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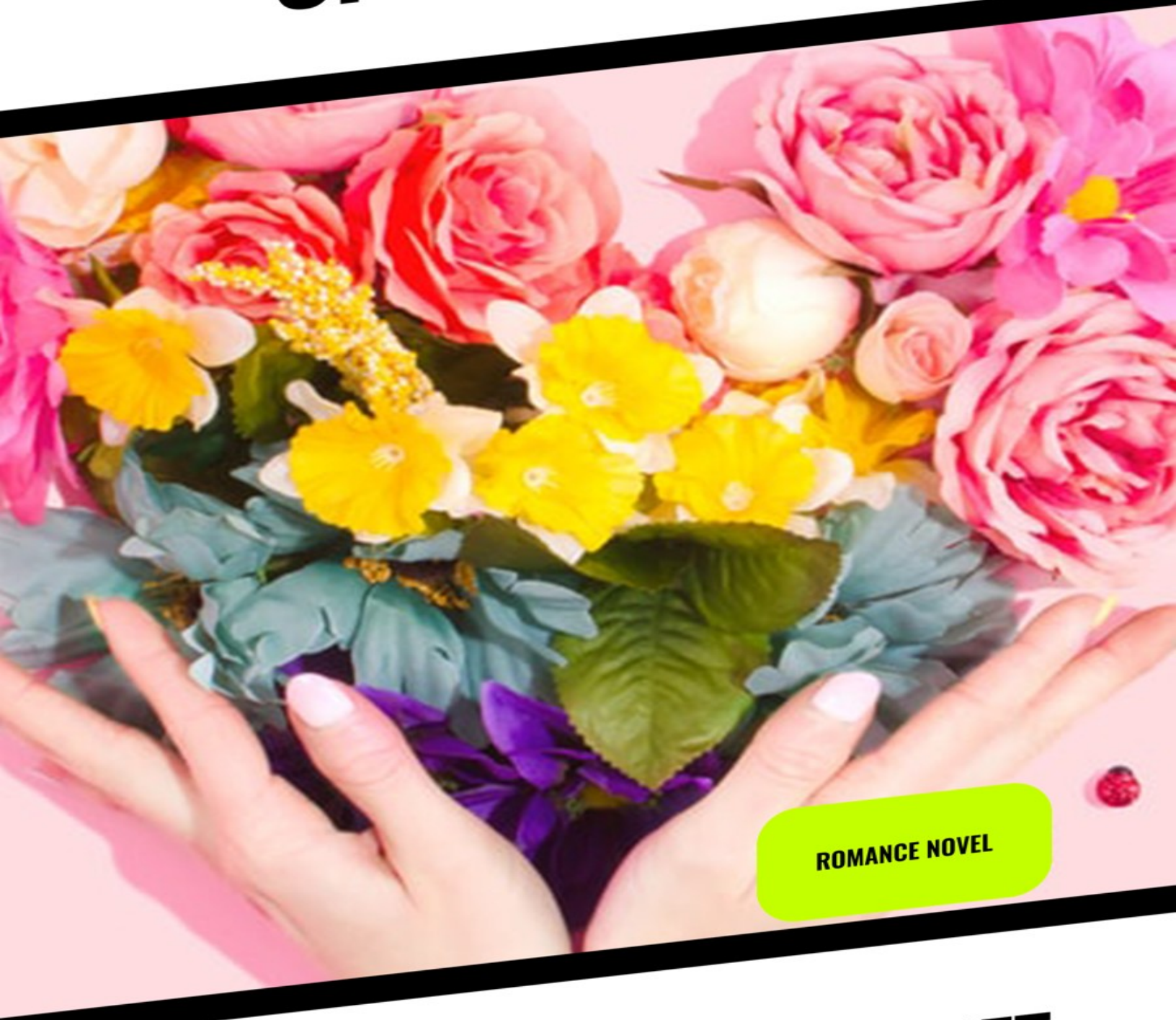
S. R. CROCKETT



ROMANCE NOVEL

THE LILAC SUNBONNET

S. R. Crockett

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Romance Novel

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CHAPTER I.

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THE BLANKET-WASHING.

Ralph Peden lay well content under a thorn bush above the Grannoch water. It was the second day of his sojourning in Galloway—the first of his breathing the heather scent on which the bees grew tipsy, and of listening to the grasshoppers CHIRRING in the long bent by the loch side. Yesterday his father's friend, Allan Welsh, minister of the Marrow kirk in the parish of Dullarg, had held high discourse with him as to his soul's health, and made many inquiries as to how it sped in the great city with the precarious handful of pious folk, who gathered to listen to the precious and savoury truths of the pure Marrow teaching. Ralph Peden was charged with many messages from his father, the metropolitan Marrow minister, to Allan Welsh—dear to his soul as the only minister who had upheld the essentials on that great day, when among the assembled Presbyters so many had gone backward and walked no more with him.

