

# KYLOE-JOCK AND THE WEIRD OF WANTON-WALLS.

A LEGEND : IN SIX CHAPTERS.

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## CHAPTER III.

HOW THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE WAS  
ABSENT, AND IN HIS ABSENCE IT WAS  
BELEAGUERED.

ON some errand of public duty or private business, Mr. Rowland soon had to leave home for the distant city. There he was to stay some days, which might be more numerous than he knew yet: and, as he much disliked to be long absent from the parish, or indeed to leave home at all for a single night, so as to lodge with strangers—thus might be explained the cloud of gravity that sat upon his serious forehead, while he parted from his household at the front

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door; mounting the new but docile horse, hight "Rutherford," to ride to the coach-town, only six miles off. No horse could more steadily have taken the road, than *Rutherford*, or more becomingly have sustained the dignified proportions of that figure after which Andrew looked, with a well-satisfied interest, from the open gate. The object of his complacency was borne away into a winter fog, that blended horse and master, dilating them grandly, like the chief of Centaurs; while at a sober trot it reached the brow of the frosty road; then gently vanished downwards, as over a depth of antique Fate. Still, for minutes onward, did the sound come regular and far from the iron-like

ground, through the keen, echoing air. Then the silence fell vast, like an augury of old.

Winter it was, without a doubt. The days were at the shortest; and the intense icy cold possessed the earth, binding the very sky, as it were in tyranny, from letting down any help to the strife. So vivid was the sense of life below, for all that, as to send up exhilaration through the gloom itself; at the very sight of those sharp hacks and cracks in the earth's old shape again, showing her merely wounded as before, with hard wrinkled ribs laid bare, fleshless arms and bony fingers, eyes all puckered and stony, veins empty and brittle as glass, fetters of steel and outspread covers of sealed iron—all to be changed immediately into fresh novelties, and some time or other be restored to the familiar state. Already, in fact, where the wet marsh had been a useless place in the hollow below the hill, icy enchantment had come upon it; making it worth the boy's pains to visit, if lesson-time had but allowed, in days so brief. Only the lessons with his father, indeed, had hindered the triumph it would have been for Hugh to be the first improver on that enchantment, as a conjuror of polished slides and gliding tracks, pushing alone into the centre of those rushy islands, and those sedgy quagmires, where the water-lily had been inaccessible before, where the water-hen had defied approach to her young, and where the flocks of white-maws had laid their precious eggs in vain. Nearer to Kirkhill, than to Etherwood and the parish-school, how just were Hugh's claims to the first pleasures of that place; and how easily could he have forestalled the vulgar but busy school-children in possession of it, had it not been for that ever-growing Latin, those too-swiftly rising Romans of Cornelius Nepos, which had detained him, a solitary pupil, under his father's concentrated eye! Even now when, in the troubled joy he felt in the removal of that eye for a space, strange hopes were whispered to him from behind—yet what possibilities of terror gazed from

before! For had not his father ere he finally departed, reined in the horse Rutherford a moment at the gate, and called him to the horse's side, stooping down to remind him of the pages that were to be revised by himself, for fuller mastery; also of the rules from Ruddiman's Rudiments, that were to be committed to memory for complete use; in order that the regretted absence might not be altogether a loss? Then, as to the ice, Hugh knew, at any rate, how in the mean time its best charm had been already taken away. Etherwood school was not so busy or so bound to its set hours, but that children on the way to and from it had loitered long enough to find the secret of so tempting a sliding-ground; and they had snatched its delight in their play-time, till the bloom of the spot was soiled by many a smear or flaw. Yet, though the spot had been thus invaded before him, and he had lost the joy of first possession, there still remained for Hugh a private relish to be hastily gratified, now that his father was absent, in the safe hours of parish school-time, when he could have the ground to himself.

The first day of his release from his father's vigilance the boy found in his anticipated pleasure, by himself, in the icy hollow the new zest, not of watchfulness only, but of self-restraint as well. An influence hung over him, from the recent glimpse of a bliss unthought-of before, in the recent gracious approval of his teacher. The closer touch of paternal kindness, for a moment like that he had felt in childhood, warmly wrought about his heart, and moved him to study Cornelius Nepos unseen; nay, even, for the future's sake, to prepare the Rules of Ruddiman, though free from superintending vigilance. Moreover, Andrew had to walk the same day to the town, where the horse would have been left; and to come riding back at night. In this circumstance there was a check for Hugh till that day at least was over. For, had it not been heard of that coaches were missed, and that travellers

rather returned than awaited the next day under hospitable roofs; and so, if the ice tempted too long, then instead of Andrew at the stable-door by dusk, might not the parlour candle-light show a more awful form?

