

***S. R. CROCKETT***



***SWEETHEARTS  
AT HOME***

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# **Sweethearts at Home**

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# HE TELLS HOW IT ALL CAME ABOUT

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## I

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A sleepy Sunday morning—and no need for any one to go to church.

It was at Neuchâtel, under the trees by the lake, that I first became conscious of what wonderful assistance Sweetheart might be to me in my literary work. She corrected me as to the date upon which we had made our pilgrimage to Chaumont, as to the color of the hair of the pretty daughter of the innkeeper whom we had seen there—in her way quite a Swiss Elizabeth Fortinbras. In a word, I became aware that she had kept a diary. Sweetheart, like her nearest literary relative, began with "poetry." That was what we called it then. We have both revised our judgments since. Only Sweetheart has been more wise than I should have been at her age. She has resisted temptation, and rigorously ruled out all verse from the Diary as at present published! This is wonderful. I published mine.

Since then, she and I have been preparing the present volume, just as eagerly as if we had "yielded to the solicitations of numerous friends," as the privately-printed books say.

No, it was quite the contrary with us. Nobody, except one nice publisher, knows anything about it. He asked us to let him print it, and even he has not seen the very least little

scrap. All he knows is that Sweetheart has a good many thousand friends scattered up and down two hemispheres, and he believes (as we also are vain enough to believe) that they will not let *Sweetheart's Diary* go a-begging to be bought.

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There is something curiously dreamy about the Lake of Neuchâtel. I knew it and the school down by the pier long ago, when the little town still preserved distinct traces of the hundred and fifty years of Prussian drill-sergeants. Here and there the arms of Brandenburg were to be seen curiously mixed, and almost entwined, with the strong red cross of the Swiss Confederation.

Specially interesting is the opposite side of the lake, for there the Cantons push forward their narrow necks of territory to the very lake shore—possibly as the price of their support against the Eagles of the North, whose claws have never let go their hold but this once. There, within a day's easy walk, you can pass from Canton Vaud into Canton Friburg and back again into Vaud. Then, Morat-way, you come on a little inset square of Canton Berne, whose emblematic bears also have their claws in every pie thereabout. And all the way, never a hotel for the fleecing of the foreigner! Here and there, indeed, one passes a country inn with sanded floor. More often it is only a rather superior house with a bush hung out French-fashion over the threshold.

It is best, as Sweetheart and I found, to make for one of these. Generally I had known them of old, and though since

then the years had done some stiff route-marching, most of their hosts and hostesses remembered me.

How do you get there? Well, you cross the lake almost at its narrowest part. A little stream drains into it, slowly and in Dutch fashion, as if it were smoking a peaceful pipe by the way. Indeed, for a little while you might fancy yourself actually in Holland, so thickly are the flowers set. Only—only (and oh! the difference!) they are all wild. For I cannot help my heart beating faster when I set foot on any of the untrodden places of the earth, when I know that the next person I meet will be different from anybody I have ever met before—that he will be as frankly interested and very likely amused by me as I am by the moldy and the quaint about him—things that nobody in his senses has ever thought of looking at in that countryside for a hundred years! Privately there is often a quiet, widespread, wholly unspoken doubt of my entire sanity. That dry smile hovering about the mouth of the courteous mayor of the commune says as much. Just the same with the quick, intelligent glance that shoots betwixt husband and wife when you ask to see their barn—once the chapel of a long-destroyed monastery (Carthusians from the Italian valleys driven out by the religious wars). To them it is a barn, commodious—only a little damp. But it is nothing more. A new model one, now—all burnt brick, floor of concrete, with iron roof pillars—now *that* would be something worth crossing the lake to look at. Hold—there is one at Estavayer! The farmer there would be glad to show it, if only Monsieur and the young lady...? No! Well, there is no accounting for tastes, and that shrug from Master Pierre said quite plainly that he had the



poorest opinion of our mental capacity. But all the same Master Pierre is kind to the infirm—to those (as the Catechism says) "of weaker understanding."

Yes, there is the key. We can take our own time, and when we have done we can hang it up where we got it.

But good Master Pierre is curious too. Where might we be going? If it is a fair question—or, indeed, whether or not! "To Madame Marie Brigue's!" "Yes, but certainly!" "Had we known Madame Marie long?" The Elder of us had known her for some twenty years or more.

