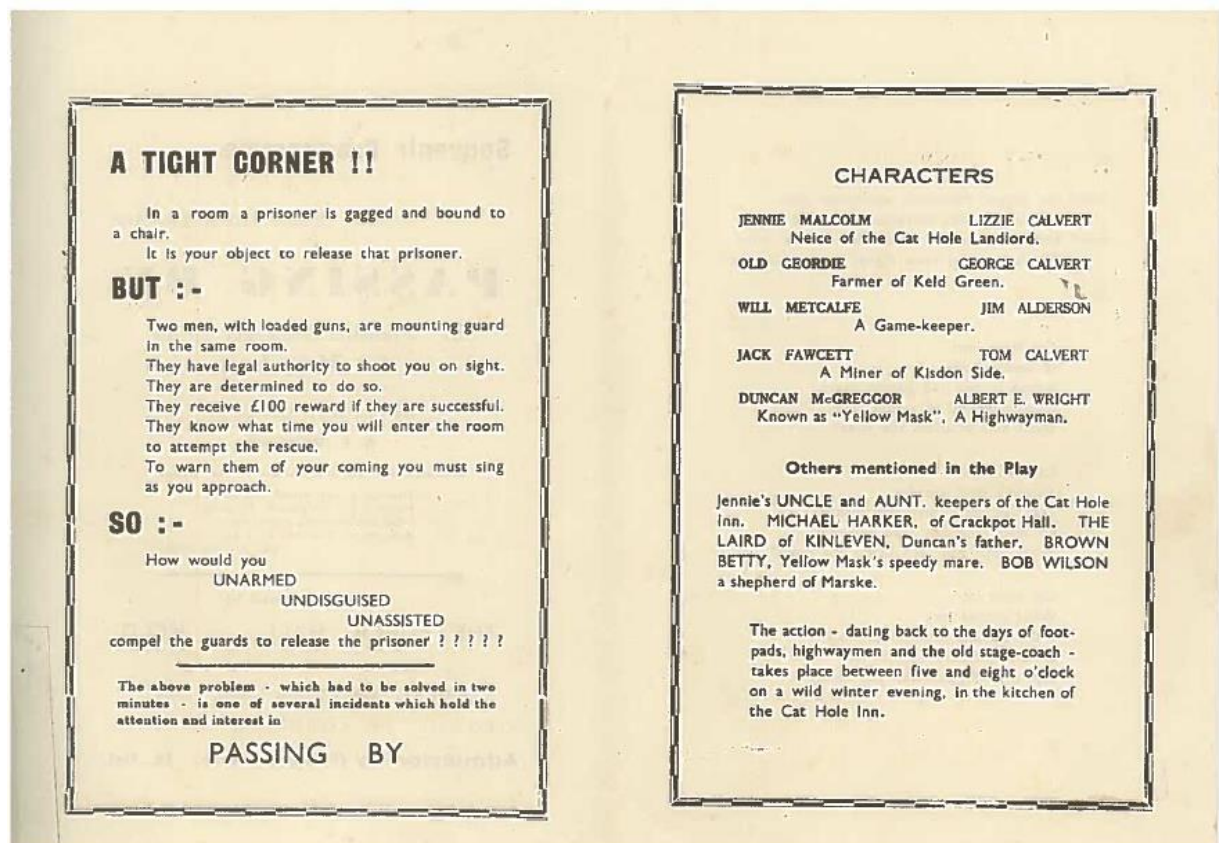
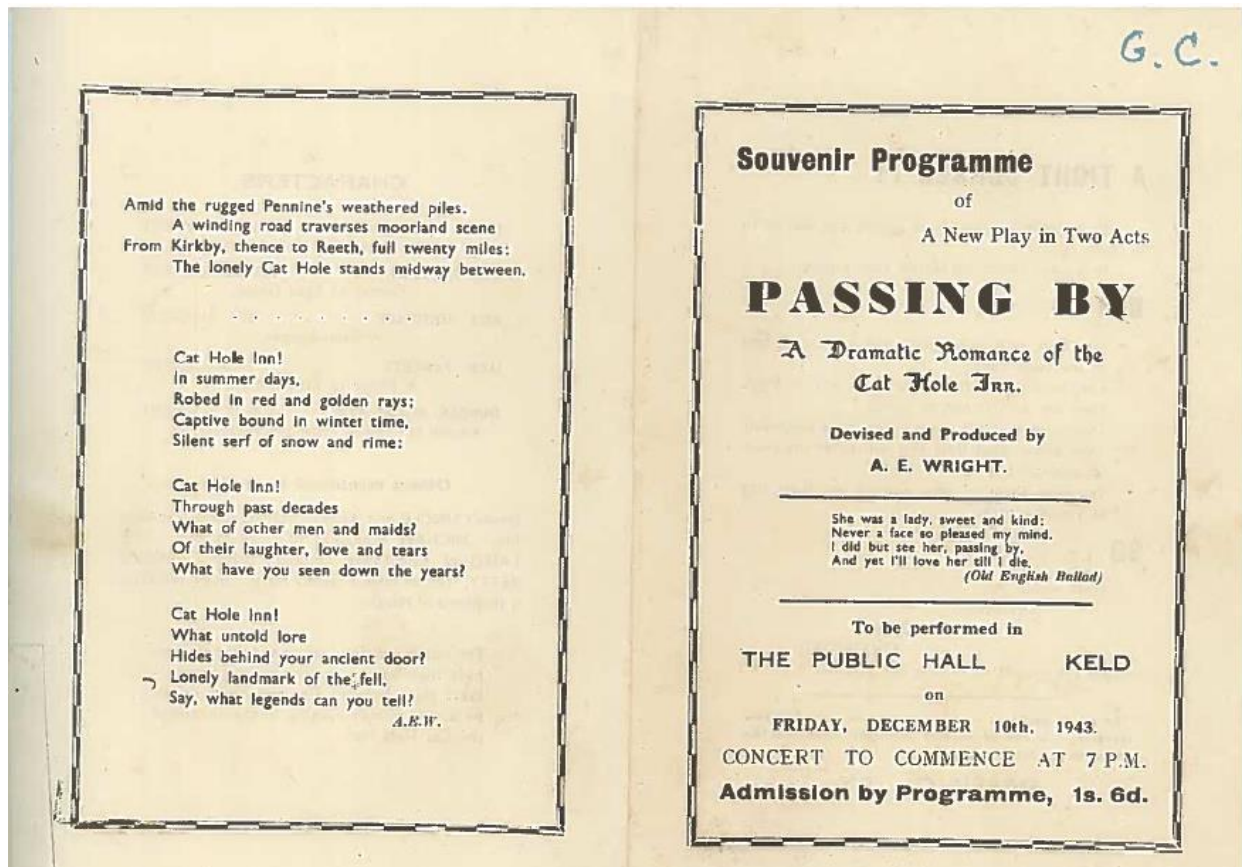


'Passing By' Play Script - 1943



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When the curtain rises, Old Geordie and Jack Fawcett are seated opposite each other at the round table. Will Metcalfe is seated between them, from which position he is able occasionally to inspect both hands as a game of dominoes proceeds. Old Geordie is shuffling the dominoes, and as he and Jack Fawcett draw six each, he begins to speak,

O.G. Well, mi lads, this'll ha'e to be t'last hand. Night's getting on, and it's time I were locking up. (surveying his hand) And I'll tell tha what, Fawcett, if tha can beat this little lot, then tha's a good un. Let's see ... my down ... (places a domino) ... double five.

J.F. It's a one! (plays his first)

O.G. It's a one, is't? (plays number two)

J.F. It's a four! (plays his second)

O.G. Any more fives? (plays number three)

J.F. (pausing) Oh! I can gan!

Enter Jennie Malcolm.

J.M. Now, Geordie, what about you? Everybody's gone from the front room.

O.G. Right-o, Jennie lass! Just a minute! I've got him thinking hard.

Exit Jennie Malcolm.

When Jack Fawcett has played his third domino Old Geordie places his fourth and asks:-

O.G. Has tha any two's?

J.F. No!

O.G. (placing his fifth domino) Well, there's double two ... (plays his sixth) and there's two-blank, and that's thee well wolloped again (rising and stretching himself) so off tha pops thi ways up Kisdon Side, and thee, too, Will Metcalfe: and them's t'orders fra t'Cat Hole general manager.

J.M. (making preparations for leaving, together with Jack Fawcett) And how long are you here for this time, Geordie?

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O.G. Why, as a matter of fact, I'll be sleeping here t'week out. Jennie's uncle'll be back by Saturday at latest, but I don't know whether t'missu'll be coming with him. She's been none so well for quite a while, and if t'change is doing her any good, then happen she'll stop on a bit longer. Anyhow, I'll be stopping here till Saturday for certain.

Enter Jennie Malcolm.

J.M. Now then!

O.G. Aye! We're just packing up, Jennie. Goodnight, Will, and Good-night, Fawcett!

J.F. (together with Will Metcalfe) Good-night, Geordie!
(addressing Jennie alone) And good-night, Jennie!

J.M. Good-night ... both of you.

Old Geordie follows Jack Fawcett and Will Metcalfe into the passage when they leave.