But Andrew went and returned duly, and all that was safe. New mornings brought new thoughts, new balances of virtue with pleasure. Again was the frosty air exhilarating, sometimes sparkling; and the distant marsh-ice, with its solitary glidings, its swift companionless exploits, triumphs, or discoveries, grew more entrancing than expectation had told; until Cornelius Nepos and his Romans were like to be outweighed. Nay, even through what had seemed most helpful to them, did they utterly lose substance and kick the beam, as when Brennus, leader of the hostile Gauls, threw his barbaric sword into the Roman scales. For, although Hugh Rowland knew well the parish school-hours, and in his shy solitude adhered to these only, if on no other account but a wild shrinking from strangers—nevertheless, suddenly a little troop of parish-scholars surprised him at that very time, and with a bound, a race, a hollow hum, and noiseless rush, flew forth upon the ice that kept him spell-bound, mingling their slides with his. What wonder, indeed that they should be there in school-hours, when he saw them headed by little Will, the sly glebe cow-herd—considering how idly that urchin was inclined! There, at their head, was this school-hating imp of mischief with smaller imps behind him, not so ignorant as he. But this was not the chief surprise. Most wonderful of all was it to behold amongst them *Kyloe-Jock* and his dog *Bauldy*. For, though they both had left the hill—whence, at this season, the very *kyloes* had departed to some shedded camp, with vast store of turnips—yet both were now punctually each Sabbath at the church; both were well known to be busily at school, under Andrew's careful supervision, and under the very eye of that schoolmaster who was at once elder, precentor, and Kirk-session clerk. Did Jock fear no penal-

ties for playing truant from school; did *Bauldy* entertain no prudent forethought; or could they both be led away by such an inferior creature as little Will, who slunk with deference from the very shyness of Hugh Rowland?

Truly a most unaccountable pair were *Kyloe-Jock* and *Bauldy*. To see them in broad day-light again, severed from any imposing charge of wild cattle, away from all labyrinthine obscurity of stack-yard or *Bogle*, was fascination more than ever. Hovering apart, unmixed with them, sliding or practising the incipient skates in independence of their boon or bane, their fear or favour—to be within view of them was yet to be of their circle and company. *Bauldy* remained a steadfast mark upon the shore, now dim but magnified, now distinct though dwindled back; and for the most part sat on end, to gaze imperturbably, whatever his master's seeming destiny. Luckless might that destiny have been supposed. For, big as was *Kyloe-Jock*, wearing a shortened tail-coat, that flew behind him as he ran, there were little ones in pinafores, who belonged to his class at school, and who hurried at last away in fear. Even Will the cow-herd boasted over him, that he was "*Dults*" (*i. e.* the blockhead of his class), though without angering him; and, but for Jock's heedlessness of all this, doubtless Will himself would have gone away. Not that *Kyloe-Jock*, like little Will, cast any sly glance at the boy Rowland then, as if claiming secrecy from a new accomplice in higher quarters; nor did he laugh at all, like Will; but only with a deep enjoyment rushed again upon the slide, that glittered with him into a length beyond belief, until he well might hoot, and give a yell, turning slowly round—to show *Bauldy*, perhaps, that he had not utterly vanished. Then, departing farther for another race, back did he come steadily, as if shot forth from a gun, his form a giant's, his breath like smoke, his face bright-red, shooting with incredible speed into ordinary view; yet was not the smooth ice swift enough for him, but he must post up and down

upon it marvellously faster, as on horse-back, then fly with his arms along it as with wings like an ostrich; inevitably overtaking in a moment the eagerest effort of that cowherd, whose silly presence could be no more than a stumbling-block and pillow to his magical career. Yet, for all his magical effect, most unassuming was *Kyloe-Jock*. In some imperceptible natural way he grew familiar to the mere spectator, and took hold upon acquaintance without ceremonies of introduction; so that ere long, neither seeking it nor sought, the boy was *with* him. Sharing, joining, sliding and shouting too, he seemed to have been familiar with *Kyloe-Jock* for years before; not now even excluded by the dog Bauldy.

Thus did they glide, float, or whirl into a dizzy unison of recklessness, alike superior to the hungry instinct or the trivial fear that took the cowherd home, whether at the sight of the quick darkening of the afternoon, or when the ice gave a crack and a weltering groan, as if to thaw beneath them. As for *Jock*, *he* had no fear: *he* could tell, merely by peering up, that it was not so late as it looked, nor would it thaw, but snow. And, when the boy at last misgave himself too greatly to stay longer, though *Jock* and *Bauldy* would still have sat or slid on contented, as beings without a home, a dinner, or a dread—they both, nevertheless, forsook their own satisfaction to convoy him on the right way; perhaps at view of a sudden uncertainty that had terrified him—since the right way proved to be of their choosing, so that, if he had not turned when they turned, he would have found himself high upon an unknown hill in the dark. Then *Hugh*, as they left him alone in the same abrupt unceremonious fashion, still gazed bewildered for home, on the wrong side; till, like a dog himself, he recognized a scent the other way, of the kitchen-cookery that spoke volumes to him out of the fog, and, next moment, there broke out a part of the house, with roof lost in uncertainty, and endless wall—the bare branch dripping by the

