

CHAPTER SIX

Catriona

SHE first appeared in his writing as Katriona. Hidden away in his little cubby hole on the upper verandah at Vailima, Louis could call her what he liked. As the book poured out of him, half a novel in a month, he would play with the girl's name like a lover obsessed with the most wonderful word in the world – metamorphosing his heroine from Katrine (the name of a Scottish loch) and Cateran (a Highland raider) to Catrine and finally Catriona. Yet when Louis emerged each day to join the family for lunch, that was not the name on his lips. And when each day's work was read aloud to Fanny, Lloyd and Belle, the book was always referred to as David Balfour, the name it would bear in Fanny's native America.

But the sequel to *Kidnapped* would always be *Catriona* in Scotland... where perhaps the original lived still. More than 20 years after Louis lost his heart to the girl who did all she could to break it, he took up his pen in Samoa on the morning of February 13th, 1892 and began to write: 'The 25th day of August, 1751, about two in the afternoon, I, David Balfour, came forth of the British Linen Company, a porter attending me with a bag of money...'¹

The 25th day of August, 1870, had been the day on which Louis arrived back in Edinburgh from *Earraid* - not with Alan Breck but with his parents aboard the lighthouse steamer *Pharos*. Nor was Louis, like David, an orphan inheriting a fortune. Much though he might have liked to emerge laden with gold from the British Linen Company, where Tom Stevenson kept substantial sums, he was still attempting to finance his life of pleasure on £1 a month.

But fiction need not follow the facts too closely. In starting David's story in *Kidnapped*, Louis had deliberately bent time by a year, and drew attention to it in his dedication to the friend who shared many of the original adventures: 'My dear Charles Baxter, if you ever read this tale, you will likely ask yourself more questions than I should care to answer: as for instance how the Appin murder has come to fall in the year 1751...'²

The real Appin murder was in 1752. So was another historical event in *Catriona* - the freeing of James More Drummond from Edinburgh Castle by his daughter³. There was no need to interfere with chronology to make the story fit Jacobite history, but it seems something within Louis wanted the book to fit the history of his own life. For him, perhaps, the original love affair took place in 1871 and the final digit seems to have mattered - so in writing the story of *Kidnapped/Catriona*, Louis cast everything back 120 years to 1751.

He changed the girl's name, too. The daughter who rescued her father from Edinburgh Castle was Malie or May Drummond⁴, grand-daughter of Rob Roy Macgregor, a real woman who was only 13 when she rode out with her father in 1745 to meet Bonnie Prince Charlie's army. But Louis may have been thinking of a woman 120 years younger - and the name that flowed out of his pen in Samoa was not Malie but *Katriona*.

Then there was the question of ages. David Balfour is 17 at the start of *Kidnapped* but, within three months, he puts on a whole year, telling the lawyer Rankeillor that he was born 'in Essendean, sir, the year 1733, the 12th of March'.⁵ Yet this was not enough for Louis. As he continued the *Kidnapped* story into *Catriona*, he tinkered with time again, confessing enigmatically: 'Instead of three hours between the two parts, I fear there has passed three years on Davie's character, but do not tell anybody: see if they can find it for themselves.'⁶

Adding three years to the 17-year-old at the start of *Kidnapped* would make David 20 when he fell in love - the same age as Louis at the start of 1871 and just a year older than the historical Miss Drummond when she rescued her father. As the sun beat down on the tin roof of Vailima and Louis dipped pen in ink, the ghost of a smile may have played around his lips as they breathed her name. Would any reader ever solve the conundrum? Maybe all these seemingly senseless liberties with the great destroyer Time were simply to bring him face-to-face with her once more.

