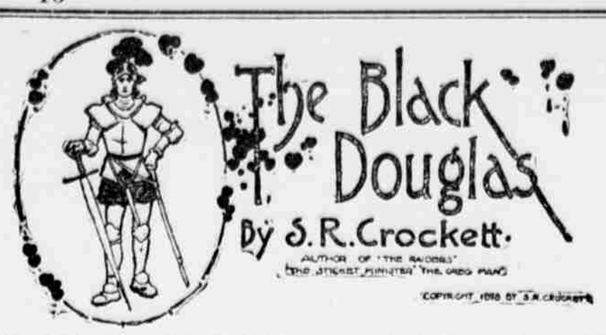

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CHAPTER I.

Enter the Black Douglas.

Merry fell the eve of Whitsunday of the year 1439 in the fairest and heartsomest spot in all the Scottish southland. The twined maypole had not yet been taken down from before the house of Brawny Kim, master armorer and foster father to William, sixth earl of Douglas and lord of Galloway.

Malise Kim, who by common voice was named "the Brawny," sat in his wicker chair before his door, overlooking the island-studded, fairylike loch of Carlinwark. In the smithy across the green, bare-trodden road two of his elder sons were still hammering at some armor of choice. But it was a ploy of their own, which they desired to finish that they might go trig and point-device to the earl's weapon-showing tomorrow on the braes of Balmaghie. Sholto and Laurence were the names of the two who hammered the ringing steel and blew the smooth-handled bellows of tough bull hide that wheezed and puffed as the fire roared deep and red before sinking to the right welding heat in a little flame round the buckle tache of the girdle brace they were working on.

And as they hammered they talked together in alternate snatches and silences. Sholto, the elder, meanwhile keeping an eye on his father, for their converge was not meant to reach the ear of the grave, strong man who sat so still in the chair with the afternoon sun in his eyes.

"Hark ye, Laurence," said Sholto, returning from a visit to the door of the smithy, the upper part of which was open, "no longer will I be a hammerer or iron and blower of fires for my father. I am going to be a soldier of fortune, and so I will tell him."

"When wilt thou tell him?" laughed his brother, tauntingly. "I wager my purple velvet doublet slashed with gold, which I bought with mine own money last Rood fair that you will not go across and tell him now. Will you take the dare?"

"The purple velvet—you mean it?" said Sholto, eagerly. "Mind if you refuse and will not give it up after promising. I will nick that lying throat of yours with my gullie knife."

And with that Sholto threw down his pincers and hammer and valiantly threw open the lower door of the smithy. He looked with bold dark eyes at his father, and stepped slowly across the grimy doorstep. Brawny Kim had not moved for an hour. His great hands lay in his lap, and his eyes looked at the purple ridges of Screel across the beautiful loch of Carlinwark, which sparked and dimpled among its isles like a little wilful beauty under the gaze of a score of gallants.

But Sholto's step slowed and lost its braggart strut and confidence. Behind him Laurence chuckled and laughed, smiting his thigh in his mocking glee.

"The purple velvet, mind you, Sholto; how well it will become you, coft from Rob Halliburton, our mother's own brother, seamed with red gold and lined with yellow satin and cramosie. Well, indeed, will it set you when Maud Lindesay, the maid who came from the north for company to the earl's sister, looks forth from the canopy upon you as you stand in the archer's rank on the morrow's morn."

Sholto squared his shoulders, and with a little backward hitch of his elbow, which meant, "Wait till I come back and I will pay you for this flouting," he strode determinedly across the green space toward his father.

The master armorer of Earl Douglas did not lift his eyes till his son had half crossed the road. Then even as a rank of spearsmen at the word of command lift their glittering points to the "ready," Sholto MacKim stopped dead where he was with a sort of gasp like one who finds his defenseless body breast high against the line of hostile steel.

"The purple velvet—" came the cautious whisper from behind. But the taunt was powerless now.

The smith held his son a moment with his eyes.

"Well?" came in the deep, low voice, more like the lowest tones of an organ than the speech of a man.

Sholto stood fixed, then half turning on his heel he began to walk towards the corner of the dwelling house over which a gay streamer of the creeping convolvolus dangled and swung in the stirring of the light breeze.

"You wish speech with me?" said his father, in the same level and thrilling undertone

"No," said Sholto, "I but thought—that is I desired—saw you Magdalen pass the way? I have somewhat to give her."

"Ah so," said Brawny Kim without moving, "a steel breastplate, belike. Thou hast the brace-buckle in thy hand. Doth the little Magdalen go with you to the weapon show tomorrow?"

"No, father," said Sholto, stammering, "but I was uneasy for the child. It is an hour since I heard her voice."