"Be faithful with the young man, my son," Allan Welsh read in the quaintly sealed and delicately written letter which his brother minister in Edinburgh had sent to him, and

which Ralph had duly delivered in the square, grim manse of Dullarg, with a sedate and old-fashioned reverence which sat strangely on one of his years. "Be faithful with the young man," continued the letter; "he is well grounded on the fundamentals; his head is filled with godly lear, and he has sound views on the Headship; but he has always been a little cold and distant even to me, his father according to the flesh. With his companions he is apt to be distant and reserved. I am to blame for the solitude of our life here in James's Court, but to you I do not need to tell the reason of that. The Lord give you his guidance in leading the young man in the right way."

So far Gilbert Peden's letter had run staidly and in character like the spoken words of the writer. But here it broke off. The writing, hitherto fine as a hair, thickened; and from this point became crowded and difficult, as though the floods of feeling had broken some dam. "O man Allan, for my sake, if at all you have loved me, or owe me anything, dig deep and see if the lad has a heart. He shews it not to me."

So that is why Ralph Peden lies couched in the sparce bells of the ling, just where the dry, twisted timothy grasses are beginning to overcrown the purple bells of the heather. Tall and clean-limbed, with a student's pallor of clear-cut face, a slightly ascetic stoop, dark brown curls clustering over a white forehead, and eyes which looked steadfast and true, the young man was sufficient of a hero. He wore a broad straw hat, which he had a pleasant habit of pushing back, so that his clustering locks fell over his brow after a fashion which all women thought becoming. But Ralph

Peden heeded not what women thought, said, or did, for he was trysted to the kirk of the Marrow, the sole repertory of orthodox truth in Scotland, which is as good as saying in the wide world—perhaps even in the universe.

Ralph Peden had dwelt all his life with his father in an old house in James's Court, Edinburgh, overlooking the great bounding circle of the northern horizon and the eastern sea. He had been trained by his father to think more of a professor's opinion on his Hebrew exercise than of a woman's opinion on any subject whatever. He had been told that women were an indispensable part of the economy of creation; but, though he accepted word by word the Westminster Confession, and as an inexorable addition the confessions and protests of the remnant of the true kirk in Scotland (known as the Marrow kirk), he could not but consider woman a poor makeshift, even as providing for the continuity of the race. Surely she had not been created when God looked upon all that he had made and found it very good. The thought preserved Ralph's orthodoxy.

Ralph Peden had come out into the morning air, with his note-book and a volume which he had been studying all the way from Edinburgh. As he lay at length among the grass he conned it over and over. He referred to passages here and there. He set out very calmly with that kind of determination with which a day's work in the open air with a book is often begun. Not for a moment did he break the monotony of his study. The marshalled columns of strange letters were mowed down before him.

A great humble-bee, barred with tawny orange, worked his way up from his hole in the bank, buzzing shrilly in an

impatient, stifled manner at finding his dwelling blocked as to its exit by a mountainous bulk. Ralph Peden rose in a hurry. The beast seemed to be inside his coat. He had instinctively hated bees and everything that buzzed ever since as a child he had made experiments with the paper nest of a tree-building wasp. The humble-bee buzzed a little more, discontentedly, thought of going back, crept out at last from beneath the Hebrew Lexicon, and appeared to comb his hair with his feeler. Then he slowly mounted along the broad blade of a meadow fox-tail grass, which bent under him as if to afford him an elastic send-off upon his flight. With a spring he lumbered up, taking his way over the single field which separated his house from the edge of the Grannoch water—where on the other side, above the glistening sickle-sweep of sand which looked so inviting, yet untouched under the pines by the morning sun, the hyacinths lay like a blue wreath of peat smoke in the hollows of the wood.

But there was a whiff of real peat smoke somewhere in the air, and Ralph Peden, before he returned to his book, was aware of the murmur of voices. He moved away from the humble-bee's dwelling and established himself on a quieter slope under a bush of broom. A whin-chat said "check, check" above him, and flirted a brilliant tail; but Ralph Peden was not afraid of whin-chats. Here he settled himself to study, knitting his brows and drumming on the ground with the toe of one foot to concentrate his attention. The whin-chat could hear him murmuring to himself at intervals, "Surely that is the sense—it must be taken this way." Sometimes, on the contrary, he shook his head at

Luther's Commentary, which lay on the short, warm turf before him, as if in reproof. Ralph was of opinion that Luther, but for his great protective reputation, and the fact that he had been dead some time, might have been served with a libel for heresy—at least if he had ministered to the Marrow kirk.