"When she was with old Monsieur Alexander—yes, at the Upper Riffel House, and everything in her charge?" Sanity was returned to us like a passport examined doubtfully. We should not this time be committed to a House of Retreat for the mentally infirm—no, not if fifty doctors, all specialists, had so certified. *We knew Madame Marie!* Master Pierre would lay aside everything and come with us. It was not possible that we could know the way.

I thanked Master Pierre, but for my own reasons preferred to go alone—that is to say, alone with Sweetheart, which is the best kind of loneliness.

"There is going to be a storm!" I said to my Maid, as we paced along side by side. Sweetheart looked at the cloudless September sky, at the boldly-designed splashes of the leaf-shadows making Japanese patterns on the narrow path through the wood. Then she regarded me inquiringly. Of a storm in the heaven above or on the earth beneath there was certainly no visible sign.

Then I explained that the tempest was a moral one, and would certainly break when we met in with Madame Marie.

And I set her this riddle to read, for she is fond of such.

I had always been first favorite with Madame Marie. She had spoiled me as a wandering boy. She has assisted me as a callow youth to the sweetmeats under her control. In my earlier manhood she had taken me to see her brother, who was a *curé* of a great parish in the Valais.

Yes, boy and man, she had always scolded me, railed upon me, declared to my face that I was of a surety "the Last of the Last," and that, altogether apart from my being a heretic, my misdeeds would inevitably render my future far from enviable! According to Madame Marie I was certainly bound for an ice-free port!

"And what had you done to her, father, to make her so angry with you—or at least scold you so much?"

"Only come in late for my meals!" I said. Sweetheart took one look at me, as one who would say, "Pray remember that I am no more a simple child!" But what she said aloud was, "Did all this happen before I was born?"

And I knew instantly that I was underlying an unjust suspicion, from which the very first glimpse of Madame Marie would instantly free me. For even when I knew her Madame had long passed the canonical age, and must now be verging on the three-score years and ten.

It was, however, quiet unlikely that she would ever refrain from scolding me, even in the presence of my eldest daughter.

By and by we came in sight of a little white house, and upon the path which passed beneath it. Over the door, half hidden by the yellow splashes of *Canariensis*, was the sign, "*Madame Marie Brigade ... Restaurant.*" There was a great

quiet everywhere about the place. Some pigeons were cooing in the Basse Cour. A cat regarded us with the sleepy dispassion of its race. However, there was certainly a stirring among earthenware somewhere towards the entrance of the cellar. We could make out the grating of carrots, or, as it might be, the scraping of potatoes. I motioned Sweetheart to get behind me—which she did, eager to take a hand in one of "father's ploys."

Then I went to the front door, and in the loud, confident voice of one who, after a short absence, has come back at the proper hour, to find his dinner not ready, I called out, "Marie, are those chops not done yet?"

A dish clattered on the floor. We could hear the splash of the fragments on the cool flagstones of the inner kitchen.

"Marie, old Lazybones! Here have I been twelve hours on the mountains, and not even an omelette ready!"

"It is the Herr-with-the-Long-Legs—the Herr who kept my good dinner waiting while he ran about the '*bergen*'! And now—oh, the Good-for-Nothing, the *Vaurien*, he come back to old Marie crying hunger—just as he used to do more than a score of years ago up in the Riffel House!"

And before I knew it I was embraced and kissed on both cheeks by this tall, gaunt old woman—greatly, of course, to the joy of Sweetheart. But her turn was yet to come. Madame Marie continued scolding me even in the utmost expansion of her greeting. She held me at arm's length and scolded. She scolded because I had come without warning, and because I had not come sooner. Scolded because I had let the years slip past till her hair was white like the snow on the mountains, on which I had so often tarried till my dinner

was burnt to a cinder! While mine—but there—who was this with me? Was I married? "Your daughter!" A daughter like that, and old Marie getting so blind that she had called me bad names—the names of the old time—in her hearing. But Mademoiselle would understand! She would pardon a poor old woman who had known her father, and been a mother to him, years and years before the young lady was born, or even thought of!

So, indeed, Mademoiselle understood very well. No forgiveness was necessary. She was all too happy. And while the dinner was preparing, she set down all these facts in her notebook, so that when Madame Marie came to the door to say that the omelette was ready to be put before us on the table, she called to Sweetheart that she was indeed her father's own daughter. For that in the old days at the Riffel House he had always been like that, sitting down on the very glacier to scribble in his notebook all about nothing, and so letting good food spoil because of his foolishness!

And so it happened that on our way back from Madame Marie's, Sweetheart let me see the first pages of her Diary. I found them so interesting that we arranged on the spot how they were to be published. And so here they are, ready (if you be simple) to please you as well as they pleased me.



