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GIRLHOOD AND WOMANHOOD

The Story of some Fortunes and Misfortunes

BY SARAH TYTLER

AUTHOR OF "PAPERS FOR THOUGHTFUL GIRLS,"
"CITOYENNE JACQUELINE," ETC. ETC.

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CAIN'S BRAND

I.—ON THE MOOR.

CAIN'S BRAND! that is no fact of the far past, no legend of the Middle Ages, for are there not Cains among us; white-faced, haggard-featured Cains to the last? Men who began with a little injury, and did not dream that their gripe would close in deadly persecution? Cains who slew the spirit, and through the spirit murdered the body? Cains unintentionally, whom all men free from the stain of blood, and to whom in the Jewish economy the gates of the Cities of Refuge would have stood wide open, yet who are never again light of thought and light of heart? On their heads the grey is soon sprinkled, and in the chamber of their hearts is drawn a ghastly picture, whose freshness fades, but whose distinct characters are never obliterated.

Of this class of men, of hot passions, with rash advisers, who meditated wrong, but not the last wrong, victims of a narrow, imperious code of honour, only to-day expunged from military and social etiquette, was the Laird of the Ewes. Many of us may have seen such another—a tall, lithe figure, rather bent, and very white-headed for his age, with a wistful eye; but otherwise a most

composed, intelligent, courteous gentleman of a laird's degree. Take any old friend aside, and he will tell, with respectful sympathy, that the quiet, sensible, well-bred Laird, has suffered agonies in the course of his life, though too wise and modest a man to hold up his heart for daws to peck at, and you will believe him. Look narrowly at the well-preserved, well-veiled exterior, and you will be able to detect, through the nicely adjusted folds, or even when it is brightened by smiles, how remorse has sharpened the flesh, and grief hollowed it, and long abiding regret shaded it.

Twenty years before this time, Crawfurd of the Ewes, more accomplished than many of the lairds, his contemporaries, and possessed of the sly humour on which Scotchmen pride themselves, had been induced to write a set of lampoons against a political opponent of his special chief. He was young then, and probably had his literary vanity; at least he executed his task to the satisfaction of his side of the question; and without being particularly broad and offensive, or perhaps very fine in their edge, his caricatures excited shouts of laughter in the parish, and in the neighbouring town.

But he laughs best who laughs last. A brother laird, blind with fury, and having more of the old border man in him than the Laird of the Ewes, took to his natural arms, and dispatched Mr. Crawfurd a challenge to fight him on the Corn-Cockle Moor. No refusal was possible then, none except for a man of rare principle, nerve, and temper. The Laird of the Ewes had no pretensions to mighty gifts; so he walked out with his second one autumn morning when his reapers were flourishing their sickles, met his foe, and though without the skill to defend himself, he shot his man right through the head. He was tried and acquitted. He was the challenged, not the challenger; he might have given the provocation, but no blame was suffered to attach to him. His antagonist, with a foreboding of his fate, or by way of clearing his conscience, as the knights used to confess of a morning before combat, had exonerated Mr. Crawfurd before he came upon the ground. The Court was strongly in his favour, and he was sent back to his family and property without anything more severe than commiseration; but that could never reach his deep sore.

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How was this gentle, nervous, humorous Laird to look out upon the world, from which he had sent the soul of a companion who had never even harmed him? The widow, whom he had admired as a gay young matron, dwelt not a mile from him in her darkened dwelling; the fatherless boy would constantly cross the path of his well-protected, well-cared-for children. How bear the thousand little memories—the trifling dates, acts, words, pricking him with anguish? They say the man grew sick at the mere sight of the corn-cockle, which, though not plentiful on other moors, chanced to abound on this uncultivated tract, and bestowed on it its name; and he shivered as with an ague fit, morning after morning, when the clock struck the hour at which he had left his house. He did in some measure overcome this weakness, for he was a man of ordinary courage and extraordinary reserve, but it is possible that he endured the worst of his punishment when he made no sign.

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The Laird was a man of delicate organism, crushed by a blow from which he could not recover. Had he lived a hundred years earlier, or been a soldier on active service, or a student walking the hospitals, he might have been more hardened to bloodshed. Had his fate been different, he might have borne the brunt of the offence as well as his betters; but the very crime which he was least calculated to commit and survive encountered him in the colours he had worn before the eventful day.

Yet there was nothing romantic about Crawfurd of the Ewes, or about the details of his deed, with one singular exception, and this was connected with his daughter Joanna. The rest of the family were commonplace, prosperous young people, honest enough hearts, but too shallow to be affected by the father's misfortune. The father's sour grapes had not set these children's teeth on edge. Joanna—Jack, or Joe, as they called her in sport—whom they all, without any idea of selfishness or injustice, associated with the Laird, as one member of the family is occasionally chosen to bear the burdens of the others,—Joanna was papa's right hand, papa's secretary, steward, housekeeper, nurse. It had always been so; Joanna had been set aside to the office, and no one thought of depriving her of it, any more than she dreamt of resigning it.

Joanna was the child born immediately after the duel, and on the waxen brow of the baby was a crimson stain, slight but significant, which two fingers might have covered. Was this the token of retribution—the threat of vengeance? The gossips' tongues wagged busily. Some said it was Cain's brand, "the iniquity of the fathers visited on the children;" others alleged more charitably that it ought to prove a sign in the Laird's favour, to have the symbol of his guilt transferred to a scape-goat—the brow of a child. However, the gossips need not have hidden the child's face so sedulously for the first few days from the mother. Mrs. Crawfurd took the matter quite peaceably, and was relieved that no worse misfortune had befallen her or her offspring. "Poor little dear!" it was sad that she should carry such a trace; but she daresayed she would outgrow it, or she must wear flat curls—it was a pity that they had gone quite out of fashion. It was the father who kissed the mark passionately, and carried the child oftenest in his arms, and let her sit longest on his knee; and so she became his darling, and learnt all his ways, and could suit herself to his fancies, and soothe his pains, from very youthful years. The public recognised this peculiar property of her father in Joanna, and identified her with the sorrowful period of his history. She was pointed out in connexion with the story—the tragedy of the county,—and she knew instinctively that there would be a whispered reference to her whenever it was told in society.

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The Crawfurds had a cousin visiting them—an English cousin, Polly Musgrave—from the luxury and comparative gaiety of her rich, childless aunt's house in York. Polly was a well-endowed orphan, had no near family ties, and had been educated in the worldly wisdom and epicurean

philosophy of a fashionable girls' school. She had come to spend a few weeks, and get acquainted with her Scotch country cousins. Polly had not found her heart, but it was to the credit of her sense and good-nature that she made the very best of a sojourn that had threatened to be a bore to her. She dazzled the girls, she romped with the boys, she entered with the greatest glee into rural occupations, rode on the roughest pony, saw sunset and sunrise from Barnbogle, and threatened to learn to milk cows and cut corn. She brought inconceivable motion and sparkle into the rather stagnant country house, and she was the greatest possible contrast to Joanna Crawford. Joanna was a natural curiosity to Polly, and the study amused her, just as she made use of every other variety and novelty, down to the poultry-yard and kitchen-garden at the Ewes.

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The girls were out on the moor, in the drowsy heat of a summer day, grouped idly and prettily into such a cluster as girls will fall into without effort. Susan, the beauty—there is always a beauty among several girls—in languid propriety, with her nice hair, and her scrupulously falling collar and sleeves, and her blush of a knot of ribbon; Lilius, the strong-minded, active person, sewing busily at charity work, of which all estimable households have now their share; Constantia, the half-grown girl, lying in an awkward lump among the hay, intently reading her last novel, and superlatively scorning the society of her grown-up relatives; Joanna, sitting thoughtfully, stroking old Gyp, the ragged terrier, that invariably ran after either Joanna or her father; and Polly, who had been riding with Oliver, standing with her tucked-up habit, picturesque hat and feathers, smart little gentleman's riding-gloves and whip, and very *espiègle* face—a face surrounded by waves of silky black hair, with a clear pale skin, and good eyes and teeth, which Polly always declared were her fortune in the way of good looks; but her snub nose was neither of a vulgar nor coarse tendency—it was a very lively, coquettish, handsomely cut, irresistible cock nose.

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If these girls on the moor had been tried in the fire heated seven times, it would not have been to the strong-minded, broad-chested, dark-browed Lilius that they would have clung. They would have come crouching in their extremity and taken hold of the skirt of round, soft, white Joanna, with the little notable stain on her temple.

Polly was detailing her adventures and repeating her news with a relish that was appetizing.

"We went as far as Lammerhaugh, when Oliver remembered that he had a commission for your father at Westcotes, just when my love, Punch, was broken off his trot, and promised to canter, and the morning was so fresh then—a jewel of a morning. It was provoking; I wanted Noll to continue absent in mind, or prove disobedient, or something, but you good folks are so conscientious."

"Duty first, and then pleasure," said Lilius emphatically.

"That was a Sunday-school speech, Lilius, and spoken out of school; you ought to pay a forfeit; fine her, Susie."

"Aren't you hot, Polly?" asked Susan, without troubling herself to take up the jest.

"Not a bit—no more than you are; I'm up to a great deal yet; I'll go to the offices and gather the eggs. No, I am warm though, and I don't want to be blowsy to-night; I think I'll go into the house to the bath-room, and have a great icy splash of a shower-bath."

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"You'll hurt your health, Polly, for ever bathing at odd hours, as you do," remonstrated Joanna.

"All nonsense, my dear; I always do what is pleasantest, and it agrees with me perfectly. In winter, I do toast my toes; and you know I eat half-a-dozen peaches and plums at a time like a South Sea Islander, only I believe they feast on cocoa-nut and breadfruit; don't they, Conny? You are the scholar; you know you have your geography at your finger-ends yet."

"Oh, don't tease me, Polly!" protested Conny impatiently.

"Dear Jack, hand me a sprig of broom to stick in Conny's ear," persisted Polly in a loud whisper.

Constantia shook her head furiously, as if she were already horribly tickled, and that at the climax of her plot.

"Never mind, Conny, I'll protect you. What a shame, Polly, to spoil her pleasure!" cried Joanna indignantly.

"I beg your pardon, Donna Quixotina."

"I wonder you girls can waste your time in this foolish manner," lectured Lilius, with an air of superiority; "you are none of you better than another, always pursuing amusement."

"What a story, Lilius!" put in Polly undauntedly; "you know I sew yard upon yard of muslin-work, and embroider ells of French merino, and task myself to get done within a given time. Aunt Powis says I make myself a slave."

"Because you like it," declared Lilius disdainfully; "you happen to be a clever sewer, and you are fond of having your fingers busy and astonishing everybody—besides, you admire embroidery in muslin and cloth; and even your pocket-money—what with gowns and bonnets, tickets to oratorios and concerts, and promenades, and 'the kid shoes and perfumery,' which are papa's old-fashioned summing up of our expenses, bouquets and fresh gloves would be nearer the truth—won't always meet the claims upon your gold and silver showers; and Susan," added Lilius, not to

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be cheated out of her diatribe, and starting with new alacrity, "practising attitudes and looking at her hands; and Conny reading her trashy romances."

"It is not a romance, Liliás," complained Conny piteously; "it is a tale of real life."

"It is all the same," maintained the inexorable Liliás; "one of the most aggravating novels I ever read was a simple story."

"Oh, Liliás, do lend it to me!" begged Polly; "I'm not literary, but it is delightful to be intensely interested until the very hair rises on the crown of one's head."

"I don't know that you would like it," put in Joanna; "it is not one of the modern novels, and it has only one dismal catastrophe; it is the fine old novel by Mrs. Inchbald."

"Then I don't want it; I don't care for old things, since I have not a palate for old wines or an eye for old pictures. I hate the musty, buckram ghosts of our fathers."

"Oh! but Mrs. Inchbald never raised ghosts, Polly; she manoeuvred stately, passionate men and women of her own day." [Page 10]

"The wiser woman she. But they would be ghosts to me, Jack, unless they were in the costume of the present day; there is not an inch of me given to history."

"And you, Joanna," concluded Liliás, quite determined to breast every interruption and finish her peroration, "you have listened, and smiled, and frowned, and dreamt for an hour."

"I was waiting in case papa should want me," apologized Joanna, rather humbly.

"That need not have hindered you from hemming round the skirt of this frock."

"Oh, Liliás! I am sorry for you, girl," cried Polly. "You're in a diseased frame of mind; you are in a fidget of work; you don't know the enjoyment of idleness, the luxury of laziness. You'll spoil your complexion; your hair will grow grey; no man will dare to trifle with such a notable woman!"

"I don't care!" exclaimed Liliás bluntly and magnanimously. "I don't want to be trifled with; I don't value men's admiration."

"Now! Now!! Now!!! Now!!!!" protested Polly; "I don't value men's admiration either, of course, but I like partners, and I would not be fond of being branded as a strong-minded female, a would-be Lady Bountiful, a woman going a-tracking; that's what men say of girls who don't care to be trifled with. But, Liliás, are you quite sure you don't believe in any of the good old stories—the 'goody' stories I would call them if I were a man—of the amiable girl who went abroad in the old pelisse, and who was wedded to the enthusiastic baronet? My dears, you must have observed they were abominably untrue; the baronet, weak and false, always, since the world began, marries the saucy, spendthrift girl, who is prodigal in rich stuffs, and bright colours, and becoming fits, and neat boots and shoes—who thinks him worth listening to, and laughing with, and thinking about—the fool." [Page 11]

"Really, Polly, you are too bad," cried both Susan and Liliás at once; their stock-in-trade exhausted, and not knowing very well what they meant, or what they should suggest further if this sentence were not answer enough.

"Now, I believe Joanna does not credit the goody stories, or does not care for them, rather; but we are not all heroines, we cannot all afford an equal indifference."

Joanna coloured until the red stain became undistinguishable, and even Polly felt conscious that her allusion was too flippant for the cause.

"So you see, Liliás," she continued quickly, "I'm not the least ashamed of having been caught fast asleep in my room before dinner the other rainy day. I always curl myself up and go to sleep when I've got nothing better to do, and I count the capacity a precious gift; besides, I will let you into a secret worth your heads: it improves your looks immensely after you've been gadding about for a number of days, and horribly dissipated in dancing of nights at Christmas, or in the oratorio week, or if you are in a town when the circuit is sitting—not present as a prisoner, Conny."

"Polly!" blazed out Constantia, who, on the plea of the needle-like sharpness and single-heartedness which sometimes distinguishes her fifteen years, was permitted to be more plain-spoken and ruder than her sisters; "I hate to hear you telling of doing everything you like with such enjoyment. I think, if you had been a man, you would have been an abominable fellow, and you are only harmless because you are a girl." [Page 12]

Polly laughed immoderately. "Such a queer compliment, Conny!"

"Hold your tongue, Conny."

"Go back to your book; we'll tell mamma," scolded the elder girls; and Conny hung her head, scarlet with shame and consternation.

Conny had truth on her side; yet Polly's independence and animal delight in life, in this artificial world, was not to be altogether despised either.

Polly maintained honestly that the girl had done no harm. She was glad she had never had to

endure senior sisters, and if she had been afflicted with younger plagues, she would have made a point of not snubbing them, on the principle of fair play.

"And you were a little heathenish, Polly," suggested Joanna, "not giving fair play to the heroism of the ancients."

But Susan had long been waiting her turn, testifying more interest in her right to speak than she usually wasted on the affairs of the state. She wished to cross-examine Polly on a single important expression, and although Susan at least was wonderfully harmless, her patience could hold out no longer.

"Why are you afraid of being blowsy to-night, Polly?"

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"I'm not frightened, I would not disturb myself about a risk; but you've kept an invitation all this time under my tongue, not in my pockets, I assure you;" and Polly elaborately emptied them, the foppish breast pocket, and that at the waist.

"It is only from Mrs. Maxwell," sighed Susan; "we are never invited anywhere except to Hurlton, in this easy way."

"But there is company; young Mr. Jardine has come home to Whitethorn, and he is to dine with the Maxwells, and we are invited over to Hurlton in the evening lest the claret or the port should be too much for him."

The girls did not say "Nonsense!" they looked at each other; Joanna was very pale, the red stain was very clear now. At last Liliás spoke, hesitating a little to begin with, "It is so like Mrs. Maxwell—without a moment's consideration—so soon after his return, before we had met casually, as we must have done. I dare say she is sorry now, when she comes to think over it. I hope Mr. Maxwell will be angry with her—the provoking old goose," ran on Liliás, neither very reverently nor very gratefully for an excellent, exemplary girl.

"There is one thing, we can't refuse," said Susan with marvellous decision; "it would be out of the question for us to avoid him; it would be too marked for us to stay away."

"Read your book, Conny," commanded Liliás fiercely; "you were sufficiently intent upon it a moment ago; girls should not be made acquainted with such troubles."

"I don't want to be a bar upon you," cried the belated Conny, rising and walking away sulkily, but pricking her ears all the time.

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"Joanna, you had better mention the matter to papa."

"Don't you think you're making an unnecessary fuss?" remarked Polly. "Of course, I remembered uncle's misfortune," she admitted candidly, "though none of you speak of it, and I noticed Oliver stammer dreadfully when Mrs. Maxwell mentioned Mr. Jardine; but I thought that at this time of day, when everybody knew there was no malice borne originally, and Uncle Crawford might have been killed, you might have been polite and neighbourly with quiet consciences. I tell you, I mean to set my cap at young Mr. Jardine of Whitethorn, and when I marry him, and constitute him a family connexion, of course the relics of that old accident will be scattered to the winds."

"Oh! Polly, Polly!" cried the girls, "you must never, never speak so lightly to papa."

"Of course not, I am not going to vex my uncle; I can excuse him, but Joanna need not look so scared. There is not such a thing as retribution and vengeance, child, in Christian countries; it is you who are heathenish. Or have you nursed a vain imagination of encountering Mr. Jardine, unknown to each other, and losing your hearts by an unaccountable fascination, and being as miserable as the principals in the second last chapter of one of Conny's three volumes? or were you to atone to him in some mysterious, fantastic, supernatural fashion, for the unintentional wrong? Because if you have done so, I'm afraid it is all mist and moonshine, poor Jack, quite as much as the twaddling goody stories."

"Polly," said Joanna angrily, but speaking low, "I think you might spare us on so sad a subject."

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"I want you to have common sense; I want you to be comfortable; no wonder my uncle has never recovered his spirits."

"Indeed, Polly, I don't think you've any reason to interfere in papa's concerns."

"I don't see that you are entitled to blame Joanna," defended sister Liliás, stoutly;—Liliás, who was so swift to find fault herself.

"There, I'll say no more; I beg your pardon, I merely intended to show you your world in an ordinary light."

"Do you know, Polly, that Mrs. Jardine has never visited us since?" asked Susan.

"Very likely, she was entitled to some horror. But she is a reasonable woman. Mr. Maxwell told me—every third party discusses the story behind your backs whenever it chances to come up, I warn you—Mr. Maxwell informed me that she never blamed Uncle Crawford, and that she sent her son away from her because she judged it bad for him to be brought up among such recollections, and feared that when he was a lad he might be tampered with by the servants, and might imbibe prejudices and aversions that would render him gloomy and vindictive, and unlike

other people for the rest of his life; she could not have behaved more wisely. I am inclined to suppose that Mrs. Jardine of Whitethorn has more knowledge of the world and self-command than the whole set of my relations here, unless, perhaps, my Aunt Crawford—she will only speculate on your dresses—that is the question, Susan."

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II.—THE ORDEAL.

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"Would you not have liked to have gone with the other girls, Joanna? for Conny, she must submit to be a *halflin* yet. But is it not dull for you only to hear of a party? country girls have few enough opportunities of being merry," observed Mr. Crawford, with his uneasy consciousness, and his sad habit of self-reproach.

"Oh, Mr. Crawford, it would not have done—not the first time—Joanna had much better stay at home on this occasion. She is too well brought up to complain of a little sacrifice."

It is curious how long some wives will live on friendly terms with their husbands and never measure their temperaments, never know where the shoe pinches, never have a notion how often they worry, and provoke, and pain their spouses, when the least reticence and tact would keep the ship and its consort sailing in smooth water.

Mrs. Crawford would have half-broken her heart if Mr. Crawford had not changed his damp stockings; she would fling down her work and look out for him at any moment of his absence; she would not let any of her children, not her favourite girl or boy, take advantage of him; she was a good wife, still she did not know where the shoe pinched, and so she stabbed him perpetually, sometimes with fretting pin-pricks, sometimes with sore sword-strokes.

"My dear, I wish you were not a sacrifice to me." It is a heart-breaking thing to hear a man speak quite calmly, and like a man, yet with a plaintive tone in his voice. Ah! the old, arch spirit of the literary Laird of the Ewes had been shaken to its centre, though he was a tolerable man of business, and rather fond of attending markets, sales, and meetings.

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"Papa, what are you thinking of?" exclaimed Joanna indignantly. "I am very proud to help you, and I go out quite as often as the others. Do you not know, we keep a card hung up on Liliias's window-shutter, and we write down every month's invitations—in stormy weather they are not many—and we fulfil them in rotation. You don't often want me in the evenings, for you've quite given me up at chess, and you only condescend to backgammon when it is mid-winter and there has been no curling, and the book club is all amiss. Liliias insists upon the card, because the parties are by no means always merry affairs, and she says that otherwise we would slip them off on each other, and pick and choose, and be guilty of a great many selfish, dishonourable proceedings."

"Liliias is the wise woman in the household. I'm aware there is a wise woman in every family—but how comes it that Liliias is the authority with us? It always rather puzzles me, Joanna; for when I used to implore Miss Swan to accept her salary, and pay Dominie Macadam his lawful demand of wages for paving the boys' brains in preparation for the High School, they always complimented me with the assurance that you were my clever daughter."

"Because they saw your weak side, I dare say, my dear," suggests Mrs. Crawford.

"No, I am the cleverest, papa; I am so deep that I see that it is easier to live under an absolute monarchy than to announce myself a member of a republic, and assert my prerogatives and defend my privileges—but I confess I have a temper, papa. Liliias says I am very self-willed, and I must grant that she is generally in the right."

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"You don't feel satisfied with the bridle, child, till it gets into stronger hands."

"Yes, Joanna has a temper," chimed in Mrs. Crawford, pursuing her own thread of the conversation. "Strangers think her softer than Susan; but I have seen her violent, and when she takes it into her head, she is the most stubborn of the whole family. I don't mean to scold you, my dear; you are a very good girl, too, but you are quite a deception."

"Oh, mamma! what a character!" Joanna could not help laughing. "I must amend my ways."

Of course, Joanna was violent at times, as we imagine a sensitive girl with an abhorrence of meanness and vice, and she was stubborn when she was convinced of the right and her friends would assert the wrong. Mr. Crawford's idea was, that Joanna had a temper like Cordelia, not when she spoke in her pleased accents, "gentle, soft, and low," but when she was goaded into vehemence, as will happen in the best regulated palaces and households.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Crawford, five minutes afterwards, disturbing the cosy little party round the tea-table by her sudden air of distress. "Oh! dear, dear me! Susie has left her pearl sprigs behind her. There they are on the loo-table. My pearl sprigs, Mr. Crawford, that I used to wear when I was young; they have come in again for the hair, and Susie settled they were just the thing to give a more dressed look to her spring silk—these easy way parties are so ill to manage, and Polly was of the same mind, and she came in to show me the effect, for I always like to see the girls after they are dressed, and be satisfied how they look—and there she has forgotten the box, and she will appear quite a dowdy, and be so vexed."

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"I don't think it will signify very much, mamma; Susan looks very well in her blue silk."

"But it is such a pity, Joanna; so unfortunate,—she only put them out of her hand for one moment, and you see there they are still;" and so Mrs. Crawford sounded the lamentation, and dwelt on its salient points, and ingeniously extracted new grounds of regret, till, by dint of repetition, in ten minutes more Mr. Crawford and Joanna were almost persuaded that Susan had sustained a serious loss.

"Send a servant with the foolery," proposed Mr. Crawford, seeking a little relief, and tolerably affronted at his interest in the question.

"I don't think it would do. Would it, Joanna? There is always such confusion at Hurlton when there is company? and then they have people dining. There would be a mistake, and my pearls are no joke, Mr. Crawford. They cost papa fifty pounds when they were so prettily set to go to Sir William's ball. Ah! you don't remember it. There would be a fuss, and Lillias would not like it. If Oliver had not been there at dinner, or Charlie had been at home—"

"Of the two evils choose the least," recommended Mr. Crawford, taking up his book.

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"If you are very anxious, mamma," said Joanna, "as it is very early, and they set out to walk round by the garden at Houndwood to get some geraniums, which Polly saw yesterday, and set her heart upon; if you order out the ponies and Sandy, I think Conny and I could easily ride over to Hurlton, and deliver the little parcel to the girls in time. It would be a nice evening ride for us, since you are afraid that Conny hangs too much over her books."

"Thank you, dear; that is just like you, Joanna, you are so sensible and helpful, no wonder papa monopolizes you. I will be so glad that Susie has the pearls. Such a pity, poor dear! that her evening should be spoilt, and they lying ready to be put on. Conny? Yes, indeed, that girl will be getting spine complaint, or the rickets. In my day it was sewing in frames that twisted girls; but these books in the lap, the head poked forward, one shoulder up, and knees half as high as the shoulder, are a thousand times worse."

"Good luck to you, Jack. Now you deserve your name, since you constitute yourself groom of the chambers to your sisters."

Joanna laughed back to him. "Come and meet us, papa." And in the shortest interval given to tie on their hats and skirts, the girls were racing along to Hurlton.

In that moorland country, with outlying moorland fields where it was not primitive nature—in a large family like that of the Crawfurds, rough walking ponies swarmed as in Shetland. They were in constant request at the Ewes, and the girls rode them lightly and actively, with the table-boy, Sandy, at their heels, as readily as they walked. Perhaps Joanna was the least given to the practice, though she availed herself of it on this domestic occasion.

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Joanna was a deception, as her mother said. She was a little, round, soft thing, whom you would have expected to flash over with sunshine. She was not a melancholy girl—as you may have been able to judge—and it was not her blame that anything in her position had developed her into a thoughtful, earnest character. But then she was always fancied younger than she really was; people supposed her as easy as her mother, while she could be vehement, and was firm to tenacity. Perhaps the reason of the puzzle might be, not only that she had a little of that constitutional indolence which serves to conceal latent energy, but that, in trifles, she did inherit, in a marked degree, the unexacting, kindly temper which causes the wheels of every-day life to turn easily. She allowed herself to be pushed aside. She accepted the fate or superstition which linked her with her father's sorrow; she was content, she thought, to suffer the dregs of his act with him; she wished she could suffer for him; the connexion had indeed a peculiar charm for her enthusiasm and generosity, like her admiration of this Corncockle Moor.

Corncockle Moor, in its dreariness, loneliness, and wildness, now hung out a vast curtain, which Joanna and Conny were skirting under the golden decline of day, not so far from the spot where the little group of men had gathered on the autumn morning, and the two sharp, short cracks, and the little curl of blue smoke had indicated where one life had gone out, and another was blasted in a single second. Joanna had scarcely got time to wonder how Harry Jardine and her sisters would look at each other, and she did not allow herself to think of it now. She would wait till she had skilfully avoided any chance of encountering the company, delivered her mother's errand, and was safe with Conny, cantering homewards. Even then she would not dwell on the notion, lest her father should allude to the stranger, and she should betray any feeling to discompose him. "I must take care of papa. Papa is my charge," repeated Joanna, proud as any Roman maid or matron.

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What malign star sent Mrs. Maxwell into the bedroom, just as Joanna had entered it? She ought to have been only quitting the dining-room for the drawing-room, but Mrs. Maxwell was always to be found where she was least expected. She was a good-natured, social, blundering body, whom girls condescended to affect, because she liberally patronized young people, proving, however, quite as often the marplot, as the maker of their fortunes—not from malice, but from a certain maladroitness and fickleness. Mrs. Maxwell took it into her head to lay hands on Joanna, and to send out for Conny, whom Joanna had cautiously deposited in the paddock, and to insist that they should remain, and join the party. She would take no denial; she never got them all together; it was so cruel to leave out Joanna and Conny, a pair of her adopted children, since she had no bairns of her own to bless herself with. She had plenty of partners, or the girls would dance

together. Yes, say no more about it; she was perfectly delighted with the accession to her number—it was to be.

Conny's eyes sparkled greedily. "Oh, Joanna! mamma won't be angry."

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Oh, Conny! you traitor!

"There, it will be a treat to Conny, and there is nothing to prevent it. Conny has let the cat out of the bag, as Tom would say. Conny consents, Joanna may sulk as she pleases."

"I won't sulk, Mrs. Maxwell; I'll go off by myself, and leave you Constantia, since she wishes it."

"To hear of such a thing! You girls won't allow it. It is very shabby, Susan, Lilies, Miss Musgrave, that Joanna should not have a little amusement with the rest."

"I'm sure we won't prevent it, Mrs. Maxwell, we don't stand in the way," said Lilies stiffly; "Joanna is free to remain or return as she chooses. Joanna, you had better stay, or there will be a scene, and the whole house will hear of it."

"Keep her, Mrs. Maxwell, please," cried Miss Polly mischievously; "my cousin Joan is so scarce of her countenance, that I want to know how she can behave in company."

"Very well, I assure you," avouched Mrs. Maxwell zealously; then she began to remember, and start, and flounder—"only she is so modest. Joanna, my dear, you cannot be so stupid as to hesitate from a certain reason?"

"Oh, no. You can send back Sandy, Mrs. Maxwell, since you are so good. Mamma knows what we will require; or I will write a little note."

Joanna could have borne any encounter rather than a discussion of the obstacle with Mrs. Maxwell—a discussion which might be gone over again any day to anybody.

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But Joanna was terribly vexed and provoked that she had exposed herself to this infliction, though she was fain to comfort herself with the argument that it would make no difference to papa's feelings; and she trusted that she and Conny would slip into the drawing-room when the guests were occupied, and subside into corners, and escape attention.

Joanna was established in her recess, nearly confident that she was not conspicuous, and considerably interested in watching Harry Jardine.

Mrs. Jardine's intentions had been in a great measure fulfilled. The young Laird of Whitethorn had grown up at his English school and German university without the cloud which rested on his father's end descending on his spirit. He was as strong and pleasant and blithe as his father, with the self-possession which a life amongst strangers, and the available wallet of a traveller's information, could graft upon his gentle birth and early manhood. At the same time, there was no deception about Harry Jardine. While he was gay and good-humoured, he had an air of vigour and action, and even a dash of temper lurking about his black curls and bright eyes, which prepared one for hearing that he had not only hobnobbed with the Göttingen students, but had also won their prizes, and thrashed them when they aspired to English sports; and had travelled four nights without sleep, under stress of weather, to reach Whitethorn on the day he had fixed to his mother. He had brought a steady character along with him, too; they said that he had been a good son, and had remembered that his mother was a widow, and had endured enough grief to last her all her days. Mrs. Jardine, who was not a flatterer, declared that Harry had not cost her a care which she needed to grudge. There is enough temptation, and to spare, for men like Harry Jardine, but it is not in such that early self-indulgence and lamentable weakness may be feared.

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Harry Jardine was the style of man fitted to command the admiration of Joanna Crawford. Contemplative girls love men of experience. Staid girls love men with a dash—a dash of bravery, self-reliance, or even of recklessness. Harry Jardine's gladness to be at home; his interest in everything and everybody; the pleasant tone in which he referred to his mother; the genuine fun of which he gave a glimpse; the ring of his laugh, were all set store upon by Joanna with a sober satisfaction.

Harry had not been so agreeable, or felt the world so pleasant, two hours before. It was impossible to escape memories or to hide wincing; but he had said to himself that these associations ought to have been worn threadbare by familiarity, or to have been approached gradually, and he could not conquer his awkwardness or crush his susceptibility. But youth is pliable and versatile, and Harry Jardine was determined to evince no dislike, and make no marked distinction. Very soon the Miss Crawfurds and their cousin blended with the other young ladies in his view,—nay, he discovered that he had come across a cousin of theirs settled abroad, and was qualified to afford them information of his prospects and pursuits handsomely.

So far Joanna's penalty had been moderate, until, towards the close of the evening, when most of the young people had gone into the library to get some refreshments, she found herself left in her corner almost alone, with Mr. Jardine talking to Mrs. Maxwell within a few yards of her. This was the occurrence which Joanna had dreaded. "By the pricking of her thumbs" she was aware of a wicked destiny approaching her. Mr. Jardine in his conversation glanced towards her, then looked away, and beat his foot on the carpet, and a twitch passed over the muscles of his face, and his smile, though he still affected a smile, had lost all its glow. Joanna dared not look any longer. Mrs. Maxwell was certainly speaking of her. Perhaps in her rash inconsiderate way she

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had volunteered information.

Perhaps Harry Jardine had himself made inquiry—the pale girl who kept in the background, with the little scar—was it—on her temple? Joanna quivered under the process, and the witness beneath the light brown hair throbbed painfully. She was glad when Mr. Jardine walked away quickly; but the next moment he came back and turned directly towards her.

"I have been introduced to your sisters, Miss Crawford, and you must excuse further ceremony from me. Will you allow me to take you into the next room and get a glass of wine or a biscuit for you? You should not try fasting at an evening party. Mrs. Maxwell would call it a very bad example."

He spoke fast, with a laugh, and crimsoned all over. She knew perfectly well what he was about. He was determined to perform all that could possibly be required of him. He would put down invidious comments, disarm gossip, in short cut off the gorgon's head at the first struggle. They might term it unnatural, overdone, but at least it would not be to do again; and Harry Jardine's was the temper, that, if you presented an obstacle to it, it itched the more to grapple with the obstacle on the spot.

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Precisely for the reason that she could not ride away from the party, after Mrs. Maxwell assailed her with a motive for her conduct, Joanna could not repel his overture. It was incredibly trying to her. He saw how differently she was affected from her sisters. He was aware of another influence. He felt very uncomfortable. Why, the very flesh of his arm, which she touched lightly enough, crept, when the superstition of the old ordeal of the bier flashed upon him, as he caught, with a furtive glance, the tiny brand pricking and burning to fiery incandescence above the waxen face. Was it a splash of his father's blood impressed there, till the "solid flesh" would verily "melt"? Was it his neighbourhood which brought out the ruddy spot, that, like the scarlet streaks down Lady Macbeth's little hands, would not wash off? Absurd folly! But he wished he had done with it. He wished old ladies would confine themselves to their own concerns. He hoped fainting was not heard of among the girls of the moors—that would be a talk! He supposed he must say something commonplace and civil; he must task his brains for that purpose. He coined a remark, and Joanna answered him quietly and with simplicity. She must have possessed and exercised great self-command. It struck Harry Jardine. It was a quality he valued highly, possibly because he felt such difficulty in looking it up on his own account. All through the few minutes' further conversation and association between them, it impressed him, conjointly with the odd recoiling sensations, which he had so rapidly shaken off, where her sisters were concerned.

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Harry had the faults of his kind, not inveterately, for he spoke good English to women; but as he indulged in his dear island slang to men, he felt bound to use it to himself. "This poor little woman is thorough game," he said to himself. "I can see that she is as tender as a little bird, yet she has shown as much pluck as a six-foot grenadier? She has not flinched at all. I can do justice to this spirit." He remembered it all the time when Polly Musgrave was sounding him, and when he did not choose to give her the slightest satisfaction.

"I saw you with my cousin Joanna, Mr. Jardine; you'll find her in the Spanish style."

"Not in complexion certainly. Do you mean in name?"

"Oh, no! Do you know so little about the south of Scotland after all? You had better conceal this piece of ignorance. I am sure you understand this much—a general acquaintance with the whole habitable globe would not atone for a deficiency with regard to this one dear little spot of earth. Joanna is as common a name in the south of Scotland as Dorothy is in the north of England. Examine the register, and see if you have not twenty Jardine cousins christened Joanna. I call Joanna in the Spanish style, because, although she conceals it, and you cannot have found it out yet, she is a vestige of romantic chivalry. Joanna is a Donna Quixotina, an unworldly, unearthly sort of girl, with a dream of tilting with the world and succouring the distressed. I term it a dream, because, of course, she will never accomplish it, any more than the knight of La Mancha, and she will be obliged to descend from her stilts by-and-by. I call Susan in the beautiful style, and Liliás in the good style, and Conny in the sweet sixteen style."

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"Miss Musgrave, I am not versed in ladies' styles, you must teach me;" and Polly and he looked into each other's eyes, and laughed and felt they were match for match.

And Joanna had a little regret that Mr. Jardine should, like most men, be caught with Polly Musgrave; not that Joanna did not admire Polly, though she was her antithesis, and count her handsome and brilliant in her way, like any sun-loving dahlia or hollyhock; but Joanna had no enthusiasm in her admiration of Polly, and she had a little enthusiasm in her estimation of Harry Jardine.

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III.—"HE LAY DOWN TO SLEEP ON THE MOORLAND SO DREARY."

Polly Musgrave was gone with flying colours. She had been indefatigable in procuring her aunt, uncle, and cousins, parting gifts that would suit their tastes; she had actually toiled herself in paying courtesy-calls round the neighbourhood; and she had written half-a-dozen letters, and evinced a considerable amount of successful management in procuring an invitation for two of

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her cousins to join her during the week or weeks of York's gaieties. She would have had Joanna also, but Joanna would not leave home at the season when her father was liable to his worst rheumatic twinges. Polly had shown herself really good-natured under her ease and luxury, and Joanna had been a little penitent and vexed that she did not like Polly any more than in a cousinly way. Whether Polly was right in saying that Joanna was romantic or not, Polly had not a particle of romance in her constitution, though much was flourishing, fresh, and fragrant, in pure, commonplace, selfish, good-natured worldliness, for it is a mistake to suppose that quality (without hypocrisy) has not its attractive guise. Without knowing herself romantic, Joanna was apt to quarrel in her own mind with cleverer girls, accomplished girls, pleasant girls, even good girls, sensible women, business women, nay religious women, until she feared she must be fault-finding, satirical, sour—as her sisters protested at intervals. Joanna, sour? Joanna, so charitable and sympathizing? Take comfort, Joanna; the spirit is willing, though the flesh is weak.

The Ewes was in its normal condition; the parish was in its normal condition; the excitement of Harry Jardine's return to Whitethorn had died out; he might shoot, as it was September, or fish still, or farm, or ride, or read as he pleased. He retained his popularity. His father had been a popular man, fully more popular than Mr. Crawford of the Ewes. Harry was even more approved, for mingling with the world had smoothed down in him the intolerance of temper which beset his father. What did Joanna Crawford say to such compromising agreeability? Joanna was disarmed in his case; she contradicted herself, as we all do. She had the penetration to perceive that many externals went to raise Harry Jardine's price in the eyes of the world; externals which had little to do with the individual man,—youth, a good presence, a fair patrimony, freedom from appropriating ties. Strip Harry of these, render him middle-aged, time-worn or care-worn, reduce him to poverty, marry him, furnish him with a clamorous circle of connections, land-lock him with children! Would the difference not be startling? Would he need to be condemned for the world's favour, then? Joanna trowed not.

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The Crawfurds met Mr. Jardine occasionally, but there was no probability of the acquaintance ripening, since Mr. Crawford could not call for Harry at Whitethorn, and Harry did not see the necessity of offering his company at the Ewes. Mrs. Jardine had not visited much since the shock of her widowhood, and she only now began to recur to her long-disused visiting-list on Harry's account. Though a reasonable woman, it is scarcely requisite to say that she did not propose to renew her friendship with the family at the Ewes. The blow which rendered her without control did not break her spirit, but it pressed out its buoyance. Mrs. Jardine was a grave, occupied, resigned woman, no longer a blithe one, very fond and proud of Harry, but grateful, not glad in her fondness and pride.

The frost had come early, strong, and stern on those Highlands of the Lowlands, those moors of the south. The "lustre deep" at twilight and dawn, the imperial Tyrian dye at noon, the glorious "orange and purple and grey" at sunset and sunrise, which, once known and loved, man never forgets, nor woman either—all would soon be swept away this year, and Joanna regretted it. She liked the flower-garden, but, after all, the garden was tame to the moor. The moor's seasons were, at best, short—short the golden flush of its June; short the red gleam of its September. Not that the lowland Moor has not its dead, frosted grace in its winter winding-sheet, and its tender spring charm, when curlews scream over it incessantly. But Joanna had never seen the autumn so short as this year; and she had heard them tell, that in the Fall, when poor Mr. Jardine was killed, the heather remained bright till November.

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Thinking of that date caused Joanna, when she strolled out on the moor one morning, to go near the scene with its melancholy celebrity.

It was quite early in the morning, a hail shower lying all around, though the sky was a deep sapphire blue, with the wan ghost of the moon lingering on the horizon, and the atmosphere bitter cold. The breakfast was late at the Ewes, owing to Mr. Crawford's delicate health, and because Mrs. Crawford had her fancies like Mrs. Primrose. Thus Joanna was frequently abroad before breakfast, and, like most persons of healthy organization, was rather tempted to court the stinging air as it blew across the heather, bracing her whole frame, nipping her fingers and toes, and sending blush-roses into her cheeks.

Joanna was walking along, feeling cheerful, although she was in that neighbourhood, and vaunting to herself that their moor was infinitely superior to a park, when a grey object caught her eye, lying beyond some whin bushes—a thing raised above the ground, but stretched still and motionless. Joanna stopped with a strange thrill. No! it was not on that piece of earth; but so must he have lain on that disastrous morning, far removed from the abundance, and garnered goods, and heartiness of harvest.

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Joanna stood a moment, then reproaching herself with cowardice, egotism, inhumanity, she advanced, her heart fluttering wildly. Yes, it was a man in tweed-coat, trousers, and cap; and stay! was that a gun by his side? Joanna could not go a step further; she closed her eyes to hide the blood which she felt must be oozing and stealing along the ground, or else congealed among the heather and it was only after she had told herself how far she was from home, and how long it would be ere she could run back for assistance, that she opened them and approached the figure. There was no blood that she could see; the man might not be dead, but stupefied or insensible. Oh, dear! it was Harry Jardine of Whitethorn; the hail-drops among his black curls, the sprigs of the heather dented into his brown cheek.

It darted into Joanna's mind like inspiration how the chance had occurred. She remembered

Susan had said, yesterday, that she had met Mr. Jardine going in shooting garb across the moor in the afternoon, and he had stopped her and asked if she had seen a dog. He had taken out a new dog and lost it, and was vexed at wasting half the morning in the pursuit. She recalled, with a peculiar vividness of perception, that somebody had observed, one day lately, that Mr. Jardine was not so strong as he looked; that he had fever while abroad, just before he came home, and that his mother was annoyed because he would not take care of himself, and complained that he was constantly over-taxing his unrecovered powers, and subjecting himself to fresh attacks of illness. Joanna remembered, with a pang, that she had laughed at the remark, mentally conjuring up Harry Jardine's athletic, sunburnt comeliness.

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Joanna freed herself more quickly from this phantom than from the last, and, while she did so, called out his name, and stepped to his side, stooping down and even touching him. He was breathing, though he was very cold and stiff, and she did not rouse him. Oh, Joanna was very thankful! But what should she do next? Life must be very faint, and frozen in the muscular, active young man. He had loitered at his sport till the dusk; he had been bewildered on the moor—strange to him as to a foreigner; he had wandered here and there impatient and weary; but still more angry with himself than alarmed. He had sat down in the intense chill and dim darkness to recover himself; no way forewarned, "simply because he was on Corncockle Moor, so near home," on a September night. He had sunk down further and further, until the stealthy foe sprang upon him and held him fast—the sleep from which there is so tardy an awakening.

Joanna dared not leave the faint, vital spark to smoulder down or leap out. The moor was very unfrequented at this hour; at certain periods of the day, portions of it, intersected by meandering tracks, were crossed by men labouring in the adjacent fields or quarry; but till then it was only the circumstance of alarm being excited on Harry's account, or her protracted absence giving rise to surmise and search, that could bring them companions.

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As a forlorn hope Joanna raised her voice and cried for assistance; fear and distress choked the sound, and the freezing air caused it to fall on the silence with a ringing quaver. She persevered, however, every now and then varying the appeal, "Papa, Lilies, Sandy, do some of you come to me; I want you here, for God's sake! here."

She took his big hands and chafed them between her own little ones; she lifted his head on her lap, her fingers getting entangled in his curly hair, she prayed for him that he might be restored to them.

He continued to breathe dully and heavily; his eyes never unclosed; she felt tempted to raise the lashes, as she would lift up and peep under the lids of a child. Ah! but she feared to see the balls sightless and glazing over fast. The marked, lively face was placid as if it were set in death, and the slight contraction between the brows, which she had remarked the first night she saw him, was almost effaced. How dreadful it would be if he died on her knees there, in the solitude of the moor! The son at the daughter's feet, as his father at her father's. How would his mother bear it? Her father would never survive this mournful re-writing of the old letters traced in blood. It should be she rather who should die; and Joanna in her piety, her goodness, her great love for her father, her exquisite kindness for Harry Jardine, did ask God if He sought a life, in His justice and mercy, to allow hers to pay for Harry's, to substitute her in some way for Harry; and Joanna well remembered that prayer afterwards.

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Joanna was beginning to cower and fail in her trial. Suddenly she shook herself up, when she was lapsing into a heap nearly as passive as that beside her; a suggestion darted across her brain; she detected in the little pocket of her dress a bottle of a strong essence and perfume, which Polly Musgrave had forced upon her the day she left.

Joanna was quick and clear in following out a notion. With trembling fingers she poured the hot, stimulating, subtle liquid into her hollow hands, and bathed his forehead. She unloosed his cravat, and sent the warm stream over his throat and chest, rubbing them with her free hand, while she supported his head on the other arm; and inspired with fresh courage and trust she called anew this time a shrill, echoing call, and Harry Jardine shivered, sobbed, and stretched himself, and slowly opened his sealed eyes, looking her first vaguely and then wonderingly in the face, and her father's and Lilies's voices rose from opposite sides of the heath, near and far in reply. "What is it, Joanna? What has kept you? What has happened? We missed you; we were getting anxious; we are coming, coming!"

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IV.—MERCY AND NOT SACRIFICE.

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Harry Jardine was taken to the Ewes some hours before his mother, who had happily been deceived as to his return on the previous night, was even apprised of his narrow escape. He received the greatest kindness from the Crawfurds, and his mother herself found it incumbent on her to write a little note to the Ewes, thanking the family for their humanity and benevolence towards her son. It is possible, had Mrs. Jardine been awakened to her son's danger a little sooner, and before its traces were entirely blotted out, the expressions in the note might have been a few shades less general and cold.

Mr. Crawfurd excused her fully. He would not have expected Harry to come back to the Ewes, though he rejoiced, from the bottom of his heart, that Joanna had served the young fellow. How much his poor father would have been delighted in him? Mr. Crawfurd rejoiced, although he was

too righteous and humble-minded to say to himself that God was appeased, or that He had permitted this atonement as a sign in answer to his life-long penance.

Harry Jardine represented a different theory; he would be a dolt, a brute, unpardonably vindictive, if he did not cherish all friendly feelings to the Crawfurds; if he did not visit them openly and frankly. He did visit at the Ewes, but he found the plainest opportunities ready made for him during one fortnight at Hurlton, to come in contact with Joanna Crawford. She had gone there to look after Conny, suborned by Mrs. Maxwell, and laid up with a sore throat, and forlorn and wretched if one of her sisters was not looking after her.

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This intercourse could scarcely fail to have one grand climax. Joanna, the thoughtful, imaginative, true, tender woman—a fair woman besides, with that one little blot which singularly appealed to him with a harsh sweet voice—a sufficiently rare woman, to stand quite distinct from her sisters and companions in the light of the practical, active, ardent, honest heart—became the one mistress in the world for Harry Jardine, coveted and craved by him as the best gift of God, without which the others were comparatively worthless, and for which he could have been willing to sacrifice them one and all. Harry himself, in after years, confessed that since the moment he awakened from that leaden drowsiness on the moor, the image of Joanna Crawford, tending him as a mother her sick child, was constantly before him.

Joanna had not precisely the same experience. From the moment that, with the prescience of a woman where feelings are concerned, she saw the end, she avoided Harry Jardine with all her power. Harry's generous determination and daring, his fearlessness, confidence, and steadfastness overpowered her.

Mr. Crawford was dreadfully upset by Harry Jardine's application to him, his claim for forbearance, his entreaty for grace, and his candid confession that his mother was violently opposed to his suit. It was a case which could neither be considered nor rejected without remorse. Oh, bitterness, which spread like an infection through so many years, and into such different relations, and spoilt even the young man's fairness, good faith, free forgiveness, and the purity and earnestness of his passion, the pearl of his manhood, which, if lost to him, would be a loss indeed! How Harry implored Mr. Crawford to spare it to him, to reflect that it was the greatest benefit which he asked at his hands, to pause before he denied it to him solely because he had been the unfortunate means of depriving him of his father!

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Harry had agitating scenes with his mother besides; these two had never been placed against each other before, and the contest between them was neither gracious nor good for either heart.

"Harry, I am horrified at you; it is a dishonour to your poor father's memory; it is shocking to think of it; and if you have been so lost to duty as to fall into so unnatural an entanglement, it is surely the least you owe to both parents to give it up."

"Mother! I cannot see it as you do; my father fully exonerated Mr. Crawford—you have told me so a hundred times. No one, not you, his widow, mourned my father as Mr. Crawford mourned—nay, mourns him to this day."

"Harry, do you wish to see a bloody guest present at your wedding?"

"Mother, that is a baseless, cruel horror. You would not wish me to maintain a hereditary feud on the principle of my forefathers. I cannot tell what the Christian religion teaches if it does not enjoin forgiveness of injuries."

"I hope I am a Christian, Harry, and I have tried to forgive my enemies, but it is one thing to make every allowance for them and entertain charitable feelings towards them, and another to ally myself with them, and constitute them my closest friends. Harry, the whole neighbourhood would shrink from the idea of what you contemplate."

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"If my principles and my heart said Yes, not the neighbourhood, but the whole world might cry No, and I would not feel bound to listen to the clamour."

"A young man's improper boast, Harry, and since you force me to it, not the world alone—I tell you nature objects to that girl—that girl of them all; how can you look her in the face and think of love?"

"Would you have me think of hate? Since you make the allusion, I declare to you, mother, that mark appeals to you and me in another fashion. Cain's brand! do they call it? And who set the brand, and when, on Cain's brow? Sovereign clemency, after the wanderer's punishment was more than he could bear, if the reflection of my father's blood was transmitted to so innocent and noble a proxy, it must have been designed to teach such as you and me New Testament lessons of perfect charity."

"Harry, I have never been able to look that girl in the face."

"Mother, I pray never to forget that face, although it remain like an angel's face to me, because it is the fairest example of the human face divine that I ever hope to behold."

"Harry Jardine, you are mad, or worse; these are some of the sickening French and German sentimentalities against which I have been warned. There is such a thing as a wholesome sense of repulsion, an honest manly recoil, a pure instinct of loathing, a thousand times to be preferred to this morbid mixture of good and evil, friend and foe, life and death, this defiance of decency

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and general opinion."

"Very true, mother; but there are a thousand exceptional cases, and a million points of ruthless prejudice. 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' sounded very righteous and respectable in the ears of the Jews, yet I believe the sentence had its condemnation, and the amendment was neither French nor German."

"Harry, you are profane, and you forget what is due to yourself and me."

The last saying was a hard one; his mother could be no judge of his profanity, but he had been a good son, and it had not been without a curb upon him that the strong man had accustomed himself to leave so much of the power and authority of Whitethorn in the wilful woman's hands.

In the library at the Ewes Mr. Crawford was addressing Joanna very gently.

"My dear, I am very sorry it cannot be; of course Mrs. Jardine will never consent, but it goes to my heart to grieve you."

"Papa, I cannot help it."

"And to grieve Harry Jardine."

"Papa, that is worse; but do not think that anybody—that he blames you."

"We shall trust, my dear, that he will soon recover the disappointment."

"Of course—it is not a great loss."

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"My dear, pray don't smile when it hurts you, for I cannot bear it; it is natural that this should be a heavy cross to you; but setting it aside as unavoidable, is there no respect in which I can lighten it to you? No indulgence which you could fancy that I could procure for you? No old wish of his Joan's that papa could by an effort gratify? Surely I cannot be so miserable, child."

"Oh, no, papa! I mean you can please in a great many things; you always could, and you always will. Women are not like men, their natures are not so concentrated. They have so many tastes and whims, you know; I possess them by the score, and I will never cease to relish their fulfilment so long as you and I keep labouring together, papa. I am not going to be a hypocrite, papa. This strange story has vexed me a good deal, but I was aware from the first of its unsubstantial character. I still want money to be charitable on my own account, like Lilies. I've a notion to revive our old greenhouse; I've a longing to see a little of the world with you, sir, in spring and summer; I've never been indifferent to silks and muslins, though I think my chief weakness in dress is the very finest of fine chintz prints, ever so dear a yard, papa, which an artist might paint, and more of a Duchess's wear than velvet. All these matters are acceptable to me, papa."

"You are sure that you are my pet and darling."

"Yes, papa; you have spoilt me."

Joanna was gone to her own room; there she laid her head on her arm, and asked her heart bitterly, "Have I succeeded in deceiving papa? Can he believe for a moment that any poor precious treasure in the wide world will make up to me for the want of Harry Jardine; that there is anything left me but Heaven instead of Harry Jardine? But then there is papa, dear papa, and I used to be papa's. What will not women do for their children? I always thought I could attain as much for papa. I was proud to prove my love to him, and I will drive out Harry's image for papa's sake, though I should die in the struggle."

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Harry did not altogether admire this resolution. He was a good fellow, an excellent fellow, and he had the true, ineffable devotion to Joanna Crawford; but he was not free from jealousy and irritation, as well as sorrow and fear, when he was compelled to part from her for a time, and content himself with swearing fidelity on his own account, and seeing her occasionally as an ordinary acquaintance, until their relative positions should be changed, or his truth fail.

The common world rolled on its course; the seasons succeeded each other, although even they seemed to culminate in dull, monotonous vanity and vexation of spirit. The frosty wind had swept "that lustre deep from glen and brae," and the chill watery mosses alone looked green and fresh when the snow melted. It was the cold under which Joanna Crawford shivered and shrank; at least so she assured every friendly person who remarked that she was thin, and paler than ever. Mrs. Jardine had looked her in the face, nay, kept nervously glancing at her when she was visible at church, on the loch where the curling match was played, or in the concert-room at the county town.

Of course the girl would get over it; yet Joanna bore a suspicious likeness to Mrs. Jardine's sister Anne, who did not "get over" such a cross. Mrs. Jardine remembered well her sister Anne's parting look, and now, strive as she would, she could not resist the conviction that it was hovering over Joanna Crawford's face. Mrs. Jardine, like the Laird of the Ewes, could have cried, "Pray do not smile, girl; you do not know how you look; we, the initiated, have not stony enough hearts to stand that." Mrs. Jardine was surprised that Harry could be so foolish as to redden and appear displeased at Joanna Crawford's gaiety.