It chanced the girl turned suddenly about, so that I saw her face for the first time. There is no greater wonder than the way the face of a young woman fits in a man's mind, and stays there, and he could never tell you why; it just seems it was the thing he wanted. She had wonderful bright eyes like stars, and I daresay the eyes had a part in it; but what I remember

the most clearly was the way her lips were a trifle open as she turned...⁷

Louis would lie 30 years in his grave on Mount Vaea before Kate Drummond stepped out from the world of fiction to have her name taken seriously in a biography. It was 1924 when John Alexander Steuart completed his two-volume *Robert Louis Stevenson, Man And Writer*, signing off with the words: 'It may be added that from the first line to the last this book was written in Stevenson's native town amid the scenes which are for ever intimately associated with his memory.'⁸

In Edinburgh, Steuart spoke with people who had known Louis in his youth, and heard of an early love affair: 'She was a Highland girl and her name was Highland, Kate Drummond... She has been described to me by one who saw her as slim and dark, very trim and neat, with jet-black hair and a complexion that needed no cosmetics to make it rosy and alluring. Stevenson was scarcely twenty at the time of their meeting.'⁹

The name, description and their provenance are clearly stated, yet subsequent biographers would discard Kate Drummond as a myth. Admittedly Steuart confused the girl with a non-existent 'Claire', a romantic pseudonym for another woman¹⁰, but this does not mean Kate never existed. And if she was a myth, where did Steuart get her name? He might have plucked it fancifully from the book - *Catriona* spawning Kate Drummond, rather than vice versa. But if there had been no real Kate in Louis's mind, why would he depart from the name Malie? He did not normally change the names of real historical figures for fictional purposes. When Louis called her Kate, disguised in its Gaelic form *Catriona*, he did so for a reason.

There is no reason to doubt that Steuart was given the Kate Drummond story by someone he had grounds to believe had seen her. Certainly there are few other witnesses to what Louis was doing at this time. Between the end of November 1870 and the summer of 1871, there are no known personal letters surviving in his hand. Years later, his friend Sidney Colvin would say this was a period when Louis sought solace 'in the crude allurements of the city streets'¹¹. According to Steuart's informant, this was also when Louis fell in love.

Kate, says Steuart, was a girl from the Highlands: 'The acquaintance began dubiously enough in the purlieu of Calton Hill and Leith Street, a notorious quarter

in those days.' Somehow she 'had tripped, and was paying the penalty which falls so heavily on a woman'.¹² Around this time, by day and night, Louis was frequently in Leith Street. He bought Honey Dew mixture from Henry Wilson the tobacconist at No 9. Louis would recall how 'the tobacconists' shops in Edinburgh used to be curious institutions. Young men who couldn't afford a club used to use them for the same sort of purposes. You used to have letters sent there, or meet friends whom you didn't want to bring to your father's house.'¹³

Wilson's sat cheek-by-jowl with an old public house run by Rutherford's, the same firm that had the Pump. Within the same Leith Street tenement block, and across the street on the terrace, were several brothels where the girls slept late after their night's labours, then rose for a late breakfast in the communal kitchen, bleary-eyed and tousle-haired, lounging in their shifts while making repairs to tawdry silks, or washing out their white stockings and drying them by the fire. Thus Leith Street's purveyors of nicotine, alcohol and sex combined to provide Louis with impromptu headquarters where he could read, and write, and see life.

*Looking back upon it, I am surprised at the courage with which I first ventured alone into the societies in which I moved; I was the companion of seamen, chimney-sweeps, and thieves; my circle was being continually changed by the action of the police magistrate. I see now the little sanded kitchen, where Velvet Coat (for such was the name I went by) has spent days together, generally in silence and making sonnets in a penny version-book... I was distinctly petted and respected; the women were most gentle and kind to me... Such indeed was my celebrity, that when the proprietor and his mistress came to inspect the establishment, I was invited to tea with them; and it is a grisly thought to me, that I have since seen that mistress, then gorgeous in velvet and gold chains, an old, toothless, ragged woman...*¹⁴