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When the Roads Were Sweet, Safe and Silent.

So, preliminaries being settled, the elder of the *Sweetheart Travelers* was entrusted with the editing of this

book, on the express condition that he must *not* edit it! Strange but true! It is just sixteen years since, with the assistance of Mr. Gordon Browne's pencil, he began the preparation of the first series of *Sweetheart*. Ever since which, for him, fortunate day, he has been under promise to supply a second volume having for title *Sweethearts at Home*. From all over the world children keep writing to ask him for more adventures with his little companion on the front basket-seat of his tricycle. Gladly would he respond to this wish of unseen baby lips, generally expressed on ruled paper in straggly lines of doubtful spelling. But, alas! Sweetheart is nineteen and tall. She would be the death of her poor father (and of the machine) at the very first hill. Now she rides a "free-wheel" of her own, and saddest of all to relate, prefers Hugh John or other younger company to her ancientest of comrades. That is, on cycling trips. But she makes up to him in other ways, and hardly anything gives her greater pleasure than to "revisit the roads and ridges" where, sixteen years ago, her baby fingers, vigilant on the cycle bell, called the preceding wayfarer to attention.

Then we had the world to ourselves, save for a red farm cart or so. Then there were no motor-cars, no motor-buses, no clapping insolent monocycles! It was in some wise the rider's age of gold. The country still lay waste and sweet and silent about him. The ignoble "toot-toot" and rhinoceros snort of the pursuing monster was unknown—unknown, too, the odors which leave the wayfarer fretful and angry behind them.

"*Get out of the way, all you mean little people!*" was not yet the commonest of highway sounds. The green

hedgerows were not hidden under a gray dust veil. The Trossachs, the Highlands, the English lakes, and our own fair Galloway roads were not splashed with the iridescent fragrance of petrol. Ah, we took Time by the forelock, Sweetheart, you and I, in those old days when the hawthorn was untainted and the wayside honeysuckles still gave forth a good smell. True, Sweetheart (as above stated) sounded a bell. But even she did it with relish, and the trill carried tenderly on the ear, like the mass-bell rung in some great cathedral as the service culminates, each time more thrilling and insistent. And it was good to see the smile of the folk as they stood aside, and the nod which red-cloaked Sweetheart gave them as we glided noiselessly past!

Ah, a good time! Neither of us are in the least likely to see a better! For during these fifteen years there has come upon our land a strange thing, a kind of plague of heartlessness; the return, perhaps, of mechanically civilized man to the brute, or (if that be too strong) at least to the ruling-out of all gracious consideration for the rights of wayfarers.

I am sure that the "motoring-habit" is more poisonous and more injurious to the nations in this Year of Grace, 1911, than all the poisons that ever were "listed." It is the Indian hemp of the soul, which makes even good men mad. The earth may still belong to the Lord, though, standing afar off, I have sometimes my doubts. But of a certainty the roads between city and city, the creeper-hung village street where, generation after generation, children played, the quiet lanes where the old folk walked arm in arm, are now

given over to the Minotaur whose name is "My Lord Teuf-Teuf."

Every day in all lands (called civilized) the journals are filled with a lengthening tale of victims—of the little child going to school, bag on back; the bairn playing with his soldiers in the dust; the deaf old lady walking along the lanes, so safe and quiet a few years ago. I can see her pattering about, looking for a few roses to grace her room—roses to dream over, roses to call back the good days now past for ever.

"HRRUMPH! HRRUMPH!" It is the trump of doom—behind her, unseen, to her unheard. And in the next number of the local paper there will be the briefest of paragraphs: "No blame attaches to the proprietor or to his excellent and competent chauffeur."

Sometimes, if one has the honor to be run over by the Highest of the High Born, they do inquire for you at the hospital, or even send a wreath for the coffin. For this one should even be content to die. And the paragraphs in the papers recording the gift quite make up to the mourners for their loss.

But even so, this is on the heights of motoring generosity. For at least *noblesse* does sometimes oblige. But the more recently and the more ignobly the Over-Slaughterman has been enriched, the more ignorant of all knowledge he is, the less he has seen of other lands, the fewer incursions he has made into the world of books and art, the less he possesses of that kindly natural consideration which the King-Gentleman shares with the Working-Gentleman—the more cruel and selfish he is when he gets himself upon the road,

rushing along, disguised to the eyes, fakir-mad in a kind of devilish Juggernaut joy, to the holocaust of innumerable innocent victims.

