

# The BANNER of BLUE

by S.R. Crockett

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## CHAPTER XX—CONTINUED.

And as I stood trembling and greatly afraid in the little passage which leads to my own chamber, the English surgeon Warner laid in my arms a baby boy.

"The heir of Castle Gower!" he said with a strange smile. "Take good care of him, Miss Fairlie! If I mistake not, he will need it!"

"God helping me, I mean to! and of his mother, too!" I made answer.

And I think I have kept my word.

My Kate—my sister!—How I prayed out there in the darkness, fronting the tempest on the island brow, praying that the bitter cup first brewed in Eden might pass from her. How I trembled and shook more with anger than fear, when I had to give her up into the hands of Warner and old dumb Janet. I had been strong before, but now I felt all the weakness of girlhood.

But when at last the day emerged out of darkness and I saw Hamish take the new-born and Surgeon Warner together across the ferry, I could have danced for very joy. Kate herself was given back to me. The

Each day she sat there a little longer, gazing wistfully out to sea, but with more of her old, winsome hopefulness showing in her face, for she would coo to the child and talk to it by the hour. Now it was the loveliest baby—its own father's own son! How pleased Rupert would be—she could hardly wait to show baby to him!

Nevertheless, Hamish had gone twice to the mainland and twice returned with empty excuses—the lame leg still inflamed and painful, summoned to Drumfern by urgent business, friends arrived unexpectedly to visit him—before Mr. Rupert Glendonwyn came to Inch Jonet to kiss wife and child.

Kate was sitting up with the babe in her arms when Rupert came in, a sweeter picture of young motherly grace than my eyes had ever seen before—aye, or since,

and defame very pretty to see. So (though I) I have seen children brought to visit a father's grave, sporting about the grave of buried love.

When I looked again Mr. Rupert was standing erect by the window, frowning and gnawing his moustache. The expression on his face was not pleasant or amiable. I think if he only could have slain me with any chance of safety at that moment he would have done it. But I sat and sewed with great calmness at the small white garment I was making, looking up occasionally at him. Kate was again wrapped up in her boy.

"Well—let us have it! Out with it!" I said at last. For I was pleased that the game was, as I thought, in my hands.

"I will," he cried, with a quick spirit of anger, "and on your head the consequences!"



fascinated look seemed quite gone out of her eyes. A sweet smile, a more gracious manner—womanhood in a word, had come to her as she lay with her babe on her arm, still and slow-breathing, reborn to me out of a great weakness and the valley of the shadow of death.

Never was there a better nurse than this good, old voice-beret Janet proved herself. I was so glad that I could have hugged her every five minutes, but since she was always busy with mother or child the exercise seemed as much as my life was worth.

To Janet I could not speak—to Kate I must not. Books were vain things. So as a last resort I betook myself to wait for old Hamish's return upon the pier, where I was standing, wind-blown of skirt and hair, when the old man came back.

I was ready for him as soon as he stepped ashore, and, putting my arms about his neck (for I felt I must hug somebody), I cried, "O, I am so glad!"

"Here, let me be, hands off—dell's the lass!" was Hamish's uncomplimentary rejoinder, "ken ye no I am a married man?"

"I know, Hamish," I said, meekly, "but Janet won't mind. I'll go and ask her if you like. Tell me, do you think Mr. Rupert will be glad of the news?"

"Mr. Rupert, Mr. Rupert!" he repeated, going comically on with the chaining of his boots, "what might Mr. Rupert have to do with the bairns?"

"Why, it is his own son and heir," I cried indignantly, "my sister is his wife. You know that very well!"

"Ech! said Hamish, unemotionally, "ow aye—doonless!"

"I wonder if he will come tomorrow?" I went on, for it seemed as if I must ask of somebody the questions which were troubling my own heart.

"I wonder!" remarked Hamish, untying a knot with his teeth.

"Perhaps Mr. Glendonwyn will come—or even Mr.—Mr. John—" I went on, "perhaps now he is settled in his parish, they will tell him the secret!"

"Maybe!" said Hamish, turning his quid over in his mouth.

"O, Hamish," I cried, "you are so disappointing. You will answer me nothing. And you could help us so much, Hamish. My word, you would only be kind—and without doing harm to anyone."

