

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane
Burroughs Verne
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch
Homer Tolstoy Whitman Twain
Darwin Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott
Potter Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte
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Poe Aristotle Wells Bunner Shakespeare Cooke
Hale James Hastings Richter Chambers Irving
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Nancy Stair A Novel

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Nancy Stair

A NOVEL

By *ELINOR MACARTNEY LANE*

Author of "Mills of God"



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NEW YORK

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To Frank Brett Noyes
*Who accepted, with a kind letter,
The first story I ever wrote,
This tale of Nancy Stair is dedicated,
As a tribute of affection,
From one old friend to another.*

"For woman is not undeveloped man,
But diverse; could we make her as the man,
Sweet Love were slain: his dearest bond is this,
Not like to like, but like in difference."
Tennyson.

"Auld Nature swears, the lovely dears,
Her noblest work she classes, O,
Her 'prentice hand she tried on man,
And then she made the lasses, O."
Robert Burns.

"Ye can't educate women as you can men. They're elemental creatures; and ye can no more change their natures than ye can stop fire from burning."
Hugh Pitcairn.

PREFACE BY LORD STAIR

Two excellent accounts of the beautiful Nancy Stair have already been published; the first by Mrs. George Opie, in the Scots News, giving a detailed account of the work on the burnside, and a more recent one by Professor Erskine, of our own University, which is little more than a critical dissertation upon Nancy as a poet; the heart of the matter with him being to commend her English verses, as well as those in "gude braid Scot."

With these accounts to be secured so easily it may seem presumptuous, as well as superfluous, for me to undertake a third. I state at the outset, therefore, that it is beyond my ambition and my abilities to add a word to stories told so well. Nor do I purpose to mention either the work on the burn or Nancy's song-making, save when necessary for clearness.

For me, however, the life of Nancy Stair has a far deeper significance than that set forth by either of these gifted authors. My knowledge of her was naturally of the most intimate; I watched her grow from a wonderful child into a wonderful woman; and saw her, with a man's education, none but men for friends, and no counsels save from her own heart, solve most wisely for the race the problem put to every woman of gift; and with sweetest reasoning and no bitter renouncings enter the kingdom of great womanhood.

To tell this intimate side of her life with what skill I have is the chief purpose of my writing, but there are two other motives almost as strong. The first of these is to clear away the mystery of the murder which for so long clouded our lives at Stair. To do this there is no man in Scotland to-day so able as myself. It was I who bid the Duke to Stair; the quarrel which brought on the meeting fell directly beneath my eyes; I heard the shots and found the dead upon that fearful night, and afterward went blindfolded through the bitter business of the trial. I was the first, as well, to scent the truth at the bottom of the defense, and have in my possession, as I write, the confession which removed all doubt as to the manner in which the deed was committed.

The second reason is to set clear Nancy's relation to Robert Burns, of which too much has been made, and whose influence upon her and her writings has been grossly exaggerated. Her observation of natural genius in him changed her greatly, and I have tried to set this forth with clearness; but it affected her in a very different manner from that which her two famous biographers have told, and I have it from her own lips that it was because of the Burns episode that she stopped writing altogether.

If it be complained against me that the tale has my own life's story in it, I would answer to the charge that only a great and passionate first love could have produced a child like Nancy, and I believe that the world is ever a bit interested in the line of people whose loves and hates have produced a recognized genius. Then, too, the circumstances attending her birth had more influence on her after life than may at first be seen, giving me as they did such a tenderness for her that I have never been able to cross her in any matter whatever.

Much of the story, of which I was not directly a witness, comes from Nancy herself. I have sent the tale to Alexander Carmichael as well, and in all important matters his recollections accord with mine.

There came to me but yesterday, in this queer old city, a letter from him urging me back to Stair, closed with a stanza that was not born to die:

"Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And never brought to min',
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
And the days of Auld Lang Syne?"

