



The ISLE of the WINDS By S. R. CROCKETT

Author of "The Stick Minister," "The Raiders," "The Lilac Sun-Bonnet," "Cleg Kelly," "The Red Axe," Etc.

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CHAPTER I. I Meet My Father.

"Come in here, Joe Janet! Here you will see at one eye-blink the whole cursed pack kenneled, the lying priest that slandered me, the fatted English cat that disinfected me and the rap-tongued old hound that begat me—and did me other deservings besides!"

These are the first words that ever I remember hearing my father speak—clear, that is, for I must have been and heard him often enough in my innocence before that I grew word-conscious.

I can recall the scene yet as clear in my mind's eye—aye, clearer than the dinner I have this day eaten or the pattern in the laced-silk waistcoat which lies folded in the drawer at my elbow.

It was in the wide kitchen or house-place of James Brydson's change house or common wayside inn which sits on the brow overlooking the little Scottish town of New Mills. A low door it had, to enter which your head had to bow and your feet simultaneously to descend till with a creak and double twist of the body you were seated on a bench of wicker and after the wicker-banking and sneezing in the bluish atmosphere of the peat reek that billowed and belled between you and the hatch. But Brydson's inn was mostly frequented by weavers and they had hauled in any number of stoves peculiarly of access mattered little, though now and then a gentleman or hill farmer broke his head on the crossbeam.

I remember I was sitting on a crepe sole by the peat fire warming my feet at the red glow and admiring the glinting of the little flames on my new silver shoe-buckle. I had gone thither from the lodge yet, which was my mo'ra dwelling, clinging to my grandfather's hand. As I went my feet had hardly touched the ground, so firm a hold he took of my wrist and such long strides as he conquered the ground withal. Sir James Stanfield of New Mills, he was called, a fine, upstanding, well-regarded man in any that count, a friend of demagogue, gracious of speech and exceeding keenly to the eye with his broad-brimmed hat, wide-ankled coat of blue blue cloth, white silk undervest, white stockings and the silver buckled shoes that were copies in great of mine. There was no other gentleman in all the southlands of Scotland than my grandfather.

He seemed at once to enoble and to illuminate that smoky little hostelry as he sat in the high-backed elbow chair and tapped the bare boards lightly with his glove tips. With him were Mr. John Bell, preacher of the gospel, in whose discourse my grandfather sometimes delighted (at other times he would laugh heartily at his simplicity), and Umphray Spurway, the old master-drover, a great red Englishman from Yorkshire, at whose laugh you seemed to see the rafters dirl as he threw back his head and blattered applause with his palm on the white scoured tent of the table.

To these three gentlemen, sitting at their wine in the change house kitchen of New Mills that snowy December night in the year of our Lord's grace 17—there entered a fourth, and with him presently a fifth, at sight of whom silence fell upon the men, and constraint upon the women folk. James Brydson, the landlord, was out upon his occasions, and I mind nothing of him. But Mistress Brydson, the landlady, sat in the corner by a flickering cruciate lamp dretty and as silently as an spider spinning a web across a windowpane; and, smiling good-humoredly all the while she glanced up and caught the eye of this one and that among her guests, proud, even, that Sir James himself did not disdain to leave his great furnished house to sit with his guests in her kitchen. A proud woman, as all might see, was Lucky Brydson, smiling and beeking at her ease as the white bonnet knitting pin clicked and twinkled in the cross lights. Shyly and at times slyly whispering, nodding and confiding secretiveness to each other, as girls will, her two daughters, Elsie and Margaret, stood by the door of the inner room, where the entrance to the cellar was. I suppose they were bonny enough rose-cheeked wenches. I was not yet of an age to note or care. But this I know, that Elsie was kind to me, and often gave me fine tastes of cake with honey in my lady's bread thereon liberally. I had no fault to find with Elsiep Brydson that night or any night, but sat composedly munching my piece and dusting the crumbs from my bosom, lest, when I returned to the cellar way, my eyes should note a helious sin in the decolour of Lady Griselda Stanfield, which must indeed have been written upon two tables of sin.