The silent Highlander meditated a while on this, and then with a staccato utterance and a curious movement of the mouth, as if he were chewing the words before uttering them, he said, "Ye-ash, as far as I am concerned, Hamish McColl is perked to look after the sheep, to row the bit boats and to keep his tongue frae meddling in what doesn't concern him."

And so without heat or manifesting any feeling he broke himself through the little casp in the direction of the long, low peastack which he was slowly rearing on the moor to be fuel for the winter's fire of Inch Jonet.

Whereat I was so much subdued that I actually ran after him crying, "Let me come with you, Hamish, and I promise not to ask any questions."

"Hoos, lassie," said Hamish, with perfect aplomb, "dinna strain yourself! None of your kind were ever able to accomplish that frae the time o' Eve. Speer a' the questions that come into your head. Only g'ie it please ye, dinna compel purr Hamish to answer them, that's a'!"

"Oh, how I wish I could compel you, Hamish!" I cried. "I don't know any way to do it!"

He appeared to revolve the query earnestly for a good minute, and then replied, "Troth, an' I dinna ken that, either!"

So for hours each day Hamish and I betook ourselves to and fro over the whole face of the island. For, though within hours I was allowed to do many things—for my sister, these must not be immediately connected, as it were, with the technique of the situation. For Janet brooked no interference within her own province.

"WHAT!" SHE CRIED, "NOT FROM ME; HE IS MINE, ALL I HAVE, AND I WILL KEEP HIM."

She held up the babe to be dandled, her own face to be kissed. How could any man resist that mute appeal, that adoring glance. He was come—Kate's universe was there.

"Is he not lovely? Kiss him, Rupert!" she cried, clapping her hands to see him hold the child—gingerly as if he would break.

"Come and sit by me, Rupert," she said. "I am strong. See, I can hold him myself. You think he will tire me. Well, you shall have him to hold for five minutes, no more. Then you must give him back to me. He is so precious, you know—that his mother cannot do without him—no, not for a minute. But she will lend him to you while she counts a hundred—because you are his father, but to no one else in all the world!"

Rupert had perforce to sit beside his wife, and, knowing that I was watching him, he put a strong constraint upon himself, and began to talk with some appearance of goodwill—of the beauty of the babe, of his own unfortunate accident, of the slowness of Warner's cure, and especially of the terrible straits to which, if relief did not come soon, they would be put for money.

All the time, however, I could see Mr. Rupert growing perceptibly uneasy. He wished to have an interview with his wife alone, in order, as I anticipated, that she might be able to get her consent to some arrangement disadvantageous to her, to which he knew I would never give in. His continual references to the family difficulties pointed that way. As also the numerous errands which he invented in order to get me out of the room. He put the matter more boldly when next he spoke.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "will you permit me to have a few minutes' private conversation alone with my wife? I have something to say to her which concerns herself and our future."

Kate raised her head from the babe, in surprise at his tone.

"No," I said firmly, settling myself to my sewing. "I will not leave the room. Enough mischief has been done already by Kate and you having suffered from me. I give you a right to share in any plans you may form for my sister or her child. She is still weak and, I consider, in my charge, so long, that is, as you cannot or will not give her her proper position in the world as your wife. So say what you have to say in my presence, if you please, Mr. Rupert Glendonwyn!"

"This is past bearing!" he cried, leaping to his feet. "Have you forgotten that you are in this house on sufferance? You came here without being asked—you stay here against our will—and yet you will not permit me to speak for five minutes alone with my wife!"

"Very likely, it is all true," I said, very calmly. "The last accusation certainly is. What you have to say to Kate you must say to me, unless you propose to call Hamish up and carry me down stairs between you!"

At this he tried another tack.

"Mademoiselle," he said, softly (and when he chose no one has a softer voice or a more winning way with him than Mr. Rupert), "when people love one another—they do not always wish to show it before all the world—"

"Oh, as to that," said I, "I will sit by the window and turn my back—I will shut my eyes, but not my ears!"

Whereupon Kate laughed aloud with perfect unconcern and joyousness.

"Why, I will kiss you, Rupert," she said, "before Father or anybody. Who, indeed, has a better right!"

And drawing his face down between her two palms, she kissed him, smiling and nodding over to me with a kind of triumph,

the hundredth time how surpassing lovely he was.

