britain's ally of a later war was the enemy, and the enemy of that later one was an ally. Side by side they polished silver, from Communion Cups to cocktail-shakers.

For a little while that porter and polisher in the service of the Mackenzies, Stewart Reid, had been a subject for discussion above-stairs. In the slack period between noon and one, Mr. Rigby, coming from behind a counter, and Begg at the door of his cage, discussed him. The cashier hoped that, "for the sake of the children, as much as for himself," he would marry again soon. Rigby murmured, "He was fond of her," for all reply to that. Rattray, unoccupied at the moment, and sufficiently condescending to be willing to exchange a few words with cashier and manager (or chief assistant), drew near but, hearing of whom they talked in friendly interest, moved away again, the subject of a porter in the basement beneath his condescension. Kerr, after Stewart had gone with his bag one night—the porter having seemed almost cheerful, less drawn in the face than he had been—curled a nostril and told Malcolm, a note of happy derision in his voice and an accent of contempt on the first word, "He will find another wife soon!" but Malcolm, who was not all servile flatterer to his immediate chief, merely answered, "Do you think so?" in a tone that suggested to Kerr's ears that he thought he might not. Miss Lennox, rustling in in the mornings, was even more sedulous than before to catch Stewart's eye as he

bent over the crank of the shutters, and give a greeting; and Nell Drummond embarrassed him, made him dread a breakdown on his part, by saying, as she leant against the big wooden tub, “Puir wee laddies! It’s sad for them. They must miss their mither and a mither’s love,” and she thought Stewart heartless because he responded gruffly with his mere monosyllabic *Aye*. Watty Barr got the impression into his head that Nell was “trying to catch” Reid, and giggled over that, communicating it to Mr. Murray.

Mrs. Mackenzie, who took an interest in the affairs of her husband’s shop, inquired one evening over dinner: “How’s that poor man getting on who lost his wife?”

“All right, I think,” answered Mackenzie. “Don’t you, Bob?”

Bob nodded.

“Is he getting over it?” she asked.

“I think he was very fond of her,” Bob replied. “He looks dreadful sometimes.”

“I suppose they have friends who will help with the boys?”

“Oh, my dear,” exclaimed her husband, “these people have no social life. The man knows his barber, perhaps, to nod to on the street, and his fellows at the shop. That’s practically all. The wife talks to the stair-landing neighbour—or doesn’t! Nobody calls, you know, except the rent collector and, now and then, in some of these tenements that they are only allowed to occupy with a letter of recommendation from an employer or a clergyman, somebody to see if the flat is being kept in order.”

“It seems rather a lonely life,” Mrs. Mackenzie remarked.

“Something to be said for it,” declared Robert with a laugh. “The trouble about some other spheres is simply in the social contacts. One may like a man and not his wife, or one may like a woman and not her husband——”

“That’s rather dangerous,” his father interjected.

“James!” said Mrs. Mackenzie, pretending to be shocked.

“—— but,” continued Robert, “one has to go out, and one has to invite others in, and friends of one’s friends one does not always feel as friendly to as one’s friends feel.” He chuckled. “Get me?” he asked. “It’s a dreadful bore sometimes and makes one feel lonelier than when alone.”

Mackenzie threw back his head, laughing.

" 'O for a lodge in some vast wilderness,' " he quoted.

"Absolutely—sometimes," Robert replied.

Mrs. Mackenzie looked sadly at her son, thinking he had the very manner of a bachelor, like the uncle after whom he was named.

"When trouble comes," said she, "it must be terrible to be so very much alone." Her mind departed a little way from the case of Stewart Reid. "Bachelors, spinsters, widows or widowers without children, must often be lonely too." Her mind returned to the case under discussion. "That porter has his boys to think of, at any rate, to live for."

"When trouble comes," Mackenzie assured her, "these people are wonderful. They rally then one to another; they are all Jock Thomson's bairns then."

"All old soldiers together," Robert added.

"The Todds, I know," said Mackenzie, "looked after the Reid boys quite a lot during the dark days after the mother died. I understand he left them with Mrs. Todd in the morning and called for them on his way home at night, till the schools opened again. And I haven't the slightest doubt that their stair-landing neighbour will be kindness itself."

"Well," said she, "I think the best thing that man could do would be to marry again. What is the charlady like who comes to the shop? You told me she was a single woman."

"Oh, she wouldn't do," said Robert.

"Why not?"

"She's like nothing on God's earth," he explained.

And that ended their discussion of Stewart.