dim gable, the smoke from the chimney striving against a pressure from the viewless sky, and one fire-lit window, hanging in the air, disclosing its inner spectacle of shadows. A sight too changefully dubious still on the brightest background, sometimes too colossal, to be trusted without caution! So he skirts around to reconnoitre like an Indian, to circle in upon it from a corner, ere finally stealing upstairs. He has seen, in the passage, that the hat and great-coat are absent as before! The snow that had been prophesied, too, has begun to fall. It is falling faster; falling to make the night earlier; falling and showering and whirring down, to cover the ground deep as of old, to fill the roads, to block the house in, to sever it from the world, and towns, and travellers. Then safely, with book in hand, out of his little new bedroom, he comes down at leisure, and seems by his undisturbed aspect to have been some time in; if at all too late, then seeming not to have heard the dinner-bell, which *Nurse Kirsty* rang outside; nor to have known, in his studious absorption, that her harsh voice had searched for him beyond, prompted by a fonder anxiety than *hers*.

It snowed a day or two together, but as yet only to brighten the earth and clear the sky. In the soft radiant intervals, what augmented pleasure! Innocent satisfaction comes even to little *Hannah* and lesser *Joey*; brushing the snow from their brief track, to the wheel-ruts outside the gate; enterprising farther along the road, past the very barn and stable, to smooth by dint of patience one icy groove—even to venture on the ditch below the fleecy elm-tree in the powdered hedge, so tiresomely well known through all disguises from that weary old nursery-window which still keeps the children in sight. For *Nurse Kirsty*, with her toothachy face in flannel, stands within, ironing or plaiting, sewing or crimping. She could not see over to the marsh: she knew nothing of *Cornelius Nepos*; still less than the mistress herself, who might at least hear her eldest boy repeat those rules of *Ruddiman*, to make sure that

he observed his father's grave injunction. Surely neither of them knew anything at all of *Kyloe-Jock*; and, if *any* one watched in secret, to lay up a store of new power, or to vindicate the old, it certainly was not the mother, whose chidings were so open at the sharpest, whose purposes were so transparent, however eager. It surely mattered not, besides, that in the shoes of *Jock* there were holes, and but ill-patched fragments of other cloth on his corduroy; while through the cap he wore—a blue one with a red knob upon the top, even as a lid over something strange—there came up tufts of his hair like dry grass; nor were the hues of his face less vivid by comparison, but even with a more life-like glow went kindling out to his projected ears, which mocked all inclemency of weather. Not that the frost or snow altered him, but he lifted up to them the standard of their measurement; and shoes were to him not for clothing, but of swiftness to slide; caps were as mere adornment, not covers; a coat or plaid less for garment than for pockets or for covering in sleep. Nay, if he were one who could not learn at school, he threw a great light upon it himself, explaining why he was said to be only half-witted. Though with a look askance, suggesting deeper knowledge, well did he inquire—rather as if from *Bauldy* than from *Hugh*—why then did the folks want him to know the catechism? why turn him back to the *Second Primer*? why be angered if he had played the truant for one afternoon? Whereat *Hugh* wondered equally with *Bauldy*. Not that *Kyloe-Jock* was going any more to play truant in order to be on the ice! It was now only between times that he hurried there, or on the Saturday afternoon. For the master had made his palms so thoroughly to remember his duty of being at school that he still writhed as he showed forth the reminding method. He did so not in mockery of the master, but only earnestly to prove why he must not delay again behind the rest, so long as ice and snow remained. Moreover,

with his mittenless hands, as he clapped them in the frosty weather, he had found out a local secret which he made that an occasion for confiding at the same time. Taking a piece of frosted sedge, and standing solemnly, with tails uplifted to the lurid sunset that glowed behind him like a fire upon the snow, he exhibited himself as the schoolmaster, burning one end of that mimic *tawse* in silence at the school fire, and coughing as he fixed his eye upon the distance. Then on tiptoe did *Jock* walk to a stump of paling by the edge where *Bauldy* sat, and begin to lay successive strokes majestically upon the wood, pausing to cough loud between, till even *Bauldy* whimpered, drawing back, like to utter a yell—though *Hugh*, shuddering within, would have laughed. But the frosty air was all echoes then; and from the distant brae, through some change of the snow, came back a new echo, so deliberate, distinct, and grave, repeating everything more awfully, that for once did the uncouth dog take fright. It fled away with an actual yell; swifter, indeed, than the elsewhere-muffled hill deigned to record. But when *Bauldy's* master stopped, indignant at him, and summoned him vainly back—it was too much to hear the spectral halloo, the ghostly whistle, the very rustling and roar of phantom *Kyloes* that returned. *Hugh* himself then also fled in terror; nay, when the *Kyloe*-herd, not the least aghast himself, would have checked the boy's flight in turn, he only quickened it: for back again came graver ejaculations from above, and the hill shouted solemnly *Hugh's* own name. Then, seeing more need to overtake *Bauldy*, did *Jock* take but a sudden step or two to a long glassy path, that bore him smoothly and swiftly, with both hands in his pockets, towards *Etherwood* school.