In such a place, Kate Drummond appears in Steuart's narrative and meets Louis: 'I have been told that she was many times scolded by "the head of her establishment" for wasting so much time in his company, and at last actually beaten. The house in which the chastisement is said to have been given was pointed out to me by one who is well acquainted with Stevenson's early history.'¹⁵

If Kate Drummond was real, who was she - one of the city's shameless 'gay ladies', or simply a poor, honest, working-class girl caught up in Edinburgh's vice

trade, besmirched by the same innuendo that the bank-porter in *Catriona* casts over her namesake, to the chagrin of David Balfour:

'I thought ye had been a lad of some kind o' sense,' he began, shooting out his lips. 'Ye're no likely to gang far this gate. A fule and his siller's shune parted. Eh, but ye're a green callant!' he cried, "an' a veecious, tae! Cleikin' up wi' baubeejoes!'

'If you dare to speak of the young lady...' I began.

'Leddy!' he cried. 'Haud us and safe us, whatten leddy? Ca' THON a leddy? The toun's fu' o' them. Leddies! Man, its weel seen ye're no very acquaint in Embro!'

A clap of anger took me.

'Here,' said I, 'lead me where I told you, and keep your foul mouth shut!'

He did not wholly obey me, for, though he no more addressed me directly, he very impudent sang at me as he went in a manner of innuendo, and with an exceedingly ill voice and ear -

'As Mally Lee cam down the street, her capuchin did flee,

She cuist a look ahint her to see her negligee.

And we're a' gaun east and wast, we're a' gann ajee,

*We're a' gaun east and wast courtin' Mally Lee.'*¹⁶

Miss Lee had been a gay lady, but Miss Drummond may have been perfectly respectable. The Leith Street 'purlieu' contained many honest families and businesses. In nearby Calton Street, a Peter Drummond from Strathmiglo in Fife kept Drummond's Temperance Hotel, while among the main employers was another Peter Drummond, a master clothier and hosier with two separate shops in Leith Street, although he lived off the premises at a more respectable address on George IV Bridge.¹⁷

This Peter Drummond had come a long way from his origins on a farm at Muthill, near the Perthshire town of Crieff. In Edinburgh he prospered and settled. Yet his brother William, who also took up tailoring, clung to his roots in Clan Drummond country, although commercial necessity drove him to spend much of his life in Edinburgh and Glasgow. It was in Glasgow, on the last day of January, 1852, that his daughter Catherine was born, yet he registered the birth in Crieff,¹⁸ where little Katie Drummond would spend much of her childhood, 25 miles east of the Braes of

Balquidder that were the fictional Catriona Drummond's home.

'Balwhither?' she cries. 'Come ye from Balwhither! The name of it makes all there is of me rejoice. You will not have been long there, and not known some of our friends or family?'

'I lived with a very honest, kind man called Duncan Dhu Maclaren,' I replied.

'Well, I know Duncan, and you give him the true name!' she said.¹⁹

In 1871, Duncan McLaren, a Perthshire man who married a McGregor, kept an Edinburgh eating house and lived in Calton Street, alongside Drummond's Temperance Hotel.²⁰

William Drummond, Kate's father, was often in Edinburgh. His wife Isabella Bathgate hailed from Prestonpans, scene of the battle in which James More Drummond fought bravely in Bonnie Prince Charlie's army. At the start of the 1860s, William Drummond appears to have moved his family to live in Portobello, on the Firth of Forth between Prestonpans and Edinburgh.²¹ There Kate had several Bathgate relatives. But in 1870, the footloose Drummonds were on the move again, this time to Greenock on the Clyde.²² Did Kate, now a young woman of 18, go with them?

She may not have taken kindly to being uprooted. If she decided to stay in the Scottish capital, or to return there alone from Greenock, she had her uncle in Leith Street and her mother's people in Portobello to keep an eye on her, but Edinburgh was a teeming city in which the vice trade sucked in penniless young girls. If this was the Kate whom Stuart describes in Leith Street at the start of 1871, she would then be turning 19 while Louis was 20 - the ages he tinkered with time to create for Catriona and Davie.