*"The police failed to obtain the number of the car which caused the accident."*

Naturally! Excellent Under-Slaughterman, vulgarly called Chauffeur! Knows his business! He will ask for a rise next week and he will get it. That paragraph about the little girl trailed along for fifty yards under the rear wheels, with—Hold your tongue, you understand, Higgins—the details would not look well posted up in my club! Brave Under-Slaughterman! He winks an eye, as he has a right to do when he puts his latest-earned gratuity in his pocket.

But, halt there! I will do no man an injustice if I can help it. There are motorists and drivers of motor-cars who are nowadays "motor-fiends," who conduct a car as safely and carefully as in other times they would a pair of horses. I have friends among such. God keep them in life and the practice of "Unto others as I would that others should do unto me!"

But I grow old, at least in experience, and I fear for these my friends. Motoring as practiced in Great Britain to-day (and the northern continent is little better) is the direct and intentional abrogation of the Golden Rule. More, it is the only way in which a man, light-heartedly, taking no thought for the morrow, may kill his neighbor with impunity. In old times it was the pursuit of cent.-per-cent. which damned a man, and delivered him bound body and soul to Satan. We have changed all that. Now it is the pursuit of the mile-a-minute which sucks men's hearts empty of a generous



feeling, which is the great open-air school for making iron-bound materialists out of human men—or rather animals fitted with deadly mechanical appliances worse than those of Mr. Wells's Martians.

I love my friends who are tied to these chariot wheels. But I fear for them. Temptation is great. Easy is the descent of Avernus, aided by a smart chauffeur, who wants to give you "the value of your money" in speed and the survival of the fittest: *id est*, of himself and you!

Better, far better, to take pack on back, pilgrim staff in hand, and then—to the woods and the hills with Sweetheart and me, where never "teuf-teuf" can be heard, nor petrol perfume the land.

But at least in Sweetheart's new book you will only find the old sweet things, the pleasures that do but gladden, the record of things at once simple and gracious and tender—such as, if you have been fortunate, must have happened to yourself. She does not once mention any car except that pulled along by honest "gees," or that still more favorite sort of all engineering achievements—the fortifications that the next tide will sweep away.

Sweetheart, little Sweetheart, and that "dear diary" of yours—for this relief, much thanks! God keep you ever of the humble, of the wayside-goers, of those who think—first, second and always—of the comfort of their fellow-men, especially of the weak, the friendless, and the poor who foot it along life's way. In brief, may you stay what you have always been, Sweet of heart—and *my Heart!*

Ainsi soit-il!

S. R. CROCKETT.

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# SWEETHEART'S DIARY

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## I

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# SWEETHEART OBJECTS

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In June—Some Day, 3 o'clock. Cool under the Trees.

Some while ago a book was written about me, called *Sweetheart Travelers*. It was father who wrote it, and I think he did his best, saying a lot of nice things. But, of course, how could he really understand little girls?

At first I thought I would write a book contradicting the mistakes. But Mr. Dignus, who is a friend of mine and knows about such things, said that would not be very kind to father, and might do him harm in his business. But that if I would write about everything just as it seemed to me as I grew up, he would see to it that it was printed and published.

So when father sees it, won't he just get a surprise? Perhaps he will go into a shop and buy *Sweetheart's Diary*, thinking that somebody is poaching on his preserves. I can see him tugging at his big mustache, and walking very solid and determined, same as he does when he says to the boys, "You, sir, come into the study along o' me!" Which makes all the rest of us go sort of cold and trembly all over, like a rabbit smelling fresh lettuce.

But it is for what we are NOT going to get that we are sincerely thankful.

Only, after a dreadful lecture the boys are generally let off—"for this time only, mind you!"—whereas the rabbit always ends up by eating the lettuce. [Moral somewhere about, but I can't just make it out.]

And that reminds me. I will tell you the dreadful history of the Blue Delhi Vase. It is one of the first things I can remember and the one that frightened me the most. It used to sit on our brown, carved-oak table in the little drawing-room. It was pale blue like the color of the beady stones you can't see into—oh, yes—thank you very much—*turquoise*. And somehow I thought that it had come from a fearfully rich uncle in India, who was Prime Minister to a Begum, and would come home one day with an elephant in a huge cattle truck, like what I had seen on the railway. He would then have a scarlet carpet laid to keep his embroidered slippers clean—there is always mud before our station—and he would ride up to our front door on the Begum's state elephant. And the first question he would ask was always, "Is my Blue Delhi Vase in good repair?"

