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# **What's Mine's Mine –Volume 2**

George MacDonald

# Imprint

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# WHAT'S MINE'S MINE.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE STORY TOLD BY IAN.

"There was once a woman whose husband was well to do, but he died and left her, and then she sank into poverty. She did her best; but she had a large family, and work was hard to find, and hard to do when it was found, and hardly paid when it was done. Only hearts of grace can understand the struggles of the poor—with everything but God against them! But she trusted in God, and said whatever he pleased must be right, whether he sent it with his own hand or not.

"Now, whether it was that she could not find them enough to eat, or that she could not keep them warm enough, I do not know; I do not think it was that they had not gladness enough, which is as necessary for young things as food and air and sun, for it is wonderful on how little a child can be happy; but whatever was the cause, they began to die. One after the other sickened and lay down, and did not rise again; and for a time her life was just a waiting upon death. She would have wanted to die herself, but that there was always another to die first; she had to see them all safe home before she dared wish to go herself. But at length the last of them was gone, and then when she had no more to provide for, the heart of work went out of her: where was the good of working for herself! there was no interest in it! But she knew it was the will of God she should work and eat until he chose to take her back to himself; so she worked on for her living while she would much rather have

worked for her dying; and comforted herself that every day brought death a day nearer. Then she fell ill herself, and could work no more, and thought God was going to let her die; for, able to win her bread no longer, surely she was free to lie down and wait for death! But just as she was going to her bed for the last time, she bethought herself that she was bound to give her neighbour the chance of doing a good deed: and felt that any creature dying at her door without letting her know he was in want, would do her a great wrong. She saw it was the will of God that she should beg, so put on her clothes again, and went out to beg. It was sore work, and she said so to the priest. But the priest told her she need not mind, for our Lord himself lived by the kindness of the women who went about with him. They knew he could not make a living for his own body and a living for the souls of so many as well, and the least they could do was to keep him alive who was making them alive. She said that was very true; but he was all the time doing everything for everybody, and she was doing nothing for anybody. The priest was a wise man, and did not tell her how she had, since ever he knew her, been doing the work of God in his heart, helping him to believe and trust in God; so that in fact, when he was preaching, she was preaching. He did not tell her that, I say, for he was jealous over her beauty, and would have Christ's beloved sheep enter his holy kingdom with her wool white, however torn it might be. So he left her to think she was nobody at all; and told her that, whether she was worth keeping alive or not, whether she was worth begging for or not, whether it was a disgrace or an honour to beg, all was one, for it was the will of God that she should beg, and there was no word more to be said, and no thought more to be thought about it. To this she heartily agreed, and did beg—enough to keep her alive, and no more.

"But at last she saw she must leave that part of the country, and go back to the place her husband took her from. For the people about her were very poor, and she thought it hard on them to have to help a stranger like her; also her own people would want her to bury. For you must know that in the clans, marriage was thought to be dissolved by death, so far at least as the body was concerned; therefore the body of a dead wife was generally carried back to the burial place of her own people, there to be gathered to her fathers.

So the woman set out for her own country, begging her way thither. Nor had she any difficulty, for there were not a few poor people on her way, and the poor are the readiest to help the poor, also to know whether a person is one that ought to be helped or not.

"One night she came to a farm house where a rich miserly farmer dwelt. She knew about him, and had not meant to stop there, but she was weary, and the sun went down as she reached his gate, and she felt as if she could go no farther. So she went up to the door and knocked, and asked if she could have a nights lodging. The woman who opened to her went and asked the farmer. Now the old man did not like hospitality, and in particular to such as stood most in need of it; he did not enjoy throwing away money! At the same time, however, he was very fond of hearing all the country rumours; and he thought with himself he would buy her news with a scrap of what was going, and a shake-down at the foot of the wall. So he told his servant to bring her in.