Back to school must even *Bauldy* have retreated. Back to school went *Kyloe-Jock* after him. *Hugh Rowland* alone was masterless, wild, and free. And still gently fell the intermittent snow, to separate and shut them in.

## CHAPTER IV.

## DESTINY MARKS OUT KYLOE-JOCK.

THE SNOWY country was but sheeted by degrees; field, hedge, and hill only lost their shapes imperceptibly by fairy-like changes to one shrouded mould, under a sky that seemed azure above it all, or amber, or vast with stars. The people could still come with ease to church on that Sabbath when the stranger preached; that tall, and gaunt, and elderly Probationer—with one limb mysteriously different from the other, leaving a round print beside each single footstep to the church-door—who stayed two nights, and went upstairs to bed with an iron sound, depositing but one giant shoe outside the best-bedroom door. A preacher whom, it was said, mysterious powers had bewildered; ever since that day when the gipsies captured him, marking him out to the glance of a great Magician who lived near! On former occasions, in Mr. Rowland's absence, had that memorable "Dominie" come to fill his pulpit, with abstracted mien, and wandering, dream-like habit; and had stood poring into a stray book by the hour, as he did now, and been heard strangely in his chamber, stamping to and fro, and rehearsing his sermon before unseen attentive audiences, or holding dialogue with fancied Co-Presbyters—never destined, poor man, to enjoy the dignity of either. But he had never before so delightfully accorded his sympathy to Mrs. Rowland's concern for the progress of Hugh as he now did snuffing up, at the names of Ruddiman and Cornelius Nepos, an air of inspiration; examining the boy with a pedagogic zeal, and with a technical keenness discovering his errors, which alarmed while it aided. Fain would the *Dominie* have revelled longer in a congenial delay which the mother pressed, in order that the relentless exercise might have helped his victim. But the snow warned the good Mr. George Simson to betake himself homeward, and Hugh Rowland inwardly rejoiced. The preacher swung his inflexible wooden limb over the back of his small pony, as if he had walked for-

ward upon it; and, as Andrew with a demure gravity disposed the skirt of Mr. Simson's great coat above the creature's tail, Mr. Simson waved a hand with dignity, to let the bridle go, and to bid farewell to all. Thereupon, less like a Colossus than the old disproportionate forms in Christmas revel, or Abbots of Unreason upon pictured hobby-horses—one foot avoiding the snow—he was borne away into the wastes. Borne away toward his paternal Manse, which stood hard by the ruined Monastery of "Kennaquhair," near where the deathless Enchanter abode in his late days. *He*, also, the *Dominie*, was borne away immortal; although at that time giving place in Hugh Rowland's mind to hopes of freedom with *Kyloe-Jock*.

Still was the hoary church distinguishable (and the flaky end-aisle that belonged to Wanton-Walls), beside the furry trees, from the hooded corn-stacks and the fleecy hay-rick with one end cloven; where Andrew from the stable would yet mount the ladder, to slice it down with his trenchant blade, under the hanging icicles, past the ice-sheathed progs. The horse Rutherford was champing at his stall, though for the most part idly; and his hollow stamping could be sometimes heard, if but in token of impatience. Hard the times were already, indeed, for all wild creatures without stall or herd; and the shepherd, though at home, sought the unfolded sheep on the braes when they wandered. Birds of all kinds put off their shyness, as if sorry to have been wayward and secret; the hare and rabbit trespassed on the shrubbery, invading the garden by tracks that betrayed a piteous urgency in their boldness; while poisonous berries, alike with culinary roots or precious barks of fruit-trees, were turned to *their* vital uses. Sweet it was, too, even yet, to see the parlour-window opened, at the violet shadow of little Robin-red-breast on the feathery sill, that Hannah and Joey might feed him, as Hugh could have done once, with crumbs from the snug table near the fire—disturbing though

