

# Weir of Hermiston

Weir of Hermiston by Robert Louis Stevenson is an unfinished novel that delves into the moral struggles of Archie Weir, a young Scottish man torn between love, family duty, and his sense of justice.

## CHAPTER I - LIFE AND DEATH OF MRS. WEIR

This chapter introduces the formidable Lord Justice-Clerk, Adam Weir, and his delicate wife, Jean Rutherford, the last descendant of the wild "riding Rutherfords of Hermiston." Their union appears mismatched; his demanding nature clashes with her meek fragility. Jean, known for her piety and tenderness, struggles with her role as the judge's wife, failing to meet his domestic expectations and suffering under his harsh comments. Despite her devotion and attempts at expressing love, including a poignant moment crafting slippers for him, she feels inadequate.

Their son, Archie, grows in a household torn between his mother's religious zeal and his father's worldly pragmatism. Observing his father's stern demeanor and reputation as "The Hanging Judge," Archie begins to question the morality of his profession, aligning it with sinfulness. This internal conflict between justice and compassion forms the crux of Archie's upbringing, leading to poignant discussions with his mother about righteousness, obedience, and the nature of judgment. Jean's attempts to navigate these conversations reveal her inner turmoil and doubts about her husband's spiritual disposition.

The narrative also spotlights Kirstie Elliott, a loyal but fiery housekeeper whose devotion to Jean contrasts sharply with her disdain for Lord Hermiston. Towards the chapter's end, Jean's health declines, marked by aimless wanderings and a troubling conversation with Kirstie, hinting at her deep-seated fears for her husband's soul. Her sudden death, narrated with a chilling simplicity, leaves a void in the Hermiston household and sets the stage for the unfolding drama between Adam Weir and his son, Archie.

The chapter deftly explores themes of duty, piety, moral judgment, and the complexities of familial relationships within the rigid structures of Scottish society.

## CHAPTER II - FATHER AND SON

In "Weir of Hermiston," Chapter II, "Father and Son," the complex and strained relationship between Lord Justice-Clerk Adam Weir and his son Archie is explored against the backdrop of late 18th century Scotland. The chapter reveals the stark contrast between the two characters: Adam Weir, a respected yet feared judge known for his stoicism, imperiousness, and dedication to law, and his son Archie, a sensitive and intelligent young man with a penchant for the humanities, fostered by his friendship with Lord Glenalmond.

Adam Weir's lack of interest in his son's early life and education, except for ensuring he followed a conventional path of a boy of his station, epitomizes the emotional distance between them. The father's rare attempts at bonding, such as sharing murder cases with a young Archie on a trip to Hermiston, are misguided and serve only to leave a lasting, grim impression on Archie. Their interactions are characterized by Adam's sardonic and often contemptuous demeanor, contrasted with Archie's growing distaste and discomfort with his father's crude expressions of humor and views, especially during the elder Weir's indulgent and demeaning gatherings.

Archie's education and interests lead him away from his father's world of law and order, toward aspirations influenced by Lord Glenalmond's gentle guidance. Despite Lord Hermiston's attempts, albeit half-hearted and awkward, to connect with his son, he fails to bridge the emotional and intellectual chasm that has formed between them. The father's obstinate disposition and the son's sensitive nature exacerbate their estrangement, casting a shadow over their relationship. Adam Weir's inability to express affection or understand his son's aspirations, coupled with Archie's repulsion and avoidance, encapsulates the tragedy of their relationship—an inability to communicate and understand one another, setting the stage for ensuing conflicts and Archie's struggle between duty and desire.

The chapter poignantly captures the generational tension and the clash of ideals between a rigid, unyielding father and his progressive, idealistic son. Through their turbulent relationship, Stevenson explores themes of authority, rebellion, and the quest for individual identity against the expectations of familial legacy and societal norms.

## **CHAPTER III - IN THE MATTER OF THE HANGING OF DUNCAN JOPP**

In 1813, Archie Weir, the son of the presiding judge, Lord Hermiston, witnesses the trial and execution of Duncan Jopp, a man accused of heinous crimes, and is deeply disturbed by it. The trial exemplifies both the harshness of justice and the moral indifference of the era towards capital punishment. Archie, horrified by the cruelty and glee with which his father, Lord Hermiston, administers justice, publicly denounces the hanging as a "God-defying murder," causing scandal.

