



### NANNACK

**S**UN burnt and sun burnt,  
Rain on soft rain fell,  
And gleamed a tinge of green—  
Just a heart beat:  
Then the suns stopped,  
Then the clouds fixed,  
And heavy came the gloom.

The Rev. Colin Davidson sat in his study brooding. The text of his sermon lay on his desk before him. The sinking sun fell on his sadness, and he thought of a joy that once was his. He knew the whole story now, and he often told it to himself.

He was a lad again standing on a far-off Highland station. A nipping wind cut him like a jagged knife, but with wide open eyes he watched the train peching up the hillside. The steam was falling in lumps against the heather. There was a handkerchief fluttering at a window, and he waved back as one in a dream. In a moment the red end of the guard's van had turned the corner, and only a sound was left. He remembered as he set out for home how he had parted from Nannack the night before. They climbed up the face of Scourouran, and

it was sweet to feel her hand as he helped her at the rocky parts. They sat upon the western shoulder that commands the sea, and, with never a word, they looked far out on the waters. The beauty of the night was nothing then, but he now went back on it. The hills wore dark, solemn faces, and a west wind swung round them. The stars sang. The waves danced shorewards in rows, and a band of moonlight lay upon their jewelled heads.

'You must be going now, Nannack. You'll have a lot of packing to do,' he said helplessly. The shaking of his heart stopped the words he wished to say. He just looked at her, and he could remember how her eyes glistened.

'Oh, ye have to go, Nannack!' he said again, and his love felt ashamed of his words.

'Ay, Colin, and I don't know what to do.' It was her voice with a quiver in it he heard. She turned her soft eyes to him, and he longed to catch her. She put her hand on his shoulder. He felt it there now. Her face had love's beauty on it as she said, 'Kiss me.'

The sun had led its fire away, and in the dim light of his study he was on Scourouran.

From a drawer he took a packet of letters, and he read the first. As he looked upon the scratchy writing he felt a strange kind of pride for all his sadness—the pride of winning a great heart. The letter was just this:—

'170 Grosvenor Square,  
'Edinburgh.

'My own dear Colin,—i got here fine, its an affil thing the trane and we jist came down some of the braes that quick that you wood think we wood never stop. i was thinkin i wood be feelin very lonely here if i wood be havin the time. its a busi place this but often at night when everything gets as quate all jist be mindin on you all at home and then i'll jist be like to cry but i am jist riting abowt mysell and no askin how you will all be keepin at home you will be havin fine

wether jist now i am thinking, and i hope you will be enjoying yourself very much. o i am longing affle to see you and i am afrade it will be a terrble long time before i wont see you. i often lie thinkin of our waaks and us going along the shore yon night to Glendhu and climbing Scourouran and watching everything so big roond us. it was terrble fine, but o it will be an affle time before we hev waaks like yon agen. am likin my place fine, they are too other girls in the place, one of them is from Tain and the other one is from Dundee and some times from the talk that will be on them i will be thinking they will not be very good girls but there very kind too. there at denner up the stairs just now and i am writing this quick and i will run out to the post with it before there finished no more just now my own dear Colin. hopping you are verry well i am the same with all my love your loving Nanni.'

Shadows had settled round him, and his text was a blur on the white paper.

And now the memory of student days come to him. It is a time of work, but yet the happiness of it tingles in his mind as the dim class-rooms ring with laughter, and his stamping feet keep time to the old Psalm tunes. And he is with Nannack. Her night out is his too, and on Sundays they attend the evening service in St. Columba's with its homely faces and homely voices. He remembers her joy and her sweet encouragement. His heart grew light with success, he was at last a minister of the gospel he loved. Then the great day and the sermon in the Barclay. He preached to one, and he felt the living God in him. He saw her face—just the pale face, the glistening eyes, and the dark hair—far up in the third gallery. God was very good to him.

And next day the letter came.

She—there are two sides to many a story—worked and saw the sun through the railings. Thought is not a servant's work, but Nannack did dream of her Colin. She wrote him every

week, and he little knew her fears. She looked on her blotted pages, and her heart shrank. Did Colin laugh at her scribbling? Ah, if she could just speak to him. But she sought earnestly to school herself.