Mr. Glendonwyn had seated himself at the table with a large pocketbook full of papers, which he presently spread out before him and studied intently. Warner had brought a book from the library, which he was pretending to read.

"Now for it," I thought, "how I wish John were here to help me!"

Quite abruptly Mr. Glendonwyn turned to Kate, who started violently as he addressed her.

"Madam," he said, "I am aware that upon a certain date of January of this present year my son, Rupert, foolishly and without my knowledge went through a form of marriage with you. Into the legality or illegality of that ceremony I shall not enter. It is sufficient that the fact cannot now be proved in any court of law—"

"But the witnesses—the minister?" I cried, indignantly. "I myself was present!"

"The first is dead," said Mr. Glendonwyn gravely, "the second (here he turned toward the surgeon) bowed himself away. I will not, I think, be able to give such evidence as would tend to establish your sister's claim. There remains yourself, Miss Fairlie—and, I believe, a certain certificate of the form of marriage gone about recently, why you signed and your own mother, Mr. Glendonwyn!"

"I will certainly not keep silent for a day," I cried; "my sister was as truly married as any woman—as your own mother, Mr. Glendonwyn!"

Mr. Glendonwyn made a little impatient movement with his hand.

"I think," he went on, "if you will do me the favor to give me your attention, that I can show you some good reasons why you should either deliver that certificate into my hands or burn it before my eyes;—"

"I shall be glad to hear your reasons," I said; "they must be grave indeed to justify us in taking such a step."

"They are of the gravest or I should not be here today in the attitude of a suppliant," said he, with a kind of mock gravity. "Briefly, then, they are three. First, my son required the paper with and my son declared free to marry. Rupert will go to prison as a forger, I as an embezzler. Again, I have legal opinion that in the absence of witnesses in your favor, the quasi certificate, a purely invalid, remembering the fact that we are, thirdly, which may influence you most, if our demands are not complied with by Dr. Warner and I intend to take with us the child which has been the issue of my son's unfortunate misalliance."

"It had hardly the words out of his mouth when Kate rose on her feet, breathing deeply and fiercely, her head thrown a little forward and her splendid hair falling in disorder about her neck. With a single motion of her hands she pushed back the chair and stood with clasped fingers and flashing eyes between the men and the babe.

"You shall not—you cannot—take my child!" she cried. "You only do this to frighten me. I know. I will call for help. I will strike you dead with my hands. Fairlie—Hamish—John—help me! They are going to take him away—to take my little child from me. Oh, no—no—no!"

I had risen and gone across to her, but with one hand she put me easily aside. She was wonderfully strong. She held out the other hand to me, as if to ward off my interference, having consideration to the necessary privacy.

As he spoke Kate came quite near him and looked into his face. Her hands were clasped before her, her lips and face like marble.

"God knows I would give my life for you, Rupert," she said, "I have always been ready to do that. I am still. But I must keep the babe. He may soon be all I have left. I can see that. I do not think it is your fault, but that of your father, who hates me. If he hates me he would hate the child also—I know he would. And so I cannot give him up even to you—my father and I will not. You will have to kill me first, Rupert!"

And she stooped to the little white ba-

bet by the window, and, lifting up the sleeping babe, pressed it jealously to her bosom.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### Nativity of Marriage.

That was one interview which served to shake the foundation of my darling's reason, thank God, only for a time. The other I shall relate more briefly. For it is as useless as it is painful to dwell on these attempts of wicked and weak men to sacrifice the innocent over the graves of their own sins.

That winter the son had been unable to effect by persuasion, Gregory, the father, came some time after to carry out by sterner means. It was that day in late November to which and the night that followed it, so many references have been made in this history.

When I saw Mr. Glendonwyn disembark with Mr. Surgeon Warner, I knew that the battle so long imminent must now be fought to a finish.

And I do not think that I was very sorry. These Glendonwyns, with their pitiful shifts and their pride in the wrong place, their willingness to sacrifice all for their great name—the woman who loved them, the babe that had been born to them, stirred every bit of combativeness in me. Of course I expect John, who, though he bore the name, was as different from the others as God's gospel is from the devil's lie.

But our assailants did not appear to be in any haste to begin operations. Indeed I grew to wonder whether there was to be any direct attack that day or no, and to dread their proffered gifts more than their openest enmity.