Following this outburst, Archie and his father have a tense confrontation in which stark differences in their worldviews are laid bare. Lord Hermiston chastises Archie for his naivety and disapproval of capital punishment, while Archie accuses his father of taking pleasure in the act of sentencing men to death. Throughout the exchange, Archie seeks to justify his outburst and aspirations for a life different from the one his father envisions for him, proposing to join the military rather than continue in law or enter the pulpit, which his father scornfully rejects.

The argument ends with a deeper chasm between father and son. Despite Lord Hermiston's harsh rebuke and the threat of disinheritance, Archie remains resolute in his moral opposition to his father's actions. Hermiston, resigned to the disappointment his son represents, alludes to the constraints of duty both to family and to the position he holds, revealing a complex character torn between personal and public obligations.

This chapter showcases the conflict between generational values, the weight of familial expectations, and the personal struggle for identity and moral integrity within the strictures of society and justice. Hermiston's stern disposition and Archie's idealistic inclinations set the stage for a continuing battle of wills, highlighting the theme of justice versus mercy that runs throughout "Weir of Hermiston."

## **CHAPTER IV - OPINIONS OF THE BENCH**

In Chapter IV of "Weir of Hermiston" titled "Opinions of the Bench," Archie visits Lord Glenalmond late at night, deeply agitated and in search of counsel. Despite Archie's refusal to eat citing his distress, Glenalmond insists on the importance of nourishment, subtly indicating his expectation of Archie's visit and his understanding of his troubled state without pressing for details immediately. Once the servant leaves, Archie confronts the matter directly, asking Glenalmond if he was the one who informed his father about his objectionable actions. Glenalmond denies this, suggesting another, Glenkindie, as the likely informant. This conversation reveals the undercurrents of tension and dissatisfaction Archie harbors towards his father, Lord

Hermiston, stemming from a lack of familial warmth and exacerbated by his father's harsh professional demeanor evidenced during a legal trial.

Archie expresses a complex mixture of admiration, fear, and revulsion towards his father, who he views as both admirable in his unwavering principles and repugnant in his severity. Glenalmond, adopting a balanced stance, listens without judgment, offering comfort and wisdom rather than direct advice. He highlights Archie's intolerance and lack of understanding towards his father, stressing the need for acceptance and obedience as forms of respect and suggesting that Archie's feelings of love and duty towards his father, though conflicted, can lead to reconciliation.

As their conversation delves into the ethics of judgment and the difficulty of understanding human nature fully, particularly in the context of capital punishment—a matter of personal conflict for Archie—they reach a consensus on the complexity of such moral issues. Glenalmond steers the dialogue to a more philosophical reflection on the nature of justice and human empathy, encouraging Archie to adopt a more compassionate and tolerant perspective.

The chapter concludes with a mutual toast to Lord Hermiston, indicating a moment of understanding and respect towards him, despite the differences. Their evening is interrupted by the arrival of a drunken Lord Glenkindie, whose abrupt entrance starkly contrasts with the serene and reflective atmosphere, reminding Archie of the broader social and familial challenges he faces.

This chapter intricately explores themes of paternal relationships, the quest for personal identity and moral integrity, and the complexities of human judgment, all within the setting of a troubled yet deeply introspective dialogue between Archie and Glenalmond.

## **CHAPTER V - WINTER ON THE MOORS**

Weir of Hermiston

62

"They ken the road," replied she, implying, it might be supposed, a negative answer. "And yet ye seem fond of the family, Kirstie, and you're fond of Dand at least," he went on. "I think you would like to see more of them?"

"Me! Likin's neither here nor there," said Kirstie. "I'm ower auld to be seekin' pleesure, though I'll never deny but what it's pleesurin' I am when I see the bairns, and Dandie, he's a kind of a bairn too - I wad never deny that. But it's the way God made me. I'm like a dog - I ken them that belangs to me. It's there, and I canna help it, and I dinna seek to. But it's neither you nor me that has to mend it, if it's wrang, and I daurna say: it's mair in His hands, Mr. Erchie."

