## CHAPTER XIII
## A RIDE THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS

Iread Don Escoban's narrative over and over again, till I had thoroughly mastered every detail of it; then I studied the key of the number cipher till I had it by heart. I had an instinct that memory on this subject would be a help and a safety to me now or hereafter. For now new doubts had begun to assail me. What I had learned was in reality a State secret and had possible consequences or eventualities which, despite the lapse of three centuries, might prove far-reaching and dangerous. The treasure in question was so vast, its purpose so definite, and its guardianship so jealously protected against time and accident, that there was but little chance of forgetfulness regarding it. I was not assailed by moral scruples in any way. The treasure had been amassed and dedicated to the undoing of England; and for those who had gathered it and sent it forth I had no concern. That it had been hidden in Britain by Britain's enemies during time of war surely deprived them of all right to recover by legal means. What the law might be on the subject I did not know, and till I knew I cared little. It was a case of "finders keepers," and if I could find it first I held myself justified in using it to my own purposes. All the same I made up my mind to look up the law of Treasure Trove, which I had a hazy idea was in a pretty uncertain condition. At first none of these issues troubled me. They were indeed side[123] issues till the treasure should be found; when they would become of prime importance. I had felt that my first step to winning the hand of Marjory Anita was to read the cipher. This I had done; and in the doing had made discovery of a secret of such a nature that it might place me beyond the dreams of avarice, and in a position to ask any girl in the world to marry me. I believe that I regarded the treasure as already my own; as much as though I had already recovered it from the bowels of the earth.

Early in the morning I took my way to Whinnyfold, bringing with me a pocket compass so that I could locate the exact spot where the mouth of the cave had been closed. I knew of course that even granite rocks cannot withstand untouched the beating of three centuries of stormy sea, the waste of three hundred summers and winters, and the thousands of nights of bitter frost and days of burning sun which had come to pass since the entrance of the cave had been so rudely shaken down. But I was, I confess, not prepared for the utter annihilation which had come to every trace of its whereabouts. Time after time the sea had bitten into the land; and falling rocks, and creeping verdure, and drifting sand had changed the sea-front beyond all recognition.

I did what I could, however, to take the bearings of the place as laid down by Don de Escoban by walking along the top of the cliff, beginning at the very edge of Witsennan

Point till I reached a spot where the south end of the outer rock of the Skares stood out.

Then to my surprise I found that it was as near as possible in the direction of my own house. In fact when I looked at the plan which the local surveyor had made of my house I found that the northern wall made a bee line for the south end of the main rock of the Skares. As it was manifest that what had originally[124] been the front of the cave had fallen in and been partly worn and worked away, my remaining hope was that the cave itself lay under part of my ground if not under the house itself. This gave a new feature to the whole affair. If my surmise were correct I need not hurry at all; the safest thing I could do would be to quietly make an opening from my house into the cave, and explore at leisure. All seemed clear for this proceeding. The workmen who had done the building were gone, and the coming of the decorators had not yet been fixed. I could therefore have the house to myself. As I went back to the hotel, I planned out in my mind how I should get from Glasgow or Aberdeen proper implements for digging and cutting through the rock into the house; these would be sent in cases, so that no one would suspect what I was undertaking. The work would have to be done by myself if I wished to preserve secrecy. I had now so much to tell Marjory when we should meet that I felt I should hardly know where to begin, and the business side of my mind began to plan and arrange so that all things might come in due order and to the best effect.

When I got to the hotel I found awaiting me a letter from Marjory which had come by the last post. I took it away to my room and locked the door before opening it. It had neither address nor date, and was decidedly characteristic:

“My dear Sir: Mrs. Jack asks me to write for her to say that we shall be leaving Braemar on Tuesday. We shall be staying at the Fife Arms Hotel, and she will be very happy if you will breakfast with us at nine o’clock A. M. Room No. 16. This is all of course in case you care to ride down to Aberdeen. We are breakfasting so early as the ride is long, sixty miles, and Mrs. Jack[125] thinks that I should have a rest at least twice on the way. As I believe you know the road, she will be glad if you will kindly arrange our stopping places. Mrs. Jack will leave Braemar at about three o’clock and drive down to Ballater to catch the half-past five train. She asks me to say that she hopes you will pardon her for the trouble she is giving you, and to impress on you that in case you would rather not come, or should anything occur to prevent you, she will quite understand a telegram with the single word ‘regret.’ By the way she will be obliged if you will kindly not mention her name—either her surname or her Christian name—before any of the people—strangers or hotel people, at Braemar or during the journey—or indeed during the day. Believe me,

Yours very truly,

“Marjory Anita.”

“P.S.—How about the cipher; have you reduced the biliteral, or got any clue yet?

“P.P.S.—I don’t suppose that anything, unless it be really serious, will prevent your coming. Mrs. Jack is so looking forward to my having that bicycle ride.

“P.P.P.S.—Have you second-sighted any ships yet? Or any more white flowers—for the Dead?”

For long I sat with the letter in my hand after I had read it over and over again many many times. Each time I read it its purpose seemed more luminous. It may have been that my old habit of a year ago of finding secret meanings in everything was creeping back to me. I thought and thought; and the introspective habit made me reason out causes even in the midst of imaginative flights. “Might not” I thought “it be possible that there be minor forms of Second Sight; Day Dreams based on some great effort of truth. In the real world there are manifestations of life in lower as well as higher forms;[126] and yet all alike are instinct with some of that higher principle which divides the quick and the dead. The secret voices of the brain need not always speak in thunder; the Dream-Painter within us need not always have a full canvas for the exercise of his craft.”

On Tuesday morning when at nine o’clock to the minute I went to the Fife Arms at Braemar, I found Marjory alone. She came forward with a bright, frank smile and shook hands. “It’s real good to see you” was all she said. Presently she added:

“Mrs. Jack will be here in a minute or two. Before she comes, it is understood that between this and Aberdeen and indeed for to-day, you and I are only to be comrades.”

“Yes!” said I, and then added: “Without prejudice!” She showed her pearly teeth in a smile as she answered:

“All right. Without prejudice! Be it so!” Then Mrs. Jack came in, and having greeted me warmly, we sat down to breakfast. When this was over, Marjory cut a good packet of sandwiches and tied them up herself. These she handed to me saying:

“You will not mind carrying these. It will be nicer having our lunch out than going to a hotel; don’t you think so?” Needless to say I cordially acquiesced. Both our bicycles were ready at the door, and we lost no time in getting under weigh. Indeed my companion showed some anxiety to be off quickly, as though she wished to avoid observation.

The day was glorious. There was bright sunshine; and a sky of turquoise with here and there a flock of fleecy clouds. The smart easterly breeze swept us along as though we were under sail. The air was cool and the road smooth as asphalt, but with the springiness of well-packed gravel. With the least effort of pedalling we simply[127] seemed to fly. I could see the exhilaration on my companion's face as clearly as I could feel it in my own nature. All was buoyancy, above, below, around us; and I doubt if in all the wide circle of the sun's rays there were two such glad hearts as Marjory's and my own.

As we flew along, the lovely scenery on either hand seemed like an endless panorama. Of high mountains patched with heather which here and there, early in the year as it was, broke out in delicate patches of pink; of overarching woods whose creaking branches swaying in the wind threw kaleidoscopic patterns of light along our way; of a brown river fed by endless streams rushing over a bed of stones which here and there lifted their dark heads through the foam of the brown-white water; of green fields stretching away on either side of the river or rising steeply from our feet to the fringes of high-lying pines or the black mountains which rose just beyond; of endless aisles of forest where, through the dark shade of the brown trunks, rose from the brown mass of long-fallen pine needles which spread the ground below, and where patches of sunlight fell in places with a seemingly intolerable glare! Then out into the open again where the sunlight seemed all natural and even the idea of shade unreal. Down steep hills where the ground seemed to slide back underneath our flying wheels, and up lesser hills, swept without effort by the wind behind us and the swift impetus of our pace.

After a while the mountains before us, which at first had seemed like an unbroken line of frowning giants barring our course, seemed to open a way to us. Round and round we swept, curve after curve yielding and falling back and opening new vistas; till at the last we passed into the open gap between the hills around Ballater. Here in the face of possible danger we began to crawl cautiously down the steep hill to the town. Mrs. Jack[128] had proposed that we should make our first halt at Ballater. As, however, we put on pace again at the foot of the hill Marjory said:

"Oh do not let us stop in a town. I could not bear it just after that lovely ride through the mountains."

"Agreed!" I said "let us push on! That twenty miles seems like nothing. Beyond Cambus-o-May there is a lake on the northern side; we can ride round it and come back to the road again at Dinnet. If you like we can have our lunch in the shelter of a lovely wood at the far side of it."

“That will be enchanting!” she said, and the happy girlish freshness of her voice was like a strain of music which suited well the scene. When we had passed Ballater and climbed the hill up to the railway bridge we stopped to look back; and in sheer delight she caught hold of my arm and stood close to me. And no wonder she was moved, for in the world there can be few places of equal beauty of a similar kind. Right above us to the right, and again across the valley, towered mountains of rich brown with patches of purple and lines of green; and in front of us in the centre of the amphitheatre, two round hills, looming large in a delicate mist, served as portals to the valley which trended upward between the hills beyond. The road to Braemar seemed like a veritable road of mystery, guarded by an enchanted gate. With a sigh we turned our backs on all this beauty, and skirting the river, ran by Cambus-o-May and between woods of pine in an opening vista of new loveliness. Eastward before us lay a mighty sweep of hill and moor, backed on every side by great mountains which fell away one behind the other into misty distance of delicate blue. At our feet far below, lay two spreading lakes of sapphire hue, fringed here and there with woods, and dotted with little islands whose trees bent down to the water’s[129] edge. Marjory stood rapt for awhile, her breast heaving and her face glowing. At last she turned to me with a sigh; her beautiful eyes were bright with unshed tears as she said:

“Oh, was there ever in the world anything so beautiful as this Country! And was there ever so exquisite a ride as ours to-day!”

Does ever a man love a woman more than when she shows herself susceptible to beauty, and is moved to the fulness and simplicity of emotion which is denied to his own sex? I thought not, as Marjory and I swept down the steep road and skirted by the crystal lakes of Ceander and Davan to the wood in which we were to have our *al fresco* lunch. Here, sheltered from the wind, the sunshine seemed too strong to make sitting in the open pleasant; and we were glad to have the shade of the trees. As we sat down and I began to unpack the luncheon, Marjory said:

“And now tell me how you have been getting on with the cipher.” I stood still for so long that she raised her head and took a sharp glance of surprise at me.

In the charm of her presence I had absolutely forgotten all about the cipher and what might grow from it.

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## CHAPTER XIV
## A SECRET SHARED

“There is so much to tell” I said “that I hardly know where to begin. Perhaps I had better tell you all here, where we are alone and not likely to be disturbed. We have come so fast that we have lots of time and we need not hurry. When you have had your lunch I shall tell you all.”

“Oh please don’t wait till then,” she said, “I am all impatience. Let me know right away.”

“Young woman” I said sternly “you are at present insincere. You *know* you are ravenously hungry, as you should be after a twenty mile ride; and you are speaking according to your idea of convention and not out of your heart. This is not convention; there is nothing conventional in the whole outfit. Eat the food prepared for you by the thoughtfulness of a very beautiful and charming girl!” She held up a warning finger and said:

“Remember ‘*Bon Camarade*—without prejudice.’”

“All right” I answered “so it shall be. But if the lady wants to hold me up for criminal libel I shall undertake to repeat the expression when, and where, and how she will. I shall repeat the assertion and abide by the consequences.” She went on eating her sandwiches, not, I thought, displeased. When we had both finished she turned to me and said:

“Now!” I took from my pocket the rescript of[131] Don Bernardino de Escoban’s narrative and handed it to her. She looked at it, turned over the pages, and glanced at them as she went. Then she returned to the beginning, and after reading the first few lines, said to me with an eager look in her eyes:

“Is this really the translation of the secret writing? Oh, I am so glad you have succeeded. You are cute!” She took out her watch, and having looked at it, went on: “We have loads of time. Won’t you read it for me? It will be so much nicer! And let me ask you questions.”

“Delighted!” I answered, “But would it not be better if I read it right through first, and then let you ask questions! Or better still you read it yourself right through, and then ask.” I had a purpose in this. If I had to read it, my eyes must be wholly engrossed in my work; but if she read, I need never take them off her face. I longed to see the varying expression with which she would follow every phase of the strange story. She thought for a few seconds before answering, and as she thought looked me straight in the eyes. I think she read my secret, or at any rate enough of it to fathom my wish; nothing else could account for the gentle blush that spread over her face. Then she said in quite a meek tone:

“I shall read it myself if you think it best!”

I shall never forget that reading. Her face, always expressive, was to me like an open book. I was by this time quite familiar with de Escoban’s narrative, as I had with infinite patience dug it out letter by letter from the cipher in which it had been buried for so long. As also I had written it out fair twice over, it was little wonder that I knew it well. As she read I so followed that I could have told to a sentence how far she had got in the history. Once she unconsciously put her hand to[132] her throat and felt the brooch; but immediately drew it away again, glancing for a moment at me from under her eyelashes to see whether I had observed. She saw I had, shook her head with a smile, and read on.

When she had finished reading, she gave a long sigh and then held out her hand to me saying:

“Bravo! I congratulate you with all my heart!” Her touch thrilled me; she was all on fire, and there was a purposeful look in her face which was outside and beyond any joy that she could have with regard to any success of mine. This struck me so much that I said impulsively:

“Why are you so glad?” She answered instinctively and without thought:

“Because you will keep it from the Spaniards!” Then she stopped suddenly, with a gesture of self repression.

I felt a little piqued. I would have thought that her concern would have been rather individual than political. That in such a matter even before racial hatred would have come gladness at the well-doing of even such a friend—without prejudice—as I was. Looking at me, she seemed to see through me and said

“With her two white hands extended, as if praying one offended:”

“Oh, I am sorry! I did not mean to hurt you. I can’t explain yet; not to-day, which is for comradeship only.—Yes without prejudice”—for she saw my look and answered it “But some day you will understand.” She was so evidently embarrassed and pained at having for some reason which I did not comprehend to show reticence to me who had been so open with her, that I felt it my duty to put her at ease. This I tried to do by assuring her that I quite understood that she had some good reason, and that I was quite content to wait. I could not help adding before I stopped: “This is a[133] small thing to have to wait for after all; when I have to wait for something so much more important.” The warning finger was held up again with a smile.

Then we went over the whole of the narrative again, I reading this time and she stopping to ask me questions. There was not much to ask; all the story was so plain that the proceeding did not take very long. Then she asked me to explain how I had come to decipher the cryptogram. I took out my pocket book and proceeded to make a key to the cipher, explaining as I went on the principle. “To me,” I said, “it is very complete, and can be used in an infinity of ways. Any mode of expression can be used that has two objects with five varieties of each.” Here she interrupted me. As I was explaining I was holding out my hands with the fingers spread as a natural way of expressing my meaning. She saw at once what had escaped me, and clasping her hands exclaimed impulsively:

“Like your two hands! It is delightful! Two hands, and five fingers on each. We can talk a new deaf and dumb alphabet; which no one but ourselves can understand!” Her words thrilled through me. One more secret to share with her; one more secret which would be in perpetual exercise, in pursuance of a common thought. I was about to speak when she stopped me with a gesture. “Sorry!” she said. “Go on; explain to me! We can think of variety later!” So I continued:

“So long as we have means that are suitable, we have only to translate into the biliteral, and we who know this can understand. Thus we have a double guard of secrecy. There are some who could translate into symbols with which they are familiar, symbols with which they are not; but in this method we have a buffer of ignorance or mystery between the known and the unknown. There is also this advantage; the cipher as it stands is sufficiently[134] on a basis of science or at any rate of order, that its key is easily capable of reproduction. As you have seen, I can make a key without any help. Bacon’s biliteral cipher is scientifically accurate. It can, therefore, be easily reproduced; the method of exclusions is also entirely rational, so that we need have no difficulty in remembering it. If two people would take the trouble to learn the symbols of the biliteral, as kept after the exclusions and which are used in this cipher, they might with very little practice be able to write or read off-hand. Indeed the suggestion, which you have just made, of a deaf-and-dumb alphabet is capital. It is as simple as the daylight! You have only to decide whether the thumb or the little finger means 1 or 2; and then reproduce by right hand or left, and using the fingers of each hand, the five symbols of the amended biliteral, and you can talk as well and as easily as do the deaf mutes!” Again she spoke out impulsively:

“Let us both learn off by heart the symbols of our cipher; and then we shan’t want even to make a key. We can talk to each other in a crowd, and no one be the wiser of what we are saying.”

This was very sweet to me. When a man is in love, as I was, anything which links him to his lady, and to her alone, has a charm beyond words. Here was a perpetual link, if we cared to make it so, and if the Fates would be good to us.

"The Fates!" With the thought came back Gormala's words to me at the beginning. She had told me, and somehow I seemed to have always believed the same, that the Fates worked to their own end and in their own way. Kindness or unkindness had no part in their workings; pity had no place at the beginning of their interest, no more than had remorse at the end. Was it possible that in the scheme of Fate, in which Gormala and I and[135] Lauchlane Macleod had places, there was also a place for Marjory? The Witch-woman had said that the Fates would work their will, though for the doing of it came elements out of past centuries and from the ends of the earth. The cipher of Don de Escoban had lain hidden three centuries, only to be revived at its due time. Marjory had come from a nation which had no existence when the Don had lived, and from a place which in his time was the far home of the red man and the wolf and the bison and the bear.

But yet what was there to connect Marjory with Don de Escoban and his secret? As I thought, I saw Marjory who had turned her back to me, quietly take something from her throat and put it into her pocket. Here was the clue indeed.

The brooch! When I had taken it up from the sea at the Sand Craigs I had returned it to her with only a glance; and as I had often seen it since, without any mystery, I had hardly noticed it. It rushed in on my mind that it was of the same form as that described by Don de Escoban as having been given by the Pope. I had only noticed a big figure and a little one; but surely it could be none other than a figure of St. Christopher. I should have liked to have asked Marjory about it at once; but her words already spoken putting off explanation, and her recent act, of which I was supposed to know nothing, in putting it out of sight, forbade me to inquire. All the more I thought, however; and other matters regarding it crowded into my mind.

The chain was complete, the only weak link being the connection between Marjory and the St. Christopher brooch. And even here there was a mystery, acknowledged in her concealment, which might explain itself when the time came.

Matters took such a grave turn for me with my latest[136] surmise, that I thought it would be well to improve the occasion with Marjory, in so far as it might be possible to learn something of her surroundings. I was barred from asking questions by her own wish; but still I did not like to lose the chance without an effort, so I said to her:

"We have learned a lot to-day, haven't we?"

“Indeed we have. It hardly seems possible that a day could make such a change!”

“I suppose we should take it that new knowledge should apply new conditions to established fact?” I said this with some diffidence; and I could see that the change in my tone, much against my will, attracted her attention. She evidently understood my wish, for she answered with decision:

“If you mean by ‘new conditions’ any alteration of the compact made between us for to-day—yes, I remember ‘without prejudice’—there is nothing in our new knowledge to alter the old ones. Do remember, sir, that this day is one set apart, and nothing that is not a very grave matter indeed can be allowed to alter what is established regarding it.”

“Then,” said I, “at all events let us learn the cipher—our cipher as you very properly called it.”

“Oh no! surely?” this was said with a rising blush.

“Indeed, yes—I am glad to say!”

“Take care!” she replied, meaningly, then she added:

“Very well! Ours let it be. But really and truly I have no right to its discovery; it makes me feel like a fraud to hear you say so.”

“Be easy,” I replied. “You helped me more than I can say. It was your suggestion to reduce the terms of the biliteral; and it was by that means that I read the cipher. But at any rate when we call it ‘ours’ it will content me if the word ‘ours’”—I could not help repeating the word for it was delight to me; it did not displease her[137] either, though it made her blush—“is applied not to invention but to possession!”

“All right,” she said. “That is good of you. I cannot argue with you. Amendment accepted! Come, let us get on our wheels again. You have the key of *our* cipher with you; you can tell me the items one by one, and we will learn them as we go along.”

And so as we swept round Davan Lake, with the wind behind us driving us along except just before we regained the high road at Dinnet, I repeated the symbols of the reduced biliteral. We went over and over them again and again, till we were unable to puzzle each other questioning up and down, ‘dodging’ as the school-boys say.