Robin's visits were now to those forced efforts upon Ruddiman and his despotic rules, which alone brought a shiver at the letting in of the cold. For the others, they could afford to hold their breath, not even whispering lest Robin might take fright: each peck he made, they could be delighted; till, at the triumphant clapping of their hands, he fluttered back from the very curtain within, away to the snow outside. Then with old stories of Babes in the Wood, of children rescued from the snow, of brothers that came back in time, of merchants hurrying home with gifts and packages, and the avalanche that buried the cottage for a time—might Mamma console them when the window was shut, and the curtains drawn. But oh! why for *one*, had there been Latin rules invented, harder than Draconic, more deserving the sleepy oblivion that often strove against them? Why had there been any Romans, why such an officious recorder as Cornelius Nepos? Why, indeed, any parents except mothers—who were so easily convinced that tasks had been got by heart, when they were repeated fresh from the book? *They* might carefully hear over the rules and the exceptions, but demanded no practical application; and they could see that Cornelius was revised, with dictionary and syntax at hand, yet not know if the meaning grew clearer in retrospect, or only deeper, darker, more confused. Maternal anger itself, how simply appeased, how soon relaxed! It could be talked into conviction of integrity, and argued back to complacent trust in progress. Under such soft supervision the books might, after a little, be put away; and, with lifted face and ready tongue, the gossip might be joined in—the little trivial children's gossip which the servants raise even in snow-time; which spreads about the small neighbourhood, more eagerly as it closes smaller in.

Such matter of gossip there was for the little household world of Kirkhill Manse, during the absence of its head in that season of deep winter. The hen-roost had been suffering. Now a

chicken, and now a duck, had gone; till at length the favourite hen, speckled and crested, that had laid eggs so long, was suddenly missing before the dusk of the afternoon. This was after Andrew, speaking of polecats from the planting, or weasels from the dykes, had closed the hutch at night. That precaution had evidently been in vain; it could not, therefore, be weasel or polecat that had done the harm. Nurse Kirsty hinted then at poor old Lucky Wood, the glebe-boy's grandmother, who was on the parish, and would often be coming to the Manse in her old cloak, with stick and basket, to hang about the kitchen for old bones, old rags—perhaps even, as Kirsty hinted, for better things. Was she not all the oftener coming in that weather; and were there not foot-steps in the morning toward the hen-house door? Yet Andrew said openly that the steps might be Nurse Kirsty's own: on which supposition of his, clearing away suspicion where it had unduly fallen, little Will had come back, to sleep by Andrew's leave in the bar, close by, with a rusty gun all loaded—Will firmly believing with Andrew now, as a greater authority than both of them had agreed, that the real evil-doer was no other than a fox from the firwoods on the hill. No less, in fact, was this great authority than *Kyloe-Jock* himself with Bauldy. Tracing the marks, scenting the very track, they were aware by what ways the robber had come, lain in ambush, and departed. Yet to no purpose had Will kept guard two nights. The third, as *Kyloe-Jock* declared, he might watch till morning and hear no sign; but more hens would be taken away, till all were done, or till the snow was melted! Nevertheless had Nurse Kirsty risen to higher scorn, and, speaking of *Kyloe-Jock* for the first time, had vowed like an oracle that the culprits were Jock himself, and his dog Bauldy. She told of his idle doings at Halloween, and suspected a truth in the report that at Hogmanay he had led the profane guizards. She nodded her head more darkly yet,

shaking it more ominously, when, to Mrs. Rowland, before the boy Hugh, she hinted that *Kyloe-Jock* was on the parish too—more starved than *Lucky Wood* herself; nay, but a half-natural in wits, by birth even something worse—an evil example and a bad companion, of whom the Minister ought to hear when he came home! These things, in greater privacy, did the boy, roused to resistance by *Kirsty's* dark insinuations, explain and reconcile to the maternal judgment. He even extolled *Kyloe-Jock*, and used cunning eloquence to show him to be the only help in this case worthy of being depended on;—thus, at least, paving the way for security against *Kirsty*, should she say, before a higher bar, that *Kyloe-Jock's* first appearance about the manse had been developed farther in secret than the supreme law allowed. He did not, however, disclose the full knowledge which he already possessed of *Kyloe-Jock's* purpose to constitute himself, unsolicited, the protector of the Manse, and to bring the true depredator to justice by a competent exercise of his own energy in defence of his own credit.

How suddenly had *Hugh's* sensitiveness to the touch of strangers left him! That very evening in secret, in the dark back-court behind the peat-stack, did he even crouch in company with the glebe cow-herd, to await the coming of *Kyloe-Jock* and *Bauldy* on their mystic purpose. Neither were their plans made clearly manifest when they came. No sooner on the household premises, indeed, than *Bauldy* took up the ground as *Jock's* own, to be sentinelled against the most customary frequenter or settled occupant. Yet *Bauldy* followed at a whisper, to consider alone with *Jock* those places *he* examined—to peer forth with him from that opened shrubby-wicket, where he looked toward the dark hill; and, even when *he* would apparently have left it open, to counsel in some unaccountable way, that it should be shut again. This was a wicket which the thoughtless cow-herd had purposely

