

S. R. CROCKETT



***THE DEW
OF THEIR
YOUTH***

S. R. Crockett

The Dew of Their Youth

EAN 8596547363286

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE HAUNTED HOUSE OF MARNHOUL

CHAPTER II

"IN THE NAME OF THE LAW!"

CHAPTER III

MISS IRMA GIVES AN AUDIENCE

CHAPTER IV

FIRST FOOT IN THE HAUNTED HOUSE

CHAPTER V

THE CENSOR OF MORALS

CHAPTER VI

THE APOTHEOSIS OF AGNES ANNE

CHAPTER VII

THE DOCTOR'S ADVENT

CHAPTER VIII

KATE OF THE SHORE

CHAPTER IX

THE EVE OF ST. JOHN

CHAPTER X

THE CROWBAR IN THE WOOD

CHAPTER XI

AGNES ANNE'S EXPERIENCES AS A SPY

CHAPTER XII

THE FIGHT IN THE DARK

CHAPTER XIII

A WORLD OF INK AND FIRE

CHAPTER XIV

THE WHITE FREE TRADERS

PART II

CHAPTER XV

MY GRANDMOTHER SPEAKS HER MIND

CHAPTER XVI

CASTLE CONNOWAY

CHAPTER XVII

THE MAN "DOON-THE-HOOSE"

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF AUNT JEN

CHAPTER XIX

LOADED-PISTOL POLLIXFEN

CHAPTER XX

THE REAL MR. POOLE

CHAPTER XXI

WHILE WE SAT BY THE FIRE

PART III

CHAPTER XXII

BOYD CONNOWAY'S EVIDENCE

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SHARP SPUR

CHAPTER XXIV

THE COLLEGE OF KING JAMES

CHAPTER XXV

SATAN FINDS

CHAPTER XXVI

PERFIDY, THY NAME IS WOMAN!

CHAPTER XXVII

“THEN, HEIGH-HO, THE MOLLY!”

CHAPTER XXVIII

LOVE AND THE LOGICIAN

CHAPTER XXIX

THE AVALANCHE

CHAPTER XXX

THE VANISHING LADY

CHAPTER XXXI

TWICE MARRIED

CHAPTER XXXII

THE LITTLE HOUSE ON THE MEADOWS

CHAPTER XXXIII

AND THE DOOR WAS SHUT

CHAPTER XXXIV

A VISIT FROM BOYD CONNOWAY

CHAPTER XXXV

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE SUPPLANTER

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE RETURN OF THE SERPENT TO EDEN VALLEY

CHAPTER XXXVIII

BY WATER AND THE WORD

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE WICKED FLAG

CHAPTER XL

THE GREAT “TABERNACLE” REVIVAL

CHAPTER XLI

IN THE WOOD PARLOUR

CHAPTER XLII

THE PLACE OF DREAMS

PART I

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

[Table of Contents](#)

THE HAUNTED HOUSE OF MARNHOUL

[Table of Contents](#)

I, Duncan MacAlpine, school-master's son and uncovenanted assistant to my father, stood watching the dust which the Highflyer coach had left between me and Sandy Webb, the little guard thereof, as he whirled onward into the eye of the west. It was the hour before afternoon school, and already I could hear my father's voice within declaiming as to unnecessary datives and the lack of all feeling for style in the Latin prose of the seniors.

A score of the fifth class, next in age and rank, were playing at rounders in an angle of the court, and I was supposed to be watching them. In reality I was more interested in a group of tall girls who were patrolling up and down under the shade of the trees at the head of their playground—where no boy but I dare enter, and even I only officially. For in kindly Scots fashion, the Eden Valley Academy was not only open to all comers of both sexes and ages, but was set in the midst of a wood of tall pines, in which we seniors were permitted to walk at our guise and pleasure during the “intervals.”