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Mrs. Jardine almost complained against Providence that she was condemned to punish her only child. Then she could not help speculating whether, if by some unimaginable arrangement of events, she had been the sufferer, and Harry's father had been spared to him, he would have

denied Harry his happiness in the name of her memory, and from a sense of righteous animosity, whether, if she could have looked down purified and peaceful from the spirit-world, she would have desired the sacrifice, and whether she would not have pleaded against it for love and mercy's sake?

The winter was gone, the early spring was at hand, and all around the outskirts of the moor, like an incense to spring and the Lord of the spring, rose the smoke of the whin burnings which were to clear the ground for the sweet young grass, to employ the nibbling teeth of hundreds on hundreds of sheep and lambs. Joanna Crawford had never so sighed for spring, never sat in such passive inertness (highly provocative to Lillias), receiving and realizing what it brought to her.

But the period of listlessness and inaction, life-long to some, was nearly ended for this pair. With the last snowdrops of the garden in February, and the first glinting gowans of the lea in March, came the news to the country-side of the bankruptcy of one of the first of the chain of banks, whose defalcations have accomplished more in causing property to change hands than the lances of the moss-troopers. The young Laird of Whitethorn held money in the shape of his father's shares in one of those unlucky banks; and so it fell upon him one morning like a clap of thunder that he was responsible for about as much as the acres of Whitethorn would retrieve, besides the trifling morsel to whet his appetite in the loss of his loose thousands. Harry Jardine was likely to know himself as "landless, landless," as ever a proscribed Macgregor.

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Harry rose to the encounter. "I am sorry for you, mother, and I do not pretend that I shall not regret the old moorland acres; but I shall do very well, notwithstanding. I'm old to learn a profession; but how many volunteers and retired lieutenants had to study and serve apprenticeships after the long wars! I will stick in; I don't mind it on my own account, and I will be proud to provide for you. I say, mother, don't vex yourself; perhaps it is the best thing that can happen to me. I don't think a fellow gets well seasoned unless he is knocked about at some time: better late than never. I have been coveting change—any change and occupation, an engrossing occupation—for the last few months." He said that to reconcile her to what was an overwhelming blow to her, and his words aroused her with a sharp pang. Had Harry become so miserable and sick of his blessings that he was ready to welcome the cold-bath of labour and poverty as a relief to his oppressive languor, and a ground of hope for his fainting mind?

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But Harry came in to her with a troubled face, on another day—a mild day—a subtle, penetrating, relaxing day, under whose balmy breath it is doubly difficult to contend with encircling difficulties, and reject the one clue suddenly vouchsafed to lead us out of the labyrinth.

"I must tell you, mother, though, of course, it cannot be in the circumstances—he does not see it—but there is no fatality to bind me to his views. Mr. Crawford of the Ewes sent for me this morning, and I went to him immediately; I could not tell what he might have to say to me."

"Without consulting your mother, Harry?"

"Yes, mother," answered Harry, with unconscious sternness, "because it might have been my own business, entirely my own affair, with which no mortal, not even you, can be entitled to interfere. But it was only to offer and urge upon me a loan of money to enable me to satisfy the bank's claims, if they come to the worst, and retain Whitethorn, paying him at my leisure. I assure you that it was delicately done; my father's ghost may rest in peace. I beg your pardon, mother; I did not mean to pain you. I am afraid I do speak queerly at times. Well, well; it was a kind, confiding, neighbourly action, though I refused it decidedly, from the man whose alliance is forbidden to us. I had no resource but to respect myself, as I respected him; and it is no great matter that it hurt me to cut up that gentle, inoffensive old man, endeavouring to show his rue for having proved, twenty years ago, what my father was to at least an equal degree, and what I have no assurance that I would not have found myself, to a far greater extent than either of them—a slave to a false code of honour."

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Harry sat down, haggard, dispirited, half-desperate. His mother made no reply. All the rest of the day she walked about the house like a restless spirit; half the night she paced up and down her chamber softly, lest Harry should hear her, and come in again, and begin to caress her; for she could not endure Harry's kisses now—they were like Joanna Crawford's smiles.

Was Harry quarrelling with his father's memory? It was a ghastly sacrilege to her; yet might he not arrive at cursing in his heart, even while he was grasping the devil within him by the throat? What had it not cost him? First, his young love and the cream of his happiness; and now his paternal acres, and his position among the independent, influential gentlemen of his native county. He might not value the last in his present fever and rashness, but he would weigh it more justly hereafter. The moorland inheritance was not of great money purchase, but it had descended to its possessors through long generations. It was hallowed by venerable associations. The name and the property together were of some importance in this nook of the south. Harry's father had a family affection for his *place*, and, doubtless, Harry entertained it also, undeveloped as yet, but to grow and acquire full maturity one day, addressing him at every pensive interval with a vain craving and yearning. And, again, in the confusion and distraction of Mrs. Jardine's feelings, there was her sister Anne haunting her dreams, and reproaching her with having forgotten her; and lastly, one verse in her well-worn Bible was constantly standing out before her aching eyes in letters of fire, and shining into her rebellious but scared heart, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

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It is one thing to have been Christians all our lives, drawn along by a current, only broken by

comparatively trivial, every-day temptations, contests and sacrifices, and another thing to wrestle with a decree that all at once confronts and contradicts a master-passion, a deeply-founded verdict, a strongly-rooted opinion whose overthrow will shake the entire framework of our lives.

Mrs. Jardine descended the stairs the next morning very pale and exhausted, and for the first time (though she was a widow by a peculiarly sorrowful visitation), with a certain wistful air which Harry had observed in Mr. Crawford. It touched him—a fiery, dogged man—extremely, in the one case as in the other. His mother, on the announcement of his loss, had insisted on undertaking various domestic examinations with respect to general retrenchment; he had humoured her, under the impression that it diverted her mind, and broke the force of what was a great calamity to her. He believed that she had over-exerted herself, and he commenced to remonstrate in the imperious, reproachful, affectionate tone, which the mother loves in her manly son.

"Yes, Harry, I have undertaken too much, and therefore I have requested the company of two friends, who will be willing to lighten our burden."

"Strangers in the house at this time, mother?" exclaimed Harry, bewildered. "Well, if you can bring yourself to suggest it, and wish it, I need have no objection. Never mind me, mother. Besides, I shall be from home. Yes, I do believe it will be a good plan."

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"I thought, Harry," said Mrs. Jardine, so tremulously that Harry felt quite alarmed for his upright, obdurate mother, "as Mr. Crawford had been so friendly in his intentions towards you—the only man who has come forward with such a proposal and entreaty—isn't he, Harry?—that two of the Miss Crawfurds might consent to pay us a visit at last. I believe they would waive all ceremony, and their father would like it. It would show that we were willing, at least, to be reconciled in our evil day; that we appreciated their magnanimity; that we were not mean as well as malicious, Harry."

Harry stared, "Mother," he said slowly, colouring violently, "are you prepared for the consequences of inviting the Miss Crawfurds here, or what do you mean?"

"I have counted the cost, Harry; I have written and sent away a note, asking if Miss Joanna and one of her sisters will have so much consideration for an old afflicted woman."

Harry burst away from her, that she might not read the glow which was in his eyes and searched through his whole being.

Mrs. Jardine cried a little, as a woman might say, quietly and comfortably; a strange thing for her, since she was one of those women who shed vehement tears or none at all; then she dried her eyes and folded her hands reverently, saying, "I have a strange sense of calm and of Divine favour this morning. I am sure I am not mystical, but one jogs along the beaten way, and gets stupified, and doubts whether one can be a Christian or no, there is so little conviction of the fact in what divines, from the Bible, call 'the inner man of the spirit;' but when we conquer our wills, and obey one of His everlasting decrees, then we do feel that we must belong to Him, and we have an assurance of His presence, which is a great enough reward without the gratification of earthly afflictions. Ah! I have had dear old Annie's voice ringing in my ears all the morning; and I have heard George Jardine bidding me take care of Harry, as he always did before he went from home, except the last day when he dared not face me."

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The Crawfurds came to Whitethorn. Mr. Crawford sent them at once; he would not listen to a single objection or obstacle, though Lillas and Conny were with Polly Musgrave, and it was inconvenient to spare the others on a moment's warning. Susan could not understand it—why they should be bidden to Whitethorn now, when it had been so long debarred to them; but Susan liked company, even company under a cloud; and she had a curiosity to inspect Whitethorn, into which not one of them had put a foot, except papa and mamma, long ago. Joanna made no demur, though, a month before, nothing would have induced her to believe that she would be staying with Susie this March at Whitethorn. Mr. Crawford walked with his daughters to the great gate, and Joanna, looking back, saw him, on his return, switching the thistle-heads in the hedge, as she had never witnessed him attempt in her experience; she could almost fancy he was whistling, as Harry Jardine went piping along before he fell in love with her.

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It was a trial when Harry Jardine was introduced into the Crawfurds' company; but Mrs. Jardine was very hospitable and kind, and Harry rapidly recovered or assumed his usual ease and animation, and Susan soon lost all peculiar consciousness, and Joanna fell back on the woman's armour, dented, but not broken, of her self-control. In a few hours they did wonderfully well together. Susan was delighted with the novelties of the old-fashioned country-house, and Harry was not particularly downcast in his misfortunes; he was almost as amusing as ever, and invented fun for her as if he had never heard the name of bank, and, finally, he did not complain of the arrangement, of which Susan highly approved, that she should be Harry's companion, and Joanna should belong to Mrs. Jardine. Joanna was so sedate, and, although she was not a business-woman like Lillas (how Susan would boast of the ground she had gained when she wrote and amazed Lillas!) she was used to associating with older people, and could suit herself to their ways and be handy to them.

Harry smiled blandly on the partition for three whole days. At the close of the third day, when Susan and Joanna were brushing their hair together, Susan started the proposal that they should return to the Ewes whenever Mrs. Jardine's inventories, and settling and sorting of accounts, were brought to an end; "because, Joanna, Harry is getting cross; I am sure of it; he is not half so

agreeable as he was the first night. I think he is angry because his mother keeps you to herself, and sends me to talk to him and give him music. When I come to think of it, it is a very senseless plan of hers, and perhaps she is spiteful though she is so attentive, and I am not frightened at her any longer. She is a quick woman, but as pleasant as possible; but if you please, Joanna, you can be shut up with her, and go out with her till we leave, for I should not care for it very much, and I see no call for it on my part; and I am certain we had better fix on going home again as soon as we can manage it."

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"Very well, Susan; only you speak very fast; I can scarcely follow you. It strikes me you are wrong on one point. I never noticed that Harry Jardine was tired of being your host, or that he minded who sat next him."

"Not tired of me exactly, or careless of my enjoyment, because, to be sure, Harry Jardine is courting all of us. Nonsense, Joanna, you need not affect to be sage and precise and unconcerned. I am not so silly, and it is very conceited of you, and I have no patience with you. Of course I was not blind and deaf, and I have not lost my memory. Harry Jardine is continually looking after you, whatever his mother persuades herself. He never notices what I wear, and he remembered ribbons you wore months since. I put on mine, and he looked at it and said, 'That is like one of Joanna's; is it not?' Now I know very well he never calls any of us by our Christian names to other people, and only you to one or other of us, and he does it pointedly, as if to express, 'I mean to be your brother-in-law one of these days, and I want to keep you in mind of my intentions, so I take the liberty.'"

"Why don't you say, 'Mr. Jardine, Joanna does not like a liberty taken with her name'?"

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"I dare say! and have him reply, 'Did Joanna tell me so herself?' I believe he would be only too glad to have you speak to him on any subject, and I put him into such a fume about your appearance, Jack! Of course, I intended no harm, the words came out somehow. You remember, last night, his showing me an engraving he had bought. 'Tell me some one that is like,' he said to me. It was the least in the world like you, or like your mode of dressing your hair, but it flattered you, as these chance likenesses always do. 'Is it a little like Joanna?' I asked trying him; and I continued, 'Our Joanna would be rather a pretty girl if it were not for the blemish;' and there I stopped short, for I recollected that I should not have mentioned it to him. I wish you had seen him, how hot and haughty he was, as if you were not my own sister, and as if I had not more business with you than he had yet. 'I wonder how any one who has any regard for Joanna can term that mark a defect: it is very sacred and beautiful, otherwise Joanna is without spot'—and there he caught himself and turned away—he was about to add, 'or wrinkle or any such thing,' and I am afraid it was a quotation from the Bible; but I fancy he felt that he was making a fool of himself, and held his tongue. We ought to speak of going home."

"Susie, dear, don't be unreasonable; you know what a claim this family has upon ours; you know what papa desires."

"I know nothing except that Harry Jardine wants me out of his way, and you in his way. It is very disagreeable to me, and a great responsibility to me. You are an interested party, you cannot be expected to see things as you should."

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"Why not? I told you to correct him when he was wrong. But I thought you were great friends; and poor Mrs. Jardine, Susan, I can be of use to her in her adversity. I can do things for her as I do for—"

"As you do for papa; there is a fine confession!"

Joanna ensconced herself in silence. Susan had provocation, but Joanna took great care next day not to support Harry Jardine in his levity and discontent. All the morning she spent with Mrs. Jardine; she pinned herself to her sleeve until, after luncheon, she was taken by the old lady into her own room, with its bright fire and shining dogs, its broad, easy couch, its table, with the handsome ponderous writing-desk, flanking the handsome heavy dressing-case, and its look-out from the warmly-curtained windows quite across the moor.

"What a comfortable room, Mrs. Jardine!" Joanna could not help exclaiming; "I never saw a more fresh, inspiring view to my taste, and such a stretch of sky,—you may sit and foretell all weathers here."

"Yes, my dear, and I have foretold all weathers here. I'll talk to you a little of my nice room, and why I am so sorry to think of leaving it."

"We hope you will not leave it," Joanna ventured, timidly.

"Ah! that rests with others now. But I came here a gay girl; I visited at Whitethorn before my marriage, Joanna; I dwelt here a thoughtless, happy young wife; and here I kept Harry, not quite so troublesome as now; and here I lay a heart-stricken widow while they were bringing home the corpse of my husband, who had left me a vigorous, determined man two hours before."

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"It must have been dreadful! dreadful!" murmured Joanna faintly; but lifting up her face to Mrs. Jardine with the earnest confiding eyes, the blanched cheeks, and that seal on her brow—"Oh, how often papa and I have thought of it, and pitied you and ourselves!"

"My dear, it was one of those dispensations of Providence which one never forgets to the end of a long life. But I was a sinner, I deserved what I bore; we all deserve the sorest evil that can afflict

us; and, thank God, there is mercy mingled with the greatest misery. I do not speak often of it, but I can do so to-day; and I find it is a relief to talk to you of our misfortune, because you can sympathize with me; you were a sufferer in it like myself; it cannot be to many other living persons what it is to us two. I have had that brought home to me, my love. I do not grieve or frighten you, Joanna?"

"No, Mrs. Jardine, I have lamented it all my life. I am very grateful that you should let me say that papa was very sorry; they sound very little words, Mrs. Jardine, but you understand them, and papa will never cease to be sorry in this world, and we have only wanted to comfort you."

"Poor fellow!" sighed Mrs. Jardine absently. "Crawfurd of the Ewes, an accomplished, pleasant fellow—so broken a man!"

They talked a little longer of the tragedy with composed but strong mutual interest and commiseration; and Mrs. Jardine acknowledged that such pity was not like the world's pity, but was delicate and tender as the ministry of any Barnabas or son of consolation; and when she finished, she kissed Joanna on the forehead, and said to herself, "Harry was right. If this is the sign of George Jardine's blood, it was placed there to pay her father's debt, and set her apart for us."

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"Now, the sun is shining out, Joanna—'a clear shining after rain,'—don't you like the Bible words?—I know you do. You must have a walk yet. Why, the violets will be out in another ten days. Hand me my garden bonnet, and we will have a turn in the garden or shrubbery. I saw Harry and your sister take the way there. My dear, you have the look of a sister I was very fond of, and I think Mr. Jardine would have admired you. Yonder they are, Joanna. I should like that you would send Miss Crawfurd to me, and have a stroll with Harry yourself. You will injure your health, child, if you do not attend more to yourself. And, Joanna, if my son questions you as to what I said to you, for he is a curious fellow, tell him I have been reading a text for myself this morning, and for several mornings—'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.' And although I am an old woman, I have got it by heart. And bid him show you the thorn walk."

Joanna did not like to decline a commission of Mrs. Jardine's, but she could no more have asked Harry to walk with her than if he had been a duke. However, Harry was loitering and watching them, and came forward at this moment, and Mrs. Jardine herself appropriated Susan, and transferred Joanna to Harry.

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"I am very much obliged to you for your kindness to my mother," said Harry formally—no Joanna this time, no name at all. "I never saw my mother take so much to any one," he continued eagerly; "she is naturally a self-reliant, reserved woman; but she has opened up to you?"

"Yes," answered Joanna softly; "and do you know, she has been talking to me of the past."

Harry started. "What did she say, Joanna? She could not offend you. Pray what did she say to you?"

"She did not offend me—far from that—she was very good, and she gave me a message to you, if you were inquisitive—she had been studying a text, 'I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.'"

"Ah! I am very happy to understand it."

"It seems easily understood; and she advised us to walk in the thorn walk. Is it near at hand? Shall we have time?"

"We must take time, we cannot disappoint my mother. The thorn walk is a favourite with her all the year round, although it is only in its beauty in the month of May. Shall I explain to you why she has selected it to-day?"

"Yes, if you please."

"My father lived here, when he was a young man, with his uncle the laird. They had no near female relative. It was a dull house, as dull an establishment as my mother and I maintain together."

"Much duller, I should think."

"No; for before a certain time he was not sensible of its deficiency; he had no definite wishes or hopes for an increase to their circle, a re-modelling of their housekeeping. My mother was distantly related to him; she came on a visit to my grand-uncle with an elderly lady, who was also a connexion; she was a lively young girl then. My father often told her afterwards to what an incalculable degree her presence brightened the old house and the two forlorn gentlemen; it would have been utter darkness if she had left them again to their old hazy sunlessness; so my father took the desperate step of leading her to the thorn walk. It was the month of May then, and it was covered with blossoms, sending a white shower on their bent heads from a whole line of trysting trees; but, when I think of it, March, which is lightly esteemed, is preferable to May, for March has all the promise of the year in prospect; and see, it has cloth of gold and silver to step upon, in the shape of the bright, commonplace, unjustly overlooked crocuses."

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"You have been reading the seedsman's tallies, Mr. Jardine."

"Never mind; you agree with me?"

"The world and the poets choose May. And you begin to be eccentric and choose March."

"My father conducted my mother here; she has told me the circumstances a hundred times, though she is a quiet woman; and she wore such a cloth gown as you wear to-day."

"Mr. Jardine, you are talking nonsense; this is a new stuff, I assure you it has not been half-a-dozen months out of the looms; and do you suppose, sir, that I shall wear this dress in the month of May?"

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"That comes of confiding those details to men. I always thought it was a gown like this one; and he asked her to abide at Whitethorn, and crown his lairdship and gladden and sweeten his entire future career; and he succeeded at last in winning her consent. And this is the thorn walk, Joanna, and I am free to re-enact the old passage in two lives, and plead with you not to desert Whitethorn if we are to retain it. I am poorer by a few thousands since I first made the same prayer to you; but your father puts no weight on the difference, or, in his rare generosity, lets it tell in my favour; and I don't think we need break our hearts about our little loss, if we look to our great gain. Here I beg you, as the humblest and most sincere of your petitioners, to put your life into my life, and cause the united life to bud and blossom into the May of the heart."

"And November and December would come to that year likewise."

"Yes, they will; but they will tread hard upon the real new-year, the veritable new year, that will

"Ring out the false, ring in the true"

of this hoary world. Will you travel to it with me, Joanna? Shall we strive and pray, and help each other to reach it together? Shall we begin it even here? Your father will bestow you solemnly and gladly; my mother will accept you with a blessing."

Joanna said, "Yes; God bless us, Harry," reverently; and, reverently, God blessed them.

Harry was energetic, and Joanna was prudent, and old Mrs. Jardine was proud of the spirit with which they saved the swamped estate of Whitethorn even from Mr. Crawford's bond; and having helped themselves, they helped others, then and ever afterwards.

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Polly Musgrave applied to them in time. Polly had written on Joanna Crawford's marriage a jeering, jibing letter. "So you have gone and done as I prophesied, after all your wrath on the moor, and preciseness at Hurlton. But, first, you were as silly as possible, and wanted to revive the Middle Ages, which was quite in Don Quixote's tone; you to pine and die, and he to shoot himself (as violent deaths are hereditary), or addict himself to loose living and destruction. Then, when he loses his money, and in common sense you may both think better of it, shake hands and go your several ways; you make all up, post haste, and come together with a flourish of trumpets, and poverty *will* come in at the door, and love fly out at the window. Fie! I am ashamed of you, after all!"

But Polly wrote in a different strain a year or two later:—"DEAR COUSIN JOANNA,—I am not so healthy and heartless as I used to be, and I have been teased with a desire to come to Whitethorn, and perhaps profit by your carriage in this world, as I never dreamt of once upon a time. But I will say this for myself, I only wrote and crowed over you when you were quite able to afford it. I was very glad of your happiness, child (as our grandmother wrote, and one of our grandmothers was the same person! think of that, Harry Jardine!). Is Harry Jardine as promising as he used to be before you took him in hand; or is the promise fulfilled in an upright, generous, gladsome (and because of that last word you would insist on adding godly) man? He was a man of whom to make a spoon or spoil a horn, and you were the woman to perform the delectable feat."

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Polly had found her heart not a very lofty one, not a very sensitive one—but an honest and kind heart in the main, which was permitted to extricate itself from the slough of luxury and self-indulgence, and beat warmly and faithfully throughout the rest of its course.

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ON THE STAGE AND OFF THE STAGE.

I.—THE "BEAR" AT BATH.

THE Place was old Bath, in the days immediately succeeding those of Alexander Pope and William Hogarth, and dovetailing into those of Horace Walpole and the Wesleys.

The Age was one of rackets and reaction from morning till night, and Bath was the headquarters of the first—the scene of the pump-room, the raffle, the public breakfast, the junketing at mid-day, the ball at midnight, the play, the ridotto.

The Scene was a private room in the "Bear," when it was crowded with peers, bullies, rooks, highwaymen, leaders of fashion, waiting-women, and stage stars. The "Bear" was held by great Mrs. Price, a hostess large, shining, portly—a friendly great woman, too magnificent to be fussy, or mean, or spiteful. The "Bear" looked out on the Parade, with its throngs of beaux—veritable beaux, with Beau Nash at their head—wiggled, caned, and snuff-boxed, and belles with trains borne by black boys, cambric caps and aprons, and abundance of velvet patches. In and out of its

yawning doorway strutted fine gentlemen, chaplains, and wits, while grooms, public and private, swarmed round the house. Its broad stairs and low wide corridors, traversed by the more private company, led to sitting rooms of all degrees, panelled with oak or lined with cedar, with worked worsted wonders in the shape of chairs, and China monsters by way of ornaments.

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The Person was a handsome woman, attired negligently in what was called a sacque, with a mob-cap. She sat sipping a dish of tea, as sober women will after fatigue or in anticipation of exertion, and making occasional reference to some shabby, well-worn volumes and printed sheets piled up beside her. Her attitude was studious, for days when a chapter of the Bible, a cookery recipe, a paper by Addison or Dick Steele, or a copy of verses, included all the knowledge after which the gentler sex aspired; her retirement was remarkable at that gay era, and in that gadding neighbourhood; and her morning dress, though it would not have offended a Tabitha Tidy, looked plain among the silvered mazarines and the tippetts of pheasants' tails.

She was a woman of about five-and-twenty; but her beauty, though still in its prime, showed the wear and tear of years. Had it not been that its chief power lay in the intellect and goodness which sat on the capacious but not cloudy brow, and gleamed out of the cordial dark blue eyes, and hovered round the somewhat wide and somewhat lined but never sensual mouth—you would have said this was a faded queen whom the world was mad to worship. As it was, she did look faded this spring afternoon, and occasionally fretted audibly enough as she turned over the leaves of her volumes, and sighed "heigho!" as she looked at her repeater—not quite so common an appendage as the little Geneva story-tellers, though a footpad carried always a goodly supply, and a gentleman's gentleman of very fine prestige would wear a couple, "one in each fob"—and sipped her tea; which, by the way, she drank, not out of one of the diminutive China cups, but out of an old battered, but very shining little silver tankard.

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Anon my lady rose and strolled to a back window. She looked across the noisy, crowded stable-yard into the corner of a garden, where a lilac bush was budding into dusty dim purple and a hoary apple-tree blossomed white and pink like a blushing child, away over the green fields to a farmhouse upon a hill, where russet and yellow stacks proved the farmer's command of ready money, or caution in selling. From just such another farmhouse as that on which our bright benevolent woman—even in the dumps—was gazing wistfully, issued Caroline Inchbald, a beauty, and a generous, virtuous woman under great temptations, a friend and rival on equal terms with Amelia Opie.

But hark! an arrival in the next room: fresh guests—country people of consequence, for they were ushered in by Mrs. Price herself, who received in person their orders for an incongruous meal, neither dinner nor supper, to recruit them for some gala in which they had the prospect of figuring, to judge from a torrent of exclamations which pierced through a convenient cupboard in the partition.

"Make haste, girls," in bass tones.

"Eat away, Fiddy," in treble, mimicking the bass.

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"Uncle, don't attempt the game-pie. We'll be too late, as sure as our heads. Didn't you hear Mrs. Price say there was a power of company wanting seats; it would be too bad if we lost the sight after all."

"What, Prissy, worse than Admiral Byng's defeat, or my spoilt medal?"

"Oh! Uncle Rowland, how can you joke! Now, Fiddy, there's a dear creature, don't have anything to say to the cream-tart. What although we're as hungry as hawks, if we only get a good view to talk about at the Vicarage and Larks' Hall."

"There—Prissy, dear, then I've done. I'll just run and shake our myrtle crapes and fresh pinch our stomachers."

"Hold! no such thing, lasses. I'm not to be left here to feed in solitude, and without e'er a portfolio or picture. You little geese, it is two good hours to the exhibition. Are you to be frizzing, and painting, and lacing, and mincing, and capering for two mortal hours, and your poor country uncle left to spoil his digestion for want of something else to do than eat? Is that your gratitude, when here have I come against my will to introduce you to the wicked, gay world, and spoil your Arcadian simplicity? Don't make faces, Prissy!"

"Oh! Uncle Rowland; you are making base pretences."

"Indeed, sir, I think you are as wild to see the wonders as we are."

But the remonstrance had its effect, for the young ladies evidently sat down again, and, by the clatter of knives and forks, one could judge they condescended to do some justice to the good things provided for their solace, while the conversation went on in more regular order.

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The lady in the Nankin sitting-room had decidedly the advantage in this situation, as she did not soliloquize in private, and she heard through the cupboard and the locked door of communication the chat of her neighbours. They spoke no treason, and they ought to be more prudent if they told secrets: it was a real benefit to a lonely wight, a little irritated in nerve and temper, to be a party to their lively, affectionate, simple intercourse; and, as the truth must be told, the lady in the Nankin sitting-room crossed her hands with a motion of indolent interest and turned her head with an air of listless pleasure, nodding and beating her foot lightly on the floor now and then, in

interjection and commentary. She could figure the group perfectly. Two rosy little girls brought into the town for a day and a night's shopping and gadding, as they would call it, under the escort of an indulgent uncle: a bachelor probably, else madam, his wife, would have been there to keep them in order; and not so very elderly, for the good man was of what is styled a sprightly turn, and though his nieces submitted to his authority, there was a decidedly modified amount of reverence in the way in which they insisted,

"You must comb out your curls, Uncle Rowland."

"And I'll tie your cravat for you, sir, and make you quite smart. We are not to appear abroad with a country bumpkin or a fright of a student, are we, Prissy?"

And mutual jokes were bandied pretty freely.

"Now, Prissy, are we to see the famous Traveller?"

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"No, sir, it is to be the Virtuoso, with the mock copper coins."

"Bronze, child, bronze."

"We're to have nobody in particular, only Lady Betty," chimed in the more girlish voice. "The company, the other gentlefolks, will be quite sufficient besides."

"And Fiddy will scream when the blunderbusses are fired. Shall we take the precaution of putting cotton in her ears beforehand?" derided the man.

Then the single lady fixed further, that Prissy (Mistress Priscilla, doubtless, in company down in Somersetshire) was the cleverest and most forward, and that Fiddy (Mistress Fidelia) was the shyest and, perhaps, the prettiest, for she was clearly Uncle Rowland's favourite. But then, for all her rosy cheeks, poor child! she was delicate, since there was a constant cry from the conductor of the party, "Fiddy, you vain doll, remember your mantle; Madam is not here to wrap you up, nor Granny."

"Oh, sir! we've lots of scarfs and shawls, all for Fiddy; and she is to tie on her Iris hood against the draughts."

"What! one of the poppies and bluebells that Will Honeycomb admired? She'll beat you, Prissy, out and out. I would sicken and bear her company."

"I wonder to hear you, sir. I can tell you, Granny would not coddle me so. Granny is always preaching of hardening weakness."

"Ah, the old mother is no milksop!"

There, was she not right? Had she not full hints of the history of the Vicarage and madam its mistress, the mother of these two little girls; and of the parish priest her husband, their father—the younger brother of the tolerably educated squire yonder, with his Larks' Hall; and of Granny, who kept house there still for her elder son, where she had once reigned queen paramount in the hearty days of her homely goodman. It was a scroll fairly unfolded, and perfectly legible to the experienced woman.

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"Uncle Rowland," prefaced the soft voice, more quietly, "do you really think the gay world of the town so much more vicious than the sober world of the country?"

"Why, no, my dear," answered the manly voice, now graver, and with a little sadness in its ring, "ignorance is not innocence, and depravity is vastly more general than any mode. Nevertheless, there are customs of which I would greatly prefer Prissy and Fiddy to remain unaware, like their mother before them."

"But Granny lived in the great world, and there is not one of us like Granny."

"The risk is too great, child; the fire is wondrous strong, though the pure gold be sometimes refined in the process—as your father would preach."

"And, sir, this Mistress Lumley, or Lady Betty, as they called her downstairs, is as virtuous as she is clever."

"You may depend upon that, Miss, or you had not come to Bath to see her play. They term the poor soul Lady Betty because she has turned on her heel from the worthless London sparks, and taught them to keep their distance."

"Uncle Rowland, I don't think you heartily sympathize with charming Lady Betty."

"Tut! child, I have not seen her. You would not have me captivated ere I ever set eyes on my enslaver? But, to speak honestly, little Fiddy, I own I have no great leaning to actresses and authoresses. There are perils enough in a woman's natural course, without her challenging the extremes of a fictitious career. More than that, Fiddy, I have not much faith in the passion that is ranted to the public; even if it were always a creditable passion. Those who are sorely hurt don't bawl, child: deep streams are still."

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"I will play to him," the lady of the Nankin sitting-room says to herself, her lips parting with a slight smile, and her colour rising at the same time. Your true woman is easily pained, and, the more fully furnished, the more finely skilled, she is all the more susceptible to blame as to praise,

and so on that account the less qualified for public life. There was many a strong enough argument against the stage and the desk which Master Rowland might have used instead of his weak one.

Lady Betty, in that bubbling, frothing, steaming London—Mistress Lumley in the provinces—was a young actress of great repute and good character, who had compelled success, like Mrs. Siddons after her, and reigned for several seasons, and still her fame was paramount and her respectability unquestioned. In those very dissipated days of Queen Anne and the early Georges, the broad prejudices which darken the stage were light in tint and slender in force. The great world was tumultuous, giddy, reckless, with innumerable victims falling suddenly into its yawning chasms, like the figures from the bridge in Mirza's vision; and the theatre was not a more exposed sphere than many another, and that made all the difference in the world. Very few save the strictest Methodists condemned it, when Henry Brooke wrote for it, and Dr. Johnson stood with his hands behind his back in the green room.

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Mrs. Betty Lumley, tall, comely, high-principled, warm-hearted, and ingenuous, was come of yeomen ancestors. She did not see a play in a barn and run away after the drama, like Caroline Inchbald; but on the death of her father and mother, she went up with an elder sister and young brother to London to seek for an employment and a livelihood. Encountering some person of dramatic pursuits—manager, stage-painter, ticket-taker, or the like, or the wife of one or other—she was recommended to the stage. She was supported in the idea by all her connections, for then no one questioned the perfect respectability of the profession. She studied hard in new, though not uncongenial fields; she ventured; she tried again and again, with the "modest but indomitable pluck" of genius, and she at last won a position and a prospect of independence. In all this nobody blamed her; on the contrary, the magnates of the hour—kings, councillors, bishops—awarded her great credit for her parts, her industry, her integrity, her honour.

Not a lady of quality in London was more respected and admired, rightly or wrongly, than Mistress Betty. At the same time it is possible that, having reached the goal, could she have turned back and begun her walk anew, she would have hesitated before following this thorny path. It was a thorny path, for all its applause and success; nay, on account of them; even with a good woman like Mistress Betty it required all her sincerity, her sobriety, and, according to the prevailing standard, her religion, to deliver her from imminent danger. Moreover, with the attainment of the object, had come the bitter drops which qualified the cup. Her plain, fond, innocent sister was in her grave; and so within the two last years was the young brother, for whom her interest had procured a post of some importance in the Colonies, whence he bequeathed to Mistress Betty, his dear distinguished sister, his little savings. She struggled to be resigned, and was not only weary, but tempted to grasp at material rewards. This was the turning-point of her life. She would be virtuous to the last. Her honest, clear character revolted at vice; but she might harden, grow greedy of power, become imperious and arrogant. For, remember, I do not say that Mistress Betty had contracted no contamination. No, no; she had suffered from her selfish fits, her vain fits, her malicious fits—she had experienced her hours of boldness and levity—she had made her own way to eminence—she had struggled with unscrupulous rivals—she had heard much which we would have wished her not to have heard—she had been a member of that wild, ultra-fine, coarse, scandalous society: but as we find saints in strange company sometimes, so the cordial, faithful, generous woman remained with only a slight coating of affectation and worldliness, thirst for praise, desire after excitement, habit of command.

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"I'll play to this horrid country Justice," whispers Mistress Betty, quite roused, and looking animated and brilliant already. "I hear by the gentleness of his voice, when he speaks of the sins and sorrows of mankind, and when he addresses his little girl, that the fellow has a heart; but he gave me no quarter, and he shall receive none in return. I'll conquer him. To come within sight and sound of the boards with his muddy boots and his snarls, spoiling the enjoyment of the lasses!"

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Very true, Mistress Betty, it was neither very wise nor very gallant; but you ought to remember that the most loyal prejudices are sometimes as loyally abandoned.

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II.—LADY BETTY ON THE STAGE.

The principal theatre of the queen of watering-places in her palmy days was filling fast, as it had done for the last two nights. Other attractions lost their power. Ombre, basset, hazard, lansquenet, loo, spread their cards and counters in vain for crafty or foolhardy fingers. The master of the ceremonies found his services at a discount; no troops of maidens, no hosts of squires, answered to his appeal; no double sets were forming to the inspiring strains of "Nancy Dawson." The worthy, charming, gifted Lady Betty had come down for three nights to improve, entertain, and enrapture, and this being her last night the theatre constituted the only orbit in which the planets would revolve.

The world was here in full-blown variety; sublime, languid peers, needy placemen, hilarious foxhunters, brave tradesmen, aspiring mechanics, poor good-for-nothings; sober housewives, whose thoughts were still of their husbands' shirt-fronts and their hasty-puddings, and who never dreamt that they were impugning their sobriety by attending a play; and above all, fine ladies armed with their fans and their essences. As a whole, the audience was in a vastly respectful

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attitude—the gentlemen tapping their snuff-boxes meditatively, and desisting in a great measure from their loud laughter, their bets, their cursing and swearing; the ladies only whispering behind their handkerchiefs, and moving to cause their diamonds to sparkle, all in acknowledgment of the vicinity of the fair and potent Lady Betty.

The play was *Venice Preserved*, and Lady Betty entered in an early scene. Truly a fine woman—not so lovely as Anne Oldfield, not so superb as Sarah Siddons; but with a frank, fair, womanly presence—bright, genial, quick, passionate through the distress of Belvidera, the repudiated daughter and beggared wife.

Dressed in the English fashion under the Georges, walked the maiden reared in the air blowing off the lagoons within the shadow of the grim lion of St. Mark, to such sentimental accompaniments as the dipping oar and the gondolier, and finished off with the peculiar whims of Betty Lumley. She wore a fair, flowered brocade, for which William Hogarth might have designed the pattern and afterwards prosecuted for payment the unconscionable weaver; a snow-white lace kerchief was crossed over her bosom and reached even to her shapely chin, where it met the little black velvet collar with its pearl sprig; her brown hair (which had shown rather thin, rolled up beneath her mob-cap) was shaken out and gathered in rich bows with other pearl sprigs on the top of her head; her cheeks showed slightly hollow, but were so fresh, so modest, so cool in their unpainted paleness, and on the smallest provocation acquired the purest sea-shell pink which it would have been a sin and a shame to eclipse with staring paint; the contour, a little sharper than it had once been, was only rendered more delicate by the defect, and so sweet yet—so very sweet; her beautiful arms were bare to the elbow, but shaded with falls of cobweb lace; and in one hand, poised daintily between two fingers, she held a natural flower, a bunch of common rural cowslips. At this period of the year such an appendage under any other touch would have been formal as the Miss Flamborough's oranges, but it was graceful in this woman's slight clasp.

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"Enchanting creature!" "Fine woman!" "Otway's devoted wife to the life!" murmured the company, in a flutter of genuine admiration—forgetting themselves, these Sir Plumes and Belindas, once in a way.

"I do hope the poor soul will not be deserted and undone—she's so easy to serve—and all Bath, and, for that matter, Lon'on too, as I believe, at her feet!" says Mrs. Price, emphatically, to young Medlicot, whom she is patronizing for one night, because he knows somewhat of plays and players; and who, in spite of his allegiance to swimming, simpering Clarissa, would give a fortune to paint that pose. Belvidera need fear no lolling, no sneering, no snapping at her little peculiarities this night.

As she came on, "kind, good, and tender," telling poor distracted, misguided Jaffier, in his humiliation, that she joyed more in him than did his mother, Lady Betty darted a sharp, searching glance through the boxes. Ah! yonder they were! The little girls the parson's daughters, with their uncle the squire, fault-finding, but honourable. Two round-faced, eager, happy girls, intent upon the play, and the great London star, beautiful, bewitching Lady Betty, who is now looking at them—yes, actually staring them full in the face with her deep, melting, blue eyes, while she reassures her cowardly husband. How dared uncle Rowland disparage her?

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There was uncle Rowland, younger than Lady Betty had taken him for—not more than five-and-forty—his coat trimmed with silver lace, a little old-fashioned, and even a little shabby in such company, his Mechlin tie rather out of date and already disordered, and his cocked-hat crushed below his arm. His face is bluff and ruddy among his pinched and sallow brethren: that of a big English gentleman, who hunted, shot, or fished, or walked after his whistling ploughman every morning, and on occasions daringly dashed in amongst the poachers by the palings of his park or paddock on summer evenings; yet whose hands were reasonably white and flexible, as if they handled other things than guns and fishing-rods, and whose eyes, at once clear and meditative, had studied more than the spire of his brother's church and the village street, more than quiet country towns, and loud watering-places, and deep metropolises.

Master Rowland had no family ties beyond the Vicarage; and was in no hurry to marry or settle, as the phrase went; though he was settled long ago, and might have married once a year without any impediment from old madam, as Mistress Betty would have been swift to suppose. He perfectly approved of Mr. Spectator's standard of virtue—"Miss Liddy can dance a jig, raise a pasty, write a good hand, keep an account, give a reasonable answer, and do as she is bid;" but then, it only made him yawn. The man was sinking down into an active-bodied, half-learned, half-facetious bachelor. He was mentally cropping dry and solid food contentedly, and, at the same time, he was a bit of a humourist. He loved his little Prissy and Fiddy, as dear god-daughters, whom he had spoilt as children, and whom he was determined to present with portions when he presided at their wedding dinners; but he had no mind to take any of their fellows, for better for worse, as his companion, till death did them part.

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Then Lady Betty stepped upon the stage at Bath, and before a multitude of frivolous and simple, or gross and depraved spectators, incapable of comprehending her, she played to the manly, modestly intellectual squire.

Master Rowland woke up, looked his fill, as open-mouthed as the rest, and while he did so, his system received a shock. Lady Betty was revenged to an extent she had not foreseen.

The noble woman went with her whole soul into the sorrows of the dark-eyed, brown-faced sister

whom Titian might have painted, and made them accord with her fair English love of justice, her blue-eyed devotion to her husband, her Saxon fearlessness and faith in the hour of danger: only she did look strange and foreign when, in place of lying prostrate in submission and rising in chaste, meek patience to rear her orphan son, she writhed, like a Constance in agony, and died more speedily from her despair than Jaffier by the dagger which on the scaffold freed Pierre. The assembly rose in whole rows, and sobbed and swooned. Mrs. Prissy and Mrs. Fiddy cried in delicious abandonment; Master Rowland sat motionless.

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"I declare I had forgotten the Justice," reflects Lady Betty, resting behind the scenes. "I do believe I am that poor Belvidera for the last half-hour. I meant to bring the man to tears. His blooming face was as white as a sheet;—poor, dear, good man, I hope he's none the worse of it."

Master Rowland knows full well that she is Mistress Betty Lumley the great London actress, not Belvidera the Venetian senator's daughter; but he will never again turn from the chill of his stone-arched hall, where his fingers have grown benumbed riveting a piece of armour or copying an epitaph or an epigram, or linger under his mighty oak-tree, or advise with his poor tenants, or worship in church, without the sickening sense of a dull blank in his heart and home.

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III.—MISTRESS BETTY BECOMES NURSE.

Bath was sleeping as soundly as if it had been a quaker town: any sounds of riot were scattered and subdued. The dowager did not count her gains as she clutched them, while borne along the street by the glare of the dropping flambeaux. Her son, who, like the young Duke of Marlborough and his brother peer, carried no meaner change than golden guineas, did not clink them as he tossed them to the chairmen fighting for the prize. The "Bear" was reasonably still for a great public-house with twos and threes of travellers departing at all hours, as waiters and ostlers stirred on their behalf, horses trotted out from adjoining stables, and circles of chariots suffered displacement—all in addition to the distinct and fervent sensation of the night coach.

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Suddenly a noise and a flurry arose in the grey light and its general repose. Accents of terror and anxiety are heard, and a movement of pity and distress arises and grows in the establishment. A young girl is attacked by violent illness—a life in its spring-time is threatened with sudden extinction; friends at hand are seeking remedies and bewailing the calamity—friends at a distance, all unconscious, are mentioned with subdued voices and averted eyes.

Mrs. Price was wiping her eyes and carrying up restoratives with her own hands. "'Twas Mistress Fiddy, whom she had known from a child; the niece of Master Rowland, who had always supported the house; and madam, her mother, away at the Vicarage, and the dear child, so good and quiet."

"I will come, my good Mrs. Price. My sister had these fainting fits; I'm used to them. I'll revive the child: the poor child, I am sure she'll not be offended at the liberty. Pooh! I can sit up as well as sleep after playing. Dear! dear! Many a night I was happy to sit up with Deb," pleaded an urgent, benevolent voice, waxing plaintive towards the conclusion of the speech.

"Indeed you are too gracious, my lady—I mean madam," protested the perplexed, overwhelmed Mrs. Price; "but I dare not venture without Master Rowland's consent: he will do everything himself, issue his orders even, although Dr. Fulford's been upstairs lending his advice these ten minutes."

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"A fudge for doctors when there's a helpful woman at hand, Mrs. Price? Convey my message to the squire; inform him that I've had experience—mind, experience—and am a full-grown, reasonable woman, and not a fine lady. I know the poor little sister will be shaking like a leaf, and frightening the darling; and you are stiff in the joints yourself, Mrs. Price, and a little overcome. I'm just the person, so let me in!"

Master Rowland, without his coat (for though he had an orderly turn of his own, he was not a methodical enough man to travel with a gown and slippers in his valise), was labouring to recover his niece; Mistress Prissy, with her cloak huddled round her, was making magnanimous efforts to aid her uncle; while the poor little sufferer—guileless, affectionate Mistress Fiddy—lay pale, faint, and chill, with life flickering beneath her half-closed eyelids and in the gushes of her fitful breath. Master Rowland's trouble rendered him outwardly cold and hard, as it does some men; yet Mistress Fiddy's closing eyes turned trustfully to him, and her weak fingers clung tightly to his strong hand.

"No, no; the fewer onlookers the better. What would a stranger do here, Mrs. Price?" he inquired angrily, remembering, with a pang, that certain new, unaccountable, engrossing emotions had quite banished Fiddy from his thoughts and notice, when he might have detected the signs of approaching illness, met them and vanquished them before their climax.

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"Bid him speak a word with me, Mrs. Price, a gentleman cannot refuse. I have reasons which will excuse my importunity," reiterated that sympathetic voice.

He walked out doggedly, and never once lifted his eyes. "Madam, I am your servant; but we do not need your help: my niece would be scared by the presence of a stranger. Reserve your charity ——" "for the poor" he was about to add; but she put her frank hand upon his arm, and said, "Your worship, I believe I could nurse the young lady better than anybody: I have seen my dear

sister afflicted, as I judge similarly. Do not stand on ceremony, sir, and deprive a poor girl of a benefit which Providence has sent her, if you would not regret it. I beg your pardon, but do let me succour her."

He looked up. There she stood in her white wrapping-gown and cap, ready prepared for her patient; so appropriate-looking in dress and face, with her broad forehead full of thought, and her cheek flushed with feeling; an able tender woman in her prime, endeavouring to do Christian offices, longing to pour balm into gaping, smarting wounds, imploring to be allowed to fulfil her mission. He bowed, and stood aside; she curtsied, and passed in. He heard her voice the next moment, low, but perfectly audible, cheerful and pleasant, addressing Mistress Prissy. "My dear madam, your uncle has permitted me to count myself a mature friend, like madam your mother; and after this introduction you will excuse me for taking care of you. Doctor, what drops do you favour? You have them there; if you please, I'll offer them: I've administered them before." She spoke to the doctor very courteously; perhaps remarking that he was young and somewhat agitated. "Mayn't I chafe Mistress Fiddy's hands, doctor? You're better, my dear?"

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Mistress Fiddy's head was on her arm; her eyes were raised to her nurse's face wonderingly but complacently, and, though quite conscious, Mistress Fiddy involuntarily sighed out "mother." Very motherly was the elder woman's assurance: "Yes, my dear, I'll serve as madam your mother in her absence, till madam herself comes; and she'll laugh at our confusion and clumsiness, I warrant."

Mistress Fiddy smiled a little smile herself. Nature was reacting in its own redemption; the necessary stimulus was obtained, and the little lass was in a fair way of recovery.

But Mistress Betty did not leave off her cares; she elected herself mistress of the sick room—for she reigned there as everywhere else. She dismissed shivering, tearful, grateful Prissy with a hug, and a whispered promise that her dear sister Fiddy would be as lively as a grig in the morning; got rid of the doctor and Mrs. Price, and all but routed Master Rowland, succeeding in driving him as far as the next room.

How light her foot was—light as her fingers were nimble; how cleverly she shaded the sick girl from the light, without depriving her of air! How resigned Fiddy was to be consigned to her! how quickly and entirely the child had confided in her; she had hailed her as another mother! Mistress Betty was putting the chamber to rights, in defiance of all the chamber-maids of the "Bear;" she was concocting some refreshing drink, for which Mrs. Price had supplied the materials, over the fire, which she had ordered in case of mould and damp, even in the well-seasoned "Bear." Once she began to sing softly what might have been a cradle-song, but stopped short, as if fearing to disturb Fiddy, and composed herself to perfect stillness. Then Master Rowland heard Mistress Fiddy question Mistress Betty in her weak, timid voice, on Fiddy's own concerns. "You said you had seen these fits before, madam? May I be so bold as to ask, did the sufferer recover?"

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There was a moment's silence. "It was my sister, Fiddy: she was much older than I. She had a complication of diseases, besides being liable to swoons all her life. My dear, she died, as we must all die when our time comes; and may we all be as well prepared as was Deb! In the meantime we are in God's hands. I have been taken with fainting fits myself, Fiddy, ere now. I think they are in my constitution, but they are not called out yet, and I believe they will be kept under; as, I fully trust, country air, and exercise, and early hours, will conquer yours."

"And you will take great care of yourself, and go into the country sometimes, dear Mistress Betty," pleaded the girl fondly, forgetting herself.

Mistress Betty laughed, and turned the conversation, and finally read her patient to sleep with the Morning Lesson, given softly and reverently, as good Bishop Ken himself might have done it.

The poor squire was a discomfited, disordered Sir Roger. He could not cope with this fine woman; and then it came home to him imperatively that he was precisely in that haggard, unbecoming state of looks and costume significantly expressed in those days by the powder being out of a man's hair and his frills rumped. So he absented himself for an hour, and returned freshened by a plunge in the river and a puff in his wig. But, alas! he found that Mistress Betty, without quitting Mistress Fiddy's bedchamber, and by the mere sleight of hand of tying on a worked apron with vine clusters and leaves and tendrils all in purple and green floss silks, pinning a pink bow under her mob-cap, and sticking in her bosom a bunch of dewy ponceau polyanthuses, had beat him most completely.

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Mistress Fiddy was, as Mistress Betty had predicted, so far re-established that she could breakfast with the party and talk of riding home later in the day; though wan yet, like one of those roses with a faint colour and a fleeting odour in their earliest bud. And Mistress Betty breakfasted with the Parnells, and was such company as the little girls had never encountered before; nor, for that matter, their uncle before them, though he kept his discovery a profound secret. It was not so pleasant in one sense, and yet in another it made him feel like a king.

This was Mistress Betty's last day in Bath, and she was to travel up to Town in the train of my Lord and Lady Salop, by easy stages and long halts; otherwise she must have hired servants, or carried pistols, and been prepared to use them, in the mail. Fortunately the Salops' chariots and gigs did not start till the afternoon, so that Mistress Betty had the morning to spend with her new friends, and she was delighted to bestow it on them; though my Lord and Lady and their satellites were perpetually sending lacqueys with compliments, conveniences, and little offerings to court Mistress Betty,—the star in the plenitude of her lustre, who might emulate Polly Peacham, and be

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led to the altar by another enslaved Duke of Bolton.

How pleasant Mistress Betty was with the girls! Upon the whole, she slighted "the Justice," as she had dubbed him. She saw with her quick eyes that he was something superior; but then she saw many men quite as well-looking, well-endowed, well-mannered, and with as fair intellects, and more highly cultivated than he.

But she did not often find a pair of unsophisticated little girls won to her by her frankness and kindness, and dazzled by her goodness and greatness. How she awoke Fiddy's laugh with the Chit-Chat Club and the Silence Stakes. What harmless, diverting stories she told them of high life—how she had danced at Ranelagh, sailed upon the Thames, eaten her bun at Chelsea, mounted one of the eight hundred favours which cost a guinea a piece when Lady Die became a countess, and called upon Lady Petersham, in her deepest mourning, when she sat in her state-bed enveloped in crape, with her children and grandchildren in a row at her feet! And then she told that she was born in a farmhouse like that on the hill, and would like to know if they roasted groats and played at shovelboard there still; and ended by showing them her little silver tankard, which her godfather the jolly miller had given her, and out of which her elder sister, who had never taken kindly to tea, had drunk her ale and her aniseed water. And Fiddy and Prissy had each a draught of milk out of it, to boast of for the rest of their lives, as if they had sipped caudle out of the caudle-cup at a royal heir's christening.

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Mistress Betty made the girls talk, too,—of their garden, the old parish clerk, the housekeeper at Larks' Hall, granny, madam, the vicar, and, to his face, of Uncle Rowland, his horses and colts, his cows and calves, his pictures and cabinets. They spoke also of Foxholes, of Letty and Grizel, of Sedley and Bearwood, and Dick Ashbridge—at whose name Prissy laughed saucily, and Fiddy bit her lips and frowned as fiercely as she was able. With what penetration Mistress Betty read their connections, and how blithely and tenderly she commented upon them!

Mistress Betty promised to send her young friends sets of silk for their embroidery (and kept her word); she presented Prissy with her enamel snuff-box, bearing an exact representation of that ugly building of St. James's; and Fiddy with her "equipage"—scissors, tablets, and all, chased and wreathed with tiny pastorals, shepherds reclining and piping on sylvan banks, and shepherds and shepherdesses dancing on velvet lawns.

Mistress Betty kissed the girls at parting, and wished them health, peace, and good husbands; she held out her hand to Master Rowland, who took it with a crimson cheek, and raised it to his lips: pshaw! she never once looked at him.

The poor bachelor squire drove off, but for his manhood, groaning inwardly. Lady Betty had acted, and caught not only her share of Master Rowland's ticket, to which she was fairly entitled, but the cream of his fancy and the core of his heart; with which she had no manner of business, any more than with the State Papers and the Coronation-jewels.

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IV.—MASTER ROWLAND GOES UP TO LONDON.

In the green-room of one of the great London theatres—David Garrick's, perhaps—the stage company and their friends were waiting the call-boy and the rising of the curtain.

As strange boards as any—as broad contrasts. Here a king, with his crown cast down; there a beggar, with his wallet laid aside. But kings and beggars are not affording the glaring discrepancies of Hogarth's "Olympus in a Barn," but suggesting and preserving the distinctions far below the buskins, the breastplate, the sandals, the symars. Here are heroes, with the heroism only skin deep; and peers, like their Graces of Bolton and Wharton, with less of the lofty, self-denying graces and the ancient chivalry, than the most grovelling of ploughmen.

Among the crowd, Lady Betty is biding her time, very *nonchalant*, and a little solitary in her state. Ladies who are independent, exclusive, and inflexible, however admired and respected, are generally left to enjoy their own opinions unmolested and at their leisure, whether behind the stage curtain or elsewhere.

Just then a country gentleman, whose murrey coat has a certain country cut, while his complexion breathes of hay-fields and hedge sides, is introduced, gazes round, and steps up to her. Mistress Betty cries out, "La!"—an exclamation not a whit vulgar in her day—"the Justice!" And she holds forth both her hands. "How are dear Mistress Prissy and Mistress Fiddy? Have you come up to town for any time, sir? I wish prosperity to your business."

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He has not held such kind, unaffected, friendly hands since they parted; he has only once before held a hand that could have led a Jaffier to confess his conspiracy—that could have clung to a crushed man, and striven to raise him when calamity, like a whirlwind, cast him down.

The squire is sensibly moved, and Mistress Betty vindicates her womanliness by jumping at a conclusion and settling in her own mind that his brain is addled with this great London—its politicians, its mohawks, its beggars in Axe Lane, its rich tradesmen in Cranbourne Alley, its people of quality, fashion, and taste in their villas at Twickenham.

He asks if she is on in Belvidera, and when he hears that it is another actress's benefit, and that she has only consented to appear in a secondary part in a comedy of Sir John's, who is now a

great castle-builder, he does not trouble himself to enter a box; at which she is half flattered, half perplexed. He waits, hot and excited, until her short service is over. He will not call upon her at her lodgings, because, in his delicacy, he has so keen a remembrance of her exposed position.