They should not, Sandy, and none know it better than we; and I long for a grip of your hand, lad, and to feel the winds blow through the rowans at Stair and the copper birches of Arran; to hear the blackbirds whistle across the gowan-tops; to see the busy burn-folk through the break in the old south wall; and with the ending of these writings my steps are turned toward home. Rome, 1801.

NANCY STAIR

CHAPTER I

AT STAIR HOUSE, NEAR EDINBURGH, IN 1768

By reason of a breakneck ride through the Pentlands, I entered the dining-room at Stair very late one morning to find Huey Mac-Grath in a state of deepest gloom waiting to serve my breakfast.

"Good morning, Huey," I said, opening *The Glasgow Sentinel* which had come by the post.

"Good morning, my lord," he returned, in a grudging tone.

"It's a fine morning," said I.

"Ye think sae!" with a show of great surprise.

"Why, man!" I cried, "can not ye see for yourself?"

"We've the spring rains to come yet."

"They're by these ten days," I answered.

"Nae, nae," he said quietly. "That was jest the equinoctial, I'm thinking."

"The equinoctial comes in March, man!" I observed with some surprise.

"Tammas was telling me yesterday that the roads to London were fair impassable."

"Nonsense," said I. "The summer's here, Huey."

"There's a chill at the gloamin', yet. Nae, nae," he went on earnestly, "simmer's far awa',—I've seen snaw's late's this!"

"Ye've had wonderful eyesight," I laughed, seeing the point toward which this talk was aimed. "And did ye hear nothing of tidal waves, Huey?" I asked; "with impassable roads to London, and snow in June, ye've surely heard of some disasters by sea."

"Ah!" he cried, "ye can tell of what I'm thinking, for I've seen the signs of it in ye for a fortnight back. You're like your father before you, and your grandfather, as weel, for the curse of wandering seems to follow the name of Stair. With the first warm day ye have your windows wide open; and next your beds are into a draught fit

to blaw ye from between the sheets; and then ye're up in the morn-
ing, aff on a hoorse scouring the hills as tho' ye were gyte; and at the
end your valise's packed, the coach stopped, and ye aff amang the
heathen, Gude alane kens wheer!

"Ah, laddie!" he continued, his voice changed to an affectionate
wail, "dinna be gane awa'! Ye've niver seen Stair in the simmer time;
but when the elderberries and lilacs flower on the burn; and the
gilly flowers and hollyhocks are bloomin' by the north tower; when
the wind blows soft through the rowans, and the pineys' pink and
white faces, as big as cabbages, nod against the old south wall,
there's no bonnier place in Scotland than your own place of Stair."

He was so moved at the thought of my leaving him, that I an-
swered in some haste,

"In truth, Huey, I've no thought of going away."

"Ah," he answered, "ye don't know it, but ye have. It's been in ye
for a week back,"—and casting his eye out of the window, "there's
Mr. Carmichael now, riding in by the Holm gate. I'll jest open the
door till him."

This was an entirely unnecessary attention on Huey's part, as
Sandy Carmichael, whose estate of Arran Towers joins my own on
the west, generally opened the door of Stair for himself, or the win-
dows either, for the matter of that, if the latter were more conven-
ient entrance from the place he happened to be.

My recollections of Sandy begin with my recollections of myself.
As lads together, indeed before we were long out of skirts, we gud-
dled for fish in the burn-water; went birds' nesting, raced our po-
nies, fought each other behind the stables and made a common
stock of our money for the purchase of dimpies, peoys and jelly-
tarts. We attended the High School together and upon leaving it
chose the same college, where Sandy ran a merry pace, throwing his
money out of the windows, as it were, and gaining for himself the
reputation of wearing more waistcoats, drinking more whisky,
making love to more women, and writing better verses, than any
other man in the University.