Here the ground was thick and elastic with dry pine needles, two or three feet of them firmly compacted, and smelling delightfully of resin after a shower. Indeed, at that moment I was interested enough to let the boys run a little wild at their game, because, you see, I had found out within

the last six months that girls were not made only to be called names and to put out one's tongue at.

There was, in especial, one—a dark, slim girl, very lissom of body and the best runner in the school. She wore a grey-green dress of rough stuff hardly ankle-long, and once when the bell-rope broke and I had sprained my ankle she mounted instead of me, running along the rigging of the roofs to ring the bell as active as a lamplighter. I liked her for this, also because she was pretty, or at least the short grey-green dress made her look it. Her name was Gertrude Gower, but Gerty Greensleeves was what she was most frequently called, except, of course, when I called the roll before morning and afternoon.

I had had a talk with Sandy Webb, the guard, as he paused to take in the mails. My father was also village postmaster, but, though there was a girl in the office to sell stamps and revenue licences, and my mother behind to say “that she did not know” in reply to any question whatsoever, I was much more postmaster than my father, though I suppose he really had the responsibility.

Sandy Webb always brought a deal of news to Eden Valley. And as I had official and private dealings with him—the public relating to way-bills and bag-receipts, and the private to a noggin of homebrewed out of the barrel in the corner of our cellar—he always gave me the earliest news, before he hurried away—as it were, the firstlings of the flock.

“There's a stir at Cairn Edward,” he said casually, as he set down his wooden cup. “John Aitken, the mason, has fallen off a scaffolding and broken——”

“Not his leg?” I interrupted anxiously, for John was a third cousin of my mother’s.

“No, more miraculous than that!” the guard averred serenely.

“His back?” I gasped—for John Aitken, as well as a relation, was a fellow-elder of my father’s, and the two often met upon sacramental occasions.

“No,” said Sandy, enjoying his grave little surprise, “only the trams of his mortar-barrow! And there’s that noisy tinkler body, Tim Cleary, the Shire Irishman, in the lock-up for wanting to fight the Provost of Dumfries, and he’ll get eight days for certain. But the Provost is paying the lodgings of his wife and family in the meantime. It will be a rest for them, poor things.”

It was at this moment that Sandy Webb, square, squat, many-wrinkled man, sounded his horn and swung himself into his place as the driver, Andrew Haugh, gathered up his reins. But I knew his way, and waited expectantly. He always kept the pick of his news to the end, then let it off like a fire-cracker, and departed in a halo of dusty glory.

“Your private ghost is making himself comfortable over yonder at the Haunted House. I saw the reek of his four-hours fire coming up blue out of the chimbly-top as we drove past!”

It was thus that the most notable news of a decade came to Eden Valley. The Haunted House—we did not need to be told—was Marnhoul, a big, gaunt mansion, long deserted, sunk in woods, yet near enough to the Cairn Edward road to be visible in stray round towers and rows of chimneys, long unblackened by fire of kitchen or parlour. It had a great forest

behind it, on the verges of which a camp of woodcutters and a rude saw-mill had long been established, eating deeper and deeper in, without, however, seeming to make any more difference than a solitary mouse might to a granary.

We boys knew all about the Haunted House. Since our earliest years it had been the very touchstone of courage to go to the gate on a moonlight night, hold the bars and cry three times, "I'm no feared!" Some had done this, I myself among the number. But—though, of course, being a school-master's son, I did not believe in ghosts—I admit that the return journey was the more pleasant of the two, especially after I got within cry of the dwellings of comfortable burgesses, and felt the windows all alight on either side of me, so near that I could almost touch them with my hand.

Not that I *saw* anything! I knew from the first it was all nonsense. My father had told me so a score of times. But having been reared in the superstitious Galloway of the ancient days—well, there are certain chills and creeps for which a man is not responsible, inexplicable twitchings of the hairy scalp of his head, maybe even to the breaking of a cold sweat over his body, which do not depend upon belief. I kept saying to myself, "There is nothing! I do not believe a word of it! 'Tis naught but old wives' fables!" But, all the same, I took with a great deal of thankfulness the dressing-down I had got from my father for being late for home lessons on a trigonometry night. You see, I was born and reared in Galloway, and I suppose it was just what they have come to call in these latter days "the influence of environment."