The talk had been brisk and merry all the evening, and such of it, as I can remember now, goes to show how debonaire and kind my grandfather was when he escaped from his wife's leading. For an hour, unbuttoning his waist and ungrinding his waistband in a place where mirth was not counted ungodliness and laughter compared (with true asperity) to the crackling of thorns under a pot.

"Ha, Elsie, lass," he had cried, when he came in, crooking a finger to the elder maid by the inner door, "come hither to my knee. Nay, what, never bashful? Why, 'tis but yesterday that you would have run to it and climbed for kisses. And today you are as welcome—very welcome!"

Whereat right merrily Umphray Spurway, the Englishman, laughed, but not so the minister, Mr. John Bell.

"Hush, Umphray! Besides what, Elsie?"

"As I say, she was indeed very bonny and homely of feature, but (this I learned afterward) there was no steadfast or housewifely look in her eyes. And that, after all, is the way to tell a good woman."

The young man with the haughty air and handsome countenance took his hand from his sword and pointed scornfully at the table.

"Look, Janet," he cried, "look we'll at them. There sit all the three. For a silver girl I would send them all to hell—aye, and swing for them in the Grass Mercat in the morning, Janet!"

The rosy mirth of the wine beat had ebbed quickly from my grandfather's lips. He gripped the table to steady himself—so that he was in the least overcome with fear or apprehension, but that he might worthily say that which he had to say.

"Philip," he murmured, and then put his fingers to the koftered frill of his neckerchief. "Philip, my lad, you are my eldest son. Will you not take warning and lead a new life? Give up the skirts of the sake of the hair I learned to say his prayers kneeling at my knee. Put away this wicked, wanton woman that has made you live like a beast. Return to your wife. She greets for you. She prays for you. Look upon this hair—"

My grandfather had now his hand upon my head, for I had run to him at the first sight of my father. He would have said more. I could hear his heart thumping in his side and his breath wheezing dryly in his throat. But at this moment the woman broke in shrill revellings, demanding furiously who he was that flit from her her good name.

"I would have you know that I am an honest man's wife. She shutted the words at him like throwing stones."

"Sir James' eyes were steady on her face. 'Said you by any chance,' he inquired gravely, 'a man's honest wife?'"

He dropped his honest wife quietly as a fisher drops a bait into a pool. "At which the woman swore a horrid oath and turned away as if to escape the questioning eyes of these present. She even made as if to leave her companion's side and go over to the other side of the room, where Mistress Brydson still sat knitting with her daughters gathered in beside her like chickens when the hawk hovers. But the women folk of the house readily 'divining' her intent, gathered the skirts of their clothes closely about them and swept off into the inner room. The door slammed in her face and with a heartick little laugh the woman returned to the side of her paramour. There was no weakness in his attitude."

Philip Stanfield stood browbeating all that were in the inn kitchen except perhaps Umphray Spurway, the Englishman, who sat sipping his stone ale contemptuously and muttering in a way that was a vast admiration to me to behold.

CHAPTER II. The Lame Man.

Then the minister man arose and lifted his hand with great appearance of solemnity, which made the Englishman cough behind his palm. For Master Bell began to exhort the young man and woman to repent and put away their sin, citing instances of well-accredited reformations both from scripture and (as he added) from the records of profane history.

But this timely and improving rebuke did the young man no good. Nay, it even made him more angry than before, such is the hardness of the human heart.

"On upon you, canting hound," he cried, breaking in on the preacher's sermonizing. "I tell you plainly that had I as much to do with my belly as you do with your tongue, I would never trouble my father again."

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"Come this night only to the great house," continued Mr. Bell, "bide to supper and the worship of the family altar. Then will I beseech for you a new heart. I feel that for this very purpose I have been sent to New Mills from the wicked city of Edinburgh."

"The devil fly away with my father and you both—to Edinburgh if he will! Think you I would frequent his table to have him forever grinning at me like a sheep's head on the tongas? Ye dog in bandstrings! (there he broke out in sudden fury) 'what is your concern in the matter? Know you to whom ye speak?'"