Exit Jack Fawcett and Will Metcalfe.

J.M. (calling into passage while doing odds and ends of clearing up, glasses, dominoes, etc.)
Lock the front door, Geordie ... And you might bring those glasses from the room when you come.

Enter Old Geordie, carrying tray of glasses.

O.G. Why! That's another day over, Jennie. And I'll tell tha what I've been thinking. The more I come to stay here, and be a sorta God-father to thee, helping tha when thl uncle and aunt goes away, the more I begins to think to missen that I ought to have had a nice little country pub of my own somewhere, years ago.

J.M. Well, there's many a worse job than that, Geordie. But then, where should we have been without you to help us out at times?

O.G. Aye! Happen as how there's a bit o' summat i' that. Which reminds me, is there owt particular that tha wants doing t'morn?

J.M. No! Not that I can call to mind at the moment ... just the usual routine jobs, I suppose. Why?

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O.G. Nobbut I were thinking of having a go at that old stable door. It swings rather badly. Do you think your uncle would fancy having it put right?

J.M. I should think he would be only too pleased, if you care to take it in hand.

O.G. Right! I'll be off to shut-eye, then; and then be up betimes in t'morning and get an early start on it. (lighting candle, and other business, suggesting that he is making preparations for bed) You won't be so long ^{yer saw} before making tracks for bed, will you Jennie?

J.M. No! There's nothing to keep me very long to-night: as soon as these (glasses, etc.) are away.

O.G. Aye! A grand thing is shut-eye! Better nor all your fancy powder and stuff for that pretty complexion of yours. I thinks that bed's t'best pastime that were ever invented. In fact, I believe I like it even better than t'dominoes.

Exit Old Geordie: chuckling to himself, etc!

J.M. Good-night, Geordie.

O.G. (from passage) Good-night, Lassie!

Jennie completes business with tumblers soon after, makes certain that back door is secure, lights candle, extinguishes lamp, and finally gives impression that she is leaving the kitchen. As she nears exit, the handle of the back-kitchen door is heard to rattle quietly. She turns, startled, and enquires:-

J.M. (rather nervously) Who is there?

Y.M. (off stage) A traveller!

J.M. (approaching kitchen door, slowly and timidly) A traveller? At this hour of the night?

Y.M. Yes! A traveller who wishes to inform you that, though you have locked this door, you have forgotten the outer one.

J.M. And ... who may you be?

Y.M. I am one who is in need of both advice and assistance.

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J.M. But, why the back door?

Y.M. Because I have already found it impossible to enter by the front. I had no desire to disturb the whole household if all were abed.

J.M. And what do you need?

Y.M. That, I think, I have already explained. But my most pressing need at the moment is that you will be kind enough to allow me to enter.

J.M. I am not so sure that I should.

Y.M. Then, indeed, fair lady, most assuredly would you be guilty of bespoiling the good name of the Cat Hole Inn, known far and wide for its open-door hospitality.

J.M. (to herself) Who can it be? Sounds ... a gentleman.
(aloud) One moment, then, sir, and I will open unto you.

She unlocks the door and allows Yellow Mask to enter. During the following dialogue Jennie will re-light the lamp, and Yellow Mask will convey the impression that all is not quite well with him, but at the same time, trying to hide this fact from Jennie.

Y.M. (on entering) I thank you madam, most sincerely. (he surveys kitchen, examining it in some detail) Are you alone?

J.M. Yes!

Y.M. Strange ... is it not?

J.M. Why so? I mean, that is, I am alone downstairs.

Evidently satisfied with his surroundings, Yellow Mask continues to focus his attention on Jennie.

Y.M. Ah! I see! And may I enquire as to who may be upstairs? Travellers? Guests?

J.M. No! Merely a friend who helps about the place, and who rejoices in the playful title of general manager.

Y.M. And who may he be?

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J.M. He is ... But why all this cross-examination such as one might expect to hear in a court of law? ... And ... and why do you stare at me so?

Y.M. Pardon my fault, I pray you ... but I had no idea I was being so rude ... to so charming a lady. And as for my questions, they are not born of mere idle curiosity. A habit of mine is that I ... er ... always like to be familiar with my immediate surroundings.

J.M. And neither is it my intention to be inquisitive, sir, but may I ask you concerning the advice and the assistance you mentioned?

Y.M. Most certainly you may. I came to Keld for the purpose of calling on an old friend of mine, but after almost battering the door in for a matter of ten minutes or so, I reluctantly came to the conclusion that the house must be empty. Then I decided that the most likely place where I might glean information of his whereabouts would be the local inn.

Yellow Mask sways a little, etc.

J.M. Sir, are you ill?

Y.M. No! I'm ... I'm not ill. But that is the second part of my story. When I tried to dismount, a short distance from here, somehow or other my foot became entangled in the stirrup: I came to the ground rather heavily, and had the misfortune to strike my head against a wall. It is nothing more than a giddiness ... or a faintness ... and I thought that if I might crave a little brandy, it would perhaps help me to pull myself together.

J.M. You are more than welcome, sir, to what service I can render. But will you not sit down ... and rest yourself while I bring you something?

Y.M. Thank you for your kindness: I shall be glad to do so.

Exit Jennie Malcolm. Yellow Mask follows her up-stage and peers into passage. He returns down-stage. Holds hand to his head.

Y.M. My head! My head! This arm!

He moves left arm stiffly as if in pain, moves towards arm-chair, and still complaining, drops listlessly into it, as if in a faint.

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In doing so, his hat falls to the floor, and reveals a yellow mask which has been concealed inside.

Enter Jennie Malcolm to discover this situation. As she approaches him, she sees the yellow mask. Hastily placing the tray on the round table, she stoops and picks up the mask to examine it.

J.M. A yellow mask? Yellow Mask?

Y.M. (dreamily) ~~Yellow Mask?~~ Who calls Yellow Mask?

J.M. (approaches him) Are you Yellow Mask? A highwayman?

Y.M. What leads you to think that?

J.M. Look! (confronts him with the mask) What is this? Is there any need to ask who you are?

Y.M. (gradually recovering) A thousand pardons, lady, if I have caused you one moment's fear or anxiety. I had no wish to do so. It was for that purpose alone I removed the mask ere you let me enter. Together with my hat, it must have fallen to the ground when I ... I think I must have swooned, or something. But if you will allow me to depart, I promise I will trouble you no further.

He holds out his hand for the mask and hat. Jennie places them behind her.

J.M. You mentioned Cat Hole hospitality ... I cannot let you go in your present state. Pray rest awhile until your strength returns. Besides, your brandy is poured and awaits you.

Yellow Mask again occupies the arm-chair while Jennie brings the tray. When Yellow Mask takes the brandy, Jennie notices the injury and the blood on his wrist and hand.

J.M. Have you seen your hand?

Y.M. Yes! It certainly is not a very pretty picture ... compared with yours ... so dainty and so delicate.

J.M. I wonder ... would you like me to ... shall I tend it for you?

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Y.M. I dislike to trouble you ... but there is nothing I would like better.

J.M. Well ... sip your brandy ... while I make ready the water and a bandage.

Jennie retires to back kitchen, soon returning with bowl of water, towel, bandage, etc. She places bowl on a stool by the side of Yellow Mask, adopting a kneeling position while bathing etc. is in progress.

Y.M. It is not often I am favoured by such a ministering angel. But since, as you imagine, you have discovered my identity, tell me, are you not afraid of Yellow Mask? So many people seem to be.

J.M. No! I cannot truthfully say that I am. At least, up to the present I don't think I have discovered anything about him of which one need be afraid. Perhaps I have been too busy thinking about other things.

Y.M. What other things?

J.M. Oh! I don't know. Perhaps ... more than feeling any fear of you, I have been ... wondering about you.

Y.M. Wondering?

J.M. Yes. You see ... in a place like this, we ... meet so many different kinds of people, and yet I ... I don't think I have ever met anyone quite like you ... before.

Y.M. Strange that you should almost take the very words out of my mouth. I, too, was thinking ... that I had never before met anyone quite like you.

J.M. Ah! ... but, you ... you sir, in your travels ... surely you must have met many, many kinds of people ... Are you ... are you ... a gentleman?

Y.M. Well! Perhaps that depends upon your idea of a gentleman. But whatever may constitute the gentleman of your imagination, I trust that in the eyes of such a lady as yourself, I may always remain true to your picture Do you like living here, in this lonely countryside?

J.M. Yes! Very much!

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- Y.M. I thought you would. I was sure you would. To be here amidst all this wonderful pattern of God's own creation ... to be the very centre-piece of one of Nature's beautiful pictures ... where ... what is it the poet says? ... "where only man is vile!" ... Do you like poetry?
- J.M. At times I do.
- Y.M. When you went to school, as a girl, did you ever learn, as I believe all boys do, Grey's Elegy ... written in a country church-yard?
- J.M. You mean the one beginning:- "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day, The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea" ...
- Y.M. (continuing) "The ploughman homeward plods his weary way, And leaves the world to darkness and to me!" To darkness and to me! I have thought of that line many times these past years. Most of my life seems to have been lived in ... darkness ... and loneliness. But I was not thinking of that verse just now. I had in mind a later one ... which says ... "Full many a gem of purest ray serene The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear: Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, And waste its sweetness on the desert air!" But please do not imagine for one moment that you are wasting your sweetness on the desert air tonight ... I mean ... er ... what you have done for me is very highly appreciated.
- J.M. But surely one can perform a simple act of kindness. Is your arm any easier?
- Y.M. So much so that I had almost forgotten its existence.
- J.M. Then why do you continue to let me bathe it ... and to hold my hand?
- Y.M. Er! Yes! Of course ... there is still the bandaging to be done ... before the complete highwayman is fully restored.
- Jennie proceeds with the bandage.
- J.M. If I may mention it, there is another point on which you have set my mind wondering.
- Y.M. What?