Well, at that moment, who should come up but Jo Kettle, a good fellow and friend of mine, but of no account in the school, being a rich farmer's son, who was excused from taking Latin because he was going to succeed his father in the farm. Jo had a right to the half of my secrets, because we both liked Gerty Greensleeves pretty well; and I was certain that she cared nothing about Jo, while Jo could swear that she counted me not worth a button.

So I told Jo Kettle about the Haunted House, and he was for starting off there and then. But it was perfectly evident that I could not with these fifth class boys to look after, and afternoon school just beginning. And if I could not, I was very sure that he had better not. More than once or twice I had proved that it was his duty to do as I said. Jo understood this, but grew so excited that he bolted into school in a moment with the noise of a runaway colt. His entrance disarranged the attention of the senior Latiners of the sixth. My father frowned, and said, "What do you mean, boy, by tumbling through the classroom door like a cart of bricks? Come quietly; and sit down, Agnes Anne!"

This was my poor unfortunate sister, aged fourteen, whom a pitiless parent compelled to do classics with the senior division.

Jo Kettle sat down and pawed about for his mensuration book, which he studied for some time upside down. Then he extracted his box of instruments from his bag and set himself to do over again a proposition with which he had been familiar for weeks. This, however, was according to immemorial school-boy habit, and sometimes succeeded with my father, who was dreamy wherever the classics were

not concerned, and regarded a mere land-measuring agricultural scholar as outside the bounds of human interest, if not of Christian charity.

In two minutes my father was again immersed in Horace, which (with Tacitus) was his chief joy. Then Jo leaned nearer to Agnes Anne and whispered the dread news about the Haunted House. My sister paled, gasped, and clutched at the desk. Jo, fearful that she would begin, according to the sympathetic school phrase, "to cluck like a hen," threatened first to run the point of his compasses into her if she did not sit up instantly; and then, this treatment proving quite inadequate to the occasion, he made believe to pour ink upon her clean cotton print, fresh put on that morning. This brought Agnes Anne round, and, with a face still pale, she asked for details. Jo supplied them in a voice which the nearness of my father reduced to a whisper. He sat with his fingers and thumbs making an isosceles triangle and his eyes gently closed, while he listened to the construing of Fred Esquillant, the pale-faced genius of the school. At such times my father almost purred with delight, and Agnes Anne said that it was "just sweet to watch him." But even this pleasure palled before the tidings from the Haunted House as edited and expanded by Jo Kettle.

"Yes, Duncan had told him, and Sandy Webb had told *him*. There were daylight ghosts abroad about Marnhoul. Everybody on the coach had seen them——"

"What were they like?" queried Agnes Anne in an awestruck whisper; so well poised, however, that it only reached Jo's ear, and never caused my enraptured father to wink an eyelid. I really believe that, like a good Calvinist

with a sound minister tried and proven, my father allowed himself a little nap by way of refreshment while Fred Esquillant was construing.

Nothing loath, Jo launched headlong into the grisly. Through the matted undergrowth of years, over the high-spiked barriers of the deer-park, the Highflyer had seen not only the familiar Grey Lady in robes of rustling silk (through which you could discern the gravel and weeds on the path), but little green demons with chalk-white heads and long ears. These leaped five-barred gates and pursued the coach and its shrieking inmates as far as the little Mains brook that passes the kirk door at the entrance of the village. Then there was a huge, undistinct, crawling horror, half sea-serpent, half slow-worm, that had looked at them over the hedge, and, flinging out a sudden loop, had lassoed Peter Chafts, the running footman, whose duty it was to leap down and clear stones out of the horses' hoofs. Whether Little Peter had been recovered or not, Jo Kettle very naturally could not tell. How, indeed, could he? But, with an apparition like that, it was not at all probable.