Then after a little he pulled his hat over his eyes to think, and lay back till he could just see one little bit of Loch Grannoch gleaming through the trees, and the farm of Nether Crae set on the hillside high above it. He counted the sheep on the green field over the loch, numbering the lambs twice because they frisked irresponsibly about, being full of frivolity and having no opinions upon Luther to sober them.

Gradually a haze spun itself over the landscape, and Ralph Peden's head slowly fell back till it rested somewhat sharply upon a spikelet of prickly whin. His whole body sat up instantly, with an exclamation which was quite in Luther's manner. He had not been sleeping. He rejected the thought; yet he acknowledged that it was nevertheless passing strange that, just where the old single- arched bridge takes a long stride over the Grannoch lane, there was now a great black pot a-swing above a blinking pale fire of peats and fir-branches, and a couple of great tubs set close together on stones which he had not seen before. There was, too, a ripple of girls' laughter, which sent a strange stirring of excitement along the nerves of the young man. He gathered his books to move away; but on second thoughts, looking through the long, swaying tendrils of the broom under which he sat, he resolved to remain. After all, the girls might be as harmless as his helper of yesterday.

"Yet it is most annoying," he said; "I had been quieter in James's
Court."

Still he smiled a little to himself, for the broom did not grow in James's Court, nor the blackbirds flute their mellow whistle there.

Loch Grannoch stretched away three miles to the south, basking in alternate blue and white, as cloud and sky mirrored themselves upon it. The first broad rush of the ling [Footnote: Common heath (Erica tetralix).] was climbing the slopes of the Crae Hill above —a pale lavender near the loch-side, deepening to crimson on the dryer slopes where the heath-bells grew shorter and thicker together. The wimpling lane slid as silently away from the sleeping loch as though it were eloping and feared to awake an angry parent. The whole range of hill and wood and water was drenched in sunshine. Silence clothed it like a garment—save only for the dark of the shadow under the bridge, from whence had come that ring of girlish laughter which had jarred upon the nerves of Ralph Peden.

Suddenly there emerged from the indigo shade where the blue spruces overarched the bridge a girl carrying two shining pails of water. Her arms were bare, her sleeves being rolled high above her elbow; and her figure, tall and shapely, swayed gracefully to the movement of the pails. Ralph did not know before that there is an art in carrying water. He was ignorant of many things, but even with his views on woman's place in the economy of the universe, he could not but be satisfied with the fitness and the beauty of the girl who came up the path, swinging her pails with the

compensatory sway of lissom body, and that strong outward flex of the elbow which kept the brimming cans swinging in safety by her side.

Ralph Peden never took his eyes off her as she came, the theories of James's Court notwithstanding. Nor indeed need we for a little. For this is Winifred, better known as Winsome Charteris, a very important young person indeed, to whose beauty and wit the poets of three parishes did vain reverence; and, what she might well value more, whose butter was the best (and commanded the highest price) of any that went into Dumfries market on Wednesdays.

Fair hair, crisping and tendrilling over her brow, swept back in loose and flossy circlets till caught close behind her head by a tiny ribbon of blue—then again escaping it went scattering and wavering over her shoulders wonderingly, like nothing on earth but Winsome Charteris's hair. It was small wonder that the local poets grew grey before their time in trying to find a rhyme for "sunshine," a substantive which, for the first time, they had applied to a girl's hair. For the rest, a face rather oval than long, a nose which the schoolmaster declared was "statuesque" (used in a good sense, he explained to the village folk, who could never be brought to see the difference between a statue and an idol—the second commandment being of literal interpretation along the Loch Grannoch side), and eyes which, emulating the parish poet, we can only describe as like two blue waves when they rise just far enough to catch a sparkle of light on their crests. The subject of her mouth, though tempting, we refuse to touch. Its description has already wrecked three promising reputations.