In the corner behind the curtain, bounded by the refreshment table, and filled with the prompter's monotonous drawl,—far, far from his barley ripe for the mowing, his boxwood peacocks, his greyhaired Hal and his buxom milkmaids; far from old madam, the pedantic, formal vicar, young madam, brisk, hot, and genial, and his old charmers Prissy and Fiddy,—the squire told his tale of true love. The man threw down the costs and besought Mistress Betty Lumley, Lady Betty, to renounce the stage, forsake fame, quit studies, rehearsals, opening-nights, and concluding curtsies amidst the cheers of thousands, to go down with him to rural Larks' Hall, to grow younger, happier, and better every day, and die like Lady Loudon in her hundredth year, universally regretted,—above all, to fill up the gulf which had yawned in the market-place of his existence since that night at Bath.

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It was a primitive proceeding. Lady Betty was amazed at the man's assurance, simplicity, and loyalty. He spoke plainly—almost bluntly—but very forcibly. It was no slight or passing passion which had brought the squire, a gentleman of a score and more of honourable descents, to seek such an audience-chamber to sue a pasteboard queen. It was no weak love which had dislodged him from his old resting-place, and pitched him to this dreary distance.

Mistress Betty was taken "all in a heap;" she had heard many a love-tale, but never one with so manly a note. Shrewd, sensitive Mistress Betty was bewildered and confounded, and in her hurry she made a capital blunder. She dismissed him summarily, saw how white he grew, and heard how he stopped to ask if there were no possible alternative, no period of probation to endure, no achievement to be performed by him. She waved him off the faster because she became affrighted at his humility; and got away in her chair, and wrung her hands, and wept all night in the long summer twilight, and sat pensive and sick for many days.

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In time, Mistress Betty resumed her profession; but she was unusually languid: she played to disappointed houses, and cherished always, with more romance, the shade of the brave, trustful, Somersetshire squire and antiquary. Suddenly she adopted the resolution of retiring from the stage in the summer of her popularity, and living on her savings and her poor young brother's bequest. Her tastes were simple; why should she toil to provide herself with luxuries? She had no one now for whose old age she could furnish ease, or for the aims and accidents of whose rising station she need lay by welcome stores; she had not even a nephew or niece to tease her. She would not wear out the talents a generous man had admired on a mass of knaves and villains, coxcombs and butterflies; she would not expose her poor mind and heart to further deterioration. She would fly from the danger; she would retire, and board with her cousin Ward, and help her with a little addition to her limited income, and a spare hand in her small family; and she would jog-trot onwards for the rest of her life, so that when she came to die, Mistress Prissy and Mistress Fiddy would have no cause to be ashamed that so inoffensive, inconspicuous, respectable a person had once been asked to stand to them in the dignified relation of aunt. The public vehemently combated Mrs. Betty's verdict, in vain; they were forced to lament during twice nine days their vanished favourite, who had levanted so unceremoniously beyond the reach of their good graces.

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V.—MISTRESS BETTY TRAVELS DOWN INTO SOMERSETSHIRE.

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A formal but friendly letter came to Mistress Betty, when her life was one of long dusty exertion, and her heart was very thirsty and parched. The shabby-genteel world and the tradesman's life, unless in exceptional cases of great wealth, were different things a hundred and fifty years ago from what they are now. The villas at Twickenham, the rural retreats, the gardens, the grottos, the books, the harpsichords, the water-colour drawings, belonged to the quality, or to the literary lions: to Lady Mary or Pope, Horace Walpole or his young friends the Berrys. The half-pay officer's widow, the orphan of the bankrupt in the South Sea business, the wife and family of the moderately flourishing haberdasher, or coach-builder, or upholsterer—the tobacconist rose far above the general level—were cooped up in the City dwellings, and confined to gossip, fine clothes, and good eating if they could afford them. A walk in the City gardens, a trip to Richmond Hill, and the shows, were their pastimes, and Mr. Steele's 'Christian Hero,' 'An Advice to a Daughter,' and De Foe's 'History of the Plague,' were their mental delectation.

But Mistress Betty had the soul of a martyr; she had resigned herself to sinking down into the star of cousin Ward's set, who went on holidays to the play—mostly honest, fat and fatuous, or jaunty and egotistical folk, who admired the scenery and the dresses, but could no more have made a play to themselves than they could have drawn the cartoons. She helped cousin Ward, not only with her purse, but with a kinswoman's concern in her and hers: she assisted to wash and dress the children of a morning; she took a turn at cooking in the middle of the day; she helped to detain Master Ward at the tea-table, and to keep his wig and knee-buckles from too early an appearance and too thorough a soaking of his self-conceit and wilfulness at his tavern; and she heard the lads their lessons, while she darned their frills before supper.

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Then arrived the summons, over which Mistress Betty, a little worn by voluntary adversity, shed "a power" of joyful tears. To travel down into Somersetshire, and stroll among the grass in the meadows, and the gorse on the commons, which she had not seen for twelve months; to feed the

calves, and milk the cows, and gather the eggs, and ride Dapple, and tie up the woodbine, and eat syllabub in a bower; to present "great frieze coats" and "riding-hoods" to a dozen of the poorest old men and women in the parish; to hear prayers in a little grey church, through whose open windows ivy nodded, and before whose doors trees arched in vistas; to see her sweet little Prissy and Fiddy, who had taken such a fancy to her, and the vicar, and madam, and granny, and find them all perfectly agreeable, and not slighting her or doubting her because she had been a woman of fashion and an actress; and Master Rowland well disposed of elsewhere; Larks' Hall deserted by its master—the brave, generous, enamoured squire—heigho! Mistress Betty, for all her candour, good humour, and cordiality, had her decent pride, and would not have thrown herself at any man's head.

Somersetshire, in spite of Bath, was as antediluvian a hundred and fifty years ago as the lanes and coombes of Devonshire. Larks' Hall, Foxholes, Bearwood, the Vicarage of Mosely, and their outlying acquaintances, their yeomen and their labourers, lived as old-fashioned and hearty a life as if the battle of Sedgemoor had never been fought.

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Down in Somersetshire, among its orchards, nutteries, and blackberry thickets, poor little Mistress Fiddy was drooping, as girls would pine sometimes, even in the days of Will Shakspeare, ere cloth-yard shafts were abolished from merry England, when there were still mayings among the hyacinths, and milkmaids' dances under the thorns, and mummings when the snow fell. And Dick Ashbridge shot and fished in the most disconsolate abandonment, though the girl yet ran past him "like a ghost" when the beetle and bat were abroad, and he was still mooning about the vicarage meadows.

Neither of them knew for certain, and nobody could predict exactly, that she would live to wed Dick, bear him children, and leave him a sorrowful widower, whose heart was chastened—not torn. No; nor could the good folk in Somersetshire understand how closely Lady Betty and little Fiddy were bound up together, and how little Fiddy was to return Lady Betty's kindness, in the days when the little girl should be the teacher, and the fine woman the scholar, and the lesson to be learnt came from regions beyond the stars.

In the meantime, Fiddy was a sick, capricious, caressed darling in a cambric cap and silk shawl, on whom fond friends were waiting lovingly: whom nobody in the world, not even the doctor, the parish clerk, or the housekeeper at Larks' Hall, dreamt of subjecting to the wholesome medicine of contradiction—unless it might be Granny, when she came in with her staff in her hand. She would laugh at their excess of care, and order them to leave off spoiling that child; but even Granny herself would let fall a tear from her dim eyes when she read the register of the child's age in the family Bible.

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"Ah!" sighs whimsical little Mistress Fiddy, "if only Lady Betty were here—great, good, kind, clever, funny, beautiful Lady Betty—who cured me that night at Bath, papa and mamma, I would be well again. She knows the complaint; she has had it herself; and her face is so cheering, her wit so enlivening, and she reads the lessons so solemnly and sweetly. O mamma! send for Mistress Betty; she will come at once; she does not play now; the prints say so. She will be the better of the country air too. Send for Mistress Betty to Mosely."

Madam was in a difficulty. An actress at the vicarage! And Master Rowland had been so rash. He had dropped hints, which, along with his hurried visit to London, had instilled dim, dark suspicions into the minds of his appalled relations of the whirlpool he had just coasted, they knew not how: they could not believe the only plain palpable solution of the fact. And Granny had inveighed against women of fashion and all public characters, ever since Uncle Rowland took that jaunt to town, whence he returned so glum and dogged. But then, again, how could the mother deny her ailing Fiddy? And this brilliant Mistress Betty from the gay world might possess some talisman unguessed by the quiet folks at home. Little Fiddy had no real disease, no settled pain: she only wanted change, pleasant company, and diversion, and would be plump and strong again in no time. And Mistress Betty had retired from the stage now; she was no longer a marked person: she might pass anywhere as Mistress Lumley, who had acted with success and celebrity, and withdrawn at the proper moment, with the greatest dignity and discretion. And Master Rowland was arranging his affairs to make the grand tour in the prime of life: his absence would clear away a monstrous objection. What would the Vicar say? What would Granny say?

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The Vicar ruled his parish, and lectured in the church; but in the parsonage he thought very much as madam did, and was only posed when old madam and young madam pulled him different ways.

And Granny! Why, to madam's wonder, Granny required no wheedling, but—apprised of the deliberation, by the little minx Prissy, who in Fiddy's illness attended on Granny—she sent for madam before madam even knew that the proposal had been so much as mooted to her, and struck her stick on the ground in her determined way, and insisted that Mistress Betty should be writ for forthwith and placed at the head of the child's society. Granny, who had soundly rated fine ladies and literary women not two days before! It was very extraordinary; but Granny must have her way. The children paid her affectionate duty, young madam did her half-grateful, half-vexed homage, the Vicar and Master Rowland deferred to her in her widowhood and dependence, and with little less grace and reverence than what she had taught them to practise when they were lads under tutelage. She was, in fact, the fully accredited mistress of Larks' Hall.

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And Granny, in reality, presided at the vicarage; not oppressively, for she was one of those sagacious magnates who are satisfied with the substance of power without loving its show.

Notwithstanding, she prevented the publication of more than two calf-skin volumes at a time of the Vicar's sermons; she turned madam aside when she would have hung the parlour with gilt leather, in imitation of Foxholes; and she restricted the little girls to fresh ribbons once a month, and stomachers of their own working. And so, when Granny decreed that Mistress Betty was to be invited down to Mosely, there was no more question of the propriety of the measure that there would have been of an Act of Council given under the Tudors; the only things left to order were the airing of the best bedroom, the dusting of the ebony furniture, and the bleaching on the daisies of old madam's diamond quilt.

Down to Somersetshire went Mistress Betty, consoling cousin Ward with the gift of a bran-new mantua and a promise of a speedy return, and braving those highwaymen who were for ever robbing King George's mail; but the long, light midsummer nights were in their favour, and their mounted escort had to encounter no paladins of the road in scarlet coats and feathered hats.

Mistress Betty's buoyant spirit rose with the fresh air, the green fields, and the sunshine. She was so obliging and entertaining to an invalid couple among her fellow-travellers, an orange nabob from India and his splendid wife, that they declared she had done them more good than they would derive from the Pump-room, the music, and the cards, to which they were bound. They asked her address, and pressed her to pay them a visit; when they would have certainly adopted her, and bequeathed to her their plum. As it was, half-a-dozen years later, when, to her remorse, she had clean forgotten their existence, they astounded her by leaving her a handsome legacy; which, with the consent of another party concerned—one who greatly relished the mere name of the bequest, as a proof that nobody could ever resist Lady Betty—she shared with a cross-grained grand-nephew whom the autocratic pair had cut off with a shilling.

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VI.—BETWEEN MOSELY AND LARKS' HALL.

At Mosely Mistress Betty alighted at last, entered the wicket-gate, and approached the small, weather-stained, brick house. She made her curtsy to madam, asked the Vicar's blessing—though he was not twenty-five years her senior and scarcely so wise—hugged the little girls, particularly sick Fiddy, and showered upon them pretty tasteful town treasures, which little country girls, sick or well, dearly love. Fiddy's eyes were glancing already; but she did not leave off holding Mistress Betty's hand in order to try on her mittens, or to turn the handle of the musical box. And Mistress Betty finally learned, with some panic and palpitation, which she was far too sensible and stately a woman to betray, that the Justice was not gone—that Master Rowland, in place of examining the newly-excavated Italian cities, or dabbling in state treason in France, was no further off than Larks' Hall, confined there with a sprained ankle: nobody being to blame, unless it were Granny, who had detained Master Rowland to the last moment, or Uncle Rowland himself, for riding his horse too near the edge of the sandpit, and endangering his neck as well as his shin-bones. However, Mistress Betty did not cry out that she had been deceived, or screech distractedly, or swoon desperately (though the last was in her constitution), neither did she seem to be brokenhearted by the accident.

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But Granny's reception of her was the great event of the day. Granny was a picture, in her grey gown and "clean white hood nicely plaited," seated in her wicker seat "fronting the south, and commanding the washing-green." Here Granny was amusing herself picking gooseberries—which the notable Prissy was to convert into gooseberry-fool, one of the dishes projected to grace the town lady's supper—when Mistress Betty was led towards her.

It was always a trying moment when a stranger at Mosely was presented to old Madam Parnell. The Parnells had agreed, for one thing, that it would be most proper and judicious, as Mistress Betty had quitted the stage—doubtless in some disappointment of its capabilities, or condemnation of the mode in which it was conducted,—to be chary in theatrical illusions, to drop the theatrical *sobriquet* Lady Betty, and hail their guest with the utmost ceremony and sincerity as Mistress Lumley. But Granny turned upon her visitor a face still fresh, in its small, fine-furrowed compass, hailed her as Lady Betty on the spot, and emphatically expressed all the praise she had heard of her wonderful powers; regretting that she had not been in the way of witnessing them, and declaring that as they escaped the snares and resisted the temptations of her high place, they did her the utmost honour, for they served to prove that her merits and her parts were equal. Actually, Granny behaved to Lady Betty as to a person of superior station, and persisted in rising and making room for the purpose of sharing with her the wicker seat; and there they sat, the old queen and the young.

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Young madam had been quite determined that, as Uncle Rowland was so unfortunate as to be held by the foot at Larks' Hall from his tour, he should not risk his speedy recovery by hobbling over to Mosely, when she could go herself or send Prissy every morning to let him know how the invalid was. But the very day after Mistress Betty's arrival old madam secretly dispatched Tim, the message-boy, to desire the squire to order out the old coach, and make a point of joining the family party either at dinner or at supper. Young madam was sufficiently chagrined; but then the actress and the squire met so coldly, and little Fiddy was flushing up into a quiver of animation, and Mistress Betty was such delightful company in the slumbrous country parsonage.

It is pleasant to think of the doings of the Parnells, the witcheries of Mistress Betty, and the despotism of old madam, during the next month. Indeed, Mistress Betty was so reverent, so charitable, so kind, so gentle as well as blithe under depressing influences, and so witty under

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stagnation, that it would have been hard to have lived in the same house with her and have been her enemy: she was so easily gratified, so easily interested; she could suit herself to so many phases of this marvellous human nature. She listened to the Vicar's "argument" with edification, and hunted up his authorities with diligence. She scoured young madam's lutestring, and made it up in the latest and most elegant fashion of nightgowns, with fringes and buttons, such as our own little girls could match. She made hay with Prissy and Fiddy, and not only accomplished a finer cock than weak Fiddy and impatient Priss, but surpassed the regular haymakers. And she looked, oh! so well in her haymaker's jacket and straw hat—though young madam was always saying that her shape was too large for the dress, and that the slight hollows in her cheeks were exaggerated by the shade from the broad-brimmed flapping straw.

Of course Mistress Betty performed in the "Traveller" and "Cross Purposes," and gave out riddles and sang songs round the hearth of a rainy evening, or about the cherrywood table in the arbour, of a cloudless twilight, much more pat than other people—that was to be looked for; but then she also played at love after supper, loo and cribbage for a penny the game—deeds in which she could have no original superiority and supremacy—with quite as infectious an enthusiasm.

To let you into a secret, young madam was in horror at one time that Dick Ashbridge was wavering in his allegiance to her white rosebud, Fiddy; so enthralling was this scarlet pomegranate, this purple vine. But one evening Mrs. Betty turned suddenly upon the mad boy, to whom she had been very soft, saying that he bore a great resemblance to her cousin's second son Jack, and asked how old he was? and did he not think of taking another turn at college? This restored the boy to his senses in a trice, and she kissed Mistress Fiddy twice over when she bade her good night.

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But old madam and Lady Betty were the chief pair of friends. Granny, with her own sway in her day, and her own delicate discrimination, acute intellect, and quick feelings, was a great enough woman not to be jealous of a younger queen, but to enjoy her exceedingly. Madam Parnell had seen the great world as well as Lady Betty, and never tired of reviving old recollections, comparing experiences, and tracing the fates of the children and grandchildren of the great men and women her contemporaries. Prissy and Fiddy vowed over and over again, that the stirring details were more entertaining than any story-book. For this reason, Granny took a personal pride in Lady Betty's simplest feat, as well as in her intellectual crown, and put her through every stage of her own particular recipes for cream cheese and pickled walnuts.

"The dickons!" cried a Somerset yeoman: "The Lon'on madam has opened the five-barred gate that beat all the other women's fingers, and gathered the finest elder-flowers, and caught the fattest chicken; and they tell me she has repeated verses to poor crazed Isaac, till she has lulled him into a fine sleep. 'Well done, Lon'on!' cries I; 'luck to the fine lady:' I never thought to wish success to such a kind." Granny, too, cried, "Well done, Lon'on! Luck to the fine lady!" If all Helens were but as pure, and true, and tender as Lady Betty!

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Granny would have Lady Betty shown about among the neighbours, and maintained triumphantly that she read them, Sedleys, Ashbridges, and Harringtons, as if they were characters in a printed book—not that she looked down on them, or disparaged them in any way; she was far more tolerant than rash, inexperienced Prissy and Fiddy. And Granny ordered Lady Betty to be carried sight-seeing to Larks' Hall, and made minute arrangements for her to inspect Granny's old domain, from garret to cellar, from the lofty usher-tree at the gate to the lowly

"Plaintain ribbed that heals the reapers' wound"

in the herb-bed. No cursory inspection would suffice her: the pragmatistical housekeeper and the rosy milkmaids had time to give up their hearts to Lady Betty like the rest. Master Rowland, as in courtesy bound, limped with the stranger over his helmets and gauntlets, his wooden carvings, his black-letter distich; and, although she was not overflowing in her praises, she had seen other family pictures by Greuze, and she herself possessed a fan painted by Watteau, to which he was vastly welcome if he cared for such a broken toy.

She fancied the head of one of the Roman emperors to be like his Grace of Montague; she had a very lively though garbled familiarity with the histories of the veritable Brutus and Cassius, Coriolanus, Cato, Alexander, and other mighty, picturesque, cobbled-up ancients, into whose mouths she could put appropriate speeches; and she accepted a loan of his 'Plutarch's Lives,' "to clear up her classics," as she said merrily; altogether poor Squire Rowland felt that he had feasted at an intellectual banquet.

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At last it was time to think of redeeming her pledge to cousin Ward; and, to Mistress Betty's honour, the period came while Master Rowland was still too lame to leave Larks' Hall, except in his old coach, and while it yet wanted weeks to the softening, gladdening, overwhelming bounty of the harvest-home.

Then occurred the most singular episodes of perverseness and reiterated instances of inconsistency of which Granny had been found guilty in the memory of man, either as heiress of Larks' Hall or as old madam of the vicarage. At first she would not hear of Mistress Betty's departure, and asked her to be her companion, during her son's absence, in his house of Larks' Hall, where all at once she announced that she meant to take up her temporary residence. She did not approve of its being committed entirely to the supervision of Mrs. Prue, her satellite, the schoolmaster's daughter who used so many long words in cataloguing her preserves and was so trustworthy: Mrs. Prue would feel lonesome; Mrs. Prue would take to gadding like the chits

Prissy and Fiddy. No, she would remove herself for a year, and carry over her old man Morris along with her, and see that poor Rowley's goods were not wasted or his curiosities lost while he chose to tarry abroad.

Master Rowland stared, but made no objection to this invasion; Mrs. Betty, after much private rumination and great persuasion, consented to the arrangement. Young madam was obliged to be ruefully acquiescent, though secretly irate at so preposterous a scheme; the Vicar, good man, to do him justice, was always ponderously anxious to abet his mother, and had, besides, a sneaking kindness for Mistress Betty; the girls were privately charmed, and saw no end to the new element of breadth, brightness, and zest, in their little occupations and amusements.

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When again, of a sudden, after the day was fixed for Master Rowland's departure, and the whole family were assembled in the vicarage parlour—old madam fell a-crying and complaining that they were taking *her* son away from her—robbing her of him: she would never live to set eyes on him again—a poor old body of her years and trials would not survive another flitting. *She* had been fain to gratify some of his wishes; but see if they would not destroy them both, mother and son, by their stupid narrow-mindedness and obstinacy.

Such a thing had never happened before. Who had ever seen Granny unreasonable and foolish? The Vicar slipped his hand to her wrist, in expectation that he would detect signs of hay-fever, though it was a full month too late for the complaint—there had been cases in the village—and was shaken off with sufficient energy for his pains.

"Mother," exclaimed Master Rowland, haughtily, "I understand you; but I had a plain answer to a plain question months ago, and I will have no reversal to please you. Pity craved by an old woman's weakness! favours granted in answer to tears drawn from dim eyes! I am not such a slave!"

The others were all clamouring round Granny, kissing her hand, kneeling on her footstool, imploring her to tell them what she wanted, what she would like best, what they could go and do for her; only the squire spoke in indignant displeasure, and nobody attended to him but Mistress Betty.

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It did appear that the squire had been too fast in repelling advances which did not follow his mother's appeal. Mistress Betty gave no token—she stood pulling the strings of her cap, and growing first very red, and then ominously white, like any girl.

Perhaps the squire suspected that he had been too hasty, that he had not been grateful to his old mother, or generous to the woman who, however fine, and courted, and caressed, was susceptible of a simple woman's anguish at scorn or slight. Perhaps there flashed on his recollection a certain paper in the 'Spectator,' wherein a young lady's secret inclination towards a young gentleman is conclusively revealed, not by her advances to save his pride, but by her silence, her blushes, her disposition to swoon with distress when an opportunity is afforded her of putting herself forward to attract his notice—nay, when she is even urged to go so far as to solicit his regard.

Master Rowland's brow lightened as if a cloud lowering there had suddenly cleared away—Master Rowland began to look as if it were a much more agreeable experience to contemplate Mistress Betty nervous and glum, than Lady Betty armed at a hundred points, and all but invulnerable—Master Rowland walked as alertly to her side as if there were no such things as sprains in this world. "Madam, forgive me if I have attributed to you a weak complacency to which you would never condescend. Madam, if you have changed your mind, and can now tolerate my suit, and accord it the slightest return, I am at your feet."

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Assuredly, the tall, vigorous, accomplished squire would have been there, not figuratively but in his imposing person. Family explanations were admissible a century and a half ago; public declarations were sometimes a point of honour; bodily prostration was by no means exploded; matter-of-fact squires knelt like romantic knights; Sir Charles Grandison and Sir Roger de Coverley bent as low for their own purposes as fantastic gauze and tinsel troubadours.

But Mistress Betty prevented him. "I am not worth it, Master Rowland," cried Mistress Betty, sobbing and covering her face with her hands; and, as she could not have seen the obeisance, the gentleman intermitted it, pulled down the hands, kissed Madam Betty oftener than the one fair salute, and handed her across the room to receive Granny's blessing. Granny sat up and composed herself, wished them joy (though she had the grace to look a little ashamed of herself), very much as if she had obtained her end.

There is no use in denying that young madam took to bed for three days, and was very pettish for a fortnight; but eventually gave in to the match, and was not so much afflicted by it as she had expected, after the first brunt. Granny, in her age, was so absurdly set on the *mésalliance*, and so obliging and pleasant about everything else—the Vicar and the little lasses were so provokingly careless of the wrong done them and the injury to the family,—that she knew very well, when her back was turned, they formed as nonsensically hilarious a bridal party as if the wedding had concerned one of themselves and not the bachelor uncle, the squire of Larks' Hall. And Mistress Betty ordered down the smartest livery; and the highest gentry in Somersetshire would have consented to grace the ceremony, had she cared for their presence, such a prize was she in their country-houses when they could procure her countenance during their brief sojourn among sparkling rills and woodland shades. Altogether, young madam, in spite of her vanities and humours, loved the children, the Vicar, Granny, the bridegroom, and even (with a grudge) the

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bride, and was affected by the sweet summer season and the happy marriage-tide, and was, in the main, too good to prove a kill-joy.

Master Rowland and Mistress Betty were married by Master Rowland's own brother in the Vicar's own church, with Fiddy and Prissy and the Sedleys for bridesmaids, and Dick Ashbridge for a groom's-man. Cousin Ward, brought all the way from town to represent the bride's relations, was crying as if she were about to lose an only daughter. For Granny, she would not shed one bright, crystal tear on any account; besides, she was ever in state at Larks' Hall to welcome home, the happy couple. Ah, well, they were all happy couples in those days!

At Larks' Hall Mistress Betty bloomed during many a year; for a fine woman knows no decay; she only passes from one stage of beauty and excellence to another, wearing, as her rightful possession, all hearts—her sons', as their father's before them. And Master Rowland no longer sat lonely in his hall, in the frosty winter dusk or under the usher-oak in the balmy summer twilight, but walked through life briskly and bravely, with a perfect mate; whom he had not failed to recognize as a real diamond among the bits of glass before the footlights—a diamond which his old mother had consented to set for him.

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Our squire and Lady Betty are relics of a former generation. We have squires as many by thousands, as accomplished by tens of thousands; but the inimitable union of simplicity and refinement, downrightness and dignity, disappeared with the last faint reflection of Sir Roger de Coverley. And charming Lady Betty departed also with early hours, pillions, and cosmetics—that blending of nature and art, knowledge of the corrupt world and abiding true-heartedness, which then existed—a sort of marvel.

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A CAST IN THE WAGGON.

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I.—DULCIE'S START IN THE WAGGON FOR HER COMPANY.

OLD and young were clamouring hoarsely and shrilly by daybreak one September morning round a little girl, one of a cloth-worker's numerous family. She had been rather a tender lass, and change of air was thought good for her full growth. Though she was still small, she was close on her one-and-twentieth year, and her friends held it was high time for her to see the world. It was seeing the world to go with a late mayor's daughter, an orphan and an heiress, who had been visiting the cloth-worker's family, and would have Dulcie to live with her for awhile in a neighbouring town as a friend and companion.

Mind those worthy warm-hearted relatives of Dulcie's had no idea of her returning to her parents' nest in a hurry, though the two towns, Fairfax and Redwater, were within a day's journey by waggon of each other. Dulcie would see the world, and stay in her new abode in the next country town, or lose her character for dignity and spirit; and girls were fain to be thought discreet and decided a hundred years ago or so. She might as lief marry as not, when she was away on her travels. Girls married then with far less trouble than they accomplished such a journey. They ran down to Richmond and married on a Sunday, to save a talk and a show; they walked out of the opera where Handel might be performing, and observant gentlemen took the cue, followed on their heels, and had the knot tied by a priest, waiting in the house opposite the first chair-stand. Indeed, they contracted alliances so unceremoniously, that they went to Queen Caroline's or the Princesses' drawing-room, without either themselves or the world appearing quite sure whether they were maids or wives. Dear! dear! what did come of these foolish impulsive matches? Did they fulfil the time out of mind adage, "Happy's the wooing that's not long a-doing"? or that other old proverb, "Marry in haste, and repent at leisure"? Which was the truth?

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It is a pity that you should see Dulcie, for the first time, in tears. Dulcie, who only cried on great occasions, in great sorrow or great joy—not above half-a-dozen times in her life. Dulcie, whom the smallpox could not spoil, with her pretty forehead, cat's eyes, and fine chin. Does that description give you an idea of Dulcie—Dulcie Cowper, not yet Madam, but any day she liked Mistress Dulcie? It seems expressive. An under-sized, slight-made girl, with a little face clearly, very clearly cut, but round in all its lines as yet; an intelligent face, an enthusiastic face, a face that could be very shrewd and practical, and, at the same time, a face that could be lavishly generous. The chief merit of her figure lay in this particular, that she "bridled" well. Yes, it is true, we have almost forgotten the old accomplishment of "bridling"—the head up and the chin in, with the pliant knees bent in a low curtsy. Dulcie "bridled," as she prattled, to perfection. She had light brown hair, of the tint of a squirrel's fur, and the smoothness of a mouse's coat, though it was twisted and twirled into a kind of soft willowy curls when she was in high dress. Ah! no wonder that Kit Cowper, the cloth-worker, groaned to see that bright face pass from his ninepin alley; but it was the way of the world, or rather the will of Providence to the cloth-worker, that the child should fulfil her destiny. So Dulcie was launched on the sea of life, as far as Redwater, to push her fortune.

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No wonder Dulcie was liked by Clarissa Gage. Clarissa was two years younger than Dulcie, but she was half-a-dozen years older in knowledge of the world, and therefore fell in love with Dulcie for the sake of variety. Clarissa had the bones of a noble woman under her pedantry and

affectation; she was a peg above Dulcie in station, and a vast deal before her in the world's estimation. She was indeed "a fortune;" and you err egregiously if you suppose a fortune was not properly valued a hundred years ago. Men went mad for fair faces and glib tongues, but solidly and sensibly married fortunes, according to all the old news-prints. But Clarissa was also a beauty, far more of a regular beauty than Dulcie, with one of those inconceivably dazzling complexions that blush on like a June rose to old age, and a stately height and presence for her years. She had dark brown curls of the deep brown of mountain waters, with the ripple of the same, hanging down in a wreath of tendrils on the bend of the neck behind. With all her gifts, Mistress Clary had the crowning bounty which does not always accompany so many inferior endowments: she had sense under her airs, and she was good enough to like Dulcie instinctively, and to think how nice it would be to have Dulcie with her and Mistress Cambridge in their formal brick house, with the stone coping and balcony, at Redwater. Besides, (credit to her womanhood,) Clarissa did reflect what a fine thing it would be for Dulcie Cowper getting up in years, really getting up in years, however young in spirit, to have the variety, and the additional chance of establishing herself in life. Certainly, Redwater was a town of more consideration than Fairfax, and had its occasional assemblies and performances of strolling players; and Clarissa, in right of her father's family, visited the vicar and the squire, and could carry Dulcie along with her, since the child's manners were quite genteel, and her clothes perfectly presentable.

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It was a harmonious arrangement, in which not only Clarissa but Mistress Cambridge agreed. Cambridge was one of those worthy, useful persons, whom nobody in those strangely plain but decidedly aristocratic days—not even Clarissa and Dulcie, though they sat with her, ate with her, hugged her when they wanted to coax her—ever thought or spoke of otherwise than "Cambridge, a good sort of woman in her own way." The only temporary drawback to the contentment of the party was the shower of tears which fell at Dulcie's forcible separation from her relatives. It was forcible in the end; all the blessings had been given in the house—don't sneer, they did her no harm, no harm, but a vast deal of good—and only the kisses and tears were finished off in the street.

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After all this introduction, it is painful to describe how the company travelled. It was in a stage waggon! But they could not help it. We never stated that they were out-and-out quality; and not even all the quality could travel in four coaches and six, with twelve horsemen riding attendance, and an unpaid escort of butchers, bakers, and apothecaries, whipping and spurring part of the way for the custom. What could the poor Commons do? There were not stage coaches in every quarter of the great roads; and really if they pocketed their gentility, the huge brown waggons were of the two extinct conveyances the roomier, airier, and safer both from overturns and highwaymen. The seats were soft, the space was ample, and the three unprotected females were considered in a manner incognito, which was about as modest a style as they could travel in. Of course, they were not in their flowered silks, their lustrings, their mantuas. We are assured every respectable woman travelled then in a habit and hat, and no more thought of hoops than of hair powder. The only peculiarity was that beneath their hats they wore mob-caps, tied soberly under the chin, and red or blue handkerchiefs knotted over the hat, which gave them the air of Welsh market-women, or marvellously clean and tidy gipsies. Clarissa was spelling out the words in *Pharamond*—a French classic; Dulcie was looking disconsolately straight before her through their sole outlet, the bow at the end of the waggon, which circumscribed as pretty and fresh a circle of common and cornfield, with crimson patches of wood and the blue sky above, as one might wish to see. Occasionally the crack of a sportsman's gun was heard to the right or left, followed by a pheasant or a string of partridges darting across the opening of the canvas car; but as yet no claimant had solicited the privilege and honour of sharing the waggon and the view with our fair travellers.

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II.—TWO LADS SEEK A CAST IN THE WAGGON.

"Hullo, Joe! we want a lift," cries a brisk voice, and the couple of great steeds—they might have been Flanders mares or Clydesdale horses, so powerful were they over the shoulders, so mighty in the flanks—almost swerved out of their direct line and their decorum. Two fellows suddenly started up from a couch where they had lain at length on a hay-stack, slid down the height, crashed over an intervening bit of waste land, and arrested the waggoner in his smock-frock and clouted shoes.

"Get in, Will, and take possession. Ha! hum! here are ladies: where will we stow our feet? I declare Will is on their skirts already, with more green slime than is carried on the breast of a pond. I believe he thinks them baggage—lay figures, as they've turned aside their heads. Gentlefolks for a wager! duchesses in disguise! I must make up to them, anyhow. Ladies, at your service; I humbly beg your pardon for having so much as thought of incommoding you, but indeed I was not aware of your presence. Come, Will, tumble out again instantly, and do not let us be so rude as to plague the ladies."

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Poor Will! very stiff and tired, stared about him, disturbed and discomforted, and prepared to perform the behest of his more energetic companion.

Dulcie did a little of her "bridling," but said never a word; Clarissa lifted her large, rather languishing eyes, let them fall again on her mittens, and remained dumb. They speak before they were spoken to? not they, they knew better. At the same time, when Will stumbled as he alighted

on his weary feet, they were guilty of an inclination to titter, though the accident was excusable, and the point of the joke small.

"You are very polite, sirs," protested Cambridge, making round eyes, and reddening and blowing at being constituted the mouthpiece of the party on any interest save that of victuals. "I vow it is very pretty behaviour; but as it is a public carriage, I don't think we are at liberty to deprive Joe of his money, and you, sirs, of your seats. What say you, Mistress Clary?"

"I decline to give an opinion," answered Clarissa with great dignity; in which she broke down a little by adding hastily, in half audible accents. "Be quiet, Dulcie!" for Dulcie's risible faculties had been excited in a lively degree. She had been crying so lately that there was a hysterical turn in her mirth, and having once given way to it she could not restrain herself, but was making all sorts of ridiculous faces and spasms in her throat without effect. You see, these were two ordinary, happy young girls; and the stiff starch of their manners and pretensions only brought out in a stronger light, and with a broader contrast, their youthful frolicsomeness.

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"I think, sirs, you may come in—that is, if you keep your distance," Mistress Cambridge decided, with solemn reservation. With a multitude of apologies and thanks, the two young men, more considerate and courteous in their forward and backward fashion than many a fine gentleman of the time, clambered up, and coiled themselves into corners, leaving a respectful void between them and the original occupants of the waggon.

Tranquillity settled down on the travellers—a tranquillity only broken by the drowsy rumble of the waggon-wheels, and the perennial whistle of the stooping, grizzled waggoner. Dulcie was just thinking that they might have been Turks, they were so silent, when Mistress Cambridge stirred the still atmosphere by the inquiry—

"Pray, sirs, have you happened to fall in with any stubble chickens in your walk; I think you said you had been walking hereabouts?" affording Clarissa an opportunity of complaining afterwards, in the retirement of the little inn's private room, that these young fellows would judge them a set of gluttons or farmers' daughters abroad for a holiday, aping gentlewomen, instead of being duchesses in disguise.

Although the girls never lifted their eyes, yet, by a magic only known to such philosophers, they had taken as complete an inventory of the young men, beginning at their wardrobes, as if they had looked at them coolly from head to foot for a whole half-hour. They were aware that the fellows were in plain suits, though one of them was not without the air of being fine on occasions. Their coats were cloth, not brocade or velvet; their ruffles were cambric, not lace; their shoe-buckles were only silver; their hats were trimmed with braid, and neither with gold nor silver edging. They were not my lords; they were not in regimentals; they did not rap out oaths; they had not the university air; they showed no parson's bands; they were not plain country bumpkins—what were they?

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After all, it was scarcely worth inquiry whether the newcomers belonged to law or physic; for the young women in their pride and petulance felt bound not to consider the investigation worth the trouble. The lad who was the leader, and who was unquestionably of gentle enough nurture, was a plain little fellow, sallow and homely-featured, although a good-natured person might suppose from his smiling sagacity that in animated conversation it would be quite possible to forget his face in his countenance. The other was ruddy, with a face as sharply cut as a girl's, and delicate features not fitting his long limbs—clearly he was no better than a nincompoop. Yes, the girls were perfectly justifiable in whispering as the waggon stopped to bait at the "Nine Miles House," and they got out to bait also—

"What a pair!"

"Such a fright, the little fellow, Clary!"

"Such a goose, the tall fellow, Dulcie!"

It is a sad truth that foolish young women will judge by the exterior, leap at conclusions, and be guilty of rude and cruel remarks.

What would come of it if the silly, sensitive hearts were in earnest, or if they did not reserve to themselves the indefeasible right of changing their opinions?

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At the "Nine Miles House" the wayfarers rested, either in the sanded parlour, or the common kitchen of the ale-house. Mistress Clarissa and her party had the sanded parlour for themselves; the young men, with their cramped legs, stumbled into the fitch-hung kitchen, the more entertaining room of the two, and had plates of beans and bacon, a toast and a tankard; for the day was in September, and the wind was already bracing both to body and appetite. Mistress Clarissa carried her private stores, and Cambridge laid out her slices of roasts and broils, plates of buns and comforts, and cruets with white wines. But when did a heroine remain in a sanded parlour in an inn, when she could stroll over the country and lose her way, and get run at by wild cattle, and stared at by naughty gentlemen? Clary was not so mean-spirited, though she was physically lazier than Dulcie; she was eager to scamper across the stubble fields (where Cambridge expected chickens to roam in flocks), and to wander, book in hand, by yon brook with the bewitching pollards.

Dulcie could not accompany her. Dulcie being a practical woman, a needle in innocent sharpness, had peeped about the waggon to inspect their luggage, and had found to her horror that one of

her boxes had burst its fastenings—that very box with her respected mother's watered tabby, and her one lace head on the place of honour on the top. So she and Cambridge had an earnest consultation on the accident, which resulted in their proceeding to tuck up their skirts, empty the receptacle with the greatest care and tenderness, and repack it with such skill that a rope would replace its rent hinges. Dulcie was not for walking.

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Clarissa was thus forced to saunter alone, and after she had got to the brook and the pollards, she sat down, and leant her arms on the bars of an old farm gate. Soon tiring of looking about her, staring at the minnows and the late orange coltsfoot and white wild ranunculus, and the straw-coloured willow-leaves drooping into the water, she took out of her pocket that little brown French classic, *Pharamond*, and started again to accompany the French storyteller, advancing on the very tallest of stilts that storyteller ever mounted. It was a wonder truly that Clary on her mossy bank, and by a rustic stile, had not preferred the voices of the winds and the waters, the last boom of the beetle, the last screech of the martin, the last loud laugh of the field-workers borne over a hedge or two on the breeze, to the click and patter of these absurd Frenchmen's tongues.

At last Clarissa bethought her of the hour, sprang up, carefully put away her volume—volumes and verses were precious then—and began to pick her steps homewards. Ah! there had been a wretch of a man looking at her—actually drawing her in his portfolio—the ugly fellow in the waggon. Thank goodness, he could not have recognized her as his fellow-traveller; he had copied the old farm-gate from the other side, and he could only have got a glimpse of her figure through the bars with not so much as the crown of her hat above them. He had only put her in faithfully by a line or two, and three dots, and he did not observe her now as she passed behind him and scanned his performance ere she scampered off. But what a risk she had run of having her likeness taken without her knowledge or consent, and carried about the country by a walking gentleman!

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It was quite an adventure; yet how could Clary think it so when an earthquake and a whole town burnt to ashes were nothing in her French novels! But, still true to the instinct of personality which causes us to think a molehill in reference to our dear selves a world more momentous and interesting than a mountain in reference to a princess of the blood-royal, stately Clarissa flew off like a lapwing to tell Dulcie that she had just had such an escape, and hit on such a discovery—she had found out all about the two fellows; they were a couple of painters. Marry! it was a marvel to see the one so hearty, and the other so rosy. Doubtless they did not have an odd penny in their purse between them.

Clarissa came too late; she encountered Dulcie running out to meet her, all alive with the same news, only gathered in a more orthodox manner. The fair, soft lad, whom they had reckoned a nincompoop, had shaken himself up in his companion's absence, and had offered his landlady a drawing for his share of the dinner, "if you will score the value off the bill." And the landlady had repeated the story to Cambridge and Dulcie when she showed the picture to them, and expressed her conviction that the lad was far gone in the spleen—he seemed always in a brown study; too quiet-like for a lad. She should have no peace in her mind about him if she were in any way related to him. Bless her heart! he would sell another for something much less than a crown.

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Dulcie, all in a glow, had actually been chaffering with the painter for one of those wonderful groups of luscious peaches, mellow pears, July flowers, and striped balsamine, singing birds and fluttering insects, full of extravagant beauty. In the business, too, Dulcie had been by far the more overcome of the two. The painter, roused to a job, had not cheated her; on the contrary, he had been as usual a conscientious spendthrift of his powers. He had conducted the negotiation in the plainest, manliest spirit, looking the eager girl in the face with his blue eyes, and receiving her crown-piece in his hand, which was nobler than his face, inasmuch as it was seamed with the action of his paints and tools, without a notion of anything unbecoming or degrading.

The brother painter shook his head when he returned, and found what Will had been about in his absence.

"Man, man, didn't I bargain that I was to pay for your company, and haven't I put you in the worst bed, and allowed you the burnt meat and the sodden bread, and the valise to carry twice as often as I took it myself, to satisfy your plaguy scruples? And yet you could go and scurvily steal a march upon me the moment you were out of my sight! But," brightening immeasurably, and bowing low, "you have certainly contrived what I had not the face to attempt—an introduction to the ladies—although, no doubt, it was very simply done, and you are a very modest man, as I do not need to tell them. Ladies, I am Sam Winnington, son of the late gallant Captain Winnington, though I should not call him so; and this is Will Locke, the vagrant child of an excellent man, engaged, I believe, in the bookselling and stationery trade. We are painters, if it please you, on a tour in search of sketches and commissions. I beg to assure you, that I do portraits on a great scale as well as a small, and Will sometimes does lions in the jungle, as well as larks in a tuft of grass."

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Cambridge was more posed than ever by the fresh advance included in this merry speech; but the girls were quite of another mind, and took the matter forthwith into their own hands, as is usual with the class, and bore down caution and experience, particularly when it proceeded from their housekeeper. They liked the young man's congenial sense and spirit, they secretly hankered after his vivacity; they were, with their dear woman's romance, all afire in three minutes about pictures, gods, and goddesses, historic scenes, and even scratches in Indian ink. A true woman and a painter are hand and glove at a moment's warning in any age. Cambridge could but drop

naturally into the background, and regard the constant puzzle, "How girls can talk with fellows!"

The chance companions were once more packed into the waggon, pleasantly mixed together this time, and away they trundled yet many weary miles by the sunset and the light of the moon. The boughs in the horses' collars dangled brown, Cambridge and the waggoner nodded drowsily; but, divine privilege of youth! the spirits of the lads and lasses only freshened as the long day waned and they neared the goal. They were *dramatis personæ* on a moving stage, jesting like country folks going to a fair. Even Will Locke was roused and lively as he answered Dulcie's pertinacious, pertinent questions about the animal and vegetable life he loved so well; while Dulcie, furtively remembering the landlady's suggestion, wondered, kind heart! if she could use the freedom to mention to him that ground ivy was all but infallible in early stages of the spleen, and that turnip broth might be relied on to check every incipient cough. Clarissa was coquettish, Sam Winnington was gallant. With all the girls' mock heroism, and all their arrogance and precision, trust me, girls and lads formed a free and friendly company in the end.

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III.—REDWATER HOSPITALITY.

Clarissa and Dulcie did do the young men service in their calling. They said it would be a shame not to help two such likely fellows (you know they had undauntedly set the one down as a fright and the other as a goose in the morning); they were sure they were industrious and worthy, and they would give bail for their honesty. So they spoke right and left to the few influential families who were at Redwater of the two young painters, who by mere luck had come with them in the waggon, had put up at the "Rod and Fly," and were waiting for commissions. Had the Warrens or the Lorimers not heard of them? they would come bound they were a couple of geniuses, from their conversation.

The old world grinned, and said to the girls' faces that the lasses had better not be too zealous for the lads; they were generally fit to manage their own business, and something more into the bargain. Uncle Barnet would not care to have his niece Clary fling herself away with her tidy fortune on a walking gentleman, though he were a genius.

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The result was that Dulcie "bridled" in a twitter of wounded faith and anger. Clarissa was superb and scornful. She ordered a full-length portrait, and fixed the hour for the sitting within the week. Dulcie set off alone with Master Will Locke—Dulcie, who knew no more of Redwater than he should have done, if his wits had not been woolgathering—to find the meadow which was beginning to purple over with the meadow saffron.

But for all the townspeople laughed at Mistress Clary's and Mistress Dulcie's flights, they never dreamt of them as unbecoming or containing a bit of harm. Fine girls like Clary and Dulcie, especially an accomplished girl like Clary, who could read French and do japan, besides working to a wish in cross-stitch and tent-sketch, were not persons to be slighted. The inhabitants saw for themselves that the painters had coats which were not out at elbows, and tongues, one of which was always wagging, and the other generally at rest, but which never said a word fairly out of joint. They needed no further introduction; the gentlemen called for the young men, the ladies curtsied to them in the bar of the "Rod and Fly," in the church-porch, in the common shop, and began conversations with them while they were chaffering at the same counter for the same red ribbons to tie up the men and the women's hair alike; and they felt that their manners were vastly polite and gracious, an opinion which was not far from the truth.

The Vicar lent the painters books. The Mayor invited them to supper. The nearest Justice, who was a family man, with a notable wife, had them to a domestic party, where they heard a little girl repeat a fable, and saw the little coach which the Justice had presented to his son and heir, then in long clothes, in which he was to be drawn along the smooth oak boarded passages of the paternal mansion as soon as he could sit upright.

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Lastly, Clarissa Gage, under the sufficient guardianship of Cambridge, treated the strangers to a real piece of sport—a hop on the washing-green, under her mulberry-tree. It commenced at four o'clock in the afternoon, and ended with dusk and the bats, and a gipsy fire, and roasting groats and potatoes in the hot ashes, in imitation of the freakish oyster supper which Clary had attended in town.

Clary took care to have her six couples well assorted, and not to be severed till the merry-making was over; she did not mind uniting herself to Master Sam Winnington, and Dulcie to Master Will Locke—mind! the arrangement was a courteous compliment to the chief guests, and it gave continual point to the entertainment. The company took a hilarious pleasure in associating the four two-and-two, and commented openly on the distribution: "Mistress Clary is mighty condescending to this jackanapes." "Mistress Dulcie and t'other form a genteel pair."

To be sure the two young men heard the remarks, which they might have taken as broad hints, and the girls heard them too, uttered as they were without disguise; but so healthy were our ancestors, that nobody was put out—not even soft, mooning Will Locke. Nothing came of it that evening, unless a way Dulcie had of pressing her red lips together, throwing back her little brown head, shaking out the powder from her curls, and shaking down the curls themselves, with a gleeful laugh, which appeared to turn her own "bridling" into derision; and a high assertion of Clary's that she was determined never to wed a man beneath the rank of a county member or a peer. Now, really, after Clary had danced fifteen dances, and was about to dance other five,

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without stopping, with a portrait painter, of her own free will, this was drawing a longish and very unnecessary bow. But then Sam Winnington did not take it amiss or contradict her. He said she was right, and he had no doubt she would keep her word, and there was a quick, half-comic, half-serious gleam from the depths of his grey eyes which made Clarissa Gage look more bashful and lovelier than any man had ever yet beheld her. Pity the member or the peer could not have been that man!

Imagine the party after Mistress Cambridge had provided them with some of her favourite chickens, and more substantial Dutch beef, with wet fruit and dry, cold Rhenish and sugar, and mulled wine against the dew and damp feet, collecting merrily round the smoky fire, with little jets of flame shooting up and flashing out on the six couples! Sam Winnington in his silk stockings and points neatly trussed at the knee, was on all-fours poking the blue and red potatoes into the glowing holes. Another man with rough waggishness suddenly stirred the fire with an oak branch, and sent a shower of sparks like rockets into the dark blue sky, but so near that it caused the women to recoil, screaming and hiding their faces on convenient shoulders, and lodged half-a-dozen instruments of ignition and combustion in Sam Winnington's hair, singeing it and scorching his ears. Had Sam not been the best-natured and most politic fellow in the world, he would have dragged the aggressor by the collar or the cuff over the smoking crackling wood, and made the ladies shriek in greater earnest.

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There was the strange ruddy light now on this face, now on that—on Will Locke's as he overturned a shovel of groats at Dulcie's feet, and on Dulcie's, so eager to cover his blunder, that she quite forgot the circumstances of the case, and never came to herself till she had burnt all the five tips of her rosy fingers catching the miller's pearls. Then Will Locke was so sorry, stroked the fingers so daintily, hung upon Cambridge so beseechingly, imploring her to prepare a cool mash for Mistress Dulcie's finger points, the moment they were all gone—that Dulcie could have cried for his tenderness of heart, and quickness and keenness of remorse.

Conjure up the whole fourteen—the Vicar and Cambridge of the number—when the fire had sunk white in ashes, when they could scarcely see each other's faces, and only guess each other's garments, having a round at "Puss in the corner," running here and rushing there, seizing this shoulder-knot, holding tight like a child by that skirt, drawing up, pulling back, whirling round all blowsy, all panting, all faint with fun and laughter, and the roguish familiarity which yet thought no evil. Very romping, was it not? very hoydenish? yes certainly. Very improper? by no means. It was practised by dignitaries of the Church, still more classic than the Vicar scuttling and ducking after Cambridge (you never saw the like), and by the pink and pride of English womanhood.

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Redwater was hospitable to these painter lads, as we understand hospitality, unquestionably, ungrudgingly hospitable; but it was more than hospitable to them, it was profitable to them in a pecuniary sense, without which great test of its merits they could not long have tarried within its bounds. They were neither fools nor hypocrites to pretend to be clean indifferent to the main chance.

The Vicar fancied a likeness of himself in his surplice, which his parishioners might buy and engrave, if they had a mind to preserve his lineaments when he was no longer among them. The Justice took a notion to have his big girls and his little girls, his boy and nurse, his wife, and himself as the sheltering stem of the whole young growth, in one canvas.

But the great achievement was Sam Winnington's picture of Clarissa, "not as a crazy Kate this time," she told him saucily, "but myself in my hair and brocade, to show what a grand lady I can be." Thus Clarissa dressed herself out in one of those magnificent toilettes all in the autumn mornings, and sat there in state for hours, for the sole benefit of posterity, unless Sam Winnington was to reap a passing advantage by the process. Clarissa in her brocade, with the stiff body and the skirt standing on end, her neckerchief drawn through the straps of her bodice, her bouquet pinned, "French fashion," on her side; surely that picture was a masterpiece. So speaking was the copy of her deep brown hair, her soft, proud cheek, the wave of her ripe red lips, that a tame white pigeon, accustomed to sit on her shoulder, flew into the window right at the canvas, and, striking against the hard, flat surface, fell fluttering and cooing in consternation to the ground. If that was not an acknowledgment of the limner's fidelity, what could be?

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Clary, in person, played my lady very well, reclining in her father's great chair. Her hall was roomy enough; it had its space for Sam Winnington's easel as well as Clary's harpsichord, and, what was more useful, her spinning-wheel, besides closets and cupboards without number. Sam Winnington entertained Clarissa; he was famous in years to come for keeping his sisters in good humour. He told her of the academy and the president's parties, of the public gardens and the wild beast shows; and how the Princesses had their trains borne as they crossed the park. He asked her what quality in herself she valued the most; and owned that he was hugely indebted to his coolness. When his colours were not drying fast enough, he read her a page or two of grand heroic reading from Pope's 'Homer' about Agamemnon and Achilles, Helen and Andromache; when she tired of that he was back again to the sparkling gossip of the town, for he was a brilliant fellow, with a clear intellect and a fine taste; and he had stored up and arranged elegantly on the shelves of his memory all the knowledge that was current, and a little more besides.

When he was gone, Clary would meditate what powers of conversation he had, and consider rather glumly how she would miss the portrait painter when he migrated to his native air, the town; how dull Redwater would be; how another face would soon supplant hers on the canvas!

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He had shown her others in his portfolio quite as blooming and dignified, though he had tumbled them carelessly over; and so he would treat hers when another's was fresh before him. Clary would be restless and cross at her own suppositions; for where is the use of being a beauty and a wit if one must submit to be either forgotten or beaten, even by a portrait painter?

In the meantime, the Vicar also wanted a *facsimile* of his hayfield, as it looked when the haymakers were among the tedded grass, or under the Redwater ash-trees, to present him with a pleasant spectacle within, now that the bleak autumn was coming on, and there would be nothing without but soaked or battered ground, dark skies, and muddy or snowy ways. The Mayor desired a pig-sty, with the most charming litter of little black and white pigs, as nice as guinea-pigs, and their considerably coarser grunting mamma, done to hand. He was a jolly, prosaic man, Master Mayor, very proud of his prosaicness, as you rarely see a real man of his poetry: he maintained, though Mrs. Mayor nearly swooned at the idea, that he would sooner have a pig-sty than a batch of heroes. Perhaps the heroes of Master Mayor's day had sometimes wallowed in the mire to suggest the comparison. And Clarissa Gage would have her bower done—her clematis bower before the leaves were brown and shrivelled and there only remained the loving spindle-shanked stems clinging faithfully to the half-rotten framework which they could no longer clothe with verdure.

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What a bower Will Locke made of Clary's bower! as unique as Sam Winnington's portrait of Clary herself. It was not the literal bower; and it would not have suited Master Mayor or the Justice, though it might have had a charm for the Vicar. We will go with the Vicar; although he also had his bombast, and, when elevated by company and cheer, denominated Cambridge a goddess, and raised in the poor woman's breast expectations never to be realized. We don't altogether approve that wonderful bit of work, but we like it. There never were such deep damask roses as hung over the trellis, there never were such flaming sunflowers, or pure white lilies as looked in at the sides. Squirrels don't frequent garden bowers unless they are tamed and chained by the leg. Our robin redbreasts are in the fields in summer, and do not perch on boughs opposite speckled thrushes when they can get abundance of worms and flies among the barley. We have not little green lizards at large in England; the only one ever seen at Redwater was in the apothecary's bottle. Still what a bower that is! What a blushing, fluttering bower, trilling with song, glancing and glowing with the bronze mail of beetles and the softened glory of purple emperors! What a thing it was to examine; how you could look in and discover afresh, and dwell for five minutes at a time on that hollow petal of a flower steeped in honey, on that mote of a ladybird crawling to its couch of olive moss.