"He received her not unkindly, for he wanted her to talk; and he let her have a share of the supper, such as it was. But not until he had asked every question about everybody he could think of, and drawn her own history from her as well, would he allow her to have the rest she so much needed.

"Now it was a poor house, like most in the country, and nearly without partitions. The old man had his warm box-bed, and slept on feathers where no draught could reach him, and the poor woman had her bed of short rumped straw on the earthen floor at the foot of the wall in the coldest corner. Yet the heart of the man had been moved by her story, for, without dwelling on her sufferings, she had been honest in telling it. He had indeed, ere he went to sleep, thanked God that he was so much better off than she. For if he did not think it the duty of the rich man to share with his neighbours, he at least thought it his duty to thank God for his being richer than they.

"Now it may well seem strange that such a man should be privileged to see a vision; but we do read in the Bible of a prophet who did not even know his duty to an ass, so that the ass had to teach it him. And the man alone saw the vision; the woman saw nothing of it. But she did not require to see any vision, for she had truth in the

inward parts, which is better than all visions. The vision was on this wise:—In the middle of the night the man came wide awake, and looking out of his bed, saw the door open, and a light come in, burning like a star, of a faint rosy colour, unlike any light he had ever before seen. Another and another came in, and more yet, until he counted six of them. They moved near the floor, but he could not see clearly what sort of little creatures they were that were carrying them. They went up to the woman's bed, and walked slowly round it in a hovering kind of a way, stopping, and moving up and down, and going on again; and when they had done this three times, they went slowly out of the door again, stopping for a moment several times as they went.

"He fell asleep, and waking not very early, was surprised to see his guest still on her hard couch—as quiet as any rich woman, he said to himself, on her feather bed. He woke her, told her he wondered she should sleep so far into the morning, and narrated the curious vision he had had. 'Does not that explain to you,' she said, 'how it is that I have slept so long? Those were my dead children you saw come to me. They died young, without any sin, and God lets them come and comfort their poor sinful mother. I often see them in my dreams. If, when I am gone, you will look at my bed, you will find every straw laid straight and smooth. That is what they were doing last night.' Then she gave him thanks for good fare and good rest, and took her way to her own, leaving the farmer better pleased with himself than he had been for a long time, partly because there had been granted him a vision from heaven.

"At last the woman died, and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. She was now with her own people indeed, that is, with God and all the good. The old farmer did not know of her death till a long time after; but it was upon the night she died, as near as he could then make out, that he dreamed a wonderful dream. He never told it to any but the priest from whom he sought comfort when he lay dying; and the priest did not tell it till after everybody belonging to the old man was gone. This was the dream:—

"He was lying awake in his own bed, as he thought, in the dark night, when the poor woman came in at the door, having in her

hand a wax candle, but not alight. He said to her, 'You extravagant woman! where did you get that candle?' She answered, 'It was put into my hand when I died, with the word that I was to wander till I found a fire at which to light it.' 'There!' said he, 'there's the rested fire! Blow and get a light, poor thing! It shall never be said I refused a body a light!' She went to the hearth, and began to blow at the smouldering peat; but, for all she kept trying, she could not light her candle. The old man thought it was because she was dead, not because he was dead in sin, and losing his patience, cried, 'You foolish woman! haven't you wit enough left to light a candle? It's small wonder you came to beggary!' Still she went on trying, but the more she tried, the blacker grew the peat she was blowing at. It would indeed blaze up at her breath, but the moment she brought the candle near it to catch the flame, it grew black, and each time blacker than before. 'Tut! give me the candle,' cried the farmer, springing out of bed; 'I will light it for you!' But as he stretched out his hand to take it, the woman disappeared, and he saw that the fire was dead out. 'Here's a fine business!' he said. 'How am I to get a light?' For he was miles from the next house. And with that he turned to go back to his bed. When he came near it, he saw somebody lying in it. 'What! has the carline got into my very bed?' he cried, and went to drive her out of the bed and out of the house. But when he came close, he saw it was himself lying there, and knew that at least he was out of the body, if not downright dead. The next moment he found himself on the moor, following the woman, some distance before him, with her unlighted candle still in her hand. He walked as fast as he could to get up with her, hut could not; he called after her, but she did not seem to hear.