He was a big, athletic, clean-limbed fellow, with brown hair, a
bright face, warm eyes, and friendly genial ways which came from

the kindest heart in the world. Five years before the time of which I write, which would be in 1763, he had married the Honorable Miss Llewellyn from the north, a pitiable pale-colored lady, who, half crazed by jealousy and ill health, was sending him back to unmarried ways again. Being only sister to Lord Glenmore, who had no heirs and was subject to seizures of a very malignant type, it was yearly expected that the title would come to Sandy's bit of a boy, a handsome-faced little fellow of four, who paid me long visits at self-selected times, demanding my watch, a pipe to smoke, and horses to ride.

Before Huey had time to reach the door, Sandy, in his riding clothes, with his cap on the back of his head, stood looking in at me. There was a scowl between his brows, and by this as well as other certain signs, I knew that all was not well with him.

"Will ye go on a cruise with me?" says he from the doorway with no introduction whatever.

"Would it be an unseemly prying into your affairs to ask where to?" I inquired with a smile.

"North or south," said he, still keeping his place by the door. "It's immaterial to me, so I escape accompanying my womenfolk to London."

"And if I go with ye," says I, "your wife will like me less than she does now."

"That would be impossible, so ye needn't worry over it," he returned dryly. "The only good word ye ever had from her was that if ye'd been a less handsome man ye might have been a better one."

"And even that could scarce be termed fulsome flattery," I observed.

"Will ye go!" he repeated, his mind set on the one point.

A sudden thought, bred of some news in the paper which I had just received, came to me upon the instant.

"Let us take the boat from Leith, and go north by the Orkney and Hebrides Islands, through the Minch to the west coast. There are all kinds of stories afloat concerning the gipsies and free traders who live in those deep coves; we might fall in with a pirate ship— —"

"Or find a hidden treasure!" he said scoffingly, as he seated himself on the other side of the table and took some coffee, the frown gone, and the Sandy I knew with the bright face and laughing eye back again.

"Aye," he went on in his humorous way, "I am convinced 'twill be hidden treasure we'll find, Jock. We'll go ashore at midnight, and under a stunted pine will be a sailor's chest. Hidden treasures are always found in sailors' chests, ye know. And taking a three-foot bar of iron, which every gentleman in tales carries concealed upon his person, we, you and I,—none of the others, of course,—will pry this chest open—to find ducats and doubloons, and piastres, and sous-marquees—and a map of the Spanish Main and the Dry Tortugas—with crosses in blood. I'll tell you, ye can have my share of it now," he cried, laughing at me.

"Ye're over generous," says I, for jesting of this kind was a thing to which I was accustomed in him.

He dropped the raillery on the moment, however, to take a notebook from his pocket.

"Whom shall we ask?" he inquired in his natural voice.

Now I had one other friend, almost as dear to me as Sandy, named Hugh Pitcairn. But while there could be no doubt of the affection each had for me, there could be equally no doubt of the dislike they bore each other, this feeling having grown from the first day they met in the hockey grounds of the High School, where almost at sight of each other they fell to fighting, until finally pulled apart by some of the older lads.

"In this connection," said I, getting back at him a bit, for his jeering at my plans, "what do you think of Hugh Pitcairn?"

"In this connection," he returned dryly, "I do not think of Hugh Pitcairn at all."

"It's strange," I went on, in the same remote tone, as though it were a subject mentioned for the first time, "that ye should dislike him so."

"It can not match the strangeness of any one's enduring his society," he replied with heat.

"Well, well," said I, putting Pitcairn out of the talk. "What do you say to Geordie MacAllister?"

"The very man," he cried, writing the name in the book.

"And Graham Annesley," I went on.

"Good again."

"And Donald McDonald."

"He won't do at all!" Sandy broke out in a determined way. "He's gone the way of all trouble, which is the way of women. He's crazed about the Lady Mary Llewellyn and we'll have no one along who is sighing for a woman, be she his own or another man's wife. That's what I like in you, Jock Stair," he said, gazing at me with approval. "Ye've your faults— —"

"No?" I said, with pretended amazement.

