

- Reformed yet effective reaction 67 70  
courtesy.  
Hinders incident common place but the setting

### CHAPTER III.

#### RUSTIC COURTSHIP.

TAM MEERISON had been servant to Johnny Gibb only from the term of Whitsunday, that is to say for about three weeks previous to the date of which I have been writing. He was a stout fellow of six or seven and twenty, with a broad, good-natured face, and straggling, but very promising whiskers of light complexion fringing his cheeks. On his head he wore a sort of nondescript blue bonnet, and going downward on his person you found a remarkably substantial sleeved vest of moleskin and a pair of cord trousers, narrow at the knees, and spreading somewhat about the ankles, with about half-a-dozen buttons at bottom overhanging the heavy beetikin on either foot. The servant lass, Jinse Deans, a sedate-looking, red-haired damsel of fully Tam's age, had been a resident at Gushetneuk for a couple of twelvemonths bygone; and when Johnny had set out for the Wells the two were master and mistress of the place for the time being. Tam pursued his work industriously afield during the day, along with the orra man, Willy M'Aul, a youth of sixteen or seventeen, and son of the souter of Smiddyward. When six o'clock p.m. had come, Tam incontinently lows't. Then came supper of kail and kail brose, of which the three partook in company, amid no little badinage, consisting mainly of equivocal compliments to Jinse on her housekeeping capabilities, from Willy M'Aul, or as he was more commonly designated, the loon, who was of

that particular character fitly described as a roy't nickum. Tam next lighted his pipe and blew clouds of smoke to the kitchen roof, as he watched Jinse "washing up" her dishes, an operation which Jinse invariably performed with an amount of clattering and noise that made the beholder marvel how it happened that she did not break at least one half of the crockery as it passed through her hands. Whether Tam was admiring Jinse's dexterity and vigour in going through her work or not I cannot say; I rather think, at any rate, that Jinse was not altogether unconscious that she was making a considerable display of these qualities before the new ploughman. At last she had finished, when, addressing the loon, she said—

"Gae 'wa', ye haveril, an' fesh hame the kye, till I get them milket."

"An' fat 'll aw get for that, Jinse?"

"Gin ye get fat ye deserve, ye winna braig about it."

"Wud ye gi'e's a kiss gin aw war to dee't?"

"Ye're a bonny ablich to seek a kiss. I'se rug yer lugs t' ye gin ye dinna gae this minit."

"Hoot man, ye've nae pluck ava," exclaimed Tam, as the loon retreated towards the door to escape from Jinse, who had shown a distinct intention of suiting the action to the word. "Canna ye tak' a grip o' 'er?"

"I wudna advise you to dee that, Tam, or ye'll maybe fin' 't she's a sauter," replied Willy, as he marched off for the cows.

Later in the evening, when the cows had been milked, the calves properly attended to, and the work of the day fully concluded, Johnny Gibb's three servants were to be seen loitering about the kitchen door, and talking over the countra clatter. Tam, who was seated on the big beetlin stone by the door cheek, had spoken once and again of going to bed, and had given the loon emphatic warning of the expediency of his immediately seeking repose, as he might depend on it that he, Tam, would pull him out of the blankets by the heels if he were not astir by five o'clock next morning. Notwithstanding his urgency with the loon,

Tam did not himself give any distinct indication of hurrying to bed. But as the loon failed to "obtemper" his repeated hints, he at last started to his feet, and went clanking across the causeway and up the trap stair to the chaumer over the stable. And while the loon proceeded to undress, Tam yawned once and again portentously. He then, very deliberately, wound up his watch, and, seating himself on his kist began, by and by, to sowff over "My love she's but a lassie yet." When he had got Willy fairly into bed, Tam next rose, and under pretence of going to the stable, slipped down the trap and out by the door, which he quietly locked, to make sure that Willy M'Aul would not follow him. In somewhat less than two minutes thereafter, Tam Meerison and Jinse Deans were seated side by side on the deece in Johnny Gibb's kitchen.