Stuart gives sparse detail of the affair in his biography, but three years later he embroidered the story into a novel. On the dust-wrapper of *The Cap of Youth, Being the Love Romance of Robert Louis Stevenson*, was a curious note to the reader: 'As his host of admirers are now aware, Robert Louis Stevenson had a passionate love affair in his early manhood in Scotland... Stevenson wrote the story of this great and moving romance, but it was not then, and cannot now be published. Mr John A. Stuart... found material not quite appropriate for a biography, but too vitally interesting and significant to be passed by...'²³

Subsequent biographers would dismiss *The Cap of Youth* as a 'foolish novel', or ignore it. Yet it may contain elements of truth. In the biography, Steuart had hinted at there being more to the story: 'I may say that several people still alive knew a great deal about the youthful Stevenson's escapades, his unhappiness in Edinburgh and its causes, but for most part either remained silent or merely hinted their knowledge... Now they feel at liberty to speak more freely...'²⁴

According to Steuart, the first encounter between Louis and Kate was at the Pump in Drummond Street by the university - a short walk from her Uncle Peter Drummond's home in George IV Bridge. They met in early 1871, when Louis was working with Ferrier, Brown and the curiously unforgivable Omond on the Edinburgh University Magazine. The next encounter described by Steuart is at Portobello, where Louis chances upon Kate sitting alone on the beach. She seems evasive and anxious to avoid intimacy. Louis returns alone on the train to Edinburgh, but hangs around Waverley Station and accosts Kate when her train arrives. From the Waverley Steps, he walks with her down Leith Street, where she attempts to say goodbye: 'On the other side of the street two gaudy, loud-looking girls were laughing and nodding familiarly. She flushed crimson. They were part of her reason for summarily dismissing him.'²⁵

Steuart's Kate has good reason to be reticent. During a short period of working as a medical nurse in Glasgow, she has been seduced by a doctor and, on finding herself betrayed, has fled to Edinburgh. She has now unwittingly been taken in by the mistress of a brothel, who expects her to pay for the favour in kind. Alone in a squalid, attic room, gazing longingly out of the window across the Forth to her native Highlands, she is in despair when called down to the mistress's parlour. There she is told to have nothing more to do with 'Velvet Coat': 'I can't and won't have my girls playing the fool where there's no money.'²⁶

It is interesting to note how Steuart has Kate returning from Glasgow to her old haunts in Leith Street and Portobello. Yet he also makes her an orphan, adrift in Edinburgh without a friend. Stevenson's *Catriona* has an elderly cousin, Mrs Drummond-Ogilvy of Allardice, and a father whose lack of care for his own daughter makes her increasingly ashamed until he abandons her altogether, leaving

it to David Balfour to look after her. When the tailor William Drummond moved his family to Greenock at the end of 1870, he might likewise have abandoned a headstrong, 18-year-old daughter who insisted on staying in Edinburgh.

On the Census night of April 2nd, 1871 - about three months after the affair with Louis allegedly began - the Drummonds listed Kate as staying with the family in Greenock.²⁷ There is no mention of her being a nurse. She may have stayed there all along and never met Louis at all. But if she was involved with him, perhaps flitting back and forth on the train to Waverley, it may have been the love affair that gave Louis the self-confidence to stand up to his father and assert his own plans for his life.

Up until the end of March, Louis had played the dutiful son, following in his father's footsteps to become an engineer. On March 27th he stood up before the Royal Scottish Academy and delivered a paper on A New Form of Intermittent Light for Lighthouses. From the son of the man credited with perfecting the rotating lens mechanism, this was hardly evidence of great original thought - but Louis's paper won a silver medal and Tom Stevenson glowed with pride.