"Then," said his father, "go finish your work, put out the fire and seek your sister."

Sholto brought his hands together and made the little inclination of the head which was a sign of filial respect. Then, solemn as if he had been in his place in the ordered line of the earl's first levy of archer-men, he turned him about and went back to the smithy.

Laurence lay all abroad on the heap of charcoal of which the armorers' welding fire was made. Laurence was fairly expiring with laughter, and when his brother angrily kicked him in the ribs he only waggled an ineffectual hand and feebly crowed like a cock in his throat, in his efforts to stifle the sounds of mirth.

"Get up, fool," hissed his angry brother, "help me with this accursed hammer striking or I will make an end of such a giggling lout as you. Here, hold up."

And seizing his younger brother by the collar of his blue working blouse, he dragged him upon his feet.

"Now, by the saints," said Sholto, "if you cast your gibes upon me, by St. Andrew I will break every bone in your idiot's body."

"The purple velvet—O, the purple velvet," gasped Laurence, as soon as he could recover speech, "and the eyes of Maud Lindesay!"

"That will teach you to think rather of the eyes of Laurence MacKim!" cried Sholto, and without more ado hit his brother with his clenched knuckles a fair blow on the bridge of his nose.

The next moment the two lads were grappling together like wildcats, striking, kicking and biting with no thought except of who should have the best of the battle. They rolled on the floor, now tusseling among the crackling faggots, anon pitching soft as one body on the peat dust in the corner, again knocking over a bench and bringing down the tools thereon to the floor with a jingle which might have been heard far out on the loch. They were still clawing and cuffing each other in blind rage, when a hand, heavy and remorseless, was laid upon each. Sholto found himself being dabbled in the great tempering cauldron which stood by his father's forge. Laurence heard his own teeth rattle as he was shaken till his joints waggled like those of a puppet at Kelton hill fair. Then it was his turn to be dowsed in the water. Next their heads were soundly knocked together, and finally like a pair of arrows sent right and left, Laurence sped forth at the window in the gable end and found himself in the midst of a gooseberry bush, whilst Sholto, flying out of the door, fell sprawling on all fours almost under the feet of a horse on which a young man sat, smilingly watching the scene.

Brawny Kim scattered the embers of the fire on the forge hearth, and threw the breastplate and girdle brace at which the boys had been working into a corner of the smithy. Then he turned to lock the door with the massive key which stood so far out from the upper leat that to it the horses waiting their turn to be shod were ordinarily tethered.

As he did so he caught sight of the young man sitting on the black horse. Instantly a change passed over his face. With one motion of his hand he swept the broad blue bonnet from his brow and bowed the grizzled head which had worn it upon his breast. Thus for the breathing of a breath the master armorer stood, and then looked up again at the young knight on horseback.

"My lord," he said, after a long pause, in which he waited for the youth to speak, "this is not well—you ride unattended and unarmed."

"Ah, Malise," laughed the young earl, "a Douglas has few privileges if he may not sometimes on a summer eve lay aside his heavy prisonment of armor and don such a suit as this. What think you, eh? Is it not a valiant apparel, as might almost beseem one who rode a-courting?"

The mighty master smith looked at the young man with eyes in which reverence, rebuke and admiration strove together.

"But," he said, wagging his head with a grave humorousness, "your lordship needs not to ride a-courting. You are to be married to a great dame, who will bring you wealth, alliance and the dower of provinces."

The young man shrugged his shoulders and swung lightly off his charger, which turned to look at him as he stood and patted its neck.

"Know you not, Malise," he said, "that the earl of Douglas must needs marry provinces and the lord of Galloway wed riches? But what is there in that to prevent Will Douglas going courting at 17 years of his age, as a young man ought? But have no fear. I come not hither seeking the favor of any save of that lily flower of yours, the only true May blossom that blooms on the thorns of Carlinwark. I would look upon the angel smile on the face of your little Magdalen. And she be here, I would toss her arm-high for a kiss of her mouth, which I would rather touch than that of lady or leman. For I do ever profess myself her vassal and slave. Where have you hidden her, Malise?"

The smith lifted up his voice till it struck on the walls of his cottage and echoed like thunder along the shores of the lake

"Dame Barbara," he cried, and again getting no answer, "Ho, Dame Barbara, I say!"

Then at the second hello, a shrill and somewhat peevish voice proceeded from within the house opposite.

"Aye, coming, can you not hear, great dolt! Deed and deed 'tis a pretty pass when a woman with the cares of a household must come running light-toe and clatter-heel to every call of such a lazzy lout. Husband indeed—not house-band, but house-bond—I wot, house-torment, house-thorn house-cross—"

A sonsy well favored head strangely at variance with the words which came from it peeped out, and instantly the scolding prattle was stilled. Back went the head into the dark of the house as if shot from a bombard.