I don't know all what Tam Meerison said to Jinse Deans that summer gloamin. How should I? The whispers of lovers are hard to catch. Nor am I able to say how far Johnny Gibb would have approved of the sort of sederunt that took place on this occasion, in his absence, between his servant maid and his servant man. But certain it is that this was not the first time that Jinse had been wooed in a similar manner, and in that same place. Not by the same wooer, certainly, for until three weeks ago she had been utterly unaware that such a man as Tam Meerison existed.

At any rate, if Jinse saw no harm in receiving a little attention from an additional sweetheart, Tam evidently found her company the reverse of disagreeable. The time fled swiftly past, as it is wont to do in such circumstances. It had "worn on" to twelve o'clock; to one o'clock; and the lonely corncraik, which had so long kept up its rasping, yet cheery, note, to break the stillness of the summer twilight, had at last ceased its cry, and gone to sleep. It was still and quiet as quiet could be, when footsteps were surely heard approaching the house of Gushetneuk.

"Wheesht!" exclaimed Jinse, in a low whisper. "Fat's that?—I hear a fit."

"Nonsense," said Tam; "it's some o' the horse i' the park at the back o' the hoose."

"It's naething o' the kin'. Here, I say—there's somebody comin' up the close! In aneth the decee wi' ye this minit!" whispered Jinse, in great excitement.

Tam felt there was nothing for it but to do as he was bid; not that he liked the idea of doing it, or that his judgment was fully convinced of the propriety of the course prescribed, but he failed in getting up any valid negative to oppose to Jinse's urgency; and so, giving way to the force of her exhortation, Tam proceeded to squeeze his inconveniently-bulky person under the decee, among a horde of old shoes, dilapidated brooms, and sic like, with all the celerity he could achieve. And he was not a moment too soon, for the head and shoulders of some person were already dimly discernible at the front window. The decee stood opposite to this window, at the back wall. A tap or two on the pane were immediately heard, followed by a loudly-whispered "Jinse!"

Now, Jinse's position at the moment *was* a little awkward. With womanly tact she had remained by the decee to cover Tam's retreat, which had been accomplished with tolerable success; but here there were one, if not two pairs of eyes staring through the uncurtained window, and there was yet light enough to enable the owners of those eyes to follow the movements of any one inside, and even to discover their whereabouts, if they happened to be fully in view of the window, which the occupant of the decee unluckily was. She hesitated, yet remained still; but the call was persistently kept up, "Jinse! I'm sayin, Jinse!" Jinse's wits could scarcely have been calmed to the point of keeping continued silence under the increasingly-violent demand of the assailants of the window to have audience of her; to pretend that she was in bed was hopeless; and so, starting up in a fashion to knock over one or two chairs and stools—not a bad feint either—Jinse advanced to the window, and indignantly demanded what the midnight brawlers wanted.

"Ou, Jinsie, 'oman, dinna tak' the huff—nae fear o' the aul' cock the nicht. We ken brawly that Gushets an' 's wife tee 's awa' fae hame."

"Futher they be awa' fae hame or no, ye hae nae bizness comin here at this time o' nicht disturbin fowk."

"Wus ye sleepin terrible soun', Jinse?"

"Sleepin!" exclaimed a second voice; "the fowk o' Gushetneuk sleeps noo oot o' their beds, an' wi' a' their claes on!" And at this sally of wit the two men laughed loudly.

"Gae wa' this minit, I tell ye," exclaimed Jinse, with increased vehemence.

"I wauger she has a man wi' 'er, the jaud," was the only reply that proceeded from the first speaker.

Jinse, who either did not hear, or pretended not to hear, this remark, then, in a rather less indignant tone, asked, "Fat are ye wuntin here, I'm sayin?"

"Fat are we wuntin! Wuntin in tae see ye, Jinse; fat ither," said the voice that had spoken most.

"Gae awa' hame, I tell ye."

