

S. R. CROCKETT

***THE BLACK
DOUGLAS***

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The Black Douglas

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CHAPTER I

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THE BLACK DOUGLAS RIDES HOME

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Merry fell the eve of Whitsunday of the year 1439, in the fairest and heartsomest spot in all the Scottish southland. The twined May-pole had not yet been taken down from the house of Brawny Kim, master armourer and foster father to William, sixth Earl of Douglas and Lord of Galloway.

Malise Kim, who by the common voice was well named "The Brawny," sat in his wicker chair before his door, overlooking the island-studded, fairy-like loch of Carlinwark. In the smithy across the green bare-trodden road, two of his elder sons were still hammering at some armour of choice. But it was a ploy of their own, which they desired to finish that they might go trig and point-device to the Earl's weapon-showing to-morrow on the braes of Balmaghie. Sholto and Laurence were the names of the two who clanged the ringing steel and blew the smooth-handled bellows of tough tanned hide, that wheezed and puffed as the fire roared up deep and red before sinking to the right welding-heat in a little flame round the buckle-tache of the girdle brace they were working on.

And as they hammered they talked together in alternate snatches and silences?—Sholto, the elder, meanwhile keeping an eye on his father. For their converse was not meant to reach the ear of the grave, strong man who sat so

still in the wicker chair with the afternoon sun shining in his face.

"Hark ye, Laurence," said Sholto, returning from a visit to the door of the smithy, the upper part of which was open. "No longer will I be a hammerer of iron and a blower of fires for my father. I am going to be a soldier of fortune, and so I will tell him—"

"When wilt thou tell him?" laughed his brother, tauntingly. "I wager my purple velvet doublet slashed with gold which I bought with mine own money last Rood Fair that you will not go across and tell him now. Will you take the dare?"

"The purple velvet—you mean it?" said Sholto, eagerly. "Mind, if you refuse, and will not give it up after promising, I will nick that lying throat of yours with my gullie knife!"

And with that Sholto threw down his pincers and hammer, and valorously pushed open the lower door of the smithy. He looked with bold, dark blue eye at his father, and strode slowly across the grimy door-step. Brawny Kim had not moved for an hour. His great hands lay in his lap, and his eyes looked at the purple ridges of Screel, across the beautiful loch of Carlinwark, which sparkled and dimpled restlessly among its isles like a wilful beauty bridling under the gaze of a score of gallants.

But, even as he went, Sholto's step slowed, and lost its braggart strut and confidence. Behind him Laurence chuckled and laughed, smiting his thigh in his mocking glee.

"The purple velvet, mind you, Sholto! How well it will become you, coft from Rob Halliburton, our mother's own brother, seamed with red gold and lined with yellow satin

and cramosie. Well indeed will it set you when Maud Lindesay, the maid who came from the north for company to the Earl's sister, looks forth from the canopy upon you as you stand in the archers' rank on the morrow's morn."

Sholto squared his shoulders, and with a little backward hitch of his elbow which meant "Wait till I come back, and I will pay you for this flouting," he strode determinedly across the green space towards his father.

The master armourer of Earl Douglas did not lift his eyes till his son had half crossed the road. Then, even as if a rank of spearmen at the word of command had lifted their glittering points to the "ready," Sholto MacKim stopped dead where he was, with a sort of gasp in his throat, like one who finds his defenceless body breast high against the line of hostile steel.

"The purple velvet!" came the cautious whisper from behind. But the taunt was powerless now.

The smith held his son a moment with his eyes.

"Well?" came in the deep low voice, more like the lowest tones of an organ than the speech of a man.

Sholto stood fixed, then half turning on his heel he began to walk towards the corner of the dwelling-house, over which a gay streamer of the early creeping convolvulus danced and swung in the stirring of the light breeze.

"You wish speech with me?" said his father, in the same level and thrilling undertone.

"No," said Sholto, hesitant in spite of himself, "but I thought—that is I desired—saw you my sister Magdalen pass this way? I have somewhat to give her."

"Ah, so," said Brawny Kim, without moving, "a steel breastplate, belike. Thou hast the brace-buckle in thy hand. Doth the little Magdalen go with you to the weapon-show to-morrow?"

"No, father," said Sholto, stammering, "but I was uneasy for the child. It is full an hour since I heard her voice."

"Then," said his father, "finish your work, put out the fire, and go seek your sister."