But withal Winsome Charteris set her pails as frankly and plumply on the ground, as though she were plain as a pike-staff, and bent a moment over to look into the gypsy-pot swung on its birchen triangle. Then she made an impatient movement of her hand, as if to push the biting fir-wood smoke aside. This angered Ralph, who considered it ridiculous and ill-ordered that a gesture which showed only a hasty temper and ill-regulated mind should be undeniably pretty and pleasant to look upon, just because it was made by a girl's hand. He was angry with himself, yet he hoped she would do it again. Instead, she took up one pail of water after the other, swung them upward with a single dexterous movement, and poured the water into the pot, from which the steam was rising. Ralph Peden could see the sunlight sparkle in the water as it arched itself solidly out of the pails. He was not near enough to see the lilac sprig on her light summer gown; but the lilac sunbonnet which she wore, principally it seemed in order that it might hang by the strings upon her shoulders, was to Ralph a singularly attractive piece of colour in the landscape. This he did not resent, because it is always safe to admire colour.

Ralph would have been glad to have been able to slip off quietly to the manse. He told himself so over and over again, till he believed it. This process is easy. But he saw very well that he could not rise from the lee of the whin bush without being in full view of this eminently practical and absurdly attractive young woman. So he turned to his Hebrew Lexicon with a sigh, and a grim contraction of determined brows which recalled his father. A country girl

was nothing to the hunter after curious roots and the amateur of finely shaded significances in Piel and Pual.

"I WILL not be distracted!" Ralph said doggedly, though a Scot, correct for once in his grammar; and he pursued a recalcitrant particle through the dictionary like a sleuthhound.

A clear shrill whistle rang through the slumberous summer air.

"Bless me," said Ralph, startled, "this is most discomposing!"

He raised himself cautiously on his elbow, and beheld the girl of the water-pails standing in the full sunshine with her lilac sunbonnet in her hand. She wared it high above her head, then she paused a moment to look right in his direction under her hand held level with her brows. Suddenly she dropped the sunbonnet, put a couple of fingers into her mouth in a manner which, if Ralph had only known it, was much admired of all the young men in the parish, and whistled clear and loud, so that the stone-chat fluttered up indignant and scurried to a shelter deeper among the gorse. A most revolutionary young person this. He regretted that the humble-bee had moved him nearer the bridge.

Ralph was deeply shocked that a girl should whistle, and still more that she should use two fingers to do it, for all the world like a shepherd on the hill. He bethought him that not one of his cousins, Professor Habakkuk Thriepneuk's daughters (who studied Chaldaeic with their father), would ever have dreamed of doing that. He imagined their horror

at the thought, and a picture, compound of Jemima, Kezia, and Kerenhappuch, rose before him.

Down the hill, out from beneath the dark green solid foliaged elder bushes, there came a rush of dogs.

"Save us," said Ralph, who saw himself discovered, "the deil's in the lassie; she'll have the dogs on me!"—an expression he had learned from John Bairdison, his father's "man," [Footnote: Church officer and minister's servant.] who in an unhallowed youth had followed the sea.

Then he would have reproved himself for the unlicensed exclamation as savouring of the "minced oath," had he not been taken up with watching the dogs. There were two of them. One was a large, rough deerhound, clean cut about the muzzle, shaggy everywhere else, which ran first, taking the hedges in his stride. The other was a small, short-haired collie, which, with his ears laid back and an air of grim determination not to be left behind, followed grimly after. The collie went under the hedges, diving instinctively for the holes which the hares had made as they went down to the water for their evening drink. Both dogs crossed to windward of him, racing for their mistress. When they reached the green level where the great tubs stood they leaped upon her with short sharp barks of gladness. She fended them off again with gracefully impatient hand; then bending low, she pointed to the loch-side a quarter of a mile below, where a herd of half a dozen black Galloway cows, necked with the red and white of the smaller Ayrshires, could be seen pushing its way through the lush heavy grass of the water meadow.

"Away by there! Fetch them, Roger!" she cried. "Haud at them—the kye's in the meadow!"

The dogs darted away level. The cows continued their slow advance, browsing as they went, but in a little while their dark fronts were turned towards the dogs as after a momentary indecision they recognized an enemy. With a startled rush the herd drove through the meadow and poured across the unfenced road up to the hill pasture which they had left, whose scanty grasses had doubtless turned slow bovine thoughts to the coolness of the meadow grass, and the pleasure of standing ruminant knee-deep in the river, with wavy tail nicking the flies in the shade.

For a little while Ralph Peden breathed freely again, but his satisfaction was short-lived. One girl was discomposing enough, but here were two. Moreover the new-comer, having arranged some blankets in a tub to her satisfaction, calmly tucked up her skirts in a professional manner and got bare-foot into the tub beside them. Then it dawned upon Ralph, who was not very instructed on matters of household economy, that he had chanced upon a Galloway blanket-washing; and that, like the gentleman who spied upon Musidora's toilet, of whom he had read in Mr. James Thomson's Seasons, he might possibly see more than he had come out to see.