And so again Archie was brought face to face with the problem that had so long and often interested him; to see the woman torn in two between her acceptance of a practical necessity and an unchanged aspiration; and that with such depth of feeling, with such a sense of sacrifice and loss, and yet in a region so foreign to his own experience, that he could only look on from outside in a kind of sad amazement. Many other traits he could discern by the way, and pieces of the jangled puzzle they helped him to fit together: that the brothers had grown slowly further apart, and their visits become rare in the course of time; that Kirstie's favour extended very largely to Dand and very partially to Gilbert, whom she suspected of holding something back from her; that

while she staunchly pardoned Hob for some past event, she thought him capable of repetitions; that in the whole list of their failings not the least was the habit of family concealment - from which it followed directly that the India shawl manoeuvres had passed without an open explosion: a conclusion welcome to Archie, who was of the opinion that the fewer family jars, in the present state of affairs at Hermiston, the better perhaps for all parties.

[And here the text breaks off abruptly, with the problem of Kirstie's life unsolved, the brother's quarrel but guessed at, and the shadow of coming events only suggested.]

## **CHAPTER VI - A LEAF FROM CHRISTINA'S PSALM-BOOK**

sank into a more continuous slumber where no thought survived, it was to wake again at the accustomed hour, when the hands of the clock are laid together and the first beam of the morning shoots into the east, with a smile that surprised her attendant.

"Are ye no well, Mem?" asked the little lass.

"Troth, and I am extraordinar' weel," said Kirstie.

She sprang from bed, as if to embrace and inhabit her day of glory, and then, recollecting custom and the terrible eye of Mrs. Hob - who was already afoot, an incredible timekeeper, "the earliest bird in Tantallon," and had heard Kirstie's descent, and was now posting to inquire the cause of it - repented, and fell back in the meanwhile on that symbolic dressing of hair, studied indifference of attire, and steadfast aim (peculiar to her age and sex) at once to publish and conceal her state of mind.

Downstairs, her secret went abroad and was the cause of kindness, of mirth, of envy and emulation; it became the business of all these young people in love to push and to assist the love affair of one. The toast of the breakfast-table, Kirstie blushed, bridled, walked in a vain show, and looked upon life with the brave uncertainty of morning. Incorporate maiden modesty, incarnate girl, she trod the rough world underfoot - herself fleet, impenetrable, a foot above it: Angel of the morning she was; harbinger of day - carrying it in her bosom.

The morning passed in vain duties; the mid-day meal; the sauntering walk among the kale-yard alleys and between the clipped yew trees; and then, with cambric needlework in hand - a humble pretext - she took her chosen place where a green alley opened on the tableland above Hermiston and the glen of the Cauldstaneslap. Thence she had a peep of a few roofs of the mains, and the smoke of fireplaces; and on the other side the dell lay open, and she might feast her eyes on the Slap, the Praying Weaver's stone, and the path between the heather. There she waited the miracle of his re-arising. He had come yesterday; by heavenly guidance he might come again to-day. He did: and he looked up and saw her, and waved his hat, and toiled up the steep path to her side, spent at the top, and pleased, and ready to spend his best breath on any follies she might ask of him.

## CHAPTER VII - ENTER MEPHISTOPHELES

Frank Innes arrives at Hermiston with an undefined invitation from Archie, who is surprised but welcoming. Despite their history as schoolmates and friends, Archie and Frank's relationship becomes strained due to Frank's careless and intrusive nature, contrasting sharply with Archie's reserved personality and secretive behavior. Frank's attempts to fit in at Hermiston are met with general dislike from the household and locals, aside from minor successes at neighboring social gatherings, where he subtly maligns Archie's reputation with insinuations of disgrace and concern for his friend's well-being.

Frank's curiosity about Archie's secretive outings leads to a discovery of an interest in a young woman, Kirstie (Christina Elliott), from Cauldstaneslap. Despite initially pursuing this interest partly in jest and partly in pique, Frank finds himself becoming a genuine rival for Kirstie's affections. Through observation and inference, Frank deduces the nature of Archie's secret romantic endeavors and confronts him, causing tension. Frank's insinuations about the potential consequences of Archie's relationship with a lower-class woman, and the implied threat of social ruin, highlight the class prejudices and personal rivalries at play.