Oh, but that ride was delightful! There was some sort of conscious equality between us which I could see my comrade felt as well as myself. Down the falling road we sped almost without effort, our wheels seeming to glide on air. When we came to the bridge over the railway just above Aboyne, where the river comes north and runs in under a

bank of shale and rock, we dismounted and looked back. Behind us was our last view of the gorge above Ballater, where the two round hills stood as portals, and where the cloud rack hanging above and beyond made a mystery which was full of delightful fascination and no less delightful remembrance. Then with a sigh we turned.

There, before us lay a dark alley between the closing pines. No less mysterious, but seemingly dark and grim.

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## CHAPTER XV
## A PECULIAR DINNER-PARTY

We did not stop at Aboyne, but ran on beyond Kincardine O'Neill, and took our second rest close to the Bridge of Potarch where we had tea at the little hotel on the right bank of the river. Then for a while we leaned over the parapet and looked at the water flowing swiftly far below as the river narrows from its pebbly bed to the gorge of rock on which the bridge rests. There is something soothing, perhaps something hypnotic, in the ceaseless rush of water. It unconsciously takes one's thoughts on and on, till the reality of the present is in some measure lost and the mind wanders towards imagination through the regions of the unknown. As I looked at Marjory, with the afternoon sun falling on her superb figure and showing up her clear-cut profile with all the finish of a cameo, I could not but be struck with the union of gentleness and independence which was so clearly manifested in her. Without thinking, I spoke out my mind. It is a privilege of those who understand each other, or of the very young, to give voice to the latter portion of a train of thought without feeling it necessary to enlighten the hearer as to what has gone to make up the conclusion. The feeling was hourly growing upon me that, even if I could not quite understand Marjory, at least she understood me.

"But then all you American girls are so independent!" She did not seem a bit surprised by this fag end of reasoning;[139] she had evidently been following up some train of thought of her own, and by some happy instinct my words fitted in with it. Without turning towards me, but still keeping her eyes fixed down the stream to where far away it swayed to the right through a gap between pine clad hills she answered:

"Yes! We are as a rule brought up to be independent. It seems to be a part of what our people call the 'genius' of the country. Indeed for many, women as well as men, it is a sort of necessity. Our nation is so vast, and it expands so quickly, that there is nearly everywhere a family separation. In the main, all the children of one generation

become the heads of families of the next. Somehow, the bulk of our young people still follow the sunset; and in the new life which comes to each, whether in the fields or in the city or in the reclamation of the wilderness, the one thing which makes life endurable is this independence which is another form of self-reliance. This it is which enables them to brave hunger and thirst and all danger which comes to pioneers; which in the cities makes the solitude of lonely life bearable to the young as well as to the old; which makes them work and study in patience; which makes them self-sacrificing, and thrifty, and long enduring. I tell you it is this which makes a race of patriots, whose voices swell in unison till the great voice of the nation, raised in some good cause, can ring and echo through the world!" As she spoke she got more and more earnest, more and more enthusiastic, till her voice began to vibrate and her face to flush. When she turned towards me at the end, her eyes were full of spiritual light. I looked at her, and I suppose my love as well as my admiration must have expressed itself, for her eyes fell and the flush on her face melted into a soft blush. She turned, looked at the water again, and then went on speaking:

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"This is the good side of our independence and *faute de mieux* it serves; those who know no better do not miss what might be. But oh! it has to be paid for. The little sufferings of day by day can grow into a mass which in the end outweighs those seemingly far greater ills which manifest themselves all at once. No one knows, no one ever will know, how much quiet, dull pain goes to tame a woman's heart to the solitude of life. I have not seen so much of it as some others; my life has been laid in pleasant places, and only through the small accidents of life have I come to know of the negative pain which other girls have to endure. It is so much to have round one the familiar faces of our youth; to meet sympathy at every turn of life, and to know that there is understanding for us always. We women have to give something in order to be happy. The stronger-minded ones, as we call them, blame the Creator for this disposition of things—or else I do not know who or what they blame; but the rest of us, who are wise enough to accept what cannot be altered, try to realise what can be done for the best. We all want to care for some one or something, if it is only a cat or a dog. For myself, so far back as I can remember, I longed to have a brother or sister, but I think that in my secret heart it was a brother I wanted. Of course as I merged into my actual surroundings I grew out of this; but once it was brought home to me with new force. We were staying for a few days in one of those great English houses where there was a growing family of boys and girls. There was one sweet young girl, just about my own age, who seemed idolised by all her brothers. When we arrived they were all going in to evening prayers. The last of the sunlight was falling through the old stained glass

window of the great baronial hall, and lit up the little family group. The girl sat between two of her young brothers, great stalwart lads who had all the characteristics[141] of a family of soldiers. During prayers each of them held one of her hands; and when they all knelt, her arms went round their necks. I could not help feeling deeply—down into the very depths of my soul—how good it was for them all. I would have given everything I have, or am ever likely to have, that mine had been such an upbringing. Think, how in after years it will come back to those boys in hours of trial, or pain, or prosperity, or passion; in all times when their manhood or their honour or their worth is to be tried; how they will remember the words which were spoken to them as those were spoken, and were listened to as those were listened to, in the midst of sympathy and love. Many and many a time in years to come those boys will bless such hours, and God Himself will surely rejoice that His will was being wrought in so sweet a way. And the same thing is going on in a thousand English homes!" She paused and turned to me and the feeling in her heart found expression in the silent tears that ran down her cheeks. Again she turned her eyes to the running water and gazed awhile before speaking again. Then looking at me, she went on:

"And the girl, too, how good it was for her! What an antidote to selfishness! How much of self-control, of sympathy, of love, of toleration was begun and fostered and completed in those moments of the expression of her heart! What place can there really be for selfish want and sorrows in the heart of a woman so trained to sympathise with and help others? It is good! good! good! and I pray that in the later development of my own dear country, all such things may have a part. Expansion at its present rate must soon cease; and then some predominant idea must take the place of the eternal self-independence. We shall, I trust, moult no feather of our national feeling of personal duty; but I am sure that our people, and more[142] especially our women, will lead happier as well as healthier lives."

This present phase of Marjory's character was new to me, fresh and enchanting. Every hour seemed to bring out new worths and beauties of the girl's character, of her intellectual gifts, of the endless wealth of her heart.

When she ceased speaking I took her hand in mine, she not resenting, and kissed it. I said only one word "Marjory!" but it was enough. I could see that in her eyes which made my heart leap.

Then a new life seemed to come to both of us. With one accord we moved towards our bicycles, and mounted in silence. After a few minutes of rapid spin down the sloping road from the bridge, we began to chat again gaily. For myself I was in wildly joyous spirits. Even a self-doubting lover could not fail to understand such a look in his

mistress's eyes. If ever love spoke out in eloquent silence it was then, all doubt melted from my heart, as the night shadows pale before the dawn. I was content to wait now, illimitably and in silence. She, too, seemed altogether happy, and accepted in unquestioning faith all the little pleasures which came in the progress of our journey. And such pleasures are many. As we drew down the valley of the Dee, with the mountains falling back and the dark pinewoods running up them like tongues of flame and emphasising by their gloom the brightness of grass and heather which cropped up amongst the rocks beyond, every turn of the road brought us to some new scene of peaceful beauty. From under the splendid woods of Crathes Castle we saw the river running like a blue ribbon far to the east and on either side of it fields and gardens and woods spreading wide. On we sped with delight in every moment, till at last through miles of shady woods we came to the great stone bridge,[143] and ended our jaunt over the rough granite cobblestones of Aberdeen.

We were a little before the time the train was due; so leaving our wheels in the Palace Hotel we went down on the platform to meet Mrs. Jack on her arrival.

We met her in due course, and brought her up to the hotel. At the stairway Marjory, who had lingered half a flight behind her companion, whispered to me:

"You have been a good boy to-day, a real good boy; and you shall before long have your reward." As she gave me her hand, I whispered:

"I am content to wait now Marjory; dear Marjory!" She blushed and smiled, and fled upstairs with a warning finger laid upon her lips.

It had been understood that I was to dine with Mrs. Jack and her friend, so I went up to the room which I had secured, to change my clothes. When I came down, in what I thought was a reasonable time, I went to the private sitting-room and knocked. As there was no answer I knocked again; then receiving no reply I took it for granted that the ladies had not yet come from their rooms and entered.

The room was empty but on the table which was laid for dinner for three was a note in Marjory's hand directed to me. With a sinking of the heart I opened it, and stood for a few minutes amazed. It had no apostrophe and ran as follows:—

"We have had to leave suddenly, but Mrs. Jack wants you to oblige her very much if you will be so good. Stay in the room, and when dinner is served sit down by yourself and eat it. Please, please do not think hardly of Mrs. Jack's request; and do not fail to carry it out. There is good reason for it, as you will very soon know. More[144] depends on your doing as Mrs. Jack"—the "Mrs. Jack" was written over an obliterated "I"—"asks than you may think. I am sure that by this time you know you can trust me.

“Marjory.”

The situation was disappointing and both humiliating and embarrassing. To be a guest under such conditions was almost ridiculous; and under ordinary circumstances I should have refused. But then I remembered that last look of Marjory’s eyes at the bridge of Potarch! Without a word, or another thought, of revolt I sat down to the dinner which the waiter was just now bringing into the room.

As it was evident to me that my staying in the room was for some purpose of delay, I lingered over my wine and had two cigars before I came away.

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## CHAPTER XVI
## REVELATIONS

In the hall I met together two men whom I knew well. The first was Adams of the American Embassy in London; the second Cathcart of the British Embassy at Washington, now on leave. I had not seen either for two years, and it was with mutual pleasure that we met. After our preliminary handshaking, and the inevitable drink at the American’s request, Adams slapped me on the shoulder and said heartily:

“Well, old fellow, I congratulate you; or rather am I to congratulate you?”

“What do you mean?” I asked in feeble embarrassment.

“All right, old chap!” he said heartily. “Your blush is enough. I see it hasn’t come off yet at all events!” A man never lets well alone when he is in an awkward position. If I had only held my tongue I might not have made a guy of myself; but as I was in doubt as to what might be the issue of my suit to Marjory, I felt additionally constrained to affect ignorance of his meaning. So I floundered on:

“‘Come off yet’? What on earth do you mean?” Again he slapped me on the back as he said in his chaffing way:

“My dear boy I saw you come in over the bridge. You had had a long ride I could see by your wheels; and I am bound to say that you did seem on excellent terms[146] with each other!” This was getting dangerous ground, so I tried to sheer off. “Oh,” I said, “you mean my bike ride with Miss Anita”—I was interrupted by his sudden whistle.

“Oh,” he said in exact imitation of my own manner. “You mean Miss Anita! So it has come to that already! Anyhow I congratulate you heartily, whether it has come, or may come, or will come to anything else.”

“I don’t see,” I said, with a helpless feeling of having been driven into a corner, “that there is anything especially remarkable in a man having a bicycle ride with a young lady of his acquaintance.”

“Keep your hair on, old man!” he said with a smile. “There is nothing remarkable about a man riding with a young lady; but there is something very remarkable about any man riding with this particular young lady. Why, man alive, don’t you know that there isn’t a man in America, or out of it, that wouldn’t give the eyes out of his head to take your place on such an occasion. To ride alone with Marjory Drake—”

“With whom?” I said impulsively; and having spoken could have bitten out my tongue. Adams paused; he was silent so long that I began to grow uneasy. His face grew very grave, and there spread over it that look between cunning and dominance which was his official expression. Then he spoke, but his words had not the same careless ring in them. There was a manifest caution and a certain indefinable sense of distance.

“Look here, Archie Hunter! Is it possible that you don’t know who it is that you were with. All right! I know of course that you are acquainted with her personally,” for he saw I was about to protest, “the very fact of your being with her and your knowing the name that she seldom uses answer for that; and you may take it from[147] me that the lady needs no character for discretion from me. But how is it that you are on such good terms with her, and yet don’t seem even to know her name?” For fully a minute there was silence between us. Cathcart had as yet said not a word, and Adams was thinking. For myself I was in a sea of multitudinous concerns; whichever way I turned I was face to face with some new difficulty. It would not do to leave these men under the impression that there was any social irregularity in my friendship with Marjory; I was too jealous of her good name to allow such a thing to be possible. And yet I could not explain at length how we had come to be such good friends. Already there were so many little mysteries; right up to this very evening when she and Mrs. Jack had gone away so strangely, leaving me in the ridiculous position of a guest with no host. It was not easy to explain these things; it was impossible to avoid them. In the midst of this chaotic whirl of thoughts Adams spoke:

“I think I had better say no more, anyhow. After all, if Miss Drake chooses to keep a secret, or to make one, it is not my business to give it, or her, away. She knows what she’s doing. You will excuse me, old fellow, won’t you; but as it is manifestly a lady’s wish, I think I can do best by holding my tongue.”

“Any wish of that lady’s,” said I, and I felt that I must seem to speak grandiloquently, “can only have my most loyal support.”

There was an awkward silence which was relieved by Cathcart, who said to me:

“Come up to my room, Archie; I want to tell you something. You’ll join us, too, Sam, won’t you?”

“All right, Billy,” said Adams, “I’ll come in a few minutes. I want to give some directions about a horse for to-morrow.”

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When we were in Cathcart’s room, he closed the door and said to me with the most genuine good feeling:

“I didn’t like to say a word downstairs, old chap; but I could see you were in some difficulty. Of course I know it’s all right; but ought you not to know something of the lady? With any one else but Sam and myself such a thing might have conveyed a false impression. Surely you can best protect the lady by knowing how to avoid anything that might embarrass her!” This was all good sound common sense. For a moment I weighed up the matter against the possibility of Marjory’s wishing to keep her name a secret. Looking back, however, I could see that any concealment that had been was rather positive than negative. The original error had been mine; she had simply allowed it to pass. The whole thing had probably been the passing fancy of a bright, spirited young girl; to take it too seriously, or to make too much of it might do harm. Why, even these men might, were I to regard it as important, take it as some piece of deliberate deceit on her part. Thus convinced of the wisdom of Cathcart’s proposition I spoke:

“You are quite right! and I shall be much obliged if you will—if you will enlighten me.” He bowed and smiled, and went on genially:

“The lady you called Miss Anita, you so far called quite correctly. Her name is Anita; but it is only her second Christian name. She is known to the world as Miss Marjory Drake, of Chicago.”

“Known to the world.” Was this a mere phrase, or the simple expression of a fact! I asked directly:

“How known to the world? Do you mean that is the name known amongst her circle of acquaintances? Is—is there any cause why the great world outside that circle should

know her at all?" He smiled and laid his[149] hand on my shoulder in a very brotherly way as he answered:

"Yes, old fellow. There is a reason, and a good one, why the great world should know her. I see you are all in the dark; so I had better tell you what I know. Marjory Anita Drake is an heiress, a great heiress, a very great heiress; perhaps a long way the greatest heiress in America, or out of it. Her father, who died when she was a baby, left her a gigantic fortune; and her trustees have multiplied it over and over again." He paused; so I said—it seeming necessary to say something:

"But being an heiress is not sufficient reason why a girl should be known to the world."

"It is a pretty good one. Most people wouldn't want any better. But this is not the reason in her case. She is the girl who gave the battle ship to the American Government!"

"Gave the battle ship! I don't understand!"

"It was this way. At the time the reports kept crowding in of the Spanish atrocities on the *reconcentrados*; when public feeling was rising in the United States, this girl got all on fire to free Cuba. To this end she bought a battle ship that the Cramp's had built for Japan. She had the ship armed with Krupp cannon which she bought through friends in Italy; and went along the Eastern coast amongst the sailors and fishermen till she had recruited a crew. Then she handed the whole thing over to the Government as a spur to it to take some action. The ship is officered with men from the Naval Academy at Annapolis; and they tell me there isn't one of the crew—from the cabin boy to the captain—that wouldn't die for the girl to-morrow."

"Bravo!" I said instinctively! "That's a girl for a nation to be proud of!"

"She is all that!" said Cathcart enthusiastically.[150] "Now you can understand why Adams congratulated you; and why he was so surprised when you did not seem to know who she was." I stood for a moment thinking, and all the clouds which wrapped Marjory's purpose in mystery seemed to disperse. This, then, was why she allowed the error of her name to pass. She had not made an *incognita*; chance had done this for her, and she had simply accepted it. Doubtless, wearied with praise and with publicity and notoriety in all its popular forms, she was glad to get away and hide herself for a while. Fortune had thrown in her way a man who was manifestly ignorant of her very existence; and it was a pleasure to play with him at hide-and-seek!

It was, after all, an up-to-date story of the Princess in disguise; and I was the young man, all unknowing, with whom she had played.

Here a terrible doubt assailed me. Other Princesses had played hide-and-seek; and, having had their sport, had vanished; leaving desolation and an empty heart behind them. Was it possible that she too was like this; that she had been all the while playing with me; that even whilst she was being most gracious, she was taking steps to hide even her whereabouts from me? Here was I, who had even proposed marriage; and yet who did not even know when or where I should see her again—if indeed I should ever see her again at all. I could not believe it. I had looked into her eyes, and had seen the truth. Here was no wanton playing at bowls with men's hearts. My life upon her faith!

I seemed to have lost myself in a sort of trance. I was recalled from it by Cathcart, who seeing me in a reverie had gone over to the fireplace and stood with his back to me, filling his pipe at the mantel-piece:

"I think I hear Adams coming. Pardon me, old fellow, but though I am sure he knows I have told you[151] about Miss Drake, and though he probably made an excuse for delay so that I might have an opportunity to do so, he wants to appear not to enter on the subject. He is *diplomat* all over. Remember he is of the U. S. Embassy; and Miss Drake, as an American citizen, is theoretically under his care in this foreign country. Let us be talking of something else when he comes in!" Sam came along the passage softly whistling a bar of "Yankee Doodle." Cathcart nodded to me and whispered:

"I told you so! He takes good care that he may not surprise us." When he came in we were talking of the prospects of the Autumn fishing on the Dee.

When we left Cathcart's room, after a cigar, I, being somewhat tired with my long ride, went at once to my room. Adams came with me as far as the door.

I was just getting into bed when I heard a slight tap at the door. I unlocked it and found Adams without. He raised a warning hand, and said in a whisper:

"May I come in? I want to say something very privately." More than ever mystified—everything seemed a mystery now—I opened the door. He came in and I closed it softly and locked it.

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## CHAPTER XVII
## SAM ADAMS'S TASK

Adams began at once: “Archie I want to tell you something; but it is in the strictest confidence. You must promise me not to mention to any one, mind *any one*, what I say; or even that I have spoken to you on the subject.” I thought for a moment before replying. It flashed across me that what he had to say must concern Marjory, so I answered:

“I fear I cannot make such a promise, if the matter is regarding some one other than myself.” A shade of annoyance passed across his face as he said:

“Well, it is about some one else; but really you must trust me. I would not for the world, old fellow, ask you to do anything that was not correct.”

“I know that” I said “I know it right well; but you see it might be regarding some one with whom my relations might be peculiar—not fixed you know. It might be necessary for me to speak. Perhaps not now; but later on.” I was stumbling blindly, so sought refuge in fact and query, “Tell me” I said “does it relate to Miss Drake?”

“It does; but I thought that you who are a friend of hers might like to do her a service.”

“Of course I would.” I answered. “There is nothing I would not do for her if it were in my power.”

“Except hold your tongue!” he said with a touch of bitterness unusual with him. I could see that anxious[153] as I was to hear he was still more anxious to tell me; so I was able to keep my temper and not make matters worse by answering back sarcastically. I said:

“Yes, old chap, even by holding my tongue. If I could see that I would benefit her by holding my tongue, or by cutting out my tongue, I would do it. What I must refuse is to *promise* to hold my tongue. Come, old fellow, don’t put me in a wrong position. You don’t know all that I do, or exactly how I am placed. Why don’t you trust me? I am willing to promise that I won’t speak at all of the matter unless it be necessary; and that I won’t speak at all in any case of having been told anything by you.” He brightened up at once and said:

“All right, then we can drive on. I take it that since we met last”—that was a few minutes ago, but he was a diplomatist—“you have learned more about Miss Drake, or rather of her history and her position and importance, than you knew at that time?”

“Yes,” I answered, and I could not help smiling.