Malise MacKim indulged in a low hoarse chuckle as he caught the words "Eh, 'tis my Lord William! Save us, and me wanting my Ryssil gown that cost me ten silver shillings the ell, and not even my white peaked cap upon my head."

Her husband glanced at the young earl to see if he appreciated the savor of the jest. Then he looked away turning the enjoyment over and over under his own tongue, and muttering: "Ah, well, 'tis not his fault. No man hath sense of humor before he is 40 years of his age—and 'tis all the riper at 50."

The young man's eyes were looking this way and that, up and down the smooth pathway that skirted like a green selvage the shores of the loch.

"Malise," he said, as if he had already forgotten his late eager quest for the little Magdalen, "Darnaway here has a shoe loose, and tomorrow I ride to levy, and may also joust a bout in the tilt yard of the afternoon. I would not ask you to work on Whitsunday but that there cometh my Lord Fleming and Alan Lauder of the Bass, bringing with them an embassy from France and I hear there may be fair ladies of their company."

"Ah, quoth Malise, grimly. "So I have heard it said concerning the embassies of Charles, king of France!"

But the young man smiled and dusted one or two flecks of foam, which had blown backward from his horse's bit, upon the rich crimson doublet of finest velvet, which cinctured closely at the waist, fell half-way to his knee in heavy double plaits sewn with gold. A hunting horn of black and gold was suspended about his neck by a bandolier of dark leather, embroidered with bosses of gold, laced boots of soft, black leather, drawn together on the outside from ankle to mid-calf with golden cord met the scarlet "chauses" which covered his thigh and outlined the figure of him who was the noblest youth and the most gallant in all the realm of Scotland.

Earl William wore no sword, only a little gold-headed poinard with a woman's finger ring set upon the point of the hilt was at his side, and he stood easily resting his hand upon it as he talked, drawing it an inch from its sheath and snicking it back nonchalently with a sound like the clicking of a well-oiled lock.

"Clink the strokes strongly and featly, Malise, for tomorrow, when the Black Douglas rides upon Black Darnaway under the eyes of—well—of the women whom the ambassadors are bringing to greet me, there must be no stumbling and no mistakes. Or on the head of Malise MacKim the matter shall be, and let that wight remember that the Douglas does not keep a dule tree up there by the Gallows Slock for nothing."

The mighty smith was by this time examining the hooves of the earl's charger, one by one, with such instinctive delicacy of touch that Darnaway felt the kindly intent, and bending his neck about blew and snuffled into the armorer's tangled mat of crisp gray hair.

"Up there," exclaimed MacKim as the warm breath tickled his neck, and at the burst of sound the steed shifted and clattered upon the hard-beaten floor of the smithy, tossing his head till the bridle chain rang amain. "Eh, my Lord William," an altered voice came from the doorstep where dame Barbara MacKim stood louting low before the young earl, "but this is a blythe and calamitous day for this poor bit bigging o' the Carlinwark—to think that your honor should visit his servants! Will you no come ben and sit doon in the house-place. 'Tis far from fitting for your feet to pass thereupon But gin ye will favor—"

"Nay, I thank you, good Dame Barbara," said the earl, very courteously taking the close-fitting black cap with the red feather in it off his head. "I must bide but a moment for your husband to set right certain nails in the hooves of Darnaway here, to ready me for the morrow. Do you come to see the sport? So Buxom a dame as the mistress of Carlinwark should not be absent to encourage the lads to do their best at the sword-play and the rivalry of the butts."

And as the dame came curtseying and bowing her delighted thanks Earl William setting a forefinger under her triple chin stooped and kissed her in his gayest and most debonnair manner.

"Eh, to think on't, cried the dame clapping her hands together as she did at mass, "that I, Barbara MacKim, that am marriet to a donnert auld care like Malise there, should hae the privlege o a salute frae the bonny mou' o' Yerl William—(Thank ye kindly my lord) and be invceted to the weapon-shawing to sit amang the leddies and view the sport. Mellse, my man, caa' ye no that an honor, a preevilege? Is that no' owing to me being the sister—on my faither's side o' Ninian Halliburton merchant and indweller in Dumfries?"

"Nay, nay, good dame," laughed the earl, "'tis all for the sake of your own charms. I trust that your good man here is not jealous, but beauty, you well do ken, ever sends the wits of a Douglas wool gathering. Nevertheless, let us have a draft of your home-brewed ale, for kissing is but dry work after all—and little do I think of it, save (and he set his cap on his head with a gallant wave of his hand) in the case of a dame so fair and tempting as Dame Barbara."