Dulcie was speechless with admiration before this vision of Clarissa's bower. Heigho! it was an enchanted bower to Dulcie as to Will Locke. It was veritably alive to him, and he could tell her the secrets of that life. What perfume the rose was shedding—he smelt it about his palette; what hour of the clock the half-closed sunflower was striking; whence the robin and the thrush had come, and what bean fields they had flown over, and what cottage doors they had passed; of what the lizard was dreaming in south or east as he turned over on his slimy side—all were plain to him.

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Ostensibly Dulcie was taking lessons from Will Locke in flower-painting, for Dulcie had a delicate hand and a just eye for colours, and the sweetest, natural fondness for this simple, common, beautiful world. And Will Locke was a patient, indulgent teacher. He was the queerest mixture of gentleness and stubbornness, shyness and confidence, reserve and candour. He claimed little from other people, he exacted a great deal from himself. He was the most retiring lad in society, backward and out of place; he was free with Dulcie as a girl of her own stamp could be. He had the most unhesitating faith in his own ability, he relied on it as on an inspiration, he talked of it to Dulcie, he impressed it upon her until he infected her with his own credulity until she believed him to be one of the greatest painters under the sun. She credited his strangest imagination, and that quiet lad had the fancy of a prince of dreamers.

In the end Dulcie was humble and almost awed in Will Locke's presence. Now here comes the sign of Dulcie's innate beauty of character. Had Dulcie been a commonplace, coarse girl, she would have been wearied, aggrieved, fairly disgusted by Will Locke in three days. But Dulcie was brimfull of reverence, she was generous to the ends of her hair, she liked to feel her heart in her mouth with admiration.

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The truth of the matter was, Dulcie would have been fain to lift up Will Locke's pencil as they pretend Cæsar served Titian, to clean his palette, gather flowers for him, busk them into a nosegay, preserve them in pure water, and never steal the meanest for her own use. Will Locke was her saint, Dulcie was quite ready to be absorbed in his beams. Well for her if they did not scorch her, poor little moth!

Oh! Dulcie, Dulcie, your friends could not have thought it of you—not even Clary, tolerably misled on her own account, would have believed you serious in your enamourment, though you had gone down on your knees and sworn it to them. It was nothing but the obliging humour of Mistress Dulcie and the single-heartedness of the youth; still even in this mild view of the case, if their friends had paid proper attention to them, they would have counselled Dulcie to abide more securely by her chair covers, and my simple man to stick more closely to his card or his ivory, his hedges or his hurdles.

Sometimes, late as the season was, Will Locke and Dulcie went out picking their steps in search of plants and animals, and it was fortunate for Dulcie that she could pull her mohair gown through her pocket-holes, and tuck her mob-cap under her chin beneath her hat, for occasionally

the boisterous wind lifted that trifling appendage right into the air, and deposited it over a wall or a fence, and Will Locke was not half so quick as Dulcie in tracing the region of its flight, neither was he so active, however willing, in recovering the truant. Why, Dulcie found his own hat for him, and put it on his head to boot one day. He had deposited it on a stone, that he might the better look in the face a dripping rock, shaded with plumes of fern and tufts of grass, and formed into mosaic by tiny sprays of geranium faded into crimson and gold. It was a characteristic of Will that while he was so fanciful in his interpretation, the smallest, commonest text sufficed him. The strolls of these short autumn days were never barren of interest and advantage to him. The man carried his treasures within himself; he only needed the slightest touchstone from the outside world to draw them out. A fieldmouse's nest was nearly as good to him as an eagle's eyrie, an ox-eyed daisy as a white rose, a red hemp-nettle as a foxglove. He put down his hat and stood contemplating the bit of rock, until every morsel of leaf told him its tale, and then proceeded to fill his pockets and hands with what the poorest country boy would have deemed the veriest weeds; and at last he would have faced round, and marched home, unconscious that his fair hair, bleached like a child's, was undefended from a pitiless shower impending over his head. Dulcie lingered dutifully behind, picked up that three-cornered hat timidly, called his attention to his negligence, and while he stooped with the greatest ease in life, she, bashfully turning her eyes another way, finally clapped the covering on his crown, as a mother bonnets her child.

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IV.—OTHER CASTS FOLLOWING THE CAST IN THE WAGGON.

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Clary and Dulcie were slightly censured for their officiousness in the affairs of these painter fellows: but it is in the nature of women not to take well with contradiction: it is in the nature of good women to fly furiously in the face of whatever crosses their generosity, or thwarts their magnanimity.

The crisis came about in this way: Will Locke had finished his work long before Sam; not that Will was more industrious, but he had not got half the commissions at only half the price, and that was about the usual division of labour between them. The two men were born to it. Sam's art took the lucrative shape of portrait-painting; Will's the side of flower and fruit and landscape painting, which was vilely unremunerative then, and allegorical painting, which no one will be at the pains to understand, or, what is more to the purpose, to buy, in this enlightened nineteenth century. Sam, who was thriving already, fell in love with Clarissa Gage, with her six thousand pounds fortune: there was no premeditation, or expediency, or cunning, in the matter; it was the luck of the man. But Will Locke could never have done it: he, who could never make a clear subsistence for himself, must attach himself to a penniless, cheery, quick little girl like Dulcie; and where he could not well maintain one, must provide for two at the lowest estimate. Will Locke was going, and there was no talk of his return; Dulcie was helping him to put up his sketches with her orderly, ready, and respectful hands.

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"When we are parted for good, I shall miss you," he said, simply.

Her tender heart throbbed with gratitude, but she only answered, "Are we to be parted for good? Will you never come back to Redwater?"

"I cannot come back like Sam," he affirmed, sadly, not bitterly; "I am not a rising man, Dulcie, though I may paint for future ages."

A bright thought struck Dulcie, softening and warming her girlish face, till it was like one of those faces which look out of Fra Angelico's pictures, and express what we are fond of talking about—adoration and beneficence: "Could I paint for the potteries, Master Locke?" For, in his noble thriftless way, he had initiated her into some of the very secrets of his tinting, and Dulcie was made bold by the feats she had achieved.

"What should set you labouring on paltry porringers?—you are provided with your bit and sup, Mistress Dulcie."

"I thought it might be fine to help a great painter like you," confessed the gentle lass; very gently, with reluctance and pain, for it was wrung by compulsion from her maidenliness.

"Do you think so? I love you for thinking it," he said directly: but he would never have done so, brave as he was in his fantasies, without her drawing him on.

However, after that speech, there was no further talk of their parting for good: indeed, Dulcie would do her part; and slave at these "mugs and pigs" to any extent; and all for a look of his painting before he quitted the easel of nights; a walk, hanging upon his arm, up Primrose Hill; a seat by his side on the Sundays in the city church where he worshipped. Dulcie did not care to trouble her friends at home with the matter: instead, she had a proud vision of surprising them with the sight of—her husband. "They would be for waiting till they could spare money to buy more clothes, or perhaps a chest of drawers; they could not afford it; no more could Will find means to fly up and down the country. Father dear will be pleased to see him so temperate: he cannot drink more than a glass of orange-wine, or a sip of cherry-brandy; he says it makes his head ache: he prefers the clear, cold water, or at most a dish of chocolate. Mother may jeer at him as unmanly; she has a fine spirit, mother: and she may think I might have done better; but mother has grown a little mercenary, and forgotten that she was once young herself, and would

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have liked to have served a great genius with such a loving heart and such blue eyes as Will's. Ah! the girls will all envy me, when they get a glance from Will's blue eyes: and let them, for he is too good a fellow to look at anybody but his poor ordinary silly wife, and if he did, the odds are that he would not see them: could not see whether their hair were black or red. Ah me! I am not sure whether Will always sees me—poor me—and not one of his angels from paradise."

But Dulcie did mean to tell Clary, and to ask her what she would advise her to wear for her wedding-gown, and whether she and Sam Winnington would be best maid and best man. But Clary put her foot through the plan neatly. Clary was in one of her vapourish moods when she inquired one night, "Is Will Locke coming down again, Dulcie? Oh! what ever is he seeking here? What more can we do for him? Nobody wants any more sheep or goats (were they sheep or goats, Dulcie?), or strawberries and currants, unless as mutton, and kid, and preserves. And, Dulcie, you must not stand in your own light, and throw away any more notice upon him; it is wasting your time, and the word of him may keep away others. A match with him would be purely preposterous: even Sam Winnington, who is a great deal more of a scamp, my dear, treats him as a sublime simpleton."

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What induced Clary to attempt to lock the stable after the steed was stolen? What drove her off all of a sudden on this dreadfully candid and prudent tack? She only knew. Possibly it was to ease her own troubled conscience: but with Sam Winnington constantly dangling about her skirts, and receiving sufficient encouragement, too, it was hard for Dulcie to bear. She was in a fine passion; she would not tell Clary, after that round of advice; no, not a word. How did she know what Clary would do next? Perhaps forbid Will the house, when he came back from London with the licence, lock her into a room, and write an evil report to her friends? No, Dulcie could keep her own counsel: she was sorry to live in Clary's house, and eat the bread of deceit, but she would not risk Will's happiness as well as her own.

Will Locke reappeared on the scene within a fortnight. The lad did not tell Dulcie, though, that he had walked the most of the way, and that he had rendered himself footsore, in order to be able to count out Dulcie's modest expenses up to town, and perhaps a month's housekeeping beforehand: for that was the extent of his outlook. Will Locke appointed the Vicar to meet him and a young woman in Redwater church, the very morning after his return: there was no use in delay, except to melt down the first money he had hoarded; and Will and Dulcie were like two children, eager to have the business over and done with, and not to do again by the same parties. The Vicar was quite accustomed to these sudden calls, and he submitted to them with a little groan. He did not know who the young woman might be, and he did not care; it might be Mistress Cambridge, it might be Mistress Clarissa herself, it might be the still-room maid, or the barmaid at the "Rod and Fly;" it was all one to him. As for the young painter fellow, the quiet lads were as likely to slip into these scrapes as the rattles; indeed, the chances were rather against them: the Vicar was inclined to cry, "Catch Mr. Sam Winnington in such a corner." But the Vicar was in no way responsible for a youth who was not even his own parishioner; he was not accountable for his not having worldly goods wherewith to endow the young woman whom he was to lead to the altar. Oddly enough, though worldly goods are undoubtedly introduced into the service, there are no accompanying awkward questions: such as, "What are your worldly goods, M.?" or, "Have you any worldly goods, M.?" The Vicar did not care at all, except for his incipient yawns, and his disordered appetite; he was a rebuke to gossips.

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When the hour came, Dulcie was distressed: not about wrongdoing, for the girl had no more idea that she was doing wrong than you have when you write a letter on your own responsibility, and at your own dictation; not at the absence of friends, for in Dulcie's day friends were considered very much in the way on such occasions. Indeed, the best accredited and most popular couples would take a start away from their companions and acquaintances, and ride ten miles or so to be married privately, and so escape all ceremony. Dulcie was troubled by the want of a wedding-gown; yes, a wedding-gown, whether it is to wear well or not, is to a woman what a wig is to a barrister, what a uniform is to a soldier. Dulcia's had no existence, not even in a snip; no one could call a half-worn sacque a wedding-gown, and not even her mother's tabby could be brought out for fear of observation. Only think! a scoured silk: how could Dulcie "bridle" becomingly in a scoured silk? There would have been a certain inappropriateness in its shabbiness in the case of one who had done with the vanities of this world: but a scoured silk beside bridal blushes!—alas, poor Dulcie!

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In every other respect, there appears something touching as well as humorous in that primitive marriage-party on the grey October morning, with the autumn sunbeams, silver not golden, faintly brightening the yellowing vine, over the sexton's house, and the orange and grey lichens, the only ornaments outside the solid old church, with its low, heavy Saxon arches. The Vicar bowed with ceremony, and with a dignified and deliberate air, as he recognised Mistress Dulcie; the old clerk and his wrinkled wife stumbled into an apprehension that it was Mistress Clarissa Gage's friend who was to have the knot tied all by herself so early: but it was nothing to them either—nothing in comparison with the Christmas dole. The lad and lass so trustful, so isolated, making such a tremendous venture, deserved to have the cheery sunshine on their lot, if only for their faith and firmness.

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When it was over, Dulcie plucked Will's sleeve, to turn him into the vestry. One must be the guide if not the other, and "it's main often the woman," the old clerk would tell you, with a toothless grin.

Then Dulcie went with Will straight to the "Rod and Fly;" for such was the established rule. These

occurrences were so frequent, that they had their etiquette cut out for them. From the "Rod and Fly" Will and Dulcie sent the coolest and most composed, the most perfectly reasonable and polite of messages, to say they had got married together that morning, and that Mistress Cambridge need not have the trouble of keeping breakfast for Mistress Dulcie. A separate apology was sent from Dulcie for not having procured the watercresses which she was to have sought for Cambridge. Further, Mr. and Mrs. Will Locke would expect all of their friends who approved of the step they had taken to come to the "Rod and Fly," and offer their congratulations and drink their healths that morning without fail; as the young couple had to start by the very waggon in which they had first set eyes on each other. "Think of that, Will!" Dulcie had exclaimed, breathlessly, as if she was calling his notice to a natural phenomenon. They had now to ask and receive Dulcie's parents' blessing before they began housekeeping in Will's lodgings in London, on the strength of a month's prices with future orders and outwork from the potteries. Oh! these old easy beginnings! What have we gained by complicating them?

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Will Locke and Dulcie had cast the die, and, on the first brush of the affair, their friends at Redwater took it as ill as possible: Clarissa was hysterical, Sam Winnington was as sulky as a bear. If this treatment were to be regarded as a foreshadowing of what the behaviour of the authorities at Fairfax would prove, then the actors in the little drama might shake in their shoes. But Will Locke placidly stood the storm they had brewed, only remembering in years to come some words which Dulcie did not retain for a sun-down. Dulcie was now affronted and hurt, now steady as a stepping-stone and erect as a sweet-pea, when either of the two assailants dared to blame Will, or to imply that he should have refrained from this mischief. Why, what could Will have done? What could she have done without him? She was not ashamed to ask that, the moment they reflected upon Will Locke, though she had not borne his name an hour. Oh! child, child!

Notwithstanding, it was very trying to Dulcie when Clary protested that she never would have believed that Dulcie could have stolen such a march upon her; never. Dulcie to deceive her! Dulcie to betray her! Poor Clary! Whom could she turn to for affection and integrity, in the days that might remain to her in this wicked world? She had walked all along the street with its four or five windows in every gable turned to the thoroughfare, with her handkerchief at her eyes, while the whole town was up, and each window full. She was so spent now, with her exertions and her righteous indignation, that she sat fanning herself in the bar: for Will and Dulcie could not even afford a private room to receive their wedding company so summarily assembled. Never was such a business, in Clary's opinion; not that she had not often heard of its like—but to happen to a kind, silly, credulous pair, such as Dulcie and Will Locke! Clary sat fanning herself, and casting knots on her pocket-handkerchief, and glancing quickly at Sam Winnington's gloomy, dogged face, so different from the little man's wonted bland, animated countenance. What on earth could make Sam Winnington take the wilful deed so much to heart? Hear him rating Will, whom he had been used to patronize in a careless, gracious style, but upon whom he now turned in strong resentment. These reproaches were not unprovoked, but they were surely out of bounds; and their matter and manner rankled in the breasts of both these men many a day after they had crossed the Rubicon, and travelled far into the country on whose borders they were still pressing.

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"You have disgraced yourself and me, sir! You have gone far to ruin the two of us! People will credit us of the same stock: a pair of needy and reckless adventurers!"

"Master Winnington, I was willing: I could do what I liked with myself without your leave; and I suppose Will Locke was equally independent," fired up Dulcie.

"We'll never be mistaken for the same grain, Sam Winnington," declared Will Locke, with something like disdain. "I always knew that we were clean different: and the real substance of the wood will come out more and more distinctly, now that the mere bark is rubbed off."

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Clary was modified at last; she kissed and sobbed over Dulcie, wished her joy sincerely, half promised to visit her in town, and slipped a posy ring from her own hand to the bride's, on the very finger where Will Locke had the face to put the marriage-ring which wedded a comely, sprightly, affectionate young woman to struggles and disappointments, and a mad contest between spirit and matter. But Sam Winnington would not so much as shake hands with Will; though he did not bear any malice against Dulcie, and would have kissed her fingers if she would have allowed it: and the young men, erstwhile comrades, looked so glumly and grimly at each other, that it was a universal relief when the great waggon drew up at the inn door.

Dulcie, in another character now, and that even before the fall of the russet leaves—half ashamed but very proud, the little goose! of the quick transformation—stepped into the waggon; the same boxes were piled beside her; Will leapt in after her, and away they rolled. There was nothing more for Dulcie to do but to wave her hand to Clary and Cambridge, and the women of the inn (already fathoms deep in her interest), and to realize that she was now a married woman, and had young Will Locke the great painter, in his chrysalis state, to look after.

But why was Sam Winnington so irate? He had never looked sweet on Dulcie for half a second. Was it not rather that a blundering dreamer like Will Locke had anticipated him, marred his tactics, and fatally injured his scientific game? Sam came dropping down upon Redwater whenever he could find leisure, when the snow was on the ground, or when the peaches were plump and juicy, for the next two or three years. If he had not been coming on finely in his profession, heightening his charges five guineas at a time, and if Clary had not possessed that six thousand pounds' fortune, they would have done off the matter in a trice, like Will Locke and Dulcie Cowper. Poor Sam! poor Clary!—what an expenditure of hours and days and emotions,

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they contrived for themselves! They were often wretched! and they shook each other's faith: it is doubtful if they ever quite recovered it. They were so low occasionally that it must have been dreadfully difficult for them to get up again; they were so bitter that how they became altogether sweet once more, without any lingering remains of the acrid flavour in their mouths, is scarcely to be imagined. They were good and true in their inmost hearts; but it does appear that some of the tricks of which they were guilty left them less honest human creatures. There was a strong dash of satire in Sam's fun afterwards; there was a sharpness in Clary's temper, and a despotism in her dignity. To be sure, Clary always liked Sam's irony a thousand times better than another man's charity, and Sam ever thought Clary's impatient, imperious ways far before the cooing of any turtle-dove in the wood; but that was only an indication that the real metal was there, not that it was not smirched and corroded with rust.

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The first effect of Will and Dulcie's exploit was extremely prejudicial to the second case on the books. Uncle Barnet, a flourishing London barrister, a man with strong lines about his mouth, a wart on his forehead, and great laced flaps at his coat pockets, and who was supposed to be vehemently irresistible in the courts, hurried down to Redwater on purpose to overhaul Clary. What sort of doings were those she presided over in her maiden house at Redwater? Not the runaway marriage of a companion; that occurred every day in the most polite circles; Clary could not fairly be called to account for such a trifle; besides, a girl without a penny might do as she chose. But there was something a vast deal more scandalous lurking in the background: there was word of another fellow of the same kidney buzzing about Clary—Clary with her six thousand pounds' fortune, her Uncle Barnet, her youth, her handsome person, her what not? Now, as sure as Uncle Barnet's name was Barnet, as he wore a wig, as there was justice in the country, he would have the law of the fellow. Don't tell him the man was advancing rapidly in his profession. What was a painter's profession?—or the son of a gallant Captain Winnington? If a gallant Captain Winnington could do nothing more than gallant, he did not deserve the name; it was a piece of fudge to cheat foolish women with. Yes; he would have the law of the fellow if he buzzed about his niece; he would have the law of Clary if she encouraged him.

What could Clary do? she had been taught to look up to Uncle Barnet; she had seen polite society under his wife's wing; she had obeyed him at once as her Mentor and her Mæcenas—as her father and prime-minister. She cried and kissed his hand, and promised not to forget her position, and to be a good girl; and as she was not engaged to Sam Winnington, and did not know for certain that he would return to Redwater for the grass-mowing or the hop-gathering, she thought she might be free to promise also that she would not see him again with her will. Of course, she meant to keep her word if she might; but there are two at a bargain-making; and observe, she said "with her will;" she made no reference to Sam Winnington's pleasure. And yet, arrogant as Clary could be on her worst side, she had found her own intentions and purposes knocked down by Sam Winnington's determinations before now.

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When Sam Winnington did come down next, Clary had such honour and spirit, that she ordered the door to be shut in his face; but then she cried far more bitterly than she had done to Uncle Barnet, in the same hall where Sam had painted her and jested with her; and somehow her affliction reached Sam's ears, living in a little place like Redwater at the "Rod and Fly" for several days on end.

At last another spice entered into the dish; another puppet appeared on the boards, and increased the disorder of the former puppets. The county member did turn up. Clary was a prophet: he came on a visit to his cousin the Justice, and was struck with tall, red and white, and large-eyed Clary; he furbished up an introduction, and offered her the most marked attention.

Mistress Clarissa was in ecstasy, so her gossips declared, and so she almost persuaded herself, even after she had certain drawbacks to her pleasure, and certain cares intruding upon her exultation; after she was again harassed and pestered with the inconvenient resuscitation of that incorrigible little plain, vain portrait painter, Sam Winnington. He was plain—he had not the county member's Roman nose; and he was vain—Clary had already mimicked the fling of his cravat, and the wave of his white hands. Clever, smart fellows, like Sam Winnington, are generally coxcombs. Oh, Sam! where, in order to serve your own turn now, be your purple shadows, your creamy whites, your marvellous reading of people's characters, and writing of the same on their faces, their backs, their very hands and feet, which should leave the world your delighted debtor long after it had forgotten yon member's mighty services?

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Clarissa had never danced so many dances with one evening's partner as with the smitten member, at the assembly given on the spur of the moment in his honour, whereat Sam Winnington, standing with his hat under his arm, and leaning against the carved door, was an observant spectator. He was not sullen as when Will Locke and Dulcie tumbled headlong into the pit of matrimony! he was smiling and civil; but his lips were white and his eyes sunken, as if the energetic young painter did not sleep of nights.

Clary was not sincere; she gave that infatuated, tolerably heavy, red-faced, fox-hunting member, own cousin to the Justice, every reason to suppose that she would lend him the most favourable ear, when he chose to pay her his addresses, and then afforded him the amplest provocation to cry, "Caprice—thy name is woman." She had just sung "Tantivy" to him after supper, when she sailed up to Sam Winnington, and addressed him demurely:—

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"I have come to wish you good-night, sir."

"And I to wish you farewell, madam."

"Farewell is a hard word, Master Winnington," returned Clary, with a great tide of colour rushing into her face, and a gasp as for breath, and tracing figures nervously on the floor with her little shoe and its brave paste-buckle.

"It shall be said though, and that without further delay, unless three very different words be put in its place."

"Sir, you are tyrannous," protested Clary, in a tremulous voice.

"No, Mistress Clarissa, I have had too good cause to know who has been the tyrant in this business," declared Sam Winnington, speaking out roundly, as a woman loves to hear a man, though it be to her own condemnation, "You have used me cruelly, Clarissa Gage; you have abused my faith, wasted the best years of my life, and deceived my affections."

"What were the three words," asked Clary, faint and low.

"'Yours, Sam Winnington;' or else, 'Farewell, Clarissa Gage?'"

"Yours, Sam Winnington."

He caught her so sharp up by the arm at that sentence, that some persons said Mistress Clarissa had staggered and was about to swoon; others, that the vulgar fellow of a painter had behaved like a brute, pulled her to his side as she was marching past him, and accused her of perjury before the whole ball-room. Bold men were apt at that time to seize aggravating women (especially if they were the wives of their bosoms) by the hairs of their heads, so that a trifling rudeness was little thought of. The county member, however, pricked up his long ears, flushed, fiercely stamped to the particular corner, and had a constable in his eye to arrest the beggarly offender; but before he could get at the disputants, he had the mortification to see them retreat amicably into a side room, and the next thing announced to him was, that Mistress Clarissa had vanished home, before anybody could get rightly at the bottom of the mystery.

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Very fortunately, the county member ascertained the following day, before he had compromised his pride another hair's-breadth, that the fickle damsel had accepted the painter's escort the previous evening, and had admitted the painter at an incredibly early hour the subsequent morning. After such indiscretion, the great man would have nothing more to say to Mistress Clarissa, but departed in great dudgeon, and would never so much as set his foot within Redwater again; not even at the following election.

Uncle Barnet was forced to come round and acknowledge, with a very bad grace, that legislation in heiresses' marriages—in any marriage—is out of the question. No man knew how a marriage would turn out; you might as well pledge yourself for the weather next morning; certainly there were signs for the wise; but were weather almanacs deceptive institutions or were they not? The innocent old theory of marriages being made in heaven was the best. Clary was not such a mighty catch after all: a six thousand pounds' fortune was not inexhaustible, and the county member might never have come the length of asking its owner's price. People did talk of a foolish engagement in his youth to one of his yeomen's daughters, and of a wealthy old aunt who ruled the roast; though her well-grown nephew, not being returned for a rotten borough, voted with dignity for so many thousands of his fellow-subjects in the Commons. Uncle Barnet, with a peculiarly wry face, did reluctantly what he did not often advise his clients to do, unless in desperate circumstances—he compromised.

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Clary was made a wife in the height of summer, with all the rites and ceremonies of the Church, with all the damasks, and laces, and leadings by the tips of the fingers, and lavishings of larkspurs, lupins, and tiger-lilies proper for the occasion, which Dulcie had lost. Nay, the supper came off at the very "Rod and Fly," with the tap open to the roaring, jubilant public; a score of healths were drunk upstairs with all the honours, the bride and bridegroom being king and queen of the company: even Uncle Barnet owned that Sam Winnington was very complaisant—rather exceed in his complaisance, he supplemented scornfully; but surely Sam might mend that fault with others in the bright days to come. It is only the modern English who act Hamlet *minus* the Prince of Denmark; sitting at the bridal feast without bride or bridegroom. They say hearts are often caught on the rebound, and if all ill-treated suitors spoke out warmly yet sternly like Sam Winnington, and did not merely fence about and either sneer or whine, more young fools might be saved, even when at touch-and-go with their folly, after the merciful fate of Clary and to the benefit of themselves and of society.

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V.—DULCIE AND WILL, AT HOME IN ST. MARTIN'S LANE.

While Sam and Clarissa were fighting the battles of vanity and the affections down in the southern shire in quite a rural district, among mills and ash-trees, and houses with gardens and garden bowers, William and Dulcie were combating real flesh-and-blood woes—woes that would not so much set your teeth on edge, as soften and melt your tough, dry heart—among the bricks and mortar of London. These several years were not light sunshiny years to the young couple. It is of no use saying that a man may prosper if he will, and that he has only to cultivate potatoes and cabbages in place of jessamine and passion flowers; no use making examples of Sir Joshua and Vandyke, and telling triumphantly that they knew their business and did it simply—only pretending to get a livelihood and satisfy the public to the best of their ability, but ending in

becoming great painters. One man's meat is another man's poison; one man's duty is not his neighbour's. When shall we apprehend or apply that little axiom? The Duchess of Portland killed three thousand snails in order that she might complete the shell-work for which she received so much credit; Dulcie would not have put her foot voluntarily on a single snail for a pension.

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It was Will Locke's fate to vibrate between drudgery and dreaming; always tending more inevitably towards the latter, and lapsing into more distant, absorbing trances, till he became more and more fantastic and unearthly, with his thin light hair, his half-transparent cheek, and his strained eyes. To prophesy on cardboard and canvas, in flower and figure, with monster and star, crescent and triangle, in emerald green and ruby red and sea blue, in dyes that, like those of the Bassani, resembled the clear shining of a handful of jewels, to prophesy in high art, to be half pitied, half derided, and to starve: was that Will Locke's duty?

Will thought so, in the most artless, unblemished, unswerving style; and he was a devout fellow as well as a gifted one. He bowed to revelation, and read nature's secrets well before he forsook her for heaven, or rather Hades. He devoted himself to the sacrifice; he did not grudge his lust of the eye, his lust of the flesh, his pride of life. He devoted Dulcie, not without pang; and he devoted his little sickly children pining and dying in St. Martin's Lane. He must follow his calling, he must fulfil his destiny.

Dulcie was not quite such an enthusiast; she did love, honour, and obey Will Locke, but she was sometimes almost mad to see him such a wreck. It had been a sent evil, and she had looked down into the gulf; but she had missed the depths. She had never seen its gloomy, dark, dreary nooks, poor lass! in her youthful boldness and lavishness; and our little feminine Curtius in the scoured silk, with the powdered brown curls, had not merely to penetrate them in one plunge, but had to descend, stumbling and groping her way, and starting back at the sense of confinement, the damp and the darkness. Who will blame her that she sometimes turned her head and looked back, and stretched up her arms from the desert to the flesh-pots of Egypt? She would have borne anything for her husband; and she did work marvels: she learned to engrave for him, coloured constantly with her light, pliant fingers, and drew and painted from old fresh memories those articles of stoneware for the potteries. She clothed herself in the cheapest and most lasting of printed linen sacques and mob caps, and hoods and aprons, fed herself and him and the children on morsels wellnigh miraculously. She even swallowed down the sight of Clary in her cut velvet and her own coach, whose panel Sam Winnington himself had not thought it beneath him to touch up for Clary's delectation and glory. If Will would only have tarried longer about his flowers and bees, and groves and rattlesnakes: if he had even stopped short at faces like those of Socrates, Cæsar, Cleopatra, Fair Rosamond—what people could understand with help—and not slid off faster and more fatally into that dim delirium of good and evil, angels and archangels, the devil of temptation and the goblin of the flesh, the red fiend of war, and the pale spirit of peace!

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The difference which originated at Will and Dulcie's marriage had ended in alienation. Dulcie thought that Sam Winnington would have bridged it over at one time, if Will would have made any sign of meeting his overtures, or acknowledged Sam's talents and fortune: nay, even if Will had refrained from betraying his churlish doubts of Sam's perfect deserts.

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But no, this Will would not deign to do. The gentle, patient painter, contented with his own estimation of his endowments, and resigned to be misjudged and neglected by the world, had his own indomitable doggedness. He would never flatter the world's low taste for commonplace, and its miserable short-sightedness; he would never pay homage to Sam Winnington which he did not deserve—a man very far from his equal—a mere clever portrait-painter, little better than a skilled stonemason. Thus Sam Winnington and Will Locke took to flushing when each other's names were mentioned—sitting bolt upright and declining to comment on each other's works, or else dismissing each other's efforts in a few supremely contemptuous words. Certainly the poor man rejected the rich not one whit less decidedly than the rich man rejected the poor, and the Mordecais have always the best of it. If we and our neighbours will pick out each other's eyes, commend us to the part of brave little Jack, rather than that of the belligerent Giant, even when they are only eyeing each other previous to sitting down to the ominous banquet.

But this was a difficulty to Dulcie, as it is to most women. No one thinks of men's never showing a malign influence in this world; it is only good women who are expected to prove angels outright here below. But it does seem that there is something more touching in their having to stifle lawful instincts, and in their being forced to oppose and overcome unlawful passions—covetousness, jealousy, wrath, "hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness."

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Dulcie, with the sharpness of her little face, divested of all its counterbalancing roundness—a keen, worn little face since the day it had smiled so confusedly but generously out of the scurvy silk in the church at Redwater—was a sweet-looking woman under her care-laden air. Some women retain sweetness under nought but skin and bone; they will not pinch into meanness and spite; they have still faith and charity. One would not wonder though Dulcie afforded more vivid glimpses of *il Beato's* angels after the contour of her face was completely spoilt.

You can fancy the family room in St. Martin's Lane, some five or six years after Will Locke and Dulcie were wed, with its strange litter of acids and aquafortis, graving tools and steel plates. Will and Dulcie might have been some of the abounding false coiners, had it not been for the colours, the canvas, and the vessels from the potteries, all huddled together without attention to effect. Yet these were not without order, for they were too busy people to be able to afford to be purely disorderly. They could not have had the curtain less scant, for the daylight was precious to them; they had not space for more furniture than might have sufficed a poor tradesman or better

sort of mechanic; only there were traces of gentle birth and breeding in the casts, the prints and portfolios, the Dutch clock, and the great hulk of a state-bed hung with the perpetual dusky yellow damask, which served as a nursery for the poor listless little children.

Presently Dulcie looked after the sops, and surreptitiously awarded Will the Benjamite's portion, and Will ate it absently with the only appetite there; though he, too, was a consumptive-looking man—a good deal more so than when he attracted the pity of the good wife at the "Nine Miles Inn." Then Dulcie crooned to the children of the milk-porridge she would give them next night, and sang to them as she lulled them to sleep, her old breezy, bountiful English songs, "Young Roger came tapping at Dolly's window," and "I met my lad at the garden gate," and brushed their faces into laughter with the primroses and hyacinths she had bought for Will in Covent Garden Market. Will asked to see them in the spring twilight, and described the banks where they grew, with some revival of his early lore, and added a tale of the fairies who made them their round tables and galleries, which caused the eldest child (the only one who walked with Dulcie in his little coat to the church where he was christened) to open his heavy eyes, and clap his hot hands, and cry, "More, father, more." Will and Dulcie looked gladly into each other's eyes at his animation, and boasted what a stamping, thundering man he would yet live to be—that midge, that sprite, with Dulcie's small skeleton bones, and Will's dry, lustreless, fair hair!

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Anon while Dulcie was still rocking one of these weary children moaning in its sleep, Will must needs strike a light to resume his beloved labours; but first he directed his candle to his canvas, and called on Dulcie to contemplate and comprehend, while he murmured and raved to her of the group of fallen men and women crouching in the den—of the wind of horror raising their hair,—of the dawn of hope bursting in the eastern sky, and high above them the fiendish crew, and the captains of the Blessed still swaying to and fro in the burdened air, and striking deadly blows for supremacy. And Dulcie, open-eyed and open-mouthed as of old, looked at the captives, as if listening to the strife that was to come, and wellnigh heard the thunder of the captains and the shouting, while her eye was always eagerly pointed to that pearly streak which was to herald the one long, cool, calm, bright day of humanity. No wonder Dulcie was as demented as Will, and thought it would be a very little matter though the milk-porridge were sour on the morrow, or if the carrier did not come with the price in his pocket for these sweet pots, and bowls, and pipkins: she believed her poor babies were well at rest from the impending dust, and din, and danger; and smiled deep, quiet smiles at Clary—poor Clary, with her cut velvet, her coach, and her black boy. Verily Will and Dulcie could afford to refer not only pleasantly but mercifully, to Sam Winnington and Clary that night.

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"It is contemptible to lose sight of the sublimity of life even to enjoy perfect ease and happiness." That is a very grand saying; but, oh dear! we are poor creatures; and though Dulcie is an infinitely nobler being now than then, the tears are fit to start into our eyes when we remember the little brown head which "bridled finely," the little feet which pranced lightly, and the little tongue which wagged, free from care, in the stage waggon on the country road yon clear September day.

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VI.—SAM AND CLARISSA IN COMPANY IN LEICESTER SQUARE.

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Sam and Clarissa were worshipful people now. Uncle Barnet no longer invited them to his second-rate parties; Uncle Barnet was really proud to visit them in their own home. Sam Winnington was a discerning mortal; he had a faculty for discovering genius, especially that work-a-day genius which is in rising men; and he certainly had bird-lime wherewith he could fix their feet under his hospitable table. The best of the sages and wits of the day were to be met in Sam Winnington's house; the best of the sages and wits of the day thought Clary a fine woman, though a little lofty, and Sam a good fellow, an honest chum, a delightful companion, and at the same time the prince of portrait-painters. What an eye he had! what a touch! How much perception of individual character, and at the same time, what sober judgment and elegant taste to preserve his sitters, ladies and gentlemen, as well as men and women! Cavaliers would have it, the ladies and gentlemen, like Sam's condescension at his wedding-feast, overtopped the mark; but it was erring on the safe side. Who would not sink the man in the gentleman? After all, perhaps the sages and wits were not altogether disinterested: almost every one of them filled Sam Winnington's famous sitter's chair, and depended on Sam's tasteful pencil handing down their precious noses and chins to posterity.

Sam and Clary were going abroad, in that coach, which had made Dulcie Locke look longingly after it, and ponder what it would be for one of her frail children to have "a ride" on the box as far as Kensington. They were bound for the house of one of the lordly patrons of arts and letters. They were bound for my Lord Burlington's, or the Earl of Mulgrave's, or Sir William Beechey's—for a destination where they were a couple of mark and distinction, to be received with the utmost consideration. Sam reared smartly his round but not ill-proportioned person in his rich brocade coat, and Clary towered in the corner with her white throat, and her filmy ivory-coloured laces.

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We won't see many more distinguished men and women than the members of the set who frequented the old London tea-parties; and Sam Winnington and Clary were in it and of it, while Will Locke and Dulcie were poverty-stricken and alone with their bantlings in the garret in St. Martin's Lane. What becomes of the doctrine of happiness being equally divided in this world, as

so many comfortable persons love to opine? Possibly we don't stand up for it; or we may have our loophole, by which we may let ourselves out and drag it in. Was that illustrious voyage all plain sailing? Sam Winnington used to draw a long sigh, and lay back his head and close his eyes in his coach, after the rout was over. He was not conscious of acting; he was not acting, and one might dare another, if that other were not a cynic, to say that the motive was unworthy. He wanted to put his sitters on a good footing with themselves; he wanted to put the world on a good footing with itself; it was the man's nature. He did not go very far down; he was not without his piques, and like other good-natured men—like Will Locke, for that matter—when he was once offended he was apt to be vindictive; but he was buoyant, and that little man must have had a great fund of charity about him somewhere to be drawn upon at first sight. Still this popularity was no joke. There were other rubs. The keen love of approbation in the little man, which was at the bottom of his suavity, was galled by the least condemnation of his work and credit; he was too manly to enact the old man and the ass, but successful Sam Winnington was about as soon pricked as a man who wears a fold of silk on his breast instead of the old plate armour.

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Clary had her own aggravations: with all her airs Clary was not a match for the indomitable, unhesitating, brazen (with a golden brazenness) women of fashion. Poor Clary had been the beauty at Redwater, the most modish, the best informed woman there; and here, in this world of London, to which Sam had got her an introduction, she was a nobody; scarcely to be detected among the host of ordinary fine women, except by Sam's reflected glory. This was a doubtful boon, an unsatisfactory rise in the social scale. Then Clary had nobody beyond Sam to look to, and hope and pray for: she had not even sickly children to nurse, like Dulcie. Sam would only live to future generations in his paintings. Ah, well! it was fortunate that Sam was a man of genius.

You may believe, for all the grand company, the coach, the cut velvet, the laces, and the black boy, that this world was but a mighty sorry, uneasy place to Sam and Clarissa as they rolled home over the pavement, while Will and Dulcie slept with little betwixt them and the stars.

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VII.—STRIPS SOME OF THE THORNS FROM THE HEDGE AND THE GARDEN ROSES.

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Will Locke lay dying. One would have thought, from his tranquillity, confidence, and love of work, even along with spare diet, that he would have lived long. But dreamland cannot be a healthy region for a man in the body to inhabit. Will was going where his visions would be as nought to the realities. He was still one of the most peaceful, the happiest of fellows, as he had been all his life. He babbled of the pictures he would paint in another region, as if he were conscious that he had painted in a former state. It seemed, too, that the poor fellow's spiritual life, apart from his artist career, took sounder, cheerier substance and form, as the other life grew dimmer and wilder. Dulcie was almost reconciled to let Will go; for he would be more at home in the spirit-world than here, and she had seen sore trouble, which taught her to acquiesce, when there were a Father and a Friend seen glimmeringly but hopefully beyond the gulf. Dulcie moved about, with her child holding by her skirts, resigned and helpful in her sorrow.

The most clouded faces in the old room in St. Martin's Lane—with its old litter, so grievous to-day, of brushes, and colours, and graving tools, and wild pictures which the painter would never touch more—were those of Sam Winnington and Clary. Will had bidden Sam and Clary be sent for to his deathbed; and, offended as they had been, and widely severed as they were now, they rose and came trembling to obey the summons. Clary gave one look, put her handkerchief quickly to her eyes, and then turned and softly covered the tools, lifted the boiling pot to the side of the grate, and took Dulcie's fretful, wondering child in her lap. She was not a fine lady now, but a woman in distress. Sam stood immoveable and uncertain, with a man's awkwardness, but a face working with suppressed emotion.

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Will felt no restraint; he sat up in his faded coat with his cravat open to give him air, and turning his wan face with its dark shadow towards Sam Winnington in his velvet coat, with a diamond ring sparkling on his splashed hand, and his colour, which had grown rosy of late years, heightened with emotion, addressed his old friend.

"I wanted to see you, Sam; I had something on my mind, and I could not depart with full satisfaction without saying it to you; I have done you wrong."

Sam raised his head, startled, and stared at the sick man: poor Will Locke; were his wits utterly gone? they had always been somewhat to seek: though he had been a wonderful fellow, too, in his own way—wonderful at flowers, and birds, and beasts, if he had but been content with them.

"I called you a mere portrait-painter, Sam," continued the dying man; "I refused to acknowledge your inspiration, and I knew better: I saw that to you was granted the discernment to read the human face and the soul behind it, as to me it was given to hold converse with nature and the subtle essence of good and evil. Most painters before you have painted masks; but yours are the clothings of immortals: and your flesh is wonderful, Sam—how you have perfected it! And it is not true what they tell you of your draperies: you are the only man alive who can render them picturesque and not absurd, refined and not stinted. You were a genteel fellow, too, from the beginning, and would no more do a dirty action when you had only silver coins to jingle in your pockets, than now when they are stuffed with gold moidores."

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"Oh, Will, Will!" cried Sam, desperately bowing his head; "I have done little for you."

"Man!" cried Will, with a kingly incredulity, "what could you do for me? I wanted nothing. I was withdrawn somewhat from my proper field, to mould and colour for daily bread; but Dulcie saved me many a wasted hour, and I could occupy the period of a mechanical job in conceiving—no, in marshalling my visions. Mine was a different, an altogether higher line than yours, Sam; you will forgive me if I have told you too abruptly," and the poverty-stricken painter, at his last gasp, looked deprecatingly at his old honoured associate.

But he was too far gone for ceremony; he was too near release for pain. He had even shaken hands with the few family cares he was capable of experiencing, and had commended Dulcie to Sam Winnington without a single doubt. He felt, like Gainsborough, that they were all going to heaven, and Vandyke was in the company. Where was the room for misunderstanding now! Here was the end of strife, and the conclusion of the whole matter. Some other sentences Will spoke before his parting breath; and when his hearers heard him murmuring the word "garment," they fancied he still raved of his calling—on to the end. But his mind had turned and taken refuge in another calling, and it was in reference to it that he quoted the fragment of a verse, "And besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment; and as many as touched him were made whole." "Sam, have you put forth your hand?"

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Thus Will Locke departed rejoicing. Dulcie, a thin forlorn widow woman, talked with a lingering echo of his elevation, of her Will's being beyond lamentation, and of herself and her boy's being well off with their faith in the future. Dulcie had a proud, constant presentiment in the recesses of her woman's heart that the husband and father's good name and merited reputation would surely find his memory out in this world yet. She had no material possessions save a few of his gorgeous, gruesome, hieroglyphical pictures, and what she had borrowed or inherited of his lower cunning in tinting, a more marketable commodity in the present mind of society.

Dulcie disposed of Will's paintings, reluctantly, realizing an astonishing amount; astonishing, unless you take into account the fact that his companions and contemporaries were not sure that he was a mere madman now that he had gone from their ranks. They wished to atone for their dislike to his vagaries by preserving some relics of the curious handling, the grotesque imagination, the delicate taste, and the finely accurate knowledge of vegetable and animal forms which had passed away.

Then Dulcie went back in the waggon to her old friends at Fairfax, and, by so doing, probably saved her sole remaining child. Dulcie did not know whether to be glad or sorry when she found that Will's boy had no more of his father's genius than might have been derived from her own quick talents, and neat, nice fingers. And she was comforted: not in the sense of marrying again—oh dear, no! she cherished the memory of her Will as a sacred thing, and through all her returning plumpness and rosiness—for she was still a young woman—never forgot the honour she had borne in being a great painter's wife and companion for half-a-dozen years. Perhaps, good as she was, she grew rather to brandish this credit in the faces of the cloth-workers and their wives; to speak a little bigly of the galleries and the Academy, of chiaroscuro and perspective, of which the poor ignoramus knew nothing: to be obstinate on her dignity, and stand out on her gentility far before that of the attorneys' and the doctors' wives;—and all this though she had been, as you may remember, the least assuming of girls, the least exacting of wives. But women have many sides to their nature, and remain puzzles—puzzles in their virtues as in their vices; and if Dulcie were ever guilty of ostentation, you have not to dive deep to discover that it was out of respect to her Will—to her great, simple, single-hearted painter.

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No, Will Locke's was not a life wrecked on the rocks of adversity, any more than Sam Winnington's was stranded on the sandbanks of prosperity. The one did a little to mellow the other before the scenes closed, and Will Locke was less obliged to Sam Winnington than Sam to Will in the end. Will's nature and career were scarcely within the scope of Sam's genial material philosophy; but the thought of them did grow to cross Sam's mind during his long work-hours; and good painters' hours are mostly stoutly, steadily, indefatigably long. He pondered them even when he was jesting playfully with the affable aristocrat under his pencil; he spoke of them often to Clary when he was sketching at her work-table of an evening; and she, knitting beside him, would stop her work and respond freely. Then Sam would rise, and, with his hands behind his back, go and look at that lush, yet delicate picture of the Redwater Bower which he had got routed out, framed, and hung in Clary's drawing-room. He would contemplate it for many minutes at a study, and he would repeat the study scores and scores of times with always the same result—the conviction of the ease and security resulting from spiritualizing matter, and the difficulty and hopelessness of materializing spirit. And after these long looks into the past, Sam would be more forbearing in pronouncing verdicts on his brethren, worsted in the effort to express what was inherent in their minds; would not decide quite so dogmatically, that all a man had to do was to be sound and diligent, and keep himself far apart from high-flown rubbish, like a common-sense, sober-minded Englishman. And Sam came to be less feverishly anxious about his own monopoly of public esteem; less nettled at art-criticism; perhaps less vivacious in his talents and well-doing, but more manly and serene in his triumph, as Will Locke had been manly and serene in his failure.

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Will Locke's life and death, so devoid of pomp and renown, might be beyond lamentation, after all.

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I.—WILD, WITTY NELLY CARNEGIE.

A BONNY bride's sune buskit; eh, Nanny Swinton?"

"But ye're no bonny, Miss Nelly; na, na, ye cannot fill the shoon o' yer leddy mother; ye're snod, and ye may shak yer tails at the Assembly, but ye're far ahint Lady Carnegie."

"An' I've but to dance my set with young Berwickshire Home, I care not though I bide at home after all."

But Nelly Carnegie would have little liked that resource, though she now flung the powder out of her nut-brown hair, and tapped her little mirror with her fan.

In a low dark closet, up a steep stair, in a narrow, confined, dark-browed house in the Canongate of Edinburgh, one of the belles of 17—made her toilette. Her chamber woman, in curch and tartan screen, was old nurse and sole domestic of the high-headed, strong-minded, stately widow of a wild north-country laird, whose son now ruled alone in the rugged family mansion among the grand, misty mountains of Lochaber. Nelly Carnegie was no beauty; not fair as a red-and-white rose, like Lady Eglinton, or any one of her six daughters; not dainty, like poor imprisoned Lady Lovat; she was more like desperate Lady Primrose, flying shrieking from her mad husband's sword and pistols, or fierce Lady Grange, swearing her bootless revenge on the wily, treacherous, scared Lord of Session. She was but wild, witty Nelly Carnegie, whom no precise, stern mother could tame, no hard life at her embroidery or her spinet could subdue. She was brown as a gipsy, skin, eyes, and hair—the last a rich, ruddy chestnut brown—with nothing to distinguish her figure but its diminutiveness and the nimbleness of the shapely hands and feet; while her mother's lace lappets were higher by half a foot than the crown of many a manikin on whom she looked down, and her back that never bent or leant for a second on rail or cushion, was straight as an arrow, as well as long. But Nelly, in her absurd, magnificent brocade, and her hoop, that made her small figure like a little russet cask, and with busk and breast-knot and top-knot, was admired, as odd people will choose what is irregular, strange, and racy, in preference to what is harmonious, orderly, and insipid.

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Nelly had a cavalier to walk by her sedan, as her mother and she traversed the rough streets. He handed her out at the old Assembly door, but she flung away his hand, and followed her mother alone within the dignified precincts, leaving a gloom and a storm on a lowering brow, unshaded by the cocked hat, then carried under the wearer's arm.

The old Assembly Rooms where potent Jacky Murray presided, where urbane Duncan Forbes won all hearts, where a gentle laird wooed in sweet numbers—and in vain—the Annie Laurie of that well-known old song, are now almost forgotten. Other things have passed away in company with the wigs and ruffles, the patches and snuff. The grace may remain, and the refinement be thorough where then it was superficial, but the courtliness of conscious superiority, the picturesque contrarieties and broken natural land that lay below the heaths and craters, exist but as the black gloom and red glare of the past.

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There the grave responsible Lord of Session, sober in mien as Scotchmen are wont to be, sat at midnight and roared over his claret in the mad orgies of the Hell-fire Club; here the pawky, penetrating lawyer, shrewd both from calling and character, played the reckless game of a correspondence with the stage Court of St. Germain's; yonder mettle beauty sailed along on her high-heeled shoes to finish the night's triumph at an oyster supper in a den behind the Luckenbooths. And there again walked an imperial dowager, who still span her own linen and struck her serving-man with her ivory cane. Truly the old Edinburgh Assembly Rooms had their secrets, and contained exciting enough elements under their formal French polish.

The regular balls at the Assembly Rooms were eras in Nelly Carnegie's life, and yet she met always the same company. She knew every face and name, and what was worse, danced nightly with the same partner. The select society was constituted at the commencement of the season, and when once the individual fan was drawn from the cocked-hat of fate, there was no respite, no room for change. Young Home of Stanholme had knowledge of the filigree circle through which Nelly was wont to insert her restless fingers, and Lady Carnegie furthered his advances; so that although Nelly hated him as she did the gloomy Nor' Loch, she received his escort to and from the Assembly Rooms, and walked with him her single minuet, as inevitably as she lilted Allan Ramsay's songs, or scalded her mouth with her morning's porridge.

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Nelly's suitor was not ill to look upon, so far as flesh and blood went. He was a well-made, robust fellow, whose laced coat and deep vest showed the comely, vigorous proportions of youth. The face was manly, too, in spite of its beardless one-and-twenty, but the broad eyebrows sank, either in study or sullenness, and the jaw was hard and fixed.

Yet to see how Nelly strained her bonds, how she gecked and flouted and looked above him, and curtsied past him, and dropped his hand as if it were live coals, while the heavy brow grew darker, until it showed like a thunderstorm over the burning red of the passion-flushed cheek.

"Tak tent, Nelly," whispered a sedate companion, sensible, cautious, and canny, whose flaxen

hair over its roll had the dead greyness of age, though the face below was round and dimpled; "young Staneholme drew his sword last night on the President's son because he speered if he had skill to tame a goshawk."

"Tak tent, yerself, Janet Erskine," Nelly responded wrathfully; "think twice ere you wed auld Auchtershiel."

Janet shrank, and her bright blue eye blinked uneasily, but no additional colour came into her cheek, nor did her voice shake, though it fell. "It must be, Nelly; I daurna deny my father, and mony mair drink forby Auchtershiel; and if he cursed his last wife out and in, and drove her son across the sea, they were thrawn and cankered, and he was their richtfu' head. I'll speak him fair, and his green haughs are a braw jointure. But, Nelly, do ye believe that the auld Laird—the auld ane before Auchtershiel himself, he that shot the Covenanter as he hung by the saugh over the Spinkie-water, and blasphemed when he prayed—walks at night on the burn bank?"

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"I dinna ken; if I did not fear a livin' sorrow, I would daur a dead ane," Nelly protested, with a shade of scorn in her levity; "and ye can bide in the house on the soft summer nights. The Lady of Auchtershiel need not daunder by the burn side; she can be countin' her house purse in the still room; but if I were her, I would rather beg my bread."

"Whisht, for shame, Nelly Carnegie," was returned with a shrillness in the measured tones; "you would not; and ye'll learn yer own task, and say Yes to sour, dour Staneholme."

"I never will; I'll let myself be starved to death, I'll throttle myself with my own hands first," cried Nelly Carnegie, fire flashing in her large eyes and on her dark cheeks; and looking up in her defiance she met the glow for glow of Staneholme's star. Time-serving Janet Erskine moved off in unconcealed trepidation, and Nelly stood her ground alone, stamping her foot upon the boards, and struggling in vain against the cruel influence which she could not control, and to which she would not bend.

"He need not gloom and look at me; hearkeners never hear good of themselves," Nelly thought, with passionate vehemence; but her sparkling eyes fell slowly, and her proud panting heart quailed with a long throb.

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II.—A GALLANT REBUFFED.—NELLY'S PUNISHMENT.

The next time Nelly saw Adam Home was by the landing in the Canongate, in whose shelter lay the draw-well wherein the proud, gently-born laird's daughter every afternoon dipped the Dutch porcelain jug which carried the fresh spring-water wherewith to infuse her mother's cherished, tiny cup of tea. Young Home was passing, and he stepped aside, and offered to take the little vessel from her hand, and stoop and fill it. He did this with a silent salutation and glance that, retaining its wonted downward aim, yet suddenly lightened as if it loved to rest upon the little girlish figure, in its homely tucked-up gown, the crimson hood drawn over the chestnut hair that turned back in a crisp wave from the bold, frank, innocent face. But she waved him off, and balancing her foot upon the edge-stone, saw herself reflected in the steel-like water. Then he begged with rare softness in a voice that was rough and gruff, unless it deepened with strong feeling—

"Will you suffer me, Nelly Carnegie? I would give my hand to pluck but a flower to serve you."

Had he tried that tone at first, before she was more than chilled by his sombre and imperious gravity, before her mother supported him unrelentingly and galled and exasperated her by persecution, he might have attracted, fascinated, conquered. As it was, she jeered at him.

"Serve me! he could do me no better service than 'mount and go.' A posy! it would be the stinging-nettle and dank dock if he gathered it."

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The revenge he took was rude enough, but it was not unheard of in those days. He caught her by the wrist, and under the shadow of the abutting gable he kissed the knitted brow and curling lips, holding her the while with a grasp so tight that it gave her pain. When she wrung herself from him, she shook her little hand with a rage that quivered through every nerve, and had more of hate than of romping folly or momentary pique in its passion.

"Nelly Carnegie," said her mother, as she carefully pulled out the edge of a coil of yellow point-lace, which rested on her inlaid foreign work-table, and contrasted with her black mode cloak and white skinny fingers, and looking with her keen, cold, grey eyes on the rebellious daughter standing before her, went on, "I have word that Staneholme goes south in ten days."

Nelly could have said, "And welcome," but she knew the consequences, and forbore.

"He's willin' to take you with him, Nelly, and he shows his good blood when he holds that a Carnegie needs no tocher."

Still Nelly did not answer, though she started so violently that her loosely-crossed hands fell apart; and Nanny Swinton, who was about her housewifery in the cupboard off the lady's parlour, heard every word, and trembled at the pause.