Sholto brought his hands together and made the little inclination of the head which was a sign of filial respect. Then, solemn as if he had been in his place in the ordered line of the Earl's first levy of archer men, he turned him about and went back to the smithy.

Laurence lay all abroad on the heap of charcoal of which the armourer's welding fire was made. He was fairly expiring with laughter, and when his brother angrily kicked him in the ribs, he only wagged an ineffectual hand and feebly crowed in his throat like a cock, in his efforts to stifle the sounds of mirth.

"Get up, fool," hissed his angry brother; "help me with this accursed hammer-striking, or I will make an end of such a giggling lout as you. Here, hold up."

And seizing his younger brother by the collar of his blue working blouse, he dragged him upon his feet.

"Now, by the saints," said Sholto, "if you cast your gibes upon me, by Saint Andrew I will break every bone in your idiot's body."

"The purple velvet—oh, the purple velvet!" gasped Laurence, as soon as he could recover speech, "and the eyes of Maud Lindesay!"

"That will teach you to think rather of the eyes of Laurence MacKim!" cried Sholto, and without more ado he hit his brother with his clinched knuckles a fair blow on the bridge of his nose.

The next moment the two youths were grappling together like wild cats, striking, kicking, and biting with no thought except of who should have the best of the battle. They rolled on the floor, now tussling among the crackling faggots, anon pitching soft as one body on the peat dust in the corner, again knocking over a bench and bringing down the tools thereon to the floor with a jingle which might have been heard far out on the loch. They were still clawing and cuffing each other in blind rage, when a hand, heavy and remorseless, was laid upon each. Sholto found himself being dabbled in the great tempering cauldron which stood by his father's forge. Laurence heard his own teeth rattle as he was shaken sideways till his joints waggled like those of a puppet at Keltonhill Fair. Then it was his turn to be doused in the water. Next their heads were soundly knocked together, and finally, like a pair of arrows sent right and left, Laurence sped forth at the window in the gable end and found himself in the midst of a gooseberry bush, whilst Sholto, flying out of the door, fell sprawling on all fours almost under the feet of a horse on which a young man sat, smilingly watching the scene.

Brawny Kim scattered the embers of the fire on the forge-hearth, and threw the breastplate and girdle-brace at which the boys had been working into a corner of the smithy. Then he turned to lock the door with the massive key, which stood so far out from the upper leaf that to it the

horses waiting their turns to be shod were ordinarily tethered.

As he did so he caught sight of the young man sitting silent on the black charger. Instantly a change passed over his face. With one motion of his hand he swept the broad blue bonnet from his brow, and bowed the grizzled head which had worn it low upon his breast. Thus for the breathing of a breath the master armourer stood, and then, replacing his bonnet, he looked up again at the young knight on horseback.

"My lord," he said, after a long pause, in which he waited for the youth to speak, "this is not well—you ride unattended and unarmed."

"Ah, Malise," laughed the young Earl, "a Douglas has few privileges if he may not sometimes on a summer eve lay aside his heavy prisonment of armour and don such a suit as this! What think you, eh? Is it not a valiant apparel, as might almost beseem one who rode a-courting?"

The mighty master-smith looked at the young man with eyes in which reverence, rebuke, and admiration strove together.

"But," he said, wagging his head with a grave humorousness, "your lordship needs not to ride a-courting. You are to be married to a great dame who will bring you wealth, alliance, and the dower of provinces."

The young man shrugged his shoulders, and swung lightly off his charger, which turned to look at him as he stood and patted its neck.

"Know you not, Malise," he said, "that the Earl of Douglas must needs marry provinces and the Lord of Galloway wed

riches? But what is there in that to prevent Will Douglas going courting at eighteen years of his age as a young man ought. But have no fear, I come not hither seeking the favour of any, save of that lily flower of yours, the only true May-blossom that blooms on the Three Thorns of Carlinwark. I would look upon the angel smile on the face of your little daughter Magdalen. An she be here, I would toss her arm-high for a kiss of her mouth, which I would rather touch than that of lady or leman. For I do ever profess myself her vassal and slave. Where have you hidden her, Malise? Declare it or perish!"

The smith lifted up his voice till it struck on the walls of his cottage and echoed like thunder along the shores of the lake.

"Dame Barbara," he cried, and again, getting no answer, "ho, Dame Barbara, I say!"

Then at the second hallo, a shrill and somewhat peevish voice proceeded from within the house opposite.