It was already afternoon before Mr. Glendonwyn opened his batteries. Kate was sitting with the child in her arms, silent mostly, or lifting the babe in her strong arms that she might tell him for

compelled to appear hard to you, but all our safeties require it."

And he pushed across to me a paper which set forth "that in consideration of an annual payment of £200, Kate or Catherine Glendonwyn, daughter of David Glendonwyn of Boatcraft, in the parish of Gower, was to bind herself to renounce all claims and rights ensuing from any irregular or apparent marriage between herself and Rupert Glendonwyn, younger of Castle Gower, and to declare that she was not legally married to the aforesaid Rupert."

All in a moment the possibility of meeting stratagem with stratagem flashed upon me. I knew, of course, that the paper Kate had burned was not the original certificate which the minister had written and which Warner and I had witnessed. I had the best possible reasons for my knowledge. In fact I had carefully copied it out upon paper of a similar quality, imitating the signatures as best I could. I had done this as soon as Kate and I came back from our first carriage jaunt together. I had then put the original with all my parchments and certificates in a sealed envelope in the little safe wherein my father kept his money, his papers, his plans and his drawings. I marked the outside "Fairlie's certificates—School!" And I knew that it would rest there till the day of doom safe and intact.

For this reason alone I had permitted Kate to carry the copy about with her—which otherwise would have been a foolish and fatal thing to do, in days when Mr. Rupert's word was her law, and when, if he had asked it of her, she would have given him the very head of her shoulders to do his pleasure.

So, with this knowledge, and believing also that a marriage is a marriage, and no paper renouncing it of any legal value though signed by either or both parties, I whispered to Kate that, for the sake of peace, it would be well that she should sign the document.

"And if I do, no one will take away my child!" she cried. For that was ever uppermost in her mind.

"After I had given her this advice Gregory Glendonwyn surveyed me all over with his deep-piercing gray eyes, as if to make out how much I knew. But I continued to sit tranquilly, and bore his chilly inspection to all appearance stolidly enough.

Kate accordingly signed the paper without troubling to read it. For since baby had been brought to require special attention at the moment, what were papers to her whose very life was at the service of those whom she loved—that is, of the Ruperts whom she loved, elder and younger. And I believe, in a lesser degree, also of me, her sister. As before, Surgeon Warner and I formally witnessed the transaction, which, I admit, caused me no little secret satisfaction, remembering two similar signatures adhibited to another document locked up in the little safe along with drawings of farm carts and plans of greenhouses. Even if Kate could sign away her own rights—what about those of this clamorous young gentleman whom his mother was just now enveloping with the help of numerous safety pins, till he looked like a cocoon through which a little rubicund-faced silk worm has just begun to eat its way.

"Now," said Gregory Glendonwyn, pushing a thick envelope over to Kate, "be good enough to sign a receipt for that. There is a form inclosed. You will not, however, need the money till such time as you are landed at some Cumberland port or wherever we decide that it will be best for you to settle."

Kate looked helplessly over at me for instructions. So I counted the notes, which were upon the bank of England and amounted to £150, glanced at the form of receipt and showed my sister where to write her name.

"Write 'Kate Glendonwyn,'" said Gregory, who was watching us closely.

"Yes, write your maiden name, dear!" I whispered. For remembered John once telling me that down to a very recent date it was the custom in Scotland for married women to sign their maiden names, even to legal documents. So no harm could come of that.

"This being done, Gregory Glendonwyn and Surgeon Warner gathered their papers

and went out together without any leave-taking."

It was with a smile that I thought that, though at present we could not get out of the island, it would be a very faraway port, indeed, which would prevent me communicating with my father and John.

Nor did I feel the least remorse for the part I had played. Our enemies were trying to hoodwink and outwit us. I held it no sin, therefore, to overlook their cards as much as I could.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### The Tower Chamber.

No sooner had the laird of Castle Gower and his satellite betaken themselves out, than Kate sprang to her feet with swift, tigerish surety, to steal my boy away! Perhaps to kill him—at least to take him away where I shall never see him again."

And she proceeded to roll up her work and make a bundle of several things which the baby might require, as if she would leave the house immediately.