"Your providing is not to buy," continued the mistress of the aristocratic family, whose

attendance was so scanty and their wants so ill-supplied that even in necessities they were sometimes pinched; "we've but to bid the minister and them that are allied to us in the town, and Nanny will scour the posset dish, and bring out the big Indian bowl, and heap fresh rose-leaves in the sweet-pots. You'll wear my mother's white brocade that she first donned when she became a Leslie, sib to Rothés—no a bit housewife of a south-country laird. She was a noble woman, and you're but a heather lintie of a lass to come of a good kind. So God bless you, bairn; ye'll tak the blast of wind and gang."

As if the benediction had loosened the arrested tongue, Nelly burst out—"Oh, mother, mother! no."

Lady Carnegie, in her own person, had looked upon death with unblenching front, and had disowned her only son because, in what appeared to others a trifle, he had opposed her law. Nor did a muscle of her marked face now relax; her occupation went on without a check; she did not deign to show surprise or displeasure, although her voice rose in harsh, ironical emphasis—

"Nelly Carnegie, what's your will?"

"Not that man, mother; not that fearsome man!" pleaded Nelly, with streaming eyes and beseeching tones, her high spirit for the moment broken; her contempt gone, only her aversion and terror urging a hearing—"The lad that's blate and dull till he's braggit by his fellows, and then starker than ony carle, wild like a north-country cateran; even the hail bench o' judges would not stand to conter him."

"He'll need his stiff temper; I couldna thole a man but had a mind of his own, my dear," ejaculated Lady Carnegie in unexpected, clear, cherry accents, as if her daughter's extremity was diversion to her.

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"Oh, spare me, spare me, mother," Nelly began again.

"Hooly and fairly, Nelly Carnegie," interrupted the mother, still lightly and mockingly, "who are you that ye should pick and choose? What better man will speer your price? or think ye that I've groats laid by to buy a puggy or a puss baudrons for my maiden lady?"

"I'll work my fingers to the bone, mother; my brother Hugh will not see me want."

"Eat bite or sup of his victuals, or mint a Carnegie's working to me again, Nelly, and never see my face more."

The lady had lapsed into wrath, that burned a white heat on her wrinkled brow, and was doubly formidable because expressed by no hasty word or gesture.

"Leave my presence, and learn your duty, belyve, for before the turn of the moon Staneholme's wife ye sall be."

Do not think that Nelly Carnegie was beaten, because she uttered no further remonstrance. She did not sob, and beg and pray beyond a few minutes, but she opposed to the tyrannical mandate that disposed of her so summarily the dead weight of passive resistance. She would give no token of submission; would make no preparation; she would neither stir hand nor foot in the matter. A hundred years ago, however, the head of a family was paramount, and household discipline was wielded without mercy. Lady Carnegie acted like a sovereign: she wasted no time on arguments, threats or entreaties. She locked her wilful charge into a dark sleeping-closet, and fed her on bread and water until she should consent to her fate. Sometimes Nelly shook the door until its hinges cracked, and sometimes she flung back the prisoner's fare doled out to her; and then her mother came with a firm, slow, step, and in her hard, haughty manner commanded her to cease, or she would tie her hand and foot, and pour meat and drink down her throat in spite of her. Then Nelly would lie down on the rough boards, and stretch out her hands as if to push the world from her and die in her despair. But the young life was fresh and strong within her. She panted for one breath of the breeze that blew round craggy Arthur's Seat, and one drink of St. Anthony's Well, and one look, if it were the last, of the golden sunshine, no beams of which could penetrate her high, little window. She would fain have gone again up the busy street, and watched the crowds of passengers, and listened to the bustling traffic, and greeted her friends and acquaintances. Silence and solitude, and the close air that oppressed her, were things very foreign to her nature. In the dark night, when her distempered imagination conjured up horrible dreams, Nanny Swinton stole to her door, and bemoaned her bird, her lamb, whispering hoarsely, "Do her biddin', Miss Nelly; she's yer leddy mother; neither man nor God will acquit you; your burden may be lichter than ye trow." And Nelly was weary, and had sinful, mad thoughts of living to punish her enemies more by the fulfilment of their desire than by the terrors of her early death. So the next time her mother tapped on the pannel with her undaunted, unwearied "Ay or no, Nelly Carnegie? Gin the bridal be not this week, I'll bid him tarry another; and gin he weary and ride awa', I'll keep ye steekit here till I'm carried out a corp before ye, and I'll leave ye my curse to be coal and candle, and sops and wine, for the lave o' yer ill days."

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Nelly gasped out a husky, wailing "Ay," and her probation was at an end.

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There was brief space now for Nelly's buying pearlins and pinner, and sacques and mantles, and all a young matron's bravery, or for decorating a guest chamber for the ceremony. But Lady Carnegie was not to be balked for trifles. Nanny Swinton stitched night and day, with salt tears from aged eyes moistening her thread; and Nelly did not swerve from her compact, but acted mechanically with the others as she was told. With a strange pallor on the olive of her cheek, and swollen, burning lids, drooping over sunk violent lines beneath the hot eyeballs, and cold, trembling hands, she bore Staneholme's stated presence in these long, bleak March afternoons. He never addressed her particularly, although he took many a long, sore look. Few and formal then were the lover's devoirs expected or permitted.

The evening was raw and rainy; elderly gentlemen would have needed "their lass with a lantern," to escort them from their chambers. The old city guard sputtered their Gaelic, and stamped up and down for warmth. The chairmen drank their last fee to keep out the cold—and in and out of the low doorways moved middle-aged women barefooted, and in curch and short gown, who, when snooded maidens, had gazed on the white cockade, and the march of Prince Charlie Stuart and his Highlandmen. Down the narrow way, in the drizzly dusk, ran a slight figure, entirely muffled up. Fleet of foot was the runner, and blindly she held her course. Twice she came in contact with intervening obstacles—water-stoups on a threshold, gay ribbons fluttering from a booth. She was flying from worse than death, with dim projects of begging her way to the North, to the brother she had parted from when a child; and ghastly suggestions, too, like lightning flashes, of seizing a knife from the first butcher's block and ending her misery.

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Hasty steps were treading fast upon her track. She distinguished them with morbid acuteness through the speed of her own flight. They were mingled steps—a feeble hurrying footfall, and an iron tread. She threaded a group of bystanders, and, weak and helpless as she was, prepared to dive into a mirk close. Not that black opening, Nelly Carnegie, it is doomed to bear for generations a foul stain—the scene of a mystery no Scottish law-court could clear—the Begbie murder. But it was no seafaring man, with Cain's red right hand, that rushed after trembling, fainting Nelly Carnegie. The tender arms in which she had lain as an infant clutched her dress; and a kindly tongue faltered its faithful, distressed petition—

"Come back, come back, Miss Nelly, afore the Leddy finds out; ye hae nae refuge, an' ye're traced already by mair than me."

But in a moment strong hands were upon her, holding her like a fluttering moth, or a wild panting leveret, or a bird beating its wings; doing her no violence, however, for who would brush off the down, or tear the soft fur, or break the ruffled feathers? She struggled so frantically that poor old Nanny interposed—

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"Na, sir; let her be; she'll gae hame wi' me, her ain born serving-woman. And oh, Staneholme, be not hard, it's her last nicht."

That was Nelly Carnegie's marriage eve.

On the morrow the marriage was celebrated. The bridegroom might pass, in his manly prime and his scarlet coat, although a dowf gallant; but who would have thought that Nelly Carnegie in the white brocade which was her grandmother's the day that made her sib to Rothés—Nelly Carnegie who flouted at love and lovers, and sported a free, light, brave heart, would have made so dowie a bride? The company consisted only of Lady Carnegie's starched cousins, with their husbands and their daughters, who yet hoped to outrival Nelly with her gloomy Lauderdale laird.

The hurried ceremony excused the customary festivities. The family party could keep counsel, and preserve a discreet blindness when the ring dropped from the bride's fingers, and the wine stood untasted before her, while Lady Carnegie did the honours as if lonely age and narrow circumstances did not exist.

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IV.—NELLY CARNEGIE IN HER NEW HOME.

The March sun shone clear and cold on grey Staneholme, standing on the verge of a wide moor, with the troubled German Ocean for a background, and the piping east wind rattling each casement. There was haste and hurry in Staneholme, from the Laird's mother down through her buxom merry daughters to the bareheaded servant-lasses, and the substitutes for groom and lacquey, in coarse homespun, and honest, broad blue bonnets. There was bustle in the little dining-room with its high windows, which the sea-foam sometimes dimmed, and its spindle-legged chairs and smoked pictures. There was blithe work in the cheerful hall, in whose broad chimney great seacoal fires blazed—at whose humming wheels the young Mays of Staneholme, as well as its dependants, still took their morning turn. There was willing toil in the sleeping-rooms, with their black cabinets and heavy worsted curtains. And there was a thronged *mêlée* in the court formed by the outhouses, over whose walls the small-leaved ivy of the coast clustered untreasured. Staneholme's favourite horse was rubbing down; and Staneholme's dogs were airing in couples. Even the tenantry of the never-failing pigeon-house at the corner of the old garden were in turmoil, for half-a-score of their number had been transferred to the kitchen this morning to fill the goodly pasties which were to anticipate the blackberry tarts and sweet puddings, freezing in rich cream. But the sun had sunk behind the moor where the broom was only budding, and the last sea-mew had flown to its scaur, and the smouldering whins had leaped up into the first yellow flame of the bonfires, and the more shifting, fantastic, brilliant banners of

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the aurora borealis shot across the frosty sky, before the first faint shout announced that Staneholme and his lady had come home. With his wife behind him on his bay, with pistols at his saddle-bow, and "Jock" on "the long-tailed yad" at his back, with tenant retainers and veteran domestics pressing round—and ringing shouts and homely huzzas and good wishes filling the air, already heavy with the smoke of good cheer—Staneholme rode in. He lifted down an unresisting burden, took in his a damp, passive hand, and throwing over his shoulder brief, broken thanks, hurried up the flight of stairs, through the rambling, crooked passages into the hall.

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Staneholme was always a man of few words. He was taken up, as was right, with the little lady, whose habit trailed behind her, and who never raised her modest eyes. "Well-a-day! the Laird's bargain was of sma' buik," thought the retainers, but "Hurrah" for the fat brose and lumps of corned beef, and the ale and the whisky, with which they are now to be regaled!

In the hall stood Joan and Madge and Mysie, panting to see their grand Edinburgh sister. They were only hindered from running down into the yard by the deposed mistress of Staneholme, whose hair was as white as snow, and who wore no mode mantle nor furbelows nor laces, like proud Lady Carnegie. She was dressed in a warm plaiden gown and a close mob cap, with huge keys and huswife balancing each other at either pocket-hole, and her cracked voice was very sweet as she reiterated "Bide till he bring her here, my bairns," and her kindly smile was motherly to the whole world. But think you poor vanquished Nelly Carnegie's crushed heart leapt up to meet these Homes—that her eyes glanced cordially at Joan, and Madge, and Mysie—that her cheek was bent gratefully to receive old Lady Staneholme's caress? No, no; Nelly was too wretched to cry, but she stood there like a marble statue, and with no more feeling, or show of feeling. Was this colourless, motionless young girl, in her dusty, disarranged habit, and the feather of her hat ruffled by the wind, the gay Edinburgh beauty who had won Staneholme! What glamour of perverse fashion had she cast into his eyes!

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"Wae's me, will dule never end in this weary warld? Adam lad, Adam, what doom have you dragged doon on yoursel'?" cried Lady Staneholme; and while the thoughtless, self-absorbed girls drew back in disappointment, she met her son's proud eyes, and stepping past him, let her hand press lightly for a second on his shoulder as she took in hers Nelly's lifeless fingers. She said simply to the bride, "You are cold and weary, my dear, and supper is served, and we'll no bide making compliments, but you're welcome hame to your ain gudeman's house and folk; and so I'll lead you to your chamber in Staneholme, and then to the table-head, your future place." And on the way she explained first with noble humility that she did not wait for a rejoinder, because she had been deaf ever since Staneholme rode post haste from Edinburgh from the last sitting of the Parliament; and that since she was growing old, although it was pleasant to her to serve the bairns, yet she would be glad to relinquish her cares, and retire to the chimney-corner to her wheel and her book; and she blessed the Lord that she had lived to see the young mistress of Staneholme who would guide the household when she was at her rest. Nelly heard not, did not care to recognise that the Lady of Staneholme, in her looks, words, and actions, was beautiful with the rare beauty of a meek, quiet, loving spirit which in those troublous days had budded and bloomed and been mellowed by time and trial. Nor did Nelly pause to consider that had she chosen, she whose own mother's heart had never melted towards her, might have been nestled in that bosom as in an ark of peace.

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When Lady Staneholme conducted Nelly down the wide staircase into the chill dining-room, and to the chair opposite the claret-jug of the master of the house, Nelly drew back with sullen determination.

"Na, but, my bairn, I'm blithe for you to fill my place; Staneholme's mither may well make room for Staneholme's wife," urged the lady, gently.

But Nelly remained childishly rooted in her refusal to preside at his board, unless compelled; and her brow, knit at the remembrance of her fall, was set to meet the further encounter. Joan and Madge and Mysie, with their blooming cheeks, and their kissing-strings new for the occasion, stared as if their strange sister was but half endowed with mother wit; and Lady Staneholme hesitated until Adam Home uttered his short, emphatic "As she pleases, mother," while the flush flew to his forehead, and his firm lip shook.

Staneholme had resolved never to control the wife he had forced into his arms, beyond the cold, daily intercourse which men will interchange with a deadly foe, as well as with a trusty frere; never to approach her side, nor attempt to assuage her malice nor court her frozen lips into a smile. This was his purpose, and he abode by it. He farmed his land, he hunted, and speared salmon, was rocked in his fishing-boat as far as St. Abbs, read political pamphlets, and sat late over his wine, and sometimes abetted the bold smuggling, much like his contemporaries. But no pursuit which he followed with fitful excess seemed to satisfy him as it did others, and he never sought to supplement it by courting his alien wife.

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Lady Staneholme would fain have made her town-bred daughter-in-law enamoured with the duties of a country life, and cheered the strange joylessness of her honeymoon. Failing in this attempt, she, with a covert sigh, half-pain, half-pleasure, resumed the old oversight of larder and dairy. Such care was then the delight of many an unsophisticated laird's helpmate; and, to the contented Lady of Staneholme, it had quite made up for the partial deprivation of social intercourse to which her infirmity had subjected her. Joan, Madge, and Mysie, wearied of haughty Nelly after they had grown accustomed to the grand attire she wore, denied that they had ever been dazzled with it, and ceased to believe that she had danced minuets in the Assembly Rooms before Miss Jacky Murray. They had their own company and their own stories,

into which they had no temptation to drag an interloper.

Nelly, in her desolation standing apart in the centre of the wholesome, happy family circle, grew to have her peculiar habits and occupations, her self-contained life into which none of the others could penetrate.

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V.—NELLY'S NEW PASTIMES.

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The sea-pink and the rock saxifrage were making the rugged rocks gay, the bluebell was nodding on the moor, and Nelly had not died, as she foolishly fancied she should. She had learned to wander out along the shore or over the trackless moor for hours and hours, and often returned footsore and exhausted. She who had been accustomed only to the Canongate and High Street of Edinburgh, the tall houses with their occasional armorial bearings, the convenient huckster shops—their irregular line intersected by the strait closes, the traffic and gossip; or to the forsaken royal palace, and the cowslips of the King's Park—could now watch the red sunset burnishing miles on miles of waving heather, and the full moon hanging above the restless tide. She could listen to the surf in the storm, and the ripple in the calm, to the cry of the gull and the wh-r-r of the moorcock; pull wild thyme, and pick up rose-tinted shells and perforated stones; and watch shyly her hardy cottar servants cutting peats and tying up flax, and even caught snatches of their rude Border lore of raid and foray under doughty Homes, who wore steel cap and breastplate.

The coast-line at Staneholme was high and bold, but in place of descending sheerly and precipitately to the yellow sands, it sloped in a green bank, broken by gullies, where the long sea-grass grew in tangled tufts, interspersed with the yellow leaves of the fern, and in whose sheltered recesses Nelly Carnegie so often lingered, that she left them to future generations as "Lady Staneholme's Walks."

There she could see the London smacks and foreign luggers beating up to ride at the pier of Leith. There she could sit for hours, half-hidden, and protected from the sea blast, mechanically pulling to pieces the dried, blackened seaweed blown up among the small, prickly blush roses. In her green quilted petticoat and spencer she might have been one of the "good people's changelings," only the hue of her cheek was more like that of a brownie of the wold; and, truly, to her remote world there was an impenetrable mystery about the young mistress of Staneholme, in her estrangement and mournfulness. Some said that she had favoured another lover, whom Staneholme had slain in a duel or a night-brawl; some that the old Staneholmes had sold themselves to the Devil, and a curse was on their remotest descendants; for was not the young laird *fey* at times, and would not the blithe sisters pass into care-worn wives and matrons?

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There sat Nelly, looking at the sea, musing dreamily and drearily on Old Edinburgh, or pondering with sluggish curiosity over the Homes, and what, from casual looks and words, she could not help gathering of their history. The Lairds of Staneholme had wild moss-trooper blood in their veins, and they had vindicated it to the last generation by unsettled lives, reckless intermeddling with public affairs, and inveterate feuds with their brother lairds.

Adam Home's was a hot heart, constant in its impetuosity, buried beneath an icy crust which he strove to preserve, but which hissed and crackled when outward motives failed, or when opposition fanned the inner glow. With the elements of a despot but half tamed, and like many another tyrant, unchallenged master of his surroundings, Staneholme wielded his authority with fair result. Tenant and servant, hanger-on and sprig of the central tree, bore regard as well as fear for the young laird—all save Staneholme's whilom love and wedded wife.

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Nelly did not wish to understand this repressed, ardent nature, although its developments sometimes forced themselves upon her. She had heard Staneholme hound on a refractory tyke till he shouted himself hoarse, and yet turn aside before the badger was unearthed; she had seen him climb the scaurs, and hang dizzily in mid-air over the black water, to secure the wildfowl he had shot, and it was but carrion; and once, Joan and Madge, to whom he was wont to be indulgent in a condescending, superior way, trembled before the stamp of his foot and the kindling flash of his eye. Some affair abroad had disturbed him and he came into the hall, when his sisters' voices were raised giddily as they played off an idle, ill-thought-of jest on grave, cold Nelly. "Queans and fools," he termed them, and bade them "end their steer" so harshly, that the free, thoughtful girls did not think of pouting or crying, but shrank back in affright. Nelly Carnegie, whom he had humbled to the dust, was below his anger.

When the grey mansion of Staneholme basked in the autumn sun, an auspicious event gladdened its chambers. Joan was matched with a gay, gallant young cousin from Teviotdale, and from the commencement of the short wooing to the indefatigable dance which the young bride herself led off right willingly, all was celebrated with smiles and blessings, and harvest-home fulness of joy and gratitude. But a dark shadow moved among the merrymakers. A young heart robbed of its rights, like an upbraiding ghost, regarded the simple, loving, trusting pair, and compared their consecrated vows with the mockery of a rite into which it had been driven.

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The only change time brought to Nelly, was the progress of an unacknowledged bond between her and good old Lady Staneholme. The obstacle to any interchange of ideas and positive confidence between them, was the inducement to the tacit companionship adopted by the sick, wayward heart, with its malady of wrong and grief. Influenced by an instinctive, inexplicable

attraction, Nelly's uncertain footsteps followed Lady Staneholme, and kept pace with her soft tread, when she overlooked her spinners and knitters, gave out her linen and spices, turned over her herbs, and visited her sick and aged. There they were seen—the smiling, deaf old lady, fair in her wrinkles, and her mute, dark, sad daughter whom in patient ignorance she folded in her mantle of universal charity.

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VI.—THE LAIRD CONSCIENCE-SMITTEN.

Under a pale February sun Nelly was out on the sea-braes, where the sprays of the briar-roses were swept in circles, streaming far and wide. She lingered in the hollow, and strayed to the utmost limit of her path. As she was returning, her eye fell on the folds of an object fluttering among the tedded grass. It was Staneholme's plaid. This was the first time he had intruded upon her solitary refuge. When Nelly climbed the ascent, and saw the mansion house, with its encumbered court, she could distinguish the sharp sound of a horse's hoof. Its rider was already out of sight on the bridle-road. Michael Armstrong, the laird's man, was mounting his own nag; Wat Pringle, the grieve, and other farm folk, stood looking after the vanished traveller; Liddel, the Tweedside retriever, paced discontentedly up and down; and old Lady Staneholme met her on the threshold, and as on the night of her arrival at Staneholme, led her up the staircase and into her sleeping-chamber. Nelly marked, with dim dread, the tear-stains on the pallid cheeks of placid age, and the trembling of the feeble hand that guided her. She had nothing to fear; but what was the news for which there was such solemn preparation?

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"My puir bairn," Lady Staneholme began brokenly, "I've had an interview with my son, and I've learnt, late, some passages in the past; and I wonder not, but I maun lament, for I am a widow mother, Nelly, and my only son Adam who did you wrong and showed you no pity, has got his orders to serve with the soldiers in the Low Countries. He has not stayed to think; he has left without one farewell: he is off and away, to wash out the sins of him and his in his young blood. I will never see his face more: but you are a free woman; and, as the last duty he will receive at your hand, he bids you read his words."

Nelly's hand closed tightly over its enclosure. "Who says I told he did me wrang?" she said, proudly, her dilated eyes lifted up to the deprecating ones that did not avoid her gaze.

"Na, na, ye never stoopit to blame him. Weary fa' him! Nelly Carnegie," ejaculated honest Lady Staneholme, "although he is my ain that made you his, sair, sair against your woman's will, and so binged up blacker guilt at his doorstane, as if the lightest heritage o' sin werena' hard to step ower. But, God forgive me! It's old Staneholme risen up to enter afresh upon his straits, and may He send him pardon and peace in His ain time."

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"Nelly" (Staneholme's letter said),—"for *my* Nelly you'll never be, though the law has given me body and estate,—what garred me love you like life or death? I've seen bonnier, and you're no so good as my mother, or you would have forgiven me long syne. Why did you laugh, and mock, and scorn me, when I first made up to you among your fine Edinburgh folks? Had you turned your shoulder upon me with still steadfastness, I might have been driven to the wall—I would have believed you. When you said that you would lie in the grave sooner than in my arms, you roused the evil temper within me; and though I had mounted the Grassmarket, I swore I would make you my wife. What call or title had you, a young lass, to thwart your lady mother and the Laird of Staneholme? And when I had gone thus far—oh! Nelly, pity me—there was no room to repent or turn back. I dared not leave you to dree alane your mother's wrath: there was less risk in your wild heart beating itself to death against the other, that would have gladly shed its last drop for its captive's sake. But Heaven punished me. I found, Nelly, that the hand that had dealt the blow could not heal it. How could I approach you with soft words, that had good right to shed tears of blood for my deeds? So, as I cannot put my hand on my breast and die like my father, I'll quit my moors and haughs and my country; I'll cross the sea and bear the musquatoon, and never return—in part to atone to you, for you sall have the choice to rule with my mother in the routh and goodwill of Staneholme, or to take the fee for the dowager lands of Eweford, and dwell in state in the centre of the stone and lime, and reek, and lords and ladies of Edinburgh; in part because I can hold out no longer, nor bide another day in Tantalus, which is the book name for an ill place of fruitless longing and blighted hope. I'll no be near you in your danger, because when other wives cry for the strong, grieved faces of their gudemen, you will ban the day your een first fell upon me. Nelly Carnegie, why did my love bring no return; no ae sweet kiss; never yet a kind blink of your brown een, that ance looked at me in gay defiance, and now heavily and darkly, till they close on this world?"

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Something more Staneholme raved of this undeserved, unwon love, whose possession had become an exaggerated good which he had continued to crave without word or sign, with a boy's frenzy and a man's stanchness. Nelly lost her power of will: she sat with the paper in her hand as if she had ceased to comprehend its contents—as if its release from bondage came too late.

"Dinna ye ken, Nelly woman, his presence will vex you no longer? you're at liberty to go your own gate, and be as you have been—that was his propine," whispered Lady Staneholme, in sorrowful perplexity, but without rousing Nelly from her stupor. They lifted her on her bed, and watched her until her trial took hold of her. No stand did Nelly make against pain and anguish. She was sinking fast into that dreamless sleep where the weary are at rest, when Lady Staneholme stood by her bed and laid an heir by her side, bidding her rejoice, in tones that fell off into a faint

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quivering sob of tenderness and woe; but Nelly's crushed, stunned heart had still some hidden spring among its withered verdure, and her Benoni called her back from the land of forgetfulness.

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VII.—BLESSING AND AFFLICTION—ADAM HOME'S RETURN.

Nelly recovered, at first slowly but cheeringly, latterly with a doubt and apprehension creeping over her brightening prospect—until, all too certainly and hopelessly, her noon, that had been disturbed with thunder-claps and dashing rain, was shrouded in grey twilight.

Nelly would live, but her limbs would never more obey her active spirit, for she had been attacked by a relentless malady. The little feet that had slid in courtly measure, and twinkled in blithe strathspeys, and wandered restlessly over moor and brae, were stretched out in leaden helplessness. When she was young, she "had girded herself and gone whither she would;" but now, ere she was old, while there was not one silver thread in those chestnut locks, "another would gird her and carry her whither she would not." And oh! to think how the young mother's heart, ready to bud and bloom anew, was doomed to drag out a protracted existence, linked to the corpse-like frame of threescore and ten, until the angel of death freed it from its tabernacle of clay.

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Nelly never spoke of her affliction—never parted from her baby. Travelling with difficulty, she removed to Edinburgh, to the aspiring tenement in the busy Canongate, which she had quitted in her distraction. Lady Carnegie, in her rustling silk and with her clicking ivory shuttle, received her into her little household, but did not care to conceal that she did so on account of the ailment Staneholme had secured to his forsaken wife and heir. She did not endure the occasional sight of her daughter's infirmities without beshrewing them, as a reflection on her own dignity. She even sneered and scoffed at them, until Nanny Swinton began to fear that the judgment of God might strike her lady—a venerable grandame still without one weakness of bodily decay or human affection.

And did Nelly fret and moan over the invalid condition for which there was neither palliation nor remedy? Nay, a blessing upon her at last; she began to witness a good testimony to the original mettle and bravery of her nature. She accepted the tangible evil direct from God's hand, sighingly, submissively, and with a noble meekness of resignation. She rose above her hapless lot—the old Nelly Carnegie, though subdued and chastened, was in a degree restored.

"Nanny! Nanny Swinton!" called Nelly from her couch, as she managed to hold up, almost exultingly, the big crowing baby, in its quaintest of mantles and caps, "Staneholme's son's a braw bairn, well worthy Lady Carnegie's coral and bells."

"Deed is he," Nanny assented. "He'll grow up a stately man like his grandsire;" and recurring naturally to forbidden memories, she went on: "He'll be the marrow of Master Hugh. Ye dinna mind Master Hugh, Lady Staneholme?—the picture o' auld Lady Carnegie. That I sud call her auld!"

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Nelly's brow contracted with something of its old indignation. "There's never a look of the Carnegies in my son; he has his father's brow and lip and hair, and you're but a gowk, Nanny Swinton!" and Nelly lay back and closed her eyes, and after a season opened them again, to tell Nanny Swinton that "she had been dreaming of a strange foreign city, full of pictures and carved woodwork, and of a high-road traversing a rich plain, shaded by apple and chestnut trees, and of something winding and glittering through the branches," leaving Nanny, who could not stand the sight of two magpies, or of a cuckoo, of a morning before she had broken her fast, sorely troubled to account for the vision.

The gloaming of a night in June was on the Canongate and the silent palace of the gallant, gentle King James. Lady Carnegie was gracing some rout or drum; Nanny Swinton was in her kitchen, burnishing her superannuated treasures, and crooning to herself as she worked; Nelly, in her solitary, shadowy room, lay plaiting and pinching the cambric and muslin gear whose manufacture was her daily occupation, with her child's clumsy cradle drawn within reach of her hand. Through the dim light, she distinguished a man's figure at the door. Nelly knew full well those lineaments, with their mingled fire and gloom. They did not exasperate her as they had once done; they appalled her with great shuddering; and sinking back, Nelly gasped—

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"Are you dead and gone, Staneholme? Do you walk to seek my love that ye prigget for, but which canna gladden you now? Gae back to the bottom of the sea, or the bloody battle-field, and in the Lord's name rest there."

The figure stepped nearer; and Nelly, even in her blinding terror, distinguished that it was no shadowy apparition, but mortal like herself. The curdling blood rushed back to Nelly's face, flooding the colourless cheek, and firing her with a new impulse. She snatched her child from its slumber, and clasped it to her breast with her thin transparent hands.

"Have you come back to claim your son, Adam Home? But you'll have to tear him from me with your man's strength, for he's mine as well as yours; and he's my last, my only jewel."

And Nelly sat bolt upright, her rosy burden contrasting with her young, faded face, and her large eyes beginning to flame like those of a wild beast about to be robbed of its young.

"Oh no, Nelly, no," groaned Staneholme, covering his face; "I heard of your distress, and I came but to speer of your welfare." And he made a motion to withdraw.

But Nelly's heart smote her for the wrong her rash words had done him—a wayworn, conscience-smitten man—and she recalled him relentingly.

"Ye may have meant well. I bear you no ill-will; I am stricken myself. Take a look at your laddie, Adam Home, before ye gang." [Page 196]

He advanced when she bade him, and received the child from her arms; but with such pause and hesitation that it might have seemed he thought more of his hands again meeting poor Nelly Carnegie's, and of her breath fanning his cheek, than of the precious load she magnanimously intrusted to him. He did look at the infant in his awkward grasp, but it was with a stifled sigh of disappointment.

"He may be a braw bairn, Nelly—I know not—but he has no look of yours."

"Na, he's a Home every inch of him, my bonny boy!" Nelly assented, eagerly. After a moment she turned her head, and added peevishly, "I'm a sick woman, and ye needna mind what I say; I'm no fit for company. Good day; but mind, I've forgotten and forgiven, and wish my bairn's father well."

"Nanny Swinton," called Nelly to her faithful nurse, as she lay awake on her bed, deep in the sober dimness of the summer night, "think you that Staneholme will be booted and spurred with the sun, riding through the Loudons to Lauderdale?"

"It's like, Lady Staneholme," answered Nanny, drowsily. "The keep o' man and beast is heavy in the town, and he'll be tain to look on his ain house, and greet the folk at home after these mony months beyond the seas. Preserve him and ilka kindly Scot from fell Popish notions rife yonder!"

"A miserable comforter are you, Nanny Swinton," muttered her mistress, as she hushed her child, and pressed her fevered lips to each tiny feature. [Page 197]

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VIII.—THE RECONCILIATION AND RETURN TO STANEHOLME.

But Staneholme came again in broad light, the next day—the next—and the next, with half excuses and vague talk of business. Lady Carnegie did not interdict his visits, or blame his weakness and inconsistency, for they were seemly in the eyes of the world—which she honoured, after herself, although she washed her hands of the further concerns of these fools.

And Nelly talked to him with a grave friendliness, like one restored from madness or risen from another world. "Staneholme, you've never kissed the wean, and it's an ill omen," she said, suddenly, watching him intently as he dandled the child; and as if jealous of any omission regarding it, she appeared satisfied when he complied with her fancy.

"The curtain is drawn, and the shadow is on you; but is that a scar on your brow, Staneholme, and where did you get it?"

"A clour from a French pistol;" it was but skin deep—he was off his camp-bed in a few days.

He stooped forward, as he spoke slightly, and pushed back the hair that half obscured the faint blue seam.

"Whisht!" said Nelly, reprovingly, "dinna scorn sickness; that bit stroke might have cost Lady Staneholme her son and my bairn his father;" and she bent towards him in her turn, and passed her fingers curiously and pityingly over the healed wound, ignorant how it burned and throbbled under her touch. "When the bairn is grown, and can rin his lane, Staneholme," Nelly informed him in her new-found freedom of speech, "I will send him for a summer to Staneholme; I'll be lonesome without him, but Michael Armstrong will teach him to ride, and he'll stand by Lady Staneholme's knee." Staneholme expressed no gratitude for the offer, he was fastening the buckle of his beaver. The next time he came he twisted a rose in his hand, and Nelly felt that it must indeed be Beltane: she looked at the flower wistfully, and wondered "would the breezes be shaking the bear and the briar roses on the sea-braes at Staneholme, or were the grapes of southern vines bonnier than they?" He flung down the flower, and strode to her side. [Page 198]

"Come hame, Nelly," he prayed passionately; "byganes may be byganes now. I've deserted the campaign, I've left its honours and its dangers—and I could have liked them well—to free men, and am here to take you hame."

Nelly was thunderstruck. "Hame!" she said, at last, slowly, "where you compelled me to travel, where I gloomed on you day and night, as I vowed; I, who would not be a charge and an oppression to the farthest-off cousin that bears your name. Are you demented?"

"And this is the end," groaned Staneholme, in bitterness; "I dreamt that I would win at last. I did not love you for your health and strength, or your youth and beauty. I declare to you, Nelly Carnegie, your face is fairer to me, lying lily white on your pillow there, than when it was fresh like that rose; and when others deserted you and left you forlorn, I thought I might try again, and wha kent but the ill would be blotted out for the very sake of the strong love that wrought it?" [Page 199]

A dimness came across Nelly's eyes, and a faintness over her choking heart; but she pressed her hands upon her breast, and strove against it for the sake of her womanhood.

"And I dreamed," she answered slowly and tremulously, "that it bode to be true, true love, however it had sinned, that neither slight nor hate, nor absence nor fell decay could uproot; and that could tempt me to break my plighted word, and lay my infirmity on the man that bargained for me like gear, and that I swore—Heaven absolve me!—I would gar rue his success till his deein' day. Adam Home, what are you seekin' at my hands?"

"Nae mair than you'll grant, Nelly Carnegie—pardon and peace, and my young gudewife, the desire o' my eyes. I'll be feet to you, Nelly, as long's I'm to the fore."

"Big tramping feet, Staneholme," said Nelly, trying to jest, and pushing him back; "dinna promise ower fair. Na, Adam Home, you'll wauken the bairn!"

So Staneholme bought the grand new family coach of which the Homes had talked for the last generation; and Lady Carnegie curtsied her supercilious adieus, and hoped her son and daughter would be better keepers at home for the future. And Nanny Swinton wore her new gown and cockernonie, and blessed her bairn and her bairn's bairn, through tears that were now no more than a sunny shower, the silver mist of the past storm.

There was brooding heat on the moors and a glory on the sea when Staneholme rode by his lady's coach, within sight of home. [Page 200]

"There will be no great gathering to-night, Staneholme; no shots or cheers; no lunt in the blue sky; only doubt and amaze about an old man and wife: but there will be two happy hearts that were heavy as stane before. Well-a-day! to think I should be fain to return this way!"

Staneholme laughed, and retorted something perhaps neither quite modest nor wise; but the ready tongue that had learnt so speedily to pour itself out to his greedy ears did not now scold and contradict him, but sighed—

"Ah, Adam Home, you do not have the best of it; it is sweet to be beat; I didna ken—I never guessed that."

Gladly astounded were the retainers of Staneholme at their young laird's unannounced return, safe and sound, from the wars; but greater and more agreeable was their friendly surprise to find that his sick wife, who came back with him unstrengthened in body, was healed and hearty in spirit. Well might good old Lady Staneholme rejoice, and hush her bold grandson, for the change was not evanescent or its effects uncertain. As Staneholme drove out his ailing wife, or constructed a seat for her on the fresh moor, or looked at her stitching his frilled shirts as intently as the child's falling collars, and talked to her of his duties and his sports, his wildness was controlled and dignified. And when he sat, the head and protector of his deaf old mother, and his little frolicsome, fearless child, and his Nelly Carnegie, whose spirit had come again, but whose body remained but a sear relic of her blooming youth, his fitful melancholy melted into the sober tenderness of a penitent, believing man, who dares not complain, but who must praise God and be thankful, so long as life's greatest boons are spared to him. [Page 201]

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HECTOR GARRET OF OTTER.

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I.—THE FIRE.

A CALM, pure summer moonlight fell upon the Ayrshire mosses and deans, but did not silver, as far as we are concerned, the Carrick Castle of Bruce, nor Cameron's lair amidst the heather, nor landward Tintock, nor even seagirt Ailsa Craig, but only the rolling waves of the Atlantic and a grey turreted mansion-house built on a promontory running abruptly into the water. The dim ivory light illuminated a gay company met in the dwelling with little thought of stillness or solemnity, but with their own sense of effect, grouped carelessly, yet not ungracefully, in an old-fashioned, though not unsuitable drawing-room.

They needed relief, these brilliant supple figures; they demanded the background of grey hangings, scant carpet, spindle-legged chairs, and hard sombre prints. To these very cultivated, very artificial and picturesque personages, a family sitting-room was but a stage, where lively, capricious, yet calculating actors were engaged in playing their parts.

The party were mostly French, from the mass of gallant, dauntless emigrants, many of whom were thus entertained with grateful, commiserating hospitality in households whose members had but lately basked in the sparkling geniality of the southern atmosphere, now lurid and surcharged with thunder. [Page 203]

There was a Marquise, worldly, light, and vain, whom adversity had not broken, and could not sour; an Abbé, bland and double, but gentle and kindly in his way; a soldier, volatile, hot-headed, brave as a lion, simple as a child; an older man, sad, sneering, indifferent to this world and the next, but with the wrecks of a noble head, and, God help him, a noble heart.

Of the three individuals present of a different nation and creed, two closely resembled the others with only that vague, impalpable, but perceptible distinction of those whose rearing affords a superficial growth which overspreads but does not annihilate the original plant. The one was a young man, buoyant, flippant, and reckless as the French soldier, but with a bold defiance in his tone which was all his own; the other a young girl, coquettish and vivacious as the Marquise, but with a deep consciousness under her feigning, an undercurrent of watchful pride and passion, of which her model was destitute. The last of the circle was a fair-haired, broad-shouldered lad, who stood apart from the others, big, shy, silent:—but he was earnest amid their shallowness, noble amid their hollowness, and devoted amid their fickleness. How he gazed on the arch, haughty girl, with her lilies and roses, her pencilled brows, her magnificent hair magnificently arranged, with her rich silk and airy lace, and muslin folded and gathered and falling into lines which were the very poetry of attire, unless where a piquant provoking frill, band, or peak, reminded the gazer that the princess was a woman, a mocking mischievous woman, as well as a radiant lady! How he listened to her contradictory words, witty and liquid even in their most worthless accents! how he drank in her songs, the notes of her harp, the rustle of her dress, the fall of her foot! how he started if she moved! how he saw her, though his eyes were on the ground, and though his head was in his hands, while she marked him ceaselessly, half with cruel triumph, half with a flutter and faintness which she angrily and scornfully resisted and denied.

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A few more gay *bons mots* and repartees, a last epigram from the Abbé, a court anecdote from the Marquise which might have figured in one of those letters of Madame de Sévigné where the freshness of the haymaker of Les Rochers survives the glare and the terrible staleness of the Versailles of Louis XV., a blunt camp jest from the soldier, a sarcasm from the philosopher, a joyous barcarole, strangely succeeded by a snatch from that lament of woe wrung forth by the fatal field of Flodden, and the company dispersed. The horse's hoofs of the single stranger of the evening rung on the causeway, as he made for the smooth sands of the bay, the lights one by one leaping out, and the pale moon remaining mistress of Earlsraig as when the warder on yon tower peered out over the waters for the boats of the savage Irish kern, or lit the bale-fire that summoned Montgomery and Muir to ride and run for the love or the fear of Boswell of Earlsraig.

Had these old-world times returned by magic? had a crazed serving-man revived the vanished duties of his warlike predecessor? was the wraith of seneschal or man-at-arms conjuring up a ghostly beacon to stream into the soft air? was an evil spirit about to bewilder and mislead a fated ship to meet its doom on the jagged rocks beneath the dead calm of that glassy sea? So dense was the vapour that suddenly gathered over Earlsraig, till like an electric flash, a jet of flame sprang from a high casement and lit up the gathering obscurity. No horn blew, no bugle sounded, no tramp of horse or hurrying feet broke the silence; the house lay in profound rest, and the sleepers slept on, though truly that was no phantom glare, no marsh gleam, but the near presence of an awful foe.

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And the smoke burst forth in thicker, more suffocating volume; the red streamers shot up again and again, and the burning embers fell like thickest swarms of fire-flies, before a single hasty step roused an echo already lost in the roar and crackle of fire. A scared, half-dressed servant ran out into the court, flung up his hands as he looked around him, then hurried back, and suddenly the great bell pealed out its faithful alarm. "Good folk, good folk, danger is at the door! For Jesu's sake and your dear lives, up and flee! The angels hold out their hands, Sodom is around you—away, away!"

The summons was not in vain. Within a few seconds clamorous outcries, shrieks of dismay, the dashing open of doors and windows, answered the proclamation. A horror-struck crowd assembled rapidly in the court; but notwithstanding that the Abbé's wan face and shaven crown appeared speedily, and the soldier shouted, "Who is in danger? *mes camarades, suivez-moi!*" the philosopher instinctively elected himself commander; he rose, tall and erect, over the heads of his fellows; his face flushed and brightened; and he spoke words of wisdom and resolution whose spirit men recognised through the veil of his frozen tongue; while cravens shrank back, brave men rallied round him!

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"Where is Boswell? *Mon Dieu!* the house is burning and the master is not found! Adolphe, *sauve la Marquise, cet escalier n'est pas perdu.* But where is Boswell? Show his room to me—the nearest way—quick, or he perishes. *Ah, le voilà!*"

Down a flight of side steps stumbled the butler and a favourite groom, bearing between them the young laird, motionless, senseless, his dress dishevelled, but unscathed by flame, and unstained by blood; still breathing, but his marked imperious features were unconscious, heavy, and lethargic.

The Abbé and his elder friend exchanged glances. The brow of the latter contracted in disgust and gloom.

"Adolphe and he played billiards against my desire, as if he were not *bête* enough already," he said in an undertone. "Lay him here, my friends," to the servants, "and listen to me. If you love the Seigneur, let him never know that thus it happened this night. Cover him with a mantle; he will awake to see his chateau a ruin. *Mais, n'importe,* we will do our best. Carry out what is most precious; bring up buckets of water. *Ma foi!* there is enough at hand."

Yes; at their feet, but by a few fathoms unavailable, lay the broad sea, sufficient to extinguish the conflagration of a thousand cities, while the house above was rent with fierce heat, which reddened the sea like blood.

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The Marquise was rescued sobbing and shivering, but she shared her blanket with one of the poor servant-girls. Even the old bed-ridden nurse, so blind and stupid with age that none could satisfy her of the cause of the tumult and din, was carried out, and placed on the grass terrace beside the master; where no sooner did she apprehend intuitively the neighbourhood of her proudly cherished nursling, than she left off her weak wailing, and began to croon over him as fondly and contentedly as when he lay an innocent babe in his cradle:

"Are you weary, Earlsraig? Have you come back sorely tired from the hunt or the race? Weary fa' the men folk that let you lie down with the dew-drops on your bonny curls—bonnier than Miss Alice's, for a' their fleechin'—as if it were high noon. No but noontide has its ills, too; but you would never heed a bonnet, neither for sun nor wind. A wild laddie, a wild laddie, Earlsraig!"

Eager but ignorant hands were piling up heaps of miscellaneous goods—pictures, feather-beds, old armour, plate, mirrors, harness, carpets, and wearing apparel. All were tossed together in wild confusion. The moon was hidden; air, earth, and water were lurid; a hot blast blew in men's faces, which alone remained white and haggard, when a murmur and question, a doubt and frenzy, first stirred and fast convulsed the mass. "Where is Miss Alice?" Ay, where was Miss Alice? Who had seen her? Speak, in God's name!—shout her name until her voice replies, and men's shuddering souls are freed from this ghastly nightmare.

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Miss Alice! Alice Boswell! are you safe, lamenting unseen the home of your fathers? Or are you within that turret whose foundation rock descends sheer into the sea—that turret close by which the demon began his work, where his forked tongue is now licking each loophole and outlet, where beams are bursting and the yawning jaws of hell are about to swallow up the rapid wreck—forgotten, forsaken—the queen of hearts, the wooed and worshipped beauty; fair and sweet, ripe and rare, the sole daughter of the race; the charm and delight of its grey heads?

Oh, Father, thou art terrible in thy decrees! Oh, men, ye are miserable fools! She is there by the blazing framework of the window of her chamber, which she has never quitted; her hair loose, some portion of her dress cast about her, her eyes wide open and glazing with terror, but strangely beautiful—with a glory behind and about her; an unearthly brightness upon brow and cheek, and white arms stretched out imploringly, despairingly for help in her utmost need.

They pressed forward; they looked up in anguish; old men who had followed her when a fairy child, friends of long standing, acquaintances of yesterday. Again and again the gallant soldier penetrated the low doorway; again and again he swerved and recoiled from the furnace fumes that met him—a more fearful encounter than the fury of the sans-culottes and the reeking pools beneath the guillotine.

"*Courage, soldats! Vive la mort, pour la femme et pour la gloire!*" and with a shout half-exulting, half-maddened, the Gallic blood again fired to the desperate feat. Then there was a diversion—a rush to the opposite side of the building—a ladder might be of use there. A notion of forcing open a closed-up and disused gallery of communication, seized hold of these agitated minds, and this afforded a vent to the pent-up sympathy and distress. New energy supplanted stupor; and through the deep hush of the fire could be distinguished the blows of axe and hammer, wielded lustily by stalwart and devoted arms, eager to clear a way of life and liberty for the captive.

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But this was a work of time, and louder crackled and hissed the flames. A fiercer blaze filled the sky, and glittered back from the waves; the serpent tongues drew together, and shot up through the room in a yellow pyramid. In vain! in vain! The zealous labourers panted in the sickness of horror and the chill of great awe.

"A boat! a boat!" called a voice from the outer circle. The thinker, the scorner, stood on the verge of the rocks above the illuminated sea, his head bare, his coat stripped off. "Let Mademoiselle cast herself from the casement instantly; it is her only hope. I can swim; I will hold her up until a boat is launched. *Courage, Mademoiselle!* trust in God and in me."

"Yes, Marquise," he whispered for a second to his countrywoman near him; "I have lost God for many a day; I have found him again in this hour. *A Te Deum* for my requiem!" and looking aghast upon his face in the great light, the Marquise crossed herself, and averred ever afterwards that it was transformed like unto that of his patron saint, St. Francis. The next moment he plunged into the midnight sea. Those who witnessed the action declared that the reflection of the burning was so strong that he seemed to sink into a lake of fire, where he rose again presently, and breasted the waters stoutly.

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The girl saw the design; she comprehended it, and the hoarse murmur of encouragement that hailed its presence of mind. The concentration of the flames, which threatened every moment to bring down a portion of the ponderous roof in one destroying crash, left a freer passage. She advanced quickly—she put her foot on the smouldering sill; she paused, hesitated. It was a fearful alternative.

"Leap down, leap down, Miss Alice; a drowning man has two lives, a burning man but one. Down, down, or you are lost!"

But another cry mingled with the vehement appeal—a piercing, confident cry, that would have vibrated on the dull ear of the dying, though it said only, "I am coming. Alice Boswell: I am coming!"

He was there, on his panting, foam-flecked horse: he flung himself from his saddle; he heard her

answer, "Hector Garret, save me, save me!"

He broke the circle as Samson burst the green withes: he paralysed all remonstrance; he vanished into the abyss which the great staircase presented. He must have borne a charmed life to reach thus far—when a mightier roar, a perfect column of fire, a thundering avalanche of glowing timber and huge stones descended with a shock of an earthquake, and rebounded into the sea, engulfing for ever the fair slight form within.

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By daring and magnanimous effort and main force, other arms bore back Hector Garret from the tottering walls and shaken foundation: and the boat rowed out and delivered the heroic Frenchman. The sinking in of the turret roof satiated the destroyer, so that the further wing of the house was preserved. Its master lived unharmed, to rouse himself from his portentous slumber and face his calamity, while the lover lay writhing and raging in the clutch of wild fever.

But the summer sun shining down on the sea, once more blue and clear as heaven, fell on black yawning gaps and mounds of ashes; on shivered glass and strewn relics of former luxury; on the very grass of the promontory, brown and withered, and trodden into the earth for many a yard; on the horrible grave of the maiden who had watched her own image in the crystal pools, lilted her siren songs to the break of the waves, woven at once chains for her adorers and the web of that destiny which buried her there, unshrouded and uncoffined.

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II.—THE OFFER.

The Clyde was forded by man and horse where ships now ride at anchor; but the rush of trade, not quite so deep and rapid fifty years since as now, yet strong and swift, the growth of centuries, was hurrying, jostling, trampling onward in Jamaica Street and Buchanan Street and their busy thoroughfares. Within our quarter, however, were stillness and dimness, the cold, lofty, classic repose of the noble college to which a professor's house was in immediate vicinity.

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The room, large, low-roofed, with small, peaked windows, had not been built in modern times. The furniture was almost in keeping: roomy settees, broad, plain, ribbed-back chairs, with faded worked covers, the task of fingers crumbled into dust, heavy bookcases loaded with proportionably ponderous or curiously quaint volumes, and mirrors, with their frames like coffins covered with black velvet and relieved by gilding.

The only fresh and fragrant thing in the room—ay, or in the house, where master and mistress and servants were old and withered—was a young girl seated on a window-seat, her hands lightly crossed, watching the white clouds in the July sky, white, though nothing else is so in Glasgow, where the air is heavy with perpetual smoke and vapour.

That girl, too broad-browed and large-eyed for mere youthful beauty, but with such an arch, delicate, girlish mouth and chin as betokened her a frank, unsophisticated, merry child after all, was Leslie Bower, the young daughter and only child of an erudite and venerated professor.

Leslie had no brothers and no sisters, and in a sense she had neither father nor mother, for Professor Bower was the son, husband, and father of his books, and he had so mighty a family of these, ancient and modern, that he had very little time or attention to spare for ties of the flesh. He was a mild, absent, engrossed old man, flashing into energy and genius in his own field of learning, but in the world of ordinary humanity a body without a soul.

Professor Bower married late in life a timid, shrinking English wife, who, removed from all early ties, and never mingling in Glasgow society, lapsed into a stillness as profound as his own.

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Dr. Bower took little notice of his child; what with duties and studies, he had no leisure; he read in his slippered morning gown, he read at meals, he read by his evening lamp; probably, if Mrs. Bower would have confessed it, he kept a volume under his pillow. No wonder he was a bleary-eyed, poking, muttering old man, for he was much more interested in Hannibal than in Bonaparte, and regarded Leslie, like the house, the yearly income, the rector, the students, the janitors, as one of many abstract facts with which he troubled himself as little as possible.

Mrs. Bower cared for Leslie's health and comfort with scrupulous nervous exactness, but she was incapable of any other demonstration of regard. She was as shy and egotistical as poor Louis XVI., and perhaps it would have demanded as tragic a domestic revolution to have stirred her up to lively tenderness. Leslie might have been as dubious as Marie Antoinette of the amount of love entertained for her by her nearest kin, but curiously, though affectionate and passionate enough to have been the pure and innocent child of some fiery Jacobin, she had not vexed herself about this mystery. One sees every day lush purple and rose-flowered plants growing in unaccountable shade; true, their associates are pale and drooping, and the growth of the hardier is treacherous, and may distil poison, but the evil principle is gradual, and after conditions have been confirmed and matured.

The stronger portion of Leslie's nature, which required abundant and invigorating food, was slow of development; the lighter side flourished in the silent, dull house, where nothing else courted the sunbeam. In her childhood and girlhood, Leslie had gone out to school, and although always somewhat marked and individual in character, she had companions, friends, sufficient sympathy and intercourse for an independent, buoyant nature at the most plastic period of its existence. This stage of life was but lately left behind; Leslie had not long learnt that now she was removed

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from classes and masters, and must in a great measure confine her acquaintances to those who returned her visits at her father's house; and as visitors put mamma and papa about, and did not suit their habits, she must resign her little world, and be almost as quiet and solitary as her elders. Leslie had just begun to sigh a little for the old thronged, bustling class-rooms which she had lightly esteemed, and was active by fits and starts in numerous self-adopted occupations which could put former ones out of her head, and fill up the great blanks in her time and thoughts, for she was not inclined to sit down under a difficulty, and instinctively battled with it in a thousand ways.

Thus Leslie had her flower-painting—few natural flowers she saw, poor girl—card boxes, worsted vases, eggshell baskets, embroidery pieces, canary bird, and books—the last greedily devoured. She did not assist her mother, because although their household was limited, Mrs. Bower's quiet, methodical plans were perfect, and she gently declined all interference with her daily round. Neither did Leslie work for her father, because the professor would as soon have employed her canary bird. She was not thoughtful and painstaking for the poor, because, though accustomed to a species of almsgiving, she heard nothing, saw nothing of nearer or higher association with her neighbours. Yet there was capacity enough in that heart and brain for good or for evil.

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So Leslie sat there, pausing in her sewing, and gazing idly at the sky, with a girl's quick pensiveness and thick-coming fancies, as she mused.

How blue it was yonder! What glorious clouds! yet the world below was rather stupid and tiresome, and it was hard to say what people toiled so arduously for. There were other lands and other people: should she ever see them? Surely, for she was quite young. She wished they could go in summer 'down the water,' out of this din and dust, to some coast village or lonely loch between lofty purple mountains, such as she had seen when with Mrs. Elliot; papa might spare a few weeks, people no richer did; they had no holidays, and it was so hot and close, and always the same. But she supposed she must be contented, and would go away to cool and compose herself in the crypt of their own cathedral. How grand it was; how solemn the aisles and arches on every side, like forest trees; and then the monuments—what stories she invented for them! St. Mungo's Well! St. Mungo, austere, yet beneficent; with bare feet, cowed head, scarred back, and hardest of all, swept and garnished heart, with his fruitful blessing, 'Let Glasgow flourish.' What would St. Mungo think now of the city of the tree, the fish, and the bell?

This hoar, venerable, beautiful feat of art was to the imprisoned Glasgow girl as St. Paul's to such another isolated imaginative nature.

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There was a knock at the street-door; a very decided application of the queer, twisted knocker. Leslie roused herself: not a beggar's tap that; none of the janitors; and this was not Dr. Murdoch's or Dr. Ware's hour: the girl was accurate in taps and footsteps. Some one was shown in; a man's voice was heard greeting "Dr. Bower," before the study door was closed. Leslie started up with pleased surprise,—"Hector Garret of Otter! he will come upstairs to see us; he will tell us how the country is looking; he will bring news from Ferndean," and for the next hour she sat in happy, patient expectation.

Mrs. Bower, a fair, faded, grave woman, came into the room, and sat down with her needlework in the other window.

"Mamma," exclaimed Leslie, "do you know that Hector Garret of Otter is downstairs with papa?"

"Yes, Leslie."

"He never fails to ask for us; don't you think we'll see him here by-and-by?"

"I do not know; it depends upon his engagements."

"I wonder what brings him to Glasgow just now; he must find it so much more agreeable at home," with a little sigh.

"Leslie, I don't think you have anything to do with that."

"No, certainly; Hector Garret and I are two very different persons."