opened. So opening it, each fruitless night he had watched, in order that no barrier might interrupt the approach of *Reynard*. At that did *Kyloe-Jock* uncouthly shrug his shoulders up. Turning to *Will* the cowherd, he eyed him with an eldritch grin; and there was something weirdly in the silence wherewith he put aside that glebe-boy's advices, stepping back to the sheltered nook of the peat-stack, as if to muse alone in a warm place. Notwithstanding which, when *Bauldy* curled himself satisfied to his master's feet, and *Will* leant deferentially by, with little *Rowland* at hand, *Jock* condescended to spend a certain interval in easy colloquy, as if to await the time for action in leisurely discourse. Compared with the knowledge he imparted, what was that of letters? Without parents, it seemed, or effect of teaching, what uninherited lore was his—as if to claim obeisance from patriarchs before a Druid not anointed! He seemed even about to perform some sacrifice, rather than to slay. Meanwhile he turned his thoughts aside—reasoning of adders, how to deal with them in contest, how to prize their cast-off skins; of the water-rat, that would defy the weasel; of the toad, and of that dreadful creature from whose touch no mortal survives—the *Ask* or *Eft*, which like a tiny crocodile is seen amphibious about lonely pools; also concerning the horse-hairs which in water can be converted, through certain observances, into living eels. Of *Bauldy* he spoke—how *Bauldy* intercepted rabbits from their holes; nay, how in the course of that last summer *Bauldy* had been tempted to seize a full-grown hare. For it had lain staring close at him; and was so strong, squealing so loud, that it proved all the dog could do to hold her; and *Jock* had been terrified, thinking maybe it might be auld *Ailie Mathie* from *Boon*, that was reckoned to be uncanny in her disguises. “*Megsty*, man—*Aih*, *Wull!*” he said, with a fresh emotion, “*Wasna* I put to 't that time—but gin I hadna done something quick, the keeper might hae been in the plantings and hear't



her, it was siccan a clear simmer-day—then a' owre wi' Bauldy, pair falla'. So I just down wi' my staff, and up wi' a palin' stab, and fair felled her wi' the sharp side o't ahint the lugs o' her, till she was quiet. Hoo! hoo! hoo! what think ye I thoct that time?" chuckled he wildly: "geyan fear't though I was?" But when Will could not answer, Jock pursued. "Man, I thoct the hare's ee' gat a look o' auld Ailie's, the vera gait an'd see't her sleepin' i' the Kirk, aetime I was there—wi' her mooth an' her ee' open, though the Minister was thrang ca'in' at the De'il an' her! Weel, what did I do, but I buiry't the hare in-under a whin buss, an' I set Bauldie to watch the kyloes his 'lane—an' me awa' owre the hills to Boon, for nae ither errant but to ken gif auld Ailie was to the fore yet. Man, Wull, wasna I glad when I seed the auld donnart body sittin' i' the ingle like her ordinar', thrang at the stockin'-needles, an' girmin' at the neebors' bairns? The very minute I was gotten back to the hill, didna I howk the hare up in a jiffy, an' skinned her, and kennelt a bit fire, down by the burn in a lown spot, and pits her birlin' roond atowre't to roast, on three sticks like a tinkler's. I eatit her. At ony rate, Bauldy an' me eatit her, stoop and roop. Aih! what wad the Laird hae said? or Maviswud o' Maviswud? or auld Jock Murray o' Wanton-Wa's hissel', even? Hoo, hoo, hoo!" And more eldritch and weirdly still was the laughter of Jock, than his solemnity.

Suddenly Jock rose, and, with him, Bauldy uncurling himself sat up on end. They looked up into the dark, as at the sound of a hushing whisper that passed above; where the wan half-face of the moon had ceased to strive with the moving blackness, but downward from her place came wavering some great stray snow-flakes, that lighted here and there upon the peats, the ground, and the bristling hair of Bauldy. It was as if they saw in these the scattered feathers of some ravaged fowl in the upper world, and looked at each other with significance accordingly. Then the Kyloe-herd took a handful of the former

snow, pressing it together without effect, but nodding conviction at this sign that it was frosty still, so that the shower which now fell scantily and slowly would not long continue. Thereafter he asked to see the old iron rat-trap, which, as Will had admitted, was in the barn; and took it silently, going off with it alone, while his sentinel dog remained. This was to the end that he might set down the trap in some particular spot, beyond the corner of the wall, near a spreading fir-shrub there, which stood like an ambush toward the back-yard. He came back from thence, stooping along the wall, below the ivy and below the barn-eaves, into the gutter close by, where the hen-house door stood close, with its lutch half-raised as usual. It was seen then, that from his pocket he had been sowing upon his way some mysterious seed; the last grains of which he sprinkled out carelessly by that place of egress for the fowls at dawn, and returned thoughtfully to his former shelter. Faster the snow fell for a little, and wavered and floated again, till it came to a close, and there was through the dusk a soft hoary bloom again, with the white tops of things more discernible than before, and the woolly fibres of the trees reaching at the wan marblings of the sky. A sigh might have been thought to come in the stillness from the breast of *Kyloe-Jock*. It was the glebe cow-herd, however; who doubted, with a shiver, that the fox would ever come in so cold a night.