"Ye'd gamble on the flight of angels— —"

"Ye're speaking of some one else, maybe," I suggested.

"And ye drink more than ye should,—but you're my own man where the women are concerned; for never since I knew ye,—and that's ever since ye were born,—have I seen ye look with wanting at maid, wife, or widow, and ye're wise in that," he added in a tone whose bitterness came from the unhappiness of his own wedded life.

To put the talk into a brighter channel, I hastened to suggest a fourth and fifth companion for the cruise, upon which we fell to passing judgment on the companionable men of our acquaintance, weighing their congeniality to us and to each other until one o'clock was past before we set about the business of delivering our invitations.

Offering to accompany Sandy on these errands, I thought I heard a groan, and on leaving the dining-room I made sure of another, and on the instant knew that they came from Huey MacGrath.

This expedition falling so quickly on the heels of his warning was an odd occurrence and for some reason, perhaps in remembrance of my recent assertion that I had no heart to leave Stair, there fell a funny performance between us. He handed me my cap and coat,

determined to catch my eye, and I, having no desire to see the reproach which his glance contained, was equally set to avoid it; so that I received my cap with my eyes on my boots, my gloves with an averted head, and my riding-stick looking out of the doorway, and mounted my horse with no small resentment in my breast at this surveillance from a servant which would never be borne in any spot outside of Scotland.

"I'm thinking," said I to Sandy as we rode toward the town gate, "I'm thinking of discharging Huey when I come back."

"That will make the fifty-third time," said Sandy, with a grin, as he started his horse off at a gallop.

After the visits with Sandy, I kept an engagement with Hugh Pitcairn at the Star and Garter, just around the corner from the Tron Church, at four o'clock of the same day. It was a few minutes past the hour as I neared the place, to find him standing by the doorway, his back to the passers by, a French cap pulled low over his eyes, reading from a ponderous book which he was balancing with some difficulty against the door-rail.

"I hope I've not kept ye waiting!" said I.

"Ye have kept me waiting," he answered, but with no resentment.

"I've been seeing some men about a cruise, and it took more time than I thought," I explained by way of apology.

"You're off on a cruise?" he asked, as we seated ourselves at one of the tables.

I nodded.

"With the Carmichael fellow, I suppose?" he asked.

"I am going with Mr. Carmichael," said I.

"Well, it's just *nothing* for you to be doing at all," he returned; "you should stay at home and look after your affairs. The Carlyles have broken the entail, and you may be able to buy the land on the other side of Burnwater that you've been wanting so long."

"And why can't you attend to the matter?" I cried. "Ye handle all my business, and do it far better than I ever could, beside, I can leave procuration — —"

He smiled at this in an exasperatingly superior way as though I had used the word loosely, and went on: "The estate itself is to be looked to," and here he seemed to have learned his lesson out of Huey MacGrath's book.

"As for the house," I broke in, "it's taken better care of in my absence than when I am in it; and it's money in my pocket to leave matters with MacGrath to manage. I can not see," I said with some heat, perhaps helped by the brandy I was drinking, "why in heaven's name I shouldn't go on a cruise if I desire to! If I'd ties of any kind, a wife or children — —"

This was Pitcairn's chance, and he broke my talk to take it.

"Your friend Carmichael has both, and to them his first duty lies." And any one with his wits about him can imagine the rest of the talk, for he fell into an attitude of strong disapproval of the whole plan; stating in a cold legal way that Sandy had already let me in for more than one trouble; had caused me to spend large sums of money, foolishly doing the like himself; that we were both incapable of good husbandry; given to drinking more than was wise, and over fond of the society of persons whom we were pleased to call men of talent, but who were, by his judgment, doggerel-making people, of loose morals, with no respect for fact, the conduct which became the general, or the laws of Christ.