“Then we needn’t go into that. We take facts for granted. Well, that fine act of hers—you know what I mean—has brought her, or may bring her, a peck of trouble. There are,

or there were, a certain lot of Spaniards—Copperheads—at home who look on her as a sort of embodiment of the American antagonism to their own nation. They are the low lot; for mind you, though we are at war with them I say it, the good Spaniard is a fine fellow. It came to the ears of the authorities in Washington that there was some sort of plot on foot to do her a harm. The Secret Service was a little at fault, and couldn't get accurate or full information; for naturally enough the Spaniards didn't trust any but themselves in such a matter. We know enough, however, to be somewhat concerned for her; and it was arranged that a secret watch should be kept on her, so that no harm should[154] come that could be prevented. The proper men had been detailed off for the work; when to our surprise, and a little to our consternation, it turned out that the young lady had disappeared. We knew of course that her going was voluntary; she had left word to that effect, so that there might not be any bother made about her. But the trouble was that she did not know of the danger which threatened her; and as our people didn't know where she was, no step could be taken to protect or warn her. It is clear that my lady got tired of fireworks and of the Joan of Arc business, and bolted. It was considered necessary at headquarters that we should in the meantime all keep our heads shut. But we were advised at the Embassy in London that the plot was on, and that we should hump ourselves a bit to look after her in case she was in England. The matter was handed over to me, and I have been on the run ever since; but I have not been able to hear tale or tiding of her. Two days ago we got a cable in our cipher which told us that, from information received and the rest of it, they suspected she was in England, or probably in Scotland; and that there was later evidence that the plot was more active than ever. Unfortunately we have as yet no details, and not even a clue. That is why I am here. I came down with Cathcart, who fortunately was bound for the North, as it covered up my purpose. I have been in a regular stew for days past. Marjory Drake is too good to have any trouble come to her that any American can help. You can imagine my delight when I saw her this evening; for now that I have located her, I can take steps to look after her safety if necessary. You two went so fast on your wheels that I lost you at the Bridge; but I surmised that you would be coming here anyhow after your ride. So I came up as quickly as I could, and saw you two and the old lady come up from the railway station. I couldn't get[155] to see Miss Drake to-night; but I expect to look her up pretty early in the morning."

Here was a new entanglement. It seemed to me as more than likely that Marjory, having seen Adams and knowing his diplomatic position, suspected some interference with her liberty, and made an escape at once. This, then, was the reason why she had asked me to stay and eat dinner alone; I was to cover up her tracks and

secure her a night's delay. Thus, even to Adams, my tongue was tied as to her movements. I did not wish to seem to deceive him, so avoided the subject. In answer to him I asked:

"But tell me, old fellow, how and where do I come into your story? Why do you tell me this?" He answered very gravely:

"Because I want your help. This is, or rather may be, a very serious matter to Miss Drake. The whole business is entrusted by our government to my chief, who has detailed me on the service. It is of so delicate and secret a nature that I cannot make confidence with many people, and I am loth to trust any one but a gentleman. Besides Miss Drake is a very peculiar girl. She is absolutely independent, thoroughly determined, and more than plucky. If she knew there was a plot on foot, as likely as not she would try to encourage it out of mere recklessness; and would try to counterplot all by herself. Her enemies know this, and will avail themselves of every chance and of every false move of hers; so that she might help to work out herself the evil intended for her. This we cannot permit; and I am quite sure that you, who are a friend of hers, are at one with me here. Now, if you want to know exactly how you can help I will tell you; and you will, I am sure, pardon me if I say too much—or too little. If she were to know that the matter of her protection was a Government one, nothing on earth[156] would make her yield herself to our views. But if it were suggested by a—a friend whom she—she valued, her action would probably be quite the opposite. She is a girl all heart and soul. When she is taken rightly you can lead her with a thread; but you can't drag her with gun-ropes. From what I saw yesterday, I am inclined to think that you might have more influence with her than any one else I could pick out."

I could not say anything to this, either positive or negative, so I remained silent. He went on:

"There is one other reason why I ask you to help, but it is secondary to the other one, believe me, and one I only use to fortify a better one. I ask you as an old friend to help me in a matter which, even if you are not concerned in it, may be of the utmost importance to me in my diplomatic career. This matter has been placed in my hands, and it would not do for me to fail. There is not much κυδος to be got out of it if all be well—except with my immediate chiefs; but if I failed it would go far against me. If Marjory Drake should suffer from this Spanish plot, she who had, so to speak, fired the torch of the nation in the war, it would be formal, official ruin to me. There wouldn't be a man from Maine to California, from the Lakes to the Gulf, who wouldn't look on me as an imbecile, or worse!" Whilst he was speaking I was thinking, and trying to make up my mind as to what I should do. Manifestly, I could not tell him of the dawning

relations between Marjory and myself. I was not yet prepared to speak of the Pope's treasure. I could not in honour give away Marjory's confidence in me in asking me to cover up her escape, or the implied promise of my acceptance of it. Still, Adams's confidence required some measure of frankness from me. His last appeal to me as an old friend to help him as an individual in an important work, which might mar if it could not[157] make him, demanded that I should stretch every point I could in his favour. So I said:

"Sam, I shall do all I honestly or honourably can. But I must ask you to wait a while and trust me. The fact is I am not at liberty just at present to turn any way I choose. I am already committed to certain confidences, which were made before I saw you or had any knowledge of what you tell me. Moreover, I am in certain ways ignorant in matters that you would not expect. I shall at once take every step I can to be in a position to speak to you more freely. I am more deeply stirred, old fellow, by what you have told me than I can say; and out of the depths of my heart I am grateful to you and your Government for your care for Miss Anita—Miss Drake. I may say this, that until to-morrow at all events, I am unable to help you in any possible way. Were I to try to do anything till a certain thing happens, it would hinder rather than help your purpose. So wait patiently and do please try to understand me."

He replied with unwonted sarcasm:

"Try to understand you! Why man alive I've been trying whilst you were speaking, until my brain reels. But I'm blamed if I can make head or tail of what you say. You seem to be snarled up in more knots than a conjuror. What the hell does it all mean? You don't seem to be able to turn anywhere or do anything, even when the safety or the life of such a girl as Marjory Drake is in question. On my faith Mr. Hunter I hope I don't make any mistake about you!"

"Yes, you do, Sam!" I said quietly, for I could not but feel that he had good cause for disappointment or even anger. "At the first moment I am free to do so, I shall tell you all I can; and you shall then see that I am only doing what you would under similar circumstances do yourself. Won't you trust me, old friend!"[158] He gazed at me steadily for a few seconds, and then his look softened.

"By God I will!" he said, as he held out his hand.

"Now tell me," I said "what can I do to keep in touch with you. I must go back to Cruden in the morning. It is necessary." This was in answer to his questioning look. "It is the first step in my doing as you wish." I knew that Marjory would send to me, if at all, to Cruden. "But tell me how or where I can wire you in case we are not within hail."

For answer he pulled out of his pocket a bundle of "priority" telegrams addressed to the United States Embassy in London.

"Take them and use them as may be required. I am in constant touch with the Embassy and they will know where to find me. How will I find you?"

"Send to me care of Post-office, Cruden Bay," I said, "I shall keep you advised of wherever I may be." With that we said good night.

"I shall see you in the morning," he said as he went out.

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## CHAPTER XVIII
## FIREWORKS AND JOAN OF ARC

For some time I did not sleep. Things were hurrying on so fast; and so many new events and facts and dangers were coming to light, that I hardly knew where to begin to think. Of course all things concerning Marjory, principally her safety, took the first place. What could be this Spanish plot; what could be its method or its purpose? At first when Adams had told me of it, I had not been much concerned; it seemed so far away, so improbable, that I fear I did not take it with sufficient gravity. I had not thought at the time that the two nations were actually at war, and that already, both before the war and during it, deeds of desperate treachery had been done, the memory of which were not even obliterated by the valour and chivalry which had been shown by the nobler of America's foes. "*Remember The Maine*" was still a watchword and war cry. There were many scoundrels, such as chiefly come to the surface in war time, who would undertake any work, however deadly, however brutal, however dangerous. Such villains might be at work even now! With a bound I was out upon the floor. In that moment of concrete thought of danger to Marjory I realised to the full the danger of my own ignorance of her situation, and even of the locality where she might be. This impotence to do anything was simply maddening; when I felt it I could not but understand the[160] annoyance of Adams in feeling a measure of the same impotence, with what looked like my obstinacy added. But think how I would, I could do nothing till I should see Marjory or hear from her. With this thought, which, under the circumstances, was more than harrowing, I went back to bed.

I was waked by the knocking of Adams who in reply to my "Come," slipped in and shut the door behind him.

"They are gone!"

“Who?” I asked mechanically, though I well knew.

“Miss Drake and her friend. They went away last night, just after you came back from the station. By the way, I thought you dined with them?” he said interrogatively, and with a dash of suspicion in his tone.

“I was to dine with them;” I answered “but they were not there.” He made a long pause.

“I don’t understand!” he said. I felt that as the time which I was to cover had passed, I might speak; for all sakes I wanted to avoid collision with Adams or the appearance of deceiving him. So I said:

“I can tell you now, Sam. I was asked to dine last night with Mrs. Jack and Miss Anita—Miss Drake. When I came down to the room I found a letter saying that they had to go away and making a special request that I would dine alone, just as though they were there. I was not to say a word to any one about their being away. Please understand, my dear fellow—and I must ask you to take it that this is only a hint which you must accept and not attempt to follow up—that there are reasons why I should act on any request of Miss Drake’s, blindfold. I told you last night that my hands were tied; this was one of the cords. To-day I hold myself free to explain I may now also tell you more. Last night I could do nothing. I could take no step myself,[161] nor could I help you to take one; simply for the reason that I do not know where Miss Drake is staying. She is I know stopping, or was till lately, somewhere on the eastern side of Aberdeen County; but where the place is I have not the faintest idea. I expect to know very shortly; and the moment I know I will try to inform you, unless I am forbidden. You will know in time that I have spoken exact truth; though you may have found my words or meaning hard to understand. I am more than anxious to put Marjory on guard. When you left me last night, the whole deadly seriousness of the matter grew on me, till I was as miserable as a man can be.” His face lightened as I spoke.

“Well,” he said “at least we are one in the matter; that is something. I feared you were, and would be, working against me. Now look here, I have been thinking the matter over, and I daresay I have come nearer to understanding your position than you imagine. I don’t want to limit or hamper you in working in your own way for Miss Drake’s good; but I may tell you this. I mean to find her if I can, and in my own way. I am not fettered anywhere, except by the necessary secrecy. Outside of this I am free to act. I shall keep you advised at Cruden.”

Before I was dressed I had another visitor. This time it was Cathcart who, with considerable diffidence and all the shamefaced embarrassment of an Englishman

when doing a kindly action in which he may be taken as intruding, offered me his services. I tried to set him at ease by the heartiness of my thanks. Upon which he expanded enough to say:

"From something Adams let drop—in all confidence believe me—I gather you are or may be in trouble about some friend. If this should be, and from my heart I trust it may not, I hope you will bear in mind that I am[162] a friend, and unattached. I am pretty well alone in the world so far as family is concerned, and there is no one to interfere with me. Indeed there are some who would be happy, for testamentary reasons, to attend my funeral. I hope you will remember this, old chap, if there is any fun going." Then he went away, easy of carriage and debonair as usual. It was in such wise that this gallant gentleman made me a proffer of his life. It moved me more than I can tell.

I went down to Cruden by the next train, and arranged with the postmaster to send on to me at once by messenger or wire any telegram that might come directed as I had told Adams.

Towards dusk a letter was brought to me. It was in Marjory's hand, and on my asking at once how it had come, I was told that it was brought by a mounted man who on handing it in had said "no answer" and had ridden away.

With hope and joy and misgiving mingled I opened it. All these feelings were justified by the few words it contained:

"Meet me to-morrow at eleven at Pircappies."

I passed the night with what patience I could, and rose early. At ten I took a light boat and rowed by myself from Port Erroll across the bay. I hung round outside the Skares, ostensibly fishing but keeping watch for any sign of Marjory; for from this point I could see the road to Whinnyfold and the path by the beach. A little before eleven I saw a woman wheeling a bicycle down the Whinnyfold laneway. Taking in my lines, I pulled, quietly and avoiding any appearance of hurry, for I knew not whether any one might see us, into the tiny harbour behind the jutting rock. Marjory arrived just at the same time, and I rejoiced to see that her face bore no mark or sign of care. As yet nothing had happened.[163] We met with a slight hand shake; but there was a look in her eyes which made my heart leap. For the past thirty-six hours my anxiety for her had put aside every other feeling. I had not thought of myself, and therefore not of my love for her; but now my selfish instinct woke again in full force. In her presence, and in the jubilance of my own heart, fear in all forms seemed as impossible to realise as that the burning sun above us should be blotted out with falling snow. With one of her mysterious signs of silence she pointed to the rock that here stretches out into the

sea, and whose top is crowned with long sea grass. Together we climbed the face of the cliff, and bearing across the narrow promontory passed over the top of the rock. We found a cosy nest hidden behind it. Here we were absolutely isolated from the world; out of earshot of every one, and out of sight except from beyond the stretch of rocky sea. In a demure way she acknowledged my satisfaction.

“Isn’t it a nice place. I chose it out yesterday when I was here!” For an instant I felt as though she had struck me. Just to think that she had been here yesterday, whilst I was waiting for her only across the bay, eating my heart out. However, there was no use looking back. She was with me now, and we were alone. The whole delight of the thing swept away every other feeling. With a pretty little motion of settling herself comfortably, and which to me seemed to prelude a long talk, she began:

“I suppose you know a lot about me now?”

“How do you mean?”

“Come now, don’t prevaricate. I saw Sam Adams in Aberdeen, and of course he told you all about me.” I interrupted:

“No he didn’t.” The very tone of my voice enlightened her. With a smile she said:

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“Then some one else did. Answer me some questions. What is my name?”

“Marjory Anita Drake.”

“Am I poor?”

“In the way of money, no.”

“Right! Why did I leave America?”

“To run away from the fireworks and the Joan of Arc business.”

“Right again; but that sounds mighty like Sam Adams. Well, that’s all right; now we may begin. I want to tell you something which you don’t know.” She paused. Half in delight and half in fear, for her appearance of purpose alarmed me, I set myself to listen.

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## CHAPTER XIX
## ON CHANGING ONE'S NAME

With a smile Marjory began:

"You are satisfied that it was because of the fireworks and Joan of Arc business that I came away?"

"Oh yes!"

"And that this was the final and determining cause?"

"Why certainly!"

"Then you are wrong!" I looked at her in wonder and in some secret concern. If I were wrong in this belief, then why not in others? If Adams's belief and my acceptance of it were erroneous, what new mystery was there to be revealed? Just at present things had been looking so well for the accomplishment of my wishes that any disturbance must be unwelcome. Marjory, watching me from under her eyelashes, had by this time summed me up. The stern look which she always had when her brows were fixed in thought, melted into a smile which was partly happy, partly mischievous, and wholly girlish.

"Make your mind easy, Archie" she said, and oh! how my heart leaped when she addressed me by my Christian name for the first time. "There isn't anything to get uneasy about. I'll tell you what it was if you wish."

"Certainly I wish, if you don't dislike telling me."

So she went on:

"I did not mind the fireworks; that is I did mind them and liked them too. Between you and me, there has[166] to be a lot of fireworks for one to object to them. People may say what they please, but it's only those who have not tasted popular favour that say they don't like it. I don't know how Joan of Arc felt, but I've a pretty cute idea that she was like other girls. If she enjoyed being cheered and made much of as well as I did, no wonder that she kept up the game as long as she could. What broke me all up was the proposals of marriage! It's all very well getting proposed to by people you know, and that you don't dislike. But when you get a washing basket full of proposals every morning by the post; when seedy looking scallywags ogle you; when smug young men with soft hats and no chins wait outside your door to hand you their own poems; and when greasy cranks stop your carriage to proffer their hearts to you before your servants, it becomes too much. Of course you can burn the letters, though there are

some of them too good and too honest not to treat their writers with respect. But the cranks and egotists, and scallywags and publicans and sinners, the loafers that float round one like an unwholesome miasma; these are too many and too various, and too awful to cope with. I felt the conviction so driven in to me that the girl, or at any rate her personality, counts for so little, but that her money, or her notoriety, or celebrity or whatever it is, counts for so much, that I couldn't bear to meet strangers at all. Burglars and ghosts and tigers and snakes and all kinds of things that dart out on you are bad enough; but I tell you that proposers on the pounce are a holy terror. Why, at last I began to distrust everyone. There wasn't an unmarried man of my acquaintance that I didn't begin to suspect of some design; and then the funny part of it was that if they didn't come up to the scratch I felt aggrieved. It was awfully unfair wasn't it? But I could not help it. I wonder if there is a sort of moral[167] jaundice which makes one see colours all wrong! If there is, I had it; and so I just came away to get cured if I could.

"You can't imagine the freedom which it was to me not to be made much of and run after. Of course there was a disappointing side to it; I'm afraid people's heads swell very quick! But, all told, it was delightful. Mrs. Jack had come with me, and I had covered up my tracks at home so that no one would be worried. We ran up to Canada, and at Montreal took a steamer to Liverpool. We got out, however, at Moville. We had given false names, so that we couldn't be tracked." Here she stopped; and a shy look grew over her face. I waited, for I thought it would embarrass her less to tell things in her own way than to be asked questions. The shy look grew into a rosy blush, through which came that divine truth which now and again can shine from a girl's eyes. She said in quite a different way from any in which she had spoken to me as yet; with a gentle appealing gravity:

"That was why I let you keep the wrong impression as to my name. I couldn't bear that you, who had been so good to me, should, at the very start of our—our friendship, find me out in a piece of falsity. And then when we knew each other better, and after you had treated me with so much confidence about the Second Sight and Gormala and the Treasure, it made me feel so guilty every time I thought of it that I was ashamed to speak." She stopped and I ventured to take her hand. I said in as consolatory a way as I could:

"But my dear, that was not any deceit—to me at any rate. You took another name to avoid trouble before ever I even saw you; how then could I be aggrieved. Besides" I added, feeling bolder as she did not make any effort to draw away her hand, "I should be the last[168] person in the world to object to your changing your name!"

“Why?” she asked raising her eyes to mine with a glance which shot through me. This was pure coquetry; she knew just as well as I did what I meant. All the same, however, I said:

“Because I too want you to change it!” She did not say a word, but looked down.

I was now sure of my ground, and without a word I bent over and kissed her. She did not draw back. Her arms went round me; and in an instant I had a glimpse of heaven.

Presently she put me away gently and said:

“There was another reason why I did not speak all that time. I can tell it to you now.”

“Pardon me” I interrupted “but before you tell me, am I to take it that—well, what has just been between us—is an affirmative answer to my question?” Her teeth flashed as well as her eyes as she answered:

“Have you any doubt? Was there any imperfection in the answer? If so, perhaps we had better read it as ‘no.’”

My answer was not verbal; but it was satisfactory to me. Then she went on:

“I can surely tell you now at all events. Have you still doubts?”

“Yes” said I, “many, very many, hundreds, thousands, millions, all of which are clamouring for instant satisfaction!” She said quietly and very demurely, at the same time raising that warning hand which I already well knew, and which I could not but feel was apt to have an influence on my life, though I had no doubt but that it would always be for good:

“Then as there are so many, there is not the slightest use trying to deal with them now.”

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“All right” I said “we shall take them in proper season and deal with them seriatim.” She said nothing, but she looked happy.

I felt so happy myself that the very air round us, and the sunshine, and the sea, seemed full of joyous song. There was music even in the screaming of the myriad seagulls sweeping overhead, and in the wash of the rising and falling waves at our feet. I kept my eyes on Marjory as she went on to speak:

“Oh, it is a delight to be able to tell you now what a pleasure it was to me to know that you, who knew nothing of me, of my money, or my ship, or all the fireworks and Joan of

Arc business—I shall never forget that phrase—had come to me for myself alone. It was a pleasure which I could not help prolonging. Even had I had no awkwardness in telling my name, I should have kept it back if possible; so that, till we had made our inner feelings known to each other, I should have been able to revel in this assurance of personal attraction;" I was so happy that I felt I could interrupt:

"That sounds an awfully stilted way of putting it, is it not?" I said. "May I take it that what you mean is, that though you loved me a little—of course after I had shown you that I loved you a great deal—you still wished to keep me on a string; so that my ignorance of your extrinsic qualities might add a flavour to your enjoyment of my personal devotion?"