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- J.M. Well, what I mean is this. Does not one usually associate with a highwayman such things as fighting, duels, a hold-up, and so forth?
- Y.M. You may depend upon it, the High Sheriff of Yorkshire would confirm your convictions on that point.
- J.M. But you . . . well . . . you speak of . . . of God, and the wonders of Nature, and poetry, and beautiful things. Surely, they are not the usual stock-in-trade of a real highwayman?
- Y.M. If I speak of beautiful things, it is because I love beautiful things . . . like you . . . like you must do?
- Bandaging, etc., to be complete at this stage.
- J.M. (suddenly) Was that a noise upstairs?
- Y.M. I heard nothing.
- J.M. Whatever else we may do, we must not disturb Old Geordie.
- Y.M. Disturb . . .? who?
- J.M. Old Geordie, the esteemed general manager I told you of.
- Y.M. You mean to say that Old Geordie . . . Old Geordie of Keld Green . . . is here in the Cat Hole?
- J.M. Yes! He always stays here when I am left in charge of the inn.
- Y.M. And will he be asleep, or has the old rascal been listening to us?
- J.M. That, I cannot say. But he went to bed only a few minutes before I let you in. Do you wish to see him urgently?
- Y.M. I do.
- J.M. Then shall I call him?
- Y.M. Most certainly! Give a quiet call to discover if he is still awake.
- J.M. (calling softly at the passage entrance) Geordie! Geordie!
- O.G. (answering from upstairs) Now, what?

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J.M. Are you awake?

O.G. Well, if I ain't, then I must be talking in my sleep.

J.M. But are you into bed?

O.G. Why, where do'est tha think I am ... up i' t'balks, treading hay?

Y.M. (interceding: crosses and takes up position near Jennie)
Perhaps you will not mind if I give him a call? Geordie!

O.G. Hello! Who's that?

Y.M. You old scoundrel, do you mean to say that you do not recognise the voice?

O.G. Why! Nay! It can't be!

Y.M. You're wrong, Geordie. It is. Yes, ~~Dee!~~

O.G. Why, bless mi soul, what's amiss? Don't go, I'll be down with you in a couple o'ticks.

During the above, Yellow Mask's hands have, unconsciously, rested on Jennie's shoulders. As the conversation with Old Geordie has proceeded, the right hand has moved gradually down Jennie's arm until it finally comes to rest on her hand..

Y.M. (to Jennie) Surely is my star of fortune shining with extra radiance to-night.. First I find you and ...

Here they realise their position, with some embarrassment to them both. They separate.

...well, what I mean is ... here you are, presenting me with the very man I came to Keld to seek.

J.M. Is ... is he a friend of yours?

Y.M. He is ... and more.

Old Geordie is heard noisily and hurriedly making his way to the kitchen.

O.G. Enter Old Geordie.

O.G. Well, (advancing and shaking hands with Yellow Mask)

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- O.G. If this aint a better sight than owt I've seen in t' best nightmare I've ever had. Duncan, my lad, Duncan! And what brings you here?
- Y.M. When Old Geordie locks his door against one, then what can one do better than to seek ... consolation at the inn?
- O.G. Do you know Duncan, I've been wondering if I ought to have let you know long ago where to find me, in case you wanted me when I might be staying here. But ... well, you know how we get these jobs done in Sward'le. Is there owt special astir?
- Y.M. There is ... very special, Geordie. I have work for you.
- O.G. (indicating Jennie ... and signalling silence to Yellow Mask) Er ... Jennie, lass ... doesn't ta think its about time tha went to bed?
- J.M. Well, of course, if you two
- Y.M. Nay, please do not let me inconvenience you, Miss ... er ... I do not even know you name, ~~Miss~~ ...
- J.H. My name is Miss Malcolm.
- O.G. Aye, Miss Malcolm right enough, but I think all her friends know her better as Miss Jennie.
- Y.M. Then surely, after the services you have rendered me tonight, I may count myself as one entitled to call you Miss Jennie? And if the friendship be mutual then there is no occasion whatever for you to ... to leave us.
- J.M. I thank you for your consideration, and for your trust.
- Y.M. Yellow Mask demands no oath of allegiance from his friends and followers. ~~You see~~, with him, friendship implies trust ... full and implicit trust. And therefore I know ... in what light you will regard anything you may hear to-night. And so, Geordie, to business.

Yellow Mask and Old Geordie seat themselves at the round table. Jennie from the arm-chair, and/or before the fire-place shows interest in their conversation.

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- Y.M. I need not worry you with too many details. Suffice to say, that at a recent ... affair ... near Scotch Corner, all did not go as well as was anticipated. And, amongst other things, Joe Taylor had the misfortune to be caught.
- O.G. What, Joe at Easby?
- Y.M. Yes, the very same. He was taken to Richmond, but we have learned that he, together with one or two others, is to be transferred to York on Wednesday night, or early Thursday morning, and it is our intention to ... er ... what shall I say? ... do the best we can for him. In short, we are staging a hold-up at Bainesse, just south of Catterick, where we expect the coach to pass, early Thursday morning. However, Geordie, to come straight to your part of the business. As soon as you can get there to-morrow, I want you to ride over to Askrigg and see Harry Brown. Tell him to be somewhere near Red House on the Tunstall Road, not later than ten o'clock on Wednesday night, and wait until he hears the call, either to join me, or to follow on about fifty yards behind me. He will need his best horse, and to be well armed. To make sure of success, there will be eight of us all told. So have you got that?
- O.G. Why! *now lets see* I was going to have that stable door down in t' morning, but that can wait. I'll get to Askrigg first thing. *my* Harry Brown: Red House: Tunstall Road: Ten o'clock: Wednesday night: listen for call!
- Y.M. Right! That leaves *my* only two more to complete the eight. So. See this note (produces envelope from his pocket) Leave it at that address on your way there or back. Don't forget it. If possible, I want to get to Muker myself tomorrow, but if I don't, then much will depend on that letter. See to it that it is delivered.
- O.G. Aye! And then what?
- Y.M. How do you mean? Then what?
- O.G. Well, where do I come in?
- Y.M. I've just told you.
- O.G. Aye! But I mean on Wednesday night?
- Y.M. Now, Geordie, I know what you are thinking, but you are wrong, old man, you're wrong. You have an idea that you are being left out in the cold, but ...

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O.G. Well ... I just thought ...

Y.M. Not at all, Geordie, but you see, this is not quite a job for a man of your age. Besides, you have the Cat Hole and ... someone else ... to take care of. Stay here, and, who knows, you may be rendering me a greater service than ever you dreamed of. So, be a good lad, smile, and look pleasant, and when I next come up Swaledale ... well, (strokes geordie's chin) ... perhaps I will bring you a grand new razor.

O.G. Aye well! Orders is orders, I suppose; and you know laddie, you can always rely on Old Geordie.

Y.M. Don't I know it? Haren't I often done so in the past, and I shall ...

J.M. (interrupting) Listen!

They all remain still and silent for a short while. Then, the front door sneck is heard to rattle.

O.G. Who on earth 's that? This time o' night! Sis-ta, Duncan, into that kitchen (opens back-kitchen door for Yellow Mask's exit) Keep thl wits about tha ... and don't come in here till I fetches tha....Jennie, thee gan and see what it's about.

Jennie obeys. Unlocking and unbolting of the front door is heard, also some distant conversation. Eventually she returns to the kitchen, followed by Jack Fawcett who is carrying a lantern. They find Old Geordie, apparently fast asleep in the arm-chair, with his feet on the mantel-piece, snoring loudly.

J.F. It's my bag; I think I must have left it in here: there's a couple of rabbits in it.

O.G. (awakening) Rabbits? And who on earth wants rabbits at this time o' night? Oh, it's thee, Fawcett, is it? I thought I kicked thee out hours ago? Hes ta gett'n t'idea that landlords live without sleep?

J.F. Nay, I'd nobbut forgotten my bag; that's all, Geordie. I left it here i' t'corner. (recovers bag from end of form behind round table. In so doing, he notices the bowl, etc.) Hello! Somebody had an accident?

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Slight confusion for Jennie and Old Geordie. They look at each other, but Geordie saves the situation.

- O.G. Accident? Aye! T'canary slipped off his perch into t'watter-trough, and drowned himself.
- J.F. (loitering, and looking round him as if to gain information)
Aye! (turns to Jennie) Folk with any brains generally uses bandages on dead canaries, don't they?
- J.M. And folk with any consideration for others don't ... don't go round disturbing t'he peace at this time o'night.
- J.F. Oh well, I'm sorry if that's what I'm doing, but ... however ... never mind. I've got my bag, so I'll get missen home and leave you to ... to do whatever you may be doing. Good night, Geordie.

