

'Whereupon', continued Mr Balfour, 'I have subscribed myself with the usual compliments. You observe I have said "some of your friends"; I hope you can justify my plural?'

'Perfectly, sir; my purpose is known and approved by more than one,' said I. 'And your letter, which I take a pleasure to thank you for, is all I could have hoped.'

'It was all I could squeeze out,' said he; 'and from what I know of the matter you design to meddle in, I can only pray God that it may prove sufficient.'

## CHAPTER IV

### LORD ADVOCATE PRESTONGRANGE

MY kinsman kept me to a meal, 'for the honour of the roof', he said; and I believe I made the better speed on my return. I had no thought but to be done with the next stage, and have myself fully committed; to a person circumstanced as I was, the appearance of closing a door on hesitation and temptation was itself extremely tempting; and I was the more disappointed, when I came to Prestongrange's house, to be informed he was abroad. I believe it was true at the moment, and for some hours after; and then I have no doubt the Advocate came home again, and enjoyed himself in a neighbouring chamber among friends, while perhaps the very fact of my arrival was forgotten. I would have gone away a dozen times, only for this strong drawing to have done with my declaration out of hand and be able to lay me down to sleep with a free conscience. At first I read, for the little cabinet where I was left contained a variety of books. But I fear I read with little profit, and the weather falling cloudy, the dusk coming up earlier than usual, and my cabinet being lighted with but a loophole of a window, I was at last obliged to desist from this diversion (such as it was), and pass the rest of my time of waiting in a very burthensome vacuity. The sound of people talking in a near chamber, the pleasant note of a harpsichord, and once the voice of a lady singing, bore me a kind of company.

I do not know the hour, but the darkness was long come, when the door of the cabinet opened, and I was aware, by the light behind him, of a tall figure of a man upon the threshold. I rose at once.

'Is anybody there?' he asked. 'Who is that?'

'I am bearer of a letter from the laird of Pilrig to the Lord Advocate,' said I.

'Have you been here long?' he asked.

'I would not like to hazard an estimate of how many hours,' said I.

'It is the first I hear of it,' he replied, with a chuckle. 'The lads must have forgotten you. But you are in the bit at last, for I am Prestongrange.'

So saying, he passed before me into the next room, whither (upon his sign) I followed him, and where he lit a candle and took his place before a business-table. It was a long room, of a good proportion, wholly lined with books. That small spark of light in a corner struck out the man's handsome person and strong face. He was flushed, his eye watered and sparkled, and before he sat down I observed him to sway back and forth. No doubt he had been supping liberally; but his mind and tongue were under full control.

'Well, sir, sit ye down,' said he, 'and let us see Pilrig's letter.'

He glanced it through in the beginning carelessly, looking up and bowing when he came to my name; but at the last words I thought I observed his attention to redouble, and I made sure he read them twice. All this while you are to suppose my heart was beating, for I had now crossed my Rubicon and was come fairly on the field of battle.

'I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr Balfour,' he said, when he had done. 'Let me offer you a glass of claret.'

'Under your favour, my lord, I think it would scarce be fair on me,' said I. 'I have come here, as the letter will have mentioned, on a business of some gravity to myself; and as I am little used with wine, I might be the sooner affected.'

'You shall be the judge,' said he. 'But if you will permit, I believe I will even have the bottle in myself.'

He touched a bell, and a footman came, as at a signal, bringing wine and glasses.

'You are sure you will not join me?' asked the Advocate. 'Well, here is to our better acquaintance! In what way can I serve you?'

'I should perhaps begin by telling you, my lord, that I am here at your own pressing invitation,' said I.

'You have the advantage of me somewhere,' said he, 'for I profess I think I never heard of you before this evening.'

'Right, my lord, the name is indeed new to you,' said I. 'And yet you have been for some time extremely wishful to make my acquaintance, and have declared the same in public.'

'I wish you would afford me a clue,' says he. 'I am no Daniel.'

'It will perhaps serve for such,' said I, 'that if I was in a

jesting humour—which is far from the case—I believe I might lay a claim on your lordship for two hundred pounds.’

‘In what sense?’ he inquired.

‘In the sense of rewards offered for my person,’ said I.