"You talk" she said with a joyful smile "like a small book with gilt edges! And now, I know you want to know more of my surroundings, where we are living and what are our plans."

Her words brought a sort of cold shiver to me. In my great happiness I had forgotten for the time all anxiety for her safety. In a rush there swept over me all the matters which had caused me such anguish of mind for[170] the last day and a half. She saw the change in me, and with poetic feeling put in picturesque form her evident concern:

"Archie, what troubles you? your face is like a cloud passing over a cornfield!"

"I am anxious about you" I said. "In the perfection of happiness which you have given me, I forgot for the moment some things that are troubling me." With infinite gentleness, and with that sweet tenderness which is the sympathetic facet of love, she laid her hand on mine and said:

"Tell me what troubles you. I have a right to know now, have I not?" For answer I raised her hand and kissed it; then holding it in mine I went on:

"At the same time that I learned about you, I heard of some other things which have caused me much anxiety. You will help to put me at ease, won't you?"

"Anything you like I shall do. I am all yours now!"

"Thank you, my darling, thank you!" was all I could say; her sweet surrender of herself overwhelmed me. "But I shall tell you later; in the meantime tell me all about yourself, for that is a part of what I wait for." So she spoke:

"We are living, Mrs. Jack and I, in an old Castle some miles back in the country from here. First I must tell you that Mrs. Jack is my old nurse. Her husband had been a workman of my father's in his pioneer days. When Dad made his own pile he took care

of Jack—Jack Dempsey his name was, but we never called him anything but Jack. His wife was Mrs. Jack then, and has been so ever since to me. When mother died, Mrs. Jack, who had lost her husband a little while before, came to take care of me. Then when father died she took care of everything; and has been like a mother to me ever since. As I dare say you have noticed, she has never got over the deferential[171] manner which she used to have in her poorer days. But Mrs. Jack is a rich woman as women go; if some of my proposers had an idea of how much money she has they would never let her alone till she married some one. I think she got a little frightened at the way I was treated; and there was a secret conviction that she might be the next to suffer. If it hadn't been for that, I doubt if she would ever, even to please me, have fallen in with my mad scheme of running away under false names. When we came to London we saw the people at Morgan's; and the gentleman who had charge of our affairs undertook to keep silence as to us. He was a nice old man, and I told him enough of the state of affairs for him to understand that I had a good reason for lying dark. I thought that Scotland might be a good place to hide in for a time; so we looked about amongst the land agents for a house where we would not be likely to be found. They offered us a lot; but at last they told us of one between Ellon and Peterhead, way back from the road. We found it in a dip between a lot of hills where you would never suspect there was a house at all, especially as it was closely surrounded with a wood. It is in reality an old castle, built about two or three hundred years ago. The people who own it—Barnard by name, are away, the agent told us, and the place was to let year after year but no one has ever taken it. He didn't seem to know much about the owners as he had only seen their solicitor; but he said they might come some time and ask to visit the house. It is an interesting old place, but awfully gloomy. There are steel trellis gates, and great oak doors bound with steel, that rumble like thunder when you shut them. There are vaulted roofs; and windows in the thickness of the wall, which though they are big enough to sit in, are only slits at the outside. Oh! it is a perfect daisy of an old house.[172] You must come and see it! I will take you all over it; that is, over all I can, for there are some parts of it shut off and locked up."

"When may I go?" I asked.

"Well, I had thought," she answered, "that it would be very nice if you were to get your wheel and ride over with me to-day."

"Count me in every time! By the way what is the name of the place?"

"Crom Castle. Crom is the name of the little village, but it is a couple of miles away." I paused a while thinking before I spoke. Then with my mind made up I said:

“Before we leave here I want to speak of something which, however unimportant you may think it, makes me anxious. You will let me at the beginning beg, won’t you, that you do not ask me who my informant is, or not to tell you anything except what I think advisable.” Her face grew grave as she said:

“You frighten me! But Archie, dear, I trust you. I trust you; and you may speak plainly. I shall understand.”

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## CHAPTER XX
## COMRADESHIP

“Iwant you to promise me that you will not hide yourself where I cannot find you. I have grave reason for the request. Also, I want you, if you will, to let some others know where you are.” At first there was instinctive defiance in her mouth and nostrils. Then her brows wrinkled in thought; the sequence was an index to character which I could not but notice. However the war was not long; reason, whatever was the outcome of its dominance, triumphed over impulse. I thought I could understand the logical process which led to her spoken conclusion:

“You want to report me to ‘Uncle Sam’.”

“That’s about it!” I answered, and hurried on to give her a reason before she made up her mind to object.

“Remember, my dear, that your nation is at war; and, though you are at present safe in a country friendly to both belligerents, there are evil-minded people in all countries who will take advantage of anything unusual, to work their own ends. That splendid gift of yours to the nation, while it has made you a public favourite and won for you millions of friends—and proposals—has yet made for you a host of enemies. It is not as if you had given a hospital-ship or an ambulance. Your gift belongs to the war side and calls out active hatred; and no doubt there are men banded together to do you harm. This cannot be allowed. Your friends, and the nation as a[174] whole, would take any step to prevent such a thing; but they might all be powerless if you were hidden anywhere where they could not find you.” As I spoke, Marjory looked at me keenly, not with hostility, but with genuine interest. When I had finished she said quietly:

“That is very well; but now tell me, dear”—how the word thrilled me; it was the first time she had used it to me—“did Sam Adams fill you up with that argument, or is it

your own? Don't think me nasty; but I want to know something of what is going on. Believe me, I am willing to do all *you* wish if it is your own will; and I am grateful for your thought for me. But I don't want you to be a mere mouthpiece for any party moves by the politicians at home."

"How do you mean?"

"My dear boy, I don't suppose you know enough of American politics to see how a certain lot would use to their own advantage anything that came in their way. Anybody or anything which the public takes an interest in would be, and is, used by them unscrupulously. Why, if the hangers-on to the war party wanted to make a show, they might enroll my proposers and start a new battalion."

"But," I remonstrated, "you don't think the Government is like that?" In reply she smiled:

"I don't altogether know about that. Parties are parties all the world over. But of course the Washington people wouldn't do things that are done by local politicians. And one other thing. Don't imagine for a moment that I think Sam Adams is anything of the kind. He belongs to the service of the nation and takes his orders from his chief. How can he, or any one fixed like him, know the ins and outs of things; except from what he hears privately from home, or gathers from what goes on around him if he is cute?" It appeared to me that all this was tending to establish an argument against taking[175] the American Embassy into confidence, so I struck in before it should be complete. As I was not at liberty to take Marjory into confidence with regard to my source of information, I had to try to get her to agree to what I thought right or necessary on other grounds:

"My dearest, can you not leave out politics, American or otherwise. What on earth have politics to do with us?" She opened her eyes in wonder; she was reasoning better than I was. With an air of conviction she said:

"Why, everything! If any one wants to do me harm, it must be on the grounds of politics. I don't believe there is any one in the world who could want to injure me on private grounds. Oh! my dear, I don't want to talk about it, not even to you; but all my life I have tried to help other people in a quiet way. My guardians would tell you that I have asked them for too much money to give to charities; and personally I have tried to do what a girl can in a helpful way to others. I have been in hospitals and homes of all kinds; and I have classes of girls in my own house and try to make them happier and better. Archie, don't think poorly of me for speaking like this; but I couldn't bear that *you* should think I had no sense of the responsibility of great wealth. I have always

looked on it as a trust; and I hope, my dear, that in time to come you will help me to bear the burden and to share the trust!" I had thought up to now that I couldn't love her more than I did. But when I heard her words, and recognised the high purpose that lay behind them, and saw the sweet embarrassment which came to her in speaking them to me, I felt that I had been mistaken. She looked at me lovingly, and, holding my hand in both of hers, went on:

"What then could hurt me except it came from the political side. I could quite understand it if Spaniards[176] wished to harm me, for I have done what I can to hinder them from murdering and torturing other victims. And I could understand if some of our own low-down politicians would try to use me as a stalking horse, though they wouldn't harm me. I want to keep clear of politics; and I tell you frankly that I shall if I can."

"But Marjory dear, there may be, I believe there are, Spaniards who would try to harm you. If you were in America you would be safer from them; for there at present, whilst the war is on, every stranger is a marked man. Here, on neutral ground, foreigners are free; and they are not watched and observed in the same way. If there were such fiends, and I am told there are, they might do you a harm before any one could know their intention or have time to forestall them."

All the native independence of Marjory's race and nature stood out in strong relief as she answered me:

"My dear Archie, I come from a race of men who have held their lives in their hands from the cradle to the grave. My father, and my grandfather, and my great grandfather were pioneers in Illinois, in Kentucky, in the Rockies and California. They knew that there were treacherous foes behind them every hour of their lives; and yet they were not afraid. And I am not afraid either. Their blood is in my veins, and speaks loudly to me when any sense of fear comes near me. Their brains, as well as their hands, kept guard on their lives; and my brains are like theirs. I do not fear any foe, open or secret. Indeed, when I think of a secret foe all the keenness of my people wakes in me, and I want to fight. And this secret work is a way in which a woman can fight in an age like ours. If my enemies plot, I can counter-plot; if they watch without faltering to catch me off guard, I can keep guard unflinchingly. A woman can't go out now-a-days, except at odd times, and fight with weapons like Joan of Arc, or[177] the Maid of Saragossa; but she can do her fighting in her own way, level with her time. I don't see that if there is to be danger around me, why I shouldn't do as my ancestors did, fight harder than their foes. Here! let me tell you something now, that I intended to say later. Do you know what race of men I come from? Does my name tell you nothing? If not, then this will!"

She took from her neck, where again it had been concealed by a lace collar, the golden jewel which I had rescued from the sea. As I took it in my hand and examined it she went on:

“That came to me from my father, who got it from his, and he from his, on and on till our story of it, which is only verbal, for we have no records, is lost in the legend that it is a relic of the Armada brought to America by two cousins who had married, both being of the family to which the great Sir Francis Drake belonged. I didn’t know, till lately, and none of us ever did, where exactly in the family the last owners of the brooch came in, or how they became possessed of such a beautiful jewel. But you have told me in your translation of Don de Escoban’s narrative. That was the jewel that Benvenuto Cellini made in duplicate when he wrought the figurehead for the Pope’s galley. The Pope gave it to Bernardino de Escoban, and he gave it to Admiral Pedro de Valdes. I have been looking up the history of the time since I saw you, and I found that Admiral de Valdes when he was taken prisoner by Sir Francis Drake at the fight with the Armada was kept, pending his ransom, in the house of Richard Drake, kinsman of Sir Francis. How the Drake family got possession of the brooch I don’t know; but anyhow I don’t suppose they stole it. They were a kindly lot in private, any of them that I ever knew; though when they were in a fight they fought like demons. The old Spanish Dons were generous and free with their presents,[178] and I take it that when Pedro de Valdes got his ransom he made the finest gift he could to those who had been kind to him. That is the way I figure it out.”

Whilst she was speaking, thoughts kept crowding in upon me. Here was indeed the missing link in the chain of Marjory’s connection with the hidden treasure; and here was the beginning of the end of Gormala’s prophecy, for as such I had come to regard it. The Fates were at work upon us. Clotho was spinning the thread which was to enmesh Marjory and myself and all who were in the scheme of the old prophecy of the Mystery of the Sea and its working out.

Once more the sense of impotence grew upon me. We were all as shuttlecocks, buffeted to and fro without power to alter our course. With the thought came that measure of resignation which is the anodyne to despair. In a sort of trance of passivity I heard Marjory’s voice run on:

“Therefore, my dear Archie, I will trust to you to help me. The comradeship which has been between us, will never through this grow less; though nearer and dearer and closer ties may seem to overshadow it.”

I could not answer such reasoning; but I took her in my arms and kissed her. I understood, as she did, that my kisses meant acquiescence in her wishes. After a while I said to her:

“One thing I must do. I owe it as a duty of honour to tell my informant that I am unable to give your address to the American Embassy, and that I cannot myself take a part in anything which is to be done except by your consent. But oh! my dear, I fear we are entering on a dangerous course. We are all staying deliberately in the dark, whilst there is light to be had; and we shall need all the light which we can get.” Then a thought struck me and I added, “By the way, I suppose I am free to give information how I can, so long as you are not committed[179] or compromised?” She thought for quite a few minutes before she answered. I could see that she was weighing up the situation, and considering it from all points of view. Then she said, putting both her hands in mine:

“In this, as in all ways, Archie, I know that I can trust you. There is so much more than even this between us, that I should feel mean to give it a thought hereafter!”

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## CHAPTER XXI
## THE OLD FAR WEST AND THE NEW

Presently Marjory jumped up and said:

“Now you must get your wheel and come over to Crom. I am burning to show it to you!” We crossed the little isthmus and climbed the rocks above the Reivie o’ Pircappies. As we topped the steep path I almost fell back with the start I gave.

There sat Gormala MacNiel, fixed and immovable as though she were of stone. She looked so unconcerned that I began to suspect her. At first she seemed not to notice us; but I could see that she was looking at us under her eyelashes. I was anxious to find out how long she had been there, so I said, mentioning her name in order that Marjory might know who she was:

“Why, Gormala, what has become of you? I thought you were off again to the Islands. We haven’t seen you for a long time.” She replied in her usual uncompromising way:

“I hae nae doot that ye thocht me far, gin ye did na see me. Aye! Aye! the time has been lang; but I could wait: I could wait!”

“What were you waiting for?” Marjory’s voice seemed almost as that of a being from another world. It was so fresh, so true, so independent that it seemed at variance with Gormala and her whole existence. As a man beside two women, I felt more as a spectator than as a participant, and my first general impression was that the New World was speaking to the Old. Gormala seemed[181] to me absolutely flabbergasted. She stared, and looked in a dazed way, at the girl, standing up as she did so with the instinctive habit, ingrained through centuries of custom, of an inferior to a superior. Then she moved her hand across her forehead, as though to clear her brain, before she replied:

“What was I waitin’ for? I’ll tell ye, an ye will. I was waitin’ for the fulfillment o’ the Doom. The Voices hae spoken; and what they hae said, will be. There be them that would stand in the way o’ Fate, and would try to hinder the comin’ that must be. But they will fail; they will fail! They can no more block the river o’ time wi’ ony deeds o’ mon, than they can dam the spate wi’ a bairn’s playtoy.” Again came Marjory’s searching question, with all the mystery-dispelling freshness of her unfettered youth; and indeed it seemed as if the Old-world mystery could not hold its dignity in the face of overt, direct questioning:

“By the way, what was it that the Doom said? Was it anything that an American girl can understand?” Gormala gazed at her in manifest wonder. To her, reared in the atmosphere of the Old Far West, this product of the New Far West seemed like a being of another world. Had Marjory been less sweet in her manner than she was, or less fair to look upon, less dignified, or less grave, the old woman would probably have shown hostility at once. But it seemed to me impossible that even a witch-woman could be hostile to Marjory to-day. She looked so sweet, and kind and happy; so bright and joyous; so much like the incarnation of ideal girlhood, that criticism was disarmed, and hostility could not force a way into the charmed circle of that radiant presence. To me, her attitude towards Gormala was incomprehensible. She knew Gormala, for I had told her of who and what the Seer was, and of the prophecies and warnings that she had already[182] uttered; and yet from her manner she appeared ignorant of all concerning both her and them. She was not conciliatory after the manner of the young who wish to please the old, or to ingratiate themselves with them. She was not hostile, as would be one who had determined on opposition. About her or her manner there was nothing hard, or frivolous or contradictory. And yet it was apparent to me that she had some fixed, determined purpose of her own; and it became before long apparent to me also, that the other woman knew, or at any rate suspected, such an existence, though she could neither comprehend nor locate it. Gormala seemed once, twice, as though she were about to speak, but hesitated; at last with an effort she spoke out:

“The Voice o’ the Doom no sounds in words such as mortals can hear. It is spoken in sounds that are heard of the inner ear. What matter the words, when the ear that hearkens can understan’!”

“But,” said Marjory, “could I not be told the words, or if there were no actual words, could you not give me in your own words what the sounds uttered seemed to you to mean?” To anyone but a Seer such a request would seem reasonable enough; but visionaries who have a receptive power of their own, and who learn by means whose methods are unconscious to them, can hardly undertake to translate the dim, wide-stretching purpose of the powers of the Unknown into bald, narrow, human speech. Gormala’s brows wrinkled up in thought; then a scowl of disappointment swept over her face. In an angry tone she turned to me and said:

“Wha be yon lassie that questions so blithely the truth o’ the Voice that is kent by ye an’ me? Why dinna ye tak her awa’ before she mocks me, an’ in me the Doom; an’ I speak oot to her?” Marjory spoke up for herself.

“Please do not think it a liberty to ask you; but I[183] should like so much to know exactly what was said. It is so easy for people to confuse ideas when words are loosely used. Don’t you find it so?” I do not think Gormala MacNiel had any humour at all; if she had, I had certainly never seen any trace of it. Had it been there it would have surely saved her from anger; for there was something delicious in the way in which Marjory put her question, as though to one of her own kind and holding the same views as herself on general matters. Gormala did not like it. Though there was a blank in her mind as to the existence of humour, she must have felt conscious of the blank. She could not understand the other woman; and for a little while sought refuge in a silence composed of about equal parts of sulk and dignity. But Marjory was not content with silence; she pressed home her question in the most polite but most matter of fact way, till I could see the Witch-woman mentally writhe. I should have interfered, for I did not want any unpleasant scene in which Marjory must have a part; but I felt that the girl had some purposeful meaning in her persistence. Had Gormala had a pause in the attack she would, I felt, have gone away and bided her time: but in such a pushing of the matter as Marjory braced herself to, there could be no withdrawal, unless under defeat. Gormala looked round now and again, as one, man or animal, does when hunted; but each time she restrained herself by an effort. At last her temper began to rise; her face flushed, and the veins, of passion stood out on her forehead. Her eyes flashed, and white marks began to come and go about the face, especially round the nose. I could see from the leap of fire in Marjory’s eyes that this was what she was waiting for. She lowered her voice, and the tone of her speaking, till

both matter and manner were icily chill; but all the time she persisted in her matter-of-fact questioning.

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At last Gormala's temper broke, and she turned on the girl in such a fury that for a few seconds I thought she was going to attack her physically. I stood ready to hold her off if necessary. At the first moment the passion in her was so great that she spoke in Gaelic; blind, white-hot fury will not allow a choice of tongues. The savage in her was speaking, and it spoke in the tongue it knew best. Of course neither of us could understand it, and we only stood smiling. Marjory smiled deliberately as though to exasperate her; I smiled because Marjory was smiling. Presently, through the tumult of her passion, Gormala began to realise that we did not understand her; and, with an effort which shook her, began to speak in English. With the English which she had, came intention and the restraint which it implies. Her phrases were not common curses, but rather a picturesque half prophecy with a basis of hate. The gravamen of her charge was that Marjory had scoffed against the Doom and Fate and the Voices. To me, who had suffered the knowledge to which she appealed, the attack was painful. What was charged was a sort of natural sacrilege; and it wounded me and angered me to see Marjory made the subject of any attack. I was about to interfere, when with a gesture, which the Witch-woman did not see, she warned me to silence. She struck into the furious woman's harangue with quiet, incisive, cultured voice which made the other pause:

"Indeed you do me a wrong; I scoffed at nothing. I should not scoff at your religion any more than I should at my own. I only asked you a few questions as to facts which seemed to touch a friend of mine." The point of this speech which, strange to say, affected the woman most was regarding her religion:

"Wha be ye, ye hizzie, that wad daur to misca' me that is a Christian woman all my days. What be your releegion,[185] that ye try to shame me wi' mine." Marjory said deliberately, but with all the outward appearance of courtesy:

"But I did not know that in the scheme of the Christian belief there were such things as the Doom and the Voice and Fate!" The old woman towered up; for a moment she was all Seer and Prophet. Her words thrilled through me; and I could see through Marjory also. Though she held herself proudly, her lips grew pale:

"Then learn while ye may that there be lesser powers as well as greater in the scheme o' God's warld, and o' His working o' the wonders therein. Ye may scoff at me wha' am after all but an aud wife; though one to whom are Visions given, and in whose ears the

Voice has spoken. Ye may pride yersel' that yer ignorance is mair than the knowledge o' ithers. Ye may doot the truths that hae been garnered oot o' centuries o' dour experience, an' tak' the cloak o' yer ignorance as an answer to a' the mysteries that be. But mark me weel! the day will come—it is no far aff the noo—when ye will wring yer honds, and pray wi' all the power an' bitter grief o' yer soul for some licht to guide ye that ye no hae had yet!" She paused and stood in a sort of trance, stiffening all over like a pointer at mark. Then she raised one hand high over her head, so that the long arm seemed to extend her gaunt form to an indefinite length. With a far-away solemn voice she spoke:

"I see ye too, though no by yer lanes, in the wild tide-race amang the rocks in the dark nicht, mid leaping waves. An' lo! o'er the waste o' foam is a floatin' shrood!" Then she stopped, and in a few seconds came back to herself. In the meantime Marjory, whose lips had grown white as death, though she never lost her proud bearing, groped blindly for my hand and held it hard. She never for a moment took her eyes off the other.