Philip Stanfield, you detached man and blasphemer of your father!"

"As for you, Janet Mark," Spurway continued, speaking to the woman, "you shall be whipped from here to Moreham—aye, if I have to lay on the lashes myself!"

At which, after a volley of oaths from Philip Stanfield and a snarling like that of a trapped wild beast from his companion, the pair went forth into the night, vowing vengeance upon us all.

The three gentlemen sat a long time silent without touching the wine which remained, nor so much as emptying their glasses. Then Umphray Spurway rose.

"Let us take the boy home to his mother," he said.

And with that he handed one of the pistols to Sir James, reserving the other for himself. The minister placed himself next to my grandfather on the inner side, and commended his life and work to God in moving words. I thought he might have spared a prayer for my grandfather and me, but he did not.

In this order we were just about to go up the stairs of Brydson's change house, and adventure forth into the night, when of a sudden before us there appeared the strange, little figure.

A lassie bairn stood at the door barring the way—a girl of a year or thereby. Her head was a tangle of light brown curls, which the firelight netted with gold. Her eyes danced light. Her mouth smiled red. She herself seemed to smile and dance as she could hardly keep her feet still. I thought she looked kindly and pretty and little more than a babe, but at sight of her the womanfolk of the house, came running indignantly forward to thrust her forth.

"My mither—where have ye put my mither?" cried the child.

"Oot o' this, del'ist bratt!" they answered drily. "we could call her 'God's child!' That is little Anna Mark!"

CHAPTER III. The Great House of New Mills.

That night they took me not back to my mother's house, which was the Lodge Yett at the end of the avenue which leads to the south from the mansion house, my grandfather not wishing, for reasons of his own, to be parted from me. But when we came right to the door of the great house of New Mills, Sir James said to John Bell, the minister, "Sir, I would ask you to go down to the lodge and say to this lad's mother that he is to bide here this night, so that she may not expect him. Also bid Caleb Clinkberry, her manservant, make all fast for her, and be locked. Tell him this part. He will know the reason why."

Clearly the minister did not like his intension. Young as I was I could see that, for the place was lonely and the road dark. But he feared my grandfather, as I think now, because he was the patron of several good parishes, and he as yet both unbenedicited and expectant.

Then Sir James let himself in with a key which he took from a belt at his waist, and Umphray Spurway and I preceded him into the hall, a wide place where there was armor and old swords and a great brass-faced clock ticking comely in a corner. A lamp stood ready lighted and the place was lit by the fire in the grate. It was good to be once more within walls, though even now I could not get the thought of the witch child out of my head.

My grandfather's old serving man, Robin Green, came to take his master's overcoat, letting Umphray Spurway and myself shift for ourselves.

"Her ladyship has gone to bed," he said, "she wanted waiting for you."

"Did she wait that I was at the change house?" asked Sir James, a little anxious, it seemed to me.

"I telled her ladyship that ye were ga'en awa' to the lodge."

"I condescended not on particulars either of time or place, necessarily not being laid upon me."

Sir James was visibly relieved. "I will not forget this, Robin," he said, making his wonted grimace of pain as the servant eased his coat over his rheumatic shoulders.

There is a fire in your bedroom, nevertheless," said Robin; "her ladyship bade me say that she wished not to be disturbed."

At this Sir James clasped his hands suddenly together. "Come, ben, Umphray; come your ways ben," he said, heartily. "Robin, put a fire in the parlor—not her ladyship's parlor, but the other."

"There is a guide fire in the east room," answered the old man gravely, as if saying his prayers; "I light it as soon as her ladyship goes up to her bed. Also I took ben the guardfire and the other."

"I thank ye kindly, sir," said the man nodding with simple gravity. "Take that bairn with ye, Robin," added Sir James, his eye suddenly falling on me; "or, may, let him have some supper in the parlor first, and then lay him in the blue room that is next to mine."