He thrust away his glass once and for all, and sat straight up in the chair where he had been previously lolling. ‘What am I to understand?’ said he.

‘*A tall strong lad of about eighteen,*’ I quoted, ‘*speaks like a Lowlander, and has no beard.*’

‘I recognize those words,’ said he, ‘which, if you have come here with any ill-judged intention of amusing yourself, are like to prove extremely prejudicial to your safety.’

‘My purpose in this,’ I replied, ‘is just entirely as serious as life and death, and you have understood me perfectly. I am the boy who was speaking with Glenure when he was shot.’

‘I can only suppose (seeing you here) that you claim to be innocent,’ said he.

‘The inference is clear,’ I said. ‘I am a very loyal subject to King George, but if I had anything to reproach myself with, I would have had more discretion than to walk into your den.’

‘I am glad of that,’ said he. ‘This horrid crime, Mr Balfour, is of a dye which cannot permit any clemency. Blood has been barbarously shed. It has been shed in direct opposition to His Majesty and our whole frame of laws, by those who are their known and public opponents. I take a very high sense of this. I will not deny that I consider the crime as directly personal to His Majesty.’

‘And unfortunately, my lord,’ I added, a little drily, ‘directly personal to another great personage who may be nameless.’

‘If you mean anything by those words, I must tell you I consider them unfit for a good subject; and were they spoken publicly I should make it my business to take note of them,’ said he. ‘You do not appear to me to recognize the gravity of your situation, or you would be more careful not to pejorate the same by words which glance upon the purity of justice. Justice, in this country, and in my poor hands, is no respecter of persons.’

‘You give me too great a share in my own speech, my lord,’ said I. ‘I did but repeat the common talk of the country, which I have heard everywhere, and from men of all opinions as I came along.’

‘When you are come to more discretion you will understand such talk is not to be listened to, how much less repeated,’ says the Advocate. ‘But I acquit you of an ill intention. That nobleman, whom we all honour, and who has indeed been wounded in a near place by the late barbarity, sits too high to be reached by these aspersions. The Duke of Argyle—you see that I deal plainly with you—takes it to heart as I do, and as we are both

bound to do by our judicial functions and the service of His Majesty; and I could wish that all hands, in this ill age, were equally clean of family rancour. But from the accident that this is a Campbell who has fallen martyr to his duty—as who else but the Campbells have ever put themselves foremost on that path?—I may say it, who am no Campbell—and that the chief of that great house happens (for all our advantages) to be the present head of the College of Justice, small minds and disaffected tongues are set agog in every changehouse in the country; and I find a young gentleman like Mr Balfour so ill-advised as to make himself their echo.' So much he spoke with a very oratorical delivery, as if in court, and then declined again upon the manner of a gentleman. 'All this apart,' said he. 'It now remains that I should learn what I am to do with you.'

'I had thought it was rather I that should learn the same from your lordship,' said I.

'Ay, true,' says the Advocate. 'But, you see, you come to me well recommended. There is a good honest Whig name to this letter,' says he, picking it up a moment from the table. 'And—extra-judicially, Mr Balfour—there is always the possibility of some arrangement. I tell you, and I tell you beforehand that you may be the more upon your guard, your fate lies with me singly. In such a matter (be it said with reverence) I am more powerful than the King's Majesty; and should you please me—and of course satisfy my conscience—in what remains to be held of our interview, I tell you it may remain between ourselves.'

'Meaning how?' I asked.

'Why, I mean it thus, Mr Balfour,' said he, 'that if you give satisfaction, no soul need know so much as that you visited my house; and you may observe that I do not even call my clerk.'

I saw what way he was driving. 'I suppose it is needless any one should be informed upon my visit,' said I, 'though the precise nature of my gains by that I cannot see. I am not at all ashamed of coming here.'

'And have no cause to be,' says he, encouragingly. 'Nor yet (if you are careful) to fear the consequences.'

'My lord,' said I, 'speaking under your correction I am not very easy to be frightened.'

'And I am sure I do not seek to frighten you,' says he. 'But to the interrogation; and let me warn you to volunteer nothing beyond the questions I shall ask you. It may consist very immediately with your safety. I have a great discretion, it is true, but there are bounds to it.'

'I shall try to follow your lordship's advice,' said I.