"When first he set out, he knew every step of the ground, but by and by he ceased to know it. The moor stretched out endlessly, and the woman walked on and on. Without a thought of turning back, he followed. At length he saw a gate, seemingly in the side of a hill. The woman knocked, and by the time it opened, he was near enough to hear what passed. It was a grave and stately, but very happy-looking man that opened it, and he knew at once it was St. Peter. When he saw the woman, he stooped and kissed her. The same moment a light shone from her, and the old man thought her candle was lighted at last; but presently he saw it was her head that

gave out the shining. And he heard her say, 'I pray you, St. Peter, remember the rich tenant of Balmacoy; he gave me shelter one whole night, and would have let me light my candle but I could not.' St. Peter answered, 'His fire was not fire enough to light your candle, and the bed he gave you was of short straw!' 'True, St. Peter,' said the woman, 'but he gave me some supper, and it is hard for a rich man to be generous! You may say the supper was not very good, but at least it was more than a cup of cold water!' 'Yes, verily!' answered the saint, 'but he did not give it you because you loved God, or because you were in need of it, but because he wanted to hear your news.' Then the woman was sad, for she could not think of anything more to say for the poor old rich man. And St. Peter saw that she was sad, and said, 'But if he die to-night, he shall have a place inside the gate, because you pray for him. He shall lie there!' And he pointed to just such a bed of short crumpled straw as she had lain upon in his house. But she said, 'St. Peter, you ought to be ashamed of yourself! Is that the kind of welcome to give a poor new-dead man? Where then would he have lain if I had not prayed for him?' 'In the dog-kennel outside there,' answered St. Peter. 'Oh, then, please, let me go back and warn him what comes of loving money!' she pleaded. 'That is not necessary,' he replied; 'the man is hearing every word you and I are this moment saying to each other.' 'I am so glad!' rejoined the woman; 'it will make him repent.' 'He will not be a straw the better for it!' answered the saint. 'He thinks now that he will do differently, and perhaps when he wakes will think so still; but in a day or two he will mock at it as a foolish dream. To gather money will seem to him common sense, and to lay up treasure in heaven nonsense. A bird in the hand will be to him worth ten in the heavenly bush. And the end will be that he will not get the straw inside the gate, and there will be many worse places than the dog-kennel too good for him!' With that he woke.

'''What an odd dream!' he said to himself. 'I had better mind what I am about!' So he was better that day, eating and drinking more freely, and giving more to his people. But the rest of the week he was worse than ever, trying to save what he had that day spent, and so he went on growing worse. When he found himself dying, the terror of his dream came upon him, and he told all to the priest. But the priest could not comfort him."

By the time the story was over, to which Mercy had listened without a word, they were alone in the great starry night, on the side of a hill, with the snow high above them, and the heavens above the snow, and the stars above the heavens, and God above and below everything. Only Ian felt his presence. Mercy had not missed him yet.

She did not see much in the tale: how could she? It was very odd, she thought, but not very interesting. She had expected a tale of clan-feud, or a love-story! Yet the seriousness of her companion in its narration had made some impression upon her.

"They told me you were an officer," she said, "but I see you are a clergyman! Do you tell stories like that from the pulpit?"

"I am a soldier," answered Ian, "not a clergyman. But I have heard my father tell such a story from the pulpit."

Ian imagined himself foiled in his attempt to interest the maiden. If he was, it would not be surprising. He had not the least desire to commend HIMSELF to the girl; and he would not talk rubbish even to a child. There is sensible and senseless nonsense, good absurdity and bad.

As Mercy recounted to her sister the story Ian had told her, it certainly was silly enough. She had retained but the withered stalk and leaves; the strange flower was gone. Christina judged it hardly a story for a gentleman to tell a lady.