At this the woman cast up her hands and her eyes again. "Eh, what will Market Ahanny o' the Shankfit say noo—this frae the yearl William. Eh, sirce, this is better than an abbot's absolution. I declare its mair sustainin' than a' the consolations of religion. Malise, do you hear, great dour cuif that ye are, what says my lord? And do you think so little of your married wife as ye do? Think shame, you being what ye are, and me the ain sister to thau master o' merchandise and baillie o' Dumfries, Ninian Livingstone."

And with that she vanished into the black oblong of the door opposite the smithy.

A HAND, HEAVY AND REMORSELESS, WAS LAID UPON EACH.

CHAPTER II.

My Fair Lady.

The strong man of Carlinwark made no long job of the horseshoeing, for as he hammered and filed he marked the eye of the young earl restlessly straying this way and that along the green riverside ways and his fingers nervously tapping the ashen casing of the smithy windowsill. Malise MacKim said to himself that he had not served a Douglas for thirty years without knowing by these signs that there was the swing of a kirtle in the case.

Presently the last nail was made firm, and Black Darnaway was led, passaging and tossing, out upon the green sward. Malise stood at his head till the Douglas swung himself into the saddle with a motion light as the first upward flight of a bird.

He put his hand into a pocket in the lining of his "soubreveste" and took out a golden "lion" of the king's recent mintage. He spun it in the air off his thumb, and then looked at it as he caught it.

"I think you and I could send out a better coinage than that with the old Groat press over there at Thrieve." he said.

Malise smiled his quiet smile.

"If the earl of Douglas deigns to make me the master of his mint, I promise him good, sound, broad pieces of a noble design—that is, till Chancellor Crichton hangs me for coining in the Grassmarket of Edinburgh."

"That would be never, with the Douglas lances to prick you a way out and the Douglas gold to buy the good will of his traitorous judges!"

Half unconsciously the earl sighed as he looked at the fair lake growing rosy in the light of the sunset. His boyish face was overspread with care, and for the moment he seemed overyoung to have inherited so great a burden. But the next moment he was himself again.

"I know, Malise," he said, "that I cannot offer you gold in return for your admirable handicraft. But 'tis nigh to Keltonhill fair; do you divide this gold lion betwixt those two brave boys of yours? Faith, right glad was I to be earl of Douglas and not a son of his master armorer when I saw you discipling Messires Sholto and Laurence!"

The Smith smiled grimly.

"They are good enough lads, Sholto and Laurence both, but they will be forever gnurring and grappling at each other like messan dogs about a kirk door.

"They will not make the worse soldiers for that, Malise. I pray you forgive them for my sake."

The master armorer took the hand of his young lord on which he was about to draw a riding glove of Spanish leather. Very reverently he kissed the signet ring upon it.

"My dear lord," he said, "I can refuse naught to any of your gracious house, and most of all to you, the light and pleasure of it—aye, and the light of a surly old man's heart, more even than the duty he owes to his own married wife! O, be careful, my lord, for you are the desire of many hearts and the hope of all the land."

He hesitated a moment, and then added with a kind of curious bashfulness:

"But I am concerned about ye this night, William Douglas—I fear that ye could not—could not permit me—"

"Could not permit what—out with it, old grumblepate?"

"That I should saddle my Flanders mare and ride after you. Malise MacKim would not be in the way even if ye went a-trysting. He kens brawly when to turn his head and look upon the hills and the woods and the bonny waters."

The earl laughed and shook his head.

"Na, na, Malise," he said, "were I indeed on such a quest the sight of your gray pow would fright a fair lady, and the mere tramping of that club-footed she elephant put to flight every sentiment of love. Remember the Douglas badge is a naked heart. Can I ride a-courting, therefore, with all my fighting tail behind me, as though I besought an alliance with the king of England's daughter."

The strong man watched the young earl ride away to the south along the fair lochside. He stood muttering to himself and looking long under his hand at his lord. The rider bowed his head as he passed under the rich blossoming of the white May blossom, which covered like creamy lace the Three Thorns of Carlinwark, now deeply stained with rose from the clouds of sunset.

"Aye, aye," he said, "the Douglas badge is indeed a heart—but it is a bleeding heart. God avert the omen and keep this young man safe, for though many love him there be more that would rejoice at his fall."

The rider on Black Darnaway rode right into the eye of the sunset. On his left hand Carlinwark and its many islets burned rich with spring-green foliage and the golden sunset light. Darnaway's well-shod hooves sent the diamond drops flying as with obvious pleasure he splashed through the shallows. Ben Gairn and Screel, boldly ridged against the southern sky, stood out in dark amethyst against the rosy sky of even, but the young rider never so much as turned his head to look at them.