Jo was preparing a further instalment, including clanking chains, gongs that sounded unseen in the air, hands that gripped the passengers and tried to pull them from their seats—all the wild tales of Souter Gowans, the village cobbler, and of ne'er-do-well farm lads, idle and reckless, whose word would never have been taken in any ordinary affair of life. Jo had not time, however, for Agnes Anne had a strong imagination, coupled with a highly nervous organization. She laughed out suddenly, in the middle of a solemn Horatian hush, a wild, hysterical laugh, which

brought my father to his feet, broad awake in a second. The class gazed open-mouthed, the pale face of Fred Esquillant alone twitching responsively.

“What have you been saying to Agnes Anne MacAlpine?” demanded my father, who would sooner have resigned than been obliged to own son or daughter as such in school-time.

“Nothing!” said Jo Kettle, speaking according to the honour that obliges schoolboys to untruth as a mode of professional honour. Then Jo, seeing the frown on the master’s face, and forestalling the words that were ready to come from his lips, “But, sirrah, I saw you!” amended hastily, “At least, I was only asking Agnes Anne to sit a little farther along!”

“What!” cried my father, with the snap of the eye that meant punishment, “to sit farther along, when you had no interest in this classical lesson, sir—a lesson you are incapable of understanding, and—all the length of an empty bench at your left hand! You shall speak with me at the close of the lesson, and that, sirrah, is now! The class is dismissed! I shall have the pleasure of a little interview with Master Joseph Kettle, student of mensuration.”

Jo had his interview, in which figured a certain leathern strap, called “Lochgelly” after its place of manufacture—a branch of native industry much cursed by Scottish school-children. “Lochgelly” was five-fingered, well pickled in brine, well rubbed with oil, well used on the boys, but, except by way of threat, unknown to the girls. Jo emerged tingling but triumphant. Indeed, several new ideas had occurred to him. Eden Valley Academy stood around and drank in the wondrous tale with all its ears and, almost literally, with one

mouth. Jo Kettle told the story so well that I well-nigh believed it myself. He even turned to me for corroboration.

“Didn’t he tell you that, Duncan? That was the way of it, eh, Duncan?”

I denied, indeed, and would have stated the truth as it was in Guard Webb. But my futile and feeble negations fell unheeded, swept away by the pour of Jo’s circumstantial lying.

Finally he ran off into the village and was lost to sight. I have little doubt that he played truant, in full recognition of pains and penalties to come, for the mere pleasure of going from door to door and “raising the town,” as he called it. I consoled myself by the thought that he would find few but womenfolk at home at that hour, while the shopkeepers would have too much consideration for their tills and customers to follow a notorious romancer like Jo on such a fool’s errand.

I cannot tell how that afternoon’s lessons were got over in Eden Valley Academy. The hum of disturbance reached even the juniors, skulking peacefully under little Mr. Stephen, the assistant. Only Miss Huntingdon, in the Infant Department, remained quiet and neat as a dove new-preened among her murmuring throng of unconscious little folk.

But in the senior school, though I never reported a boy to my father (preferring to postpone his case for private dealing in the playground), the lid of the desk was opened and snapped sharply every five minutes to give exit and entrance to “Lochgelly.” Seldom have I seen my father so roused. He hated not to understand everything that was

going on in the school. He longed to ask me what I knew about it, but, according to his habit, generously forbore, lest he should lead me to tell tales upon my fellows. For, though actually junior assistant to my father, I was still a scholar, which made my position difficult indeed. To me it seemed as if the clock on the wall above the fireplace would never strike the hour of four.



CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

“IN THE NAME OF THE LAW!”