They returned almost in silence to find the table laid, a plentiful supper spread, and the company seated. After supper came singing of songs, saying of ballads, and telling of tales. I know with what incredulity many highlanders will read of a merry-making in their own country at which no horn went round, no punch-bowl was filled and emptied without stint! But the clearer the brain, the better justice is done to the more ethereal wine of the soul. Of several of the old songs Christina begged the tunes, but was disappointed to find that, as she could not take them down, so the singers of them could not set them down. In the tales she found no interest. The hostess sang to her harp, and made to revering listeners eloquent music, for her high clear tones had not yet lost their sweetness, and she had some art to come in aid of her much feeling: loud murmurs

of delight, in the soft strange tongue of the songs themselves, followed the profound silence with which they were heard, but Christina wondered what there was to applaud. She could not herself sing without accompaniment, and when she left, it was with a regretful feeling that she had not distinguished herself. Naturally, as they went home, the guests from the New House had much fun over the queer fashions and poverty-stricken company, the harp and the bagpipes, the horrible haggis, the wild minor songs, and the unintelligible stories and jokes; but the ladies agreed that the Macruadh was a splendid fellow.

## CHAPTER II

### ROB OF THE ANGELS.

Among the peasantry assembled at the feast, were two that had neither danced, nor seated themselves at the long table where all were welcome. Mercy wondered what might be the reason of their separation. Her first thought was that they must be somehow, she could not well imagine how, in lower position than any of the rest — had perhaps offended against the law, perhaps been in prison, and so the rest would not keep company with them; or perhaps they were beggars who did not belong to the clan, and therefore, although fed, were not allowed to eat with it! But she soon saw she must be wrong in each conjecture; for if there was any avoiding, it was on the part of the two: every one, it was clear, was almost on the alert to wait upon them. They seemed indeed rather persons of distinction than outcasts; for it was with something like homage, except for a certain coaxing tone in the speech of the ministrants, that they were attended. They had to help themselves to nothing; everything was carried to them. Now one, now another, where all were guests and all were servants, would rise from the table to offer them something, or see what they would choose or might be in want of, while they partook with the same dignity and self-restraint that was to be noted in all.

The elder was a man about five-and-fifty, tall and lean, with a wiry frame, dark grizzled hair, and a shaven face. His dress, which was in the style of the country, was very poor, but decent; only his plaid was large and thick, and bright compared with the rest of his apparel: it was a present he had had from his clan-some giving the

wool, and others the labour in carding, dyeing, and weaving it. He carried himself like a soldier—which he had never been, though his father had. His eyes were remarkably clear and keen, and the way he used them could hardly fail to attract attention. Every now and then they would suddenly fix themselves with a gaze of earnest inquiry, which would either grow to perception, or presently melt away and let his glance go gently roving, ready to receive, but looking for nothing. His face was very brown and healthy, with marked and handsome features. Its expression seemed at first a little severe, but soon, to reading eyes, disclosed patience and tenderness. At the same time there was in it a something indescribably unlike the other faces present—and indeed his whole person and carriage were similarly peculiar. Had Mercy, however, spent on him a little more attention, the peculiarity would have explained itself. She would have seen that, although everybody spoke to him, he never spoke in reply—only made signs, sometimes with his lips, oftener with hand or head: the man was deaf and dumb. But such was the keenness of his observation that he understood everything said to him by one he knew, and much from the lips of a stranger.

His companion was a youth whose age it would have been difficult to guess. He looked a lad, and was not far from thirty. His clothing was much like his father's—poor enough, yet with the air of being a better suit than that worn every day. He was very pale and curiously freckled, with great gray eyes like his father's, which had however an altogether different expression. They looked dreamy, and seemed almost careless of what passed before them, though now and then a certain quick, sharp turn of the head showed him not devoid of attention.