He spread a sheet of paper on the table and wrote a heading. 'It appears you were present, by the way, in the wood of

Lettermore at the moment of the fatal shot,' he began. 'Was this by accident?'

'By accident,' said I.

'How came you in speech with Colin Campbell?' he asked.

'I was inquiring my way of him to Aucharn,' I replied.

I observed he did not write this answer down.

'H'm, true,' said he, 'I had forgotten that. And do you know, Mr Balfour, I would dwell, if I were you, as little as might be on your relations with these Stewarts? It might be found to complicate our business. I am not yet inclined to regard these matters as essential.'

'I had thought, my lord, that all points of fact were equally material in such a case,' said I.

'You forget we are now trying these Stewarts,' he replied, with great significance. 'If we should ever come to be trying you, it will be very different; and I shall press these very questions that I am now willing to glide upon. But to resume: I have it here in Mr Mungo Campbell's precognition that you ran immediately up the brae. How came that?'

'Not immediately, my lord, and the cause was my seeing of the murderer.'

'You saw him, then?'

'As plain as I see your lordship, though not so near hand.'

'You know him?'

'I should know him again.'

'In your pursuit you were not so fortunate, then, as to overtake him?'

'I was not.'

'Was he alone?'

'He was alone.'

'There was no one else in the neighbourhood?'

'Alan Breck Stewart was not far off, in a piece of a wood.'

The Advocate laid his pen down. 'I think we are playing at cross purposes,' said he, 'which you will find to prove a very ill amusement for yourself.'

'I content myself with following your lordship's advice, and answering what I am asked,' said I.

'Be so wise as to bethink yourself in time,' said he, 'I use you with the most anxious tenderness, which you scarce seem to appreciate, and which (unless you be more careful) may prove to be in vain.'

'I do appreciate your tenderness, but conceive it to be mistaken,' I replied, with something of a falter, for I saw we were come to grips at last. 'I am here to lay before you certain information, by which I shall convince you Alan had no hand whatever in the killing of Glenure.'

The Advocate appeared for a moment at a stick, sitting with pursed lips, and blinking his eyes upon me like an angry cat. 'Mr Balfour,' he said at last, 'I tell you pointedly you go an ill way for your own interests.'

'My lord,' I said, 'I am as free of the charge of considering my own interests in this matter as your lordship. As God judges me, I have but the one design, and that is to see justice executed and the innocent go clear. If in pursuit of that I come to fall under your lordship's displeasure, I must bear it as I may.'

At this he rose from his chair, lit a second candle, and for a while gazed upon me steadily. I was surprised to see a great change of gravity fallen upon his face, and I could have almost thought he was a little pale.

'You are either very simple, or extremely the reverse, and I see that I must deal with you more confidentially,' says he. 'This is a political case—ah, yes, Mr Balfour! whether we like it or no, the case is political—and I tremble when I think what issues may depend from it. To a political case, I need scarce tell a young man of your education, we approach with very different thoughts from one which is criminal only. *Salus populi suprema lex* is a maxim susceptible of great abuse, but it has that force which we find elsewhere only in the laws of nature: I mean it has the force of necessity. I will open this out to you, if you will allow me, at more length. You would have me believe——'

'Under your pardon, my lord, I would have you to believe nothing but that which I can prove,' said I.

'Tut! tut! young gentleman,' says he, 'be not so pragmatical, and suffer a man who might be your father (if it was nothing more) to employ his own imperfect language, and express his own poor thoughts, even when they have the misfortune not to coincide with Mr Balfour's. You would have me to believe Breck innocent. I would think this of little account, the more so as we cannot catch our man. But the matter of Breck's innocence shoots beyond itself. Once admitted, it would destroy the whole presumptions of our case against another and a very different criminal; a man grown old in treason, already twice in arms against his king and already twice forgiven; a fomenter of discontent, and (whoever may have fired the shot) the unmistakable original of the deed in question. I need not tell you that I mean James Stewart.'

'And I can just say plainly that the innocence of Alan and of James is what I am here to declare in private to your lordship, and what I am prepared to establish at the trial by my testimony,' said I.

'To which I can only answer by an equal plainness, Mr Balfour,' said he, 'that (in that case) your testimony will not be called by me, and I desire you to withhold it altogether.'