Presently, however, he emerged from among the noble lakeside trees upon a more open space. Broom and whin blossom clustered yellow and orange beneath him, garrisoning with their green spears and golden banners every knoll and scaur, but there were broad spaces of green turf here and there on which the conies fed, or fought terrible battles for the meek ear-twitching does, "spat-spatting" at each other with their fore paws and springing into the air in their mating fury.

William of Douglas reined Darnaway underneath the whispering foliage of a great beech, for all at unawares he had come upon a sight that interested him more than the noble prospect of the May sunset.

In the center of the golden glade and with all their faces mistily glorified by the evening light he saw a group of little girls, singing and dancing as they performed some quaint and graceful pageant of childhood.

Their young voices came up to him with a wistful dying fall, and the slow, graceful movement of the rhythmic dance seemed to affect the young man strangely. Involuntarily he lifted his close-fitting feathered cap from his head and allowed the cool airs to blow against his brow.

See the robbers passing by, passing by,
passing by;
See the robbers passing by,
My fair lady!

The words came up clearly and distinctly to him and softened his heart with the indefinable and exquisite pathos of the refrain as sung by the sweet voices of children.

"These are surely but cottars' bairns," he said, smiling a little at his own intensity of feeling, "but they sing like little angels. I daresay my sweetheart Magdalen is amongst them."

And he sat still, patting Black Darnaway on the neck.

What did the robbers do to you, do to you,
do to you;
What did the robbers do to you,
My fair lady?

The first two lines rang out bold and clear. Then again the wistfulness of the refrain played upon his heart as if it had been an instrument of strings, till the tears came into his eyes at the wondrous sorrow and yearning with which one voice, the sweetest and purest of all, replied, singing all alone:

They broke my lock and stole my gold,
stole my gold, stole my gold;
Broke my lock and stole my gold,
My fair lady!

The tears brimmed over in the eyes of William Douglas, and a deep foreboding of the mysteries of fate fell upon his heart and abode there heavy as doom.

He turned his head, as though he felt some one near him, and lo! Sudden and silent as the appearing of a phantom, another horse was alongside Black Darnaway, and a maiden dressed in white sat smiling upon the young man fair to look upon as an angel from heaven.

Earl William's lips parted, but he was too surprised to speak. Nevertheless he moved his hand to his head in instinctive salutation, but finding his bonnet already off, he could only stare at the vision which had so suddenly sprung out of the ground.

The woman slowly waved her hand in the direction of the children, whose young voices still rang clear as cloister bells ringing the "Angelus," and whose white dresses waved in the light wind as they danced back and forth with a slow and graceful motion.

"You hear, Earl William?" she said, in a low, thrilling voice, speaking with a foreign accent; "you hear? You are a good Christian, doubtless, and you have heard from your uncle, the abbot, how praise is made perfect 'out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.' Hark to them; they sing of their own destinies—and of mine."

And so fascinated and moved at heart by her beauty and her strange words, the Douglas listened:

What did the robbers do to you, do to you,
do to you;
What did the robbers do to you,
My fair lady?

The woman on the delicately-pacing palfrey turned her dark eyes from the white-robed choristers to the face of the young man. With an impetuous motion of her hand she urged him to listen for the next words, which swept over Earl William's heart with a cadence of unutterable pain and inexplicable melancholy.

They broke my lock, and stole my gold,
stole my gold, stole my gold,
Broke my lock, and stole my gold,
My fair lady!

He turned upon his companion with a quick energy as if he were afraid of losing himself again.

"Who are you, lady, and what do you here?"

The girl smiled and reined her steed a little back from him.

"Is that spoken as William Douglas or as the justicer of Galloway—a country where, as I understand, there is no trial by jury?"

The light of her radiant smile passed from her lips into his soul.

"It is spoken as a man speaks to a woman beautiful and queenly," he said, not removing his eyes from her face.

"I fear I may have startled you," she said, without continuing the subject, "I saw you were wrapped in meditation, and my palfrey made no sound on the grass and leaves."

Her voice was so sweet and low that William Douglas, listening to it, wished that she would speak on forever.

"The hour grows late," he said, remembering himself, "you must have far to ride. Let me be your escort homewards, if you have none worthier than I."

"Alas," she answered, smiling yet more subtly, "I have no home nearby. My home is very far and over turbulent seas. I have but a maiden's pavilion in which to rest my head. For I and my company travel through your domains, Earl William. I trust you will not be so cruel as to forbid us?"

"Yes," he was smiling now in turn, and catching somewhat of the gay spirit of the lady, "I do forbid you to pass through these lands of Galloway without first visiting me in my house of Thrieve!"

The lady clapped her hands and laughed, letting her palfrey pace onward through the woodland glades, bridle-free, while Black Darnaway, compelled by his master's hand, followed, tossing his head indignantly because his head had been turned from the direction of his nightly stable on the castle Isle.