The relation between the two was strangely interesting. Day and night they were inseparable. Because the father was deaf, the son gave all his attention to the sounds of the world; his soul sat in his ears, ever awake, ever listening; while such was his confidence in his father's sight, that he scarcely troubled himself to look where he set his feet. His expression also was peculiar, partly from this cause, mainly from a deeper. It was a far-away look, which a common glance would have taken to indicate that he was "not all there." In a lowland parish he would have been regarded as little better than a gifted idiot; in the mountains he was looked upon as a seer, one in

communion with higher powers. Whether his people were of this opinion from being all fools together, and therefore unable to know a fool, or the lowland authorities would have been right in taking charge of him, let him who pleases judge or misjudge for himself. What his own thought of him came out in the name they gave him: "Rob of the Angels," they called him. He was nearly a foot shorter than his father, and very thin. Some said he looked always cold; but I think that came of the wonderful peace on his face, like the quiet of a lake over which lies a thin mist. Never was stronger or fuller devotion manifested by son to father than by Rob of the Angels to Hector of the Stags. His filial love and faith were perfect. While they were together, he was in his own calm elysium; when they were apart, which was seldom for more than a few minutes, his spirit seemed always waiting. I believe his notions of God his father, and Hector his father, were strangely mingled—the more perhaps that the two fathers were equally silent. It would have been a valuable revelation to some theologians to see in those two what love might mean.

So gentle was Rob of the Angels, that all the women, down to the youngest maid-child, gave him a compassionate, mother-like love. He had lost his mother when he was an infant; the father had brought him up with his own hand, and from the moment of his mother's departure had scarce let him out of his sight; but the whole woman-remnant of the clan was as a mother to the boy. And from the first they had so talked to him of his mother, greatly no doubt through the feeling that from his father he could learn nothing of her, that now his mother seemed to him everywhere: he could not see God; why should not his mother be there though he could not see her! No wonder the man was peaceful!

Many would be inclined to call the two but poachers and vagabonds—vagabonds because they lived in houses not quite made with hands, for they had several dwellings that were mostly caves—which yet they contrived to make warm and comfortable; and poachers because they lived by the creatures which God scatters on his hills for his humans. Let those who inherit or purchase, avenge the breach of law; but let them not wonder when those who are disinherited and sold, cry out against the breach of higher law!

The land here had never, partly from the troubles besetting its owners, but more from their regard for the poor, of the clan, been with any care preserved; little notice was ever taken of what game was killed, or who killed it. At the same time any wish of the chief with regard to the deer, of which Rob's father for one knew every antlered head, was rigidly respected. As to the parts which became the property of others—the boundaries between were not very definite, and sale could ill change habits, especially where owners were but beginning to bestir themselves about the deer, or any of the wild animals called game. Hector and Rob led their life with untroubled conscience and easy mind.

In a world of the devil, where the justification of existence lay in money on the one side, and work for money on the other, there could be no justification of the existence of these men; but this world does not belong to the devil, though it may often seem as if it did, and father and son lived and enjoyed life, as in a manner so to a decree unintelligible to him who, without his money and its consolations, would know himself in the hell he has not yet recognized. Neither of them could read or write; neither of them had a penny laid by for wet weather; neither of them would leave any memory beyond their generation; the will of neither would be laid up in Doctors' Commons; neither of the two would leave on record a single fact concerning one of the animals whose ways and habits they knew better than any other man in the highlands; that they were nothing, and worth nothing to anybody—even to themselves, would have been the judgment of most strangers concerning them; but God knew what a life of unspeakable pleasures it was that he had given them—a life the change from which to the life beyond, would scarce be distracting; neither would find himself much out of doors when he died. To Bob of the Angels tow could Abraham's bosom feel strange, accustomed to lie night after night, star-melted and soft-breathing, or snow-ghastly and howling, with his head on—the bosom of Hector of the Stags—an Abraham who could as ill do without his Isaac, as his Isaac without him!