Old Geordie, who has meantime resumed sleeping attitude, answers with a big snore.

Exit Jack Fawcett, followed by Jennie who locks up once more. This done, Jennie returns and Old Geordie re-calls Yellow Mask from kitchen.

- Y.M. Was that one of two men who turned out after all the other folk?
- J.M. Yes.
- Y.M. Oh! I see! Before I came in here, I saw you through the window of the front room, and counted the people with you. I waited till they had left, and was coming to the front door when two men I had not seen in the room came out. Possibly one of them saw me, I am not certain, but I fancy he may have done, for he paused and looked about him, peering into the darkness. It was when trying to evade him that I found my way to the back door. I wonder what it means? Rather unfortunate about that bag being left behind! Did he really want it, or ... was it merely an excuse to come back and ...
- O.G. May, never bother! Anyhow, we'll keep an eye on Jack Fawcett all right. He's been calling here far ower often lately, for my liking; what do you make of him, Jennie?
- J.M. Me? I ...er ... well, I can assure you he gets no encouragement from me ... just the opposite in fact ... but he still persists in making his way through here.

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O.G. Well now! I'll hop upstairs and have a look out o' t' bedroom window, just to see what happens to that lantern he were carrying.

Exit Old Geordie.

Y.M. I have a feeling that I don't altogether like this: I cannot tell you why, really, but I seem to be involving you in a deal of trouble, and that I would certainly wish to avoid. The hour is getting late ... for you, perhaps, and I, too, must be making my departure.

O.G. (calling from upstairs) T'lamp 's there all right: He's making his way down t'road. Looks like "homeward bound," as t'sailors say.

Y.M. (answering) Then if all's clear, Geordie, I am slipping away, too. But I shall see you tomorrow, somewhere, sometime, for certain. Remember Askrigg, and Muker ... and, good-night.

O.G. Good-night, lad.

Y.M. (turning to Jennie) And now will you please let me know to what extent I am in your debt?

J.M. Nothing!

Y.M. Nothing? But surely you expect callers to pay their debts?

J.M. Yes.

Y.M. Then why not me?

J.M. Because ... well ... as I have already said, a little kindness never comes amiss..

Y.M. Since then, you will not allow me to settle my debt in the usual way, I claim the right to settle it according to my own fancy.

He advances towards Jennie who, evidently under the impression that Yellow Mask may intend to embrace her, moves away to avoid him.

J.M. But surely, to pay for a kindness robs it of all its virtue.

Y.M. Earlier this evening you said that you saw nothing in Yellow Mask of which you were afraid. Does that statement still hold good?

J.M. Yes!

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Y.M. I should like to see you prove it ... Come here.

Jennie slowly approaches and stands facing him.

I said that since you will not allow me to settle my debt in the usual way, I claim the right to settle it according to my fancy. Are you fond of jewelry?

J.M. I believe that most women are.

Y.M. (taking off a brooch and holding it for Jennie's inspection)
Do you like that?

J.M. I think it ... beautiful.

Y.M. I should indeed be glad if you will allow me to pin it on your dress (he does so, Jennie silently consenting)
Sometime, I hope, I may tell you the story of that emblem, to explain its history and its significance.

J.M. You are too ^{good} kind, sir, but I do appreciate your ~~kindness~~ kindness. Does my small service warrant so handsome a recompense?

Y.M. Any lovely gem warrants an equally lovely setting ... and should I ever pass this way again, as most sincerely I hope to do, and find you still wearing that brooch, then shall I know that at least one fair lady bears a kindly thought towards a ... lonely outlaw.

J.M. But not knowing when you might return, does not that mean I must ~~wear~~ wear it ^{always}?

Y.M. And would that be asking of you ... too great a favour? (extending his hand) Good-bye, Miss Malcolm. (Jennie takes the proffered hand: he stoops and kisses her. Then holding her at arm's length by the shoulders and looking at her) Good-night, ... Jennie!

J.M. Exit Yellow Mask, via back-kitchen.

J.M. (as he departs) Good-night.

Jennie closes the door and, for a short while stands leaning against it. Then, slowly and thoughtfully, she proceeds to secure the door, light a candle, and turn out the lamp. During this, a gradually retreating voice is heard singing "Passing By"

To conclude, Jennie sits at round table examining the brooch, which she removes, by candle-light. At the words "And yet I'll love her" she raises it slowly to her lips.

C U R T A I N.

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When the curtain rises, Jack Fawcett is occupying centre of stage, Old Geordie leaning against round table, and Jennie on Jack Fawcett's right. A heated argument is in progress, Old Geordie speaking as curtain actually rises.

- O.G. Now it's not a bit o' good thee talking, Fawcett: all t'arguing in t' world makes no difference at all. Thou's no right to come in here, laying t'law down, as if t' Cat Hole and all it contains were thy own private property.
- J.F. I'm not trying to lay t'law down, as tha calls it. I'm merely speaking my mind, and trying to give a bit of advice to folk whopther can't or won't see t'sense of it.
- O.G. Oh, aye! Advice is all right in its way, but when it comes to thee telling Jennie here what she shall wear, and what she sha'nt wear, then I say tha's interfering wi' summat that's no concern o' thine at all.
- J.F. Well, she's no right to be wearing that thing (points to broach) on her dress.
- J.M. And you've no right to come walking into here and telling me what I ought to do. For whatever I may do in the Cat Hole, I am responsible to my uncle, and not to you.
- J.F. Aye, and if your uncle were nobbut here now, I'll bet he'd soon put a stop to what's going on.
- O.G. Going on? Now what's ta mean, Fawcett, wi' thi "going on?" Anyhow, tha seems to know a deal about it.
- J.F. Well, I'm not altogether blind, and I aint forgotten what happened in here last night when I came back for my bag. It were plain to see that there were summat i' t' wind, and that I were i' t'road.
- J.M. And even that might be true, at that time o' night.
- J.F. Happen so! And that's why I never bothered to tell you something else I'd intended to mention. But I'll tell ye straight, now. It was when Will Metcalfe and me were going out. I've already said that I'm not altogether blind ... although it were dark. I managed to see summat ... or somebody, outside that door (indicating front door) and even if he did seem to disappear into t' darkness, and happen thought I hadn't twigged him, well, let him think so. All t' same, I've a pretty good idea who it might have been.

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O.G. Well, and who was it? T'owd lad, himself?

J.F. No! But maybe a friend of his. And when I see'd that, then came in here later on, to see a bowl of water, and bandages, and so on, well, it's easy to put two and two together, and then (pointing) that broach on top of it all.

J.M. And supposing all you say, or all that you think, is true, well, what of it?

J.F. Only this: that when your fine gentlemen come along handing out things like that ... it must have cost a small fortune ... they don't usually do it for nothing, and it can easily lead to trouble for someone. And What's more, if you're not very careful, you might find yourselves running up against the law. I'm telling you that, Geordie. And I can tell you summat as well, Jennie Malcolm.

Yellow Mask has entered via the passage, unobserved, to hear conclusion of the above. he now comes forward and takes up position between Jack Fawcett and Jennie Malcolm.

Y.M. And has it ever occurred to you that one day someone might have something to tell you? Sit down! (produces a pistol) And remember, that any orders from Yellow Mask are usually obeyed, and promptly.

Jack Fawcett obeys: sits on form.

(to Jennie) Am I allowed to enquire what may be the cause of all the trouble? Yellow Mask counts it an honour to be of service to any fair maiden in distress.

O.G. Why! It's this great ... - coming in here and making a deal of fuss just because Mistress Jennie happens to be wearing a new broach.

Y.M. I see! While the wearer evidently dazzles his eye, the jewel does not. Is that ... the case?

O.G. Happen that's just about what it be.

Y.M. Well then, even though I may not be blessed with the wisdom of a Solomon, yet methinks it is not too difficult to pronounce judgement, and settle the case easily. If, by wearing the jewel you offend the eye of this gentleman, then ... why wear it?

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J.M. Because I ... you ... you see ... well, I like jewelry.

Y.M. There you are, Mr. Fawcett ... I believe that is your name ... an example of feminine logic to perfection. I like jewelry, so, I wear jewelry. What would you have more? (turning to Jennie and Old Geordie) And now perhaps, I may explain to you the purpose of this surprise visit? Wishing to speak to our good friend here, alone, I shall be grateful if you will grant to us the exclusive use of this kitchen for a short while.

He conducts Jennie to the back-kitchen door and opens it for her. Old Geordie, placing himself between them and Jack Fawcett, collects a glass or two from the round table, putting them on tray.

Y.M. (aside to Jennie) I should very much like to see you alone, but later. If I came tonight, about eight-thirty?

J.M. Yes! I shall be here.

Exit Jennie Malcolm, Yellow Mask closing the door behind her. Old Geordie, with glasses and tray, makes his exit via passage.

Y.M. Mr. Fawcett, you will realise that Yellow Mask is a man of action. Therefore on these occasions where only words are necessary, you will find brevity my watchword.

