

THE LAST OF THE RUTHVENS.

Dinah Maria Craik

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Table of Contents

<u>THE LAST OF THE RUTHVENS</u>	1
<u>Dinah Maria Craik</u>	1
<u>PART I</u>	1

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- PART I.
- PART II.
- PART III.
- PART IV.

PART I.

"**DAVIE CALDERWOOD!** worthy tutor and master! Davie Calderwood!" The old man made no answer to the call, which he scarce seemed even to hear. He sat not far from the shadow of his college walls, watching the little silvery ripples of the Cam. His doctor's robes hid a homely dress of gray; his large feet, dangling over the river bank, were clumsily shod, and his white close-cropped hair gave him a Puritanical look, when compared with the cavalier air of the two youths who stood behind him.

"Davie Calderwood wake up, man! News! great news! And from Scotland!" added the elder lad in a cautious whisper.

It pierced the torpor of the old man: he started up with trembling eagerness.

"Eh, my dair bairn! I mean, my lord my Lord Gowrie!"

"Hush!" said the youth, bitterly; "let not the birds of the air carry that sound. Was it not crushed out of the earth a year ago? Call me William Ruthven, or else plain William, till with my good sword I win back my title and my father's name."

"Willie Willie!" murmured the younger brother, in anxious warning.

"He's feared wee Patrick!" laughed William Ruthven. "He thinks that walls have ears, and rivers tongues, and that every idle word I say will go with speed to the vain, withered, old hag in London or to daft King Jamie in Edinburgh! He thinks he shall yet see brother Willie's love-locks floating from the top of the Tolbooth beside those of winsome Aleck and noble John."

The elder youth spoke in that bitter jesting tone used to hide keenest suffering; but the younger one, a slight delicate boy of nineteen, clung to his brother's arm, and burst into tears.

"My Lord," said Master David Calderwood, "ye suld be mair tender o' the lad your ae brother your mother's youngest bairn! Ye speak too lightly o' things awfu' to tell of awfu' to mind. Master Patrick," he added, laying his hand gently on the boy's shoulder, "ye are thinking of ilk puir bodie given to the fowls of the air and to the winds of heaven at Stirling, Edinburgh, and Dundee; but ye forget that while man dishonours the helpless dust, evermair God keeps the soul. Therefore think ye thus o' your twa brothers the bonnie Earl of Gowrie, and noble Alexander

THE LAST OF THE RUTHVENS.

Ruthven that are baith now with God."

As he spoke, the doctor's voice faltered, for nature had put into his huge, ill-formed frame a gentle spirit; and though he had fled from his country, and never beheld it since the year when his beloved lord, the first Earl of Gowrie, and father of these youths, perished on the scaffold still, amidst all the learning and honours gained in his adopted home, David Calderwood carried in his bosom the same true Scottish heart. Perhaps it yearned more over the boy Patrick, in that he was, like his long-dead father, a quiet retiring student, given to all abstruse philosophy; whereas William, the elder, was a youth of bold spirit, who chafed under his forced retirement, and longed to tread in the footsteps of his ancestors, even though they led to the same bloody end.

"Well, good master," he said, "when you have wept enough with Patrick, hear my news."

"Is it from your mother, the puir hunted dove, auld and worn, flying hither and thither about the ruins of her nest?"

Lord Gowrie's let us give him this title, borne for three months, then attained, but which yet fondly lingered on the lips of two faithful friends, David Calderwood and Lettice his daughter Lord Gowrie's brow reddened, and instinctively he put his hand to where his sword should have hung. Then he muttered angrily, "Ah, I forget I am no earl, no Scottish knight, but only a poor Cambridge student. But," he added, his face kindling, "though the lightning has fallen on the parent trunk and its two brave branches, and though the rest are trodden under foot of men, still there is life bold, fresh life in the old tree. It shall grow up and shelter her yet my noble, long-enduring mother the first, the best, the No; she shall **not** be the last Lady Gowrie."

While speaking, a flush deeper even than that of youth's enthusiasm burned on the young earl's cheek, and he looked up to the window where Lettice sat sweet Lettice Calderwood, sweeter even than she was fair! She at a distance dimly saw the look; she met it with a frank smile the smile a single-hearted, happy girl would cast willingly on all the world.

"The news the news!" murmured old David. "My bairns, ye talk and ye rave, but ye dinna tell the news."

"My mother writes that the cloud seems passing from our house; for the Queen Anne she favours us still, despite her lord the Queen Anne has secretly sent for our sister Beatrice to court."

"Beatrice, whom brother Alexander loved more than all of us," said Patrick. But the elder brother frowned, and rather harshly bade him hold his peace.

"Patrick is a child, and knows nothing," said the young Earl; "but I know all. What care I for this weak Queen's folly or remembered sin? What care I whether my bold brother Alexander encouraged her erring love or not, if through her means I creep back into my father's honoured seat? Oh shame that I **can** only creep; that I must enter Scotland like a thief, and steal in at the court holding on to a woman's robe, when I would fain come with fire and sword, to crush among the ashes of his own palace the murderer of my race!"

He spoke with a resolute fierceness, strange in such a youth; his black brows contracted, and his stature seemed to swell and grow. Simple Davie Calderwood looked and trembled.

"Ye're a Ruthven, true and bold; but ye're no' like the Earl o' Gowrie. I see in your face your father's father him that rose from his dying bed to be a shedder of blood him that slew Rizzio in Holyrood!"

"And when I stand in Holyrood whether I creep in there or force my way with my sword I will kneel down on that bloody spot, and pray Heaven to make **me** too as faithful an avenger."

THE LAST OF THE RUTHVENS.

Then turning off his passion with a jest, as he often did, Lord Gowrie said gaily to his brother, "Come, Patrick, look not so pale; tell our good master the rest of the news that to-nig