Yet it was impossible to rise composedly and take his way manseward. Ralph wished now that he had gone at the first alarm. It had become so much more difficult now, as indeed it always does in such cases. Moreover, he was certain that these two vagabonds of curs would return. And they would be sure to find him out. Dogs were unnecessary and

inconvenient beasts, always sniffing and nosing about. He decided to wait. The new-comer of the kilts was after all no Naiad or Hebe. Her outlines did not resemble to any marked degree the plates in his excellent classical dictionary. She was not short in stature, but so strong and of a complexion so ruddily beaming above the reaming white which filled the blanket tub, that her mirthful face shone like the sun through an evening mist.

But Ralph did not notice that, in so far as she could, she had relieved the taller maiden of the heavier share of the work; and that her laugh was hung on a hair trigger, to go off at every jest and fancy of Winsome Charteris. All this is to introduce Miss Meg Kissock, chief and favoured maidservant at the Dullarg farm, and devoted worshipper of Winsome, the young mistress thereof. Meg indeed, would have thanked no one for an introduction, being at all times well able (and willing) to introduce herself.

It had been a shock to Ralph Peden when Meg Kissock walked up from the lane-side barefoot, and when she cleared the decks for the blanket tramping. But he had seen something like it before on the banks of the water of Leith, then running clear and limpid over its pebbles, save for a flour-mill or two on the lower reaches. But it was altogether another thing when, plain as print, he saw his first goddess of the shining water-pails sit calmly down on the great granite boulder in the shadow of the bridge, and take one small foot in her hand with the evident intention of removing her foot-gear and occupying the second tub.

The hot blood surged in responsive shame to Ralph Peden's cheeks and temples. He started up. Meg Kissock

was tramping the blankets rhythmically, holding her green kirtle well up with both hands, and singing with all her might. The goddess of the shining pails was also happily unconscious, with her face to the running water. Ralph bent low and hastened through a gap in the fence towards the shade of the elder bushes on the slope. He did not run—he has never acknowledged that; but he certainly came almost indistinguishably near it. As soon, however, as he was really out of sight, he actually did take to his heels and run in the direction of the manse, disconcerted and demoralized.

The dogs completed his discomfiture, for they caught sight of his flying figure and gave chase—contenting themselves, however, with pausing on the hillside where Ralph had been lying, with indignant barkings and militant tails high crested in air.

Winsome Charteris went up to the broom bushes which fringed the slope to find out what was the matter with Tyke and Roger. When she got there, a slim black figure was just vanishing round the white bend of the Far Away Turn. Winsome whistled low this time, and without putting even one finger into her mouth.

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THE MOTHER OF KING LEMUEL.

It was not till Ralph Peden had returned to the study of the manse of the Marrow kirk of Dullarg, and the colour induced by exercise had had time to die out of his naturally pale cheeks, that he remembered that he had left his Hebrew Bible and Lexicon, as well as a half-written exegesis on an important subject, underneath the fatal whin bush above the bridge over the Grannoch water. He would have been glad to rise and seek it immediately—a task which, indeed, no longer presented itself in such terrible colours to him. He found himself even anxious to go. It would be a serious thing were he to lose his father's Lexicon and Mr. Welsh's Hebrew Bible. Moreover, he could not bear the thought of leaving the sheets of his exposition of the last chapter of Proverbs to be the sport of the gamesome Galloway winds—or, worse thought, the laughing-stock of gamesome young women who whistled with two fingers in their mouths.

Yet the picture of the maid of the loch which rose before him struck him as no unpleasant one. He remembered for

one thing how the sun shone through the tangle of her hair. But he had quite forgotten, on the other hand, at what part of his exegesis he had left off. It was, however, a manifest impossibility for him to slip out again. Besides, he was in mortal terror lest Mr. Welsh should ask for his Hebrew Bible, or offer to revise his chapter of the day with him. All the afternoon he was uneasy, finding no excuse to take himself away to the loch-side in order to find his Bible and Lexicon.

"I understand you have been studying, with a view to license, the last chapter of the Proverbs of Solomon?" said Gilbert Welsh, interrogatively, bending his shaggy brows and pouting his underlip at the student.

The Marrow minister was a small man, with a body so dried and twisted ("shauchelt" was the local word) that all the nerve stuff of a strong nature had run up to his brain, so that when he walked he seemed always on the point of falling forward, overbalanced by the weight of his cliff-like brow.

"Ralph, will you ground the argument of the mother of King Lemuel in this chapter? But perhaps you would like to refer to the original Hebrew?" said the minister.