Mr. Murray talked about him with no one but old Todd. For long it had been the watchmaker's custom to slip downstairs just after the under-polishers had come up for their parcels, go pattering down smartly to wash, preparatory to going home, to wash and have "a crack" with the old man. His nonsense about what agitated the public mind, and even his sense about it, was only for occasions when there were others in the basement. If others arrived when he and Todd were having their crack it always ended with a, "Well, I'll awa'." Never had he been in the Todds' house and never had they been to his. Mr. Murray's social life was nearly as restricted as that of the polisher's. Yet each, to the other, was almost necessary in the world, as near

to necessary as men aware of impermanence may admit to themselves that any one is necessary. There was a tacit understanding between them that their years of service together with the Mackenzies put them beyond the possibility of any estrangement, though always it was *Mr.* Todd and *Mr.* Murray.

"Watty Barr," said Murray, "told me he thought Nell Drummond was setting her cap for him."

"Maybe so," Todd replied, getting up to wash his great hands and mighty forearms, the working day near an end, "but she hasna got it set at the angle to catch him. He feels the loss too deep."

"He's told you?"

"No, but I ken."

"I see."

Young Maxwell came down.

"Well, I'll awa'," said Murray.

Todd realised that absence of speech does not necessarily mean absence of feeling. What Stewart felt he could never tell to any. On the morning after *She* was taken to the infirmary he had been roused by the alarm to the day's routine and suddenly realised she was not in the flat. On Hogmanay night he had touched depths the probability of which was only hinted to him when Minnie was alive and only a mile or so away in a hospital-cot. The boys were in bed. He sat alone. The bells began their clashing, ringing out the old year, ringing in the new—and she gone.

The thoughtfulness of Mrs. Todd helped him with Charley and Alec till school opened again. When the holidays were over the simple expedient of getting a duplicate key prevented that sitting on the steps for the boys till he came home, the thought of which had troubled the old man when he had heard of it that day on which Stewart had wheedled the children into happiness and sent them off to skate.

There were three letters for him to write when he felt he could, and at last he had penned and despatched them. The occasions for letters were but as follows: to announce marriages, births, deaths, and to wish a happy new year to relatives—for, apart from these matters, what was there to write about? He had written to Minnie's married sister in Perth—Australia; to her brother in South Africa; and to his own brother, Tom, in Nova Scotia. That

was the last of these duties the need for attention to which helped him to accept the dreadful as if it were matter-of-fact routine.

The routine of life went on in its usual way. Birch-trees in the gardens drew delicate traceries as of maiden-hair fern against a cold blue sky, and the crocuses, aligned, came clean from the dark mould. The shutters were rolled up and down. March winds came and the *mutch* cowls twirled atop the chimneys, and loose slates flew, crashing on the pavements, wakening up the light sleeper. Wakened, he would lie with thoughts that he told to none, of the past and Minnie, of the boys in an unknown future.

On the way to work, tilted to the winds, he saw stalwart policemen stationed at the top of the Waverley Steps grab and bring back to earth those who were lifted up by the whirling draught there. It was in April, when sudden blatters of rain on the kitchen window woke him, that Teddy Leng had left, as all had realised he would sooner or later. Down the tube, when the May sunshine was sharp on the plate-glass and dazzling on the tops of the cases, down the tube came the order, "Stewart and Mackinnon to put out the sun-blinds," instead of "Stewart and Leng." With only the change of a word the routine continued.

Laburnums waved their ecstatic clusters, instead of rattling seed-pods, over suburban walls by which Stewart marched with his green bag—in dusk instead of night. It was when he was making his rounds in daylight that he received a letter over which he desired—or thought he desired—advice.

He had not yet learned to speak of private matters to Todd before Mackinnon and awaited a moment when the new man would be called out upon an errand. It came, to his satisfaction, on the afternoon of the day that the letter arrived.

"Todd, do you ken what I'm going to ask you?" said Stewart, when the door slapped on Mackinnon's departure.

"How can I ken——"

"I'm going to ask your advice."

"Oh! Well, I'll give it to the best of my ability." Old Todd was worried, recalling the suggestion that Nell Drummond was *setting her cap* for Stewart, and thinking it would not be a good match—no, not even for the sake of somebody to look after the lads. She had a soft and cooing utterance at times but it rang false to him. Her hatreds—of Miss Lennox, for example, and for Miss Lennox's clothes—seemed both more vigorous and sincere than her likings.

“I have a letter here that I want you to read,” said Stewart.

“A letter?”

“Aye, a letter. Here it is.”

Todd readjusted his spectacles with a dab of the back of a thumb, setting them higher on his nose. Judicial of aspect he conned that letter slowly. It was from Tom Reid in Nova Scotia, suggesting that Stewart and the boys should go out to him.