Table of Contents

At last—at last! The door between the seniors and Mr. Stephen’s juniors was thrown open. My father, making his usual formal bow to his assistant, said, “When you are ready, Mr. Stephen!” And Mr. Stephen was always ready. Then with his back to the hinges of the door, and his strong black beard with the greying strands in it set forward at an angle, Mr. John MacAlpine, head-master of Eden Valley Academy, said a few severe words on the afternoon’s lack of discipline, and prophesied in highly coloured language the exemplary manner in which any repetition of it would be treated on the morrow. Then he doubled all home lessons, besides setting a special imposition to each class. Having made this clear, he hoped that the slight token of his displeasure might assure us of his intention to do his duty by us faithfully, and then, with the verse of a chanted psalm we were let go.

Class by class defiled with rumble of boots and tramp of wooden-soled clogs, the boys first, the girls waiting till the outside turmoil had abated—but, nevertheless, as anxious as any to be gone. I believe we expected to tumble over slow serpents and nimble spectres coming visiting up the school-loaning, or coiling in festoons among the tall Scotch firs at the back of the playground.

We of the sixth class were in the rear—I last of all, for I had to lock away the copybooks, turn the maps to the wall,

and give my father the key. *But* I had warned the other seniors that they were not to start without me.

And then, what a race! A bare mile it was, through the thick fringes of woods most of the way—as soon, that is, as we were out of the village. Along the wall of the Deer Park we ran, where we kept instinctively to the far side of the road. We of the highest class were far in front—I mean those of us who kept the pace. The Fifth had had a minute or two start of us, so they were ahead at first, but we barged through their pack without mercy, scattering them in all directions.

There at last was the gate before us. We had reached it first. Five of us there were, Sam Gordon, Ivie Craig, Harry Stoddart, Andrew Clark and myself—yes, there was another—that forward Gerty Greensleeves, who had kilted her rough grey-green dress and run with the best, all to prove her boast that, but for the clothes she had to wear, she was as good a runner as the best boy there. Indeed, if the truth must be told, she could outrun all but me.

The tall spikes, the massive brass padlock, green with weathering, in which it was doubtful if any key would turn, the ancient “Notice to Trespassers,” massacred by the stones of home-returning schoolboys—these were all that any of us could see at first. The barrier of the deer-park wall was high and unclimbable. The massy iron of the gates looked as if it had not been stirred for centuries.

But a tense interest held us all spellbound. We could see nothing but some stray glimpses of an ivy-clad wall. A weathercock, that had once been gilded, stood out black against the evening sky. The Grey Lady in the rustling silk,

through whom you could see the rain drops splash on the gravel stones, was by no means on view. No green demons leaped these sullen ten-foot barricades, and no forwandered sea-serpent threw oozy wimples on the green-sward or hissed at us between the rusty bars.

It was, at first, decidedly disappointing. We ordered each other to stop breathing so loudly, after our burst of running. We listened, but there was not even the sough of wind through the trees—nothing but the beating of our own hearts.

What had we come out to see? Apparently nothing. The school considered itself decidedly “sold,” and as usual prepared to take vengeance, first upon Jo Kettle and then, as that youth still persisted in a discreet absence of body, on myself.

“You spoke to Sandy Webb, the guard,” said Gertrude-of-the-Sleeves, scowling upon me; “what did he say?”

Before I could answer Boyd Connaway, the village do-nothing, enterprising idler and general boys’ abettor, beckoned us across the road. He was on the top of a little knoll, thick with the yellow of broom and the richer orange of gorse. Here he had stretched himself very greatly at his ease. For Boyd Connaway knew how to wait, and he was waiting now. Hurry was nowhere in Boyd’s dictionary. Not that he had ever looked.

In a moment we were over the dyke, careless of the stones that we sent trickling down to afflict the toes of those who should come after us. We stood on the top of the mound. Connaway disturbed himself just enough to sit up for our sakes, which he would not have done for a dozen

grown men. He removed the straw from his mouth, and pointed with it to the end chimney nearest to the great wood of Marnhoul.