"Aye, coming, can you not hear, great nolt! 'Deed and 'deed 'tis a pretty pass when a woman with the cares of an household must come running light-toe and clatter-heel to every call of such a lazy lout. Husband, indeed—not house-band but house-bond, I wot—house-torment, house-thorn, house-cross—"

A sonsy, well-favoured, middle-aged head, strangely at variance with the words which came from it, peeped out, and instantly the scolding brattle was stilled. Back went the head into the dark of the house as if shot from a bombard.

Malise MacKim indulged in a low hoarse chuckle as he caught the words: "Eh, 'tis my Lord William! Save us, and

me wanting my Ryssil gown that cost me ten silver shillings the ell, and no even so muckle as my white peaked cap upon my head."

Her husband glanced at the young Earl to see if he appreciated the savour of the jest. Then he looked away, turning the enjoyment over and over under his own tongue, and muttering: "Ah, well, 'tis not his fault. No man hath a sense of humour before he is forty years of his age—and, for that matter, 'tis all the riper at fifty."

The young man's eyes were looking this way and that, up and down the smooth pathway which skirted like a green selva the shores of the loch.

"Malise," he said, as if he had already forgotten his late eager quest for the little Magdalen, "Darnaway here has a shoe loose, and to-morrow I ride to levy, and may also joust a bout in the tilt-yard of the afternoon. I would not ask you to work in Whitsuntide, but that there cometh my Lord Fleming and Alan Lauder of the Bass, bringing with them an embassy from France—and I hear there may be fair ladies in their company."

"Ah!" quoth Malise, grimly, "so I have heard it said concerning the embassies of Charles, King of France!"

But the young man only smiled, and dusted off one or two flecks of foam which had blown backwards from his horse's bit upon the rich crimson doublet of finest velvet, which, cinctured closely at the waist, fell half-way to his knees in heavy double pleats sewn with gold. A hunting horn of black and gold was suspended about his neck by a bandolier of dark leather, subtilely embroidered with bosses of gold. Laced boots of soft black hide, drawn together on

the outside from ankle to mid-calf with a golden cord, met the scarlet "chausses" which covered his thighs and outlined the figure of him who was the noblest youth and the most gallant in all the realm of Scotland.

Earl William wore no sword. Only a little gold-handled poignard with a lady's finger ring set upon the point of the hilt was at his side, and he stood resting easily his hand upon it as he talked, drawing it an inch from its sheath and snicking it back again nonchalantly, with a sound like the clicking of a well-oiled lock.

"Clink the strokes strongly and featly, Malise, for tomorrow, when the Black Douglas rides upon Black Darnaway under the eyes of—well—of the ladies whom the ambassadors are bringing to greet me, there must be no stumbling and no mistakes. Or on the head of Malise MacKim the matter shall be, and let that wight remember that the Douglas does not keep a dule tree up there by the Gallows Slock for nothing."

The mighty smith was by this time examining the hoofs of the Earl's charger one by one with such instinctive delicacy of touch that Darnaway felt the kindly intent, and, bending his neck about, blew and snuffled into the armourer's tangled mat of crisp grey hair.

"Up there!" exclaimed MacKim, as the warm breath tickled his neck, and at the burst of sound the steed shifted and clattered upon the hard-beaten floor of the smithy, tossing his head till the bridle chains rang again.

"Eh, my Lord William," an altered voice came from the door-step, where Dame Barbara MacKim, now clothed and in her right mind, stood louting low before the young Earl, "but

this is a blythe and calamititious day for this poor bit bigging o' the Carlinwark—to think that your honour should visit his servants! Will you no come ben and sit doon in the house-place? 'Tis far from fitting for your feet to pass thereupon. But gin ye will so highly favour—"

"Nay, I thank you, good Dame Barbara," said the Earl, very courteously taking off the close-fitting black cap with the red feather in it which was upon his head. "I must bide but a moment for your husband to set right certain nails in the hoofs of Darnaway here, to ready me for the morrow. Do you come to see the sport? So buxom a dame as the mistress of Carlinwark should not be absent to encourage the lads to do their best at the sword-play and the rivalry of the butts."

And as the dame came forth courtesying and bowing her delighted thanks, Earl William, setting a forefinger under her triple chin, stooped and kissed her in his gayest and most debonair manner.