"Leslie!"

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"Well, mamma."

"I wish you would not say Hector Garret; it does not sound proper in a girl like you."

"I suppose it does not. He must have been a grown-up man when I was a child. I have caught the habit from papa, but I have not the least inclination to use the name to his face."

"I should think not, Leslie;" and the conversation dropped.

Presently the stranger entered deliberately; a tall, fair, handsome man of eight-and-thirty or forty, with one of those cold, intellectual, statuesque faces in which there is a chill harmony, and which are types of a calm temperament, or an extinct volcano. Perhaps it was that cast of countenance which recommended him to the Bowers; yet Leslie was dark, bright, and variable.

The visitor brought a gift in his hand—a basket of flowers and summer fruit, of which Leslie relieved him, while she struggled in vain to look politely obliged, and not irrationally elated.

"So kind of you to trouble yourself! Such a beautiful flower—wild roses and hawthorn too—I like so much to have them, though they wither very soon. I dare say they grew where

'Fairies light
On Cassilis Downans dance.'

(Burns was becoming famous, and Leslie had picked up the lines somewhere.) And the strawberries, oh, they must be from Ferndean."

The bearer nodded and smiled.

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"I knew it by instinct," and Leslie began eating them like a tempted child, and stained her pretty lips. "Those old rows on each side of the summer-house where papa first learnt his lessons—I wonder if there are jackdaws there still: won't you have some?"

"No, thank you. What a memory you have, Miss Bower!"

"Ferndean is my Highland hill. When papa is very stiff and helpless from rheumatism, he talks of it sometimes. It is so long ago; he was so different then."

Mr. Garret and Mrs. Bower exchanged a few civil words on his journey, the spring weather, the state of the war, like two taciturn people who force their speeches; then he became Leslie's property, sat down beside her, watched her arranging her flowers, helped her a little, and spoke now and then in answer to her questions, and that was sufficient.

Hector Garret was particularly struck this evening with the incongruity of Leslie's presence in the Professor's dry, silent, scholastic home, and with her monotonous, shaded existence, and her want of natural associations and fitting companionship. He pondered upon her future; he was well acquainted with her prospects; he knew much better than she did that the money with which his father had bought up the mortgages on Ferndean, and finally the estate itself, was drained and scattered long ago, and that the miserable annuity upon which the Professor rested peacefully as a provision for his widow and child, died with the former. It was scarcely credible that a man should be so regardless of his own family, but the echo of the mystic, sublime discourses of the Greek porches, the faint but sacred trace of the march of vast armies, and the fall of nations, caused Leslie to dwindle into a mere speck in the creation. Of course she would be provided for somehow: marry, or make her own livelihood. Socrates did not plague himself much about the fate of Xantippe: Seneca wrote from his exile to console his mother, but the epistles were for the benefit of the world at large, and destined to descend to future generations of barbarians.

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What a frank, single-hearted young girl she seemed to Hector Garret—intelligent, capable of comprehending him in a degree, amusing him with her similes and suggestions; pretty, too, as one of those wild roses or pinks that she prized so highly, though she wore a sober, green, flowered silk dress. He should like to see her in a white gown. He supposed that was not a convenient town wear. Pope had unmasked women, but he could not help thinking that a fresh, simple, kind young girl would be rather a pleasant object of daily encounter. She would grow older, of course. That was a pity; but still she would be progressing into an unsophisticated, cordial, contented woman, whom servants would obey heartily—to whom children would cling. Even men had a gush of tenderness for these smiling, unobtrusive, humble mothers; and best so in the strain and burden of this life.

Leslie knew nothing of these meditations. She only understood Hector Garret as a considerate friend, distinguished personally, and gifted mentally—for her father set great store upon him—but, unlike the gruff or eager servants to whom she was accustomed, condescending to her youth and ignorance, and with a courtesy the nearest to high-breeding she had ever met. She was glad to see Hector Garret, even if he did not bring a breath of the country with him. She parted from him with a sense of loss—a passing sadness that hung upon her for an hour or two, like the vapour on the river, which misses the green boughs and waving woods, and sighs sluggishly past wharfs and warehouses.

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It was a still greater surprise to Leslie when Hector Garret came again the next evening. He had never been with them on two successive days before. She supposed he had gone back to Ayrshire, although he had not distinctly referred to his speedy return. But he was here, and Leslie entertained him as usual.

"Should you not like to see Ferndean?" inquired Hector Garret.

"Don't speak of it," Leslie cautioned him, soberly; "it would be far too great happiness for this world."

"Why, what sort of dismal place do you think the world?"

"Too good a place for you and me," Leslie answered evasively, and with a touch of fun.

"But this is the very season for Ferndean and Otter, when the pasture is gay as a garden, and you can have boating every day in the creeks, more sheltered than the moorland lochs."

The tears came into Leslie's eyes.

"I think it is unkind of you, Mr. Garret, to tempt me with such pictures," she answered, half pettishly.

"I mean to be kind," he responded quickly. "I may err, but I can take refuge in my intentions. You may see Ferndean and Otter, if you can consent to go there, and dwell there as a grave man's friend and wife."

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Leslie started violently, and the blood rushed over her face.

"I beg your pardon, Sir, but you don't mean it?"

"I do mean it, Leslie, as being the best for both of us; and I ask you plainly and directly to marry me: if you agree, I hope and trust that you will never regret it."

Leslie trembled very much. She said afterwards that she pinched her arm to satisfy herself that she was awake, but she was not quite overcome.

"I was never addressed so before. I do not know what to say. You are very good, but I am not fit."

He interrupted her—not with vows and protestations, but resolutely and convincingly.

"I am the best judge of your fitness,—but you must judge for yourself also. I am certain of your father's and mother's acquiescence, so I do not mention them. But do not hurry; take time, consult your own heart; consider the whole matter. I will not press for your decision. I will wait days, weeks. I will go down to Otter in the meantime, if you prefer it. But if you do say yes, remember, dear Leslie, you confer upon me the greatest boon that a woman can bestow on a man, and I think I am capable of appreciating it."

He spoke with singular impartiality, but without reassuring his hearer. Leslie looked helplessly up to him, excited and distressed.

He smiled a little, and sighed a brief sigh.

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"You are not satisfied. You are too candid and generous. You wish me to take my refusal at once. You feel that I am too old, too dull to presume—"

"Oh, no, no," Leslie exclaimed, seeing herself convicted of terrible selfishness and conceit, while her heart was throbbing even painfully with humility and gratitude. "You have done me a great honour, and if you would not be disappointed—if you would bear with me—if you are not deceiving yourself in your nobleness—I should be so happy to go to Ferndean."

He thanked her eloquently, and talked to her a little longer, kindly and affectionately, and then he offered to seek her father; and left her to her agitated reflections. What a fine, dignified man he looked! Could it be possible that this was her lot in life? And the very sun which had risen upon her planning a walk with Mary Elliot next week, was yet streaming upon her poor pots of geraniums on the dusty window-sill. She quitted her seat, and began to walk quickly up and down.

"Leslie, you are shaking the room." Mamma had been in the further window with her sewing all the time.

Leslie stole behind the brown window-curtain, fluttering her hand among the folds.

"Leslie, you are pulling that curtain awry."

"I cannot help it, mamma."

"Why not, child? Are you ill?"

"Yes—no, mamma. I don't know what to think—I can't think. But Hector Garret has asked me to be his wife."

Mrs. Bower's needle dropped from her fingers. She stared at her daughter. She rose slowly.

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"Impossible, Leslie," she observed.

Leslie laughed hysterically.

"Yes, indeed. It was very strange, but I heard every word."

"Are you certain you are not mistaken?"

Mrs. Bower had never so cross-examined her daughter in her life; but Leslie was not disturbed or vexed by her incredulity.

"Quite certain. I know it was only yesterday that you scolded me for taking liberties with his name; but he was perfectly serious, and he has gone to tell papa."

Mrs. Bower gazed wistfully on Leslie, and a faint red colour rose in her cheek, while she interlaced her fingers nervously.

"Leslie," she asked again, in a shaking voice, "do you know what you are doing?"

Leslie looked frightened.

"Is it so very terrible, mamma? I should possibly have married some day—most girls mean to do it; and only think of Ferndean and Otter. Besides, there is nobody I could like so well as Hector Garret, I am quite sure, although I little guessed he cared so much for me;" and Leslie's eye's fell,

and a sunny, rosy glow mantled over her whole face, rendering it very soft and fair.

"I see it is to be, Leslie. May it be for your welfare, my dear;" and her mother stooped abruptly, and kissed the young, averted cheek.

Leslie was awed. She dreaded that her father would be equally moved, and then she did not know how she could stand it. But she might have spared herself the apprehension; for when the Professor shuffled in he sat down as usual, fumbled for his spectacles, looked round with the most unconscious eye, observed that "Ware" had that day exceeded in his lecture by twenty minutes—"a bad practice," (Dr. Bower was himself notoriously unpunctual,) and took not the slightest notice of any event of greater importance, until Leslie's suspense had been so long on the rack that it began to subside into dismay, when glancing up for a moment, he observed parenthetically, as he turned a page—"Child! you have my approval of a union with Hector Garret—an odd fancy, but that is no business of ours,"—dropped his eyes again on his volume, and made no further allusion to the subject for the rest of the evening—no, nor ever again, of his own free will. Hector Garret assailed him on preliminaries, his wife patiently waylaid and besieged him for the necessary funds, acquaintances congratulated him—he was by compulsion drawn more than once from roots and æsthetics; but left to himself, he would have assuredly forgotten his daughter's wedding-day, as he had done that of her baptism.

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Leslie recovered from the stunning suddenness of her fate, and awoke fully to its brightness. To go down to Ayrshire and dwell there among hills and streams, and pure heather-scented air, like any shepherdess; to be the nearest and dearest to Hector Garret:—already the imaginative, warm-hearted girl began to raise him into a divinity.

Leslie was supremely content, she was gay and giddy even with present excitement; with the pretty bustle of being so important and so occupied—she whose whole time lately had been vacant and idle—so willing to admire her new possessions, so openly elated with their superiority, and not insensible to the fact that all these prominent obtrusive cares were but little superfluous notes of the great symphony upon which she had entered, and whose infinitely deeper, fuller, higher tones she would learn well, by-and-by.

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Leslie Bower was the personification of joy, and no one meddled with her visions. Hector Garret was making his preparations at Otter; and when Leslie sang as she stitched, and ran lightly up and down, only the servants in the kitchen laid their heads together, and confided to each other that "never did they see so daffin' a bride; Miss Leslie should ken that a greetin' bride's a happy bride!" But no one told Leslie—no one taught her the tender meaning of the wise old proverb—no one warned her of the realities of life, so much sadder, so much holier, purer, more peaceful than any illusion. Her mother had relapsed into her ordinary calmness, rather wounding Leslie's perceptions when she allowed herself to think of it, for she did not read the lingering assiduity that was so intent it might have been employed upon her shroud. And there was no one else—no; Leslie was quite unaware that her gladness was ominous.

Only the shadow of a warning crossed Leslie's path of roses, and she disregarded it. Her confidence in Hector Garret and in life remained unbounded.

Leslie had gone to the best known of her early companions, her cup brimming over in the gracious privilege of begging Mary Elliot to be her bridesmaid. The Elliots had been kind to her, and had once taken her to their cheerful country-house; and now Mary was to witness the ceremony, and Hector Garret had said that she might, if she pleased, pay Leslie a long visit at Otter.

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Mary Elliot was a little older, a little more experienced in womanly knowledge than Leslie.

"How strange it sounds that you should be married so soon, Leslie, from your old house, where we thought you buried. We believed that you must lead a single life, unless your father made a pet of one of his students: and then you must have waited until he left college."

"It is the reverse. I have no time to lose," nodded Leslie; "only Hector Garret is not old-looking. I don't believe that he has a grey hair in his head. He is a far handsomer man than Susan Cheyne's sister's husband."

"I know it; he was pointed out to me in the street. Is he very fond of you, Leslie?"

"I suppose—a little, or he would not have me."

"Does he flatter you, pretend that you are a queen, say all manner of fine things to you? I should like to be enlightened."

"No, no, Mary; real men are not like men in books—and he is not foolish."

"But it is not foolish in a lover. They are all out of their senses—blinded by admiration and passion."

"Perhaps; but Hector Garret is a clever man, only he speaks when he is spoken to, and does not forget you when out of sight. And do you know, I have been used to clever people, and decidedly prefer to look up to a man?"

"What does he call you, Leslie?"

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"Why, Leslie, to be sure, or Miss Bower. You would not have him say Mrs. Garret yet?" And Leslie

covered her face and laughed again, and reddened to the tips of her fingers.

"Not 'Bonnie Leslie,' 'Jewel,' 'Angel,'" jested Mary, thrilling at the echo of a certain low, fluttered voice, that had sounded in her own ears and would wilfully repeat, "Winsome Mary," "Little Woman," "Witch!"

"No," Leslie replied, with honest frankness, "that would be speaking nonsense; and if Hector Garret thinks nonsense that is bad enough."

"Do you remember how we talked sometimes of our husbands?"

"Yes, I do. They were all to be heroes."

"And you were to be courted on bended knees. Yes, Leslie, solicited again and again; and when you yielded at last, it should be such an act of grace that the poor fellow would be half mad with delight."

"I was mad myself. I was full of some song or bit of poetry. I tell you again, Mary, if you have not found it out for yourself, real life is not like a book. Hector Garret is not the man to beg and implore, and wait patiently for a score of years. I wish you saw how he manages his strong horse. He sits, and does not yield a hair's breadth. Though it paws and rears, he just holds its head tight and pats its neck. Now, I want him to check and guide me. I have been left a great deal to myself. Papa and mamma are not young, and it appears to me that a single child is not enough to draw out the sympathies of a staid, silent couple. They have been very kind to me all my life, and I ought to be glad that they will not miss me much. But although it was wrong, I have often felt a little forlorn, and been tempted to have bad, discontented thoughts all by myself. However, that is over, and I hope I'm going to be a good and sensible woman now. And, Mary, I am so anxious to have your opinion upon my crimson pelisse, because mamma does not profess to be a judge; and I cannot be certain that it is proper merely on a mantua-maker's word and my own taste. I would like to do Hector Garret credit; not that I can really do so in any eyes but his own."

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III.—THE NEW HOME.

Hector Garret had his girl wife at Otter, and very sunny her existence was for the lustrum of that honeymoon. It was almost sufficient for her to be at liberty, fairly installed in her castle in the air, a country home. And its lord and master was generous and indulgent, and wasted, he did not care to say how many days, in displaying to her the green ruinousness of Ferndean—in climbing the hills and hunting out the widest views for her—in taking her out in his boat, and rowing her in sunshine and shade, enjoying her wonder and exultation most benevolently. In a short time he left her to herself, for he had much property, to whose numerous details he attended with rigid conscientiousness, and he had been a student from his youth, and sat almost as much as Dr. Bower in his library, although it was an airier and more heterogeneously fitted-up sanctuary. Leslie was perfectly satisfied; in fact, while the novelty around her was fresh, she preferred to wander about at her leisure, and find out places for herself, because Hector Garret was always hurrying her, and she was trying so hard to be clever, active, and amiable. Ah, that slight strain already perceptible, that growth of ignorance, misconception, and extravagant reverence—what fruit would it bear?

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Otter was a rambling white house in a green meadow opening to the sea. Its salient points were its size and age. The slowest-growing shrubs in its pleasance were tough, seamed, branched and bowed with time. There were few trees in the neighbourhood except at forsaken Ferndean; but there were slow swelling hills crowned with heather closing in the valley over which Otter presided with the dignified paternal character of the great house of strath, or glen. Leslie smiled when she first heard the natives of the district term the grey or glittering track that bounded the western horizon, "The Otter Sea," but very soon she fell into the use of the same name, and was conscious of feeling far more interest in the boats and ships that crossed that limited space, than in those which she saw from the hilltops spread far and wide over a great expanse broken only by the misty Irish coast-line. Indeed, Hector Garret explained to her that he had seigniorial claims over that strip of waves—that the seaweed, and, after certain restrictions, the fragments of wreck cast upon its sands, were his property, quite as much as if he had waved his banner over it, like the gallant Spaniard, in the name of his Most Catholic Majesty.

Leslie had variety in her locality; the beach, with its huge boulders and inspiring music; the fields and "uplands airy," with their hedge wealth of vetch, briar, and bramble; the garden, the ancient walled garden, at whose antiquities Hector Garret laughed.

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Leslie played sad pranks in the early season of her disenfranchisement. She wandered far and near, and soiled her white gowns, to the despair of the Otter servant who did up the master's shirts and managed the mistress's clear-starching, but who never dreamt, in those days of frills, robes, and flounces, of styling herself a laundress. Leslie filled her apron with mosses and lichens: she stole out after the reapers had left the patch of oats which was not within sight of the house, and gathered among the sheaves like a Ruth. She grew stout and hardy, and, in spite of her gipsy bonnet, as brown as a berry under this out-of-door life, until no one would have known the waxen-faced city girl; and many a time when Hector Garret left his study in the dusk and found his way to the drawing-room, he discovered her asleep from very weariness, with her head laid down on her spindle-legged work-table, and the white moonbeams trying to steal under her long

eyelashes. He would tread softly, and stand, and gaze, but he never stooped and kissed her cheek in merry frolic, never in yearning tenderness.

Such was Leslie's holiday; let her have it—it ended, certainly. The black October winds began to whistle in the chimneys and lash the Otter sea into foam; the morning mists were white and dense on the hills, and sometimes the curtain never rose the whole day; the burns were hoarse and muddy, the sheep in fold, the little birds silent. Leslie loved the prospect still, even the wild grey clouds rent and whirled across the sky, the watery sun, and the ragged, wan, dripping verdure; but it made her shiver too, and turn to her fireside, where she would doze and yawn, work and get weary in her long solitary hours. Hector Garret was patient and good-humoured; he took the trouble to teach her any knowledge to which she aspired; but he was so far beyond her, so hopelessly superior, that she was vexed and ashamed to confess to him her ignorance, and it was clear that when he came up to her domain in the evening he liked best to rest himself, or to play with her in a fondling, toying way. After the first interminable rainy day which she had spent by herself at Otter, when he entered and proceeded in his cool, rather lazy fashion to tap her under the chin, to inquire if she had been counting the rain drops, to bid her try his cigar, she felt something swelling in her throat, and answered him shortly and crossly; but when she found that he treated her offended air as the whim of a spoiled child, and was rather the more amused by it, she determined that he should not be entertained by her humours. Perilous entertainment as it was, Leslie could not have afforded it; her wilderness tamed her so that she welcomed Hector Garret eagerly, submitted to be treated as a child, exerted herself to prattle away gaily and foolishly when her heart was a little heavy and her spirits languid.

Leslie saw so little of her husband—perhaps it was the case with all wives; her father and mother were as much apart—but Leslie did not understand the necessity. She did not like her life to be selfish, smooth, and aimless, except for her own fancies, as it had been from the first. She wanted to share Hector Garret's cares and his work which he transacted so faithfully. She wished he thought her half as worth consulting as his steward. She had faith in woman's wit. She had a notion that she herself was quick and could become painstaking. She tried entering his room once or twice uninvited, but he always looked so discontented, and when she withdrew so relieved, that she could not persevere in the attempt.

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When Hector Garret went shooting or fishing, Leslie would have accompanied him gladly, would have delighted in his trophies, and carried his bag or his basket, like any gillie or callant of the Highlands or Lowlands, if he would have allowed it; but his excursions were too remote and fatiguing, and beyond the strength that was supposed consistent with her sex and nurture.

Little fool! to assail another's responsibilities and avocations when her own were embarrassing her sufficiently. Her household web had got warped and entangled in her careless, inexperienced hands, and vexed and mortified her with a sense of incapacity and failure—an oppression which she could not own to Hector Garret, because there was no common ground, and no mutual understanding between them. When Leslie came to Otter she found the housekeeping in the hands of an Irish follower of the Garrets—themselves of Irish origin; and Hector Garret presented Bridget Kennedy to his wife as his faithful and honoured servant, whom he recommended to a high place in her regard. Bridget Kennedy displayed more marked traces of race than her master, but it was the Celtic nature under its least attractive aspect to strangers, proud, passionate, fanciful, and vindictive. She was devoted to her master, and capable of consideration for Leslie on his account—though jealous of her entrance upon the stage of Otter; but she evinced this reflected interest by encroachments and tyranny, a general determination to adhere doggedly to her own ways, and to impose them upon her mistress.

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Leslie began by admiring Bridget, as she did everything else at Otter. Leslie would have propitiated the mayor of the palace with kind words and attentions, but when she was snapped up in her efforts, she drew back with a girl's aptness to be affronted and repelled. Next Leslie began to angrily resist Bridget's unbecoming interference with her movements, and design of exercising authority and control over the child whom the master had chosen to set over his house; but her fitful impulses were met and overruled by stubborn and slenderly veiled fierceness. Leslie was not weak, but she was undisciplined; and she who had been the young Hotspur of the most orderly and pacific of families, learnt to tremble at the sound of Bridget's crutch in the lobbies, and her shrill voice rating the servants who flew to do her bidding.

In proportion as Leslie cowered at her subordinate, the subordinate was tempted to despise her and lord it over her.

Hector Garret was blind to this contention. For his own part, he humoured Bridget or smiled at her asperities, as suited him; and it is probable that if he had been appealed to, he would have adopted his old favourite's side, and censured Leslie as touchy, inconsiderate, perhaps a little spiteful. But he never was made umpire, for Leslie had all the disadvantage of a noble temper in an unseemly struggle. Bridget plagued Leslie, but Leslie would not injure Bridget,—no, not for the world. The imperious old woman was Hector Garret's friend; he had said that he had known no firmer friend than Bridget Kennedy. She had closed his father's eyes, she had stood by himself in sickness and sorrow (for all his strength and self-command, Hector had known sickness and sorrow—that was a marvel to Leslie)—Bridget might clutch her rights to the end, what did it signify? only a little pique and bitterness to an interloper.

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Leslie had ceased to credit that she would ever become the wise, helpful woman that she had once warmly desired to see herself. Her own defects were now familiar and sorely disheartening to her, and she had grown aware that she could not by inspiration set and preserve in smooth,

swift motion the various wheels of Otter, not even if—unlooked for and undesired sequel!—she received express permission to dance upon the head of old Bridget.

Leslie had fancied once, when Hector Garret told her how few neighbours lived within visiting distance, that she should not want society: but the solitude was matter of regret, especially when it proved that of the few families who exchanged rare intercourse, some of better birth than breeding scarcely held the daughter of the disinherited laird and Glasgow scholar as their equal in social rank, or a spouse worthy of the master of Otter, or indeed entitled to their special esteem.

The only house without any pretension within sight of Otter was situated at the other extremity of the bay, on a peninsula projecting far into the sea. It had been built in the days when each mansion was a fortalice, and when safety from enemies was of more moment than the convenience of friends.

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This Earlsraig was now little more than a grim, grey turret, seldom occupied; the companion body of the building had been destroyed nearly a score of years before by a fire—the tragedy of the country-side, as it consummated the ruin of an old family—and in its horrors a lady of the house perished miserably. So the sight of its cold cluster of chimneys, wind-rocked walls, and scorched and crumbling vestiges of sudden destruction, far from adding to the cheerfulness of the landscape, was a blot on its rural prosperity.

The homes of humbler friends were foreign thresholds to Leslie; the reserved, engrossed, dignified master of Otter crossed them with a freer step. Leslie could but address her servants, and venture to intermeddle bashfully with their most obvious concerns. She had neither tongue nor eye for more distant and difficult dependants.

But Leslie was not dying of ennui or spleen, or miserable and with a nameless fathomless misery. She was only disenchanted—conscious of feeling a great deal older than she had done six months since. How could she have been so credulous, so vain! Verily, every path of roses has its panoply of thorns.

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IV.—THE PAGES OF THE PAST.

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One winter night Leslie, in her deep chair, observed Hector Garret turning over the leaves of an old pocket-book. Hector, catching her eye, offered it to her with a "See, Leslie, how my father chronicled the fashions"—he never did suppose her susceptible of very grave interests.

In the dearth of other amusements Leslie pored over the ancient diary, and found more suggestive paragraphs than the entry indicated: "Abel Furness has sent me a waistcoat an inch and a half shorter, and a pair of clouded silk hose for the black ditto, ordered." There were—"Three pounds English to my boy Hector, to keep his pocket during his stay at Ardhope." "A crown to Hector as fee for fishing out the black stot that broke its neck over the rocks." "A letter from Utrecht from my son Hector; a fair hand and a sensible diction." "Forty pounds over and above paid to please Hector on the bond over the flax-fields of Ferndean." "A small stipend secured to my thriftless kinsman, Willie Hamilton, by the advice and with the aid of my son Hector." "To Earlsraig with Hector:" this notice was repeated many times, until the record closed abruptly with the tremulous thanksgiving—"My dear son and heir, Hector, recovered of his malady by the blessing of God."

Very plainly lay the life-clue of that silent heart, traced in the faded ink of those yellowing pages. How old men cherished their offspring! What did Hector Garret think of those mute but potent witnesses of a regard that he could know no more on earth? She knew he prized the book, for she had seen it carefully deposited in one of the private drawers in his study. She opened it at the beginning, and slipping her fingers into its gilded pockets, discovered a folded paper. It contained merely a sprig of heather, and written on the enclosure—"From my dear wife, Isobel; her first gift." Two dates were subjoined, with thirty years' interval—that of the receipt of the token, and that of the inscription of the memorandum.

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With flushing cheeks Leslie sat, and spread out the crushed, brittle spikes, so fondly won, so dearly held. She was sure Hector had not one leaf, riband, or ring which she had given him. Once when he was gayer than his wont, and plagued her with his jesting petting, she took up the scissors and cut off a lock of his hair. He did not notice the theft till it was accomplished, and then he stood half-thoughtful, half-contemptuous. He had not a hair of hers, but of course the whole head was his; his father had judged otherwise.

This earlier Hector Garret—she had heard Bridget enlarge upon his merits. "A fine man, like the master, but frank and light of heart until he lost the lady—ay, a real lady! grand and gladsome—the old lady of Otter." Leslie longed for a vision of those old occupants of her place and her husband's; to have a vivid experience of how they looked, spoke, and lived; to see them in spirit—in their morning good wishes, their noonday cares, their evening cheer, their nightly prayers? Was their union only apparent? were they severed by a dim, shapeless, insurmountable barrier, for ever together, yet for ever apart?

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These shades lingered and abode with Leslie in her lonely vigils, ere she distinguished whether their language was that of warning or reproach. She studied their material likenesses—the last

save one in the picture-gallery—honest faces, bright with wholesome vigour; their son Hector's was a finer physiognomy, but the light had left lip and eye, and Leslie missed it as she gazed wistfully at these shadows, and compared them with their living representative.

A stranger came to Otter: that was an unfrequent event, even when the spring was advancing, and the boats which had been drawn up for the winter were again launched in the cove, and the brown nets hung anew to dry on the budding whins and gowans—the April gowans converting the haugh into a "lily lea." Their nearest neighbour, only an occasional resident among them, lounged over with his whip, dog-call, and dogs, and entered the drawing-room at Otter, to be introduced for the first time to its mistress. Leslie's instincts were hospitable, and they were by no means strained by exercise; but she did not like this guest; she felt an involuntary repugnance to him, although he was very courteous to her—with an elaborate, ostentatious homage that astonished and confused her. He was a man of Hector Garret's age, but, even in his rough coat, with marked remains of youthful foppishness and pretension. He was a tall man, with beard and moustache slightly silvered; his aquiline features were sharpened and drawn; his bold searching eyes sunken. He was a gentleman, even an accomplished and refined gentleman in manner and accent—and yet there was about him a nameless coarseness, the brutishness of self-indulgence and low aims and ends, which no polish could efface or conceal.

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Leslie, notwithstanding her slight knowledge of life, apprehended this, and shrank from the man; but he addressed Hector Garret with the ease of an intimate associate—and Hector Garret, with his pride and scrupulousness, suffered the near approach, and only winced when the stranger accosted Leslie, complimented Leslie, put himself coolly on the footing of future friendship with the lady of the house.

The day wore on, and still the visitor remained, entertaining himself, and discoursing widely, but for the most part on practices and motives strange at Otter.

"So you've married, after all, Hector," he said, suddenly, as they sat together in the twilight: "well, I excuse you," with a laugh and a touch on the shoulder.

The words were simple enough, but they tingled in Leslie's ears like insolence, and Hector Garret, so hard to rouse, bit his lips while he answered indifferently—"And when does your time come, Nigel? Are the shadows not declining with you?"

"Faith, they're so low, that there's not light left for the experiment; besides, French life spoils one for matrimony here, at least so poor Alice used to say—'no galling bonds on this side of the Channel'—the peaceful *couvent grille*, or a light *mariage de convenance* among the pleasant southerners;—not that they are so pleasant as they were formerly either."

Hector Garret got up and walked to one of the window recesses, his brow knit, his teeth set.

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Leslie rose to steal from the room.

"Nay, stay, madam," urged the bland, brazen intruder; "don't rob us so soon of a fair, living apology for *faides souvenirs*."

But "Go, Leslie, we will not detain you," Hector Garret exclaimed, impatiently; and Leslie hurried to her own chamber in a tumult of surprise and indignation, and vexed suspicion. Mysteries had not ceased; and what was this mystery to which Hector Garret deigned to lend himself in disparaging company with a sorry fine gentleman?

Bridget Kennedy was there before her, making a pretence of fumbling in the wardrobe, her head shaking, her lips working, her eyes blazing with repressed rage and malice.

"Is he there, madam, still?" she demanded, impetuously. "Is he torturing and maddening Master Hector with his tones and gestures? He!—he that ought to crouch among the bent grass and fern sooner than pass the other on the high road. Borrowing and begging, to lavish on his evil courses: he who could not pay us—not in red gold, but with his heart's blood—the woe he wrought. They had guileful, stony hearts, the Boswells, before they ever took to foreign lightness and wickedness: and evil to him who trafficked with them in life or death."

"Who is he, Bridget? I do not know him; I cannot understand," gasped Leslie.

"Don't ask me, madam—you, least of all."

"Tell me, Bridget, tell me," implored the girl, frightened, yet exasperated, catching the old woman's withered hands, and holding them fast.

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"Don't ask me, madam," reiterated Bridget, sternly. "Better not."

"I will know; what do you mean? Oh, you hurt me, you hurt me! I will ask Hector Garret himself. I cannot bear this suspense!"

"Child, do you choose what you can bear? Beware!" menaced the nurse; then, as Leslie would have broken from her—

"Have it, then! He is the brother of that Alice Boswell who perished in the burning of Earlsraig nigh twenty years ago."

"Poor lady, Bridget," Leslie said, with a bewildered, excited sob. "Poor unhappy lady; but what has that to do with him, with me? I understand no better. Help me, Bridget Kennedy—a woman,

like myself. I will not let you go."

"Madam, what good will it serve? It is small matter now:" then half reluctantly, half with that possession with which truth fills its keeper, slowly and sadly she unfolded the closed story. "What had Master Hector to do with Alice Boswell? He had to do with her as a man has to do with his heart's desire, his snare, his pitfall."

"He loved her, Bridget; he would have wedded her. I might never have been his—that is all."

"Love, marriage!" scornfully; "I know not that he spoke the words, but he lay at her feet. Proud as Master Hector was, she might have trodden on his neck; cool as Master Hector seems to others, he was fire to her. I have seen him come in from watching her shadow, long hours below her window, in the wind and rain, and salt spray. I have known him when he valued her glove in his bosom more than a king's crown—blest, blest if he had but a word or a glance. But it is long gone by, madam. Master Hector has gained wisdom and gravity, and is the head of the house; and for fair Miss Alice, she has gone to her place. Yes, she was a beauty, Miss Alice; she could play on stringed instruments like the heavenly harpers, and speak many tongues, and work till the flowers grew beneath her fingers. She learnt to wile men's souls from their bodies, if nothing more, in the outlandish parts where she was bred."

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"So fair, so gifted—did she care for him in return, Bridget? Did she love him as he loved her?" asked a faint voice.

"What need you mind, madam?" sharply. "It is ill speaking harsh words of the dead. Did I not say she had gone to her place? God defend you from such a passage. Let her rest. Sure she cared for him, as she cared for aught else save herself. She scattered smiles and favours on scores. He knew at last what she took, and what she gave, if he did not guess it always."

"Why did he not save her, Bridget? die with her!"

"Madam," bitterly, "he did what man could do. They say he was more like a spirit than a mortal; but if he was to lose his love, how could even Master Hector fight against his Maker? He was fain to follow her; he dallied with death for weeks and months. Those were fell days at Otter, but the Lord restored him, and now he is himself again, and no woman will ever move Master Hector more."

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There was silence in the room for a space. At last Bridget broke it: "Do you want anything more with me, madam, or shall I go?"

Haughty as Bridget Kennedy was, she spoke hesitatingly, almost pitifully. She had stabbed that young thing, sitting pale and cold before her; and no sooner was the deed done than her strong, deep nature yearned over her victim as it had never done to Hector Garret's girl wife, in the first rosy flush of her thoughtless gladness.

"Nothing more." The words were low and heavy, and when Bridget left her, Leslie raised her hands and linked them together, and stretched them out in impotence of relief.

What was this news that had come to her as from a far country?—this blinding light, this burst of knowledge that had to do with the very springs of a man's nature, this fountain so full to some, so empty to others? She had been deceived, robbed. Hector Garret was Alice Boswell's—in life and death, Alice Boswell's.

This love, which she had known so slightly, measured so carelessly—oh, light, shallow heart!—had been rooted in his very vitals, had constrained him as a conqueror his captive, had been the very essence of the man until it spent itself on Alice Boswell's wild grave. He had come to her with a lie in his right hand, for he was bound and fettered in heart, or else but the blue, stiff corpse of a man dead within; he had betrayed her woman's right, her best, dearest, truest right, her call to love and be loved. Another might have wooed her as he had wooed Alice Boswell; to another she might have been the first, the only one! she knew now why she was no helpmeet, no friend for him; why his hand did not raise her to his eminence, his soul's breath did not blow upon hers, and create vigour, goodness, and grace to match his own. Deep had not cried unto deep: heart had not spoken to heart: the dry bones, the vacant form, the empty craving, were her portion; and out of such unnatural hollowness have arisen, once and again, deadly lust and sin.

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Why had none stepped in between her and this cruel mockery and temptation? "Mother, mother, how could you be false to your trust? Were you, too, cheated and bereft of your due? left a cold, shrinking woman, withering, not suddenly, but for a whole lifetime?"

Leslie sat long weighing her burden, until a tap at the door and Bridget Kennedy's voice disturbed her. "Earlsraig is gone, madam; Master Hector is sitting alone with his thoughts in your room. May be, he is missing his cup of tea, or, if you please, madam, his lady's company that he is used to at this hour."

Leslie rose mechanically, walked out, and entered her drawing-room. What did he there, his eyes fixed on the broken turret of Earlsraig, defined clearly on the limited horizon, his memory hovering over the fate of fair Alice Boswell?

Was it horrible to be jealous of a dead woman? to wish herself in that ever-present grave, sacred to him as the holiest, though no priest blessed it, no house of God threw over it the shadow of the finger pointed to heaven—the cross that bore a world's Saviour? But that swift and glowing

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passage from life and light and love, such as his to darkness, forgetfulness—eternity. How could she have faced it? Bridget, her old enemy, had prayed she might be delivered from it, whatever her trials.

"Nigel Boswell is gone at last; he was an old playfellow, and fortune and he have been playing a losing game ever since," he said, in unsuspecting explanation, as he joined her where she sat in her favourite window.

She did not answer him; she was stunned, and sat gazing abstractedly on the wallflowers rendering golden the mossy court wall, or far away on the misty Otter sea. She thought he had relapsed into his reveries, was with the past, the spring-tide of his life, the passion of his early manhood, while she was a little school-girl tripping demurely and safely along the crowded Glasgow streets. If she had looked up at him she would have seen that he was observing her curiously—wondering where his young wife had acquired that serious brow, those fixed eyes.

"What are you thinking of, Leslie?"

"Nothing; I cannot tell," hastily and resolutely.

"That sounds suspicious." He put his hand on her head, as he had a habit of doing, but she recoiled from him.

"A shy little brain that dreads a finger of mine on its soft covering must discover its secrets. Are they treasures, Leslie?"

Oh, blind, absent, reckless man, what treasure-keeper kept such ward!

Lightly won, was lightly held.

Leslie struggled with her oppression for several dull feverish days; then, driven by her own goading thoughts, her sense of injury, her thirst for justice and revenge, she left the house and wandered out on the beach to breathe free air, to forget herself in exertion, fatigue, stupor. It was evening, dark with vapour—gloomy, with a rising gale, and the sea was beginning to mutter and growl. Leslie sat shivering by the water's edge, fascinated by the sympathy of nature with her bitter hopelessness. A voice on the banks and meadows, even in the chill night air, whispered of spring advancing rapidly, with buds and flowers, with sap, fragrance, and warmth, and the tender grace of its flood of green; but here, by the waves, a passing thunder-cloud, a stealthy mist, a whistling breeze, darkened the scene, and restored barren, dismal winter in a single hour. The night drooped down without moon or star, and still Leslie sat listless, drowsy with sorrow, until as she rose she sank back sick and giddy; and then the idea of premature death, of passing away without a sign, of hiding her pain under the silent earth that has covered so many sins and sorrows, first laid hold of her.

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The notion was not fairly welcome: she was young; her heart had been recently wrung; she had been listless and disappointed—but she had loved her few isolated engagements, her country life, her household dignity, the protection of her husband. She could not divest herself of these feelings at once. She feared the great unknown into which she should enter; but still death did not appal her as it might have done: it was something to be scanned, waited for, and submitted to, as a true sovereign.

The cold wind pierced her through and through; the rain fell; she could not drag herself from the shelving rock, though the tide was rising. She felt frozen, her limbs were like lead, and her mind was wandering, or lapsing into unconsciousness.

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She did not hear a call, an approaching foot; but her sinking pulses leapt up with sudden power and passion when Hector Garret stooped over her, and endeavoured to raise her.

"Here, Bridget, she is found! Leslie, why have you remained out so late? You have been sleeping; you have made yourself ill. How can you be so rash, so imprudent? It is childish—wrong. You have made us anxious—distressed us. Poor old Bridget has stumbled further in search of you, this squally night, than she has ventured on the sunniest morning for many a year."

He was excited, aggrieved; he upbraided her. He had sympathy for old Bridget's infirmities; he knew nothing of his wife's misery.

Leslie resisted him as she had done since that day, slipped from his clasp, strove to steady herself, and to walk alone in her weakness. Bridget put her feeble arm around her.

"Lean on me, madam, and I will lean on you, for I am frail, and the road is rough, and the wind is blowing fresh, besides the darkness." "I knew that would quiet her," she muttered. "Poor old Bridget indeed! said Master Hector. Poor colleen! misled, misguided. Cruel makes cruel. St. Patrick could not save himself from the hard necessity."

Hector Garret was content since he saw Leslie safe; he accused her of captiousness and nervousness, but it was the waywardness and perversity of illness. He had tried her simple nature with too much alienation from her kind; she had grown morbid on the baneful diet, tutored though she had been to self-dependence. He had been to blame; but her merry temper would come back, and the rose to her cheek, and the spring to her foot, with other ties, other occupations—dearer, more sufficient.

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V.—THE MOTHER AND CHILD.

"How is the poor child, Bridget Kennedy? Does she fare as she should do?"

"The child is as fine a child, Master Hector, as if she had been a boy, and a Garret, on both sides of the house, and will thrive if her mother will let her. There are mothers that would hinder their bairns in the death-rattle, and there are others that so watch their little ones that the angels of God are displaced from their cradles; and the weary human care haunts and harasses the infant, and stops its growth."

"I am not learned in these matters, Bridget. You brought me up; I trust you to rear my children."

"None shall rear them but their mother, Master Hector; none shall come between her and them. I have ruled long at Otter, but I dare not dispute with her there."

"Settle it as you like. I did not mean them—I was not thinking of them at all. I asked for their mother. You have experience. Is she well—happy as she should be?"

"I wish you would not provoke such mistakes, Master Hector," said Bridget, pettishly; "I wish you would find some other name for your wife. You should know best, but is it suitable to term the nursling and the parent by the same title? I am a foolish old woman, but it seems strange to me. Your father did not confound them."

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"Ah! I dare say not. We will find a Christian name for the new comer, and end the Comedy of Errors, since you dislike it, and Leslie too, doubtless; for women are nice on these points."

"Leslie, what shall we call the baby?" inquired Hector Garret the next time he stood by his wife's side, wishing to divert her by a pleasant difficulty, and to vary the expression of those large eyes—larger now than ever—which, he knew not why, fascinated him by the intensity of their gaze. "I cause Bridget to blunder oddly between you two; so set her at rest by fixing as soon as you can the momentous question."

"I have fixed," answered Leslie, quietly.

"I commend your foresight; a man, now, would have left the alternative open to the last."

"Mrs. Garret's first daughter must be named after Mrs. Garret's mother," declared Bridget, authoritatively.

"No," said Leslie, hastily; "I have named her after myself—if you do not object," she added, with a flush, half shame, half pride.

"I? Oh, no; do as you will. It will not solve Bridget's puzzle; but I am content. Leslie is a bonnie name."

Leslie compressed her lip.

"My mother's name is bonnier," she said, abruptly; "my mother's name is Alice."

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He started, and gazed at her keenly while she continued, falteringly, but with a stubborn will in her speech:—

"I wish my baby to be mine in everything, particularly as she is a girl. I am neither wise nor clever, nor strong now. I fear I am often peevish; but you will excuse me, because I am a weak, ignorant woman. Such defects are not fatal in a mother; hundreds have overcome them for their children. I trust that I will be, if not what a better woman might have been, at least more to my child than any other can be. Her mother!—so holy a tie must confer some peculiar fitness. Yes; my baby is mine, and must lie on my knees, and learn to laugh in my poor face. And so I wish her to have my name also, that there may be a complete union between us."

Hector Garret knew now what intelligence had reached his wife, and while the old wound burnt afresh, the shyness of his still but sensitive nature, the pride of the grave strong man, were offended and injured. But with regard to his wife he was only conscious of the petulant, unreasonable, unkind surface; he did not sound her deep resentment and jealousy; he did not dream of the anguish of the secret cry whose outward expression struck upon his vexed ears; he did not hear her inner protest: "I will not have my baby bear his love's name, recall her to him, be a memorial of her—be addressed with fondness as much for the sake of old times as for her own, the innocent!—be brought up to resemble Alice, trained to follow in her footsteps, until, if I died, my child would be more Alice Boswell's than mine. Never, never!"

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Hector Garret little knew Leslie Bower; slowly he arrived at the discovery. First a troubled suspicion, then a dire certainty. Not the transparent, light-hearted, humble girl, whom a safe, prosperous country home, an honourable position, a kindly regard, left more than satisfied—happy: but the visionary, enthusiastic woman, confiding, but claiming confidence for confidence; tender and true, but demanding like sincerity, constancy, purity, and power of devotion. Had he but known her the first! But a man's fate lies in one woman. Had he but left her in her girlish sweetness and gaiety; had he never approached her with his cold overtures—his barren, artificial expediency and benevolence! She erred in ignorance and inexperience; but he against the bitter

fruit of knowledge, in wilful tampering with truth—reluctantly, misgivingly—selfishly cozening his conscience, hardening himself in unbelief, applying salve to the old vital stab to his independence. He had erred with an egotistical and presumptuous conceit of protecting and defending the young full life which would have found for itself an outlet, and flown on rapid, free, and rejoicing, had he only refrained from diverting its current into a dull, dark, long-drained channel, where it was dammed up, or oozed out sluggishly, gloomily, despairingly—without natural spring-time, sunshine, abundance, gladness, until lost in the great sea.

He had viewed but the soft silken bud, whose deep cup was drunk with dew,—its subtle, spicy fragrance pervading, lingering after the leaves were drooping and the bloom fled, but its rich, royal hues were yet to come. In his blind coarse blundering, he had mistaken the bud for the flower, the portal for the church; he had entered with heedless, profane foot, and blighted the blossom and rifled the altar. For the leaves had been unclosed, the gates unbarred under his neglect; and Leslie, with a noble woman's frankness, generosity, and meekness—that true meekness which oftenest cleaves and melts the ringing metal of a high spirit—Leslie had begun to love him, to fix her heart upon him, to grow to him—stolid, sardonic statue that he was!—until that shock exposed his flaws and wrenched her from her hold. Better to be thus rudely dissevered, perhaps, than to waste her womanliness, puny and pale from its vague bald nourishment, on a fraud and a farce.

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Hector Garret awoke from his delusion, from his scholarly reveries, his active enterprise. "He that provideth not for his own house is worse than an infidel." So he watched Leslie: he saw her rise up with her thoughtful face, very individual it appeared now, and go up and down carrying her baby. He was aware that she was appropriating it as her treasure; that she was saying to herself some such words—"Silver and gold have I none, but this is my pearl beyond price; she will be enough for me; she must be so; I will make her so. She and I will waste no more silly tears on hard, changeable men. They are not like us, little daughter; they pass us by, or they love us once with fierce desire; and when satiated or balked, they turn to us again to please their eye, flatter their ear, vary their leisure; to anatomize and torture like other favourites of an hour. We will have none of them, save to do our duty. We will live for each other."

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Not that she deprived him of his rights as a father; she was too magnanimous to be unjust, and she would not have balked that puppet, to whose service she consecrated herself, of one privilege which any pangs of hers could purchase.

She presented their child to him with a serious stateliness, as if it was so very solemn a ceremony that its performance emancipated her from ordinary emotion; she came and consulted him on the small questions that concerned its welfare with the same absorbing care. If he came near her when she bore the child in her arms, she offered it to him immediately: she was righteous as well as valiant—yes, very valiant. He contemplated her steadfastness with wonder. After the blow which overcame her, when a compensation was given her—a blessing to atone for the gall in her cup, she accepted it and cherished it, and set herself to be grateful for it and worthy of it immediately. The fortitude which, after the involuntary, inevitable rebellion, would permit no more idle repining, the decent pride that hid its own disease and bore it bravely, even the sternness that set its teeth against reaction—he recognised them all; it was studying the reflection of his own lofty features in the fragile, quivering flesh of a girl.

What is often proposed, rarely practised, Leslie did. She changed her ways: with what travail of spirit, what heart-sickness she alone could tell. It is no common slight or safe influence that causes a revulsion in the whole bodily system; it is no skin-deep puncture that bleeds inwardly; it is no easy lesson that the disciple lays to heart; but Leslie surmounted and survived it. She had escaped her responsibilities, and slumbered at her post. She would do so no longer. She belonged now, after little Leslie, to her household, and its members might yet be the better for her, and Hector Garret should respect—not pity her. She vindicated her matronhood suddenly and straightforwardly, but with a sedateness and firmness that was conclusive of her future power; she had much to acquire, but she would gain something every day and every hour, until Otter should own no abler mistress. Then for her child, she would teach herself that she might instruct her daughter, so that if she proved inquiring and meditative like her father, she need not soon weary of her simple mother, and turn altogether to a more enlightened and profound instructor. Surely there was some knowledge that a woman could best store up and dispense, some gift wherein the vigorous and well-trained man did not bear the universal palm? Leslie strove to cultivate her talents; for these, in her position, there was scarcely a choice of fields, but she had eminently the power of observation, and her sharpened motives supplied the defects of her early education. Leslie became a naturalist—the most original and untrammelled of naturalists, for she proceeded upon that foundation of anecdotal and experimental acquaintance with herb and tree, insect, bird, and beast, and even atmospheric phenomena, whose unalloyed riches are peculiar to rustic and isolated genius.

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Hector Garret observed this growing taste, and appreciated it. Leslie had ceased to apologize for her stupidity, and to be shy of his scrutiny. When he found her procuring and preserving this or that specimen, or noting down a primitive fact, if he asked an explanation he had one directly.

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"This pale flower, and that with the green flowers and the great leaves, are lady's-smock and lady's-mantle; they say they are named after the Virgin, but I think Adam must have named them in the Garden.—Bridget tells me that the Irish believe the fairies sleep in these bells.—This is the plant of whose root cats are so fond that they burrow about it and nibble it, and as it does not hurt them, I have dug up a bit for our puss—little Leslie looks after her already.—I have been

writing down the day when the swallows twittered at the window, to compare with their arrival next summer. Peggy Barbour saw a double nest with one hole last year; it must have been an old pair and a young maintaining a joint roof-tree.—Yes, of course, these are jay's feathers."

Another resource which Leslie found within Hector Garret's perception was that of music. She had been endowed with a flexible, melodious voice, and as soon as she had use for them, she gathered by magic a host of ditties, blithe or sad, stirring or soothing, from the romantic fervour of 'Charlie, he's my darling,' to the pathos of 'Drummossie Moor,' or the homely, biting humour of 'Tibbie Fowler,' to carol to the accompaniment of the ancient spinet, in order to cheer or lull the child.

Hector Garret would move to his study-window, and open it softly, in the gloaming hour when the purple sunset was on the sea, and the bats abroad from the old chimneys, to listen to his wife in the room above singing to her child. He did not hear her music otherwise: if he had solicited it, she would have complied, with a little surprise, but he did not seek the indulgence.

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The alteration in Leslie which matured her unexpectedly from a girl to a woman affected powerfully both the arbiters of her destiny. Bridget Kennedy, from a tyrant, was fairly transformed into her warmest and most faithful adherent. There was something high and great in the wild old woman, that could thus at once confess her error, admit greatness in any form in another, and succumb to it reverently. Truly, Bridget Kennedy was like fire to the weak and foolish, a scourge and a grizzly phantom; to the brave and capable, a minister fearless, fond, and untiring to her last breath.

It was very strange to Hector Garret to be sensible of Bridget's lapse from his side,—to hear the present mistress, the subdued diligent woman, canonized to the level of the grand, glad lady of Otter to whom Bridget had been so long fanatically loyal. He said to himself that the child had helped to effect it, the precious descendant, the doted-on third generation; but he was uncertain. He himself was so impressed with the patient woman he had formed out of the lively girl, so tortured by a conviction that he had gagged and fettered her—that her limbs were cramped and benumbed, her atmosphere oppressive, her life self-denying—that he could bear it no longer.

"God forgive me, Leslie, for the wrong I have done you!" he confessed one night with a haggard, remorseful face, when she stood, constrained and pensive, on his joyless hearth.

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She looked up quickly, and laughed a dry laugh. "You are dreaming," she replied. "How much larger Otter is than the Glasgow house! it was a mere cupboard in comparison. How much pleasanter the fields and hills and sands than the grimy, noisy streets where my head ached and my eyes were weary. And little Leslie is a thousand times dearer than my own people, or any companions that I ever possessed. Hush! hush! I hear her cry; don't detain me, unless for anything I can do for you—because nothing keeps me from Leslie."

The coals of fire were heaped upon his head: there could be no reparation.

Why was Hector Garret not resigned? It was a cruel mistake, but it might have been worse, for hearts are deceitful, and what is false and baneful is apt to prove an edge-tool. Here was permanent estrangement, comfortless formality, cold, compulsory esteem; but there was no treachery in the household, no malignant hate, no base revenge.

But Hector Garret would not rest: he had far less or far more energy than his wife; he walked his lands a moody, harassed man. The turmoil and distraction of his youth seemed recalled; he lost his equanimity; his regular habits faded from him. Leslie could no longer count on his prolonged absence, his short stated visits; he would be with her at any time within doors or without—to exchange a word or look, and go as he came, to return as unaccountably and inconsistently. It vexed Leslie; she tried not to see it; it made her curious, anxious; and what had she to do with Hector Garret's flushed cheek and shining eye? Some anniversary, some combination of present associations and past recollections—a tendency to fly from himself, besetting at times the most self-controlled—might have caused this change in his appearance. Ah! better twist and untwist the rings of little Leslie's fair hair, and dress and undress her as she had done her doll; better examine the shell cracked by the yellow-hammer, and count the spots on the broad, brown leaf of the plane, than perplex herself with so uncongenial a difficulty. But the difficulty pursued her nevertheless, and baffled and bewitched her as it has done wiser people.

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The master and mistress of Otter were spectators of the harvest home, the plentiful feast, the merry dance in the spacious barn where their share of the fruits of the earth was about to be garnered. Leslie stood in her complimentary, gay gala ribbons, with her fingers meeting upon her wedding-ring, looking composedly and with interest on the buxom women and stalwart men, the loving lads and lasses, the cordial husbands and wives. Hector Garret, however, scarcely tarried to reply to his health and prosperity drunk in a flowing bumper, but broke from the scene as if its good was his evil, its blessing his curse.

In the parish church where Leslie had exhibited her bridal finery she now listened to the clergyman, and bent her head in penitence and worship, and was disturbed by Hector Garret's gesture of restlessness and attitude of care.

When the new moon was rising in the sky, Leslie would bid the little one look up and clap her hands, while Hector paced up and down unquiet and dissatisfied. Then she would carry the child off to her cradle pillow, and coming back would stand and look at the moon, while he was close to her, murmuring "Leslie! Leslie!" But she would turn upon him pale and cold as the moon above

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her, and would address him, "See, yonder is a ship doubling EarlsCraig point and steering into the Otter sea."

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VI.—THE STORM.

The October winds, tossing the late oats and the frosted heather, were lashing the Otter sea into heaving waves and flakes of foam. That western sea has its annals and its trophies, as well as den and moor. Edward Bruce crossed it to give to Ireland as dauntless a king as he whom a woman crowned, and who found a nameless grave; and there, in the glassy calm of a summer night, the vessel, with its passengers lulled in fatal security and slumber, sank like lead, fathoms beyond the aid of modern science with its myriads of inventions and its hardy self-confidence.

The few fishers of Otter were exposed to the swell rolling from New England and Labrador to Galloway and Argyle; many a lamp stood day and night in cottage windows, many an anxious woman forsook her brood, and under her sheltering plaid ran here and there, dizzy and desperate, to beg for counsel, and for tidings of the husband and father whose boat was due, and who was still exposed to the pitiless fury of the tempest.

Hector Garret was early summoned to marshal his men in order to succour those who were within his reach; to think, plan, and act to the last for those who were amissing, but might yet be rescued. He had been upon the beach all day; he had been handling rope and line; he had been ready at any moment to launch his own boat among the breakers.

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Leslie, too, had been abroad. She had been in several houses, especially in those whose young children were of the same age as Leslie. In all she met the same abandonment; whether the heads of the families chanced to be young or old, worthy or unworthy, mattered not; they were now the sole thought, the object of racking anxiety, lamented over beforehand with sore lamentation. If they were safe, all was well; if they were lost, these wives and mothers were bereaved indeed. The Sabine women did not cling to their rough masters with more touching fidelity. The men were in trouble—their imprudence, their intemperance, their violence were blotted out.

Leslie went home in disturbance and pain. She, too, placed a light in her window; she, too, left her infant untended, and strained her eyes to pierce the storm. Hector Garret must have descried her figure as he approached the house, for he came straight to her room, and stood a moment with his dripping clothes and a glow on his face.

"Don't go, Leslie; I'll be back presently."