At these words, glad to be rid of my grandfather for a little, I went gladly with Robin to his pantry. It had the word "Still-room" printed legibly on the door and smelt of cheese. Here Robin would not let me bide long, saying that it was cold and unfired; but putting a tumbler of milk and a liberal wedge of pastry upon a tray, he took my hand and led me back into the lighted parlor, which, like most of the rooms in the old house of New Mills, had old arras about the walls. The curtains were drawn close. The fire Robin Green had lighted was sparkling and sparkling over the great iron dogs. Billets of birch were piled up beside it, and Sir James sat toasting first and then another upon the hearth absent-mindedly, talking all the while to the English clock merchant.

As soon as Robin saw that the great iron tray on the table, and going over to his master, he took the billet of wood out of his hand and led him back to the table. Sir James looked at the birch faggot, then at the hand on his arm. The old servant was firm and respectful. So without intermitting his discourse for a moment, my grandfather permitted himself to be led back to the table and installed opposite the great oaken guardfire, which, with its silver-capped square bottles and shining ladders and runners, looked most comfortable and appetizing.

Then Robin Green went back to the hearth, and, stooping over the fire, he carefully removed the entire amount of faggots which Sir James had tossed on, blowing out each if it had caught, and laying it at the side, so that presently the whole room was full of the acrid life of wood smoke, and the shining of the great iron tray on the table was like a snowflake across the tombstones toward the wall of the Stanfields.

I think I never felt my heart lift off my head more plainly than that night. Even the minister beside me was groaning and quaking.

"Who is this devil's bairn?" he asked of Umphray Spurway. "I will have her indicted at the Presbytery for a witch."

"Some chance bairn—the child of an evil mother," said my grandfather, because it was late and my mother would wish me in bed, presently forgot all about me, and proceeded with his argument. Still talking, he crossed the hall, and, going to one of the shelves which went about the deep window seat, he took from that which was readiest to his hand a little book covered in crimson leather, and with the pages grown yellow with age and handling, he held it up, "Is now my chief comfort. No, Master Spurway, it is not the Bible. Her ladyship—yes, certainly, she is a comfort, but of a mild nature, and, as one might say, occasional in action. But, you may know it without this in Burton, his 'Melancholy,' or the right edition, before he grew clumsy. 'At Oxford: Printed by John Litchfield and James Short for Henry Crips; Anno Domini 1621.' By that you may know it. Without this written cordial I can neither live merry hour nor sleep quiet night. Having Burton's fellowship, even though my sin strive after my death, I can go on merrily toward heaven, as indeed sayeth mine author."

Then Umphray Spurway, with a curious smile on his face, asked my grandfather if it became him as an elder of the Kirk to pass his time with Burton, who, after all, was a little better than a pagan (or at least an Epicurean) in his habits. "I have not read that in my 'Naphthal' or 'Lex Rex'—or, if he minded not these, at the least casting up in his mind the points of Mr. John Bell's Sabbath sermon upon a suitable passage in Isaiah which my grandfather replied that to his thinking there was more egg meat in one page of honest Burton than in all the songs of Solomon the king."

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In answer to this outburst Umphray Spurway said no word, but held his hand across the table, and he smiled no more bided his palm. Sir James took it and held it hard in both of his.

"I will not make a stranger of you, Umphray," he said, "it is no debts that trouble me. You have put me out of the reach of that. It is that one of my sons hates me. Ye have heard his best word of me this night. My second, to whom I had thought to leave the bulk of my money, now every night comes home disguised in drink and ralls upon me worse than the other. My wife cries out constantly that I have ben well served for being so long over-indulgent with the children."

"Speaking of your son Philip," said Umphray Spurway, quietly, "have you tried all ways with him—the severe as well as the indulgent?"

"Aye," answered my grandfather, hopefully, "all ways. I sent him abroad to take service as a common soldier in the Scots' Dutch regiments. I thought this would set him him. But in a month he was in prison, and when, through the influence of our ambassador at The Hague, I got him released in another month I have news that he 'as ben condemned to death at Treves. Then, when I had provided money to bribe his fathers and bring him home, he only breaks out more and more furiously, so that I never know when I go down to mine own dining hall whether I will get the contents of a musket or a decent meal of meat into my stomach."