Archie's indignation at Frank's meddling and the suggestion that his relationship with Kirstie might be inappropriate or untenable reflect the social and personal constraints of the time. Frank, reveling in the manipulation and control he exerts over Archie's life, contemplates with delight the discomfort and turmoil he has sown, illustrating the complex dynamics of friendship, rivalry, and social standing in their community.

## CHAPTER VIII - A NOCTURNAL VISIT

Chapter VIII of "Weir of Hermiston" unfolds a deep, emotional conversation between Kirstie and Archie in the still of the night, revealing the complexity of human emotions and the inexorable flow of life's changes.

Kirstie, plagued with a concoction of fear, jealousy, and a protective instinct, confronts Archie about the brewing storm in their lives stemming from his relationship with a younger woman, also named Kirstie. The chapter navigates through the landscapes of unfulfilled dreams, youthful desires, and impending risks, using the dialogue between Kirstie and Archie to explore themes of love, regret, and wisdom gained from the hardships of life.

Kirstie reflects on her own youth, filled with the vitality and promise that life once held for her, contrasted sharply with her current state of loneliness and yearning. She reminisces about a lost love, conveying to Archie the potent dangers of youthful passion and the impact of choices made in the heat of the moment. Her story serves as both a caution and a plea, urging Archie to consider the consequences of his actions, not just for himself but for the young Kirstie, whose future hangs in the balance.

Archie, on his part, reveals his struggle with inner turmoil, haunted by the expectations set by his stern father, Lord Hermiston, and his own desires. His promises to Kirstie—to do no harm to the younger Kirstie and to keep her informed of his actions—underline a conflict between duty and desire, highlighting the perennial struggle of adhering to societal and moral standards while navigating personal feelings.

The nocturnal encounter, soaked in vulnerability and candor, peels away the layers of Archie's and Kirstie's characters, showing the reader the depth of their internal conflicts. Kirstie, with her vivid accounts and impassioned pleas, represents the wisdom of age and the painful acceptance of life's disappointments. Archie's responses, tinged with sincerity and confusion, lay bare the tumultuous journey of youth faced with the complexities of love and duty.

As the chapter closes, the emotional exchange between Kirstie and Archie leaves a lasting impact, not only on the characters but also on the reader, weaving a poignant tale of human frailty, longing, and the intricacies

of the human heart's desires amidst the inescapable flow of time and society's constraints.

## **CHAPTER IX - AT THE WEAVER'S STONE**

In the late afternoon, Archie arrives at the Praying Weaver's stone, meeting Christina (Kirstie) in a scene painted with melancholy and anticipation, set against the backdrop of the dimming moors. The moment of their meeting quickly transitions from potential warmth to serious conversation as Archie, influenced by recent admonitions, decides it's time they reconsider the nature of their secret meetings, to which the local community has apparently begun to pay attention.

He tries to address the situation with a sense of duty and foresight, pointing out the dangers of their continued clandestine encounters for their reputations and for the respect owed to his father's position. Despite his intentions, this approach comes across as cold and schoolmasterly to Kirstie, causing a sharp and immediate rift. The conversation reveals the complex undercurrents of their relationship: Archie's struggle between affection and societal obligations, and Kirstie's battle between heartbreak and pride.

In a deeply emotional response, Kirstie confronts Archie about the reality of their situation, the societal pressures they face, and the significant shadow his father casts over their relationship. The disclosure that their meetings have become common gossip, and the involvement of others in their personal affairs, particularly Archie's conversations with his father and Frank, precipitates a crisis between the young lovers.

Archie's attempt to manage the conversation with logic and foresight collapses under the weight of Kirstie's emotional revelation of her love, vulnerability, and sense of betrayal. Her fiery defense of her dignity, juxtaposed with moments of profound grief and desperation, illustrates the intense personal and societal conflicts they both navigate.

The chapter encapsulates the tumultuous encounter at the Weaver's stone as a pivotal moment of confrontation between social expectation and personal desire. It delineates not just the external conflicts posed by their families and community, but also the internal conflicts of fear, pride, and longing that both characters grapple with. As Archie attempts to reconcile his duties with his feelings, and Kirstie fiercely defends her worth and their love, the narrative delves into the complexities of their situation, the deep emotional undercurrents at play, and the looming influence of Archie's formidable father.