The father trusted his son's hearing as implicitly as his own sight. When he saw a certain look come on his face, he would drop on the instant, and crouch as still as if he had ears and knew what noise

was, watching Kob's face for news of some sound wandering through the vast of the night.

It seemed at times, however, as if either he was not quite deaf, or he had some gift that went toward compensation. To all motion about him he was sensitive as no other man. I am afraid to say from how far off the solid earth would convey to him the vibration of a stag's footstep. Bob sometimes thought his cheek must feel the wind of a sound to which his ear was irresponsive. Beyond a doubt he was occasionally aware of the proximity of an animal, and knew what animal it was, of which Rob had no intimation. His being, corporeal and spiritual, seemed, to the ceaseless vibrations of the great globe, a very seismograph. Often would he make his sign to Kob to lay his ear on the ground and listen, when no indication had reached the latter. I suspect the exceptional development in him of some sense rudimentary in us all.

He had the keenest eyes in Glenruadh, and was a dead shot. Even the chief was not his equal. Yet he never stalked a deer, never killed anything, for mere sport. I am not certain he never had, but for Rob of the Angels, he had the deep-rooted feeling of his chief in regard to the animals. What they wanted for food, they would kill; but it was not much they needed, for seldom can two men have lived on less, and they had positively not a greed of any kind between them. If their necessity was meal or potatoes, they would carry grouse or hares down the glen, or arrange with some farmer's wife, perhaps Mrs. Macruadh herself, for the haunches of a doe; but they never killed from pleasure in killing. Of creatures destructive to game they killed enough to do far more than make up for all the game they took; and for the skins of ermine and stoat and fox and otter they could always get money's worth; money itself they never sought or had. If the little birds be regarded as earning the fruit and seed they devour by the grubs and slugs they destroy, then Hector of the Stags and Rob of the Angels also thoroughly earned their food.

When a trustworthy messenger was wanted, and Rob was within reach, he was sure to be employed. But not even then were his father and he quite parted. Hector would shoulder his gun, and follow in the track of his fleet-footed son till he met him returning.

For what was life to Hector but to be with Rob! Was his Mary's son to go about the world unattended! He had a yet stronger feeling than any of the clan that his son was not of the common race of mortals. To Hector also, after their own fashion, would Rob of the Angels tell the tales that suggested the name his clanspeople gave him—wonderful tales of the high mountain-nights, the actors in them for the most part angels. Whether Rob believed he had intercourse with such beings, heard them speak, and saw them, do the things he reported, I cannot tell: it may be that, like any other poet of good things, he but saw and believed the things his tales meant, the things with which he represented the angels as dealing, and concerning which he told their sayings. To the eyes of those who knew him, Rob seemed just the sort of person with whom the angels might be well pleased to hold converse: was he not simplicity itself, truth, generosity, helpfulness? Did he not, when a child, all but lose his life in the rescue of an idiot from the swollen burn? Did he not, when a boy, fight a great golden eagle on its nest, thinking to deliver the lamb it had carried away? Knowing his father in want of a new bonnet, did not Rob with his bare hands seize an otter at the mouth of its hole, and carry it home, laughing merrily over the wounds it had given him?

His voice had in it a strangely peculiar tone, making it seem not of this world. Especially after he had been talking for some time, it would appear to come from far away, not from the lips of the man looking you in the face.

It was wonderful with what solemnity of speech, and purity of form he would tell his tales. So much in solitude with his dumb father, his speech might well be unlike the speech of other men; but whence the impression of cultivation it produced?

When the Christmas party broke up, most of the guests took the road toward the village, the chief and his brother accompanying them part of the way. Of these were Rob and his father, walking hand in hand, Hector looking straight before him, Rob gazing up into the heavens, as if holding counsel with the stars.

"Are you seeing any angels, Rob?" asked a gentle girl of ten.

"Well, and I'm not sure," answered Rob of the Angels.