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When Gormala was quite her own woman again, she turned without a word and walked away in her gaunt, stately manner, feeling I am sure, as we did, that she did not go without the honours of war. Marjory continued to watch her until she had passed up the track, and had disappeared behind the curve of the hill.

Then, all at once, she seemed to collapse in a faint; and had I not held her hand, and so was able to draw her into my arms, she must have fallen to the ground.

In a wonderfully short time she recovered her senses, and then with a great effort stood up; though she still had to steady herself by my hand. When she was all right again she said to me:

"I suppose you wonder why I attacked her like that. Oh! yes, I did attack her; I meant to," for she saw the question in my eyes. "It was because she was so hostile to you. What right had she to force you to do anything? She is harmful to you, Archie. I know it! I know it! I know it! and I determined not to let her have her way. And besides,"—this with a shy loving look at me, "as she is hostile to you she must be to me also. I want to be with you, even in the range of the hate and the love of others. That is to be one; and as we are to fight together I must share your lot in all!" I took her in my arms, and for some divine moments, our hearts beat together.

In those moments my mind was made up as to the wishes of Adams. How could I refuse in any way to fight the battle, as she might wish it fought, of a girl who so loyally shared my lot!

Then we arranged that I should go home for my bicycle, and meet Marjory at the bridge by the Parish Church.

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## CHAPTER XXII
## CROM CASTLE

When I rejoined Marjory, we went up the high road and then turned off by a by-way which took us round innumerable slopes and mounds, so characteristic of this part of Aberdeen. The entire county, seen from high places, looks bare and open; but it has its hills and hollows in endless variety. From the cross road we turned up another and still another, till I lost my bearings entirely.

The part of the country where we now were was a sort of desolation of cultivation; endless low hills clad with fields of wheat and barley with never a house to be seen, except some far off cottage or the homestead of a laird perched on the top of a hill. At last we entered through an open gateway with broken pillars, still bearing the remains of some armorial device in statuary. There was an avenue, fringed with tall trees on either side, and beyond a broad belt of undergrowth. The avenue wound round and round in an endless series of curves. From the gate where we entered was a thick, close wood nearly a quarter of a mile in width. Here the trees stood so close, and their locking branches made such a screen, that it was quite gloomy within. Here too the road was made in perpetual curves, so that it was not possible to see far ahead. Indeed I remarked to Marjory as we rode along:

“No wonder you chose this as a place to hide in; it[188] looks as if it was made for concealment. It is a regular Rosamund’s Bower!”

When we had passed through the wood, we came out on a great piece of level ground with a wide mound some twenty feet high, in the midst of it. On this was built of granite, a crenelated castle. It was not very high, but extended wide in a square, with a low arched doorway in front of us through which it might be possible to drive with care. The doorway was closed by two gates; first a massive network of interlocking steel bars of seemingly foreign workmanship, and secondly great gates of oak fortified with steel bands and massive bosses of hammered iron. Before going in, Marjory took me right round the castle and I saw that it was the same on all four sides. It was built by the points of the compass; but there was no gateway except on one side. The ordinary way of entering was by a more modern door on the south side. From inside the castle it was not possible to see anywhere beyond the wood. Even from the stone

roof, made for defence, where Marjory took me, it was only possible to get a glimpse through the tree tops here and there of round-topped hills yellow with ripening grain or crowned with groves of scanty wind-swept pine trees. Altogether it was as gloomy a place as I had ever seen. It was cut off altogether from the outer world; one might remain in it for a life-time unknown.

Inside it was, if possible, more gloomy. Small rooms almost everywhere, except the great hall, and one room at the top facing the south side which lay just under the roof and which was lined with old oak. Here there were quite a number of windows such as Marjory had described, all of them, though wide on the inner side, narrowed to mere slits on the outer. In castles and houses built, like this, for defence, it did not do to allow opportunities to an attacking force to send missiles within.

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Mrs. Jack and Marjory had made this their living room, and here were all the pretty treasures and knick-knacks which they had gathered on their travels. The old lady welcomed me warmly. Then Marjory took her aside and told her something in whispers. I could guess what it was; but any doubts I might have had were dispelled when she came over and kissed me and said:

“Indeed, I congratulate you with all my heart. You have won the best, and sweetest, and dearest girl that ever drew breath. I have been with her all my life; and I have not found a flaw in her yet. And I am glad that it is you whom she has chosen. Somehow, I wished it from the first moment I saw you. That you may both be happy, I pray the good Lord God! And I know you will; for you are true, and Marjory has a heart of gold.”

“A heart of gold!” Her words had given me more than pleasure; but the last phrase pulled my joy up short. A cold shiver ran through me. A golden man had been a part of the prophecy of the Mystery of the Sea; and only a little while ago Gormala had in her vision seen Marjory struggling in the tide-race with a shroud in the air.

I think Marjory felt something of the same kind, for she looked at me anxiously and grew a little pale. She said nothing, however, and I thought it better to pass the matter by. Although Marjory had heard the expression of the Witch-woman’s vision, and though I had told her of my first experience of the old rhyming prophecy, the former was at a time when neither I myself nor the whole mystery was of any special importance to her. She might not have remembered it; I trusted that this was so.

However, we could not either of us be sad for long to-day. Our joy was too fresh to be dimmed by any thought of gloom, except momentarily as a mirror is by a passing breath.

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Tea in the old oak room was a delight, with the afternoon sun coming in slantwise through the narrow windows and falling in lines of light across the floor. Marjory made the tea and served me; and each time I took anything from her hand our fingers met, she no more than myself avoiding the touch. Then, leaving the old lady upstairs, she took me through the various rooms; and in her pretty, impulsive way she told me all the romances which she had already woven about them in her brain. She came and saw me off; with her kiss of good-bye on my lips I rode back through the gloomy wood, feeling as proud and valiant as a knight of old.

I found my way to Ellon and went on the train to Aberdeen, for I felt it due to Adams that I should see him at once. It was impossible to write all I had to say; and besides I wanted to retain his good will, and to arrange for securing his aid, if he would consent to do so under our altered conditions.

I found him in his room hard at work. He was writing something which I suppose he considered important, for he put it carefully away and locked his despatch box before we began to talk. Of course it might have been only his diplomatic habit; but he seemed grave over it. I entered at once on the matter between us, for I thought to get the disagreeable side over first and let concessions and alterations follow:

“I am sorry, Sam, I shall not be able to help you with information regarding Miss Drake.”

“Why? Haven’t you heard from her?”

“It is not that; but I am not free to do what you wish.” Adams looked at me for a long time. Then he said quietly:

“I see. You have your orders! Well, I am sorry for it; it may bring dreadful harm to her, and I daresay to you too, now. Say, old chap, is that decision of yours[191] final? The matter is more grave than I thought when I saw you last. We have had more information, and they are pressing us from Washington to take all precautions we can. Come, won’t you help me—help her?”

“I can’t, the way you say. Sam Adams, you know I would do anything I could for you; but in this matter I am pledged. I have been given a secret, and I must keep it honourably at all hazards. But look here, I am anxious all the same. Can’t you trust me a little bit and tell me what to look for. I won’t give you away; and I may be able to carry out your wishes as to helping to guard her, though I have to do it in my own way.” He smiled, though very bitterly and ironically. I was glad to see the smile anyhow, for we

were old and tried friends and I should not like there to be any break between us. Besides I wanted his help; his knowledge now, and his resources later on, if need should be. He was an official, and the matter was an official one though his heart was in it; it was not as if his personal feelings or his honour had been involved.

“Well,” he said, “you have a fine gall anyhow! You refuse point blank to give me the slightest help, though I ask it on all grounds, official for America, personal as I am in charge, and for the sake of your own girl; and then you expect me to tell you all I can. Well, look here, I’ll tell you anything that will help you as soon as I know it, if you will keep me advised of exactly where you are—so—so that I may be able to find you if I wish.”

I told him heartily that I would keep him posted as to my movements. Then, as there was nothing to remain for, I said good-bye—a good-bye, I am glad to say, given and taken with our old heartiness. Before I went I said:

“Sam, you know how a message can find me if there[192] is anything you should think it well to tell me.” To which he replied:

“All right, Archie, I’ll remember. You understand that as I shall have to work this racket alone I must do it in my own way: otherwise we shall have complications. But if there is anything I can do on your side, I shall do it all the same. You know how to reach me. If you send for me I shall come any hour of the day or night. And say, old chap, I go heeled!” he pointed to his pistol pocket. “Let me advise you to do the same just at present!”

I took his advice and bought in Aberdeen, before returning to Cruden, two of the finest revolvers I could get. One of them was made for a lady; the other I always carried myself from that day forward.

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## CHAPTER XXIII
## SECRET SERVICE

Next morning after breakfast I wheeled over to Crom, bringing in my bicycle bag the revolver and ammunition for Marjory. I could not but feel alarmed for her safety as I rode through the wood which surrounded the house. It would need a regiment to guard one from a stray assassin. For myself I did not have any concern; but the conviction grew and grew on me to the point of agony that harm which I should be powerless to prevent might happen here to Marjory. When I was inside the house the

feeling was easier. Here, the place was to all intents and purposes fortified, for nothing short of cannon or dynamite could make any impression on it.

Marjory received my present very graciously; I could see from the way that she handled the weapon that she had little to learn of its use. I suppose the thought must have crossed her that I might think it strange to find her so familiar with a lethal weapon, for she turned to me and said with that smoothness of tone which marks the end rather than the beginning of a speech:

"Dad always wished me to know how to use a gun. I don't believe he was ever without one himself, even in his bed, from the time he was a small boy. He used to say 'It never does any one any harm to be ready to get the drop first, in case of a scrap!' I have a little beauty in my dressing-case that he got made for me. I am doubly armed now."

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I stayed to lunch, but went away immediately after as I was anxious to find if Adams had sent me any message. Before going, I asked Marjory to be especially careful not to be out alone in the woods round the house, for a few days at any rate. She demurred at first; but finally agreed—'to please you' as she put it—not to go out at all till I had come again. I told her that as I was coming to breakfast the next morning if I might, it was not a very long time of imprisonment.

When I asked for telegrams at the post-office, which was in the hotel, I was told that a gentleman was waiting to see me in the coffee room. I went in at once and found Sam Adams reading an old newspaper. He started up when he saw me and straightway began:

"I hurried over to tell you that we have had further news. Nothing very definite to-day; but the Washington people hope to have a lot of detail by to-morrow night. So be ready, old chap!" I thanked him, but even in the act of doing so it struck me that he had taken a deal of trouble to come over when he could have sent me a wire. I did not say so, however; doubts of an act of this kind can always wait.

Sam had tea with me, and then we smoked a cigar outside on the little terrace before the hotel. There were some fishermen and workmen, as usual sitting on or leaning against the wall across the road, and three men who were lounging about, evidently trippers waiting for their tea to be served. When we came out and had passed them, the little group went into the coffee room. They were, all three, keen-looking, alert men, and I had a passing wonder what they were doing in Cruden as they had no golf bags with them. Sam did not remain long but caught the six-ten train back to Aberdeen.

I cannot say that my night was an easy one. Whilst I lay awake I imagined new forms of danger to Marjory;[195] and when I fell asleep I dreamt them. I was up early, and after a sharp ride on my bicycle came to Crom in time for breakfast.

As we had a long forenoon, Marjory took me over the house. It was all of some interest, as it represented the life and needs of life in the later days of Queen Elizabeth in a part of the country where wars and feuds had to be prepared for. The Castle was arranged for siege, even to the water supply; there was a well of immense depth situated in a deep dungeon under the angle of the castle which they called the Keep. They did not, however, ordinarily depend on this, as there was otherwise an excellent water supply. In the dungeon were chains and manacles and some implements of torture, all covered with the rust of centuries. We hoped that they had not been used. Marjory consoled herself with the thought that they had been placed there at the time of the building as part of the necessary furnishing of a mediæval castle. One room, the library, was of great interest. It had not been built for the purpose, for there was no provision of light; but it must have been adapted to this use not long after the place was built. The woodwork of carved oak was early seventeenth century. I did not have time to look over the books, and there was no catalogue; but from the few which I glanced at I could see that whoever had gathered the library must have been a scholar and an enthusiast.

In the course of our survey of the castle, Marjory showed me the parts which were barred up and the rooms which were locked. That such a thing should be in a house in which she lived was a never-ending source of curiosity. There was a dozen times as much room as she could possibly want; but here was something unknown and forbidden. She being a woman, it became a Tree of Knowledge and a Bluebeard's Chamber in one. She was[196] so eager about it that I asked if she could not get permission from the agent to go through the shut rooms and places so as to satisfy herself. She replied that she had already done so, the very day after she had arrived, and had had an answer that the permission could not be given without the consent of the owner; but that as he was shortly expected in Scotland her request would be forwarded to him and his reply when received would be at once communicated to her. Whilst we were talking of the subject a telegram to Mrs. Jack came from the agent, saying that the owner had arrived and was happy to give permission required and that further he would be obliged if the tenant would graciously accord him permission to go some day soon through the house which he had not seen for many years. A telegram was at once sent in Mrs. Jack's name, thanking him for the permission and saying that the owner would be most welcome to go through the house when he pleased.

As I was anxious to hear if there was any news from Adams I said good-bye at the door, and rode back on my bicycle. I had asked Marjory to renew her promise of not going out alone for another day, and she had acceded; 'only to please you,' she said this time.

I found a wire from Adams sent at six o'clock:

"Important news. Come here at once." I might catch the train if I hurried, so jumped on my bicycle and got to the station just in time.

I found Adams in his room at the Palace Hotel, walking up and down like a caged panther. When I came in he rushed over to me and said eagerly as he handed me a sheet of note paper:

"Read that; it is a translation of our cipher telegram. I thought you would never come!" I took it with a sinking heart; any news that was so pressing could not be good, and bad must affect Marjory somehow. I read[197] the document over twice before I fully understood its meaning. It ran as follows:

"Secret Service believe that Drake plot is to kidnap and ransom. Real plotters are understood to be gang who stole Stewart's body. Are using certain Spanish and other foreigners as catspaw. Heads of plot now in Europe, Spain, England, Holland. Expect more details. Use all precautions."

"What do you think of that?" said Adams when I had taken my eyes off the paper.

"I hardly know yet. What do you make of it? You have thought of it longer than I have."

"Just what I have thought all along. The matter is serious, very serious! In one way that wire is something of a relief. If that kidnapping gang are behind it, it doesn't mean political vengeance, but only boodle; so that the fear of any sudden attack on her life is not so imminent. The gang will take what care they can to keep from killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. But then, the political desperadoes who would enter on such a matter are a hard crowd; if they are in power, or at any rate in numerical force, they may not be easy to keep back. Indeed, it is possible that they too may have their own game to play, and may be using the blackmailers for their own purpose. I tell you, old man, we are in a very tight place, and must go to work pretty warily. The whole thing swings so easily to one side or the other, that any false move on the part of any of us may give the push to the side we would least care should win. By the way, I take it that you are of the same mind still regarding Miss Drake's wishes."

"Now and always! But as you can guess I am anxious to know all I can that can help me to guard her." Somewhat to my astonishment he answered heartily:

“All right, old chap, of course I will tell you; but I[198] will depend on your letting me know of anything you are free to tell which might serve me in my work.”

“Certainly! I say,” I added, “you don’t mind my not having worked with you about finding her address.”

“Not a bit! I have to find it in my own way; that is all!” There was a sort of satisfaction, if not of triumph, in his tone which set me thinking.

“Then you know it already?” I said.

“Not yet; but I hope to before the night is over.”

“Have you a clue?” He laughed.

“Clue? a hundred. Why, man, none of us were born yesterday. There isn’t a thing on God’s earth that mayn’t be a clue now and again if it is properly used. You are a clue yourself if it comes to that.” In a flash I saw it all. Adams had come to Cruden to point me out to his detectives. These were the keen-looking men who were at Cruden when he was. Of course they had followed me, and Marjory’s secret was no secret now. I said nothing for a little while; for at the first I was angry that Adams should have used me against my will. Then two feelings strove for mastery; one of anxiety lest my unconscious betrayal of her secret might hurt me in Marjory’s eyes, the other relief that now she was in a measure protected by the resources of her great country. I was easier in my mind concerning her safety when I thought of those keen, alert men looking after her. Then again I thought that Adams had done nothing which I could find fault with. I should doubtless have done the same myself had occasion arisen. I was chagrined, however, to think that it had all been so childishly simple. I had not even contemplated such a contingency. If I couldn’t plot and hide my tracks better than that, I should be but a poor ally for Marjory in the struggle which she had voluntarily undertaken against her unknown foes.

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Before I left Adams, I told him that I would come back on the to-morrow evening. I went to bed early in the Palace hotel, as I wanted to catch the first train back to Cruden.

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## CHAPTER XXIV
## A SUBTLE PLAN

It was now a serious matter of thought to me how I could take Marjory into proper confidence, without spoiling things and betraying Adams's confidence. As I pondered, the conviction grew upon me that I had better be quite frank with her and ask her advice. Accordingly when I saw her at Crom at noon I entered on the matter, though I confess with trepidation. When I told her I wanted to ask her advice she was all attention. I felt particularly nervous as I began:

"Marjory, when a man is in a hole he ought to consult his best friend; oughtn't he?"

"Why certainly!"

"And you are my best friend; are you not?"

"I hope so! I should certainly like to be."

"Well, look here, dear, I am in such a tangle that I can't find a way out, and I want you to help me." She must have guessed at something like the cause of my difficulty, for a faint smile passed over her face as she said:

"The old trouble? Sam Adams's diplomacy, eh?"

"It is this. I want to know how you think I should act so as to give least pain to a very dear friend of mine, and at the same time do a very imperative duty. You may see a way out that I don't."

"Drive on dear; I'm listening."

"Since we met I have had some very disturbing information from a source which I am not at liberty to[201] mention. I can tell you all about this, though you must not ask me how I know it. But first there is something else. I believe, though I do not know for certain, that your secret is blown; that the detectives have discovered where you live." She sat up at once.

"What!" I went on quickly:

"And I am sorry to say that if it is discovered it has been through me; though not by any act or indeed by any fault of mine." She laid her hand on mine and said reassuringly:

"If you are in it, I can look at it differently. May I ask how you came into that gallery?"

"Certainly! I am not pledged as to this. It was by the most simple and transparent of means. You and I were seen together. They did not know where to look for you or follow you up, when they had lost the scent; but they knew me and watched me. Voila!"

"That's simple enough anyhow!" was her only comment. After a while she asked:

“Do you know how far they have got in their search?”

“I do not; I only know that they expected to find where you lived two days ago. I suppose they have found it out by this.”

“Sam Adams is getting too clever. They will be making him President, or Alderman or something, if he doesn’t look out. But do you know yet why all this trouble is being taken about me.”

“I can tell you,” I answered “but you must not tell any one, for it would not do for the sake of others if it got about. There is a plan got up by a gang of blackmailers to kidnap you for a ransom.” She jumped up with excitement and began to clap her hands.

“Oh, that is too delicious!” she said. “Tell me all you know of it. We may be able to lead them on a bit. It will be an awful lark!” I could not possibly share[202] her mirth; the matter was really too grave. She saw my feeling in my face and stopped. She thought for a minute or two with her brows wrinkled and then she said:

“Are you really serious, Archie, as to any danger in the matter?”

“My dear, there is always danger in a conspiracy of base men. We have to fear, for we don’t know the power or numbers of the conspiracy. We have no idea of their method of working, or where or how we may expect attack. The whole thing is a mystery to us. Doubtless it will only come from one point; but we must be ready to repel, all round the compass.”