"Oh, no," interrupted Ralph, aghast at the latter suggestion, "I do not need the text—thank you, sir."

But, in spite of his disclaimer, he devoutly desired to be where the original text and his written comment upon it were at that moment—which, indeed, was a consummation even more devoutly to be wished than he had any suspicion of. The Marrow minister leaned his head on his hand and looked waitingly at the young man.

Ralph recalled himself with an effort. He had to repeat to himself that he was in the manse study, and almost to pinch his knee to convince himself of the reality of his experiences. But this was not necessary a second time, for, as he sat hastily down on one of Allen Welsh's hard-wood chairs, a prickle from the gorse bush which he had brought back with him from Loch Grannoch side was argument sharp enough to convince Bishop Berkeley.

"Compose yourself to answer my question," said the minister, with some slight severity. Ralph wondered silently if even a minister of the Marrow kirk in good standing, could compose himself on one whin prickle for certain, and the probability of several others developing themselves at various angles hereafter.

Ralph "grounded" himself as best as he could, explaining the views of the mother of King Lemuel as to the woman of virtue and faithfulness. He seemed to himself to have a fluency and a fervour in exposition to which he had been a stranger. He began to have new views about the necessity for the creation of Eve. Woman might possibly, after all, be less purely gratuitous than he had supposed.

"The woman who is above rubies," said he, "is one who rises early to care for the house, who oversees the handmaids as they cleanse the household stuffs—in a" (he just saved himself from saying "in a black pot")—"in a fitting vessel by the rivers of water."

"Well put and correctly mandated," said Mr. Welsh, very much pleased. There was unction about this young man. Though a bachelor by profession, he loved to hear the praises of good women; for he had once known one.

"She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and—"

Here Ralph paused, biting his tongue to keep from describing the picture which rose before him.

"And what," said the minister, tentatively, leaning forward to look into the open face of the young man, "what is the distinction or badge of true beauty and favour of countenance, as so well expressed by the mother of King Lemuel?"

"A LILAC SUNBONNET!" said Ralph Peden, student in divinity.

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A TREASURE-TROVE.

Winsome CHARTERIS was a self-possessed maid, but undeniably her heart beat faster when she found on the brae face, beneath the bush of broom, two books the like of which she had never seen before, as well as an open notebook with writing upon it in the neatest and delicatest of hands. First, as became a prudent woman of experience, she went up to the top of the hill to assure herself that the owner of this strange treasure was not about to return. Then she carefully let down her high-kilted print dress till only her white feet "like little mice" stole in and out. It did not strike her that this sacrifice to the conventions was just a trifle belated.

As she returned she said "Shoo!" at every tangled bush, and flapped her apron as if to scare whatever curious wild fowl might have left behind it in its nest under the broom such curious nest- eggs as two great books full of strange, bewitched-looking printing, and a note-book of curious and interesting writings. Then, with a half sigh of disappointment, Winsome Charteris sat herself down to look

into this matter. Meg Kissock from the bridge end showed signs of coming up to see what she was about; but Winsome imperiously checked the movement.

"Bide where you are, Meg; I'll be down with you presently."

She turned over the great Hebrew Bible reverently. "A. Welsh" was written on the fly-leaf. She had a strange idea that she had seen it before. It seemed somehow thrillingly familiar.

"That's the minister's Hebrew Bible book, no doubt," she said. "For that's the same kind of printing as between the double verses of the hundred-and-nineteenth Psalm in my grandfather's big Bible," she continued, sapiently shaking her head till the crispy ringlets tumbled about her eyes, and she had impatiently to toss them aside.

She laid the Bible down and peeped into the other strange-looking book. There were single words here of the same kind as in the other, but the most part was in ordinary type, though in a language of which she could make nothing. The note-book was a resource. It was at least readable, and Winsome Charteris began expectantly to turn it over. But something stirred reprovingly in her heart. It seemed as if she were listening to a conversation not meant for her. So she kept her finger on the leaf, but did not turn it.

"No," she said, "I will not read it. It is not meant for me." Then, after a pause, "At least I will only read this page which is open, and then look at the beginning to see whose it is; for, you know, I may need to send it back to him." The back she had seen vanish round the Far Away Turn demanded the masculine pronoun.

She lifted the book and read:

"Alas!" (so ran the writing, fluent and clear, small as printer's type, Ralph Peden's beautiful Hellenic script), "alas, that the good qualities of the housewives of Solomon's days are out of date and forgotten in these degenerate times! Women, especially the younger of them, are become gadabouts, chatterers in the public ways, idle, adorners of their vain selves, pamperers of their frail tabernacles—"

Winsome threw down the book and almost trod upon it as upon a snake.