There was little of the fairy-story in it. Here was no rich relative overseas announcing a fortune to be shared. The depression, it appeared by the letter, was there too. In fact, from the preliminary sentences, Todd was almost prepared to find that the writer was going to ask for help. He glanced at the end to discover who wrote it.

“Tom is my brother,” Stewart explained.

Todd turned back, continued with his careful reading, and realised, after having absorbed a few more sentences, that these opening ones were possibly designed only to prevent Stewart from being over-elated at commencement. Things were none too good out there but improvement was just round the corner. The pith of the letter was that Tom Reid had strained his heart and the work on his farm was too much for him. He had no lads of his own. Considering how to carry on he had thought of his younger brother —and the boys without a mother. They would have an aunt there. He asked Stewart to go out and work the farm for him on a profit-sharing basis, and for the children, the letter ended, there were good schools.

Todd lowered the sheets of paper to his knee and sat in meditation.

“You know it is a funny thing,” said Stewart, as the old man did not speak, “but I have aye wanted to be a farmer—though they say it is no great game financially.”

“I’m just considering this,” replied Todd.

So there was silence again for a space—too long for Stewart’s impatience.

“I ken about horses,” he pointed out. “I’m as good as a farrier, almost as good as a vet.”

“Uh-huh!” grunted Todd, raising the letter and apparently rereading a sentence here and there.

“And it would be a better life for the boys when they grow up,” Stewart went on. “Nova Scotia is not a bit like Edinburghy. What chance have they here?”

Todd turned a page. He remembered a story he had heard of some poor wench who went to the minister to ask advice and how he, gravelled to give it, told her to listen that night to what the curfew (for it was a story of old times) rang, whether it rang, *Do, do, do*, or *Don’t, don’t, don’t*.

“After all,” said Stewart, “it’s not altogether a grand life here. There’s whiles, if it wasn’t for them—och, I dinna ken what I would do: gang on the tiddley for a week, maybe, and that wouldna help.”

Todd folded the letter carefully, replaced it in the envelope, and handed it back.

“Auld Todd says Go,” said he. “He’ll be sorry to lose you, but he says Go.”

“Thank you for your advice,” replied Stewart. “I was hoping it would be that. I’ll write to him the night. You’ll note he says he will send the money for our passage if I make the decision to go.”

The decision having been made, and thus ratified, there was a new brightness in his eyes for the next few weeks, but when only days instead of weeks were between him and farewell there came a shadow of doubt, of misgiving. He had examined Nova Scotia on the boys’ school atlas and it was a far cry—with all the gurly Atlantic between. He was not merely trying to be *a comic* when he posed before the fireplace, stamped on the cement, and declaimed with an arm upraised—somewhat in the manner which had accompanied his spouting of The Charge of the Light-Headed Brigade: “My foot is on my native heath, and my name is MacGregor!” He was both feeling and deriding an emotion created by the imminence of departure.

That the day would come when he would observe with something in the nature of attachment that whitening-splattered and rouge-stained table he had not ever imagined. Yes, it was a far cry to Nova Scotia—far from the castle rock, far from the Dean bridge and the twisting gorge below, from the rise of Hanover Street where the Fife fields came bobbing up and then the Forth, far from the tassels of laburnum over the garden walls of Wardie. He would miss the view which—when he came to his day’s work by the Mound instead of by South Bridge and North Bridge—was always, well though he kent it, surprising, that view on emerging from the high-perched Old Town

of the New Town and Princes Street, the grand street with the houses but to one side of it.

He would even miss the haar of autumn that set him coughing because of the touch of gas he had got in the war, the haar drifting through the streets and making the lamps like what folk call *rainy moons*. The Pentland Hills and the way they seemed to rise up suddenly at the turning of a corner when he was delivering parcels on summer evenings out by Morningside and Merchiston he would assuredly miss. He would miss——

"No, no, no!" he muttered.

He must stop thinking that way or he would never be able to flit, and what was there to stay for with Minnie gone? So the light came back to his eyes, of one on the brink of a new beginning.

When the day of his departure arrived he and those who were to see him off had, apparently, the conviction that all was for the best and, apparently, the faith that partings should not be sad but jocund.

"White heather! Good luck!"

The flower-selling gamins were calling that in Princes Street again as Stewart Reid and the boys left it, passing to the station.

"White heather! Good luck!"

The cry followed them, disturbing Stewart with a pang of homesickness before he had fairly left home.

