

Eighteen Hours of Sunshine:

A Reading of *Kit Kennedy*, Chapters Twenty-Two and Twenty-Three

In "[Galloway Bygones](#)" Crockett gives us Galloway as memory and history — shaped by exile, viewed across time, available to those who know its codes and share its loyalties. *Kit Kennedy: Country Boy* gives us something different and complementary: Galloway as immediate, inhabited present. Not a landscape remembered but a landscape lived in, on a specific June day, by a boy who has never been anywhere else and has no particular reason to think about where he is, because where he is is simply the world.

Chapters Twenty-Two and Twenty-Three — "The Two Truants" and "Kit's Eyes Are Opened" — form a single continuous dramatic unit, the chapter break falling almost invisibly at the structural hinge between the comic opening and the serious close. Read together, they demonstrate Crockett working at full stretch: the June landscape rendered with complete sensory precision, Scots humour deployed with perfect timing, and a scene of emotional and moral complexity that demands and rewards careful reading.

The novel was not published as a book until the autumn of 1899, but it reached its first readers as a weekly serial — simultaneously in *The Christian World* and *The People's Friend*, both beginning in the first days of January 1899. With approximately 28–29 instalments running through to late July, Chapters Twenty-Two and Twenty-Three would likely have arrived on readers' doorsteps in late spring.

The Ground Itself

Both "Galloway Bygones" and these chapters make the same argument about landscape, though by different means. The article argues it explicitly: Scott did not know Galloway, dressed its legends in Ettrick Forest costume, mistook its hills for smooth green swells. The chapters argue it by demonstration. Loch Grenoch is not a generic Scottish loch. (These days it's known as Woodhall Loch, but Crockett preferred the older name). The water is "clear, but with a little amber in its depths decocted from the peat bogs at its upper end and from the green water meadows of Dornal and Crae." That amber tint is exact: upland water in Galloway carries the colour of the peat it has drained through, and the naming of Dornal and Crae as specific sources of that colouring is the gesture of someone who knows this particular loch in this particular landscape.

The "eighteen-hour-long sunshine" that opens the chapter is likewise precise. This is June in the south-west of Scotland — the longest days of the year at this latitude, the light lasting until nearly eleven at night. Crockett does not say it is a long summer day in

a general way. He gives the number. And the broom waving on the hillside, the Girthon Hills gathering their thunder for the closing scene, the shingle spit where Royal settles himself to watch the humans — none of this is backdrop or atmosphere. It is specific ground, named and known. It is the landscape of Crockett's early childhood.

The chapter's emotional architecture depends on its location. The June day is not merely a pleasant setting. It is the condition of what happens. The light and warmth and freedom of the long morning — Kit's truancy, the swimming, the pure animal joy of it — are the context in which Kit can receive, and begin to process, what his mother is about to tell him. The day has expanded him before the conversation begins.

Royal and the Mechanics of Scots Humour

The characterisation of Royal across both chapters is a sustained and accomplished piece of Scots humour. It is worth examining in some detail, because it operates by the same mechanisms we identified in "Galloway Bygones" — and because it is far more structurally purposeful than it first appears.

The comedy of Royal-as-tempter is established quickly and with admirable economy. The dog's strategy is presented with complete solemnity: he had "led Kit Kennedy astray" not through any base motive but through a straightforwardly canine desire for company in the water, and the narrative presents this exactly as it would present the reasoning of a more senior character. Royal "let on" to like the sugar piece he privately despised. He gambolled in front saying "as plain as print" — come on, hurrah for the water. The free indirect speech for the dog is consistent and deadpan throughout.

The peak comes when Kit throws the stick up the bank rather than into the water. Royal's response is rendered as: "Et tu, Brute!" — and then Crockett adds the gloss: "plain as Caesar at the foot of Pompey's statue." The Latin quotation drawn from the most famous betrayal scene in English literature is applied with perfect gravity to a dog who has been misdirected in a game of fetch. And the gloss, rather than being an authorial wink, deepens the joke by committing to it even further. No explanation is offered. The absurdity is treated as self-evidently appropriate. This is Scots humour's characteristic refusal to underline: the joke is told, one dry observation is added, and Crockett moves on.

But Royal's function is not only comic. He remains present throughout the serious second chapter as a kind of displaced observer, sitting on the shingle cocking his ears at the inexplicable humans who, having a basket of good things before them, prefer to make mouth-noises. His inability to comprehend the human drama does not diminish it. It contextualises it — places it within ordinary life, which continues around and

beneath the emotional crisis with complete indifference. The loch is still there. The day is still fine. The dog still wants his breakfast. Once again, Scots humour at play.