We gazed earnestly, following the straw and gradually we could see, rising into the still air an unmistakable “pew” of palest blue smoke—which, as we looked, changed into a dense white pillar that rose steadily upwards, detaching itself admirably against the deep green black of the Scotch firs behind.

“There,” said Connaway gravely, “yonder is your ghost mending his fire!”

We stood at gaze, uncomprehending, too astonished for speech. We had come, even the unbelievers of us, prepared for the supernatural, for something surpassingly eery, and anything so commonplace as the smoke of a fire was a surprise greater than the sight of all Jo Kettle’s imaginations coming at us abreast.

Yet the people who owned the great house of Marnhoul were far away—few had ever seen any of them. Their affairs were in the hands of a notable firm of solicitors in Dumfries. How any mortal could have entered that great abode, or inhabited it after the manner of men, was beyond all things inexplicable. But there before us the blue reek continued to mount, straight as a pillar, till it reached the level of the trees on the bank behind, when a gentle current of air turned it sharply at right angles to the south.

Now we heard the tramp of many feet, and beneath us we saw Jo Kettle with half-a-dozen of his father’s workers, and the village constable to make sure that all was done in due and proper order. To these was joined a crowd of curious

townsmen, eager for any new thing. All were armed to the teeth with rusty cutlasses and old horse pistols, which, when loaded, made the expedition one of no inconsiderable peril.

The man with the crowbar applied it to the rusty chain of the padlock. Two others assisted him, but instead of breaking the chain, the iron standard of the gate crumbled into so much flaky iron rust, while padlock and attachments swung free upon the other. It was easy enough to enter after that.

“In the name of the law!” cried the constable, taking a little staff with a silver crown upon it in his hand. And at the word the gate creaked open and the crowd pressed in.

But the constable held up his hand.

“‘In the name of the law,’ I said. I *might* have put it, ‘In the King’s name,’ but what I meant was that we are to proceed in decency and order—no unseemly rabbling, scuffling, or mischief making—otherwise ye have me to reckon with. Let no word of ghosts and siclike be heard. The case is infinitely more serious——”

“Hear to Jocky wi’ his langnebbit words!” whispered Boyd Connoway in my ear.

“Infinitely more so, I say. It is evident to the meanest capacity——”

“Evidently!” whispered Connoway, grinning.

“—that a dangerous band of smugglers or burglars is in possession of the mansion of Marnhoul, and we must take them to a man!”

These words brought about a marked hesitation in the rear ranks, a wavering, and a tendency to slip away through the breach of the broken gate into the road.

“Halt there,” cried Constable Black, holding the staff of office high. “I call upon you, every man, to assist his Majesty’s officers. You are special constables, as soon as I get time to swear you in. Praise be, here’s good Maister Kettle! He’s a Justice of the Peace. He will hold you to it now and be my witness if ye refuse lawful aid. Now, forward! Quick march!”

And this formidable armed band took its way along the overgrown gravel avenue up to the front of the great house of Marnhoul. We boys (and Greensleeves close to my elbow) played along the flanks like skirmishers. All our spiritual fears were abated. At the name of the law, and specially after the display of the silver-crowned staff, we entered joyously into the game. If it had only been the arm of flesh we had to encounter, we were noways afraid—though it was a sad downcome from the solemn awe of coming to grips with the prince of darkness and his emissaries.

“You that have pistols that will go off, round with you to guard the back doors!” cried Constable John Black. “It’s there the thieves have taken up their abode. The smoke is coming from the kitchen lum. I see it well. The rest, not so well armed, bide here with me under the protection of the law!”

And with that Constable Black, commonly called Jocky, elevated once more his staff in the air, and marched boldly to the fatal door. He went up the steps by which the Grey Lady was wont to descend to the clear moonlight to take her airing in the wood. A little behind went Connaway, in the same manner holding a “bourtree” pop-gun which he had

just been fashioning for some lucky callant of his acquaintance.