CHAPTER III.

Two Riding Together.

"Joyous," she cried, "O, most joyous would it be to see the noble castle and to have all the famous 2,000 knights to make love to me at once. To capture 2,000 hearts at one sweep of the net!"

"Is no single heart sufficient to satisfy you, fair maid?" said the young man in a low voice, "none loyal enough and large enough for you that you desire so many?"

"And what would I do with one if it were in my hands?" she said wistfully, "that is, if it were a worthy heart and one worth the taking? Ever since I was a child I have words were still clear to be understood:

The voices of the singing children on the green came faintly to their ears, but the always broken my toys when I tired of them."

Off to prison you must go, you must go,
you must go,
Off to prison you must go,
My fair lady!

"You hear, it is my fate!" she said.

"Nay," answered the early, passionately, still looking in her eyes, "mine—mine, not yours! I would go to prison or to death for your sake!"

"My lord, my lord," she laughed, with a tolerant protest in her voice, "you keep up the credit of your house right nobly. How goes the distich, my mother taught it me upon the bridge of Avignon, where also the children dance and sing."

First in the love of woman,
First in the field of fight,
First in the death that men must die,
Such is the Douglas' right!

"Here and now," he said, still looking at her; "'tis only the first I crave."

"Earl William, you must come to court," she shrilled into sudden, tinkling laughter. "There be women there more worthy of your ardor than a poor errant maiden such as I."

"A court!" cried Earl William, scornfully—"to the Seneschal's court! Nay, truly. Could a Stewart ever keep his faith or pay his debts? Never since the first of them licked his way into a woman's favor."

"O," she answered, lightly, "I meant not the court of Stirling, nor yet the chancellor's castle at Edinburgh. I meant the only great court, the court of France, the court of Charles VII, the court which already owns the sway of its rarest ornament, your own Scottish Princess Margaret."

"Thither I cannot go unless the king of France grants me my father's rights and estates," he said, with a certain sternness in his tone.

"Let me look at your hand," she said, with a gentle inclination of her fair head, from which the lace that had shrouded it now streamed back in the cool wind of evening.

Stopping Darnaway the young earl give the girl his hand, and the white palfrey came to rest close beneath the shoulder of the black war charger.

"Tomorrow," she said, looking at his palm, "tomorrow you will be duke of Touraine. I promise it to you by my power of divination. Does that satisfy you?"

"I fear that you are a witch or else a being compounded of higher elements than flesh and blood," said the earl.

"Is that a spirit hand," she said, laughing lightly and giving her own rosy fingers into his, "or could even the justicer of Galloway find it in his heart to burn these as part of the body of a witch?"

She shuddered and pretended to gaze piteously up at him from under the long lashes which lay upon her cheek.

"Spirit slender, spirit white, they are indeed," he replied, "and as for being the fingers of a witch—doubtless you are a witch indeed. But I will not burn so fair things as these, save as it might be with the fervor of my kisses."

And he stooped and pressed kiss after kiss upon her hand.

Gently she withdrew her fingers from his grasp and rode further apart, yet not without one backward glance of perfect witchery.

"I doubt you have been overmuch at court already," she said. "I did not well to ask you to come thither."

"Why must I not come thither?" he asked.

"Because I shall be there!" she replied softly, courting him yet again with her eyes.

As they rode on together through the rich twilight dusk the young man observed her narrowly as often as he could.

Her skin was fair with a dazzling clearness which even the gathering gloom only caused to shine with a more perfect brilliance beneath its surface. Faint responsive roses bloomed on either cheek and cast a shadow of their color down her graceful neck. Dark eyes shone above, fresh and dewy with love and youth, and smiled upon the youth with ancient witcheries and allurements in their depths. Her lithe, slender body was simply clad in a fair white cloth of some foreign fabric and her waist, of perfect symmetry, was cinctured by a broad ring of solid silver, which to the young man looked as if he could have clasped it about with his hands.

So they rode on, through the woods mostly, until they reached a region which to the earl seemed unfamiliar. The glades were greener and denser, the trees seemed more primeval, the foliage thicker overhead, the interspaces of golden evening sky darker and less frequent.

"In what place may your company be assembled?" he asked. "Strange it is that I know not this place. Yet I should recognize each tree by conning it, and of every rivulet I should be able to tell its name. Yet with shame do I confess that I know not where I am."

"Ah," said the girl, her face growing luminous through the gloom, "you called me a witch, and now you shall see. I wave my hands, so—and you are no more in Galloway. You are in the land of fairy. I blow you a kiss, so—and lo, you are no more William VI, earl of Douglas and proximate duke of Touraine, but you are even as true Thomas, the beloved of the queen of the fairies, and the slave of her spell!"