J.F. Well?

Y.M. It has come to my knowledge that, for some reason best known to yourself, you wish to interfere with certain plans of Yellow Mask.

J.F. Any man has a right in helping to keep the laws of his country.

Y.M. Granted! I congratulate you as a citizen of no mean city. But you see, circumstances have robbed me of citizenship, therefore, I live by laws formulated according to my own conscience.

J.F. You have no right to come in here and ...

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Y.M. I have every right .. every right to give you good advice: you, yourself, were exercising the same privilege when I entered this room. And that is my purpose. I merely wish to advise you. Please understand that I do not regard you as a fool, but in fairness and justice, I must tell you this. Many times before today, better and cleverer men than you have tried to cross swords with Yellow Mask. Have you ever heard of one who met with even a modicum of success?

J.F. Mebbe not! But you'll be going just a bit too far one day.

Y.M. No, no, my good friend, quite the reverse: it is because I aim high, because I aspire to accomplish the impossible, that I reach pinnacles which prove the downfall of the less venturesome. So, my friend, will you not be advised?

J.F. I'll mind my own business.

Y.M. Which means?

J.F. What I say!

Y.M. Very well then, Mr. Fawcett, so long as your business does not interfere with mine, I am confident we shall remain the best of friends, but ...

During the foregoing, Yellow Mask, speaking lightly and airily, withdraws flourishingly from his pocket a handkerchief. At the same time a sheet of paper emerges, and drops to the floor unobserved by Yellow Mask. At the last word "but," the front door latch is heard. This attracts the attention of Yellow Mask, and gives Jack Fawcett the opportunity of securing the paper, and placing it in his pocket.

Enter Will Metcalfe.

Y.M. (addressing him) Ah! Good evening to you, sir. I have been indulging in pleasant conversation with our good friend. But duty calls me on my way and I must leave you. Nevertheless, in my regretted absence, I feel sure you would wish to honour me by drinking the very good health of Yellow Mask (throws coin on table) We part, I hope, as the best of friends. Farewell!

Exit Yellow Mask.

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W.M. Why, that's a bit of a surprise; what's he want in here of all places?

J.F. Nay, but he reckoned he'd come to see me. All the same, I wouldn't go so far as to say that I were the only one he wanted to see.

W.M. And why should he want to see you?

J.F. Somehow or other he seems to have got wind of what we intended trying tonight, and he's as good as warned us off.

W.M. Is there owt he doesn't seem to get to know?

J.F. Very li'le! But there's one thing at least he doesn't know that I do.

W.M. What's that?

J.F. Just before you came in, he dropped a paper, and I managed to pick it up while he were over there, waiting for you. (produces paper from his pocket) He doesn't know that.

W.M. And what is it?

J.F. (examining it) I dont know. It looks like a letter, or summat. (hands it over) What's thee think of it?

W.M. Aye, it looks like a letter, right enough, or at any rate, part of one.

J.F. (after further perusal of letter, together) Well, and what do you make of it all?

W.M. Why, it isn't all here, but what there is seems to be plain enough, in a way.

J.F. Aye, I reckon its plain enough all right. And it strikes me that there's someone else ought to see this. Wait a minute.

He crosses to back-kitchen door, opens it, and calls:-

J.F. Jennie!

J.M. (off-stage) Yes!

J.F. Can you come a minute? We want you. (turns to Will Metcalfe) I wonder what she will say when she sees that?

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W.M. Why? What's it got to do with her?

J.F. Do you mean to say you can't see through it, and what it all means? It's just everything to do with her.

Enter Jennie Malcolm from back-kitchen.

J.M. Well, and where's your visitor?

J.F. Gone! But we've summat else to show you. Give it to her, Will, and let her read it.

Will Metcalfe hands Jennie the letter. She reads it through silently, turns it over and examines it, and enquires:-

J.M. And what is it?

J.F. It's summat that might give you a bit of a shock ... when you know what it is. It's a letter that fell out of Yellow Mask's pocket while he were in here, talking to me.

J.M. And you kept it?

J.F. It looks like it.

J.M. Well you'd no right.

Jennie Malcolm continues to read the letter during the following. The general effect of it upon her is to make her more quiet and subdued, rather than engage in a show of feelings of any kind.

J.F. May be not! But it looks to me as if it might have been t'hand of Providence ... so far as you're concerned. Can't you see what it means? It just goes to show that what I were trying to tell you before was well worth listening to. I know. They're all alike ... his sort.

J.M. (absent-mindedly, and st-ill gazing at the paper) Then ... he is ... a gentleman!

J.F. Aye, and a fine one at that, as I telled you.

J.M. I will keep this.

J.F. And why?

J.M. That needn't concern you.

J.F. No! Mebbe not! But it's plain to see that that paper concerns you ... and pretty seriously, and all.

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W.M. It looks to me as if it might concern us all in some ways.

J.H. Why should it?

J.F. You're right, Will, it's up to everybody to try and get rid of yon, and see that he lands i' t'spot that were intended for such-like rogues, and ...

W.M. I agree on that point, Jennie.

J.F. Why, aye! So would all right-thinking folk. And that's what I came to tell you about before, but neither you nor Old Geordie would listen to what I had to say.

J.M. And what did you want to say?

J.F. Just this. That Will and myself intended to lay our hands on that robber tonight. And mind you, we could do it, too, as easy as owt, if only you'd give us just that bit of help we're wanting.

J.H. I see. And what do you expect me to do?

J.F. Nay, we-re not telling you ... at least, not until we know what you might do, or wh o you may go and tell. Oh, Jennie, why won't you listen to reason and common-sense? If you'll take no notice of me, surely to goodness you've sense to see what that paper means to you.

J.M. How do you know that it means anything to me?

J.F. Because I do. So does anybody else who can read at all.

W.M. He's right, Jennie: and you can depend upon it that wherever Yellow Mask appears, it generally means trouble for somebody. It's as Jack says: that paper might be a god-send, and prove just the very thing to help us to put a spoke in his wheel.

J.F. Of course it will. And can't you see, if only you're willing to help us, you're helping yourself at the same time?

J.M. I ... I don't know. I want ... to think.

W.M. Thinking won't do much good now, Jennie, not in the face of that.

J.F. Nay, that it won't.

J.M. (**rather more determined**) Listen to me, then. You know there is a reward for his capture. Tell me this, Jack Fawcett, are you doing this in any way to help me, as you are trying to make out, or are you merely after money?

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J.F. I'll be honest with you, Jennie. True, I wouldn't say "No" to any reward th at might come along. After all, its only payment for work done. But I do say this, and Will here'll bear me out, after reading that paper, I'd do it now, reward or no reward. And that's the truth, so why not give us just ths bit of help we want?

J.M. Very well! (crosses, and stands with kitchen-door open)
Come back here, a little before half-past eight, and I will give you both ... your answer.

Exit Jennie Malcolm, closing door after her.

TWO MINUTE CURTAIN DENOTING LAPSE OF TIME

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Curtain rises to reveal Jennie Malcolm, deep in thought, sitting at round table. The letter is in her hand.

Enter Jack Fawcett and Will Metcalfe.

W.M. Well Jennie, still thinking things over?

J.M. Yes!

J.F. And have you read that letter enough to understand what it means, and what's at t'back of it all?

J.M. Yes!

W.M. Well then, the only thing is, what have you decided to do? Do you intend falling in with our plans or not?

J.M. ... No! ... and, yes!

J.F. Good! Then I'll tell you exactly what to do.

J.M. That's just exactly what you will not do. I'm the one who's going to say what's to be done.

W.M. But, Jennie ...

J.M. Well?

J.F. It's no sort of a job for a woman.

J.M. Then why do you ask for a woman's help?

W.M. Oh, listen, Jennie ...

J.M. No! You two have got to do the listening. If you don't know why you've asked for a woman's help, then I'll tell you. It's because you're like all the rest ... the men who have been trying to lay Yellow Mask low for years past. It's because, villain that he may be, he's got more sense in one little finger than there is in half a dozen such as you.

J.F. Jennie ...

J.M. Yes, I mean it. I defy you ... the pair of you. Do your worst, or your best, and Yellow Mask will still be free as the air. You are fools, blind foals, not to be able to see that you can chase him for ever on his own ground, and he will laugh at you under your very noses.

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J.F. But I tell you, if you will do as we want, we shan't fail this time.

J.M. Whatever you may have planned, I'll have none of it. If I am to be in this, then I make my own arrangements. I have no intention of joining the chase for Yellow Mask. No! ... Yellow Mask will come to me ... to realise that where men have failed, a woman has the wits to win.

W.M. But Jennie, you can't do that by yourself.

J.M. Why not? That has to be proved. All you have to do is this. Keep a watch outside. There are two of you. There are only two ways into the Cat Hole kitchen. Yellow Mask is coming here tonight ... soon ... any time now. Keep out of sight, and when you have seen him enter, stand guard with your guns ready; one near the back door, one near the front. You understand, so far?

J.F. Yes!

J.M. Good! Then there is only one thing further for you to know. You see this box in the mantel-shelf?

J.F. Well?