I had, therefore, to get her away into her own room, where I impressed upon her how impossible it would be for us to leave the island in broad daylight with three men all on the lookout, carrying a baby, and the available boats all locked in the boathouse.

Kate listened without speaking. She seemed to be taking in what I said, but I perceived a strange lack-luster deadness in her eyes.

"I must go to him," I heard her whisper more than once, "he will surely protect his own. It is his father who has set him on to this. He is good—he is kind—he loves me!"

I did not hear all this at one time, but it snatches as I went to and fro, contriving word to keep me near my sister.

But all her excitement of the afternoon paled before what was to come, when about 4 o'clock in the afternoon Hamish entered by the great door in evident haste. He went into the back parts to see old Janet and, there unseen and, of course, unheard by us, conversed in signs with his dumb wife. It was not long before the two of them came up to our room—the little bedroom with the window upon the sea, which I had chosen for myself when first we came. Then Hamish without any preliminary informed us that "Ta gentlemen would not be crossin' in the boat that night, but would be stoppin' over till the mornin'."

Accordingly he desired Kate and myself to change into the pair of communicating rooms which gave upon the court yard, while, as he said, "him and Janet would 'mak' up shak-doons for to gentlemen" in my little chamber.

It seemed a thing natural enough, for it was late, the wind was rising and there was every prospect of a storm.

But who was to convince our frightened Kate of that? She leaped up at the word.

"No—no," she said, "I will not leave this room. I will not go into the other chambers. I will not be parted from my boy. Let them go into the front room if they like. We will all three stay here together. See, there is a lock upon the door. Fairlie, you and I will lock ourselves in. I will sit up all night. They want to take my darling from me. But they shall not—no, they shall not!"

I had to quiet her as best I could, at the same time explaining to Hamish that the gentlemen could have the other two rooms—but that Kate and I would remain where we were.

"As ye like, mem," said Hamish, "ye shouldna sleep in the meat safe gin ye want to. Dell bite me, but there's nae end to weaman's vagaries!"

Hamish went out, and the moment he was gone Kate threw herself upon the door, locked and barred it, and began to drag a heavy chest of drawers into place across it. I assured her that there was no danger, and succeeded for the time being in persuading her to restore the chest of drawers

to its place. But I could see that so far as her suspicions were concerned the mischief was done.

However, for the time being I seemed to convince her, and to have made good my point. She even took little Rupert in her arms and went with me down to the sitting room, where a bright fire was lighted. We had the room to ourselves till supper time, when Mr. Glendonwyn came in, and with the greatest politeness proposed that we should all sup together.

As soon as she heard his foot come toward the door, I could see Kate clutch her child so tightly that the youthful Rupert promptly objected and sent far and wide a lusty protestation. But when Mr. Glendonwyn came in, Kate met him smiling. There was indeed (as I remember now) a strange fixity in her smile, and she said but little. Indeed, I do not remember much of what passed at table, save that there was a great deal of talk.

I heard the words come out and go. I noted the expression of interest or indifference on the face of the laird of Castle Gower. But somehow before the meal was over a curious warm tingling drowsiness stole over me—I knew not whence or why. I had only time to warn Kate that I must go at once to our room. I dared not even wait for her to gather the various parcels, infantile and invalid, which she had brought with her. I could only seize the baby, say "Good night" in some fashion and stumble upstairs. But ere I closed the door I seemed to see an expression of intelligence pass from one to the other of our guests in the house of Inch Jonet. As to this, however, I owe myself uncertain.

I remember locking the door. \* \* \* Then, after an interval which seemed interminable, there came a knocking, again and again repeated. Kate went trembling, and, after some parley, opened the door. It was Hamish who stood without, with a folded paper, which Kate took into her hands. Then she looked, as it seemed to my dizzy brain, very many doors, and brought me the little sheet of white with a frown upon her brow.

"Tell me what it means!" she said, as if she were not able to understand.

I was lying on the bed as I had flung myself down, without undressing. I took the paper out of her hand. I saw the writing. Mr. Gregory Glendonwyn's beautiful round hand, but, curiously enough, though the individual words and letters stood out like type, the meaning of the whole wavered to and fro before me, dim as a shadow on the wall. Mine eyes saw, indeed, but between them and my brain there swept that blurring, hurrying mist. I knew no more.

(To Be Continued.)



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