"I am well content to be Thomas Rhymer," he answered, submitting himself to the wooing glamour of her eyes, "so be that you are the Lady Titania."

"A courtier, indeed," she laughed, "you need not to seek your answer. You make a poor girl afraid. But see, yonder are the lights of my pavilion. Will it please you to alight and enter? The supper will be spread, and though you must not expect any to entertain you save only your Titania (here she made him a little bow), yet I think you will not be ill content. They do not say that Thomas of Ercildoune had any cause of complaint. Do you know," she continued with a fresh gayety in her voice," it was in this very wood that he was lost."

But William Douglas sat silent with the wonder of what he saw. Their horses had come out on a hilltop. The sequestered boskage of the trees gradually thinned, finally dwarfing into a green drift of fern and birchen foliage which rose no higher than Black Darnaway's chest, and through which his rider's laced boots brushed till the Spanish leather of their gold-embossed frontlets was jetted with drops of dew.

Before him was a great drift of solemn pine trees, the like of which for size he had never seen in all his domain. Or so, at least, it seemed in that hour of glamour. For behind them the evening sky had dulled to a deep and solemn wash of blood red, across which lay one lonely bar of black cloud solid as spilled ink on a monkish page. But under the trees themselves, blazing with lights and breathing an odor of all grace and daintiness, stood a pavilion of rose colored silk, anchored to the ground with ropes of sendal of the richest crimson hue.

"Let your horse go free or tether him to a pine; he will not wander," said the girl. "I fear my fellows have gone off to lay in provision. We have taken a day or two more on the way than we had counted on, so that tonight's feast makes an end of our store. But still there is enough for two. I bid you welcome, Earl William, to a wanderer's tent."

CHAPTER IV.

The Rose Red Pavilion.

As the young earl paused a moment without to tether Black Darnaway to the fallen trunk of a pine, a chill and melancholy wind seemed to rise suddenly and toss the dark branches against the sky. Then it flew moaning like a lost spirit till he could hear the sound of its passage far a-down the valley. An owl hooted and a swart raven disengaged himself from the coppice about the door of the pavilion and fluttered away with a croak of anger. Black Darnaway turned his head and whinnied anxiously after his master.

But William Douglas, though little more than a boy, if men's ages are to be counted by years, was yet a true child of Archibald the Grim, and he passed through the mysterious encampment to the door of the lighted pavilion with a manner firm and assured. He could faintly discern other tents and pavilions with pennons and bannerets which the passing gust had blown flapping from their poles, but which now hung slackly about their staves.

"I would give 100 golden St. Andrews," he muttered, "if I could make out the 'scutcheon. It looks most like a black dragon couchant on a red field, which is not a Scottish bearing. The lady is French doubtless, and passes through from Ireland to visit the chancellor's court at Edinburgh."

The Black Douglas paused a moment at the tent flap, which, being of silken fabric, lined with heavier material, hung straight and heavy to the ground.

"Come in, my lord," cried the low and thrilling voice of his companion from within. "I bid you welcome with both hands to my poor abode. A traveler must not be particular, and I have only those things with me which my men have brought from shipboard, knowing how poor was the provision of your land. See, do you not already repent your promise to sup with me?"

She pointed to the table, on which sparkled cut glass of Venice and silverware of goldsmith's work, on which were set out oranges and rare fruits of the orient, such as the young man had never seen in his own bleak and barren land.

But the Douglas did no more than glance at the rich providing. A vision fairer and more beautiful claimed his eyes. For the lady herself stood before him, transformed and glorified. In the interval she had taken off the cloak, which while on horseback she had worn falling back from her shoulders. A thin robe of white silk, embroidered with gold, at once clothed and yet revealed her graceful and gracious figure, even as a glove covers but does not conceal the hand upon which it is drawn. Whether by intent or accident, it had been permitted to fall aside at the neck to show the dazzling whiteness of the skin beneath, but at the bosom it was secured by a button set with black pearl, which constituted the lady's only ornament.

Her arms also were bare and shone in the lamp light whiter than milk. She had removed the silver belt and tied a red silken scarf about her waist in a manner which revealed a swift grace and lithe sinuosity of movement, making her appear more wonderful and more desirable than ever to the young man's eyes.

On either side the pavilion were placed folding couches of rose silk and in the corner, draped with rich blue hangings, glimmered the lady's bed, its fair white linen half revealed, two embroidered pillows at the foot and on a little table beside it a crystal ball on a black platter.

No crucifix or prie-dieu, such as in those days was in every lady's bower, could be seen anywhere about the pavilion.