Yet Louis was deeply unhappy. On April 5th, to mark the end of the university session, he and his fellow engineering students got up a supper in honour of Fleeming Jenkin. They prepared for it by smoking, drinking and holding sweepstakes all afternoon in the classroom. 'There was something uneasy and feverish about the whole affair,' Louis would recall, recounting how they were joined by three medical students. 'One of these, a negro, had been drunk four individual times on that one day. Indeed, he was only fitted for introduction to our table by the application of a dessert spoon to the back of his throat in a bed room; after which ordeal he came in, looking very white and unwholesome for all his brown skin, and proceeded actively to rid himself of his pathological sobriety... he was the first figure of the Chamber of Horrors in which I was to spend the next two days.'²⁸

It was 4am on April 6th before Louis reeled off to his bed at Heriot Row, and three hours later he had to be at Waverley Station to catch the 7am train to Glasgow for Jenkin's final field trip to an engineering works. Louis felt distinctly queasy but

he had at least managed to change his clothes - one student was sprawled on the hard, third-class seat in the ruins of his previous night's evening dress. By the time they fell out of the train on the outskirts of Glasgow, Louis was overcome by a terrible languor. 'But everything connected with this portion of my life is jaundiced in my eyes: has an exaggeration and uncomfortable novelty of shape and size and condition, like what fever lends to the most familiar objects...'²⁹

The account of the visit to Glasgow ends there. Was drink and disgust at the intellectual poverty of his fellow engineering students the sole cause of his feverish state, or was he torn between love and duty to his family? Two days later, during a walk with his father to the village of Cramond on the Forth, Louis announced he was not going to be a civil engineer in the Stevenson family tradition. It was a bitter blow to his father, but softened by Louis agreeing to study law while pursuing his literary ambitions. That night, Maggie Stevenson recorded in her diary: 'Hear today Lou thinks of being an advocate and not a C.E. Tom wonderfully resigned.'³⁰

Curiously the decision to give up engineering strengthened Louis's friendship with Fleeming Jenkin and his wife. The charade of pretending to be an engineering student had been hard to maintain, particularly when he had to plead with Jenkin to perjure himself by certifying that Louis had attended his classes: 'I am still ashamed when I think of his shame in giving me that paper... That was the bitter beginning of my love for Fleeming; I never thought lightly of him afterwards.'³¹

Louis was invited to join the band of amateur thespians who put on plays at the Jenkins' home in Fettes Row. Despite being a histrionic *poseur*, he had limited acting talent and contented himself that April with the humble role of prompter. For the rest of the spring and all summer, he was freewheeling between careers. The Edinburgh University Magazine had collapsed after the fourth monthly number, with Tom Stevenson paying his son's share of the printer's bill. Whatever Louis's young lady thought of the magazine's literary merit, the public did not buy it and most copies were used by the four editors as spills to light their pipes.³² Louis could now lead a life of leisure, yet the poverty and squalor he witnessed in his wanderings around Edinburgh pricked his conscience. The David Balfour side of his character led him to pen an earnest plea to the Church of Scotland Home and

Foreign Missionary Record.

'There is a large class of men who would be only too glad to visit those who are sick or in prison, to clothe the naked, or feed the hungry; but they are helpless - incapable of doing anything,' lamented Louis anonymously. 'Perhaps, from a morbid self-questioning, perhaps from too well-founded scruples, they hesitate to identify themselves so openly with the Church of Christ...'³³ In short, Louis wanted the Kirk Ministers of Edinburgh to find these shy, well-meaning young men some benevolent tasks to carry out. The reverend gentlemen responded with a deafening silence. Louis gave a shrug and returned to the more congenial pursuits of late-night drinking and love.

In Steuart's novel, Kate quits the brothel without selling her body, finds humble lodgings and gets work as a singer in the disreputable subterranean drinking establishment run by 'the Frenchman' - in reality the Manxman Arthur Collett - in the cellars below the Leith Street shops. She has a beautiful voice but is ashamed and forbids Louis to go there when she is singing. Yet he persuades her to accompany him on daytime jaunts, to Cramond, Craigmillar Castle, Rosslyn Chapel and the Braid Hills to the south of Edinburgh.