She put a restraint upon herself, and became busied with the refreshments laid out for him. He came in immediately, and advanced towards her with the same eager phrase, "Don't go, Leslie," and he grasped her gown lightly. She sat down while he ate and drank.

"I'll have a cup of tea, Leslie; pour me out my tea as you used to do." She had always poured out tea for him, but not always with him close by, and his detaining hand upon her dress.

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"This is like old times. They were very foolish—those old times, but they have their sweetness to look back upon them."

She interrupted him—"They are all safe, are they not?"

"Every man of them, thank God."

He was spent with his exertions; he was fevered and incoherent; she let him speak on, detailing the minutest particulars. She even said with animation, and the tears in her eyes—

"Their protector and deliverer! God will bless you for this, Hector Garret."

He bent his head, but he held out his arms: "Will you bless me, Leslie?"

His voice was thick and hoarse; it petrified her, so still was she—so dumb; and at that moment the knocker sounded, and importunate voices were demanding the Laird of Otter.

He obeyed the summons, spoke with his servants a little time, and returned to find Leslie in the same arrested posture, with the same blanched face. He had resumed his seaman's coat, and carried his cap in his hand. He was calm now, and smiling, but with a face wan and shadowed with an inexpressible cloud.

"It may not be, Leslie," he said, soft and low; "Nigel Boswell's boat is in sight, struggling to make EarlsCraig; he was always rash and unskilled, though seaward born and bred. If he is not forestalled, his boat will be bottom upmost, or crushed like glass within the hour. I trust I will save him; but if there be peril and death in my path, then listen to what I say, and remember it. Whatever has gone before, at this moment I am yours; you may doubt it, deny it—I swear it, Leslie. Despise me, reject me if you will; I cannot perish misinterpreted and misjudged. I loved Alice Boswell. My love is ashes with its object. I did not love you once; I love you now. I love a living woman truer, higher, holier than the dead; and for my love's sake, not for my vows—the first for love, if it be the last."

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He had her in his arms; his lingering kisses were on her eyes, her hair, her hands. He was gone,

and still she remained rooted to the ground. Was it amazement, anger, terror?—or was it a wild throb of exultation for that, the real moment of their union? or because she had won him, and was his who had slighted her, sinned against her—but who was still Hector Garret, manly, wise, and noble—the hero of her girlhood.

She was roused reluctantly by the entrance of Bridget Kennedy, shaking in every limb.

"Madam, why did you let Master Hector go?—he has had the look of a doomed man this many a day. It is thus that men are called, as plain as when the Banshee cries. Madam, say your prayers for Master Hector while he is still in life."

"I must go to him, Bridget; I must follow him. Don't try to keep me. He is my husband, too. The poor women were crowding on the beach this morning. Let me go!"

She understood that he was exposing himself for another—that his life hung on the turning of a straw. She ran upstairs, but she did not seek her child, and when she descended, Bridget had still to fetch her mantle and bonnet. The old woman did not seek to detain her, but ejaculated through her chattering teeth, as she peered out after her and wrung her hands, "She will bring the Master back, if anything can; nought will harm her. I, poor miserable wretch, would but clog her swiftness. Ay, he will hearken to her voice; he has been waiting for the sound weeks and months. Who would have said that Master Hector, like Samson, would twice be given a prey to a woman! He will hear her above the winds and waves; body or soul, he will obey her, as he did Alice Boswell twenty years ago in fire and ruin."

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Leslie hurried on in the darkness, her little feet tripping, her slight form borne back by the blast. Not thus had she wandered on those sunny, summer days when she first knew Otter; but there was that within, in the midst of her distress, that she would not have resigned for that light life twice over.

She reached the beach; the roar of the surf and the shriek of the wind were in her ears, but no human presence was visible. There flashed back upon her the vision of her hopelessness and helplessness on such another blustering, raging night—but the recollection brought no comfort. She paused in dismay, with nothing but the mist and the driving rain before her. Stay! obscurely, and at intervals, she caught sight of a light, now borne on the crest of these giant waves, now sunk and lost. Hark! a pistol-shot! that must be Boswell's appeal for aid; and yonder lay Earlsraig—yonder also was Hector toiling to rescue his ancient friend and persistent foe. She should be there too. At Earlsraig their destiny would be wrought out.

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Leslie sped along in the tumult of earth and sky; the road was more than a mile, and at such a season and in such weather very toilsome and dangerous—but what deeds have not tender women achieved, strung by love, or hate!

When Leslie gained the promontory, she found the old house deserted—the few servants were on the shore, aiding or watching Hector Garret and his men in their efforts to save the last of his line, cast away within the shadow of his own rocks and towers.

Leslie shrank from descending among the spectators; she remained spent and breathless, but resolute still, where she could spy the first wayfarer, hear the first shout of triumph, and steal away in the darkness, fleeing home unmarked and undetained.

It was the first occasion on which she had been close to Earlsraig. The situation, at all times exposed, was now utterly forlorn. The spray was rising over the land, the waves were sapping its old foundation, the weird winds were tearing at the coping of the shattered house; and on the side where Alice Boswell's turret had stood, stones were rumbling, and wild weeds streaming. The scene was very dismal and eerie, but Leslie did not shudder or faint; her senses were bent on one aim, she was impervious to all else. She sank down in a kneeling position, staring with unwinking eyes, praying with her whole heart in an agony. The light which had beguiled her, passed beyond her sight after tossing for some time to and fro. She could not regain it, she could only continue ready to seize the first signal of bliss, or woe.

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It did not come. The storm raged more madly; the desolation grew more appalling; Leslie's brain began to whirl; the solitude was rife with shapes and voices.

Above all stood fair Alice Boswell, wreathed in white flames—from the wavering cloudy mass of forms the gallant exile plunged anew into the flood, now seething and rushing to meet its prey.

"Oh woman—Alice Boswell—I did not steal your lover! you kept him from me long after God and man had given him to me. There are no vows and caresses in the grave. We have had but one meeting and parting; but one! Oh, stranger, he is spending his life for her brother, as you were ready to fling down yours for her. Will none of you be appeased? Then take us both; in mercy leave not the other! In death let us not be divided!"

The pang was over; Leslie passed into insensibility. When she recovered herself, the spectres of that horrible dream still flitted around her, for did she not distinguish through the surge and the blast Hector Garret's foot speeding to receive his doom?

But "Leslie," not "Alice," was his cry. Beneath the very arches of Earlsraig, where fair Alice Boswell, her rich hair decked for one, her bright eyes sparkling for another, her sandal buckled for a third, had stood, and waved to him her hand—"Leslie! Leslie!" was his cry, uttered with such aching longing, such utter despair. It was the wail of no mocking ghost, but the human cry

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of a breaking heart.

Leslie's tongue clove to the roof of her mouth; but there was no need of speech to indicate to him his weak, fluttering treasure. Found once more! Found for ever! raised and borne away swiftly and securely. No word of explanation, no reproach for folly and desperation, no recital of his labours, no information regarding others, but—strange from Hector Garret's stern lips, and sweet as strange—murmurs of fondness and devotion: "Sweet Leslie! mine only—mine always!" Scoutings at weariness, cheery reckonings of their way, his heart beating against hers, her cheek to his; and it was only when Bridget Kennedy opened the door, and he asked her whether she had yet a chamber for this truant, that Leslie was aware how well Hector Garret had performed his part, and how many guests the hospitable walls of Otter sheltered that eventful night.

Bridget was solemnly praising heaven, whose arm had been about them, and restored them both in the flower of their days, to Otter, and to their bairn.

"We have come back for more than Otter and the bairn, Leslie. Bridget and all the men of Ayr could not have held her here, my faithful wife that needs must be my love, she has proved herself so true!"

He was throwing off her drenched cloak, and chafing her cold hands. One of them was clenched on its contents. He opened the stiffened finger, and found a lock of hair.

"It was all belonging to you that I had, Hector," she whispered; "I took it long ago, with your knowledge but without your consent. I would not look at it, or touch it; I kept it for little Leslie. But you said that you were mine, and it was something of yours to hold; you were mine, and it was part of you."

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"Better for Scotland that weans greet than bearded men," averred the Lord of Glammis; but he did not say, better for the men, or better for those who plight hand and heart with them, that the keen, clear eye melt not, either with ruth or tenderness. Nay, the plants of household faith and love, scathed by some lightning flash, pinched by some poverty of soil, will lift their heads and thrive apace when once they have been watered with this heavenly rain—and like the tree of the Psalmist growing by the river, will flourish pleasantly, and bear much goodly fruit thenceforth, and fade not at all, but instead, be transplanted into "the land that is far away."

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THE OLD YEOMANRY WEEKS.

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I.—THE YEOMEN'S ADVENT.—PRIORTON SPRUCES ITSELF UP.

TIME changes both defences and amusements. Now we have volunteer reviews in place of old yeomanry weeks. But it is worth while looking back on what was so hearty, quaint, humorous, and stirring in times bygone.

Beasts as well as men had their day in the past. The tramp of horses, their brisk neigh, and the flourish of their long tails added to the general attraction. The coats of the Yeomen, too, were of the most sanguinary red. And there were other charms. The calling out of the troop for ten days involved a muster from all the county for twelve or fifteen miles round. There was thus an inroad of country friends. The genial system of billeting was in vogue, too, so that every bed was full. And allies and satellites called in, in happy succession, to share the bustle and glee. A company of respectable theatrical stars, patronized both by officers and privates, visited the town; and a wonderfully brilliant yeomanry ball, attended alike by gentle and simple, wound up the successful interlude in ordinary life.

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The little town of Priorton spruced itself up for its yeomanry weeks, and was all agog, as it never was at any other time. The campaign commenced by the arrival on horseback of a host of country gentlemen and farmers, in plain clothes as yet. But they carried at their saddle-bows, packages containing their cherished ensigns and symbols—in their case the very glory of the affair. Along with these in many cases came judicious presents of poultry and game.

There were such hand-shakings in the usually quiet streets, such groomings of horses at stables behind old-fashioned little taverns, such pipe-claying of belts and polishing of helmets, and, above all, such joyous anticipatory parties in private houses!

The season was always the height of the summer, not perhaps in every respect the best for such a muster. Stout Yeomen had even been known to faint while at drill; the combined influences of the fatigue, the heat, and last night's hilarity being too much for them. But farmers and farming lairds could well quit their lands unless in the beginning of July, when the June hoeing of turnips and beans had been got through, the first grass cut, and while there was still a good three weeks before barley-harvest. Trees were then dusky in their green, and gooseberries and currants tinted the Priorton gardens with rich amber and crimson. Roses redder than the yeomen's coats

were in full flower for every waistcoat and waistband. The streets and roads were dusty, under blue skies or black thunderclouds; but the meadows were comparatively cool and fresh, and now white with the summer snow of daisies. The bustle of the Yeomen, like the trillings of wandering musicians, was heard only in the brooding heat of summer afternoons, or the rosy flush of summer sunset, the prime of the year lending a crowning charm to their advent.

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It was a delightful start, that first *réveillée* of the bugle at five of the clock on a July morning. Youngsters whom nought else could have tempted out of bed so early darted up at the summons. They envied papas and uncles, brothers and cousins in the ranks of the Yeomen. Comely blooming young faces joined the watch at the windows. Cloaks were loosely cast about rounded shoulders, and caps were hastily snatched up to hide dishevelled hair; while little bare pink feet would sometimes show themselves. But the young ladies only peeped out behind the window curtains, in the background of the noisy demonstrative band of youngsters.

Distant voices, excited and impatient, were soon heard; then the jingle of spurs, and the clank of swords, as half-bashful Yeomen descended the stairs for their *début* in the street. At last appeared important familiar persons, now strikingly transformed by their martial dress, but terribly uncomfortable and self-conscious.

The horses were led to the doors, and to the women who stayed at home the mounts were the exquisitely comic incidents of the day. The return of the members of the troop, now broken to their work, and detached into groups of threes and fours, and chatting and laughing at their ease, was quite tame in comparison. The country gentlemen and farmers were, of course, generally well used to the saddle, and could get upon their Bucephaluses without difficulty, and ride cavalierly, or prick briskly out of sight, as they were in good time or too late. But here and there a solicitor or banker, or wealthy shopkeeper, ambitious of being among the Yeomen, would meet with unhappy enough adventures. He might be seen issuing from his doorway with pretended unconcern, but with anxious clearings of the throat and ominously long breaths, while his nag, strange to him as John Gilpin's, was brought up to the mounting-place. The worthy man would plant his foot in the stirrup next him, but, not throwing himself round decidedly enough, the horse would swerve and rear, while he looked on beseechingly and helpless. Then he would try the other side, still failing to swing himself into the saddle. He would grow more and more flustered. His wife, in her clean muslin cap and spotless calico wrapper, with her little lads and lasses—one, two, three—would then step out on the pavement to give cautious advice. The would-be Yeoman would become more and more nervous, while his comrades rode by with jeering glances, and the passengers stood still. Little boys would begin to whoop and hurrah, and a crowd, even at this early hour, would gather round to enjoy the experiment. "Hey, Nancy! get me a kitchen chair," the town-bred Yeoman at last would say in desperation to his elderly commiserating maid-servant in the distance; and from that steady halfway stand he would climb into the saddle with a groan, settle himself sack fashion, and, working the bridle laboriously with his arms, trot off, to return very saddle-sick.

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Then some stubborn young fellow, possessed with the notion of showing off a dashing horse, would insist on riding a vicious, almost dangerous animal, which would on no account endure the sight of his flaming regimentals on the occasions of his mountings and dismountings. Once in the saddle, he would master it thoroughly, and pay it back in kind with whip and spur, compelling the furious beast to face a whole line of red coats, and wheel, march, charge, and halt, with perfect correctness. But the horse would have its moment of revenge as its rider leapt to and from the saddle. If it encountered the scarlet and the glitter of brass and steel, at that instant it would get quite wild, paw the air, fling out its hoofs, snort and dart off wildly, to the danger of its own and its master's life. But the young soldier would not be beat. Day after day the contest would be renewed. At length he would resort to a compromise, and his groom would bring out the animal with its head ignominiously muffled in a sack; and now the Yeoman would mount with comparative safety.

But the bugle is sounding to drill in the early summer morning. Tra-li-la! the clear music suits with the songs of the birds and the dew on the grass. The last lagging Yeoman is off, gone to receive a public reprimand from his strict commanding officer, but sure to have the affront rubbed out next morning by a similar fault, and a similar experience, on the part of a comrade.

The drill ends at the common breakfast hour, when the Yeoman may be supposed to return and feast sumptuously. Then "civil" work commences. Yeomen who had offices or shops, attended them with slight relics of their uniform. A stranger might have been pardoned had he imagined an invasion was daily expected, or that an intestine war was on the point of breaking out. In consideration of the hot weather, undress uniform was permitted on all save field days, and thus the toiling Yeomen enjoyed a little cool in their white ducks and jackets, though the red mark, the helmet's line, was still to be traced on their sun-browned foreheads.

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There was an afternoon's drill. It was a little of a fag, being in fact rather like a dish heated up a second time, as a duty twice done mostly always is. But the evening was particularly gay. Then the Yeomen were supposed to be enjoying themselves. Pleasant, if they had always enjoyed themselves in an innocent fashion. That many of them did so, it is only charitable to believe. And while the fast and foolish, the gross and wicked were swilling and roystering in evil localities, the generous, manly, gentle souls gratified the matrons with whom they were billeted by walking with them and their daughters through the streets, or into the nearest meadow; or perhaps they treated them to the play.

I have only heard of those days. But I should have liked to have seen the bluff kind faces above

the stiff stocks and scarlet coats, and the joyous smiles which shone upon them. I should have liked to have heard the quiet town ringing with such blithe laughter. Little jokes would cause the people to laugh, as little accidents would cause them to shake their heads. Sandy Hope's horse, for instance, lost a shoe while at the gallop, stumbled, and threw its rider, dislocating his shoulder, and breaking his arm. What a sensation the news created! It could scarcely have been greater even though Sandy's brains had been dashed out. Not only Sandy himself, but Sandy's kindred to the remotest degree, were deeply commiserated. The commanding officer sent his compliments every morning with inquiries after him. The troop doctor was besieged by anxious acquaintances. Sandy's comrades never ceased calling upon him, and sat for hours drinking beer at his open window. Delicious messes and refreshing drinks a thousand times better than beer, were sent to Sandy. Then the nosegays, the books he got! Sandy received a perfect ovation. It was even proposed that the ball should be put off because Sandy was lying in pain; and it was certain that no fewer than three reputed sweethearts of Sandy's stayed at home on the ball night. Yet the stupid fellow was so slightly hurt, that within the fortnight he was walking the streets of Priorton more briskly than ever!

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Priorton was kindly in its gaiety, and each had an interest in the other. I should have liked to have known the old town when it was thus given up for ten days, half to military exercises, half to fraternity and feasting. I should have been sorry when the feasting was intemperate, but I would no more have condemned the general feasting because of that circumstance, than I would condemn the gift of speech because some of us are so left to ourselves as to tell lies or say bad words.

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II.—A MATCH-MAKER'S SCHEME.

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It was a well-known and accredited fact that in consequence of these festivities of the Yeomen more matches were made up in this brief interval than during any other period of the year. Match-making individuals seriously counted on the yeomanry weeks; and probably far-seeing young ladies had fitting matches in their eye, as well as the fireworks and the introductory gaiety, when they came in troops to Priorton to entertain the lucky Yeomen.

"My dear," said Mrs. Spottiswoode, the wife of the chief magistrate, who was likewise banker of Priorton, to her spouse, "your cousin, Bourhope, has asked his billet with us: I must have my sister Corrie in to meet him."

Mrs. Spottiswoode was a showy, smart, good-humoured woman, but not over-scrupulous. She was very ready at adapting herself to circumstances, even when the circumstances were against her. For that reason she was considered very clever as well as very affable, among the matrons of Priorton. Mr. Spottiswoode was "slow and sure:" it was because of the happy alliance of these qualities in him that the people of Priorton had elected him chief magistrate.

"My dear," deliberately observed long, lanky Mr. Spottiswoode, "would it not be rather barefaced to have Bourhope and Corrie here together?"

"Oh, I'll take care of that," answered the lady, with a laugh and a toss of her ribbons; "I shall have some other girl of my acquaintance to bear Corrie company;—some worthy, out-of-the-way girl, to whom the visit will be like entering another world," continued Mrs. Spottiswoode, with a twinkle of her black eyes. "What do you think of Corrie and my cousin Chrissy Hunter, of Blackfaulds? The Hunters have had such a deal of distress, and so much fighting with embarrassment—though I believe they are getting clearer now—that the poor lassie has had no amusement but her books, and has seen absolutely nothing."

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Mr. Spottiswoode had no inclination to contradict his wife for contradiction's sake, and as he could rely on her prudence as on her other good qualities, he said, "Well, Agnes, I have no objection; Hunter of Blackfaulds is an honest man though he is poor, and he is righting himself now."

The invitations were dispatched, and accepted gratefully. The guests arrived before Bourhope occupied his quarters; ostensibly they came so soon to prepare for him. Corrie had nothing Roman about her except her name, Cornelia. She was a tall, well-made, fair-faced, serene beauty; the sole remaining maiden daughter of a Scotchman who had returned from the Indies with a fortune, as so many returned then. He had already endowed Mrs. Spottiswoode with a handsome "tocher," and since his marriage had settled within five miles of Priorton. Chrissy, again, was one of a large, struggling family; a small girl, a very little crooked in figure, and with irregular features, and a brown complexion. If she had not possessed a bright, intelligent expression, she would certainly have been plain—as indeed she was to those who did not heed expression. It was a delightful chance to Chrissy, this brief transplanting into the flourishing, cheerful town-house, amid the glowing gaiety of the yeomanry weeks. Accordingly she was constantly engaged in checking off every little detail on the finger-points of her active mind, in order that she might be able to describe them to her secluded sisters and her sick mother at home. She was determined not to miss one item of interest; never to sleep-in so as to lose the mount; never to stray in her walks and fail to be in the house for the return of the afternoon drill. She would pace the meadows among the gay promenaders, even when the evening was cloudy, and would not care though she walked alone. She would enjoy the play when Mrs. Spottiswoode chose to take her, and not even object to a squeeze in the box. The squeeze was really part of the fun! But she did

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not care to have her attention distracted from the stage, even by the proffers of fruit from the Yeomen. As to the ball, she did not allow herself to think much of that. Who would ever have dreamt of Chrissy figuring at a fine yeomanry ball! She would not trouble herself because she wore an old worked white frock of her mother's, taken up by tucks to suit her, and yellowed by frequent washing and long keeping. She would not fret because she could not spend money upon a hair-dresser. She must dress her own hair—which was scanty, like every other outward adornment of hers. This was little matter, she reflected, for it would not dress under the most skilful artist into those enormous bows on the crown of the head which everybody then wore—it would only go into comb-curls like little hair turrets on each side of her round, full forehead, which was by no means scanty. She had no ornaments in the way of jewellery, save a coral necklace; while Corrie had a set of amethysts—real amethysts—ear-rings, brooch, and necklace, and a gold cross and a gold watch, which she rarely wound up, and which was therefore, as Chrissy said, "a dead-alive affair." But Corrie was a beauty and an heiress, and ornaments became her person and position; while on Chrissy, as she herself admitted with great good sense, they would only have been thrown away. And what did Chrissy care for her appearance so long as her dress was modest and neat? She could walk about and listen to the ravishing music, and study the characters she saw, from Corrie up to the Countess, wife of the one earl who came to Priorton, and who was Colonel of the yeomanry. The day or two before the Yeomanry arrived was spent by the two girls in walking about, shopping and making calls. Corrie, though a beauty, proved herself a very dull companion for another girl to walk with. Very pretty to look at was Corrie in a fair, still, swan-like style of beauty; and she had a great many pretty dresses, over which she became a little more animated when Chrissy, as a last resource and for their relief, would ask her to turn them over and show them again. Corrie, of course, never dreamt of offering poor Chrissy a loan of any of those worked pelerines or aprons, which would have fitted either equally well. But Chrissy did not want them, and she got a use out of them as they were brought out one by one and spread before her. Ere the Yeomanry came, Chrissy knew the stock by heart, and could have drawn them, and cut out patterns and shapes of them, and probably did so, the little jade, when she got home.

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Bourhope came with his fellows, and was more specially introduced to Corrie and Chrissy. He had had some general acquaintance with both of them before. He gallantly expressed his pleasure at the prospect of having their society during his stay at Priorton. He was a farmer whose father had made money at war prices. He had bought his own farm, and thus constituted his son a small laird. He had an independent bearing, as well as an independent portion of the world's goods; he was really a manly fellow in his brown, ruddy, curly, strapping comeliness. But better still, Bourhope was an intelligent fellow, who read other things than the newspapers, and relished them. He was a little conceited, no doubt, in consequence of comparing himself with others, but he had a good heart. Corrie and Chrissy both regarded him with scarcely concealed interest and admiration. Chrissy wished that the lads at home would grow up to be as comely and manly; Corrie made up her mind to have just such a husband as Bourhope.

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It was evident the very first night that Bourhope was taken with Corrie. He stared and stared at her, admiring her waxen complexion, the bend of her white throat, and the slope of her white shoulders; and even changed his seat at one time, as it seemed, in order to see her better. He quickly claimed her as his partner at loo, and engaged her to walk out with him to hear the band practising next evening. Chrissy thought it all very natural, and all the more enjoyable. But she caught herself fancying Bourhope and Corrie married, and rebuked herself for carrying her speculations so far. Only she could not help thinking how Bourhope would weary after the marriage—say when there was a snow-storm, or a three days' fall of rain at the farmhouse. But that was Bourhope's affair; if he was pleased, what business was it of hers? Bourhope had this in common with Chrissy: he could entertain himself.

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During the first three days of the week, Bourhope was zealous in looking at, and attaching himself to, Corrie. But a sharp observer might have remarked that after that he flagged a little, taking more as a matter of course and politeness the association he had established between her and him at tea, loo, and the evening promenade. He would even stifle a yawn while in Corrie's company, though he was a mettlesome and not a listless fellow. But that was only like men, to prize less what they had coveted when it was half won.

So for a short time matters stood. Corrie, fair and swan-like, Bourhope reasonably impressionable, Mr. and Mrs. Spottiswoode decidedly favourable, Chrissy Hunter harmless, if not even helpful. Mrs. Spottiswoode knew that those who dally with a suggestion are in great danger of acting on it, and had very little doubt that the next ten days' work, with the crowning performance of the ball, would issue in deciding the desirable match between Bourhope and Corrie.

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III.—A MORNING MEETING AND AN EVENING'S READING.

At this juncture it struck Bourhope, riding home from the morning drill, to ask himself what could possibly take Chrissy Hunter out so early every morning. He had already seen her once or twice, keeping out of the way of him and his companions, and returning again from the opposite end of Priorton, which was flanked by the doctor's house. Corrie, he noticed, was never with her. Indeed, Bourhope had a strong suspicion that Corrie retreated to her pillow again after showing him her lovely face—lovely even in the pink curl-papers. But Chrissy certainly dressed

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immediately, and took a morning walk, by which her complexion at least did not profit. Not being a very strong little woman, her brown face was apt to look jaded and streaky, when Bourhope, resting from the fatigues of his drill, lounged with the girls in the early forenoon in Mrs. Spottiswoode's drawing-room. So it was worth while, he thought, to spur up to Chrissy, and inquire what took her abroad at such an untimely hour.

When Bourhope caught a nearer glimpse of Chrissy he was rather dismayed to see that she had been crying. Bourhope hated to see girls crying, particularly girls like Chrissy, to whom it was not becoming. He had no particular fancy for Cinderellas or other beggar-maids. He would have hated to find that his kinsfolk and friendly host and hostess, for whom he had a considerable regard, were mean enough and base enough to maltreat a poor little guest of their own invitation. Notwithstanding these demurs, Tom Spottiswoode of Bourhope rode so fast up to Chrissy as to cause her to give a violent start when she turned.

"Hallo! Do you go to market, Miss Chrissy? or what on earth takes you out in the town before the shutters are down?" pointing with his sheathed sword to a closed shop.

Chrissy was taken aback, and there was something slightly hysterical in her laugh, but she answered frankly enough, "I go to Dr. Stark's, Mr. Spottiswoode. Dr. Stark attends my mother, and is at Blackfaulds every day. I wait in his laboratory till he comes there before setting out; he goes his rounds early, you know. He lets me know how mother was yesterday, and as he is a kind man, he carries our letters,—Maggie and Arabella and I are great writers, and postage comes to be expensive—a great deal too expensive for us at Blackfaulds; but the doctor is a kind man, and he 'favours' our letters. And Mr. Spottiswoode," she said, warming with her subject and impelled to a bit of confidence, "do you know, Dr. Stark thinks my mother will be about again in a few months. You are aware her knee-joint has been affected. We were even afraid she would never put down her foot again. It would have been a dreadful trial for all of us." Chrissy spoke simply, in a rather moved voice.

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Bourhope was slightly moved, too. He had never heard much about Mrs. Hunter, of Blackfaulds, except that she was a woman who had been long ailing; and also occasional remarks about the consequences of her being lost or spared to her family.



Chrissy was grateful for his evident sympathy, and gratified by it; but, as if half ashamed of having elicited it, she at once began to prattle to him on other subjects. Bourhope had leapt from his horse, and was doing Chrissy the honour of walking at her side, his beast's bridle over his arm, and his spurs ringing on the pavement. A sparkling prattle that was of Chrissy's about the fine morning, the town, and the yeomanry—few topics, but well handled and brilliantly illustrated. Bourhope had dared to confess to himself how sorry he was when he reached Mr. Spottiswoode's door.

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Next morning Bourhope detached himself from his comrades when he approached the town, and

looked narrowly for Chrissy. It would be but civil to inquire for poor Mrs. Hunter. So bent was he on being thus civil, that though Chrissy was far in advance, he knew her by the pink gingham trimming of her morning bonnet, fluttering like rose-leaves in the morning sun. He came up to her, and politely asked after her mother. Chrissy was a little confused, but she answered pleasantly enough. She was not nearly so talkative, however, as on the preceding morning, though Bourhope made witty comments on the letter she held in her hand, and pertinaciously insisted on her telling him whether she mentioned him in her return letters! He reminded her that they were cousins in a way. This was the first time Chrissy had known of any one hunting up a relationship with her; and though pleased in her humility—Chrissy was no fool in that humility of hers—Bourhope, she knew, was destined for her cousin Corrie. He was out of Corrie's way just now, and was only courteous and cordial to her as living for a time under the same roof. She liked the ruddy, curly, independent, clever fellow of a farmer laird, who, out of the riches of his kindness, could be courteous and cordial to a poor plain girl. Bourhope could never overtake Chrissy coming from Dr. Stark's again. He spied and peeped and threw out hints, and hurried or loitered on the way to no purpose. Chrissy took care that people should not notice the fact of her being escorted home in the early morning by Bourhope.

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A chance conversation between Mrs. Spottiswoode and Corrie was overheard one day by Bourhope, when they imagined him deep in "Blackwood;" for it was the days of the "Noctes." Mr. Hunter, of Redcraigs, Corrie's father, had not been well one day, and a message had been sent to that effect to her. But Corrie was philosophic, and not unduly alarmed. "Papa makes such a work about himself," she said candidly to Mrs. Spottiswoode. "Very likely he has only taken lobster at supper, or his Jamaica rum has not agreed with him, and he is bilious this morning. I think I will send out a box of colocynt, and a bit of nice tender veal, to put him in good humour again. You know, Agnes, if I were to drive out, I would not get back in time for the evening walk in the meadows. Besides, I was to see Miss Aikin about the change in the running on of my frills. It would overturn all my plans to go, and my head gets so hot, and I look so blowsy, when my plans are disarranged," Corrie concluded, almost piteously.

"Yes, but Corrie," hesitated Mrs. Spottiswoode, "you know Dr. Stark is not easy about papa just now. I think I had better go out myself. It is unlucky that Spottiswoode is to have several other yeomen who do business at the Bank, at dinner to-day with Bourhope; but I dare say Mary will manage that, as Chrissy will mix the pudding for her. So I will go myself to Redcraigs; all things considered, it would be a pity for you not to be in your best looks——"

Bourhope at this point fell into a fit of coughing, and lost the rest of the dialogue; but perhaps his occasional snort of disapprobation was called forth as much by this interlude as by the audacious judgments of the Shepherd and Tickler.

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The day unluckily turned out very rainy, and the drill was gone through in a dense white mist, which caused every horse to loom large as an elephant, and every rider to look a Gog or Magog. The young ladies, so fond of a change of costume at this time in Prior-ton, could do no shopping; the walk in the meadows at sunset with the lounging yeomen had to be given up. The green meadows were not inviting, the grass was dripping, the flowers closed and heavy, the river red and drumly. All was disappointing; for the meadows were beautiful at this season with their summer snow of daisies—not dead-white snow either, for it was broken by patches of yellow buttercups, crow's-foot, lady's-finger, and vetch, and by the crimson clover flowers and the rusty red of sorrel, and the black pert heads of the nib-wort plaintain, whose black upon the white of ox-eye daisies has the rich tone of ermine.

Instead of walks, there were gatherings round shining tables; and bottles and glasses clinked cheerily in many a parlour. But Mr. Spottiswoode was sober by inclination. The impressiveness of office, which had quite the contrary effect on many provosts of his era, only added to his characteristic caution. The yeomen, too, knew well where hilarity ended and excess began. So there was little fear of excess in Mr. Spottiswoode's house. Mrs. Spottiswoode, a genius in her own line, had a cheerful fire in her drawing-room, and sat by the hearth with her children tumbling round her, while Corrie, fairer than ever in the blinking fire-light, and Chrissy, brown and merry, sat on either side of her. She invited the farmer laird to enter that charmed ring, which, of course, he could not help contrasting with the loneliness and comfortlessness of Bourhope. But though Bourhope sat next Corrie, a certain coldness crept over the well-arranged party. He caught himself glancing curiously at the book Chrissy Hunter had been almost burning her face in reading by the fire-light before he came in. Mrs. Spottiswoode did not much care for reading aloud, but she took the hint in good part, and called on Chrissy to tell what her book was about, and so divert Bourhope without wholly monopolizing his attention.

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Chrissy was rather shy at first. She never told stories freely away from home; but she was now pressed to do it. After a little, however, she put her own sympathetic humour and pathos into the wondrous narrative, till she literally held her listeners spell-bound. And no wonder. Those were the days of Scott's early novels, when they were greatly run after, and the price of a night's reading was high. Chrissy's cousin "Rob" was a bookseller's apprentice, and his master, for the purpose of enabling Robbie to share his enthusiasm, would lend the apprentice an uncut copy. Robbie brought it out to Blackfaulds, and then all would sit up, sick mother among the rest, to hear them read aloud, till far into the small hours.

Who can tell what that cordial of pure, healthful intellectual diversion may have been, even to the burdened father and sick mother at Blackfaulds! To Chrissy—the very speaking of it made her clasp her hands over her knee, and her grey eyes to shine out like stars—as Bourhope thought to

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himself.

How suggestively Chrissy discoursed of Glendearg, and the widow Elspeth Glendinning, her two lads, and Martin and Tib Tacket, and the gentle lady and Mary Avenel. With what breadth, yet precision, she reproduced pursy Abbot Boniface, devoted Prior Eustace, wild Christie of the Clinthill, buxom Mysie Hopper, exquisite Sir Percy Shafton, and even tried her hand to some purpose on the ethereal White Lady. Perhaps Chrissy enjoyed the reading as much as the great enchanter did the writing. Like great actors, she had an instinctive consciousness of the effect she produced. Bourhope shouted with laughter when the incorrigible Sir Percy, in the disguise of the dairywoman, described his routing charge as "the milky mothers of the herd." Corrie actually glanced in affright at the steaming windows and the door ajar, and pinched Chrissy's arm when she repeated for the last time the words of the spell:—

"Thrice to the holly brake—
Thrice to the well;—
Wake thee, O wake,
White Maid of Avenel."

The assembly paid Chrissy the highest compliment an assembly can pay a speaker. They forgot their schemes, their anxieties, themselves even, to fasten their eyes and hearts on the brown girl—the book dropping from her hand, but the story written so graphically on her memory. Corrie was the first to recover herself. "Oh dear!" she cried, "I have forgot I was to take down my hair for Miss Lothian to point it at eight o'clock," and hurried out of the room.

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Mrs. Spottiswoode roused herself next, and spoke a few words of acknowledgment to Chrissy. "Upon my word, Chrissy, your recital has been quite as good as the play. We are much obliged to you. I am afraid your throat must be sore; but stay, I have some of the theatre oranges here. No, bairns, you are not to have any; it is far too late for you to be up. Dear me; I believe you have been listening to Chrissy's story like the rest of us!" But Mrs. Spottiswoode was not under any apprehension about the success of Chrissy's reading. Mrs. Spottiswoode proved this by immediately leaving Chrissy *tête-à-tête* with Bourhope while she went to put the children to bed, and see if Mr. Spottiswoode, who was doing a quiet turn of business in his office, would have a game of cards before supper. She had really never heard of a girl being married simply for her tongue's sake! She perhaps knew the line in the song too—

"Very few marry for talking,"

and had found its truth in her own experience, for she was a shrewd, observant woman.

Bourhope, it should be understood, was longest subjected to the influence of Chrissy's story-telling power. Indeed, when he did somewhat recover from it, his fancy created fine visions of what it would be to have such a storyteller at Bourhope during the long, dark nights of winter and the endless days of summer. Bourhope was no ignoramus. He had some acquaintance with "Winter's Tales" and summer pastorals, but his reading was bald and tame to this inspiration. He thought to himself it would really be as good as a company of players purely for his own behoof, without any of the disadvantages. He stammered a little in expressing the debt he owed to Chrissy, and she could only eagerly reply by saying, "Not to me, not to me the praise, Mr. Spottiswoode, but to the great unknown. Oh! I would like to know him."

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Bourhope was stimulated to do at once what he was sure to do ultimately: he presented his hospitable entertainers with a box at the play. No doubt it was a great delight to Chrissy; for it was in the days when actors were respectable artists and play-going was still universal. Chrissy in her freshness enjoyed the provincials as well as if they had been first-rate—took the good and left the bad, and sat quite entranced.

Bourhope, although he was decidedly intellectual for his calling, watched Chrissy rather than the stage. He read the feeling of the moment reflected in her sagacious yet sensitive face. Once he turned round and tried the same experiment with Corrie. He might as well have expected to borrow a living soul from well-moulded stucco or marble. He now realized in a more lively manner than ever, that geese may look fair and white and soft and shapely as swans till they expose their waddling. He tried in church the process he had learned at the play, and, it must be confessed, not without effect—Chrissy's expression giving a fair notion of the good Priorton minister's earnestness and eloquence.

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But at length Chrissy, aware of the liberty Bourhope took in thus making her his study, got restless and troubled in her sound head and warm heart. She was no fool in her simplicity. She knew that Bourhope did not in any sense belong to Mrs. Spottiswoode and Corrie, and she had shrewdly suspected of late that their anticipated arrangements would not be carried out. She could not help occasionally turning over in her mind the circumstance that Cecilia was very plain, but that depressed Mortimer Delville nevertheless bestowed his heart on her, though the gift, like her fortune, was disastrous to Cecilia for many a long day. Chrissy thought that if Bourhope were independent and original enough to like her—to love her—he was his own master; there was nothing between him and his inclination save her inclination and her father and mother's will. And there was little doubt about father and mother's will with respect to a man so worthy, so unexceptionable, and so well endowed as Bourhope.

Nor was there anything like duty to the Spottiswoodes to stand between Bourhope and Chrissy. But still Chrissy's nice sense of honour was disturbed, for had she not a guess that a very different result had been expected? Nay, she had even a half-comical notion that she herself had

been expressly selected as a companion to Corrie Hunter during the gaities of the yeomanry weeks, because she would also prove a sort of harmless foil.

A dream of love was a grand shock to Chrissy's quiet life, making wild yet plaintive music, like all nature's true harmonies, within her, and filling her mind with tremulous light which glorified every object, and was fain even to dazzle herself. It was not unnatural that Bourhope should excite such a dream. But Chrissy was not completely dazzled. It was only a dream as yet, and she would be the mistress of her dream; it should not be the mistress of her. So she resolved, showing herself a reasonable, thoughtful, conscientious woman, as well as a loving, fairly proportioned, and lovely human spirit.

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Chrissy retained all her sober senses. She recollected what was due both to the hero and to the others concerned. She was neither a weak victim, nor a headstrong, arrogant, malicious conqueror. Like all genuine women, she struggled against yielding herself without her due—without a certainty that there was no irreversible mistake in the matter. She was not a girl to get love-sick at the first bout, nor one to run even at a worthy lover's beckoning, though she would sacrifice much, and do it proudly, joyously, for true affection, when once it had confessed itself. So she shrank from Bourhope, slipped away from, and managed to avoid him. He was puzzled and vexed, and almost exasperated by doubts as to whether she cared for or wished to accept his notice and regards. Little brown Chrissy taught the bold Yeoman a lesson in her own quiet way. She slowly forced upon him the conviction that any gifts or attainments of his—the prosperous, cultivated farmer laird—were as dross compared with the genius and acquirements of Chrissy Hunter, whom many short-sighted men called insignificant and plain amid the poverty and cares of Blackfaulds. Bourhope was not radically mercenary: he had no certainty that his superiority in worldly estate would secure the strange good upon which he set his heart, and he was at once stimulated and incensed by her indifference to his advances. So he had no communication with Chrissy, apart from a demure interchange of words in general conversation, for three days before the grand review and the ball, except in a single incident of the pipe-claying of his belts.

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The gentlemen of the old yeomanry who had not servants to do it for them, did their own pipe-claying, and might generally be seen doing it very indifferently to the accompaniment of private whistling or social bawling to each other over adjacent walls in the back courts and greens of Priorton. Bourhope was one day doing his rather gloomily in the back court, and succeeding very ill, when Chrissy, who saw him from a window, could endure it no longer. Chrissy was not what most intellectual women are described as being—an abstracted, scared being, with two left hands. The exigency of her situation as eldest daughter at Blackfaulds had rendered her as handy as other girls, and only unlike them in being a great deal more fertile in resource. How could such a woman stand and see Bourhope destroying his accoutrements, and in danger of smearing himself from head to foot with pipe-clay? Chrissy came tripping out, and addressed him with some sharpness—"That is not right, Mr. Spottiswoode; you will never whiten your belt in that way, you will only soil the rest of your clothes. I watched the old sergeant doing it next-door for Major Christison. Look here:" and she took the article out of his hands, and proceeded smartly to clean it. Poor Bourhope bowed to her empire, though he would much rather their positions had been reversed: he would rather a thousand times have brushed Chrissy's shoes than that she should clean his belt. She was gone again the moment she had directed him. A portion of his belt was now as white as snow; but nothing would have induced her to stay.

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Bourhope was new to the humiliations as well as the triumphs of love—that extreme ordeal through which even tolerably wise and sincere spirits must pass before they can unite in a strictness of union deserving the name. He was not exactly grateful for the good suggestion; indeed, he had a little fight against Chrissy in his own breast just then. He told himself it was all a whim, he did not really care for the girl—one of a large family in embarrassed circumstances. No, it would be absurd to fall in love with a little coffee-coloured girl whose one shoulder was a fraction of an inch further out than the other. He was not compelled to marry either Corrie or Chrissy—not he! Poeh! he was not yet half through with his bachelor days. He would look about a little longer, enjoy himself a little more. At the word enjoyment Bourhope stopped short, as if he had caught himself tripping. If Chrissy Hunter was ugly, she was an ugly fairy. She was his fate, indeed; he would never see her like again, and he would be a lost and wrecked man without her.

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IV.—THE BALL, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

The review and the ball were still in store. Bourhope would not be beaten with that double shot in reserve. It would go hard with the brown, curly, independent laird if he were beaten, for already he was shaken more in his pride and confidence than he ever thought to be.

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The review, for which all the drilling had been undertaken, went off without serious effect on the contesting parties. The only thing was, that Bourhope was so disturbed and so distracted in his mind that he could not attend to orders, and lost his character as a yeoman, and all chance of being future fugleman to his corps. And this, although the Major had said, when the drills began, that there was not a finer man or more promising dragoon than Bourhope in the regiment.

Chrissy's bright, tranquil satisfaction in contemplating, from the box of Mrs. Spottiswoode's phaeton, the stand of county ladies, with their gorgeousness and grace, was decidedly impaired. The review, with its tramping and halting, its squares and files, its shouting leaders, galloping aides-de-camp, flashing swords and waving plumes, was certainly very fine. All the rest of

Priorton said so and proved so, for they stood or sat for a whole day witnessing it, under a scorching sun, on foot, and in every description of vehicle from a corn-cart to a coroneted carriage. Yes, the review was very fine to the mass; but it was only a confused, hollow, agitating play to Chrissy as to Bourhope. Still she lost sight of the grand general rank and file, by concentrating her regard on one little scarlet dot. It was to her a play with its heart a-wanting, and yet the whirl and movement were welcome for a moment as substitutes for that heart.

The ball remained, and Bourhope was resolute it should settle the question for him. It was the commendable fashion at Priorton that no young lady should refuse to dance with an acquaintance without the excuse of a previous engagement, under the penalty of having to sit the rest of the night. Bourhope would get Chrissy to himself that night (balls were of some use, after all, he thought), and have an opportunity of hearing a terribly decisive word, and of getting a reason for that word too, should it prove unfavourable. In short, he would storm the fortress, and beat down its faltering guard then or never.

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Others besides Bourhope had determined on making the ball a theatre of explanations. Mrs. Spottiswoode was not pleased with the aspect of things as between Bourhope and Corrie. Their affair made no advance, and the ball was the conclusion of the yeomanry weeks. The yeomen were already to all intents and purposes disbanded, and about to return, like Cincinnatus, to their reaping-hooks. Corrie was evidently not contented. She was listless and a little peevish, unless when in the company of other yeomen than Bourhope—a rare thing with Corrie, who was really a very harmless girl. But she looked elegant in her ball dress, and had always a train of admirers on such occasions. And then, of course, many men needed the spur of jealousy to induce them to take the bold leap of matrimony. Chrissy, too, had her own fears and doubts about this ball. Bourhope hitherto had only pursued her, if he had pursued her, in rather a secret manner. She would now see how he would treat her on a public occasion. His conduct would then be marked and conspicuous, and even Mrs. Spottiswoode's and Corrie's eyes would be opened to it. Then, again, he would have an opportunity of contrasting her personally with all the girls about Priorton. Chrissy gazed wistfully into the glass as she fastened her yellow scrimp old white frock, and sighed. But she did not look so much amiss as she supposed: she was young, slight, and full of subtle character. And with her scarlet coral beads twisted among her dark little turret curls and bows, there was piquancy and attraction in Chrissy. But her first purely disinterested and unbounded pleasure in the gaiety was grievously chequered, and it was to be feared the account she would carry home of her first ball to expectant Blackfaulds would be disappointing.

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There were only two chaises in repair in Priorton, to convey the whole townspeople in rotation to the ball. It was thus unavoidable that some should be very early, as well as some very late. Mr. Spottiswoode, as Provost, was of course among the first after the Colonel and his lady, old country people, who stood arm-in-arm, bluff and bland, under the evergreens over the door, and shook hands with everybody, great and small—a family of pretty girls meanwhile laughing behind them.

Mrs. Spottiswoode wore a splendid bunch of white feathers tipped with straw-colour in her blue gauze turban. Even Chrissy's dazed eyes noticed that, as well as the white ribbon in Provost Spottiswoode's bottle-green coat, which pointed him out an honorary steward. But how handsome brown curly Bourhope looked in his red coat!

A strange thought came over Chrissy. She did not wish Corrie, in her white crape and French ribbons, and so tall and straight and fair, to be blighted in her beauty—no, not for a moment. But Chrissy was cruel enough to cherish a passing wish that, by some instantaneous transformation, Bourhope might be pitted with smallpox, or scarred with gunpowder, or have premature age brought upon him as with the wave of a wand—the soul within being left unchanged, however.

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Mrs. Spottiswoode, unlike Chrissy, was quite alive to the practical. She remarked everything with keen eyes, and determined now to be at the bottom of the business. She should either go in and win triumphantly, or take a sudden tack and sail away with flying colours, as if she had never entertained the most distant intention of coming to close quarters, and thus give the impression that she never had any intention of promoting a match between Bourhope and Corrie.

Mrs. Spottiswoode thought Bourhope looked as if he were going to do something desperate. His first blunder had been to hand, or rather lift, Chrissy into the chaise instead of Corrie, at starting from their own door. He repeated the unaccountable blunder at the County Rooms, which compelled him to take Chrissy into the ball-room; and while Chrissy was still gazing in bewilderment and admiration at the evergreens and chalked floors, and talking, laughing couples, Mrs. Spottiswoode could scarcely believe her ears when she distinctly heard Bourhope ask Chrissy's hand for the first dance, saying that he would have engaged it before if he had got the opportunity.

Now Mrs. Spottiswoode had no doubt that Bourhope would solicit her sister Corrie for this dance, and therefore she had peremptorily forbidden Corrie to engage herself in any other quarter, even when Corrie had demurred at the certainty of the arrangement. It was very odd of Bourhope, unless he thought Chrissy would have no chance of any other partner, and wanted to spare a plain little girl's mortification at the very commencement of the evening. "That must be it," Mrs. Spottiswoode said to herself, and was consoled by Corrie's hand being immediately requested for the Colonel's nephew.

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The Colonel's wife opened the ball with the most popular and oldest private for partner, and, of course, Chrissy and Bourhope stood below Corrie and the Colonel's nephew. But Bourhope and

Chrissy did not mind Corrie's precedence, and were talking to each other quite intimately. Bourhope was forgetting the figure and bending across to Chrissy, though he was saying nothing particular, and speaking out quite loud. But he looked engrossed and excited. If it had been any other girl but Chrissy, Mrs. Spottiswoode would have called it a flirtation, and more than a flirtation. Chrissy looked well in her shabby dress, almost pretty indeed, in the new atmosphere. Mrs. Spottiswoode was aggrieved, disgusted in the first instance, but she would not just yet believe such an incredible contradiction to her well-laid scheme. Match-making involves so many parties, there are such wheels within wheels of calculation and resource. She glanced at Corrie, who was dancing very complacently with the Colonel's nephew, and exchanging passing words with yeomen who tried to get speech with her. In her white crape, and teeth as white, and her dimples, she was safe, heart-whole and prosperous—a beauty who might pick and choose a suitable husband, even though Bourhope, infatuated, threw himself away.

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Mrs. Spottiswoode gave a sigh of relief. Failure now would only be comparative.

The dance being over, Bourhope sat down beside Chrissy. No, she turned her head the other way, and he rose up and strolled through the room. But he was soon back in his old place.

He wanted to dance with Chrissy again. She hesitated, grew nervous, and cast her eyes on Mrs. Spottiswoode. He went straight to their hostess, and said, "Mrs. Spottiswoode, you have no objection that I dance this dance again with Miss Chrissy Hunter?"

"None in the world, Bourhope," said Mrs. Spottiswoode, with a spasmodic smile, "why should I?"

"Why, indeed?" he returned, "or every dance? May I tell her so?"

"That is as she and you may agree. You are aware that would appear something serious," she said, trying to laugh.

"I will take the consequences," he significantly assured her, and went back and told Chrissy so, and then he drove her to her inmost citadel, and beat her there.

Other eyes than Mrs. Spottiswoode's were attracted to the pair. Half-a-dozen matrons' heads went wagging significantly; girls whispered and tittered; gentlemen opened their eyes, shaped their mouths as if about to whistle, strolled up and took their observations of the pre-occupied, unconscious couple quite coolly, and then speculated and gossiped.

Mrs. Spottiswoode read these comments as well as what had gone before, and was ready with her magnanimity. It was this which constituted her a truly able tactician. She shifted her tack before the shout of malicious exultation and ridicule could have been raised at her discomfiture. By a dexterous sleight of hand, she shuffled her cards and altered her suit. In a moment Mrs. Spottiswoode was winking and nodding with the matrons interested in the news of the night. She arrested a good-humoured yeoman, and crossed the room on his arm, to express and receive congratulations. "You have found out the secret? Foolish fellow, Bourhope; he cannot conceal his feelings, though their display is premature. I must scold him for exposing himself and her. Poor dear! she is not accustomed to this sort of thing. But I am so delighted—so nice, isn't it? Such an excellent marriage for my cousin Chrissy—a good girl, a very clever girl—such a fortunate beginning for the Blackfaulds family. I often say the first marriage makes or mars a family of girls. It is so lucky that I invited Chrissy for the yeomanry weeks this summer. It is a great deal better than if it had been Corrie, because Corrie can wait," with a careless wave of her hand in the direction in which Corrie moved, deliberately followed by her train. "Corrie has too many admirers to make up her mind speedily, yet she takes it all very quietly. But this is so appropriate—Mr. Spottiswoode's cousin and my cousin—nobody could have planned it better."

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She turned round, and heard a blunt booby of a farmer speaking out his mind. She at once took him up—"You would not have thought it? You cannot comprehend what has come over Bourhope, or what he sees in that thin, yellow mite, Miss Hunter of Blackfaulds, even though she were as good as a saint, and as wise as the Queen of Sheba? Oh! come, Balquin, you do not allow sufficient latitude to goodness and cleverness. I tell you, Bourhope has neither eyes nor ears for anybody but that mite; he counts his colourless daisy far before the gayest painted face. He knows that we are remarking on them now, and he is holding his head as high as if he had sought and won a queen. He is right; she will prove a sensible, cheerful wife to him. Bourhope will have the cleverest, best wife in the county, for all your swaggering. And that is something, when a man comes to be old and has an old wife like me. Not old, Balquin? away with you. I wish the Provost heard you. Do you think to flatter me because I am in spirits about my cousin's match? No, it is not lost that a friend gets, Balquin."

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The public of Priorton did not know whether most to admire Mrs. Spottiswoode's diplomacy, or this rare instance of poetic justice.

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DIANA.

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I.—AN UNDERTAKING.

HE will not last ten years' time, Die; and then you will be rich and independent—the lady of Ashpound."

"Don't mention it, sir, unless you mean to tempt me to commit murder next."

The speakers in the old drawing-room of Newton-le-Moor, in the south country, thirty years ago, were Mr. Baring and his daughter Diana. He was a worn and dissipated-looking man, with a half-arrogant, half-base air—implying a whole old man of the world of a bad day gone by. He was flawless in his carving, his card-dealing, his frock-coat and tie: corrupt to the core in almost everything else. She was a tall, full-formed woman, in her flower and prime, with a fine carriage and gait, which rendered it a matter of indifference that she wore as plain and simple a muslin gown as a lady could wear. Her hair was of the pale, delicate, neutral tint which the French call *blond-cendré*, a little too ashen-hued for most complexions. It was not wavy hair, but very soft and pure, as if no atmosphere of turmoil and taint had ruffled or soiled it. It made Miss Baring's fresh, clear complexion a shade too bright in the carmine, which took off the greyness of the flaxen hue and relieved the cold and steel-like gleam in her grey-blue eyes. The features of the face were fine and regular, like Mr. Baring's; but instead of the handsome, aristocratic, relentless aquiline nose, which was the most striking feature in the gentleman's face, the lady's was a modified Greek nose, broad enough at the base slightly to spoil its beauty but largely to increase its intellectual significance.

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The "he" of the conversation, who was not to last ten years, was Gervase Norgate of Ashpound—a poor, impulsive, weak-willed, fast-living young neighbouring squire. Unluckily for himself, he had been early left his own master, and had ridden post-haste to the dogs ever since. Suddenly he had taken it into his muddled head to pull up in his career, and, if need be, to chain and padlock, hedge and barricade himself with a wife and family, before Ashpound should be swallowed up by hungry creditors, and he had hurried himself into a forlorn grave.

Mr. Baring was willing to let him off as a pigeon to be plucked, and to use him instead as an unconscious decoy-duck in getting rid of Die; not that Mr. Baring had an unnatural aversion to his daughter, but that she was a drag upon him both for the present and the future. But Die, after one night's reflection, accepted Gervase Norgate to escape worse evil, having neither brother nor sister nor friend who would aid her. What Die did on that night; whether she merely "slept on the proposal," like a wise, well-in-hand, self-controlled woman; whether she outwatched the moon, plying herself with arguments, forcing herself to overcome her deadly sick loathing at the leap, nobody knows. If Die had learned anything worth retaining, in the shifts and shams of her life, it was perfect reticence. The result was that Gervase Norgate was coming to woo as an accepted wooer at Newton-le-Moor on the evening of the summer day when Mr. Baring confidentially assured the bride that the bridegroom would not last ten years.

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Newton-le-Moor was what its name suggested, an estate won from the southern moors by other and worthier adventurers than John Fitzwilliam Baring. In his hands the place was drifting back to the original moorland. Everything, except the stables and kennels, had been suffered to go to wreck. The house was of weather-streaked white stone, in part staring and pretentious, in part prodigal and vagabondish. The drawing-room of Newton-le-Moor, like most drawing-rooms, was a commentary—more or less complete—on the life and character of its owner. If it did not represent all his practices and pursuits—his repudiation of just claims and obligations; his sleeping till noon and waking till morning, and faring sumptuously at his neighbours' expense; his fleecing of every victim who crossed his false door by borrowing, bill-discounting, horse-dealing, betting, billiards, long and short whist, and brandy-drinking—at least it painted one little peculiarity of John Fitzwilliam Baring very fairly. Not one accessory which could contribute to his comfort and enjoyment was wanting, from the exceedingly easy chair for his back, to the alabaster lamp for his eyes, and the silver pastile-burner for his nose. On the other hand, there was scarcely an article that had no special reference to John Fitzwilliam Baring which was not in the last stages of decay.