"'Tis some city fop," she said, stamping her foot, "who is tired of the idle town dames. I wonder if he has ever seen the sun rise or done a day's work in his life? If only I had the wretch! But I will read no more!"

In token of the sincerity of the last assertion, she picked up the note-book again. There was little more to read. It was at this point that the humble-bee had startled the writer.

But underneath there were woids faintly scrawled in pencil: "Must concentrate attention"—"The proper study of mankind is"—this last written twice, as if the writer were practising copy-lines absently. Then at the very bottom was written, so faintly that hardly any eyes but Winsome's could have read the words:

"Of all colours I do love the lilac. I wonder all maids do not wear gear of that hue!"

"Oh!" said Winsome Charteris quickly.

Then she gathered up the books very gently, and taking a kerchief from her neck, she folded the two great books within it, fastening them with a cunning knot. She was carrying them slowly up towards the farm town of Craig

Ronald in her bare arms when Ralph Peden sat answering his catechism in the study at the manse. She entered the dreaming courtyard, and walked sedately across its silent sun- flooded spaces without a sound. She passed the door of the cool parlour where her grandfather and grandmother sat, the latter with her hands folded and her great tortoiseshell spectacles on her nose, taking her afternoon nap. A volume of Waverley lay beside her. Into her own white little room Winsome went, and laid the bundle of books in the bottom of the wall-press, which was lined with sheets of the Cairn Edward Miscellany. She looked at it some time before she shut the door.

"His name is Ralph," she said. "I wonder how old he is—I shall know tomorrow, because he will come back; but—I would like to know tonight."

She sighed a little—so light a breath that it was only the dream of a sigh. Then she looked at the lilac sunbonnet, as if it ought to have known.

"At any rate he has very good taste," she said.

But the lilac sunbonnet said never a word.

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A CAVALIER PURITAN.

The farm town of Craig Ronald drowsed in the quiet of noon. In the open court the sunshine triumphed, and only the purple-grey marsh mallows along the side of the house under the windows gave any sign of life. In them the bees had begun to hum at earliest dawn, an hour and a half before the sun looked over the crest of Ben Gairn. They were humming busily still. In all the chambers of the house there was the same reposeful stillness. Through them Winsome Charteris moved with free, light step. She glanced in to see that her grandfather and grandmother were wanting for nothing in their cool and wide sitting-room, where the brown mahogany-cased eight- day clock kept up an unequal ticking, like a man walking upon two wooden legs of which one is shorter than the other.

It said something for Winsome Charteris and her high-hearted courage, that what she was accustomed to see in that sitting-room had no effect upon her spirits. It was a pleasant room enough, with two windows looking to the south—little round-budded, pale- petalled monthly roses

nodding and peeping within the opened window-frames. Sweet it was with a great peace, every chair covered with old sprigged chintz, flowers of the wood and heather from the hill set in china vases about it. The room where the old folk dwelt at Craig Ronald was fresh within as is the dew on sweetbrier. Fresh, too, was the apparel of her grandmother, the flush of youth yet on her delicate cheek, though the Psalmist's limit had long been passed for her.

As Winsome looked within,

"Are ye not sleeping, grandmother?" she said.

The old lady looked up with a resentful air.

"Sleepin'! The lassie's gane gyte! [out of her senses]. What for wad I be sleepin' in the afternune? An' me wi' the care o' yer gran'faither—sic a handling, him nae better nor a bairn, an' you a bit feckless hempie wi' yer hair fleeing like the tail o' a twa- year-auld cowt! [colt]. Sleepin' indeed! Na, sleepin's nane for me!"

The young girl came up and put her arms about her grandmother.

"That's rale unceevil o' ye, noo, Granny Whitemutch!" she said, speaking in the coaxing tones to which the Scots' language lends itself so easily, "an' it's just because I hae been sae lang at the blanket-washin', seein' till that hizzy Meg. An' ken ye what I saw!-ane o' the black dragoons in full retreat, grannie; but he left his camp equipage ahint him, as the sergeant said when—Ye ken the story, grannie. Ye maun hae been terrible bonny in thae days!"

"'Deed I'm nane sae unbonny yet, for a' yer helicat flichtmafleathers, sprigget goons, an' laylac bonnets," said the old lady, shaking her head till the white silk top-knots

trembled. "No, nor I'm nane sae auld nayther. The gudeman in the corner there, he's auld and dune gin'ye like, but no me—no me! Gin he warna spared to me, I could even get a man yet," continued the lively old lady, "an' whaur wad ye be then, my lass, I wad like to ken?"