Almost for the first time in his life Boyd Connaway had all the humour to himself. Nobody laughed at his imitation of Officer Jocky's pompous ways. They would do it afterwards in the safety of their own dwellings and about the winter fire. But not now—by no means now.

Even though supported by the majestic power of the law, the crowd kept respectfully edging behind wall and trees. Their eyes were directed warily upwards to the long array of windows from which (legend recounted) the Maitlands of Marnhoul had once during the troubles of the Covenant successfully defended themselves against the forces of the Crown.

Now be it understood once for all, the inhabitants of Eden Valley were peaceful and loyal citizens, except perhaps in what concerned the excise laws and the ancient and wholesome practice of running cargoes of dutiable goods without troubling his Majesty's excise officers about the matter. But they did not wish to support the law at the peril of their lives.

An irregular crackle of shots, the smashing of window glass in the back of the mansion, with two or three hurrahs, put some courage into them. On the whole it seemed less dangerous to get close in under the great vaulted porch. There, at least, they could not be reached by shot from the windows, while out in the open or under the uncertain shelter of tree boles, who knew what might happen? So there was soon a compact phalanx about the man in authority.

Constable Black, being filled with authority direct from the Lord-Lieutenant of the County, certainly had the instinct of magnifying his office. He raised his arm and knocked three times on the bleached and blistered panels of the great front door.

“Open, I command you! In the name of the law!” he shouted.

After the knocking there befell a pause, as it might be of twenty breaths—though nobody seemed to draw any. Such a silence of listening have I never heard. Yes, we heard it, and the new burst of firing from the rear of the house, the cheers of the excited assailants hardly seemed to break it, so deeply was our attention fixed on that great weather-beaten door of the Haunted House of Marnhoul.

Again Jocky, his face lint-white, and his voice coming and going jerkily, cried aloud the great name of the law. Again there was silence, deeper and longer than before.

At last from far within came a pattering as of little feet, quick and light. We heard the bolts withdrawn one by one, and as the wards of the lock rasped and whined, men got ready their weapons. The door swung back and against the intense darkness of the wide hall, with the light of evening on their faces, stood a girl in a black dress and crimson sash, holding by the hand a little boy of five, with blue eyes and tight yellow curls.

Both were smiling, and before them all that tumultuary array fell away as from something supernatural. The words “In the name of——” were choked on the lips of the constable. He even dropped his silver-headed staff, and turned about as if to flee. As for us we watched with dazzled

eyes the marvels that had so suddenly altered the ideas of all men as to the Haunted House of Marnhoul.

But for a space no one moved, no one spoke. Only the tall young girl and the little child stood there, like children of high degree receiving homage on the threshold of their own ancestral mansion, facing the lifted bonnets and the pikes lowered as if in salutation.



CHAPTER III

Table of Contents

MISS IRMA GIVES AN AUDIENCE

Table of Contents

“My name is Irma Maitland, and this is my brother Louis!” Such were the famous words with which, in response to law and order in the person of Constable Jacky Black, the tall smiling girl in the doorway of the Haunted House of Marnhoul saluted her “rescuers.”

“And how came you to be occupying this house?” demanded Mr. Josiah Kettle, father of Joseph the inventive. He was quite unaware of the ghastly terrors with which his son had peopled the Great House, but as the largest farmer on the estate he felt it to be his duty to protect vested rights.

“In the same way that you enter your house,” said the girl; “we came in with a key, and have been living here ever since!”

“Are you not feared?” piped a voice from the crowd. It was afterwards found that it was Kettle junior who had spoken.

“Afraid!” answered the girl scornfully, holding her head higher than ever; “do you think that a few foolish people firing at our windows could make us afraid? Can they, Louis?” And as she spoke she looked fondly down at her little brother.

He drew nearer to his sister, looking up at her with a winning confidence, and said in as manly a voice as he

could compass, "Certainly not, Irma! But—tell them not to do it any more!"