"Nicht? *Nicht!*" responded that herd of greater creatures, staring at him side-wise. "Is't *nicht* ye say? An' div ye think he wad rarely come, the third time, at nicht ava'? Weel—oo' dark folk canna but whiles wonder at you weiss yanes, daft though ye may ca' *huz!* It's easy to be seen ye haena enter't into the gaits o' foxes. The third nicht *is* canny, nae doo't—but it's no till the dead part o'ts weel owre, that he'll e'en sae mickle as slip out o' his den by the fir-plantin,—an' no till life has begoon to steer again, when ye think a's safe, that he'll loup in upon the prey, an' awa' wi't ayont the dyke

an' the stank an' the whins, ben intil his hole. There's nae less nor nine holes o' them up bye. Though ye maunna think they're to be countit by holes. Na—they hae aye a front door, an' a back door, an' may be a bit side air-winnock or a keek-hole—an', when the t'ane door's here, t'ither's maist likely a quarter o' a mile ben the wud. I'm thinkin' there's just about three auld grown-up he-foxes a'thegither, the 'noo, on this side the big plantin'—there's ane a broon colour, anither red, an' there's anither sandy. I wadna wonder gin it's the sandy ane. An', gif it's *him*, man, he'll juist come, and come, an' better come, though there wasna nae need for't—as lang as the scent winna lie, an' the hunt isna out. Mony a time has *he* been huntit, too! Man! oo've seen aboon twa-score dowgs a' efter him full cry, an' Maviswud o' Maviswud, an' the Laird himsel', and Baillie o' Mellerstain, an' sweerin' Jock Murray o' Wanton-Wa's like a vera deevil, as they'd been dragoons efter yae auld covenannter, as they ca'd it lang-syne—an' in a moment they lost scent o' him till a' was dumb, ilka yowlin' tyke lickit-back, ilka red-coat glowerin' at the other, till at last they rade hame in the darkening to drink, as toom an' fushionless as bourtree whistles. An' efter a', gif he *did* come, what could ye *do wi' him?*" Almost dreadfully did Jock ask that question, which none could answer. Mournfully he went on, scoffing down the paltry purposes of glebe-Will.

"Gun? Na, na. As for yon bit ratton-trap, he'll juist awa' wi't, an' the chucky forbye, like a teegger doon the brae, aff to the neist-hand cover for hame. An', but for what's said at the Manse here—it wadna been Jock, far less Bauldy, that wad hae made or meddle't wi' auld Saunders, wha has gotten faes eneuch, puir lad. Man, couldna ye hae pitten yersel' in *his* place, withoot help o' *huz* twa that kens him sae weel! Ye've comed oot o' yeer hole, oo'll say, doon by the pailin', across the bog, and up the dyke side—no haein' pykit a bane this twal' hours and mair,

in siccan yaupish weather, sin' ye fand the last deed craw i' the ditch—an' what div ye see first, when ye skirt ahint the hen-houses? A yett wide open, that used for to be aye steekit close. Oo'll say ye e'en gang through, for a' that. What see ye neist, on the vera spot ye're to pass, or e'er ye win to the hen-house door—or whaur the first hens boo't to come scartin' oot by day-break, as ye lig in wait aneth the mirkest bield o' a fir-buss—*what* but the hatch-hole lifted like a trap itsel', and the grund or the snaw steered an' smuithed again, like 's Ann'ra the Bethral' hissel' had howkit a grave inunder? Houts! ye're no sic a gowk an' a gomerall as juist to gang loupin' in! Na, I'se warrant ye see a heap glegger, ma man Wull, nor ye *div* the' noo—ye see ilka track ye've made in the snaw yersel, an' ilka spot that's *withoot* a track. The lee-lane thing ye dinna see—it's hoo the snaw's sel' can hae the hairt to work against ye!"

Finally did the uncouth speaker grow silent, plunging his hands deep from the cold, which made the cow-herd's teeth chatter, till he urged their departure to the barn. There even the dog burrowed into the straw, as if heedless of further watching; while his master drew the doors as close behind them, as if the soundest sleep were the best; and the boy himself hurried gladly back within the house, to forget the ineffectual sight of their conclave, that seemed idle after all, in warmth and sleep.

Coldly, silently did the morning break, to no apparent consequence but that of troubled recollections about other things. The blue light dawned on Rud-diman's dull boards, where the book had been last thrown before the bedroom window-blind; and the first demand was by its early warning to repair past neglect. For the first voice was that of Andrew at the back gate, mounting on the horse Rutherford; which neighed and stamped as Andrew left brief word with Nurse Kirsty, how he was off to Thirlstané post-office for the expected letter, but would bring the groceries, the merceries, and what wares besides were wanted.