'You are at the head of Justice in this country,' I cried, 'and you propose to me a crime!'

'I am a man nursing with both hands the interests of this country,' he replied, 'and I press on you a political necessity. Patriotism is not always moral in the formal sense. You might be glad of it, I think: it is your own protection; the facts are heavy against you; and if I am still trying to except you from a very dangerous place, it is in part of course because I am not insensible to your honesty in coming here; in part because of Pilrig's letter; but in part, and in chief part, because I regard in this matter my political duty first and my judicial duty only second. For the same reason—I repeat it to you in the same frank words—I do not want your testimony.'

'I desire not to be thought to make a repartee, when I express only the plain sense of our position,' said I. 'But if your lordship has no need of my testimony, I believe the other side would be extremely blythe to get it.'

Prestongrange arose and began to pace to and fro in the room. 'You are not so young', he said, 'but what you must remember very clearly the year '45 and the shock that went about the country. I read in Pilrig's letter that you are sound in Kirk and State. Who saved them in that fatal year? I do not refer to His Royal Highness and his ramrods, which were extremely useful in their day; but the country had been saved and the field won before ever Cumberland came upon Drum Mossie. Who saved it? I repeat; who saved the Protestant religion and the whole frame of our civil institutions? The late Lord President Culloden, for one; he played a man's part, and small thanks he got for it—even as I, whom you see before you, straining every nerve in the same service, look for no reward beyond the conscience of my duties done. After the President, who else? You know the answer as well as I do; 'tis partly a scandal, and you glanced at it yourself, and I reprov'd you for it, when you first came in. It was the Duke and the great clan of Campbell. Now here is a Campbell foully murdered, and that in the King's service. The Duke and I are Highlanders. But we are Highlanders civilized, and it is not so with the great mass of our clans and families. They have still savage virtues and defects. They are still barbarians, like these Stewarts; only the Campbells were barbarians on the right side, and the Stewarts were barbarians on the wrong. Now be you the judge. The Campbells expect vengeance. If they do not get it—if this man James escapes—there will be trouble with the Campbells. That means disturbance in the Highlands, which are uneasy and very far from being disarmed: the disarming is a farce . . .'

'I can bear you out in that,' said I.

'Disturbance in the Highlands makes the hour of our old

watchful enemy,' pursued his lordship, holding out a finger as he paced; 'and I give you my word we may have a '45 again with the Campbells on the other side. To protect the life of this man Stewart—which is forfeit already on half a dozen different counts if not on this—do you propose to plunge your country in war, to jeopardize the faith of your fathers, and to expose the lives and fortunes of how many thousand innocent persons? . . . These are considerations that weigh with me, and that I hope will weigh no less with yourself, Mr Balfour, as a lover of your country, good government, and religious truth.'

'You deal with me very frankly, and I thank you for it,' said I. 'I will try on my side to be no less honest. I believe your policy to be sound. I believe these deep duties may lie upon your lordship; I believe you may have laid them on your conscience when you took the oaths of the high office which you hold. But for me, who am just a plain man—or scarce a man yet—the plain duties must suffice. I can think but of two things, of a poor soul in the immediate and unjust danger of a shameful death, and of the cries and tears of his wife that still tingle in my head. I cannot see beyond, my lord. It's the way that I am made. If the country has to fall, it has to fall. And I pray God, if this be wilful blindness, that He may enlighten me before too late.'

He had heard me motionless, and stood so a while longer.

'This is an unexpected obstacle,' says he, aloud, but to himself.

'And how is your lordship to dispose of me?' I asked.

'If I wished,' said he, 'you know that you might sleep in gaol?'

'My lord,' said I, 'I have slept in worse places.'

'Well, my boy,' said he, 'there is one thing appears very plainly upon our interview, that I may rely on your pledged word. Give me your honour that you will be wholly secret, not only on what has passed tonight, but in the matter of the Appin case, and I let you go free.'

'I will give it till tomorrow or any other near day that you may please to set,' said I. 'I would not be thought too wily; but if I gave the promise without qualification your lordship would have attained his end.'

'I had no thought to entrap you,' said he.

'I am sure of that,' said I.

'Let me see,' he continued. 'Tomorrow is the Sabbath. Come to me on Monday by eight in the morning, and give me your promise until then.'