"You hear what my brother says," said the girl haughtily. "Let there be no more of this!"

"But—in right of law and order, I must know more about this!" cried Constable Jacky, lifting up his staff again. Somehow, however, the magic had gone from his words. Every one now knew that his thunder had a hollow sound.

"Ah, you are the *gendarme*—the official—the officer!" said the tall girl, with a more pronounced foreign accent than before, making him a little bow; "please go and tell your superiors that we are here because the place belongs to us—at least to my brother, and that I am staying to take care of him."

"But how did you come?" persisted the man in authority.

The tall girl looked over his head. Her glance, clear, cool, penetrating, scanned face after face, and then she said, as it were, regretfully, "There are no gentlefolk among you?"

There was the slightest shade of inquiry about words which might have seemed rude as a mere affirmation. Then she appeared to answer for herself, still with the same tinge of sadness faintly colouring her pride. "For this reason I cannot tell you how we came to be here."

Mr. Josiah Kettle felt called upon to assert himself.

"I have reason to believe," he said pompously, "that I am as good as any on the estate in the way of being a gentleman—me and my son Joseph. I am a Justice of the Peace, under warrant of the Crown, and so one day will my son Joseph—Jo, you rascal, come off that paling!"

But just then Jo Kettle had other fish to fry. From the bad eminence of the garden palisade he was devouring the newcomer with his eyes. As for me, I had shaken the hand of the lately adored Greensleeves from my arm.

The girl's glance stayed for an instant and no more upon the round and rosy countenance of Mr. Josiah Kettle, Justice of the Peace. She smiled upon him indulgently, but shook her head.

"I am sorry," she said, with gentle condescension, "that I cannot tell anything more to you. You are one of the people who broke our windows!"

Then Josiah Kettle unfortunately blustered.

"If you will not, young madam," he cried, "I can soon send them to you who will make you answer."

The young lady calmly took out of her pocket a dainty pair of ivory writing tablets, such as only the minister of the parish used in all Eden Valley, and he only because he had married a great London lady for his wife.

"I shall be glad of the name and address of the persons to whom you refer!" said Miss Irma (for so from that moment I began to call her in my heart).

"The factors and agents for this estate," Josiah Kettle enunciated grandly. The writing tablets were shut up with a snap of disappointment.

"Oh, Messrs. Smart, Poole & Smart," she said. "Why, I have known them ever since I was as high as little Louis."

Then she smiled indulgently upon Mr. Kettle, with something so easily grand and yet so sweet that I think the hearts of all went out to her.

“I suppose,” she said, “that really you thought you were doing right in coming here and firing off guns without permission. It must be an astonishing thing for you to see this house of the Maitlands inhabited after so long. I do not blame your curiosity, but I fear I must ask you to send a competent man to repair our windows. For that we hold you responsible, Mr. Officer, and you, Mr. Justice of the Peace—you and your son Jo! Don’t we, Louis?”

“I will see to that myself!” a voice, the same that had spoken before, came from the crowd. Miss Irma searched the circle without, however, coming to a conclusion. I do think that her glance lingered longer on my face than on any of the others, perhaps because Gerty Greensleeves was leaning on my shoulder and whispering in my ear. (What a nuisance girls are, sometimes!) So the glance passed on, with something in it at once calm and simple and high.

“If any of the gentlefolk of our station will call upon us,” she went on, “we will tell *them* how we came to be here—the clergyman of the parish—or——” here she hesitated for the first time, “or his wife.”

Instinctively she seemed to feel the difficulty. “Though we are not of their faith!” she added, smiling once more as with the air of serene condescension she had shown all through.

Then she nodded, and swept a curtsey with an undulating grace which I thought to be adorable, in spite of the suspicion of irony in it.

“Good-bye, good people,” she said, letting her eyes again run the circuit of the sea of faces, reinforced by those who had been firing their blunderbusses and horse-pistols (now