J.M. Before the night is over, it may fall on to the hearth. Be near enough so that if it does, you will be able to hear it.

W.M. And then what?

J.M. If, and when, you hear it fall, come in here at once. That is all. (spoken as if she hears something) Listen! Go now: that way (indicating back-kitchen door) Remember, one at each door ... unseen!

Exit Jack Fawcett and Will Metcalfe.

The front door latch is heard.

Enter Yellow Mask to find Jennie seated at the round table.

Y.M. Fortune favours the brave, and luckily this time I find you alone again.

J.M. Just as you see me.

Y.M. I am glad because ...

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J.M. Of your own safety, I suppose?

Y.M. Partly, perhaps, but ... tonight may be my last opportunity of seeing you for some little time.

J.M. Yes! You are going away?

Y.M. I am.

J.M. Why?

Y.M. Well ... for ... for several reasons.

J.M. Known only to yourself.

Y.M. I suppose so. But, as I know you will understand, it is not for Yellow Mask to stay too long in one place.

J.M. That will account for your travels taking you so far afield.

Y.M. Exactly!

J.M. Even as far as ... Scotland?

Y.M. At times, yes.

J.M. You will be going there soon.

Y.M. Yellow Mask seldom divulges his intentions, but you happen to be right. I hope to be in Scotland within a week.

J.M. That sounds like urgent business.

Y.M. Not urgent, altogether, but still, of some importance to myself.

J.M. And others?

Y.M. Of course! You will have learned by now that most of my plans involve others.

J.M. Yes, I have realised that fully.

Y.M. Even tonight I have plans ... plans which involve you.

J.M. Perhaps I realise that, also.

Y.M. In what way?

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- J.M. Did you not say you were glad to find me ... alone?
- Y.M. And so I am, my only wish being that I had more time to spend with you so that I could explain to you all I mean. Oh, Jennie, you know something of the superficial history of Yellow Mask, but you do not know what lies deep beneath his heart. You will have heard of his escapades and his exploits, and know of the success which has attended them. But have you ever paused to think what may be the secret of that success ... if success it can be called?
- J.M. No!
- Y.M. Simply this! I have been one of those fools who step in where angels fear to tread. For the past few years I have played with life while courting death.
- J.M. Does not that savour of ... double dealing?
- Y.M. It may.
- J.M. And if you persistently seek disaster, may it not come when it is possibly least expected?
- Y.M. Death in those days would not have been disaster. But now, in a night, all has been changed. I can see what there is in life. I have learned what it has to offer, and the desire for death has been supplanted by a longing to live; and with that change there has come a ... dread! When I sought death, it eluded me; I could not find it. Now that I want to live ... I wonder? ... I feel .. oh, Yellow Mask is not afraid, but there is an undefinable something ... a something in the air ... that I can feel but cannot fathom. All I am certain of is this ... this change ~~change~~ within me. Do you know what ... or who ... has brought it about?

During the above Jennie and Yellow Mask finally assume a position so that Jennie has her back to front-stage. Yellow Mask, facing her, places his hands on her shoulders, and draws her nearer to him when asking the last question. As Jennie replies, she takes advantage of the position to remove the pistols from his pockets, and bring them round behind her back.

- J.M. Perhaps the anticipation of some future event?

Jennie withdraws from Yellow Mask, eventually finding her way to the mantel-shelf during the following.

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Y.M. That may be true to a degree, but in my case, future events which I might at one time have welcomed, may now be anticipated with misgiving. Living the life I lead, I have at all times realised that the end could come... so. (snaps his fingers) Brown Betty, racing along rough tracks unknown to others ... a sudden stumble! A chance shot in the dark: a hidden gun behind a wall: in so many different, aye, and so many unexpected ways ...

Jennie Malcolm knocks the box off the mantel-shelf, and it falls to the hearth with a crash.

Y.M. Jennie? ... What? ...

Enter Jack Fawcett by back-kitchen door, with gun pointing at Yellow Mask. Yellow Mask claps his hands to his pockets to discover loss of his pistols.

Y.M. My guns!

Realising the situation, he makes for the passage, to be confronted by Will Metcalfe, armed. Jack Fawcett meanwhile moves across to round table.

Yellow Mask turns to back-kitchen door, but Jennie moves from fire-place to bar his way.

Y.M. Well, and what is the meaning of all this? Some huge joke? Some funny pantomime, at which we are all intended to laugh? Will you not tell me when? (a forced and bitter laugh, which stops on realisation that Jennie is holding his own pistols) My guns! You? Then it was you? ... Jennie? ... Jennie Malcolm! Well, why do you all stand and look at me like that? Can you not speak? (to Will Metcalfe) You? (to Jack Fawcett) You? (turns to Jennie imploringly) No! Doubtless there is not very much you can say, for now my eyes are opened. I can see it all. Oh, Jennie Malcolm, when you robbed me of my guns, and felt the grip of your foul hands on their butts, why did you not shoot me then, rather than let me live, ever to see you like this ... a ... traitor! Your lips, your eyes, your cheeks, your hair, all your vile blandishments so cunningly used to one end, and one end only - to betray the man who ... who ... Yes, had you tried to shoot me with your own hand, I could have forgiven you. I could have forgiven you anything .. everything .. everything except .. treachery, ... a crime that is foreign to the blood of a McGregor. But what of it? Even that will avail me naught, now. Gentlemen, I realise I am your prisoner. Do with me as you will.

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The two men begin to approach him.

Y.M. But stay! Before surrendering myself to you, I would bargain with you for one very small favour.

J.F. Well, and what might that be?

Y.M. I would crave a few minutes alone with this..(derisively) lady! And remember, it is not the usual custom of Yellow Mask to ask for favours. His practice in the past has been either to demand them at the point of a pistol, or to pay for them. See! (produces a bag from his pocket) In that bag there are twenty golden guineas. (produces a second bag) In that, there is a like amount.

He throws a bag at the feet of each man. They stoop to retrieve them. This gives Yellow Mask opportunity to attempt an escape by the back kitchen door. Jennie prevents him.

J.M. (quiet but determined) No!

Y.M. Very well, then! Since the underlings have received twenty guineas, what is the pay demanded by their leader? Shall we make it sixty, to complete the round hundred? Surely one who can stoop to treachery will not put herself above a little bribery?

He flings a bag of coins at Jennie's feet. She either ignores them, or kicks them aside.

Y.M. Then I will address my conversation to gentlemen. Grant me, I beg of you, this one favour, sirs, and I swear to you on the honour of a scottish gentleman, that I will recall you to this room, to find us exactly as you leave us. (to Jack Fawcett, indicating back door) You stand guard outside that door. (to Will Metcalfe, indicating the front) You stand guard at the front. You have me on my sacred oath. I make ... full surrender.

W.M. Well, that is for Miss Jennie to say.

J.M. (drooping her head) Go!

The two men proceed to their separate posts.

Y.M. Jennie Malcolm, I have sought this interview, not that I have much to say to you ... now! But I thought, perhaps you might have something to say to me.

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J.M. I have. Much!

Y.M. I am listening.

J.M. You ... you stand there accusing me of treachery. Well, what of your own infamous conduct? Are you not equally guilty, not only of treachery, but of base lying and deceit as well?

Y.M. If you are trying to defend yourself, woman, at the expense of black-guarding me, then I fail to understand your reasoning.

J.M. No doubt you do, so I will enlighten you. You come here, you conceal your identity, you use your flattering tongue, and your highly polished airs and graces, for no other purpose than your own amusement, with a woman you thought was prepared to listen to all you had to say to her. You have sought to make me persuade myself that I ... that I might have ... loved you. Now, I see only too clearly that you are, just what I say, a liar and a deceiver. As to treachery, though I may not be able to accuse you of that, yet your treatment of me will condemn you as a traitor to love ... or at least, it should do ... in the eyes of your ... Lady Mary.

Y.M. Lady Mary? What do you know of Lady Mary?

J.M. I know enough.

Y.M. But ...

J.M. I know that perhaps in two or three days time you will be hurrying back to Scotland as fast as horse can carry you, to marry that lady.

Y.M. But woman, are you mad? Will you not hear me?

J.M. I will hear nothing. Much rather would I believe what I have seen.

Y.M. Seen? What have you seen?

J.M. (producing sheet of letter) That!

Y.M. How came you by that? (he feels in his pocket and produces remaining sheets)

J.M. That is my concern.

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Y.M. Give that letter to me. Where did you get it? (Jennie defies him and retains the letter) But there! What need to ask when one is associating with common pickpockets?

J.M. And are they not admirable company for such as you, a highwayman, and a common robber?

Y.M. Oh, out upon it! And an end to all this, Jennie Malcolm. Since you will not hear me, since you will not return me that paper, I give to you the rest of the letter (he forces it into her hand) It matters not to me now, who who learns the life-secret of Yellow Mask. Some day, at your leisure, read the whole, not just a part of that letter, then, among other things, you will know the true history of Duncan McGregor and this Lady Mary.

J.M. I have not the slightest interest in either.

Y.M. You mean that?

J.M. (hesitates before answering, walks to mantel-piece and puts down the pistols. She then turns and looks at him) I have said it.