The Structural Hinge

Kit rounds the broom bush looking for his clothes and finds his mother sitting beside them. This single sentence is the pivot of the entire sequence, and it arrives without preparation of any kind. The transition from the swimming scene — the laughter, the splashing, the shouted delight — to the sudden stillness of standing unclothed before his mother is instantaneous. One paragraph ends and the next begins in a different world.

Crockett manages this structural shift with the same confidence he shows in "Galloway Bygones," where the "tousy tea" anecdote and the meditation on Cameronian faith inhabit the same essay without either cancelling the other. In both cases the movement is earned rather than announced. The comedy is not a prelude to the seriousness; it is part of the same honest attention to how life actually works — which is to say, that joy and difficulty are not usually separated into neat portions but arrive entangled, in the same long day.

What follows the pivot is also structurally careful. Liliias does not begin immediately. She dresses Kit in silence, her tears averted, and the narrator observes this with a precision that says a great deal without explaining anything: "strange thrills and upleapings of her mother's heart" at doing again what she had not done since Kit was three years old. The boy, meanwhile, casts about for "some non-committal subject of conversation." Both responses are true and both are funny in the way that uncomfortable recognition is funny — Scots humour again, the pressure of ordinary humanity on an extraordinary moment.

Liliias: What the Text Does

The speech Liliias gives about loving Kit's father is not comfortable writing, and it is not meant to be. She is not describing something that can be resolved or moved past. She is describing a condition: a love that has become structural, that cannot be extracted regardless of what the man did or what she now knows about him. Her comparison between the way a man and a woman each respond to being wounded by someone they love is stated as plain observation — neither decorative nor apologetic. It is what she has found to be true in her own experience, and she offers it to her eleven-year-old son as honestly as she can.

The account of her marriage to Walter MacWalter is equally unsparing. She married him because she was told to — because her family's debt required it, because she believed

Kit's father did not love her, because her mother said love would come afterwards. The phrase she uses is exact and quietly devastating: "I sinned against love." She does not soften it. She does not explain it away as a mistake made under pressure, though that is plainly what it was. She takes the full weight of it.

The theology at the close of her speech — "God, I think, looks upon it so" — is among the most careful writing in the chapter. The "I think" carries everything. This is a woman reasoning her way towards consolation through her own suffering, not certain of any answer, not offered any easy reassurance. The suffering has been real; the punishment has been real; whether the account is therefore settled is something she does not know. She thinks so. She hopes so. That is where she has got to.

It is worth pausing here on the semi-autobiographical dimension of the novel. Kit Kennedy draws significantly on Crockett's own Galloway childhood, and the circumstances of Kit's birth — his mother unmarried, his father absent — have their parallel in Crockett's own origins. However, his mother did not marry. She did not take the path Lillas takes. Whether Crockett is, in Lillas's story, exploring the logic and the cost of the alternative — whether there is a structural comparison being drawn between Lillas's choice and a different, harder choice that does not carry the particular weight of having "sinned against love" — is a question the text raises without answering. It can be noted; it should not be pressed further than the text itself goes. Our interpretation here cannot be more than speculation. But it's clearly something that mattered deeply to Crockett even into adulthood.

The Thunder Close

The sequence ends in more Scots humour. Kit, having received his mother's confidence and lain with his head on her breast through a long silence, makes his resolve: "I am going to be a great man."

And the universe laughs. The thunder breaks "in sonorous mirth" at his daring.

The phrase is perfect in its ambiguity. Is the cosmos mocking the boy's presumption, or saluting his defiance, or simply doing what thunder does regardless of what eleven-year-old boys resolve? Crockett does not say. What he gives us is Kit's response: leaping up, shaking his fist at the elements, saying "All right, we'll see!" This is the tone of "Galloway Bygones" — the province that preferred to be put to the horn rather than come to Edinburgh and risk the King's rope, that walked round its own people like angry stranger dogs but closed ranks the moment an outsider looked sideways. Small, defiant, entirely serious beneath the comedy. The deflation is not the last word. The defiance is.

The Diptych

"Galloway Bygones" and these two chapters are not a planned pair — five years and a different form separate them — but they read like one. The essay tells you what Galloway made of its people: their pride, their loyalty, their humour, their faith. The chapters show you what it was actually like to be in it on a June day: the amber water and the long light, the dog and the sugar piece, the boy who forgot to go to school and found his whole world enlarged by the afternoon. Between them, they give you the province from the outside and from the inside — historical depth and present moment held together in the same long June sunshine.

Both texts reward slow reading. Both ask you to pay attention to the comedy before the serious passages arrive, because the comedy is not separate from the seriousness. It is its ground.

The full text of Kit Kennedy: Country Boy is available in the [Complete Crockett section](#) of the [Online Library](#) and [Galloway Bygones](#) is available in the [Articles section](#) along with other relevant writings.