He went over for the twentieth time Sandy's arrest for pulling off most of the door-knockers in Edinburgh; this event having occurred when the lad was but sixteen and home for the vacation; as well as the scandal of his having bid the Lord President in a high and excited voice to stick his head out of the window, and upon that venerable gentleman complying, shouting: "Now stick it in again!"

At the end of this discourse he invited me to remain at home with him and spend the evenings over a new treatise on the Laws of Evidence which he had just brought from the University, at which I laughed in his face and told him that I had neither the wit nor the inclination for such an enterprise. His last words were to the effect that there would be trouble bred of the expedition, and he closed his harangue in the following manner, as we stood on the South Bridge, where our ways parted:

"The Carmichael man has no judgment either for your affairs or his own. His heart may be all right, but he's got no common sense, and a man like that is little better than a fool."

CHAPTER II

I GO ON A CRUISE AND FIND A HIDDEN TREASURE

In spite of Hugh Pitcairn we were off the following Monday, going out of Leith, with a clear sky, a stiff breeze, and six men of our own feather, caring little where our destination lay, if the cards turned well, the drink held plenty, and the ocean rolled beneath us. North we went; north till the sea itself seemed quieter and lonelier; north where the twilight held far into the night, to be back by two of the morning; north by John o' Groats and the Pentland Skerries; till one June day found us turned far down the wild west coast; a colorless cruise behind us, with never a storm, a pirate ship, nor a sight of the jolly roger.

At the end of the day of which I speak we were lying in toward shore, and I was aft with a pipe for company, when Sandy came from behind the pile of sail-cloth against which I sat to say that the brig would have to lay by for repairs and to inquire what I thought of going ashore for an adventure.

"Where are we?" I asked.

"Somewhere above Landgore. 'Tis the very place for treasure," he added, with a laugh.

"There's nothing would suit me better than a night ashore," said I with truth, for I had had enough of the drink, the slack language, and the rough sea life, and looked forward to the land with a pleasant hurry of thoughts.

The moon shone bright in a sky of plain dark blue, making a path of swaying gold toward the beach, where we could see the water curl upon the sands like suds. A little back was a steep rise of granite rocks, with gorse and heather growing on the sides, at the bottom of which some gipsies, or free-traders, had built a great fire, and we heard them singing a drunken catch in chorus, and saw them whirling round and round the fire in a circle, as we stepped ashore from the boat.

An ugly silence fell as we approached them, and their women drew off, thinking that we were government men, no doubt; but finding that we had no weightier business than to get some infor-

mation as to our whereabouts, one of them gave us word that the path up the cliff led to the Cuckoo Tavern, kept by Mother Dickenson, where we could obtain what refreshment we needed as well as lodgment for the night. We had gone some fifty feet when one of the men cried after us:

"An' if luck's wi' ye, ye may have a glyff of the handsomest lass in Scotland," at which a woman cuffed him with a ringing sound. There followed a muttered curse and a roar of laughter, which was the last we had of them.

The path up the cliff twisted and roved in such a manner to avoid the many boulders that the inn-light proved little better than a will-o'-the-wisp to guide us, and it was in a breathless condition that we reached the quaint low house, which was both neat and comfortable, seeming peculiarly so perhaps after our long voyage.

A queer old woman, with a humorous wry face, yellow and deeply lined, sharp black eyes, and a ready manner, stood behind a small bar and took note of us upon our entrance, with the air of one well able to judge our rank and bearing.

The rest went off with her to inspect the chambers which she was able to offer, laughing and chaffing each other as was their way, leaving me alone in the main room with my back to the fire. As I stood thus I heard a sudden noise, saw the curtain of a door at the side raised, and a girl in a black robe with a lighted candle in her hand looked in at me.

For twenty-seven years I had waited for a sight of that girl!