Old Todd, who had got leave for half an hour to see him off, hearing it also, trusted it might be in the nature of good omen. "Aye, yes, indeed," he murmured to himself, pursuing father and sons into the station.

Mr. Murray and Watty Barr tossed a penny to decide which of them would go also—for one had to be at the shop in case of anybody coming in with a watch for expert examination. Murray won.

"No, I'm not going down to see him away," said Kerr. "I'm ower busy with all they confounded tourists beginning to come in. You can go, Malcolm, if you want to."

"All right. I bet you it will be funny. Stewart will be chowed, if I'm any judge."

He was evidently no judge.

As they clustered on the platform, Stewart's eye did once, lighting upon a sign over a frosted-glass doorway and frosted-glass windows—*Refreshments*—consider it thoughtfully. In the old days there were no partings without a *doch-an-doris*. In there he had taken one, and another, with his old pal David Scott, and had puzzled James Mackenzie with his tangled explanation for the odour that Mr. Begg had whiffed on his return to the shop. On this day of farewell he dismissed the appeal of the sign. Todd did not ever refresh. Mr. Murray never did during business hours. Besides, he was going off to a new life—in New Scotland, as Murray cheerily pointed out to him. He had never thought of that.

"Aye—that's it—Nova Scotia: New Scotland."

That information eased the determined, intrusive, sickening regret at leaving the grand city that folk from all over the world came to see, leaving the streets, the gardens, the basement with the flicker of its fire under the big cauldron.

Carriage-doors were slamming. The boys, all agog as for a great outing, a wonderful holiday, were bundled in and Stewart followed. The guard waved his flag, blew his whistle. "Good-bye, laddies. Good-bye, boy," said old Todd.

"So-long, Stewart."

"Good luck, Stewart."

"Well, good-bye, then," and the Man from Mackenzie Brothers—old soldier—was smoothly whisked away.

THE END

NOVELS BY FREDERICK NIVEN

THE FLYING YEARS

In this novel Mr. Frederick Niven's characters move against a background of changing years. Its opening scenes are in Scotland and the hardly known Canadian West of a generation ago. It is a story of the exiled and evicted in a strange land—and what they made of it and of themselves. Such has been the celerity of change there, that in the lifetime of one man we hear the lowing of the buffalo herds, the cries of the hunters and the shrill sound of the Red River carts fade away over the horizon, giving place to the locomotive's hoot and the drone overhead of the aeroplane. Against the background of the flying years, the background of Time and Eternity, go transient men—with their ambitions, their loves, their hopes, their regrets, their three-score and ten of fugitive experience, their nostalgia—as in a shadow-show.

"*This by far the most beautiful novel of the year . . . an unforgettable story.*"

Glasgow Weekly Herald

"*Here surely is a writer of the first magnitude. . . . only the dullest witted reader could fail to be profoundly stirred by the magic of Mr. Niven's word pictures.*"

Glasgow Herald

"*An achievement in which, at last, Mr. Niven really does justice to his far-reaching humanity and sympathy and his powers of description . . . a novel lit with imagination, genial with affection for men and women, and sweetened with wisdom.*"

Frank Kendon *in* John o' London's

3/6 *net*

TRIUMPH

RECOMMENDED BY THE BOOK SOCIETY

Set partly in South America, partly in Scotland—countries in which the author is equally at home—this book is a rare achievement, for Mr. Niven, with equal ease, can fill his words now with the suffocating heat and

dazzling contrast of light and shade of the southern summer, now with the chilling blast and dour greyness of a Scots winter. Those who read this book will retain a more vivid picture of Salvador than of many places they have seen with their own eyes! The story of the Scots music-teacher at the English Academy, Salvador, is just one of those things Mr. Niven can do with such perfect delicacy. Here is pathos tinged with kindly irony—an irony without which we know we would be too deeply stirred. Frederick Niven is the only writer we know who can sound the depths of sentiment and never touch sentimentality.

"*Any novel by Frederick Niven is something to look forward to, and* TRIUMPH *is one of his best . . . a novel in a thousand.*"—DR. J. M. BULLOCH *in the*

Manchester Evening Chronicle

"TRIUMPH *is one of those relentless books which insist on being read word for word, and, once read, refuse to be forgotten. . . . An unusual and distinguished story.*"

CLEMENCE DANE

"*Mr. Niven has given us a novel, delicate, sensitive and at the same time strong.*"

GERALD GOULD

3/6 *net*

MRS. BARRY

RECOMMENDED BY THE BOOK SOCIETY

"*He was the only son of his mother and she was a widow.*" This might well be the text of Mr. Frederick Niven's beautifully told story of Mrs. Barry—a story that well deserves the honour of a place by the side of *Rab and His Friends* and *Margaret Ogilvy* on the shelf of Scottish classics. Mrs. Barry is the portrait of a widow reduced by the force of circumstances to earning a precarious living by keeping lodgers in a drab Glasgow street. Yet Mrs. Barry still has her memories of youthful happiness—the big meadow at Wester Kyle, the gulls streaming behind the plough on the acres of her old home, the larks singing as she lay in the bracken with her lover—and now. . . . She has now one enduring passion, her love for her son Neil, and the story of this love is told tenderly and beautifully.