“But, look here, it is only danger.”

“The danger is to you; if it were to me, I think I could laugh myself. But, my darling, remember that it is out of my love for you that my fear comes. If you were nothing to me, I could, I suppose, bear it easily enough. You have taken new responsibilities on you, Marjory, since you let a man love you. His heart is before you to walk on; so you have to tread carefully.”

“I can avoid treading on it, can’t I?” she said falling into the vein of metaphor. “Surely, if there is anything in the world that by instinct I could know is in danger, it would be your heart!”

“Ah, my dear, it does not stay still. It will keep rolling along with you wherever you go; hopping back and forward and sideways in every conceivable way. You must now and again tread on it for all your care; in the dark or in the light.”

“I had no idea,” she said “that I had taken such a responsibility on my shoulders when I said I would marry you.”

“It is not the marrying” I said “but the loving that makes the trouble!”

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“I see!” she replied and was silent for a while. Then she turned to me and said very sweetly:

“Anyhow Archie, whatever we may settle about what we are to do, I am glad you came to consult me and to tell me frankly of your trouble. Do this always, my dear. It will be best for you, and best for me too, to feel that you trust me. You have given me a pleasure to-day that is beyond words.”

Then we spoke of other things, and we agreed to wait till the next day before arranging any fixed plan of action. Before I went away, and whilst the sentiment of parting was still on her, she said to me—and I could see that the thought had been in her mind for some time:

“Archie, you and I are to live together as man and wife. Is it not so? I think we both want to be as nearly one as a man and a woman can be—flesh of each other’s flesh, and bone of bone, and soul of soul. Don’t you think we shall become this better by being joined, us two, against all comers. We have known each other only a short time as yet. What we have seen of each other has been good enough to make us cling together for life. But, my dear, what has been, has been only the wishing to cling; the clinging must be the struggle that is to follow. Be one with me in this fight. It is my fight, I feel, begun before I ever knew you. When your fight comes, and I can see you have it before you with regard to that treasure, you will know that you can count on me. It may be only a fancy of mine, but the comradeship of pioneers, when the men and women had to fight together against a common foe, runs in my blood! Let me feel, before I give myself altogether to your keeping, or you to mine, that there is something of this comradeship between us; it will make love doubly dear!”

What could a man in love say to this? It seemed like the very essence of married love, and was doubly[204] dear to me on that account. Pledged by my kisses I came away, feeling as if I had in truth left my wife behind.

When I got back to Cruden I took up the matter of the treasure whilst I was waiting for news from Adams. In the stir of the events of the last few days I had almost forgotten it. I read the papers over again, as I wished to keep myself familiar with the facts; I also went over the cipher, for I did not wish to get stale in it. As I laboured through it, all Marjory’s sweetness to me on that day of the ride from Braemar came back to me; and as I read I found myself unconsciously drumming out the symbols on the table with the fingers of my right hand and my left after the fashion of Marjory’s variant. When I

was through, I sat pondering, and all sorts of new variants kept rising before me in that kind of linked succession when the mind runs free in day-dreaming and one idea brings up another. I was not altogether easy, for I was now always expecting some letter or telegram of a disconcerting kind; anxiety had become an habitual factor in my working imagination. All sorts of possibilities kept arising before me, mostly with reference to Marjory. I was glad that already we understood in common one method of secret communication; and I determined then and there that when I went over to Crom on the next day I would bring the papers with me, and that Marjory and I would renew our lesson, and practice till we were quite familiar with the cipher.

Just then a message was brought to me that a gentleman wished to see me, so I asked the maid to bring him up. I do not think that I was altogether surprised to find that he was one of the three men whom I had seen at Cruden before. He handed me in silence a letter which I found to be from Adams. I read it with a sinking heart. In it he told me that it was now ascertained[205] that two members of the blackmail gang had come to England. They had been seen to land at Dover, but got out between there and London; and their trace was lost. He said he wished to advise me at once, so that I might be on the alert. He would himself take his own steps as I understood. The messenger, when he saw I had read the letter, asked me if there was any answer. I said "only thanks" and he went away. It was not till afterwards that I remembered that I might have asked the man to tell me something of the appearance of the suspected men, so that I might know them if I should come across them. Once again I fell in my own esteem as a competent detective. In the meantime I could do nothing; Marjory's last appeal to me made it impossible for me to take steps against her wishes. She manifestly wanted the fight with the kidnappers to go on; and she wanted me to be with her in it heart and soul. Although this community of purpose was sweet, there grew out of our very isolation a new source of danger, a never-ending series of dangers. The complications were growing such that it would soon be difficult to take any step at all with any prospect of utility. Marjory would now be watched with all the power and purpose of the American Secret Service. That she would before long infallibly find it out, and that she would in such case endeavour at all hazards to escape from it, was apparent. If she did escape from their secret surveillance, she would be playing into the hands of her enemies; and so might incur new danger. I began to exercise my brain as to how I could best help her wishes. If we were to fight together and alone, we would at least make as good a battle as we could.

I thought, and thought, and thought till my head began to spin; and then an idea all at once sprang into my view. It was so simple, and so much in accord with[206] my wishes; so delightful, that I almost shouted out with joy.

I did not lose a minute, but hurried a change of clothes into a bag and caught the train for Aberdeen *en route* for London.

I did not lose any time. Next morning I was in London and went with my solicitor to Doctor's Commons. There I got a license of the Archbishop of Canterbury entitling Archibald Hunter and Marjory Anita Drake to be married anywhere in England—there being no similar license in Scotland. I returned at once, stopping at Carlisle to make arrangements with a local clergyman to be ready to perform a marriage service at eight o'clock of the second morning.

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## CHAPTER XXV
## INDUCTIVE RATIOCINATION

Ithink Marjory must have suspected that I had something strange to say, for almost as soon as I came in the morning room I saw that queer little lift of her eyebrows and wrinkle in her brows which I was accustomed to see when she was thinking. She held out her two hands towards me so that I could see them without Mrs. Jack being able to. She held up her fingers in the following succession:

Left index finger, right middle finger, left little finger, right little finger, left thumb, right fourth finger, right index finger, left thumb, right index finger; thus spelling "wait" in her own variant of our biliteral cipher. I took her hint, and we talked commonplaces. Presently she brought me up to the long oak-lined room at the top of the Castle. Here we were all alone; from the window seat at the far end we could see that no one came into the room unknown to us. Thus we were sure of not being overhead. Marjory settled herself comfortably amongst a pile of cushions, "Now" she said "go on and tell me all about it!"

"About what?" said I, fencing a little.

"The news that you are bursting to tell me. Hold on! I'll guess at it. You are elated, therefore it is not bad; but being news and not bad it must be good—from your point of view at any rate. Then you are jubilant, so there must be something personal in it—you are sufficiently[208] an egoist for that. I am sure that nothing business-like or official, such as the heading off the kidnappers, would have such a positive effect on you. Then, it being personal, and you having rather more of a dominant air than usual about you—Let me see—Oh!" she stopped in confusion, and a bright blush swept over her face and neck. I waited. It frightened me just a wee bit to see the unerring accuracy

with which she summed me up; but she was clearing the ground for me rapidly and effectively. After a pause she said in a small voice:

“Archie show me what you have got in your waistcoat pocket.” It was my turn to blush a bit now. I took out the tiny case which held the gold ring and handed it to her. She took it with a look of adorable sweetness and opened it. I think she suspected only an engagement ring, for when she saw it was one of plain gold she shut the box with a sudden “Oh!” and kept it hidden in her hand, whilst her face was as red as sunset. I felt that my time had come.

“Shall I tell you now?” I asked putting my arms round her.

“Yes! if you wish.” This was said in a low voice “But I am too surprised to think. What does it all mean? I thought that this—this sort of thing came later, and after some time was mutually fixed for—for—*it*!”

“No time like the present, Marjory dear!” As she was silent, though she looked at me wistfully, I went on:

“I have made a plan and I think you will approve of it. That is as a whole; even if you dislike some of the details. What do you think of an escape from the espionage of both the police and the other fellows. You got hidden before; why not again, when once you have put them off the scent. I have as a matter of fact planned a little movement which will at any rate try whether we can escape the watchfulness of these gentlemen.”

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“Good!” she said with interest.

“Well, first of all” I went on, getting nervous as I drew near the subject “Don’t you think that it will be well to prevent anyone talking about us, hereafter, in an unpleasant way?”

“I’m afraid I don’t quite understand!”

“Well, look here, Marjory. You and I are going to be much thrown together in these matters that seem to be coming on; if there is any escaping to be done, there will be watchful eyes on us before it, and gossiping tongues afterwards; and inquiries and comparing of notes everywhere. We shall have to go off together, often alone or under odd circumstances. You can’t fight a mystery in the open, you know; and you can’t by walking out boldly, bamboozle trained detectives who have already marked you down.”

“Not much; but it doesn’t need any torturing of our brains with thinking to know that.”

“Well then my suggestion is that we be married at once. Then no one can ever say anything in the way of scandal; no matter what we do, or where we go!” My bolt was sped, and somehow my courage began to ooze away. I waited to hear what she would say. She waited quite a while and then said quietly:

“Don’t be frightened, Archie, I am thinking it over. I must think; it is all too serious and too sudden to decide on in a moment. I am glad, anyhow, that you show such decision of character, and turn passing circumstances into the direction in which you wish them to work. It argues well for the future!”

“Now you are satirical!”

“Just a little. Don’t you think there is an excuse?” She was not quite satisfied; and indeed I could not be surprised. I had thought of the matter so unceasingly for the last twenty-four hours that I did not miss any of[210] the arguments against myself; my natural dread of her refusal took care of that. As, however, I almost expected her to begin with a prompt negative, I was not unduly depressed by a shade of doubt. I was, however, so single-minded in my purpose—my immediate purpose—that I could endure to argue with her doubts. As it was evident that she, naturally enough, thought that I wanted her to marry me at once out of the ardour of my love, I tried to make her aware as well as I could of my consideration for her wishes. Somehow, I felt at my best as I spoke; and I thought that she felt it too:

“I’m not selfish in the matter, Marjory dear; at least I don’t wish to be. In this I am thinking of you altogether; and to prove it let me say that all I suggest is the formal ceremony which will make us one in form. Later on—and this shall be when you choose yourself and only then—we can have a real marriage, where and when you will; with flowers and bridesmaids and wedding cake and the whole fit out. We can be good comrades still, even if we have been to church together; and I will promise you faithfully that till your own time I won’t try to make love to you even when you’re my wife—of course any more than I do now. Surely that’s not too much to ask in the way of consideration.”

My dear Marjory gave in at once. It might have been that she liked the idea of an immediate marriage; for she loved me, and all lovers like the seal of possession fixed upon their hopes:

“Time goes on crutches, till love have all his rites.”

But be this as it may, she wished at any rate to believe in me. She came to me and put both her hands in mine and said with a gentle modesty, which was all tenderness in fact, and all wifely in promise:

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“Be it as you will, Archie! I am all yours in heart now; and I am ready to go through the ceremony when you will.”

“Remember, dear” I protested “it is only on your account, and to try to meet your wishes at any sacrifice, that I suggested the interval of comradeship. As far as I am concerned I want to go straight to the altar—the real altar—now.” Up went her warning finger as she said lovingly:

“I know all that dear; and I shall remember it when the time comes. But what have we to do to prepare for—for the wedding. Is it to be in a church or at a registry. I suppose it doesn’t matter which under the circumstances—and as we are to have the real marriage later. When do you wish it to be, and where?”

“To-morrow!” She started slightly as she murmured:

“So soon! I did not think it could be so soon.”

“The sooner the better” said I “If we are to carry out our plans. All’s ready; see here” I handed her the license which she read with glad eyes and a sweet blush. When she had come to the end of it I said:

“I have arranged with the clergyman of St. Hilda’s Church in Carlisle to be ready at eight o’clock to-morrow morning.” She sat silent a while and then asked me:

“And how do you suggest that I am to get there without the detectives seeing me?”

“That is to be our experiment as to escape. I would propose that you should slip out in some disguise. You will of course have to arrange with Mrs. Jack, and at least one servant, to pretend that you are still at home. Why not let it be understood that you have a headache and are keeping your room. Your meals can be taken to you as would be done, and the life of the household seem to go on just as usual.”

“And what disguise had you thought of?”

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“I thought that if you went dressed as a man it would be best.”

“Oh that would be a lark!” she said. Then her face fell. “But where am I to get a man’s dress? There is not time if I am to be in Carlisle to-morrow morning.”

“Be easy as to that, dear. A man’s dress is on its way to you now by post. It should be here by now. I am afraid you will have to take chance as to its fit. It is of pretty thick cloth, however, so that it will look all right.”

“What sort of dress is it?”

“A servant’s, a footman’s. I thought it would probably avoid suspicion easier than any other.”

“That goes! Oh this is too thrilling;” she stopped suddenly and said:

“But how about Mrs. Jack?”

“She will go early this afternoon to Carlisle and put up at a little hotel out of the way. I have got rooms in one close to the station. At first I feared it would not be possible for her to be with us; but then when I thought it over, I came to the conclusion that you might not care to let the matter come off at all unless she were present. And besides you would want her to be with you to-night when you are in a strange place.” Again she asked after another pause of thought:

“But how am I to change my clothes? I can’t be married as a footman; and I can’t go to a strange hotel as one, and come out as a young lady.”

“That is all thought out. When you leave here you will find me waiting for you with a bicycle in the wood on the road to Ellon. You will have to start about half past five. No one will notice that you are using a lady’s wheel. You will come to Whinnyfold where you will find a skirt and jacket and cap. They are the best I could get. We shall ride into Aberdeen as by that means we[213] shall minimise the chance of being seen. There we will catch the eight train to Carlisle where we shall arrive about a quarter to two. Mrs. Jack will be there ready for you and will have the dress you will want to-morrow.”

“Oh, poor dear won’t she be flustered and mystified! How lucky it is that she likes you, and is satisfied with you; otherwise I am afraid she would never agree to such precipitancy. But hold on a minute! Won’t it look odd to our outside friends on the watch if a footman goes out and doesn’t return.”

“You will return to-morrow late in the evening. Mrs. Jack will be home by then; she must arrange to keep the servants busy in some distant part of the house, so that you can come in unobserved. Besides, the detectives have to divide their watches; the same men will not be on duty I take it. Anyhow, if they do not consider the outgoing of

a footman as sufficiently important to follow him up they will not trouble much about his incoming."

This all seemed feasible to Marjory; so we talked the matter over and arranged a hundred little details. These things she wrote down for Mrs. Jack's enlightenment, and to aid her memory when she would be alone to carry out the plans as arranged.

Mrs. Jack was a little hard to convince; but at last she came round. She persisted to almost the end of our interview in saying that she could not understand the necessity for either the hurry or the mystery. She was only convinced when at last Marjory said:

"Do you want us to have all the Chicago worry over again, dear? You approve of my marrying Archie do you not? Well, I had such a sickener of proposals and all about it, that if I can't marry this way now, I won't marry at all. My dear, I want to marry Archie; you know we love each other."

"Ah, that I do, my dears!"

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"Well then you must help us; and bear with all our secrecy for a bit; won't you dear?"

"That I will, my child!" she said wiping tears from the corners of her eyes.

So it was all settled.

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## CHAPTER XXVI
## A WHOLE WEDDING DAY

Fortune favoured us admirably in our plans. Mrs. Jack, taking only her dressing bag and a few odd parcels, went by the afternoon train from Ellon to Aberdeen. In hearing of the household she regretted that she had to go alone, as Miss Marjory was unable to leave her room. About five o'clock I was in the wood as appointed; and in about half an hour Marjory joined me in her footman's livery. I had a flannel coat in my bag which we exchanged for that which she wore and which we hid in the wood. We were thus less noticeable. We reached Whinnyfold a little after six, and Marjory went into the house and changed her dress which was left ready. She was not long; and we were soon flying on our road to Aberdeen. We arrived a little before eight and caught the mail; arriving at Carlisle at ten minutes to two o'clock. In the hotel we found Mrs. Jack anxiously awaiting us.

In the early morning we were ready; and at eight o'clock we all went together to St. Hilda's Church, where the clergyman was waiting as had been arranged. All formalities were gone through and Marjory and I were made one. She looked oh! so sweet in her plain white frock; and her manner was gentle and solemn. It all seemed to me like a dream of infinite happiness; from which every instant I feared I should wake, and find in its stead some grim reality of pain, or terror, or unutterable commonplace.

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When we went back to breakfast at the hotel, we did not even go through the form of regarding it as in any way a wedding feast. Marjory and I had each our part to play, and we determined—I certainly did—to play it well. Mrs. Jack had been carefully coached by Marjory as to how she should behave; and though now and again she looked from one to the other of us wistfully, she did not make any remark.

After a little shopping we got the 12:53 train, arriving at Aberdeen at 6:20. Mrs. Jack was to go on by the 7 train to Ellon where the carriage was to meet her. My wife and I got our bicycles and rode to Whinnyfold by Newburgh and Kirkton so as to avoid observation. When she had changed her clothes in our own house, we started for Crom. In the wood she changed her coat and left her bicycle.

Before we parted she gave me a kiss and a hug that made my blood tingle.

"You have been good" she said "and that is for my husband!" Once again she held up that warning finger which I had come to know so well, and slipped away. She then went on alone to the Castle, whilst I waited in nervous expectancy of hearing the whistle which she was to blow in case of emergency. Then I rode home like a man in a dream.

I left my bicycle at the hotel, and after some supper walked by the sands to Whinnyfold, stopping to linger at each spot which was associated with my wife. My wife! it was almost too much to think of; I could hardly realise as yet that it was all real. As I sat on the Sand Craigs I almost fancied I could see Marjory's figure once again on the lonely rock. It seemed so long ago, for so much had happened since then.

And yet it was but a few days, all told, since we had first met. Things had gone in a whirl indeed. There[217] seemed to have been no pause; no room for a pause. And now I was married. Marjory was my wife; mine for good or ill, till death did us part. Circumstances seemed to have driven us so close together that we seemed not new lovers, not bride and groom, but companions of a lifetime.

And yet.... There was Marjory in Crom, compassed round by unknown dangers, whilst I, her husband of a few hours, was away in another place, unable even to gaze on her beauty or to hear her voice. Why, it was not like a wedding day or a honeymoon at all. Other husbands instead of parting with their wives were able to remain with them, free to come and go as they pleased, and to love each other unfettered as they would. Why....

I brought myself up sharp. This was grumbling already, and establishing a grievance. I, who had myself proposed the state of things to Marjory, to my wife. She was my wife; mine against all the rest of the world. My love was with her, and my duty was to her. My heart and soul were in her keeping, and I trusted her to the full. This was not my wedding day in the ordinary sense of the word at all. This was *not* my honeymoon. Those things would come later, when our joy would be unfettered by circumstances. Surely I had reason to rejoice. Already Marjory had called me her husband, she had kissed me as such; the sweetness of her kiss was still tingling on my lips. If anything but love and trust could come to me from sitting still and sentimentalising and brooding, then the sooner I started in to do some active work the better!...

I rose straightway and went across the headland to my house, unpacked the box of tools which had come from Aberdeen, and set about my task of trying to make an opening into the cave.

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I chose for various reasons the cellar as the spot at which to make the first attempt. In the first place it was already dug down to a certain depth, so that the labour would be less; and in the second, my working could be kept more secret. In clearing the foundations of the house the workmen had gone down to the rock nearly all round. Just at the end of Witsennan point there seemed to be a sort of bowl-like hollow, where the thin skin of earth lay deeper than elsewhere. It was here that the cellar was dug out, and the labour of cutting or blasting the rock saved. With a pick-axe I broke and stripped away a large patch of the concrete in the centre of the cellar, and in a short time had dug and shovelled away the earth and sand which lay between the floor level and the bed rock. I cleared away till the rock was bare some four or five feet square, before I commenced to work on it. I laboured furiously. What I wanted was work, active work which would tire my muscles and keep my thoughts from working into channels of gloom and disintegration.

It took me some time to get into the way of using the tools. It is all very well in theory for a prisoner to get out of a jail or a fortress by the aid of a bit of scrap iron. Let any one try it in real life; under the most favourable conditions, and with the best tools

available, he will come to the conclusion that romancing is easy work. I had the very latest American devices, including a bit-and-brace which one could lean on and work without stooping, and diamond patent drills which could, compared with ordinary tools of the old pattern, eat their way into rock at an incredible rate. My ground was on the gneiss side of the geological division. Had it been on the granite side of the line my labour and its rapidity might have been different.