'Freely given, my lord,' said I. 'And with regard to what has fallen from yourself, I will give it for as long as it pleases God to spare your days.'

'You will observe', he said next, 'that I have made no employment of menaces.'

'It was like your lordship's nobility,' said I. 'Yet I am not



altogether so dull but what I can perceive the nature of those you have not uttered.'

'Well,' said he, 'goodnight to you. May you sleep well, for I think it is more than I am like to do.'

With that he sighed, took up a candle, and gave me his conveyance as far as the street door.

## CHAPTER V

### IN THE ADVOCATE'S HOUSE

THE next day, Sabbath, August 27th, I had the occasion I had long looked forward to, to hear some of the famous Edinburgh preachers, all well known to me already by the report of Mr Campbell. Alas! and I might just as well have been at Essendean, and sitting under Mr Campbell's worthy self! the turmoil of my thoughts, which dwelt continually on the interview with Prestongrange, inhibiting me from all attention. I was indeed much less impressed by the reasoning of the divines than by the spectacle of the thronged congregation in the churches, like what I imagined of a theatre or (in my then disposition) of an assize of trial; above all at the West Kirk, with its three tiers of galleries, where I went in the vain hope that I might see Miss Drummond.

On the Monday I betook me for the first time to a barber's, and was very well pleased with the result. Thence to the Advocate's, where the red coats of the soldiers showed again about his door, making a bright place in the close. I looked about for the young lady and her gillies: there was never a sign of them. But I was no sooner shown into the cabinet or ante-chamber where I had spent so weariful a time upon the Saturday, than I was aware of the tall figure of James More in a corner. He seemed a prey to a painful uneasiness, reaching forth his feet and hands, and his eyes speeding here and there without rest about the walls of the small chamber, which recalled to me with a sense of pity the man's wretched situation. I suppose it was partly this, and partly my strong continuing interest in his daughter, that moved me to accost him.

'Give you a good morning, sir,' said I.

'And a good morning to you, sir,' said he.

'You bide tryst with Prestongrange?' I asked.

'I do, sir, and I pray your business with that gentleman be more agreeable than mine,' was his reply.

'I hope at least that yours will be brief, for I suppose you pass before me,' said I.

'All pass before me,' he said, with a shrug and a gesture upward of the open hands. 'It was not always so, sir, but times change. It was not so when the sword was in the scale, young gentleman, and the virtues of the soldier might sustain themselves.'

There came a kind of Highland snuffle out of the man that raised my dander strangely.

'Well, Mr Macgregor,' said I, 'I understand the main thing for a soldier is to be silent, and the first of his virtues never to complain.'

'You have my name, I perceive'—he bowed to me with his arms crossed—'though it's one I must not use myself. Well, there is a publicity—I have shown my face and told my name too often in the beards of my enemies. I must not wonder if both should be known to many that I know not.'

'That you know not in the least, sir,' said I, 'nor yet anybody else; but the name I am called, if you care to hear it, is Balfour.'

'It is a good name,' he replied, civilly; 'there are many decent folk that use it. And now that I call to mind, there was a young gentleman, your namesake, that marched surgeon in the year '45 with my battalion.'

'I believe that would be a brother to Balfour of Baith,' said I, for I was ready for the surgeon now.

'The same, sir,' said James More. 'And since I have been fellow-soldier with your kinsman, you must suffer me to grasp your hand.'

He shook hands with me long and tenderly, beaming on me the while as though he had found a brother.

'Ah! says he, 'these are changed days since your cousin and I heard the balls whistle in our lugs.'

'I think he was a very far-away cousin,' said I, drily, 'and I ought to tell you that I never clapped eyes upon the man.'

'Well, well,' said he, 'it makes no change. And you—I do not mind you were out yourself, sir—I have no clear mind of your face, which is one not probable to be forgotten.'

'In the year you refer to, Mr Macgregor, I was getting skelped in the parish school,' said I.