Y.M. Very well, then. Go! Call in your guards. And tell them this. You have sold to them a man who thought he could have trusted you, not only with his life, but with his very soul: one who came here tonight to offer you an honourable love, devotion, adoration, awe, even worship, the like of which may never come your way again. But now that I have seen you in your true light, first a traitor, and then a self appointed judge whose sense of justice is so warped, so twisted, so biassed, that it condemns a man unheard. Go, woman, go. Leave me before the hate you have sown in my heart drives from my head it's little remaining reason. Don't stand there to torture me further. I detest the very sight of you. I despise your very name. Go, woman, go

Jennie, cowed somewhat by Yellow Mask's attitude, has been nearing the kitchen-door. Finally he hurries her through and slams the door on her, saying:-

Y.M. I hate you. I ... I ... (leaning heavily against the door) I love you. I love her still. Oh, Duncan McGregor, you fool! You fool! Only once before in your life has a woman crossed your path and left nothing in her train but grief and misery. And yet, fool that you are, you did not learn your lesson.

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He crosses to occupy stool near round table.

Y.M. Oh, God in heaven, creator of this wide and wonderful universe, throughout its length and breadth is there not to be found at least one ... one good woman?

Enter Jack Fawcett via Kitchen door, and Will Metcalfe from the passage.

Y.M. Gentelemn, I have vindicated my honour. I am your most willing prisoner. Do with me as you will. What is required of me?

J.F. Only that you come with us, to Kisdon Side and on to Reeth.

Will Metcalfe makes for the passage, followed by Yellow Mask, Jack Fawcett closing in on the rear. As they reach up-stage, Jennie hurries through the kitchen doorway, falls on her knees before Yellow Mask, and cries:-

J.M. Duncan, Duncan, I cannot let you go.

Y.M. You cannot let me go? Nothing can prevent my leaving this accursed place: nothing on earth, in heaven, or in hell. Not even you ... you ... Judas. (He flings away her hands with which she is holding his beseechingly, and she reels over to the floor)

Y.M. (turning to Will Metcalfe) Take me out of this.

They leave the stage via the passage.

A SHORT PAUSE.

Enter Old Geordie, via kitchen.

O.G. (on discovering Jennie, and helping her to rise) Why, Jennie lass, whatever's matter wi' ye? Are ye ill?

J.M. No, Geordie, no! ... Yellow Mask .. in danger .. save him.

O.G. Nay lass, now ye must be ill. Yellow Mask? Save him? I reckon if anyone can save himself, Yellow Mask's the man for the job.

J.M. Geordie, Geordie ... you don't understand ... They've taken him away.

O.G. Ta'en him? Who's ta'en him?

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- J.M. Jack Fawcett ... Kisdon Side ... to get horses ... and then to Reeth.
- O.G. Heavens, Jennie lass, what in the ^{name} ~~name~~ of goodness are you telling us? When was this?
- J.M. Just now ... a minute or two ... if you'd come in the front way you'd have met them. Oh, Geordie, what shall we do? Hurry, hurry!
- O.G. If I were nobbut as young as I was once, I know what I'd do. Anyhow, Old Geordie's never too old to try (**secures gun, etc.**) Where did you say, Kisdon?
- J.M. Yes, up by Willow Greens.
- O.G. Willow Greens? Why? Why, then heaven be praised. What time is it? (**hurries into passage to consult grandfather clock and returns immediately**) Ten past nine. Oh Jennie, Jennie, has Yellow Mask been to Muker today?
- J.M. I don't know. Why?
- O.G. If he has, then he'll have seen the Scott lads. I took a letter there for him ... you remember. But if he hasn't seen 'em, then I know, they had to be at Willow Greens at nine o'clock to-night to see him. But if he's seen 'em ... then I don't know what ...
- J.M. Oh Geordie, if anything happens ... and its all my fault ...
- O.G. Never mind whose fault it is. We can see about all that later. Our hope is that tonight's meeting with the Scott laddies still holds good. That, and provided you haven't driven him out of his senses. If only he has sense and reason enough to give the call at Willow Greens, then there's a chance. Anyhow, I'm off to do what I can. You stay where you are, and don't leave till I come back. And let's hope that Yellow Mask hasn't seen them Muker lads to-day. And pray ... pray that ye hear the call-sign of Yellow Mask ... soon.

Exit Old Geordie.

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For the finale, Jennie wanders slowly across to the mantel-shelf and picks up one of the pistols. She examines it as she re-crosses the stage to sit on the stool near the round table. Always there is a rather tense "listening" attitude.

Towards end of examination of the pistol, Jennie points it towards herself, gazing down the barrel. Then, in the distance is heard the call of Yellow Mask.

On hearing this, Jennie crashes the pistol to the far side of the room, and falls on her knees beside the round table.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~
CURTAIN
~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

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The curtain rises while Jennie is placing a white cloth on the round table. She continues arranging for a light meal as the dialogue proceeds.

Enter Old Geordie.

- J.M. How is he now, Geordie?
- O.G. He's getting up.
- J.M. He's what?
- O.G. Why, he seems to be all right, and looks none so bad, and he says he never felt better in his life. Still, there's no two ways about it, he got a nasty crack on the head last night ... must ha' done, seeing he did not come round till about four o'clock this morning.
- J.M. How did it all happen?
- O.G. Nay, I don't know for sure. Whether he were tripped or whether he stumbled I cannot say; and he doesn't know, neither. Last thing heesays he remembers was just seeing me, i' t'dark, coming towards him when he was ... why ... busy, wi' Jack Fawcett. And not knowing who it might be, he said he made a jump backward, then seemed to be falling; and then, he says, everything just seemed to go dark. Next thing he knew was that he were in bed, and found me sitting at his bed-side.
- J.M. And what made you carry him back here, Geordie?
- O.G. Why, I thought this would be t'safest spot. If any of this business should leak out, and some busybody started doing a bit o' looking round, why then I thought an open-door public inn would be t'last place they'd ever think on for a highwayman to hide in. And then, I knew you'd be handy if there were any nursing, or owt like that to be done.
- J.M. But Geordie, I'm so terribly frightened ... have been all day, and still am.
- O.G. Now there's no occasion to be frightened of them two louts. I think we've thrown enugh dust in their eyes, and led 'em well up t'garden path out of harm's way.
- J.M. What did you do with them?

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- O.G. Well, it were like this. We had 'em well trussed up, and laid behind a wall where they could see nowt. But we took good care to let 'em hear, all right. And what they heard were three horses makin_g for Muker, and Old Geordie walking back t'other way by him-self ... They didn't know that I had Duncan over my shoulder: that they didh't. And a while after I'd got him nice and comfortable into bed, I went back to Fawcett and his pal, cut their ropes and let 'em go free.
- J.M. That's what I don't like, Geordie, to think they may be coming in here sometime.
- O.G. Aye, but tha sees, I've telled 'em straight that t'Cat Hole kitchen's for family use and friends, and if they want to come here, they can use t'room, like other folk. In fact, I gave 'em it pretty hot that we'd all be better pleased if they kept away altogether.
- J.M. All the same, Geordie, I can't help feeling afraid.
- O.G. Well, tha needn't. Tha sees, I took a leaf out o' Yellow Mask's copy-book.
- J.M. In what way?
- O.G. I tried to do what I thought he might have done: took a bold course, and tried to bluff 'em out of it, and I'm certain it's come off. When I let 'em go I told 'em it was only because t'coast were clear, and if they wanted to catch Brown Betty after half an hour's start, they'd better find some horses with wings and get a move on down t'Dale. You can take it from me, they think he's gone: on that point I'm dead sure.
- J.M. But suppose they come here, and find him?
- O.G. Aye well, I'm even ready for that an' all. Tha sees, I took it upon myself to tell the two Scotts lads o' Muker to come back here tonight as soon as it were dark ... well, just to keep a sort-a lookout, and in case of owt happening.
- J.M. And does he know about all this?
- O.G. Aye, I've told him.
- J.M. And what did he say?

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- O.G. At first I were a bit scared, 'cause I know he likes nobody meddling about wi' owt that concerns him. But when I told him all I'd done, he looks at me and says, "Geordie," he says, "If you'd as many whiskers as brains, you'd want all t'mowing machines in t'Dale to cut 'em" Then, o' course, he telled me of one or two more things he wanted doing, so what wi' one thing and another, I reckon I've had a fairly busy time. Anyhow, I think we've just about got everything ship-shape, so do as I tell tha, and stop thl bothering.
- J.M. But you don't understand, Geordie. Apart from them, I'm ... I'm afraid of Yellow Mask.
- O.G. Frightened of him? And for why?
- J.M. Because ... well, have you forgotten what I told you just before you went to his help last night? That it was all my ...
- O.G. Now Jennie, it's not for me to go meddling with other folk's affairs. Whatever you may have done, or whatever there may be between you and Yellow Mask, that's no concern of mine. When you've known him as long as I have you'll find that it pays never to interfere with his affairs until you're asked to do so.
- J.M. Yes, I've discovered that ... so soon. Perhaps, too soon, or ... too late.
- O.G. Well now, listen Jennie lass, and I'll tell tha. I may be getting on in years, but I'm no'so blind. And from what I could see, well, I'd a bit of an idea as to which way t'wind were blowing ... as far as you and Duncan were concerned.
- J.M. How do you mean?
- O.G. Now don't try to pretend wi' Old Geordie, Jennie. Tha , knows very well what I mean. And besides, while I were watching at his bedside this morning, he seemed to be wandering a bit in his mind ... and talking now and again.
- J.M. About what?
- O.G. Nay, a regular mix-up. But he did keep mentioning your name. Aye, and something or other about a picture o' yours which he said he had smashed and ruined for ever. And that .. he never dare face you again. And then, t'funny thing was, after all that, as soon as he came to, and opened his eyes, first thing he says was, "Where's Jennie? Where am I?"