"Perhaps I could get one too, grannie," she said. And she shook her head with an air of triumph. Winsome kissed her grandmother gently on the brow.

"Nane o' yer Englishy tricks an' trokin's," said she, settling the white muslin band which she wore across her brow wrinkleless and straight, where it had been disarrayed by the onslaught of her impulsive granddaughter.

"Aye," she went on, stretching out a hand which would have done credit to a great dame, so white and slender was it in spite of the hollows which ran into a triangle at the wrist, and the pale- blue veins which the slight wrinkles have thrown into relief.

"An' I mind the time when three o' his Majesty's officers—nane o' yer militia wi' horses that rin awa' wi' them ilka time they gang oot till exerceese, but rale sodgers wi' sabre-tashies to their heels and spurs like pitawtie dreels. Aye, sirs, but that was before I married an elder in the Kirk o' the Marrow. I wasna twenty-three when I had dune wi' the gawds an' vanities o' this wicked world."

"I saw a minister lad the day—a stranger," said Winsome, very quietly.

"Sirce me," returned her grandmother briskly; "kenned I e'er the like o' ye, Winifred Chayrteris, for licht-heedit-ness an' lack o' a' common sense! Saw a minister an' ne'er thocht, belike, o' sayin' cheep ony mair nor if he had been a

wutterick [weasel]. An' what like was he, na? Was he young, or auld—or no sae verra auld, like mysel'? Did he look like an Establisher by the consequence o' the body, or—"

"But, grannie dear, how is it possible that I should ken, when all that I saw of him was but his coat-tails? It was him that was running away."

"My certes," said grannie, "but the times are changed since my day! When I was as young as ye are the day it wasna sodger or minister ayther that wad hae run frae the sicht o' me. But a minister, and a fine, young-looking man, I think ye said," continued Mistress Walter Skirving anxiously.

"Indeed, grandmother, I said nothing—" began Winsome.

"Haud yer tongue, Deil's i' the lassie, he'll be comin' here. Maybes he's comin' up the loan this verra meenit. Get me my best kep [cap], the French yin o' Flanders lawn trimmed wi' Valenceenes lace that Captain Wildfeather, of his Majesty's—But na, I'll no think o' thae times, I canna bear to think o' them wi' ony complaisance ava. But bring me my kep—haste ye fast, lassie!"

Obediently Winsome went to her grandmother's bedroom and drew from under the bed the "mutch" box lined with pale green paper, patterned with faded pink roses. She did not smile when she drew it out. She was accustomed to her grandmother's ways. She too often felt the cavalier looking out from under her Puritan teaching; for the wild strain of the Gordon blood held true to its kind, and Winsome's grandmother had been a Gordon at Lochenkit, whose father had ridden with Kenmure in the great rebellion.

When she brought the white goffered mutch with its plaits and puckers, granny tried it on in various ways,

Winsome meanwhile holding a small mirror before her.

"As I was sayin', I renounced thinkin' aboot the vanities o' youth langsyne. Aye, it'll be forty years sin'—for ye maun mind that I was marriet whan but a lassie. Aye me, it's forty-five years since Ailie Gordon, as I was then, wed wi' Walter Skirving o' Craig Ronald (noo o' his ain chammer neuk, puir man, for he'll never leave it mair)," added she with a brisk kind of acknowledgment towards the chair of the semi-paralytic in the corner.

There silent and unregarding Walter Skirving sat—a man still splendid in frame and build, erect in his chair, a shawl over his knees even in this day of fervent heat, looking out dumbly on the drowsing, humming world of broad, shadowless noonshine, and often also on the equable silences of the night.

"No that I regret it the day, when he is but the name o' the man he yince was. For fifty years since there was nae lad like Walter Skirving cam into Dumfries High Street frae Stewartry or frae Shire. No a fit in buckled shune sae licht as his, his weel-shapit leg covered wi' the bonny 'rig-an'-fur' stockin' that I knitted mysel' frae the cast on o' the ower-fauld [over-fold] to the bonny white forefit that sets aff the blue sae weel. Walter Skirving could button his knee-breeks withoot bendin' his back—that nane could do but the king's son himsel'; an' sic a dancer as he was afore guid an' godly Maister Cauldsowans took hand o' him at the tent, wi' preachin' a sermon on booin' the knee to Baal. Aye, aye, its a' awa'—an' its mony the year I thocht on it, let alane thocht on wantin' back thae days o' vanity an' the pride o' sinfu' youth!"