It was only as a dream that the earlier cock-crow had been followed by alarms and noises, back into roost, stable-yard, byre, and sty, with Rutherford already neighing at his stall. All this was a something that had relapsed to the usual sounds, and had turned on the other side, as it were, to repose again—by no means courting the new daylight. And, even now that the daylight had come, the barn doors were still snugly closed, as if on sluggards—so that Hugh had to conclude that the night's enterprise had failed. As he listens, however, it ever and anon grows plainer that Bauldy by fits was barking within the barn—a signal which seems to have some meaning, and which tells Hugh to make haste.

When they came out, and gathered again in private, *Kyloe-Jock* even stretched his arms and yawned. It was Bauldy that had sprung round the corner of the wall, and came sniffing along from it to the still-closed wicket, scraping there eagerly, making the snow fly behind him, to get through, or to creep under. Those marks of paws, of dragging—might indeed be his. But at the end of the train of barley-seed which Jock had sowed, round the corner, near the shelter of the young spruce-fir, what scattered feathers, and stray bird-down amongst the snow! Some specks of blood in it, too—and the trap, the buried trap, is there no longer—and, the moment that the gate is opened, like an arrow loosed from the bow did Bauldie dart away across the snowy paddock, by the white churchyard, down the stile, down the brae toward the hollow below the hill!

Away after him, shouting at the fox's traces confused with his, flew scarce less swift the two herds, scarce less eager the single boy. So singular were those traces, that they soon passed beyond mistake. First scuffling on, over the snow, then plucking it crisp from bare ground in patches with long bounds between, they plunged into the deeper places, as from a force that had bounded still on, indeed, and had sprung up again in desperate energy, but

lifted whole loads away with them, tearing out the very earth and pebbles in their course. At length had they struggled; till they had rolled like a ball altogether, and gone rolling till they vanished. Here lay the ravished chicken, and there ran *Kyloe-Jock*, and Will; while in the distance below, round a knoll of purest white, still snuffed and searched and hovered the disappointed Bauldy. A snow-wrapped block of stone it seemed, or some miniature of an avalanche, that rested there as a centre of the dog's bewildered barking, of his circling, of his retreating for aid. All else but his own marks was spotless; save where along the hill above, with a hoary sprinkling on the upper plumes, gloomed the dark of the pine-wood behind its far-ranged columns. But *Kyloe-Jock* spurned the fleecy ball with his foot, and Will the cow-herd smote it into a powdery cloud, while through the powder rushed in Bauldy, snapping, struggling, yelling painfully in the struggle with a form more savage than himself. Fettered as was the fox, half-enveloped in a wreath around the snow-ball that clogged his hind-foot, his wicked eye gleamed out, as he gnashed his sharp muzzle into Bauldy's throat. Nay, Bauldy was so vanquished that he turned, dragging both with a convulsive spring upon his master, whose blow from a mighty bludgeon was imminently required. Blows rained upon the enemy then; a cow-cudgel wreaked its revenge upon him; there were stones from the nearest dyke that mauled him, out of mere frantic impulse; Bauldy, taking fresh courage, ran in again, and bit and shook the motionless hind-leg of the helpless foe. He was silent still—dying, as it seemed, in grim silence; stretching himself out; muffling himself in his white mantle, as it were, and heaving the last breath, quite dead: so that the others would then have taken him up in triumph, had not *Kyloe-Jock* pushed them back. He even gave Bauldy a kick away, as the dog shook the carcass. Yet raising a hedge-stake he had pulled close by, he came down with it one mighty stroke behind the

head, like an executioner, and for a moment, as the blow descended, that small yellow eye might have been seen to open. It quivered, it shrank: but never closed again. It stared out wide, from the attitude of a last snarling turn. Then a second time the blow fell, even a third: but all was quiet.

*Kyloe-Jock* looked grim at the others, leaning on the hedge-stake. He drew the cuff of that tail-coat across his face, as it manifestly had often been drawn before, and surveyed the slain; not unheroically.

"It's the sandy ane," he said. "Aih man! But he's been teugh. He juist grippit-on to life like roots o' trees. Ye'd hae thocht the hail feck o' us was to dee, afore he wad dee; an', efter a', it wasna *huz* that could hae trickit the likes o' him. It was the snaw, man! I'se warrant he had ten times the glegness, an' the kenninness, o' the hail

heap o' us—Bauldy an' a'. Trap, quo' ye! Hoo! what was a ratton-trap to him? My certy, *hit* wadna lang hae been a fash to Sanders.—Oot o' that, Bauldy, I tell ye, ye vicious brute! I'm thinkin', callants, the less oo' say about this, the better. For Maviswud an' the Laird, an' a heap mae, 'll miss him geyan sair!"

Doubtless the fox was safely deposited away, by him and Will. As for the boy—whether or not there came on him from those words a chill remembrance of very different speeches in Cornelius Nepos—he hung his head even as he told at home, in part, how accused innocence had been vindicated. Ere long, Andrew came riding back from Thirlstane, and brought the expected letter. It appointed the day when Mr. Rowland would certainly return home.

*To be continued.*