I worked away hour after hour, and fatigue seemed to[219] come and go. I was not sleepy, and there was a feverish eagerness on me which would not let me rest. When I paused to ease my muscles cramped with work, thought came back to me of how different this night might have been.... And then I set furiously to work again. At last I took no heed of the flying hours; and was only recalled to time by the flickering of my lamp, which was beginning to go out. When I stood up from my task, I was annoyed to see how little I had done. A layer of rock of a few inches deep had been removed; and that was all.

When I went up the steps after locking the cellar door behind me and taking away the key, I saw the grey light of dawn stealing in through the windows. Somewhere in the village a cock crew. As I stepped out of the door to return home, the east began to quicken with coming day. My wedding night had passed.

As I went back to Cruden across the sands my heart went out in love without alloy to my absent wife; and the first red bolt of dawn over the sea saw only hope upon my face.

When I got to my room I tumbled into bed, tired beyond measure. In an instant I was asleep, dreaming of my wife and all that had been, and all that was to be.

Marjory had arranged that she and Mrs. Jack were for the coming week at least, to come over to Cruden every day, and lunch at the hotel; for my wife had set her heart on learning to swim. I was to be her teacher, and I was enthusiastic about the scheme. She was an apt pupil; and she was strong and graceful, and already skilled in several other physical accomplishments, we both found it easy work. The training which she had already had, made a new accomplishment easy. Before the week was over she was able to get along so well, that only practice was needed to make her a good[220] swimmer. All this time we met in public as friends, but no more; we were scrupulously careful that no one should notice even an intimacy between us. When we were alone, which was seldom and never for long, we were good comrades as before; and I did not venture to make love in any way. At first it was hard to refrain, for I was wildly in love with my wife; but I controlled myself in accordance with my promise. I soon began to have a dawning feeling that this very obedience was my best

means to the end I wished for. Marjory grew to have such confidence in me that she could be more demonstrative than before, and I got a larger share of affection than I expected. Besides I could see with a joy unspeakable that her love for me was growing day by day; the tentative comradeship—without prejudice—was wearing thin!

All this week, whilst Marjory was not near, I worked in the cellar at Whinnyfold. As I became more expert with the tools, I made greater progress, and the hole in the rock was becoming of some importance. One day on coming out after a spell of afternoon work, I found Gormala seated on a stone against the corner of the house. She looked at me fixedly and said:

"Be yon a grave that ye thole?" The question staggered me. I did not know that any one suspected that I was working in the house, or even that I visited it so often as I did. Besides, it did not suit my purpose that any one should be aware, under any circumstances, that I was digging a hole. I thought for a moment before answering her:

"What do you mean?"

"Eh! but I'm thinkin' ye ken weel eneuch. I'm no to be deceived i' the soond. I've heard ower mony a time the chip o' the pick, not to ken it though there be walls atween. I wondered why ye came by yer lanes to this[221] dreary hoose when ye sent yon bonnie lassie back to her hame. Aye she is bonnie though her pride be cruel to the aud. Ah, weel! The Fates are workin' to their end, whatsoe'er it may be. I maun watch, so that I may be nigh when the end cometh!"

There was no use arguing with her; and besides anything that I could say would only increase her suspicion. Suspicion abroad about my present task was the last thing I wished for.

She was round about the headland the next morning, and the next, and the next. During the day I never saw her; but at night she was generally to be found on the cliff above the Reivie o'Pircappies. I was glad of one thing; she did not seem to suspect that I was working all the time. Once I asked her what she was waiting for; she answered without looking at me:

"In the dark will be a struggle in the tide-race, and a shrood floatin' in the air! When next death an' the moon an' the tide be in ane, the seein' o' the Mystery o' the Sea may be mine!"

It made me cold to hear her. This is what she foretold of Marjory; and she was waiting to see her prophecy come to pass.

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## CHAPTER XXVII
## ENTRANCE TO THE CAVERN

One night, when I had got down a considerable depth into the rock, I took the pick to loosen out some stone which I had drilled. As I struck, the sound of the rock was hollower than I had before noticed. My heart leaped into my mouth, and I had to pause. Then I struck again harder, and the sound was more hollow still. Whether or no it was the place I was looking for, there was some cave in the rock below me. I would have gone on working straightway had there been anyone with me; but being alone I had to be careful. I was now standing on, evidently, only a layer of rock, over an opening of whose depth I was in ignorance. Should this piece of stone break away, as was quite possible from my working on it, I might be precipitated into a living tomb. The very secrecy in which I had kept my work, might tend to insure my death. Therefore I made all preparation for such a casualty. Henceforth I worked with round my waist a short rope the other end of which was fastened to a heavy staple in the wall. Even if the rock should give way underneath me, a foot or two would limit my fall. This precaution taken, I worked more furiously than ever. With a large hammer I struck the rock at the bottom of the shaft, again and again, with all my might. Then I heard a dull sound of something rattling below me; the top of the cave was falling in. I redoubled my[223] efforts; and all at once a whole mass of rock sunk beneath my hammer and disappeared into a black chasm which sent up a whiff of cold air. I had seized my rope to scramble out, fearing asphyxiation; but when I smelled salt water I did not fear. Then I knew that I had got an opening into a sea cave of some sort. I stuck to my work till I had hammered an irregular hole some three feet square. Then I came up to rest and think. I lowered a rope with a stone at the end, and found that the depth was some thirty feet. The stone had gone into water before it touched bottom. I could hear the “plop” as it struck the surface. As I thought it better not to descend by myself, lest there should be any danger of returning, I spent the rest of my stay for that evening in rigging up a pulley in the roof over the hole so that I might be lowered down when the time should come. Then I went home, for I feared lest the fascinating temptation to make the descent at once would overcome me.

After breakfast I rode over to Crom, and when I was alone with Marjory told her of my discovery. She was wild with excitement, and I rejoiced to find that this new pleasure drew us even closer together. We agreed that she should come to help me; it would not do to take any one else into our confidence, and she would not hear of my going

down into the cave alone. In order to avoid comment we thought it better that she should come late in the evening. The cave being dark, it was of course immaterial whether day or night was appointed for the experiment. Then it was, I could not help it, that I said to her:

"You see now the wisdom of our being married. We can go where we like; and if we should be found out no one can say a word!" She said nothing; there was nothing to say. We decided that she had better slip out, as she had done before, in the footman's dress. I went[224] off and made preparation for her coming, bringing in food for supper and plenty of candles and matches and lamps and rope; for we did not know how long the exploration might take.

A little before nine o'clock I met her as before in the wood. She changed her livery coat for the flannel one, and we rode off to Whinnyfold. We got into the house without being noticed.

When I took her down to the cellar and turned into the hole the reflector of the strong lamp, she held on to me with a little shiver. The opening did certainly look grim and awesome. The black rock was slimy with sea moisture, and the rays of the light were lost far below in the gloom. I told her what she would have to do in lowering me down, and explained the rude mechanism which I had constructed. She was, I could see, a little nervous with the responsibility; and was anxious to know any detail so thoroughly that no accident of ignorance could occur.

When the rope was round me and I was ready to descend, she kissed me more fondly than she had ever done yet, and held on to me as though loth to part. As I sank into the opening, holding the gasoline bicycle lamp which I had elected to take with me, I saw her pretty forehead wrinkled up in anxiety as she gave all her mind to the paying out of the rope. Even then I was delighted with the ease and poise of her beautiful figure, fully shown in the man's dress which she had not changed, as it was so suitable for the work she had to do.

When I had been lowered some twenty feet, I turned my lantern down and saw through the sheen of water a bottom of rock with here and there a cluster of loose stones; one big slab which stuck up endwise, was evidently that which had fallen from the roof under my[225] hammer. It was manifest that there was, in this part of the cave at any rate, not sufficient water to make it a matter of any concern. I called to Marjory to lower slowly, and a few seconds later I stood in the cave, with the water just above my knees. I moved the new-fallen slab to one side lest it might injure any one who was descending. Then I took the strong rope from me, and knotted round my waist the end of the thin rope which I had brought for the purpose. This formed a clue, in case such

should be necessary, and established a communication with Marjory which would tend to allay her anxiety. With the cord running through her fingers, she would know I was all right. I went cautiously through the cave, feeling my way carefully with the long stick which I had brought with me. When I had got some distance I heard Marjory's voice echoing through the cave:

"Take care there are no octopuses!" She had been thinking of all sorts of possible dangers. For my own part the idea of an octopus in the cave never crossed my mind. It was a disconcerting addition to my anxieties; but there was nothing to do. I was not going to abandon my project for this fear; and so I went on.

Further inland the cave shelved down on one side, following the line of the rock so that I passed through an angular space which, though wide in reality, seemed narrow by comparison with the wide and lofty chamber into which I had descended. A little beyond this again, the rock dipped, so that only a low tunnel, some four feet high, rose above the water. I went on, carefully feeling my way, and found that the cave ended in a point or narrow crevice.

All this time I had been thinking that the appearance of the place did not quite tally with the description in de Escoban's narrative. No mention had been made[226] of any such difficulties; as the few men had carried in what must have been of considerable bulk and weight there would have been great difficulties for them.

So I retraced my steps, intending to see if there was any other branch nearer to the sea. I kept the line taut so that Marjory might not be alarmed. I think I was as glad as she was when I saw the light through the opening, and the black circle of her head as she looked down eagerly. When underneath, I told her of my adventure, and then turned seawards to follow the cave down. The floor here was more even, as though it had been worn smooth by sea wash and the endless rolling of pebbles. The water deepened only a few inches in all. As I went, I threw the rays of my lamp around, anxiously looking for some opening. The whole distance from the place where I had made the entry to the face of the cliff was not very great; but distance in the open seems very different from that within an unknown cavern. Presently I came to a place where the floor of the cave was strewn with stones, which grew bigger and more as I went on; till at last I was climbing up a rising pile of rocks. It was slippery work, for there seemed some kind of ooze or slime over the stones which made progress difficult. When I had climbed up about half way towards the roof, I noticed that on my left side the slope began to fall away. I moved over and raising my lamp saw to my inexpressible joy that there was an opening in the rock. Getting close I found that though it was nearly blocked with stones there was still a space large enough to creep

through. Also with pleasure I saw that the stones here were small. With a very slight effort I dislodged some of them and sent them rolling down, thus clearing the way. The clatter of the stones evidently alarmed Marjory for I heard her calling to me. I hurried back under the opening—the way seemed easy[227] enough now I knew it—and told her of my fresh discovery.

Then I went back again and climbed down the slope of fallen stones; this was evidently the debris of the explosion which had choked the mouth of the cave. The new passage trended away a little to the right, making a sharp angle with the cave I had left. Then after deflecting to the left it went on almost straight for a considerable distance, thus lying, as I made it out, almost parallel to the first cave. I had very little anxiety as to the safety of the way. The floor seemed more level than even that of the entrance to the first cave. There was a couple of feet of water in the deepest part, but not more; it would not have been difficult to carry the treasure here. About two hundred feet in, the cave forked, one arm bending slightly to the left and the other to the right. I tried the former way and came to a sheer dip in the rock such as I had met with before. Accordingly I came back and tried the second. When I had gone on a little way, I found my line running out; so I went back and asked Marjory to throw me down the end. I was so sure of the road now that I did not need a clue. At first she demurred, but I convinced her; taking the rope I fixed one end of it within the cave before it branched. Then I started afresh on my way, carrying the coil of rope with me.

This branch of the cave went on crookedly with occasionally strange angles and sharp curves. Here and there, on one side or the other and sometimes on both, the rock walls bellied out, making queer chambers or recesses, or narrowing the cave to an aperture only a few feet wide. The roof too was raised or fell in places, so that I had now and again to bend my head and even to stoop; whilst at other times I stood under a sort of high dome. In such a zigzag course I lost my bearings somewhat;[228] but I had an idea that the general tendency was inland to the right. Strange to say, the floor of the cave remained nearly level. Here again, ages of tide and rolling pebbles had done their work effectively. My cord ran out again and I had to lose the far end and bring it on, fixing it afresh, as I did not like to proceed without keeping a clue behind me. Somewhat further on, the cave dipped and narrowed so that I had to bend nearly double to pass, my face being just above the water as I went. It was with difficulty that I kept the lamp from touching the water below or knocking against the rock above. I was much chagrined to find this change in the structure of the cave, for since I had entered on this branch of it I had completely made up my mind that I was on the right road and that only a short time and a little distance lay between me and the treasure. However there was nothing to do but to go on.

A few feet more and the roof began to rise; at first in a very gentle slope, but then suddenly. Stretching my cramped back and raising my head, I looked around. I raised my lamp high, turning it so that its rays might let me take in a wide circle.

I stood at the side of a large, lofty cave, quaint of outline, with here and there smooth walls from which great masses of red rock projected ominously. So threatening did these overhanging masses look, that for a few seconds I feared to stir lest some of them should topple over on me. Then, when my eyes had become accustomed to the greater glare, I saw that they were simply masses of the rugged rock itself. The whole cave, so far as I could see, was red granite, formed of the great rock flung upward in the pristine upheaval which had placed the Skares in the sea.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII
## VOICES IN THE DARK

Ilooked round the cave with mingled feelings. The place itself was, as a natural wonder, superb; but to me as a treasure hunter it was a disappointment. In no way did it answer the description of Don de Escoban. However I did not despair; there were many openings, and some one of them might bring me to the required spot. I passed to the centre of the cavern and looked round. As I did so, I got a momentary fright, for several of the openings were so much alike that only for my rope I would not have been able to distinguish that by which I had come in. The lesson of this shock should not be lost; I must make a mark by which I could distinguish this entrance from the others. No matter where the other openings might lead to, this alone, so far as I could tell, was the one which could lead me to safety. With a heavy pebble I hammered away at the right side of the entrance till I had chipped off a piece of rock. I could tell this place again by sight or by touch. Then I went round the cave examining the various branches. It was here that I began to feel the disadvantage of my imperfect light. I wanted some kind of torch which would give sufficient light to see the whole place at once. One could get no fit idea of proportion by merely making the little patch of dim light from the bicycle lamp travel along the rocky walls. I felt that all this time Marjory must be anxious about me, doubly so since she had no clue to[230] where I had gone. So I determined to come back at once, and postpone the thorough examination of the place until I should have proper appliances. Accordingly I made my way back to the place where Marjory anxiously awaited me.

Her reception of me was sweet and tender. It was so natural that its force was hardly manifest. It may have been that my mind was so full of many things that I did not receive her caress with the same singleness of devotion as was my wont. Now that I was assured of her love for me, and since I had called her my wife, my love lost its element of anxiety. It is this security which marks the difference of a husband's love from that of a lover; doubt is an element of passion, but not of true conjugal love. It was only afterwards, when I was alone, and Marjory's enchanting presence was not with me, that I began to realise through the lenses of memory and imagination the full sweetness of my wife's greeting in her joy at the assurance of my safety. It took a very few moments to tell her all the details of my adventure, and of the conclusion which I had come to as to the need for postponement. She thoroughly agreed with me in the necessity; and we then and there settled that it would be wiser for her to go back to Crom to-night. We were to settle later, when all preparations had been made, when we should again attempt the investigation of the cave.

When I had put on dry clothes, we set out for Crom. We walked our bicycles past Whinnyfold, and were grateful for the unique peculiarity of that village, an absence of dogs. We did not light our lamps till we got on the Peterhead road; and we put them out when we got into the mesh of crossroads near Crom. In the wood Marjory once more resumed her footman's coat, and we set out for the castle. On our way we had agreed that it would be best to try the other side of the castle where it was not[231] likely that any stranger would attempt to approach, as there was only the mossy foot track through the wood by the old chapel. In the later days both Marjory and I had used our opportunities of finding new paths through the wood round the castle; and we had already marked down several tracks which we could follow even in the dark with a little care. This was almost a necessity, as we had noticed of late traces of the watchers round the main gateway through which all in the castle were accustomed to come and go.

The path which we took to-night required a long detour of the wood, as it lay right on the other side from the entrance gate. It was only a narrow grass path, beginning between two big trees which stood closely together not very far from one of the flanking mounds or hillocks which here came closer down to the castle than any of the others. The path wound in and out among the tree trunks, till finally it debouched at the back of the old chapel which stood on a rising rock, hidden in the wood, some three hundred feet from the west side of the castle. It was a very old chapel, partly in ruins and antedating the castle by so many centuries that it was manifestly a relic of the older castle on whose site Crom was built. It may have been used for service early in the sixteenth century; but it could not even have been in repair, or even weather-

proof, for there were breaches at the end of it in which had taken root seedlings which were now forest trees. There was one old oak whose girth and whose gnarled appearance could not have been achieved within two centuries. Not merely the roots but the very trunk and branches had pushed aside the great stones which lay firmly and massively across the long low windows peculiar to the place. These windows were mere longitudinal slits in the wall, a sort of organised interstices between great masses of stone. Each of the three[232] on either side of the chapel was about two feet high and some six feet in length; one stone support, irregularly placed, broke the length of each. There was some kind of superstition amongst the servants regarding this place. None of them would under any circumstances go near it at night; and not even in daytime if they could decently excuse themselves.

In front of the chapel the way was very much wider. Originally there had been a clear space leading through the wood: but centuries of neglect had done their work. From fallen pine-cone, and beech-mast, and acorn, here and there a tree had grown which now made of the original broad alleyway a number of tortuous paths between the towering trunks. One of the reasons why we had determined to use this path was that it was noiseless. Grass and moss and rusty heaps of pine needles betrayed no footfall; with care one could come and go unheard. If once she could get through the wood unnoticed, Marjory might steal up to the doorway in the shadow of the castle and let herself in, unobserved.

We went hand in hand slowly and cautiously, hardly daring to breathe; and after a time that seemed endless came out at the back of the chapel. Then we stole quietly along by the southern wall. As we passed the first window, Marjory who was ahead of me stopped and gripped my hand so hard that I knew there must be some good cause for her agitation. She pressed back so that we both stood away from the window opening which we could just see dimly outlined on the granite wall, the black vacancy showing against the lichen-covered stone. Putting her lips close to my ear she whispered:

“There are people there. I heard them talking!” My blood began to run cold. In an instant all the danger in which Marjory stood rushed back upon me. Of late we had been immune from trouble, so that danger which[233] we did not know of seemed to stand far off; but now the place and the hour, the very reputation of the old chapel, all sent back in a flood the fearful imaginings which had assailed me since first I had known of the plot against Marjory. Instinctively my first act was to draw my wife close to me and hold her tight. Even in that moment it was a joy to me to feel that she let herself come willingly. For a few moments we stood silent, with our hearts beating together; then she whispered to me again:

“We must listen. We may perhaps find out who they are, and what they intend.”

Accordingly we drew again close to the opening, Marjory standing under the aperture, and I beside it as I found I could hear better in this position. The stooping made the coursing of my own blood sound in my ears. The voice which we first heard was a strong one, for even when toned to a whisper it was resonant as well as harsh and raucous:

“Then it’s settled we wait till we get word from Whiskey Tommy. How long is it likely to be?” The answering voice, also a whisper, was smooth and oily, but penetrating:

“Can’t say. He has to square the Dutchy: and they take a lot of sugar, his kind. They’re mighty pious when they’re right end up; but Lordy! when they’re down they’re holy terrors. This one is a peach. But he’s clever—I will say that; and he knows it. I’m almost sorry we took him in now, though he is so clever. He’d better mind out, though, for none of us love him; and if he goes back on us, or does not come up to the mark—” He stopped, and the sentence was finished by a click which I knew was the snapping of the spring of a bowie knife when it is thrown open.

“And quite right too. I’m on if need be!” and there was another click. The answering voice was strong and[234] resolute, but somehow, for all the wicked intent spoken, it did not sound so evil as the other. I looked at Marjory, and saw through the darkness that her eyes were blazing. My heart leaped again; the old pioneer spirit was awake in her, and somehow my dread for her was not the same. She drew close to me and whispered again:

“Be ready to get behind the trees at the back, I hear them rising.” She was evidently right, for now the voices were easier to hear since the mouths of the speakers were level with the window. A voice, a new one, said:

“We must git now. Them boys of Mac’s ’ll be on their round soon.” With a quick movement Marjory doubled under the window and came to me. She whispered as before:

“Let us get behind trees in front. We may see them coming through the door, and it will be well to know them.” So motioning to her to go on the side we were on, I slipped round the back, and turning by the other side of the chapel, and taking care to duck under the windows, hid myself behind one of the great oak trees in front, to the north of the original clearing. From where I stood I could see Marjory behind a tree across the glade. From where we were we could see any one who left the chapel; for one or other of us commanded the windows, and we both commanded the ruined doorway. We waited, and waited, and waited, afraid to stir hand or foot lest we should give a

warning to our foes. The time seemed interminable; but no one came out and we waited on, not daring to stir.