She was tall and slight, and carried herself with the careless grace of a child; her hair was of a bronze color, parted over the brows and rippling back into a great knot low on the head; her skin was cream, with a faint, steady pink burning in the cheeks, but as is the way of men, it was the eyes and lips I noted most; eyes of gray, filled with poetry and passion; eyes which looked out under brows black and heavy and between lashes, curled and long, giving a peculiar significance to the glance. The lips were scarlet, the upper one being noticeably short and full; lips mutable and inviting, lips that were made for mine—and all this I knew in the first minute that our eyes met, when, as it seemed to me, our two souls rushed together.

At gaze with each other we stood, no word spoken between us, for a full minute of time, when the noise of the men coming back disturbed her; she dropped the curtain and the light of her candle disappeared, a little at a time, as though she were walking from me down some long passage-way.

I do not know how love comes to other natures than my own, and men of notable integrity have told me how leisurely they strolled into the condition of loving; but for me, by one questioning glance from a pair of eyes, half gray, half blue, I was sunk fathoms deep in love, in love that knows nothing, cares for nothing but the one beloved. Soul and body I was signed, sealed, and delivered, "hers," in that first sight I had of her in the doorway with the candle in her hand and the crimson curtain framing her as if she were a picture.

We had supper, of which I ate nothing; liquor, of which I drank nothing; and merry talk, in which I took no part, Sandy jeering at me for a dull ass, I remember, and pretending regret at not having asked the Reverend Slowboy in my place; but his talk was of no moment to me, for my pulse was going like a trip-hammer, my brain reeled with that headiest wine of Nature's brewing, and I wanted to get out under the stars and be alone.

Having some skill at singing, Geordie MacAllister urged that I recall the catch we had heard on the beach; but finding me adamant against such an exhibition, Dame Dickenson offered a suggestion for our entertainment.

"There's a ward of mine here, a young lady, who has the music, and, seeing ye're all gentlemen, might be urged to a song."

Five minutes from the time that she was seated with us, I had heard her voice, our eyes had held each other again, and I saw a carnation flush bloom suddenly in her cheek as our hands touched. She brought with her a curious old instrument, like a lute with many strings, and upon this she struck chords to the song she sang, "The Wronged Love of Great Laird Gregory," the melody of which seems ever to be with me; and yesterday, when I heard Nancy crooning it to herself, I cried aloud as a woman might, for the unfulfilled in all our lives, and my dead youth, and Marian Ingarrach.

And at her singing, the four of us—or five it may be, for I can not now rightly recall whether Sawney MacAllister came ashore that night or not—sat before her beauty as though it were a part of witchery, for there was a bookish strangeness to it that on this wild coast, in a nest of smugglers and free-traders, after a cruise of rough living and deep drinking, we should be listening to the voice of a girl whose beauty was upsetting to the senses of man and whose bearing denoted breeding of the highest order.

She left us after a second singing, bidding us good-night in a laughing, friendly fashion, and looking at every one, save me, full in the eyes, as a child might have done; but when her hand touched mine, her eyes fell before me, and I, who knew something of woman's ways, felt with a leaping heart that she knew.

The rest were gone from the room when Sandy Carmichael, who had made the pretense of another pipe, came back to me as I stood looking into the fire.

"You saw her first!" he said.

"Aye," I answered, "and it's all over with me!"

"Is it to the church door?" he asked.

"It's to the foot of the Throne itself," I answered. "It's wherever she leads," for I was young and phrase-making was in the blood.

"Well," he says, "ye're Lord Stair, and if ye choose to marry a gips—"

"Choose!" I cried. "I have no choice. The men who stand balancing as to whether they will or they won't, with 'Would it be wise?' or 'Acceptable to the world?' I have no knowledge of, and want none, as I have told you often."

"Well," said he, "I've always called you crazy, Jock Stair," and here he put his hand lovingly on my shoulder, "but I never discovered until to-night how crazy you are. I'm not denying there's something fine about it; but is it sensible? Think o' Pitcairn," he said, with a laughing devil in his eye.

"Pitcairn may go to perdition," I answered with some heat.