That year Louis also went further afield on jaunts alone. As spring turned to summer, he took himself off to the Lake District. Love was much on his mind as he strolled by the river at Cockermouth, passing amorous ducks and courting couples and feeling very lonely and out of it. Next morning he borrowed a raft to go punting on the river, but was too restless to enjoy the experience. He gave money to an Irish beggar woman, who told him how her sister had seduced her husband and gone off with him, leaving her to bring up their little girl alone. That evening, Louis took the train to Keswick. It was dark by the time he set eyes on Derwent Water, but despite a strong wind blowing he took a moonlit stroll by the lake.

A sudden and violent squall of wind sundered the low underwood, and at the same time there came one of those brief discharges of moonlight, which leaped into the opening thus made, and showed me three girls in the prettiest flutter and disorder. It was as though they had sprung out of the ground. I accosted them very politely in my capacity of stranger, and requested to be told the names of all manner of hills and woods and places that I did not wish

*to know, and we stood together for a while and had an amusing little talk. The wind, too, made himself of the party, brought the colour into their faces, and gave them enough to do to repress their drapery; and one of them, amid much giggling, had to pirouette round and round upon her toes (as girls do) when some specially strong gust had got the advantage over her.*³⁴

Chatting up pretty girls by moonlight may have helped restore the wounded self-esteem of a young man spurned by the girl who did her best to break his heart, whoever she might be. True love's course might not run smooth but, if Steuart got it right, Louis was still seeing Kate Drummond in the autumn of 1871.

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¹ RLS, *Catriona*, Chapter I.

² RLS, Dedication of *Kidnapped* to Charles Baxter.

³ *The Scots Magazine*, November, 1752.

⁴ Forbes Macgregor, *Clan Gregor*.

⁵ RLS, *Kidnapped*, Chapter XXVII.

⁶ RLS to Sidney Colvin, Vailima, September 4, 1893, Yale 2624, MS Harvard.

⁷ RLS, *Catriona*, Chapter I.

⁸ JA Steuart, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Man And Writer*.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Mrs Fanny Sitwell.

¹¹ Sidney Colvin, Introduction to *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*.

¹² JA Steuart, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Man And Writer*.

¹³ Graham Balfour, *Reminiscences*, National Library of Scotland.

¹⁴ RLS, Autobiographical Fragment quoted by Graham Balfour, *the Life of Robert Louis Stevenson*.

¹⁵ JA Steuart, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Man And Writer*

¹⁶ RLS, *Catriona*, Chapter I.

¹⁷ GROS, 1871 Scotland Census.

¹⁸ GROS, Register of Births.

¹⁹ RLS, *Catriona*, Chapter I.

²⁰ GROS, 1871 Scotland Census.

²¹ GROS, 1861 Scotland Census.

²² GROS, 1871 Scotland Census.

²³ JA Steuart, *The Cap of Youth*.

²⁴ JA Steuart, *Robert Louis Stevenson, Man And Writer*.

²⁵ JA Steuart, *The Cap of Youth*, Chapter VIII.

²⁶ JA Steuart, *The Cap of Youth*, Chapter X.

²⁷ GROS, 1871 Scotland Census.

²⁸ RLS, MS National Library of Scotland.

²⁹ RLS, MS National Library of Scotland.

³⁰ MI Stevenson Diary, April 8th, 1871.

³¹ RLS, *Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin*, Chapter VI.

³² George WT Omond, *I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Rosaline Masson.

³³ RLS to the Editor, *The Church of Scotland Home and Foreign Missionary Record*, May 1, 1871.

³⁴ RLS, *Cockermouth and Keswick, A Fragment*, *Essays of Travel*.