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J.M. Did you tell him ... what we'd done?

O.G. Why, of course. I just explained a bit to him what had happened, and he just lay and listened awhile, and then seemed to drop into a quiet sleep.

J.M. And that was about the best thing he could do.

O.G. It was, for when he woke up again about eight o'clock, he seemed to be more like himself, but complained about his head. "Geordie" he says, "Did we have a night out together last night, on the binge?" "Not arf, we did," I says. Aye, it were good to see him smiling once more.

J.M. And what does he intend to do?

O.G. Well, when I left him, he said he was going to get up. He intends going to Catterick tonight.

J.M. But Geordie, you can't let him do that. He'll be too ill, and ...

O.G. If Yellow Mask says he's going to Catterick - he's going to Catterick, and neither Old Geordie nor anybody else'll stop him. I've known him ower long for that.

J.M. But think, it's impossible: there's best part of a thirty mile ride, to begin with. He mustn't be allowed to try.

Enter Yellow Mask, unobserved, via passage, to hear the end of the foregoing.

Y.M. And who's to prevent him?

There is a moment of confused hesitation. Yellow Mask then walks to confront Jennie.

Y.M. Miss Malcolm, some little time ago, Yellow Mask had need of Joe Taylor. The call was answered. Tonight, Joe Taylor calls for Yellow Mask. Even thieves recognise loyalty and honour. Have I said enough?

Jennie, somewhat subdued, turns away and busies herself at the fireside with kettle and tea-pot.

O.G. I told you what it would be, Jennie. But see, Duncan, you must have a bite and sup before setting out. (hands him a small flask) And here's a drop of something good that will help you on the way. Miss Jennie has made this all ready for you: there's no desperate hurry as yet, and I can keep a look-out.

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Y.M. (occupying stool) You are indeed kind to me, Miss Malcolm, and I thank you sincerely.

Jennie pours out some tea. Old Geordie, who has given evidence of scenting a rather strained situation, quietly leaves the kitchen. Jennie returns tea-pot to the fireside, notices his absence, and calls quietly into the passage.

J.M. Geordie!

Receiving no answer, she approaches quietly and stands behind Yellow Mask.

J.M. Will you allow me to say ... I am sorry.

Y.M. In an country of free speech, Miss Malcolm, one is at liberty to say what one pleases.

A pause, during which Jennie crosses to fireside.

J.M. Yes, but ... you do not make it very easy for me.

Y.M. My regrets if I inconvenience you in any way. But pray continue. You were saying? ...

J.M. I am sorry ... and sorry again, that my picture of a gentleman seems to be fading.

Y.M. Fading? I should have thought that by now such fancies of the mind would have been completely obliterated ... for ever. (rises and confronts Jennie) I, too, am sorry. Sorry to believe that a soul which I thought to be mirrored in those two eyes could ... ever ... but, there! ... Sorrow, Miss Malcolm, does not confine its visitations to one person only. It may inflict itself upon you, it may inflict itself upon ... oh, upon anyone, just like any other emotion or influence can do ... joy, happiness, love, or ... or treachery. Do you not agree?

J.M. I ... I don't know. And yet, perhaps you are right.

Y.M. I am right. Consider love. It may come: it may ^{not} go. We cannot compel it: we cannot command it. If it decides to pass us by, we cannot stay it. And on the other hand, once it has entered and taken possession of our hearts, then it is equally impossible for us to expel it, or to shut it out.

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- J.M. You may speak thus lightly of it, ~~and~~, but in what you say there is perhaps more truth ... than you fully realise.
- Y.M. I never speak lightly of love ... of real love, that is. To me it has always seemed too serious a matter, too wonderful, one of the forces with which God has endowed this world to make it a better and nobler dwelling-place for we poor mortals: a dynamic force which can transform a weakling into a giant; reduce a tyrant to a weakling. In the heart of one man, it will compel him to go forward and conquer everything: in another, to forsake everything; in another, to forgive everything ...
- J.M. Everything ... except ... treachery!
- Y.M. You speak of treachery. What is treachery? Is not that yet another influence, another emotion, which, perhaps unbidden, enters the heart and mind of a man and controls his actions to the extent that he becomes the most despicable of all God's creatures? So, if love can enter our hearts, and treachery penetrate our souls, both unbidden, then are not love and treachery allied one to the other?
- J.M. I cannot follow your reasoning, nor yet see how you can ever reconcile love and treachery in one and the same person.
- Y.M. At one time, possibly I should have thought the same. But listen a moment. Picture in your mind a woman: a woman who loves a man with a deep and intense devotion. Picture a set of circumstances which may convince her she is doomed to lose that man. Then, in order to keep him to herself, and to prevent him, as she thinks, from reaching the arms of another woman, is it not possible that, in the blindness of her passionate love, she will stop at nothing? May she not be so oblivious to all else around her, that she fails to recognise ... even treachery, when she sees it? What power is it that has driven her to pursue the course she follows? Is it treachery? Is it love? Who shall be the one to decide?
- J.M. Duncan, go. Go and leave me before you break my heart entirely.
- Y.M. I have no desire at all to do that. Six years ago my own life-cord snapped. I have learned all the sorrow and the bitterness of broken hearts. But even they are not beyond repair. One comes to learn the truth that time, in its goodness, is the great healer. At first we feel crushed, crushed beyond all hope. Then the wounds close gradually, the sores are soothed. The scars may remain for ever, but the pain subsides. Other distractions claim our attention, and we are liable to ... forget.

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J.M. To ... forget!

Y.M. Yes! Once I am out in the night again, Brown Betty flying beneath me, and God's good air fanning my cheeks and brow, I shall feel ...

J.M. Must you go?

Y.M. Nothing is more imperative.

J.M. Very well, then. Ere you take your leave, may I ... make a request?

Yellow Mask is silent. Jennie proceeds.

J.M. Since, as you say, we cannot compel love ... if you cannot love me as I love you ... if I have killed what affection you may have felt for me ... before we part, can you not find it within your heart to say at least, that you forgive me?

She kneels to Yellow Mask. He raises her to her feet.

Y.M. I cannot ... I cannot bear to see you kneeling and prostrate at the feet of a ... highwayman and - a common robber.

Jennie turns from him. Yellow Mask approaches passage exit slowly. Then he turns.

Y.M. Yes, I think I can forgive you ... on two conditions. Will you hear them?

J.M. (hesitates) Yes!

Y.M. I am more than glad. The first one, then, is an order. Did you read that letter?

J.M. No!

Y.M. And why not?

J.M. Because I ... I felt that I had no right. It was not mine. That I ... oh, if I must say it ... I preferred to think I could believe your word, alone, without any proof.

Y.M. I am grateful, for such honour. But you will read the whole of that letter of which you now know only a part. You will observe particularly the date. Then you will discover that the letter is six years old.

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J.M. Six ... years!

Y.M. Yes. ^{fact} Then you will learn that the letter was not a request, but a command, a command from my father to return home in order to marry ... to marry a lady of his choice.

J.M. Six years ago?

Y.M. By some strange coincidence, exactly six years ago tonight, that I renounced home, friends, wealth, comfort, and all that a man holds dear, rather than marry a woman I did not love, and who cared not that much for me!

Six years tonight since Duncan McGregor decided that never would he marry, except at the dictates of love.

Six years ago tonight, since a wealthy home disowned its rightful heir, and made him an outcast who ~~decided~~ ^{was} to exact penalties in hard cash from similar wealthy and arrogant families.

Six years ago tonight, since they ... ^{they} killed Duncan McGregor and from his corpse there arose ... Yellow Mask.

I intended to show and explain to you that letter last night when ... but there! ... Do as I command, read it yourself. And when you have done so, consign it to the fire. Watch it blaze until nothing remains but burnt-out ash. Then ... then what you have learned of Duncan McGregor, keep locked as the closest secret of your heart.

J.M. Then you are willing to trust a ... traitor?

Y.M. You asked for my forgiveness. I am outlining my conditions.

J.M. And the second one?

Y.M. The first concerns that secret. The second one demands a promise.

J.M. From me?

Y.M. Yes. You and I are standing here together at the parting of the ways (offers her his hand. Jennie takes it) We neither of us can tell what Fate and the future may have prepared for us. But, should I be spared, ever to pass along this beautiful highway again ... as I am praying with heart and soul I may ... and find you here, will you promise, when I come and ask you ... promise you will marry me.

J.M. I am not worthy of your love.

Y.M. On that verdict, let the heart of Duncan McGregor be judge to pass sentence.

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