"Eh, only to think on't," cried the dame, clapping her hands together as she did at mass, "that I, Barbara MacKim, that am marriet to a donnert auld carle like Malise there, should hae the privilleege o' a salute frae the bonny mou' o' Yerl William—(Thank ye kindly, my lord!)—and be inveeted to the weepen-shawing to sit amang the leddies and view the sport. Malise, my man, caa' ye no that an honour, a privilleege? Is that no owing to me being the sister—on my faither's side—o' Ninian Halliburton, merchant and indweller in Dumfries?"

"Nay, nay, good dame," laughed the Earl, "'tis all for the sake of your own very sufficient charms! I trust that your

good man here is not jealous, for beauty, you well do ken, ever sends the wits of a Douglas woolgathering. Nevertheless, let us have a draught of your home-brewed ale, for kissing is but dry work, after all, and little do I think of it save" (he set his cap on his head with a gallant wave of his hand) "in the case of a lady so fair and tempting as Dame Barbara MacKim!"

At this the dame cast up her hands and her eyes again. "Eh, what will Marget Ahanny o' the Shankfit say noo—this frae the Yerl William. Eh, sirce, this is better than an Abbot's absolution. I declare 'tis mair sustainin' than a' the consolations o' religion. Malise, do you hear, great dour cuif that ye are, what says my lord? And you to think so little of your married wife as ye do! Think shame, you being what ye are, and me the ain sister to that master o' merchandise and Bailie o' Dumfries, Maister Ninian Halliburton o' the Vennel!"

And with that she vanished into the black oblong of the door opposite the smithy.

CHAPTER II

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MY FAIR LADY

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The strong man of Carlinwark made no long job of the horseshoeing. For, as he hammered and filed, he marked the eye of the young Earl restlessly straying this way and that along the green riverside paths, and his fingers nervously tapping the ashen casing of the smithy window-sill. Malise MacKim smiled to himself, for he had not served a Douglas for thirty years without knowing by these signs that there was the swing of a kirtle in the case somewhere.

Presently the last nail was made firm, and Black Darnaway was led, passaging and tossing his bridle reins, out upon the green sward. Malise stood at his head till the Douglas swung himself into the saddle with a motion light as the first upward flight of a bird.

He put his hand into a pocket in the lining of his "soubreveste" and took out a golden "Lion" of the King's recent mintage. He spun it in the air off his thumb and then looked at it somewhat contemptuously as he caught it.

"I think you and I, Master-Armourer, could send out a better coinage than that with the old Groat press over there at Thrieve!" he said.

Malise smiled his quiet smile.

"If the Earl of Douglas deigns to make me the master of his mint, I promise him plenty of good, sound, broad pieces

of a noble design—that is, till Chancellor Crichton hangs me for coining in the Grassmarket of Edinburgh."

"That would he never, with the Douglas lances to prick you a way out and the Douglas gold to buy the good-will of traitorous judges!"

Half unconsciously the Earl sighed as he looked at the fair lake growing rosy in the light of the sunset. His boyish face was overspread with care, and for the moment seemed all too young to have inherited so great a burden. But the next moment he was himself again.

"I know, Malise," he said, "that I cannot offer you gold in return for your admirable handicraft. But 'tis nigh to Keltonhill Fair, do you divide this gold Lion betwixt those two brave boys of yours. Faith, right glad was I to be Earl of Douglas and not a son of his master armourer when I saw you disciplining for their souls' good Messires Sholto and Laurence there!"

The smith smiled grimly.

"They are good enough lads, Sholto and Laurence both, but they will be for ever gnarring and grappling at each other like messan dogs round a kirk door."

"They will not make the worse soldiers for that, Malise. I pray you forgive them for my sake."

The master armourer took the hand of his young lord on which he was about to draw a riding glove of Spanish leather. Very reverently he kissed the signet ring upon it.

"My dear lord," he said, "I can refuse naught to any of your great and gracious house, and least of all to you, the light and pleasure of it—aye, and the light of a surly old man's heart, more even than the duty he owes to his own

married wife! Oh, be careful, my lord, for you are the desire of many hearts and the hope of all this land."

He hesitated a moment, and then added with a kind of curious bashfulness—

"But I am concerned about ye this nicht, William Douglas—I fear that ye could not—would not permit me—"

"Could not permit what—out with it, old grumble-pate?"

"That I should saddle my Flanders mare and ride after you. Malise MacKim would not be in the way even if ye went a-trysting. He kens brawly, in such a case, when to turn his head and look upon the hills and the woods and the bonny sleeping waters."