'So young!' cries he. 'Ah, then, you will never be able to think what this meeting is to me. In the hour of my adversity, and here in the house of my enemy, to meet in with the blood of an old brother-in-arms—it heartens me, Mr Balfour, like the skirling of the Highland pipes! Sir, this is a sad look-back that many of us have to make: some with falling tears. I have lived in my own country like a king; my sword, my mountains, and the faith of my friends and kinsmen sufficed for me. Now I lie in a

stinking dungeon; and do you know, Mr Balfour,' he went on, taking my arm and beginning to lead me about, 'do you know, sir, that I lack mere necessaries? The malice of my foes has quite sequestered my resources. I lie, as you know, sir, on a trumped-up charge, of which I am as innocent as yourself. They dare not bring me to my trial, and in the meanwhile I am held naked in my prison. I could have wished it was your cousin I had met, or his brother Baith himself. Either would, I know, have been rejoiced to help me; while a comparative stranger like yourself——'

I would be ashamed to set down all he poured out to me in this beggarly vein, or the very short and grudging answers that I made to him. There were times when I was tempted to stop his mouth with some small change; but whether it was from shame or pride—whether it was for my own sake or Catriona's—whether it was because I thought him no fit father for his daughter, or because I resented that grossness of immediate falsity that clung about the man himself—the thing was clean beyond me. And I was still being wheedled and preached to, and still being marched to and fro, three steps and a turn, in that small chamber, and had already, by some very short replies, highly incensed, although not finally discouraged, my beggar, when Prestongrange appeared in the doorway and bade me eagerly into his big chamber.

'I have a moment's engagement,' said he; 'and that you may not sit empty-handed I am going to present you to my three braw daughters, of whom perhaps you may have heard, for I think they are more famous than papa. This way.'

He led me into another long room above, where a dry old lady sat at a frame of embroidery, and the three handsomest young women (I suppose) in Scotland stood together by a window.

'This is my new friend, Mr Balfour,' said he, presenting me by the arm. 'David, here is my sister, Miss Grant, who is so good as keep my house for me, and will be very pleased if she can help you. And here,' says he, turning to the three younger ladies, 'here are my *three braw dauchters*. A fair question to ye, Mr Davie: which of the three is the best favoured? And I wager he will never have the impudence to propound honest Alan Ramsay's answer!'

Hereupon all three, and the old Miss Grant as well, cried out against this sally, which (as I was acquainted with the verses he referred to) brought shame into my own cheek. It seemed to me a citation unpardonable in a father, and I was amazed that these ladies could laugh even while they reprov'd, or made believe to.

Under cover of this mirth, Prestongrange got forth of the chamber, and I was left, like a fish upon dry land, in that very

unsuitable society. I could never deny, in looking back upon what followed, that I was eminently stockish; and I must say the ladies were well drilled to have so long a patience with me. The aunt indeed sat close at her embroidery, only looking now and again and smiling; but the misses, and especially the eldest, who was besides the most handsome, paid me a score of attentions which I was very ill able to repay. It was all in vain to tell myself I was a young fellow of some worth as well as a good estate, and had no call to feel abashed before these lasses, the eldest not so much older than myself, and no one of them by any probability half as learned. Reasoning would not change the fact; and there were times when the colour came into my face to think I was shaved that day for the first time.

The talk going, with all their endeavours, very heavily, the eldest took pity on my awkwardness, sat down to her instrument, of which she was a passed mistress, and entertained me for a while with playing and singing, both in the Scots and in the Italian manners; this put me more at my ease, and being reminded of Alan's air that he had taught me in the hole near Carriden, I made so bold as to whistle a bar or two, and ask if she knew that.

She shook her head. 'I never heard a note of it,' said she. 'Whistle it all through. And now once again,' she added, after I had done so.

Then she picked it out upon the keyboard, and (to my surprise) instantly enriched the same with well-sounding chords, and sang, as she played, with a very droll expression and broad accent:

'Haenae I got just the lilt of it?  
Isnae this the tune that ye whustled?'

'You see,' she says, 'I can do the poetry too, only it won't rhyme.' And then again:

'I am Miss Grant, sib to the Advocate:  
You, I believe, are Dauvit Balfour.'

I told her how much astonished I was by her genius.

'And what do you call the name of it?' she asked.

'I do not know the real name,' said I. 'I just call it *Alan's air*.'

She looked at me directly in the face. 'I shall call it *David's air*,' said she; 'though if it's the least like what your namesake of Israel played to Saul I would never wonder that the king got little good by it, for it's but melancholy music. Your other name I do not like; so if you was ever wishing to hear your tune again you are to ask for it by mine.'