"*A noble story . . . one for which I shall be bold enough to claim the right to an enduring name in the literature of Scotland.*"

COMPTON MACKENZIE *in the* Daily Mail

"*An unusually fine book.*"

Morning Post

"*How like life it all is! What a deep tender quality is revealed in the relation between mother and son, what courage in dark places! I always turn to Mr. Niven's work expecting to find in it both life and art, and* MRS. BARRY *did not disappoint me.*"

PHYLLIS BENTLEY

3/6 *net*

THE RICH WIFE

The rich wife, Margaret Hepworth Humphry, daughter of a wealthy, self-made shipbuilder, is married to a writer who eventually arrives among the big sellers. He is not presented as a typical successful novelist, but merely as one self-centred to the point of megalomania, who happens to embark on writing as one of the avenues towards publicity. His interest was not at all in his craft, but in the emoluments accruing from the practice of it. The rich wife has had other riches than those for which her husband married her, and it is by aid of her great gifts of character that she returns to a healing knowledge of the ecstasy and beauty of life. On this theme Mr. Frederick Niven has written one of his powerful stories of Scottish domestic life that repeats the success of *The Three Marys*.

"*A fine book.*"

Queen

"*As usual with Mr. Niven, the writing is first class.*"

COMPTON MACKENZIE *in the* Daily Mail

"*Mr. Niven is in the front rank of contemporary storytellers. . . . He gives us real characters.*"

H. E. BATES *in* Everyman

"*A book to enjoy.*"

Aberdeen Press

"*Frederick Niven has the faculty of making his characters live.*"

Scotsman

3/6 *net*

THE PAISLEY SHAWL

Peter Cunningham, a young Scots journalist, has written his first novel. He is awaiting the cheque for it and the inspiration for his next with the feeling that both expectations are in vain. Fortunately Helen is understanding. Even although she is his wife and this is a post-war story, they loved one another, says Mr. Niven. Then comes the letter from Hilda Perry, the poetess and brilliant woman contributor to the press on all the provocative subjects of the day. She is doing a series of articles on contemporary authors and wishes to include Peter Cunningham. Peter goes to Edinburgh and brings Hilda to his home in the Elwin Hills. It might so easily have been just another eternal triangle, but Mr. Niven's touch is perfect. His style is as reflective of every nuance in his characters as the lochs that mirror his inspiring hills.

"*. . . A slight theme, perfectly handled, with wit, colour and understanding.*"

ROGER PIPPETT *in the* Daily Herald

"*There is an extraordinary quiet power in this book, a rare understanding.*"

Morning Post

"*An attractive story, mellow in tone, nicely balanced, and written with assurance and quiet distinction.*"

Sunday Express

"*Mr. Niven progresses in the art of story telling.*"

Scotsman

3/6 *net*

THE THREE MARYS

The Three Marys is the life story of Robert Barclay, the celebrated portrait painter. It opens with Barclay's boyhood days in Glasgow, and

proceeds through his art training to his final success as a painter. It is what one might call a triple love story, and each of the three Marys with whom he falls in love successively is drawn with a charm which Mr. Niven has already exploited in *A Tale That is Told*. The story is somewhat of a tragedy, as Robert divorces the third of the Marys, whom he has married. He then goes in search of the second Mary, and having finally traced her to London is rushing to meet her when his train is wrecked. Barclay is killed, and the book ends on this note of tragedy.

"*The whole story is extraordinarily good, full of vivid details and peopled by characters who remain in one's memory.*"

ST. JOHN ERVINE *in the* Daily Express

"*The first Mary is a gem and a triumph. Few more natural, vital creatures have ever got between book covers.*"

Yorkshire Post

"*A book of rare sincerity. It will appeal to every lover of a sensitive, finely-proportioned novel.*"

John o' London's

"*Mr. Niven's work is rarely over-praised; it is quiet and sure of itself and distinguished.*" RALPH STRAUS *in the*

Sunday Times

3/6 *net*

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.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Old Soldier* by Frederick John Niven]