The Earl laughed and shook his head.

"Na, na, Malise," he said, "were I indeed on such a quest the sight of your grey pow would fright a fair lady, and the mere trampling of that club-footed she-elephant of yours put to flight every sentiment of love. Remember the Douglas badge is a naked heart. Can I ride a-courting, therefore, with all my fighting tail behind me as though I besought an alliance with the King of England's daughter?"

Silently and sadly the strong man watched the young Earl ride away to the south along that fair lochside. He stood muttering to himself and looking long under his hand after his lord. The rider bowed his head as he passed under the rich blazonry of the white May-blossom, which, like creamy lace, covered the Three Thorns of Carlinwark, now deeply stained with rose colour from the clouds of sunset.



William of Douglas reined up Darnaway underneath the whispering foliage of a great beech.

"Aye, aye," he said, "the Douglas badge is indeed a heart—but it is a bleeding heart. God avert the omen, and keep

this young man safe—for though many love him, there be more that would rejoice at his fall."

The rider on Black Darnaway rode right into the saffron eye of the sunset. On his left hand Carlinwark and its many islets burned rich with spring-green foliage, all splashed with the golden sunset light. Darnaway's well-shod hoofs sent the diamond drops flying, as, with obvious pleasure, he trampled through the shallows. Ben Gairn and Screel, boldly ridged against the southern horizon, stood out in dark amethyst against the glowing sky of even, but the young rider never so much as turned his head to look at them.

Presently, however, he emerged from among the noble lakeside trees upon a more open space. Broom and whin blossom clustered yellow and orange beneath him, garrisoning with their green spears and golden banners every knoll and scaur. But there were broad spaces of turf here and there on which the conies fed, or fought terrible battles for the meek ear-twitching does, "spat-spatting" at each other with their fore paws and springing into the air in their mating fury.

William of Douglas reined up Darnaway underneath the whispering foliage of a great beech, for all at unawares he had come upon a sight that interested him more than the noble prospect of the May sunset.

In the centre of the golden glade, and with all their faces mistily glorified by the evening light, he saw a group of little girls, singing and dancing as they performed some quaint and graceful pageant of childhood.

Their young voices came up to him with a wistful, dying fall, and the slow, graceful movement of the rhythmic dance

seemed to affect the young man strangely. Involuntarily he lifted his close-fitting feathered cap from his head, and allowed the cool airs to blow against his brow.

*"See the robbers passing by, passing by,
passing by,
See the robbers passing by,
My fair lady!"*

The ancient words came up clearly and distinctly to him, and softened his heart with the indefinable and exquisite pathos of the refrain whenever it is sung by the sweet voices of children.

"These are surely but cottars' bairns," he said, smiling a little at his own intensity of feeling, "but they sing like little angels. I daresay my sweetheart Magdalen is amongst them."

And he sat still listening, patting Black Darnaway meanwhile on the neck.

*"What did the robbers do to you, do to you, do
to you,
What did the robbers do to you,
My fair lady?"*

The first two lines rang out bold and clear. Then again the wistfulness of the refrain played upon his heart as if it had been an instrument of strings, till the tears came into his eyes at the wondrous sorrow and yearning with which one voice, the sweetest and purest of all, replied, singing quite alone:

*"They broke my lock and stole my gold, stole
my gold, stole my gold,
Broke my lock and stole my gold,
My fair lady!"*

The tears brimmed over in the eyes of William Douglas, and a deep foreboding of the mysteries of fate fell upon his heart and abode there heavy as doom.

He turned his head as though he felt a presence near him, and lo! sudden and silent as the appearing of a phantom, another horse was alongside of Black Darnaway, and upon a white palfrey a maiden dressed also in white sat, smiling upon the young man, fair to look upon as an angel from heaven.

Earl William's lips parted, but he was too surprised to speak. Nevertheless, he moved his hand to his head in instinctive salutation; but, finding his bonnet already off, he could only stare at the vision which had so suddenly sprung out of the ground.

The lady slowly waved her hand in the direction of the children, whose young voices still rang clear as cloister bells tolling out the Angelus, and whose white dresses waved in the light wind as they danced back and forth with a slow and graceful motion.

"You hear, Earl William," she said, in a low, thrilling voice, speaking with a foreign accent, "you hear? You are a good Christian, doubtless, and you have heard from your uncle, the Abbot, how praise is made perfect 'out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.' Hark to them; they sing of their own destinies—and it may be also of yours and mine."