This was said with a significance that gave my heart a jog. 'Why that, Miss Grant?' I asked.

'Why,' says she, 'if ever you should come to get hanged, I will set your last dying speech and confession to that tune and sing it.'

This put it beyond a doubt that she was partly informed of my story and peril. How, or just how much, it was more difficult to guess. It was plain she knew there was something of danger in the name of Alan, and thus warned me to leave it out of reference; and plain she knew that I stood under some criminal suspicion. I judged besides that the harshness of her last speech (which besides she had followed up immediately with a very noisy piece of music) was to put an end to the present conversation. I stood beside her, affecting to listen and admire, but truly whirled away by my own thoughts. I have always found this young lady to be a lover of the mysterious; and certainly this first interview made a mystery that was beyond my plummet. One thing I learned long after, the hours of the Sunday had been well employed, the bank-porter had been found and examined, my visit to Charles Stewart was discovered, and the deduction made that I was pretty deep with James and Alan, and most likely in a continued correspondence with the last. Hence this broad hint that was given me across the harpsichord.

In the midst of the piece of music, one of the young misses, who was at a window over the close, cried on her sisters to come quick, for there was '*Grey eyes again*'. The whole family trooped there at once, and crowded one another for a look. The window whither they ran was in an odd corner of that room, gave above the entrance door, and flanked up the close.

'Come, Mr Balfour,' they cried, 'come and see. She is the most beautiful creature! She hangs round the close-head these last days, always with some wretched-like gillies, and yet seems quite a lady.'

I had no need to look; neither did I look twice, or long. I was afraid she might have seen me there, looking down upon her from that chamber of music, and she without, and her father in the same house, perhaps begging for his life with tears, and myself come but newly from rejecting his petitions. But even that glance set me in a better conceit of myself, and much less awe of the young ladies. They were beautiful, that was beyond question, but Catriona was beautiful too, and had a kind of brightness in her like a coal of fire. As much as the others cast me down, she lifted me up. I remembered I had talked easily with her. If I could make no hand of it with these fine maids, it was perhaps something their own fault. My embarrassment began to be a little mingled and lightened with a sense of fun; and when the aunt smiled at me from her embroidery, and the three daughters unbent to me like a baby, all with 'papa's orders' written on their faces, there were times when I could have found it in my heart to smile myself.

Presently papa returned, the same kind, happy-like, pleasant-spoken man.

'Now, girls,' said he, 'I must take Mr Balfour away again; but I hope you have been able to persuade him to return where I shall be always gratified to find him.'

So they each made me a little farthing compliment, and I was led away.

If this visit to the family had been meant to soften my resistance, it was the worst of failures. I was no such ass but what I understood how poor a figure I had made, and that the girls would be yawning their jaws off as soon as my stiff back was turned. I felt I had shown how little I had in me of what was soft and graceful; and I longed for a chance to prove that I had something of the other stuff, the stern and dangerous.

Well, I was to be served to my desire, for the scene to which he was conducting me was of a different character.

## CHAPTER VI

### UMQUHILE THE MASTER OF LOVAT

THERE was a man waiting us in Prestongrange's study, whom I distasted at the first look, as we distaste a ferret or an earwig. He was bitter ugly, but seemed very much of a gentleman; had still manners, but capable of sudden leaps and violences; and a small voice, which could ring out shrill and dangerous when he so desired.

The Advocate presented us in a familiar, friendly way.

'Here, Fraser,' said he, 'here is Mr Balfour whom we talked about. Mr David, this is Mr Simon Fraser, whom we used to call by another title, but this is an old song. Mr Fraser has an errand to you.'

With that he stepped aside to his book-shelves, and made believe to consult a quarto volume in the far end.

I was thus left (in a sense) alone with perhaps the last person in the world I had expected. There was no doubt upon the terms of introduction; this could be no other than the forfeited Master of Lovat and chief of the great clan Fraser. I knew he had led his men in the Rebellion; I knew his father's head—my old lord's, that grey fox of the mountains—to have fallen on the block for that offence, the lands of the family to have been seized, and their nobility attained. I could not conceive what