But, at this juncture, Jinse to her great horror, heard the latch of the door softly lifted, and the door itself, which of course had never been locked, evidently opening—a doubtful illustration, I daresay, of the saying that "love laughs at locksmiths." Before she could hinder it the two men were inside, and advancing towards the kitchen. They were quite well known to Jinse to be two of the servants at the farm of Mains of Yawal—one of them, indeed, averred that he had been "here afore"—but, for all this, it was decidedly inconvenient to have them in the house with the avowed intention of searching out the man who, as they asserted, was there before them, and all to see "fat like" he was.

"Faur hae ye pitten 'im noo, Jinsie?" exclaimed the more demonstrative of the two; "jist tell 's, 'oman—we winna hurt 'im."

"I say!" cried Jinse, excitedly, endeavouring to push him back.

"Jock, min," continued the man, addressing his friend, who had not yet emerged from the trance; "Jock, canna ye come ben an' gi'e Jinse the fawvour o' yer company. Oh-ho! he'll be i' the bed, I wauger," and the fellow darted across, and opened the doors of the bun bed in which Johnny Gibb's servant maid slept. Partly through vexation and excitement, partly perhaps as a stroke of policy, Jinse had resort now to a woman's last defence—her tears. Her tormentor, failing to find the man he groped for in the bed, and with his compunctions slightly stirred, perhaps, seized her round the neck.

"Weel-a-wuns, than, Jinsie," exclaimed the equivocal comforter, "we'se lat 'im rest 's banes in peace an quaetness;" saying which he swung Jinse round, and they both together came down on the decee with ponderous force. Now, Johnny Gibb's decee, though a substantial piece of furniture on the whole, did yield slightly, perhaps, under severe pressure; and, moreover, in the process of pushing himself under it, Tam had unsettled the decee from the two fragments of thin slate on which its front legs stood. The result of this was that, inasmuch as Tam Meerison was bulky enough to require in any case all the accommodation he could find between the decee seat and the floor, the doosht of the two persons falling on it had the effect of bringing his person into such violent contact with a three-cornered ironing heater, which happened to be under him, that Tam uttered an involuntary "Go-ch!" with considerable emphasis. The general noise going on fortunately prevented this exclamation being heard; but, as Tam lay there a very close prisoner indeed, without the power of stirring a hair's-breadth, the sweat gathered on his brow plentifully, and he began seriously to reflect what was to be the end of it, for the second man had now also taken his seat on the decee, and horrible pictures of being squeezed as flat as a skate rose in his mind; still he hoped the decee would hold out, and so long as it did so, he might hold out too, seeing he certainly had not more than half the superimposed burden to sustain.

No doubt it was a weary lie for Tam, for a full hour and a half had elapsed before Jinse managed to get rid of the two intruders. In the course of the conversation overhead of him, Tam had the pleasure of hearing his sweetheart questioned in a very direct and unceremonious fashion about himself, under the title of "Gushets' new man," the interrogator adding, as his own private opinion, "He's a queer-leukin hurb, at ony rate." It need hardly be said that Jinse answered discreetly in the circumstances.

When the unsought visitors had left, I daresay she and her companion exchanged some words of mutual congratulation and comfort; but daylight was already showing itself, and the feelings of both Tam and Jinse had been too rudely disturbed to admit of their settling down again at that time to a quiet and loving conference. Tam hung about for a little after he had risen from below the decee, and spoke widely of giving the two disturbers of his enjoyment their "kail throu' the reek some day," and then he slipped out to the stable, and crept cannily up the chaumer stair. Tam had hoped to get quietly to bed, at any rate; but, just as he had deposited the last article of his removable garments on his kist lid, and stood in nocturnal attire, ready to creep in amongst the plaids, his bed-fellow, Willy M'Aul, turned himself with a drowsy grane, and muttered, "Ay, ay! ye're a gey boy, comin to yer bed at three o'clock i' the mornin."

"Haud yer jaw, min!" was Tam's abrupt response.