

**THE LILAC
SUNBONNET:
A LOVE STORY**

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The Lilac Sunbonnet: A Love Story by S. R. Crockett

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S. R. CROCKETT

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SUNBONNET:
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She raised her head, and their lips drew together in a long kiss.

—*The Lilac Sunbonnet.*

The Lilac Sunbonnet

A LOVE STORY

By S. R. CROCKETT

Author of

“The Sticket Minister,” “Cleg Kelly, Arab of the City,”

“The Standard Bearer,” etc.



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THE LILAC SUNBONNET.

Prologue.—By the Wayside.

As Ralph Peden came along the dusty Cairn Edward road from the coach which had set him down there on its way to the Ferry town, he paused to rest in the evening light at the head of the Long Wood of Larbrax. Here, under boughs that arched the way, he took from his shoulders his knapsack, filled with Hebrew and Greek books, and rested his head on the larger bag of roughly tanned Westland leather, in which were all his other belongings. They were not numerous. He might, indeed, have left both his bags for the Dullarg carrier on Saturday, but to lack his beloved books for four days was not to be thought of for a moment by Ralph Peden. He would rather have carried them up the eight long miles to the manse of the Dullarg one by one.

As he sat by the tipsy milestone, which had swayed side-long and lay half buried amid the grass and dock leaves, a tall, dark girl came by—half turning to look at the young man as he rested. It was Jess Kissock, from the Herd's House at Craig Ronald, on her way home from buying trimmings for a new hat. This happened just twice a year, and was a solemn occasion.

"Is this the way to the manse of Dullarg?" asked the young man, standing up with his hat in his hand, the brim just beneath his chin. He was a handsome young man when he stood up straight.

Jess looked at him attentively. They did not speak in that way in her country, nor did they take their hats in their hands when they had occasion to speak to young women.

"I am myself going past the Dullarg," she said, and paused with a hiatus like an invitation.

Ralph Peden was a simple young man, but he rose and shouldered his knapsack without a word. The slim, dark-haired girl with the bright, quick eyes like a bird, put out her hand to take a share of the burden of Ralph's bag.

"Thank you, but I am quite able to manage it myself," he said, "I could not think of letting you put your hand to it."

"I am not a fine lady," said the girl, with a little impatient movement of her brows, as if she had stamped her foot. "I am nothing but a cottar's lassie."

"But then, how comes it that you speak as you do?" asked Ralph.

"I have been long in England—as a lady's maid," she answered with a strange, disquieting look at him. She had taken one side of the bag of books in spite of his protest, and now walked by Ralph's side through the evening coolness.

"This is the first time you have been hereaway?" his companion asked.

Ralph nodded a quick affirmative and smiled.

"Then," said Jess Kissock, the rich blood mantling her dark cheeks, "I am the first from the Dullarg you have spoken to!"

"The very first!" said Ralph.

"Then I am glad," said Jess Kissock. But in the young man's heart there was no answering gladness, though in very sooth she was an exceeding handsome maid.