And so fascinated and moved at heart at once by her beauty and by her strange words, the Douglas listened.

*"What did the robbers do to you, do to you, do
to you,
What did the robbers do to you,
My fair lady?"*

The lady on the delicately pacing palfrey turned the darkness of her eyes from the white-robed choristers to the face of the young man. Then, with an impetuous motion of her hand, she urged him to listen for the next words, which swept over Earl William's heart with a cadence of unutterable pain and inexplicable melancholy.

*"They broke my lock and stole my gold, stole
my gold, stole my gold,
Broke my lock and stole my gold,
My fair lady!"*

He turned upon his companion with a quick energy, as if he were afraid of losing himself again.

"Who are you, lady, and what do you here?"

The girl (for in years she was little more) smiled and reined her steed a little back from him with an air at once prettily petulant and teasing.

"Is that spoken as William Douglas or as the Justicer of Galloway—a country where, as I understand, there is no trial by jury?"

The light of a radiant smile passed from her lips into his soul.

"It is spoken as a man speaks to a woman beautiful and queenly," he said, not removing his eyes from her face.

"I fear I may have startled you," she said, without continuing the subject. "Even as I came I saw you were wrapped in meditation, and my palfrey going lightly made no sound on the grass and leaves."

Her voice was so sweet and low that William Douglas, listening to it, wished that she would speak on for ever.

"The hour grows late," he said, remembering himself. "You must have far to ride. Let me be your escort homewards if you have none worthier than I."

"Alas," she answered, smiling yet more subtly, "I have no home near by. My home is very far and over many turbulent seas. I have but a maiden's pavilion in which to rest my head. Yet since I and my company must needs travel through your domains, Earl William, I trust you will not be so cruel as to forbid us?"

"Yes,"—he was smiling now in turn, and catching somewhat of the gay spirit of the lady,— "as overlord of all this province I do forbid you to pass through these lands of Galloway without first visiting me in my house of Thrieve!"

The lady clapped her hands and laughed, letting her palfrey pace onwards through the woodland glades bridle free, while Black Darnaway, compelled by his master's hand, followed, tossing his head indignantly because it had been turned from the direction of his nightly stable on the Castle Isle.

CHAPTER III

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TWO RIDING TOGETHER

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"Joyous," she cried, as they went, "Oh, most joyous would it be to see the noble castle and to have all the famous two thousand knights to make love to me at once! To capture two thousand hearts at one sweep of the net! What would Margaret of France herself say to that?"

"Is there no single heart sufficient to satisfy you, fair maid?" said the young man, in a low voice; "none loyal enough nor large enough for you that you desire so many?"

"And what would I do with one if it were in my hands," she said wistfully; "that is, if it were a worthy heart and one worth the taking. Ever since I was a child I have always broken my toys when I tired of them."

The voices of the singing children on the green came more faintly to their ears, but the words were still clear to be understood.

*"Off to prison you must go, you must go, you
must go,
Off to prison you must go,
My fair lady!"*

"You hear? It is my fate!" she said.

"Nay," answered the Earl, passionately, still looking in her eyes. "Mine, mine—not yours! Gladly I would go to prison or

to death for the love of one so fair!"

"My lord, my lord," she laughed, with a tolerant protest in her voice, "you keep up the credit of your house right nobly. How goes the distich? My mother taught it me upon the bridge of Avignon, where also as here in Scotland the children dance and sing."

**"First in the love of Woman,
First in the field of fight,
First in the death that men must die,
Such is the Douglas' right!"**

"Here and now," he said, still looking at her, "'tis only the first I crave."

"Earl William, positively you must come to Court!" she shrilled into sudden tinkling laughter; "there be ladies there more worthy of your ardour than a poor errant maiden such as I."

"A Court," cried Earl William, scornfully, "to the Seneschal's court! Nay, truly. Could a Stewart ever keep his faith or pay his debts? Never, since the first of them licked his way into a lady's favour."

"Oh," she answered lightly, "I meant not the Court of Stirling nor yet the Chancellor's Castle of Edinburgh. I meant the only great Court—the Court of France, the Court of Charles the Seventh, the Court which already owns the sway of its rarest ornament, your own Scottish Princess Margaret."

"Thither I cannot go unless the King of France grants me my father's rights and estates!" he said, with a certain sternness in his tone.