"At this moment we heard a noise in the passageway, and both of the gentlemen rose to their feet, my grandfather pale and perturbed, Umphray Spurway with his hand again in his tail pocket, where he had put his pistol."

But after all, it was only the minister, Mr. John Bell, who came in hastily and sank into a chair, all shaken and for the moment unable to speak.

"What is it? What is it?" said my grandfather, leaning over his chair, looking anxiously at Umphray Spurway who to the door and looked down the passage. Then he came

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bed, presently forgot all about me, and proceeded with his argument. Still talking, he crossed the hall, and, going to one of the shelves which went about the deep window seat, he took from that which was readiest to his hand a little book covered in crimson leather, and with the pages grown yellow with age and handling, he held it up, "Is now my chief comfort. No, Master Spurway, it is not the Bible. Her ladyship—yes, certainly, she is a comfort, but of a mild nature, and, as one might say, occasional in action. But, you may know it without this in Burton, his 'Melancholy,' or the right edition, before he grew clumsy. 'At Oxford: Printed by John Litchfield and James Short for Henry Crips; Anno Domini 1621.' By that you may know it. Without this written cordial I can neither live merry hour nor sleep quiet night. Having Burton's fellowship, even though my sin strive after my death, I can go on merrily toward heaven, as indeed sayeth mine author."

Then Umphray Spurway, with a curious smile on his face, asked my grandfather if it became him as an elder of the Kirk to pass his time with Burton, who, after all, was a little better than a pagan (or at least an Epicurean) in his habits. "I have not read that in my 'Naphthal' or 'Lex Rex'—or, if he minded not these, at the least casting up in his mind the points of Mr. John Bell's Sabbath sermon upon a suitable passage in Isaiah which my grandfather replied that to his thinking there was more egg meat in one page of honest Burton than in all the songs of Solomon the king."

At which saying my own heart was troubled, and even Umphray Spurway covered his face with his hand. "Wait, Umphray," he went on, "only wait, my nimble bachelor, till you are a man with a family and know something about the matter. What comfort will you find in a home that is one continual strife of tongues, your sons waiting for you without your gate, wishful for your death, their teeth bared to bite, your wife peevish of face, bitter of speech?"

In answer to this outburst Umphray Spurway said no word, but held his hand across the table, and he smiled no more bided his palm. Sir James took it and held it hard in both of his.

"I will not make a stranger of you, Umphray," he said, "it is no debts that trouble me. You have put me out of the reach of that. It is that one of my sons hates me. Ye have heard his best word of me this night. My second, to whom I had thought to leave the bulk of my money, now every night comes home disguised in drink and ralls upon me worse than the other. My wife cries out constantly that I have ben well served for being so long over-indulgent with the children."

"Speaking of your son Philip," said Umphray Spurway, quietly, "have you tried all ways with him—the severe as well as the indulgent?"

"Aye," answered my grandfather, hopefully, "all ways. I sent him abroad to take service as a common soldier in the Scots' Dutch regiments. I thought this would set him him. But in a month he was in prison, and when, through the influence of our ambassador at The Hague, I got him released in another month I have news that he 'as ben condemned to death at Treves. Then, when I had provided money to bribe his fathers and bring him home, he only breaks out more and more furiously, so that I never know when I go down to mine own dining hall whether I will get the contents of a musket or a decent meal of meat into my stomach."

"At this moment we heard a noise in the passageway, and both of the gentlemen rose to their feet, my grandfather pale and perturbed, Umphray Spurway with his hand again in his tail pocket, where he had put his pistol."

But after all, it was only the minister, Mr. John Bell, who came in hastily and sank into a chair, all shaken and for the moment unable to speak.

"What is it? What is it?" said my grandfather, leaning over his chair, looking anxiously at Umphray Spurway who to the door and looked down the passage. Then he came