Dreary was her life waiting for him. She felt the chill of Edinburgh life; her heart yearning for sympathy found none. For Edinburgh is a sweet enchantress, but her smiles hide a cold heart. Young strangers crowd her streets, but to cheer them along in these days of youth there is no kind hand held out; no kind words, no home firesides give greeting. Nannack felt it, but she looked to the time when Colin would come to join his classes. Then the days sped. On Thursday nights—the ‘night out,’ which holds so much for many a weary girl—she met him, and on Sunday evenings they went together to St. Columba’s Church. Love’s expectation bridged these nights.

But then again fear came upon her. Each session brought him success. He was the first man of his year, and she—a poor servant girl. Part of her little wages she sent home, part she spent in clothes, and what remained she spent in children’s school-books to make her more worthy of a scholar’s love. She sat far into the night over nouns and verbs, and in the summer the grey of dawn looked down into the area and saw her with an old ‘Royal Reader’ in her hand. And still she often caught herself saying, ‘they wis’ and ‘we waas.’

One night she sat with Colin on a seat in the Meadows, just below the Infirmary. An east wind stole west shivering with cold, and the trees like gaunt old women at a wake rocked and cried, sad at being left behind. Through the branches, the lights of the students’ lodgings were stars.

Colin was full of his success.

‘Nannack, I’ll be through in a month, and I don’t think I’ll have very much difficulty in getting a charge. And then, Nannack?’ The prospect was beyond his words.

‘There’ll be no more working for you, then, will there?’ he went on.

‘No,’ was Nannack’s reply. ‘No, Colin, and you’ll be a great

preacher, and you'll hev a big church, an' a'll be a poor lassie 'at'll always be a burden on you.'

'Nannack,' he said, and there was a sharp cut in his words, 'Nannack! if I hear you speak like that again I'll, I'll—Ah, but, Nannack, you are too good for any one, and you have the heart that'll give me strength when I'm weak, Nannack! I think I see the future, and the sky is clear for us.'

Her face was white on his shoulder.

'Nannack!' he asked, with a pain in his heart, 'you're fond of me still, aren't you?'

Her forehead sank on his breast and tears fell on his hand.

'O Colin, a' wush a' wis strong enough to show yi how a' liked ye,' she said.

He put his arm round her, and smiled with content, knowing little.

Still she studied, but a new thought got between her and the words. Colin had passed with highest honours, and now he was a minister. Next Sabbath was to be a great day for him. He was to preach in the Barclay. She was there in the topmost gallery, and throughout the service she shrank into a dim corner lest he might see her, for she had not told him that she had got the forenoon off to hear him. A warm light filled the great church, and she felt alone in it. The sound of people moving to their seats seemed far off. But as Colin entered—her Colin! she wondered did any of the congregation know he loved a lonely servant-girl—as he entered with firm step and brave eyes, pride rose in her, and she prayed to be purged of it. From custom, and fear of being seen by him, she sat throughout the Psalm. In the prayer his voice echoed in the dark corners of the building and seemed to linger round her. His text was, 'Thy will be done on earth.' It was all she heard. Her mind was floating on the music of his words. She saw herself his wife. She was trying to help him, and he was looking fondly on her. She looked through the Summer and into the Autumn and gathering time; their hearts were locked. But her fancy shivered. She was only an ignorant servant

girl. She could not see his rich friends. She could not keep his fine house. She was a burden on him. He kissed her, and out of the goodness of his heart called her 'his own Nannack.' But his preaching staled, and his fair hair and blue eyes were grey; and his shoulders stooped. Could she bear to see him sink? Was she selfish? She left the church with questions ringing in her ears. It was a day of doubt with her.

The evening came without peace. She must think; the kitchen fire went out under her eyes. She rose at last and went to her room. Her bed companion was asleep, and the only sound was the heavy breathing. Nannack flung herself on her knees by the bedside and burst into a storm of sobbing. The struggle was long and fierce. At last peace stole into her eyes. Her bosom ceased to heave, and her pulse to throb with fever. Her face lit with the love that surpasses earthly, and her conquered soul melted into gentle tears that fell on her cold white bosom. It was all quiet now. But her heart was broken.

She rose from her knees and took pen and paper from her trunk. In the letter she wrote then, with shaking hand and striven heart, lies the secret of the sadness that broods upon the great Highland preacher's thought.

JOHN MACLEAY.