Presently I became conscious of two forms stealing between the trees up towards the chapel. I glided further round behind my sheltering tree, and, throwing an anxious glance toward Marjory, was rejoiced to see that she was doing the same. Closer and closer the two forms came. There was not the faintest sound from them. Approaching[235] the door-way from either side they peered in, listened, and then stole into the darkness between the tree trunks which marked the breach in the wall. I ventured out and slipped behind a tree somewhat nearer; Marjory on her side did the same, and at last we stood behind the two nearest trees and could both note the doorway and each of us the windows on one side. Then there was a whisper from within; somehow I expected to hear a pistol shot or to see a rush of men out through the jagged black of the doorway. Still nothing happened. Then a match was struck within. In the flash I could see the face of the man who had made the light—the keen-eyed messenger of Sam Adams. He held up the light, and to our amazement we could see that, except for the two men whom we had seen go in, the chapel was empty.

Marjory flitted over to me and whispered:

“Don’t be afraid. Men who light up like that aren’t likely to stumble over us, if we are decently careful.” She was right. The two men, seeing that the place was empty, seemed to cast aside their caution. They came out without much listening, stole behind the chapel, and set off along the narrow pathway through the wood. Marjory whispered to me:

“Now is my chance to get in before they come back. You may come with me to the edge of the wood. When I get in, dear, go back home as fast as you can. You must be tired and want rest. Come to-morrow as soon as you can. We have lots to talk over. That chapel must be seen to. There is some mystery there which is bigger than anything we have struck yet. It’s no use going into it now; it wants time and thinking over!” We were whispering as we walked along, still keeping carefully in the shadow of the trees. Behind the last tree Marjory kissed me. It was her own act, and as impulsively I clasped her tight in my arms, she nestled in to me as[236] though she felt that she belonged there. With a mutual ‘good-night’ and a whispered blessing she stole away into the shadow. I saw her reach the door and disappear through it.

I went back to Cruden with my mind in a whirl of thoughts and feelings. Amongst them love was first; with all the unspeakable joy which comes with love that is returned.

I felt that I had a right to call Marjory my very own now. Our dangers and hopes and sympathies made a tie which seemed even closer than that tied in the church at Carlisle.

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## CHAPTER XXIX
## THE MONUMENT

For the remainder of that night, whether rushing home on my bicycle, preparing for rest, lying awake, or even in my sleep, I thought over the mystery of the disappearance of the speakers in the old chapel. Certainly I went to sleep on the thought, and woke with it. It never left me even after breakfast as I rode out towards Crom. It was manifest that there must be some secret vault or hiding place in the chapel; or it might be that there was some subterranean passage. If the latter, where did it lead to? Where else, unless to the castle; such would be the natural inference. The very thought made my blood run cold; it was no wonder that it overspread my mind to the exclusion of all else. In such case Marjory's enemies were indeed dangerous, since they held a secret way to her at all times; once within the castle it would not be hard to work evil to her.

I thought that this morning I would do a little prospecting on my own account. Accordingly I left my bicycle in the wood and went a long circuit, keeping in the shadow of the woods where possible, and elsewhere stealing behind the hedgerows, till I got to the far side of the hill or spur which came nearest to the old chapel. This was one of the hills up whose base the trees ran in flame-shaped patches. Half way up, the woods ceased, and there was a belt of barrenness—outcropping rock fringed with green grass. The top, like most of the hills or[238] mounds around the castle, was covered with woods, close-growing masses of pine which made a dusk even in the noonday.

I took my way up the back of the hill and stole through the wood, carefully keeping a watchful look out all round me, for I feared the presence of either of the sets of spies. At the very top I came upon a good sized circle of masonry, low but heavily built of massive stones completely covered with rich green lichen. The circle was some fifteen feet diameter, and the top was slightly arched as though forming a roof. Leaning over it I could hear a faint trickle of water; this was evidently the source of the castle supply.

I walked round it, examining it carefully; anything which had any direct communication with the castle was at present of possibly the supremest importance. There was no flaw or opening anywhere; and from the unbroken covering of the stones by the lichen, it was apparent that there had been no disturbance for years.

I sat down on the edge of the stonework and for a long time thought over matters of probability. If underneath me, as was almost to be taken for granted, lay the reservoir of the castle, it must have been made coevally with Crom itself, or even with the older castle on whose ruins it was built. It must be fed by springs in the rock which formed the base of the hill and cropped out all over it; and if it was not approachable from without, there must be some way of reaching the water from within. It might be that the chamber which contained the reservoir had some other entrance from the hill top, or from some lower level. Accordingly I made as I conceived a bee line for the castle, till I came to the very base of the hill, for I knew that in matters of water conduit the direct way is always chosen where work has to be done. As I went, I conned the ground carefully; not merely the[239] surface for that was an uniform thick coating of brown pine needles, but the general conformation. Where a trench has been made, there is ever after some trace of it to be found. Even if the workmen level the trench most carefully there and then, the percolation of rain through the softer broken earth will make discovery of the change by shrinkage. Here, however, there was no such sign; the ground, so far as one could judge, had never been opened. The trees grew irregularly, and there was no gap such as would be, had one ever been removed. Here and there particles of rock cropped out amongst the pine needles just as anywhere else. If any opening existed it was not on the direct line between the reservoir and the castle.

Back again I went to the reservoir, and, using it as a base, began to cast around for some opening or sign. I made circles in all directions, just as a retriever does when looking for a fallen partridge in a dry stubble when the scent is killed by heat.

At last I came upon something, though whether or no it might have any point of contact with my purpose, I could not at once decide. It was a rude monument of some kind, a boulder placed endwise on a slab of rock roughly hewn to form a sort of square plinth. This again was surrounded on the outside, for the whole monument was on the very edge of a steeply-dipping crag, by a few tiers of rough masonry. The stones were roughly cut and laid together without mortar; or if mortar or cement there had ever been, time and weather had washed it away. In one respect this structure was in contrast to that above the reservoir, there was not a sign of moss or lichen about it. The trees of the wood came close up behind it; in front it was shut out from view below by the branches of a few pine trees which grew crookedly from a precarious foothold

amongst the ledges of rock beneath. As[240] I stood in front of it, I could see nothing immediately below me; however, when I had scrambled to a ledge a few feet lower down, the back wall of the old chapel became visible, though partly obscured by trunks and branches of intervening trees. I searched all over the monument for some inscription, but could see none. Then I stood on the plinth to see if there might be any inscription on the top of the boulder. As I stood, looking over the top of it from the bank, I could just see through a natural alleyway amongst the tree tops, the top of one corner of the castle, that on the side of, and farthest from the old chapel. As I looked, a bright thought struck me. Here was a place from which one might correspond with the castle, unseen by any one save at the one spot. I determined then and there, that Marjory and I should arrange some method of signalling to one another.

Somehow this place impressed me, possibly because it was the only thing, except the reservoir, which seemed to have a purpose in the whole scheme of the hill top. Where there was labour and manifest purpose, there must surely be some connection. I examined all round the place minutely, scrambling down the rocks below and on either side, but always keeping a bright look out in case of spies. The only thing I noticed was that there seemed a trace of some kind of a pathway through the wood here. It was not sufficiently marked to allow one to accept it with certainty as a pathway; but there is something about a place which is even occasionally trodden, which marks it from its surroundings virgin of footsteps. I could not find where the path ended or where it began. It seemed to grow from the monument, but here underfoot was stone and hard gravel; and the wind coming over the steep slope swept the fallen pine needles back amongst the shelter of the trees. After a few hundred yards any suggestion of a pathway disappeared, lost in the aisles of[241] the pine trees spreading round on every side. There was no need of a pathway here where all was open. Once or twice as I searched the thought came to me that there might be some opening here to a secret way or hiding place; but look how I would, I could not find the faintest trace or suggestion of any opening. In the end I had to take it that the erection was merely a monument or mark of some kind, whose original purpose was probably lost in time.

At last, as the day was well on, I made my way back to where my bicycle was hidden, always taking care to keep from observation. Then emerging on the road, I went as usual through the old ruined gateway and the long winding avenue to the castle.

Marjory met me with an anxious look, and hung on to my arm lovingly as she said:

“Oh, you are late! I have been quite nervous all the morning lest anything should have happened to you!” Mrs. Jack, after we had greeted, discreetly left us alone; and I told

my wife of all that I had thought since we had parted, and of what I had seen on the hill top. She was delighted at the idea of a means of signalling; and insisted on my coming at once to the roof to make further arrangements and discoveries.

We found the spot which I had indicated admirably adapted for our purpose. One could sit on the stone roof, well back from the wall, and through one of the openings in the castellation see the top of the monument amongst the tree tops; and could yet be unobserved oneself from any other spot around. The angles of the castellation of the various walls shut out the tops of the other hills or mounds on every side. As the signs of our code were already complete we had only to fix on some means of signalling 'A' and 'B'. This we did by deciding that by daylight A should be signified by red and B by white[242] and at night A by red and B by green. Thus by daylight two pocket handkerchiefs of red and white or two flowers of white and red; or a piece of paper and a red leaf or flower would suffice. We fixed on colour as the best representative, as the distance made simplicity necessary. By night an ordinary bicycle lamp with the lens covered could be used; the ordinary red and green side lights could be shown as required. Then and there we arranged that that very afternoon when I had left the castle I should steal back to the monument and we should make a trial of our signalling.

Then we talked of other things. Alone there on the roof we could talk freely; and the moments flew swiftly by in a sweet companionship. Even if the subjects which we had to discuss were grim ones of danger and intrigue; of secret passages and malignant enemies; of spies and possibilities of harm to one or both of us, still mutuality of our troubles and dangers made their existence to us sweet. That we shared in common even such matters was dear to us both. I could not but be conscious of Marjory's growing love for me; and if I had to restrain myself now and again from throwing my arms round her and pressing her beautiful body close to me and sweeping her face with kisses, I was repaid when, as we descended she put both her hands in mine and said:

"Oh Archie! you are good to me! and—and—I love you so!" Then she sank into my arms and our mouths met in a long, loving kiss.

We decided that as there must be some hidden opening in the old chapel, we should make search for it the next day. I was to come soon after sunrise, for this we judged would be the time when the spies of both kinds would least expect movement from the castle. I was to come by the grass path between the trees into the old[243] chapel where she would meet me and we should make our investigations together.

After tea I came away. Marjory came out on the steps with me to see me off. As we bade each other good-bye she said aloud in case any one might be listening:

“Remember, you are to come to tea to-morrow and to bring me the book. I am quite anxious to know how it ends. It is too bad of the librarian not to send us all the volumes at once!”

When I got to the road I hid my bicycle in the old place, and took my way secretly to the monument. Marjory had been much struck by the suggestion of the footpath, and, woman-like, had made up her mind on the subject. She had suggested that we should test whether any one came or went by it, and to this end gave me a spool of the finest thread so that I might lay a trap. Before I should leave the place I was to stretch threads across it here and there between the tree trunks. If on the next visit I should find them broken, we might take it that some one had been there.

From the top of the boulder I made signal and was immediately answered. My own signal was simply the expression of my heart’s feeling:

“I love you, my wife!” The answer came quickly back filling me with joy:

“I love you, my husband! Don’t forget me! Think of me!”

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## CHAPTER XXX
## THE SECRET PASSAGE

That night was one of rest. I was physically tired out, and after I had posted a few letters to merchants in Aberdeen, giving orders for various goods to be sent at once to Whinnyfold, I went to bed and slept till the early morning. I got up at daylight, and after my morning swim rode off to Crom. Again I left my bicycle in the wood and took my way round to the back of the hill and up through the wood to the monument beyond the reservoir. It was still early morning, as it is counted in the cities, though the sun was well up. I went with extra caution, stealing from tree to tree; for I knew nothing of the locality of the watchers at this hour. I saw no sign of anyone; and coming at last to where the rudimentary pathway lay, examined carefully where I had placed the first thread. As I did so I straightened myself quickly and looked round with apprehension. The thread was broken across, though the two ends were tied where I had placed them!

With a beating heart I examined all the others in turn, with the same result. It was quite evident that some one, or some thing had passed along the track. In spite of my concern I rejoiced, for something had been found. It was at least probable that there was a regular route somewhere at hand. Accordingly I prepared my traps afresh, this time placing them in various directions, and at irregular distances along the path and all round the[245] monument. I might thus be able to trace the exact route of anyone who might disturb them. This done, and it took some time, I went back to the wood, and thence rode to the castle.

Marjory was eager for news, but it thrilled me to see that her eagerness was not all from this cause; hour by hour I found myself growing in her affection. When I told her of the broken threads, she clapped her hands with delight; the hunter spirit hereditary in her was pleased. She gave her opinion that on the next morning I should be able to locate the entrance to the passage, if one there was. In the midst of her speaking thus she stopped; a bright, keen light came into her eyes, and her brows knitted.

"Why," she said, "how stupid I am. I never once thought of doing the same at my end. Yesterday, after you left, I spent an hour in the old chapel and went over every inch of it; but it never occurred to me to do there what you had gone to do at the monument. If I had done so, I might this morning have been able to discover the secret of the disappearance of the kidnappers. I shall take good care to do it this evening."

While she was speaking a fear grew upon me lest being alone in the ruin she might give her enemies the very opportunity they wanted. She saw my distress, and with her quick woman's wit guessed the cause of it. With a very tender movement she placed her hand on the back of mine, and without squeezing it held it there firmly as she said:

"Don't be frightened for me, dear. These are expert workmen that we are dealing with. They won't move till their plans are all ready. They don't wish to get hold of me for five minutes and let "Mac's men"—as lacking due respect for President McKinley, they call the Secret Service agents of my country—catch them red-handed.[246] They are only laying their plans as yet. Perhaps we may have cause to be anxious when that is done; but as yet it's all right. Anyhow, my dear, as I know it will make you easier in your mind, when you are not at hand to protect me, I shall lay the traps whilst you are with me. There now! Am I good to my husband, or am I not?" I made her aware in my own way—I could not help it—that she was good! and she let the incident pass unrebuked. Even lovers, though they have not the status of the husband, must be allowed a little latitude now and again.

We talked over all the possibilities that we could either of us think of with regard to a secret passage between the castle and the monument. It was apparent that in old

time such a hidden way might have been of the utmost importance; and it was more than possible that such a passage might exist. Already we had reason to believe that there was a way between the ruined chapel and the top of the reservoir hill, and we knew that there must be existing some secret hiding place gained from the interior of the chapel. What we had still to discover, and this was the most important of all, was whether there was a method of communication between the castle and the chapel. After tea we started out together; and as we had arranged between us before starting, managed in our strolling to go quite round the castle and through many of the grassy alleys between the woods. Then, lest there should be any listener, I said:

"Let us go into the old chapel. I haven't had a good look at it since I have been coming here!" So we went into the chapel and began to lay our traps. Of course we could not guard against any one spying upon us. There might be eyes of enemies bent on us through some secret chink or cranny or organised spy-hole. This we could not help, and had to take our chances of it; but if anyone were[247] within ear-shot and unable to see us, we guarded our movements by our misleading remarks concerning history and art. Deftly Marjory stretched sections of her gossamer thread from place to place, so that if any one went in the chapel their course must be marked by the broken threads. We finished near the door, and our artless, innocent, archæological conversation stopped there, too. We strolled back to the castle, feeling sure that if there were any secret hiding place within the ruin we should have located the entrance to it in the morning.

That afternoon I went to the house at Whinnyfold. Most of the things which I had ordered had arrived, and when I had had the various boxes and bundles moved inside I felt able to start on my work.

First I rigged up a proper windlass over the hole into the cave; and fixed it so that any one could manipulate it easily and safely from above. It could be also worked from below by aid of an endless chain round the axle. I hammered the edges of the hole somewhat smoother, so that no chance friction might cut the rope; and I fixed candles and lanterns in various places, so that all the light which might be necessary could be had easily. Then I furnished a room with rugs and pillows, and with clothes for Marjory for changing. She would be sure to require such, when our search after the treasure should come off. I had ready some tins of provisions, and I had arranged at the hotel that as I might sometimes stay and work in my own home—I was supposed to be an author—some fresh provisions were to be sent over each morning, and left ready for me with Mrs. Hay at Whinnyfold. By the time my work was through, it was late in the evening, and I went to the hotel to sleep. I had arranged with Marjory to be with her early in the morning. It was hardly daylight when I woke, but I got up at once and took

my way towards Crom, for the experience of the[248] day before had shown me that whoever used the path near the monument used it in the grey of the dawn. As usual I hid my bicycle and took my way cautiously to the monument. By this time the sun was up and the day was bright; the dew lay heavy, and when I came on any of my threads I could easily distinguish them by the shimmering beads which made each thread look like a miniature rope of diamonds.

Again the strings across the path were broken. My heart beat heavily as I began to follow back towards the monument the track of the broken thread. It led right up to it, on the side away from the castle, and then stopped. The other threads all round the monument were intact. Having learned so much, my first act was to prevent discovery of my own plan. Accordingly I carefully removed all the threads, broken and unbroken. Then I began to make minute investigation of the monument itself. As it was evident that whoever had broken the threads had come straight from it, there was a presumption that there was an opening somewhere. The rock below was unbroken and the stonework was seemingly fixed on the rock itself. By a process of exclusions I came to the belief that possibly the monument itself might be moveable.

Accordingly I began to experiment. I pressed against it, this way and that. I tried to move it by exercising pressure top and bottom in turn; but always without avail. Then I began to try to move it sideways as though it might be on a pivot. At first there was no yielding, no answer of any kind to my effort; but suddenly I thought I perceived a slight movement. I tried again and again, using my strength in the same way; but with no result. Then I tried turning it in the suspected direction, holding both my hands low down on the corners of the boulder; then going gradually up higher I pursued the[249] same effort; again no response. Still I felt I was on the track and began to make efforts in eccentric ways. All at once, whilst I was pressing with my left hand low down whilst I pulled with my right high up on the other edge, the whole great stone began to move in a slow easy way, as though in perfect poise. I continued the movement and the stone turned lazily over on one side, revealing at my very feet a dark opening of oval form some three feet across its widest part. Somehow I was not altogether surprised; my head kept cool in what was to me a wonderful way. With an impulse which was based on safety, lest the opening of the hole should make discovery of my presence, I reversed the action; and the stone rolled slowly over to its old position. Several times I moved it from its place and then back again, so that I might become accustomed to its use.

For a while I hesitated as to whether I should explore the opening immediately; but soon came to the conclusion that I had better begin at once. So I went back to my bicycle and took the lamp with me. I had matches in my case, and as I had the revolver

which I always carried now, I felt equal to any emergency. I think I was finally influenced in my decision to attempt the passage at once by the remembrance of Marjory's remark that the kidnappers would make no effort until their plans were quite complete. They, more than I, might fear discovery; and on this hope I was strong as I lowered myself down through the narrow opening. I was glad to see that there was no difficulty in moving the stone from the inside; there were two iron handles let into the stone for the purpose.

I cannot say I was at ease in my mind, I was, however, determined to go on; and with a prayer to God for protection, and a loving thought of Marjory, I went on my way.

The passage was doubtless of natural origin, for it was[250] evident that the seams in the rock were much like those on the coast where the strata of different geological formations joined. Art had, however improved the place wonderfully. Where the top had come too low it had been quarried away; the remnants still lay adjacent where the cave broadened out. The floor where the slope was steep was cut into rough steps. Altogether, there were signs of much labour in the making of the passage. As I went down, I kept an eye on the compass whenever I came to a turn, so that I might have a rough idea of the direction in which I was going. In the main the road, with counterbalancing curves and angles, led straight down.

When I had got to what I considered must be half way, allowing for the astounding magnitude which seems to be the characterisation of even a short way under ground; the passage forked, and at a steep angle another passage, lower and less altered than that along which I had come, turned away to the left. Going a few feet up it I could hear the sound of running water.

This was evidently the passage to the reservoir.

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