And if it wasn't, then he would demand the name of the miscreant who had done it, and bid the elephant, whose name was quite distinctly Ram Punch, t-r-r-rample him to pieces.

I suppose when I was very young I must have dreamed this, or heard folk talking, without understanding. At any rate I got things pretty mixed in my mind. You see I was *very* little then, so little that I don't remember there being any boys. Though I suppose Hugh John was a little trundler in a

"pram," looking up at the sky with wide solemn eyes and never saying a word. I suppose so, but I don't remember.

All I know is that I wore little red caps, one for Sunday and one for week-days. The Sunday one was put away during the week, and so mostly I had only one.

Now, on this great day I happened to be in the garden, and Somebody sent me in for my cap. Because my hair flew all about and got just fearfully "tuggy"—enough to make any one cry, even Hugh John, who never cries at all. But, then, *he* has hair short like a door-mat and rough as if made of teased string. He has also a head so hard that he will bounce it right through the panel of a door for a penny—that was, of course, afterwards, not when he used to lie in his "prim-pram." But he got whipped, for the doors had to be mended. So he stopped.

I was in a great hurry. Indeed I flew. I never remember walking in those days. So in I banged as hard as I could, and coming out of the hot sun, the rooms felt all very still and cool. The parlor smelt of old rose leaves, which I sometimes stirred with my finger. They were in a big bowl, all powdery, and smelt nice—especially on hot days. Then I used to think that the poor old dead things were stirring in their sleep, and trying to "blossom in the dust." I don't know where I got those words—in a hymn, most likely. But I used to say them over and over to myself—yes, till I cried. Because I was sorry for the old roses that tried to live and couldn't. Silly, wasn't it? Well, it seems so now. But then, of course, it was different.

Now, when I had got over the queer little catch in my throat that finding myself alone always gave me, I started

looking round under all the sofas and chairs to see that there were no lurking Day Ghosts about. They are the worst kind, and I began to wonder where my cap was.

I had come for it specially, you see. So I could not go out without it. Also there were awfully nice things going on in the garden; the picking of white raspberries, mainly; each shaped like a thimble; the cap coming easily off, and leaving a small dead white spear-point, and with a taste—oh, to make your mouth water for quite a week!

Anyway, mine does now.

For a while I could not see my red cap. Then, all in a minute, I caught sight of it on the top of the Delhi Blue Vase. It was dreadfully high, and as for me, I was dreadfully little. More than that, the table was slippery.

But I *had* to get the cap, because all the time I was missing the white raspberries out in the garden. I could hear them pattering into the tin pails with a rustle of waving stems and a *whish* of nice green leaves when you let them go.

So I got up on tiptoe. I was still ever so much too short. Then I took a buffet—the one on which I listened to stories being told. And I mounted on that. I had very nearly got the cap off when the buffet slipped sideways, and—oh, it was dreadful—there on the carpet lay the Delhi Blue Vase all in shreds—no, "shards" is the proper word.

I couldn't think. I couldn't cry. I could not even pray. I forgot how. I grew ice-cold. For I had heard it said that of all the valuable things in the house that was the rarest. I knew it could never be put together again, and it was I who had done it.

For a moment I thought of running away altogether. It was not fear of being punished. No, if it had only been that, I should not have minded. At least not much. Punishments don't last long up at our house. But now I should never see the uncle from India, nor the elephant being unpacked end-foremost out of the cattle truck, nor the crimson carpet, nor the howdah, nor any of these fine things. Or even if I did I might be stamped to death by the elephant, after all. Oh, I *was* unhappy. I looked in the glass and, I declare, I hardly knew the white, frightened, pecky face I saw there for my own.

You see, I usually see my own face when my hair is being done, or when the soap is just washed off. Then it is shiny and red; but now, in the dusk of the room, it looked very small and pale, and my eyes very big and black, with rims round them.

Now our cat was there, and the thought came of itself that everything might be blamed on her. She was our only *not-nice* pussy, and if I said it was Mir-row who did it, nobody would be the worse. She was always knocking things down anyway. She would only get chased out, and she was always being chased out. So one extra time would not matter to Mir-row.

Well, I suppose that is what the ministers and grown-up people call temptation—when you think you can do a thing so as not to be found out. When you do a thing and don't care whether you are found out or not—that is different. That's like Sir Toady (he's my brother, as you shall hear) when he goes bird-nesting and has to watch out for the keeper. But he doesn't really care if he *is* caught.