As soon as the tent-flap had fallen behind him Earl William abandoned himself to the strange enchantment of his surroundings. He did not stop to ask himself how it was possible that such dainty providings had been brought into the midst of his wide, wild realm of Galloway. Nor yet why this errant damsel should be all alone on this hilltop with the tents of her retinue empty and silent about. The present sufficed him. The soft radiance of dark eyes fell upon him and all the quick-running, inconsiderate Douglas blood rushed and sang in his veins responsive to their subtle shining.

He was with a fair woman, and she not unwilling to be kind. That was enough for all the race of the Black Douglas. What the Red Douglas loved was another matter. Their ambitions were more reputable, if less generous.

"My lord," she said, giving him her hand, "will you lead me to the table? I cannot offer you the refreshment of any elaborate toilet, but here at least is wheaten bread to eat and wine of a good vintage to drink."

"You yourself scarce need such earthly sustenance," he answered gallantly, "for your eyes have stolen the radiance of the stars and 'tis evident that the night dews visit your cheeks only as they do the roses—to render them more fresh and fair."

"My lord flatters well for one so young," she smiled as she seated herself and motioned him to sit close beside her. "how comes it that in this wild place you have learned to speak so chivalrously?"

"When one speaks to beauty the words are given," he answered, "and moreover, I have not dwelt in the gray Galloway all my days."

"You speak French?" she queried in that language.

"Ah," she said, when he answered, "the divine language. I knew you were perfect." And so for a long while the young man sat spellbound, watching the smiles coming and going upon her red and flower-like lips, and listening to the fast-running ripple of her foreign speech. It was pleasure enough to listen without reply.

It seemed no common food of mortal men that was set before him with sweep of white arms and bend of delicate fingers upon the chalice stem. He did not care to eat, but again and again he set the wine cup down empty, for the vintage was new to him and brought with it a haunting aroma instinct with strange hopes and vivid with unknown joys.

The pavilion with its cords of sendal and its silver hanging lamps spun round about him. The fair woman seemed to dissolve and reunite before his eyes. She had let down her hair, and it flowed in the Venetian fashion over her white shoulders, sparking with an inner fire, each fine silken thread as it glittered separate from its fellows like a twining golden snake.

And the ripple of her laughter played upon the young man's heart as a lute that is touched carelessly by the hands of a master. Something of the primitive glamor of the night and the stars clung to this woman. It seemed a thing impossible that she should be less pure than the air and the waters, than the grass beneath the sky overhead. He knew not that the devil sat from the first day of creation on Eden wall, that human sin is well nigh as eternal as human good, and that passion rises out of its own ashes like the phoenix bird of fable and stands again all beautiful before us a creature of fire and dew.

Presently the lady rose to her feet and gave the earl her hand to lead her to a couch.

"Set a footstool by me," she said, "I desire to talk to you."

"You know not my name," she said, "though I know yours. But then, the sun in mid-heaven cannot be hidden, though nameless bide the thousand stars. Shall I tell you mine? It is a secret, nevertheless I will tell you if such be your desire."

"I care not whether you tell me or no," he said looking up into her face from the low seat at her feet, "birth cannot add to your beauty nor lack of quarterings detract from it. I have enough of both, good lack! And little good they are like to do me!"

"Shall I tell you now," she went on, "or will you wait till you convoy me to Edinburgh?"

"To Edinburgh!" cried the young man, astonished, "I have no purpose of journeying to that town of mine enemies. I have been counseled oft by those who love me to remain in mine own country. My horoscope bids me refrain. Not for 1,000 commands of king or chancellor will I go to that dark and bloody town, wherein they say lies the curse of my house."

"But you will go to please a woman?" she said, and leaned nearer to him, looking deep into his eyes.

For a moment William Douglas wavered. For a moment he resisted. But the dark eyes thrilled him to the soul and his own heart rose insurgent against his reason.

"I will come if you ask me!" he said. "You are more beautiful than I had dreamed any woman could be."

"I do ask you!" she continued, without removing her eyes from his face.

"Then I will surely come!" he replied. She set her hand beneath his chin and bent smilingly and lightly to kiss him, but with an imprisoned, passionate cry the young man suddenly clasped her in his arms. Yet even as he did so his eyes fell upon two figures, which, silent and motionless, stood by the open door of the pavilion.

(To be Continued.)

Mrs. Lottie B. McCaffray, secretary of the Woman's auxiliary to the ex-prisoners of war, is a regular member of the parent organization and is the only ex-woman prisoner of the civil war. Her husband was killed at Winchester, his body being left inside the enemy's lines. She ventured there to recover it, was captured and was sent to Belle Isle, afterward being taken to Castle Thunder. She was exchanged with 1,000 union soldiers.

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