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On this evening, before Gervase Norgate came up with her father from the dining-room, where he might sit too long, considering who was waiting him, Diana had her tea-table arranged, and sat down behind it as if to do its honours. She showed no symptoms of discomposure, unless that her rose-colour flickered and flushed in a manner that was not natural to it; yet she had so entrenched herself, that when Gervase Norgate entered, with an irregular, unsteady step, although as nearly sober as he ever was, she could not be touched except at arm's length, and by the tips of the fingers, over which he bowed.

Mr. Norgate was not in his flower and prime. He was not above a year or two Miss Baring's senior; but his whole being had suffered eclipse before it reached maturity, though he still showed some remains of what might have been worth preserving. His physique had been what no word interprets so fitly as the Scotch word "braw,"—not huge and unwieldy in size and strength, but manly and comely. His shoulders were still broad, though they slouched. His hand and arm were still a model, somewhat wasted and shaken, of what in muscular power and lightness a hand and arm should be. His dark brown hair, dry and scanty at five-and-twenty, still fell in waves. His eyes, dulled and dimmed, were still the kindly, magnanimous, forgiving blue eyes. His mouth had always been a heavy mouth (better at all events than a mean mouth); it was coarse now, but with strange lines of gentleness breaking in upon its tendency to violence. But his carriage, though he was pre-eminently a well-made man, was the attribute most spoilt about him. He had the blustering yet shuffling bearing of a man who is fully convinced that he has gone to the dogs, and it did not alter its expression that he was making an effort to quit his canine

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associates. Perhaps the effort required to be confirmed before its effects could be seen; perhaps he was not setting about the right way of redeeming himself, after all.

Mr. Baring was pompous in his high breeding—the first gentleman in Europe was pompous also. Mr. Baring brought forward his intended son-in-law as his young friend, and alluded pointedly to the summer evening and its event as an "auspicious occasion." But he was cut short by a frosty glance from Die, and a brief remark that she was not sure that this evening and its party were more auspicious than usual.

Although Miss Baring was a person of very little consequence in her father's house, she acted on Mr. Baring as a drag. Her cold looks inadvertently damped him; and she had a way, which he could not account for in his daughter, of making blunt speeches, like that on the auspicious occasion and on her being left a rich young widow, if Gervase Norgate did for himself smartly. This was discomfiting even to a man who piqued himself on his resources in conversation. Die had uttered twice as many of these abrupt, unamiable, unanswerable rejoinders within these twenty-four hours, since she had accepted Gervase Norgate's hand.

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Whatever Mr. Baring thought of the rebuff, he was above exhibiting any sign of his feelings, and no one could have refused him the tribute of consideration for the position of his companions, as he blandly announced that he had the day's 'Chronicle' to read, and begged to be excused for accomplishing the task before post-time. He retired to sip his tea and disappear behind the folds of his newspaper. It was the first evening for a dozen years that he had not handled cue or fingered cards.

Gervase Norgate, assuming his character of a man about to amend his ways, marry, and settle, sat by Die Baring. He noted and summed up the girl's good points, as no man in love ever yet did. She was a finer-looking woman than he had supposed,—one to be proud of as he presented her to his friends as his wife; pity that he had so few creditable friends left now! He could think of none at that moment except his strong-minded old Aunt Tabby, who had some sneaking kindness for him in the middle of her scorn, and his old man, Miles. Die Baring would not tolerate his boon companions—not that he wanted her to tolerate them; she would not suit for his mistress and manager if she did; though where she got her niceness—seeing what her father was up to in cool, barefaced scampishness, in horse-flesh, bones, and pasteboard—he could not tell.—She was a capable woman he was certain, if she got a fair field for her capability. She was clever: anybody with half an eye or an ear might recognize that. And she would want all her cleverness—ay, and her will and temper—for what she would have to do. But she had undertaken the task, and it was not much to the purpose that if she had not been the daughter of a disreputable spendthrift she would doubtless as lief have touched live coals as have submitted to be his wife. Ah, well, it was his luck in his last toss-up, and he had never been lucky before; yet he had never felt so great a reluctance to conclude his engagement of twenty-four hours, and clinch his repentance, as he did at this moment. It was good for him that he stood committed. But why had he not sought out some humble, meek lass, who would still have looked up to him and reckoned him not quite such a reprobate, but believed that there was some good left in him, and liked him a little for himself—not married him to suit her own book and save him for her own sake, if it were possible? Why had he not chosen a simple pet lamb, in place of a proud heifer who scarcely took the trouble to conceal from him how it galled her neck to put it into his yoke? Psha! he would break any poor heart with his incorrigible wildness and beastly sottishness in a month's time. A woman without a heart; a good, hard-mouthed, strong-pulling, well-wearing woman,—honest, and a lady; a handsome, superior woman, and far beyond his deserts, was the wife for him.

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Gervase pursued this line of thought; but he spoke to Miss Baring, after a little introductory flourish about the weather, his ride from Ashpound, and the embroidery which she had taken up, in a different strain.

"You have shown a great, I must say an unmerited, trust in me, Miss Baring—Diana: but I mean—I swear I mean to do the best I can for you and myself. I have thought better of the life I have been leading; I shall turn over a new leaf, and be another man if you will help me."

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The confession was fatally facile, like most confessions, but it was sincere, and not without its touching element, which, however, did not reach her.

She replied, without being greatly moved, and corrected what might be a slight misconception on his part: "I am quite aware, Mr. Norgate, that you have been rather wild; but since you mean to do better, I am willing to try you and to be your wife."

Diana's candid acquiescence had the same disconcerting influence upon Gervase that her speeches had on her father, unlike as the men were: it struck him dumb when he should have overwhelmed her with thanks. After a while he recovered himself, took heart of grace, and blundered out that he was grateful,—a happy man; would she not say Gervase, when she was having him altogether?

"I suppose I may," acceded Diana, with a hard smile. "There, Gervase—it is not hard to say," as if she were humouring him.

He did not ask for any more favours or rights, but maundered a little on nobody calling him Gervase for many a day except his aunt Tabby, and she contracted it to Jarvie, which had a stage-coach flavour.

"Tell me something about your aunt Tabby. Do you know, I have not visited an aunt since I was a

little girl of ten?" This afforded him an opening more naturally and pleasantly, and the two went off on Aunt Tabby instead of accomplishing more courtship, and got on a little better. Diverging from Aunt Tabby to her place, and from her place to Ashpound, they went on with mention of Gervase's factotum, Miles, and discussed capabilities and future arrangements with wonderful common sense.

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Mr. Baring swallowed his last gape over his 'Chronicle,' concluded that the couple had surely had their swing of private conversation for one night, and resolved to curtail the courtship to the shortest decorous bounds. So Mr. Baring looked at his watch, and said quite lovingly to Gervase: "My boy, when I do act the family man, I do the thing thoroughly, by supping in my dressing-room at eleven. What! you are off? A pleasant ride to you. You will receive your orders from Die, I fancy, when to report yourself in attendance. To-morrow is it, or next day? Make yourself at home, my dear fellow. Happy to think that you are going to be one of us—a son for me to be proud of. Good-night. God bless you."

Thus the preliminaries to the alliance ended with Gervase bowing again over the tips of Die's fingers. He had not the smallest inclination to raise them to his lips.

"I will do my duty by him," said Diana to herself, when she was in the sanctuary of her own bare room. And what a poor sanctuary it had been! "It may be bad in me to have him, but what can I do? and what can he do, for that matter? If I do my duty by him, surely some good will come of it." Perhaps her imagination was haunted by a garbled version of the text about him who turns a sinner from the error of his ways and covers a multitude of sin.

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II.—THE FULFILMENT.

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"She's a fine woman the mistress, a rare fine woman; but she's going the wrong way. It's the cart before the horse, and I tell you it's not conformable; and the master, God help him, poor fellow, will never be brought to go at the tail of the cart—never." So ruminated Gervase Norgate's old servant, Miles, pushing back the tufts of ragged red hair on his long head ruefully, as he sat "promiscuous" in what he was pleased to call his pantry at Ashpound, while he contemplated with the eye of the body his chamois skin for what he proudly denominated his silver, and with the eye of the mind the new régime and its ruling spirit.

"She's a fine woman," remarked also of her new niece, Miss Tabitha Norgate, of Redwells. "She's a fine woman, a great deal too good for him; but she oughtn't to have gone and married Jarvie, or to have married anybody, there's the long and the short of it. She ought to have remained single, like me. She was made to stand alone, while he wanted a woman and as many children as she could muster to hang round his neck—the liker a millstone the better,—he won't drown: he could not take the straight road without a weight to ballast him and keep him steady. If he had consulted me, I would have advised him to marry that dawdling, whimpering Susie Lefroy, the widowed daughter of the Vicar, with her unprovided-for orphans. Jarvie might have stepped into a young family at once, and he would have been a kind stepfather—he might have righted himself then. To go and marry a clever, active, handsome, well-born woman like Die Baring. Oh! dear, dear, what folly!"

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In spite of her critics, Mrs. Gervase Norgate spared no pains to acquit herself of her obligation, and to discharge her debt at Ashpound. Ashpound was a much more exhilarating residence than Newton-le-Moor. At Newton-le-Moor the desolation of prodigality and immorality was objective and deductive. At Ashpound the desolation was subjective and inductive, a plague-spot within; and although the flush of decay was visible, Gervase would struggle against it to the last. He would make an effort to preserve the pleasant, rambling, mellow brick house, most of it one-storied and draped with jessamine and clematis as old as the building; the belt of ash-trees round the ferny dells of the little park; and the whitewashed offices, in excellent repair; the well cared for cattle and poultry-yard; the amply-stocked, flourishing gardens; the pretty gardener's house and lodge—the prettiest things about the place, as his father had left them to him. To the last Gervase would aim at keeping up the place, to his mother's drawing-room, his father's study, Miles's pantry and cellar, even the modern housekeeper's room, and the maids' gallery, in comfort and pleasantness. Only his own rooms—dining-room, smoking-room, bedroom—had been suffered to show traces of many a brawl and fray. It was as if he had deemed anything good enough for a scapegrace and beast like him, and thought to pay the whole price in his own person. It would not be with his will if any other person, high or low, contributed to his heavy forfeits. And Gervase Norgate's servants, new as well as old, had a pitiful liking for him, a remorseful regard for his interests, even when these clashed with their own. So when Gervase had removed the traces, repaired the damages, and taken the decisive step of forbidding the inroads of his evil associates, Mrs. Gervase Norgate found a peaceful, prosperous-seeming, as well as fair, country home awaiting her.

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Neither did Mrs. Gervase Norgate droop or mope; she was alive to every advantage, alert to improve every opportunity. Frankly she praised the house at Ashpound, which she had formerly known at the distance of common acquaintanceship, but now knew in the nearness of home, from garret to cellar. "What a well-seasoned, kindly dwelling you have here, Gervase. How I like the windows opening down to the floors, the creeping plants, the hall window-seats, and the attics with their pigeon-hole bureaux." She made herself familiar with its details, and she flattered its old occupants with the extent of her intimacy and appreciation. She did not let the grass grow

beneath her feet in learning and acquiring its owner's habits. Early rising had been one of the good old country habits which had stuck to Gervase. And not a dairymaid at Ashpound was up and abroad at so primitive an hour as its mistress, ready to walk with the Squire to his horses' stalls and paddocks, his cattle sheds, his game preserves, his workpeople in the fields; anywhere but to the sign of the 'Spreading Ash-tree,' in the village of Ash-cum-thorpe, for his morning draught.

"Well-a-day," cried Dolly; "I would not be the mistress, to rise and go to her work afore the stroke of six, and she a fine lady born and bred, for all the hats and feathers, table heads, and carriage-seats in this here world. If I ever have a word to say to Luke Jobling, I know it will be with an eye to a good long lie in the morning when he has gone to his mowing or his reaping. How Madam does it without ever drooping an eyelid, none of us can tell; but they do say the gentlefolks are as strong as steel when they like to put out their strength; happen it is the high living as gives it to them. I know Madam puts us to our mettle here. And lawk! the Squire, he's as restless and lost like as a new weaned calf. Eh! I had liefer have the holding-in of a senseless calf, though I had not Luke to help me with the bars of the gates, than the holding in of a full-grown, whole-witted man. But the poor mistress—they as don't know the rights of a thing calls her saucy—young lady though she be, she do work hard for her place and living, she do, since she has got Master Gervase and Ashpound."

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Anticipating her husband's commands, Diana was ever ready to bear him company, to share his engagements and amusements, walking, riding, shooting, fishing, playing billiards, cribbage, bowls, racket, backgammon, draughts, for hours on a stretch; to go abroad attending the market and doing banking business at Market Hesketh, dining out with the Vicar or with any country host save Mr. Baring—Mrs. Gervase Norgate setting her face against the paternal hospitalities—dancing at the county balls as one of the leaders. She did not seem to know what weariness meant. She would trudge whole half-days with him and the keepers, after luncheon, beating the plantations and pacing the turnip-fields to start and bring down birds, and she would be sauntering with him on the terrace and in the park after dinner all the same. She would be in the saddle ten hours during a long day's hunt, as the autumn advanced and the meets assembled, and within an hour of alighting at the door of Ashpound, she would have exchanged muddy bottle-green or Waterloo blue cloth for glistening white satin, and be stepping into the carriage with Gervase to be present at one of their wedding parties.

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There was something positively great in the intentness with which the woman pursued her end of the man's salvation; the vigilance with which she ever kept sight of the wounded quarry she was to rescue and to restore. The neighbourhood watched the struggle with interest, admiration, hostile criticism, not very delicate diversion. Only to John Fitzwilliam Baring the struggle was a matter of indifference—rather of repugnance. He would have liked Die to be more feminine and more helpless.

Would Die slacken in her energy and devotion? Would Gervase be able to bear his cure much longer?

Beyond the honeymoon, and with the feeling decidedly growing, Gervase Norgate was gratified by his wife's sacrifice of herself in every respect, and long before he grew accustomed to it and felt easy under it, he was touched by it. He liked her company too, for he was fond of society, and had been lonely since his father and mother died. She was an observant, intelligent woman, high-minded and pure-hearted, and vastly superior to his late satellites. She was eager to suit herself to him, and made herself as free with him as she could be, as far as he knew, with any one. At this season Gervase Norgate was attracted to something warmer, sweeter, more intimate in their intercourse. He enjoyed her quick remarks and shrewd conclusions. He was pleased with, and proud of the new blossoming of her beauty under the combined influences of an open-air life, constant occupation, and a powerful object. He was willing to wait till more tender feelings should awaken between them. It looked as if Gervase Norgate had turned over a new leaf: his cheek lost its dull, engrained red, or its pallor; his lips grew firmer; his eyes clearer and cooler; he raised his head, and threw off something of the slouch of his shoulders and the swing and uncertainty of his walk.

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"How well you look in that pretty dress, Diana!" he would say; "I declare you are as brave a figure as any in my Lord's picture-gallery. Let me fetch you a cluster of monthly roses, though I am not fit to hold the candle to you." Or, "Come, Die, let us have a stroll and a smoke in the garden." Or, "Sit still for another game, will you? My hand is just in and my luck beginning. I know you are never tired. Mrs. Gervase, you are a trump—the ace of trumps."

Ignorant spectators might have set them down for a good, happy, well-met young couple, with regard to whom it would be simply and equally appropriate to wish "God bless them."

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III.—HAZARD.

Diana did not slacken in her devotion, but there came a limit to the endurance of Gervase. The gleam of success was but the gleam before the overcast.

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First, Gervase was conscious of being nettled by the distance which existed between him and Diana. And certainly, to be sensible of his arm being arrested by an unseen obstacle when he thought to put it round his own wife's waist, to collapse in the mere idea of asking her to give him

a kiss, never to have felt so fully the dissipated, degraded fool he had been, as he felt then, was not a pleasant sensation. It may sound immoral, but it seemed as if, had Gervase been more depraved, there would have been more hope for him, since he would have appreciated the gulf between him and his guardian less.

Then the old craving returned like a death thirst. The old, wild, worthless, low companions, were cognisant, as if by instinct, of a relapse. Eager to hail its signs, and profit by them, they waylaid him at the 'Spreading Ash,' with "Hey, don't you dare to swallow a single glass in your own village, to give custom to your villager, man?" They waylaid and gathered round him in the market-place of Market Hesketh, with "Well met, Mr. Gervase Norgate. Lord! are you alive still? for we had doubted it. Don't speak to him to detain him, you fellows; don't you see Mrs. Gervase has her eye upon him, and is craning her neck to discover what is keeping him? Off with you, sir, since you are a husband, a reformed rake, and a church-goer. If you had gone and joined the Methodists, you might have been a preacher yourself by this time. Oh! we don't want to spoil sport and balk your good intentions; but, by George, Gervase, we never thought you would have been the man to be tied so tight to a woman's apron-string. You must spare us one more carouse for old friendship's sake, my boy, just to try what it is like again, and hear all the news. Ah! your teeth are watering; come along; Madam is not to swallow you up entirely."

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They got him away from his wife, and made him leave her sitting an hour in the carriage, with a pair of young horses pawing and rearing and endangering her very life in the yard of the 'Crown.' They made him send her home without him, and kept him till they had nothing more to say than "Heave the poor devil into a gig, and drive him up to his own door and put him down there. It is the best you can do for him,—the fool was always so easily upset; and it will do for her at the same time—give her something to hold her cursed high white head in the air and turn up her nose for; serve her impudence right for taking it upon her to act as private policeman to Jarvie." They sent him home to her, a beast who had been with wild beasts. They did it for the most part heedlessly, in jollity and jeering; but they did it not the less effectually. The wild beast of sensuality had him again; not one devil, but seven, had entered into him; and reigning king over the others, an insensate devil of cruel jealousy of his wife, of his gaoler, resenting her efforts, defying her pains.

Diana did not take Gervase Norgate's backsliding to her very heart, was not wounded to death by it as if she had loved him. But she did not give him up. She was a tenacious woman, and Gervase Norgate's salvation was her one chance of moral redemption from the base barter of her marriage. She did not reproach him: she was too proud a woman, too cold to him, to goad and sting him by reproaches. They might have served her end better than the terrible aggravation of her silence. She was just too, and she did not accuse him unduly. She said to herself, "He is a poor, misguided fellow, a brute where drink is concerned: when I married him, that was as clear as day. I have no right to complain, though he resume his bad courses." Still she left no stone unturned; she was prepared, as before, to ride and walk and play with him at all hours; she ignored his frequent absences and the condition in which he came back, as far as possible. She abetted old Miles in clearing away, silently and swiftly, the miserable evidences of mischief. She smuggled out of sight, and huddled into oblivion, battered hats, broken pipes and sticks, stopperless flasks, cracked, smoky lanterns—concealing them with a decent, decorous, sacred duplicity even from Aunt Tabby, who trotted across the country on her father's old trotting mare, took her observations, and departed, shaking her head and moralizing on the text, "Cast not your pearls before swine."

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Diana sat at her forlorn post in the billiard-room, or by the cribbage-board, or at the piano which Gervase had got for her. She had some small skill to play and sing to him, and was indefatigable in learning the simple tunes and songs he liked. And night after night she was left alone, unapproached, uncalled for; or else Gervase stumbled in from the dining-room or from an adjournment to the village tavern, where he was the acknowledged king and emperor, bemused, befumed, giddy, hilarious, piteously maudlin, or deliriously furious. She stooped to smile and answer his random ravings and to comply with his demands. If she escaped actual outrage and injury in his house and hers, it was not because she did not provoke him, for there was nothing in his wife which Gervase hated so heartily, resented so keenly, as her refraining from contradicting him. But below the grossness and sin of the poor lout and caitiff there was a fund of sullen, latent manliness and kindness, which held him back from insulting the defenceless woman—for all her pride and purity—who was his wife, just as it had held him back from dallying with and caressing her as his mistress.

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The neighbourhood which had furnished both a dress-circle and a pit to witness Diana's spectacle, was not astonished at the fate of the adventure. Its success would have been little short of a miracle, and these were not the days of faith in miracles; so the neighbourhood did not pity Mrs. Gervase Norgate, for she had been foolhardy at the best, and her fortune or misfortune had only been what ought to have been expected. For that matter Mrs. Gervase Norgate would not have thanked the world for its pity, though it had been lavishly vouchsafed.

There was one point on which Diana did not hesitate to contradict Gervase, and persisted in contradicting him. She would not suffer him, if she could help it, to frequent Newton-le-Moor, or to consort with Mr. Baring. For to go to Newton-le-Moor was to go among the Philistines; and lawless as Gervase was in his own person, it should never be with his wife's consent that he should go and be plundered by her own flesh and blood—his errors rendering him but a safer and a surer prey.

Gervase was standing restless and indignant by the low bow-window of his wife's drawing-room, opening on the flower-garden, which had been laid out in their honeymoon, and in which she continued to take pleasure, though the wealth of glowing autumn geraniums and verbenas had given place to the few frosted winter chrysanthemums. It was but the middle of the day, and he had risen and had his cup of tea laced with brandy and crowned with brandy, so that the jaded man was comparatively fresh, but irritable to the last nerve, each jarring nerve twanging like harpstrings, sending electric thrills of vexation and rage over his whole body at the cross of every straw.

Diana, who had been up and busy for hours, was sitting at her desk; her brow, whatever cares lurked behind it, unruffled and white; a seemly, reasonable, refined woman, aggrieved every day she lived, but scorning to betray a knowledge of the grievance.

"Don't go to Newton, above all by yourself, Gervase," the wife was entreating, gravely and earnestly. "I am afraid my father may take the opportunity of trying to get money from you. He has entered horses for the Thorpe stakes: he will seek to make you enter them, and you told me yourself May and Highflyer were not fit to run this year. Or he will seek to lead you into some other transaction in horse-flesh, or have you into the house to play billiards and remain to dinner and cards all night, and there is always high play at Newton. My father is a needy man, and needy men are tempted to be unscrupulous; at least his code implies few scruples, where the letter of the laws of honour is complied with."

"It comes ill off your hand to say so," observed Gervase harshly. Undoubtedly he spoke no more than the truth, and such a life as Gervase Norgate's was not a school for magnanimity.

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Die winced a little; and she was a woman whose fair cheek so rarely blushed, that her blushing was like another woman's crying. Die never cried; Gervase Norgate had never wrung a tear from her, or seen her shed a tear.

"Well, it was hard for me to say it," she admitted, with an accent of reproach in her equable tones; "but there the wrong and the shame are, and I owe it to myself and to you to warn you."

"I wonder how much I owe your being here to Newton-le-Moor being little better than a not very reputable gambling-house," exclaimed Gervase rudely.

She looked at him with her wide-open eyes, as if she had been struck, but did not care to own the blow.

"It was not to much profit where you were concerned," he continued, in an infatuation of brutality; "it did not get you so much as a pocket-handkerchief, or a flower-garden like that down there, or," glancing round him, "trumpery hangings and mirrors, and a new gown or two, or any other of the miserable trash for which women sell themselves."

She neither spoke nor stirred.

He had worked himself into a blindness of rage, in which he could see nothing before him but the possibility of moving her, of breaking down and destroying her calm front.

"And I wonder how much you owe your being here to my being a prodigal clutching at any respite? You may well come down lightly on my faults, Madam; they have made you the mistress of Ashpound in the present, and won for you its widow's jointure in the future. If I had known all beforehand, I might not have encumbered myself in vain. As it is, I do not think it becomes you to lecture me on keeping company with your own father."

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She got up and left the room.

It was time, when all was lost, even honour. If he had not been himself, she might have passed over his taunts with simple shame and disgust; but given, as they were, when she held that he knew what he was saying—as a proof that he had not a particle of respect and regard for her after their months of wedlock, they were a certain indication of his ruin and her reward.

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IV.—THE LAST THROW.

"Poor Mrs. Gervase Norgate, she must have been so put about to have to go away with her husband last night. How the scamp got into the drawing-room I cannot tell; but he could do nothing but lean against the wall: he could not have bitten his fingers to save his life. She did not show her mortification unless by going away immediately. A wonderful amount of countenance has that poor young woman; but I take it she will not go out with him again if she can help it—and she need not, she need not, Lady Metcalfe. I can tell you he shall not be asked within my doors again; but I shall be very glad if you will always remember to send her a card, poor thing: she can go out without him, it must come to that eventually. It is not a mere kindness; she is really a credit and an ornament to your parties, to the county set altogether. But the sooner she learns to go out without him, and keep him in the background, the better for all parties. She has the command of a good income still, with a very tolerable jointure behind it, and Ashpound is a pretty place; not a fine place, like my lord's, but a very pretty place for a sensible woman's management and enjoyment."

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One of Gervase Norgate's oldest neighbours, a fussy but good-natured, middle-aged baronet,

pronounced this judgment.

There was nothing left for Diana but to resign Gervase to his fate, and gather up the gains which were left her. The most impartial authorities decided so. The gains would have sufficed for many a woman. Mrs. Gervase Norgate had comparative riches, after the cash scramble in which she had been brought up. Gervase had not succeeded in wasting above one-third of his fortune, and would doubtless end his career before he made away with the whole. Mrs. Gervase was the mistress of Ashpound, and most people would have valued it as what newspapers describe as a most desirable residence, a most eligible investment. If she ever had a child—a son, though she shuddered at the idea,—he would be the young Squire, the heir of Ashpound. In the meantime, Gervase Norgate was not a churl: he did not dream of stinting his wife in her perquisites, though he was not fond of her, and they now no longer lived comfortably together. She might have out his mother's carriage every day, or she might have another built for her, and drive it with a pair of ponies if she chose; she had a well-bred, fine-mounted, thin-legged, glossy-coated saddle-horse kept for her sole use, and she might have a second bred and broken for her any year she liked. She could even employ her own discretion in the income to be spent in the housekeeping. Ready money was becoming short with him; but his sense of her rights, and his faith in her prudence, had not failed. She had only to draw on his banker or agent to have her draught honoured. Whatever sums she might devote to her personal pleasures, her prodigal husband would not call in question. She might indulge in fine clothes, *recherché* jewellery, embellishments and ornaments for her rooms; she might take up art or literature, or heaths, or melons, or poultry, or flannel petticoating and soup-making for the poor (Sunday-schools and district visiting were hardly in fashion), and pursue one, or other, or all, for occupation and amusement, without impairing her resources; and she claimed a very respectable circle of friends as Mrs. Gervase Norgate, though she had been friendless, and getting always more friendless, as Miss Baring. The world had put its veto on the risk of her marriage with Gervase Norgate, in so far as its excusable element—the reformation of Gervase Norgate—was concerned; but with commendable elasticity it had allowed itself to be considerably influenced by the advantages which the marriage had obtained and secured for Diana, as well as by her conduct in their possession, and had awarded her the diploma of its esteem. A handsome, ladylike, sensible, well-disposed, sufficiently-agreeable, though quiet young matron, almost too wise and forbearing for her years, was its verdict. It was wonderful how well she had turned out, considering how she had been exposed; for every one knew John Fitzwilliam Baring, and how little fitted he was for the care of a motherless daughter. The more tender-hearted and sentimental world began to look upon Mrs. Gervase Norgate's bad husband, whom she had married in the face of his offence, as one of her merits,—a chief merit, to make of her a popular victim and martyr, no matter that she was not naturally constituted for the *rôle*, was not frank enough for popularity, not meek enough for martyrdom.

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Even Miss Tabitha, who had still a friendly feeling for the culprit, had nothing to say against Mrs. Gervase, except that she was too good for him. Poor Miles listened wistfully for his master's reeling step, and went out in the night air, risking his rheumatism, for which Mr. Gervase had always cared, making sure that the old boy had a screen to his pantry, and shutters to his garret. He watched lest his master should make his bed of the cold ground and catch a deadly chill; caring for the besotted man, when he found him, with reverence and tenderness, as for the chubby boy who had bidden so fair to be a good and happy man, worthy of all honour, when Miles had first known him as his young master. Miles resented feebly the perishing of the forlorn hope of a rescue, and muttered fatuously the cart had been put before the horse, and the reins taken out of the whip hand, and that'd never do. What could come of the unnatural process but a crashing spill?

Diana could not accept the solution. Nineteen women out of twenty, who had acted as she had done, would have taken the compensations, perhaps been content with the indemnifications of her lot; but Diana was the twentieth. Whether the cost of his mercenary marriage was far beyond what she had estimated it, she lost heart and hope and heed of the world's opinion, and was on the high road to loss of conscience, from the moment she was convinced that Gervase Norgate was lost.

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Diana gave up going into the society which was so willing to welcome her, which thought so well of her. She relinquished all pride in personal dignity and propriety, as she had never done when she had locked her doors to shut out the jingling rattle of the bones, and, occasionally, the curses, not loud but deep, which broke in upon the repose of the long nights at Newton-le-Moor. She ceased to exert herself to regulate the expenditure of the house, to preserve its respectability, to wipe out the signs of its master's ruin. Old Miles might strive to keep up appearances, but his mistress no longer aided and abetted him. It had become a matter of indifference to Mrs. Gervase whether the dragged carpet, the wrenched-down curtain, the shattered chair, were removed or repaired, or not: she took no notice.

By the time Ashpound was budding in spring, Mrs. Gervase Norgate had fallen away, and changed rapidly for the worse, to the disappointment and with the condemnation of her acquaintances. She lay in bed half the morning, dawdled over her breakfast, and trailed her way from place to place, ageing too, with marvellous celerity.

Sunk in the mire as Gervase was, he noted the transformation in his wife with discomposure and vexation. It fretted him always, and infuriated him at times, to discover that she was likely to justify his contempt by proving a poor wife after all. Her rule ended, her energy exhausted, given over to an unprincipled, destructive listlessness and, carelessness, such a prospect did not make

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Gervase amend the error of his ways: but it caused his road to ruin to be harder to tread, it caused the fruits of his vice to be more bitter between his teeth, it drove him at times to reflect when it was madness to reflect. She would not take the luxuries which she had bought dearly, which he wanted her to take. Her person, drawing-room, flower-garden were fast showing neglect and cheerlessness, in spite of him, or to spite him, as he vowed savagely. Here was his sin cropping out and meeting him in the life of another, and that other a woman. She was going to ruin with him as truly and faithfully as if they had been a pair of fond lovers. The shy goodwill of Gervase Norgate's early married life had waned into discontent and dislike, and was fast settling into rooted hatred.

"Lawk!" Dolly the dairymaid reflected indignantly, "Madam is become as careless and trolloping-like as master is wild. If we don't take care, no one will continue to call on us and hinvite us with our equals. For that matter, the mistress has denied herself to every morning caller this spring, and it is my opingen she never so much as sends hapologies to them dinner cards as she twists into matches. If it were me, now, wouldn't I cut a dash of myself? She didn't care a bit of cheese-curd for him, folks say, when she had him to begin with, so why she should pine for his misdeeds now, is more than I can compass."

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It was on a clear, fragrant evening in June, when the world was all in flower, that a whispering, and pulling of skirts and sleeves, and throwing up of hands and eyes, arose among the servants at Ashpound, at a sight that was seen there. The servants' hall were gathered secretly at a side-door and a lobby-window, and were watching Mrs. Gervase Norgate feeling her way, like a blind woman, her tall figure bent down, crouched together, swaying, along the pleached alley from the garden.

One or two of the more sensitive of the women covered their faces and wrung their hands. Old Miles tugged at his tufts of red hair and smote his hands together distractedly. The new shame was too open for concealment; he could only cry, "God ha' mercy; there is not one to mend another; what will we do?"

As living among men and women given up to delusions begets delusions in rational minds with a dire infectiousness, so living with Gervase Norgate, and day by day regarding the evil which could not be stayed, Diana had caught the fell disease.

A whisper of the culminating misfortunes of Ashpound spread abroad like wild-fire, soon ceased to be a whisper, and became a loud scandal; and Diana lost her credit as summarily as she had acquired it. It was—"That wretched Mrs. Gervase Norgate came of an evil stock, though drinking was not Mr. Baring's vice. They were an ill-fated race, these Barings, with a curse—the curse of ruined men—upon them. Who knew, indeed, but if poor Gervase Norgate, come of honest people at least, had gone into another family—one which he could have respected, which could have shown him a good example and remonstrated with him with authority—he might have been reclaimed?"

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About the middle of summer there came a seasonably rainy period, such as frequently precedes a fine harvest. But Gervase Norgate was so ailing that he could not go out and look at his fields, where the corn in the ear was filling rarely, and the growth of second clover was knee-deep. He was forced to keep the house. He loathed food, and his sleep had become a horror to him. He had fits of deadly sickness and of shaking like an aspen. His only resource, all the life that was left to him, was to be found in his cellar; and even Miles, seeing his master's extremity, brought out and piteously pressed the brandy upon him.

Gervase's cronies had never come about his house since his marriage. There had been something in Diana which had held them at arm's length; and although they had heard and scoffed at her fall, they had not the wit to discern that it clean removed the obstacle to their harbouring about the place as they had done before her reign and abdication. They might come and go now by day and night without feeling themselves too much for Mrs. Gervase Norgate, or being compelled to regard her as a being apart from them. But they did not comprehend the bearing of the common degradation, and they had not returned to their haunt as they might have done.

Gervase had declined into such a state of fractiousness and sullenness, that he was very poor company even for illiterate country-bred men like himself. He was something of a ghastly spectacle, as he sat there, with his glass three-fourths empty, and part of its contents spilt around him, trying to smoke, trying to warm himself, with the soles of his boots burnt from being pressed on the top of the wood fire, his teeth chattering, at intervals, notwithstanding, as he cast furtive, dark glances behind him.

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Gervase was alone. Mrs. Gervase was dozing on a drawing-room couch, not troubling to order a fire, though the room was on the ground-floor,—a pleasant room in sunshine, but looking dull and dismal in wet and gloom. She had lain there all the evening, with her hair, tumbled by the posture, fallen down and straying in dim tresses on her shoulders.

Overcome by illness, Gervase at last defied his shrinking from his room and bed, and retired for the night. His uneven footsteps and the closing of his door had not long sounded through the house, which might have been so cheery and was so dreary and silent, when Mrs. Gervase, cold and comfortless, rose and proceeded to the study. She was drawn by the fire and the light, but she was drawn more irresistibly by the subtle, potent odour in the air. She came on like a sleep-walker. She sank down in the chair which her husband had occupied, and stretched out her fine white hand to the decanters which Miles had not removed. She had raised one, and was about to

pour its contents into a glass, when a noise at the door startled her, and caused her to hold her arm suspended. Gervase, returning for the bottle she grasped, stood in the doorway.

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Ruined husband and ruined wife confronted each other on their stained hearthstone. His weakness, replaced by failing strength, gathered up and increased tenfold by horror and rage. Her eyes glared defiance, and her presence there, in her white dress, with the crimson spots on each cheek, and the fair hair scattered around her, was a presence of ominous beauty, the hectic beauty of the fall. A feather's weight might have turned the scale whether Gervase should totter forward and deal Diana a deadly blow which should finish the misfortunes of that generation at Ashpound, and brand Ashpound itself with the inhuman mark of an awful crime; or whether he should melt in his misery, weep a man's scalding tears, and bemoan their misery together. Diana's words were the feather's weight: she broke God's unbearable silence, and by God's power and mercy saved both. She cried out, not so much in self-defence, for she was a daring, intrepid woman, as in righteous accusation, "You dare not blame me, for you taught me, you brought me to it."

Through his undone condition he owned the truth of the accusation, and the old spring of manliness in him welled up to protect the woman who spoke the truth and impeached him justly of her ruin as well as his own.

"No, I dare not blame you. We are two miserable sinners, Die." And he let his arms fall on the table and bowed his head over them.

He had spared her, he had not taunted her, and he had not called her Die for many a day before. She put down the decanter and cowered back with a sense of guilt which made her glowing beauty pale, fade, wither, like the sere leaf washed by the heavy tears of a November night's rain.

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When Gervase Norgate lifted up his bent head again, all the generosity that had ever looked out of his comely face reappeared in its changed features for a moment. "I have smitten you when you came and tried to cure me, Die. And I cannot cure myself. I believe, before God, if I can get no more drink, I shall go to-night; but I shall go soon, anyhow, no mistake, and I ought to do something to save you, when I brought you to it. So, do you see, Die? here go the drink and me together." And with that he took up the decanters and dashed them, one after the other, on the hearthstone, the wine and brandy running like life-blood in bubbling red streams across the floor. He summoned Miles, and demanded his keys—all the keys of closet and cellar in the house. And when the old man, flustered and scared, did not venture to dispute his will, he caught up the keys, cast them into the white core of the wood-fire, piled the blazing logs upon them, and stamped them down, sending showers flying up the wide chimney.

Then the blaze of passion died away from Gervase's brow, the force of self-devotion ebbed out of him, his unfastened vest and shirt collar did not allow him air enough, and he fell back, gasping and quaking and calling the devils were upon him.

Old Miles wrung his hands, and shouted "Help," and cried the Master was dying, was dead.

But Diana pushed the old servant aside, put her arms round Gervase, and raised him on her breast, telling him, "Do not think of dying for me, Gervase; I am not worthy. You must not die, I will not have you die. Oh, God! spare him till I kneel at his feet and beg him to forgive all my disdainful pity, and we repent together."

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Gervase Norgate did not die that night: it might have been easier for him if he had, for he lay, sat, walked in the sunshine deadly sick for months. When men like him are saved, it is only as by fire, by letting a part of the penal fire pass over them, and enduring, as David did, the pains of hell.

But all the time Die did not leave him. Night and day she stood by him, renouncing her own sin for ever. She shared vicariously its revolting anguish and agonizing fruits, in his pangs. And the woman learned to love the man as she would have learned to love a child whom she had tended every hour for what looked like a lifetime, whom she had brought back from a horrible disease and from the brink of the grave, to whose recovery she had given herself body and soul, in a way she had never dreamt of when she first undertook the task. She had lulled him to sleep as with cradle songs, she had fed him with her hands, ministered to him with her spirit. She learned to love him exceedingly.

Other summer suns shone on Ashpound. Gervase and Diana had come back from a lengthened sojourn abroad. Gervase, going on a visit to his faithful old Aunt Tabby, looked behind him, to say, half-shamefacedly, half-yearningly, "I wish you would come with me, Die; I do not think I can pay the visit without you." And she exclaimed, with a little laugh, beneath which ran an undercurrent of feeling, still and deep, "Ah! you see you cannot do without me, sir." And he rejoined, laughing too, but a little wistfully, "I wish I could flatter myself that you could not do without me, madam."

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She assured him, with a sudden sedateness which hid itself shyly on his breast, "Of course I could not do without you to save me from being a pillar of salt, to make me a loving, happy woman."

"God help you, happy Die!"

"Yes, Gervase; it is those who have been tried that can be trusted, and I have been in the deep pit, and all clogged with the mire along with you, and He who brought us out will not suffer us to fall back and be lost after all."

The neighbours about Ashpound were slow to discover, as erring men and women are always slow to discover, that God is more merciful than they, and that he can bring good out of evil, light out of darkness; but they discovered it at last, and, after a probation, took Mr. and Mrs. Gervase Norgate back into society and its esteem and regard, and the family at Ashpound became eventually as well considered, and as much sought after in friendship and marriage, as any family among the southern moors, long after John Fitzwilliam Baring had dressed for dinner, and taken a fit with a cue in his hand.

As for Aunt Tabby and old Miles, they said, "All's well that ends well." But old Miles stood out stubbornly, "That it is not a many carts afore the horses as comes in at the journey's end, and it ain't dootiful-like in them when they does do it, though I'm content." And Aunt Tabby argued, "It is shockingly against morality to conclude that her fall—and who'd have thought a strong woman like her would fall?—has been for his rising again."

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MISS WEST'S CHRISTMAS ADVENTURE.

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I.

MISS WEST, I will thank you to see that the school-books and the school-work are in their proper places, and the school-room locked for the holidays."

The speaker, Miss Sandys, was the proprietor of Carter Hill School, and Miss West was the governess. The season was Christmas, and the children, without an exception, had departed rejoicing.

With a sense of liberty as keen as the children's, but with a glee of a decidedly soberer kind, Miss West executed the commission, and then took her place beside her superior at the parlour-fire.

Miss Sandys was quite an elderly woman. She was over fifty, and had grown grey in the service. Her features, even in her prime, had been gaunt, like the rest of her person. But she had mellowed with age, and had become what the Germans call *charakteristisch*, and what we may term original and sagacious. She dressed well—that is, soberly and substantially—in soft wools or strong silks, as she possibly did not find it easy to do in her youth. She was stately, if somewhat stiff, in her deportment. At present she felt intoxicated at the prospect of enjoying for ten days the irresponsibility of private life.

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Miss West had not by any means attained the Indian summer of Miss Sandys; she was still in the more trying transition stage. In spite of the shady hollows in the cheeks, and the haggard lines about the mouth, she was a young woman yet. Indeed, had it not been for those hollows and lines, she would have been pretty—as she was when the clear cheeks had no wanness in their paleness, but were round and soft; when the straight mouth pouted ever so little, and the sharp eyes were bright, and the fine dark hair was profuse instead of scanty. But she laid no claim to prettiness now, and dressed as plainly as feminine propriety would allow.

As she sat in the linen and drugget-covered parlour, which was a drawing-room when in full-dress, she could not help a half-conscious restraint creeping over her. But this was not because Miss Sandys was an ogress, rather because she herself had grown semi-professional even in holiday trim. She looked into the compressed fire in the high, old-fashioned grate, and wondered how she would pass the coming idle week. She had spent a good many idle weeks at Carter Hill before; but they always came upon her afresh with a sense of strangeness, bringing at the same time a tide of old associations.

Miss Sandys was a blunt woman by nature, and it was only by great effort that she had become fine-edged. So she said to Miss West, with a sort of naïve abruptness, "I'll tell you what, Miss West, we'll have cake to tea, because there are only you and I, and it is the first night of the holidays; and we'll have a strong cup, since we have all the teapot to ourselves. I think I shall try my hand this week at some of my old tea-cakes and pies and things which my mother taught me to bake. I am going to have my cousin Jamie and his wife here. He is a rough sailor, and his conversation does not suit before the girls. She was only a small farmer's daughter, and cannot behave prettily at all. But they are worthy people, and are the nearest relations I have left in the world. Perhaps I'll take you to see them in the summer, Miss West. Ah, dear! it is liberty-hall at my cousin Jamie's little place. Peggy's Haven, he calls it, after his old ship and his old wife. But it is a fine change for me, though it would not do for the young people to hear about it—you understand, Miss West."

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Miss West understood, and she readily acquiesced in the prospect of meeting Captain and Mrs. Berwick. She was even flattered by it. The right chord of genuine nobility was in her, though she was reported to be satirical. It was true that she was slightly disposed to make abrupt, ironical speeches, the practice being one of her few small privileges. But she felt that Miss Sandys' confidence was honourable alike to giver and receiver, and that the terms on which she lived with her employer did no discredit to either. The fact was that Miss West returned thanks for these same terms in the middle of her confession of errors every day of her life.

Accordingly Miss West drank the strong tea, and did her best to relish the little blocks of cake, though they were slightly stale; and not the less did she enjoy them that she settled in her private mind to propose buttered toast next time, and to prepare it herself. She listened and replied to Miss Sandys' conversation, which did not now run so much on school incidents as on affairs in general. Miss Sandys' talk was shrewd and sensible at all times, and not without interest and amusement, especially when it diverged, at this point and that, to her own experience, and to the customs and opinions of her youth, when faded Miss West was a baby.

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Christmas brought holidays to Miss Sandys' school, but Christmas Eve was, in other respects, very unmarked. It would have been dull, almost grim, to English notions. There was no Christmas tree, no waits, no decorating of the church for the morrow. Still, it was the end of the year—the period, by universal consent, dedicated to goodwill and rejoicing all over the world—the old "daft days" even of sober, austere Scotland. Jenny and Menie, in the kitchen, were looking forward to that Handsel Monday which is the Whit Monday of country servants, and the family gathering of the peasantry in Scotland. First footing and New Year's gifts were lighting up the servant girls' imaginations. The former may be safely looked upon as over with Miss Sandys and Miss West, but they were not without visions of New Year's gifts—the useful, considerate New Year's gifts of mature years. Miss West was at this moment knitting an exquisitely fine, yet warm, veil which she had begun two months ago, and which she had good hopes of completing within the next few days. Miss Sandys had a guess that this veil was for her velvet bonnet, and looked at it admiringly as a grand panacea for her spring face-ache.

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In the course of the evening Miss Sandys, after a fit of absence of mind, suddenly asked Miss West's name.

On the spur of the moment, she answered, with surprise, "Why, Miss West, to be sure. What do you mean, Miss Sandys?" Then she reflected, laughed, and owned that she had almost forgotten that she had a Christian name. But she had certainly got one, and it was Magdalene, or Madge, or Maddie; once it was Mad; and as she said Mad she laughed a second time, to conceal a break in her voice.

Miss Sandys smiled awkwardly and guiltily, and observed quickly, "My Christian name is Christian. Did you know that, Miss West? Oh, I forgot; you must have seen it marked on the table and bed linen."

"Mine is to be read on my pocket-handkerchiefs. Our Christian names preserved on table-cloths and pocket-handkerchiefs!—droll, isn't it, Miss Sandys?"

"Of course they are in our books and letters," corrected matter-of-fact Miss Sandys. "I dare say they are in a couple of family Bibles, too (at least, I can speak for one), and in the records of births and baptisms in session books, if these are not destroyed by damp and rats; and since names are recorded in heaven," Miss Sandys was drawn on to ramble, "surely our Christian names are there, my dear."

Miss West knew as well as if she had been told it, that Miss Sandys was about to bestow on her a present with which her Christian name was to be connected. Miss Sandys' eyes had failed through long looking over lessons, and she no longer did any handiwork, save coarse knitting, hemming, and darning. But she had a fuller purse than her companion, and shops, even metropolitan shops, were to be reached by letter from Carter Hill.

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In addition to the strong tea and the cake, Miss Sandys further treated Miss West to a supper of such dainties as toasted cheese and Edinburgh ale. There were prayers—they seemed quite family prayers—with only the four worshippers to join in them. Then there was a shake of the hands, and Miss West lit her candle, retired, and shut herself up in her own little room. Its daily aspect was so unchanged, that it appeared when she entered it as though the holidays had not come, and that it must still be the ordinary bustling school life.

She sat down, though there was no fire, and thought a little, till she fell on her knees and prayed in low murmurs that God would enable her to bear this season, which made her heavy, sick, and faint with associations, and that He would render her contented with many undeserved blessings, and resigned to many natural penalties which He ordained. Next, with strange inconsistency to all but the Hearer of prayer and the Framer of the wayward human heart, she besought to be forgiven and delivered from levity and folly—to be kept humble and mindful of death. "It is ill tearing up weeds by the roots," she said to herself plainly, when she had risen from her knees, "and I am vain and volatile, and I like to mystify and tease my neighbour to this day."

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II.

Christmas Day rose with a clear, frosty blue sky. Miss Sandys and Miss West both felt the unwonted stillness of the house; and they could not help a lurking suspicion that time without public occupation might hang a dead weight on their hands. The two ladies went through the ceremony of wishing each other a merry Christmas, Scotland though it was. Miss Sandys went off to put into execution her holiday cooking practice—for it was refreshing to her to have a bowl instead of a book in her grasp—and to make her preparations for welcoming her primitive cousins. Miss West sat down to write her letters and to work at her veil and at her other New Year's gifts.

She wished she could work with her mind as well as her fingers, so that it might not run on

picturing what this day was in tens of thousands of homes throughout Christendom. It had always been an unruly member this fancy of hers, and it was particularly busy at this season. Yesterday the roads had resounded with the blithe tramp of eager feet hieing homewards. To-day the air was ringing with the pleasant echo of voices round hearths, the fires of which flashed like the sun, and where age and youth met in the perfect confidence and sweet fearlessness of family affection. In her mind's eye, she had yesterday seen railways and coaches disgorging their cheerful loads; she had witnessed the meetings at lodge gates, in halls, and on the thresholds of parlour and cottage kitchens; she had looked on the bountiful boards, where cherished guests crowned the festival, of which Miss Sandys' rasping tea and stale cake was a half-pathetic, half-comic version. To-day she was in spirit with the multitude walking in close groups to holly-wreathed churches, sharing in the light-hearted thoughtlessness of many an acknowledgment, and in the deep gratitude of many a thanksgiving. She strove to put herself aside altogether in her meditations, and simply to rejoice with those who rejoiced; but she had not attained this degree of unselfishness; she could not help believing sometimes that she had plucked all the thorns and none of the roses of life. But if you suppose that she betrayed this yearning and pining to the world at large, you are very much mistaken. As has been told, she had the right chord of genuine nobility and generosity in her, and she laboured to fit her cross to her own back, so that it might not overshadow and crush others. Her fingers went nimbly about her gifts—trifling things, only enough to gladden simple hearts. She gratified Miss Sandys by praising her rusty accomplishments in cookery; she uttered a jest or two for the benefit of Jenny and Menie, who had a liking for her, though they called her "scornful;" and she brought in holly and box from the garden to decorate the sitting-rooms. The last move, however, proved nearly a failure, for there was one little pink and white blossom of laurustinus, which had ventured out in a sheltered nook, though half of its leaves were blanched ashen grey. It somehow or other raised such a tide of sentiment in her as all but overcame her.

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Miss West desired work for this season, and she got work, and tolerably hard work too, for besides completing her New Year's gifts, she had to help to entertain Captain and Mrs. Berwick.

The visitors were so vulgar, according to fine people, that they were not even sensible of their own vulgarity. And so good-natured were they, that they were not offended because cousin Sandys did not invite them with any of the genteel parents of her pupils. They took this reserved hospitality as a complimentary admission of their kinsmanship. But they were not intrinsically more coarse-minded than many dukes and duchesses. Captain Berwick, it is true, was nautical in his tone, and talked shop, but that is permitted to sea captains in novels, nay, enjoined upon them. He was apt to be broad in his jokes, and to use unwarrantable expressions, for which he bent his shock head in penitent apology the moment after he had used them. "It is the effect of bad habits, Kirsten and Peggy," he would cry: "you women know nothing of bad habits any more than of bad words."

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Mrs. Berwick was a particularly round-eyed woman, and was plump and ruddy where the Captain was battered and weather-beaten. She placed the scene of most of her narratives in the kitchens of her acquaintances, and scrambled with her *dramatis personæ* through the strong situations of a servant's history.

Nevertheless the manner of the Berwicks was not without the refreshing influence of common, rude fresh air. They were not exceptionally coarse-minded, but unluckily they were neither strong nor fine minded. They were ponderous, clumsy beings, and although genuine and warm-hearted, were destitute of internal resources. They expected to be constantly eating and drinking, or to be constantly entertained. If they were not entertained, they showed their weariness without restraint, by yawning outrageously. The entertaining of Captain and Mrs. Berwick was therefore no sinecure. But Miss West was loyal. She walked with the Captain, so that he might have more than his one smoke a day, and perseveringly copied and sang Braham's songs for him. She designed and cut out patterns for Mrs. Berwick, who, as the Captain had saved money, did not make her own dresses, but nevertheless loved to accumulate patterns of sleeves, capes, and flounces. She listened to her tales, and helped her to as much more kitchiana as she could produce on short notice. She told how Betsy had worn feathers and been taken to prison on suspicion of theft; and how Marianne her sister had hoarded her wages in order to secure legal advice for Betsy, and had captivated and married an officer of the court in which Betsy had been tried, and how it had all happened in a family where Miss West had lived.

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III.

Captain and Mrs. Berwick were gone. The holidays at Carter Hill were all but ended—"all but ended," Miss Sandys repeated with a little sigh of relief, and an inclination to moralize on that weariness which is the result of pleasure. When Miss West came down in the morning the kettle was steaming on the hob, the teapot under its cosie, and the couple of rolls and the dish of sausages were set in their places. Miss Sandys—her working apron lying ready to take up on the side-table behind her—was bent to the last on buns and pork pies, though she frankly admitted they were vanity. But the girls must be broken from their home dainties by degrees, and Jenny and Menie must have "cakes" to carry to their homes on their Handsel Monday.

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Miss West found a letter on her plate. It caused her complexion to change, and her sharp eyes to fasten on it fixedly. No wonder her head swam and her ears rang. She was going through the uncomfortable process of turning back some ten or twelve years in her life. It was a strange letter to come to her—a large letter, which had been charged double postage; a letter with the

elements of mortification in it, as well as other elements, both to sender and receiver. It was written in a big, scampering hand.

"Dear Mad," it began, "it is so queer to be addressing you again. I remember when I used to say 'Mad' to a white-faced, dark-eyed girl. Was she pretty, I wonder? Some people said so, but I don't know, only I have never seen a face quite equal to hers since—never. Mad and I were great friends when I used to visit her elder brother; great friends, indeed, in a bantering, biting way. But it was Mad who bantered and bit; certainly I did not banter and bite again, rarely even so much as gave a gentle pinch, for I would not have hurt Mad for the world, and Mad did not hurt me. At least she never meant it seriously, and she was always so piteously penitent when she thought she had wounded my feelings. Oh, dear, quizzing Mad! she had such a soft heart in its bristling shell, and I hurt it. I hurt Mad—yes, I know; I know to my sorrow and shame.

"Mad, do you remember how you went every day to meet a timid little brother coming from school along a lonely moorland road, where there were broomy braes in June and heathery braes in September? What a convenient custom it was for me, since the little brother, unlike little monsters of the same kind, had neither eyes nor ears but for his own avocations, and trotted on obediently in front of us. The sight of my own little Bill's satchel gives me a turn, and makes me feel spongy to this day. Do you remember your great dog, Mad? (what a child you were for pets!)—and who it was used to go to the kennel to feed it with you? If that dog had been a true Bevis, it would have torn that hulking fellow where he stood, yet he meant no harm; nay, he had a strong persuasion that he was doing something meritorious (how he hit it I can't tell) in not committing himself and binding you when he had no more than a clerk's paltry income. But I have heard that trees, stripped of leaves in flowery May, revenge themselves by bursting out green, if the frosts will let them, in foggy November. So the prudence of twenty-five may be the folly of thirty-five. It was rank mean-spiritedness in me not to go through thick and thin, through flood and fire, for Mad. What in the world was worth striving for if she was not worth it? Ah, I lost my chance when I might have taken it, and trusted the rest to Providence! But I did not know, though I fancied I did, the value of the jewel, the price of which, in stern self-restraint, I refused to pay. I might have been another man if I had not been so prudent, for, as I have said, not another face has been to me quite (no, not by a long chalk) what Mad's once was. It was only yesterday that I heard by chance—and the story has haunted me since—that Mad is still a single woman, her family all dispersed, and she a teacher in a school—my quizzing, affectionate Mad a drudging, lonely teacher!

"After being so prudent, it is not wonderful to record that I was fickle, though circumstances, and not my will, separated Mad and me at first. I could not get down to the old place so regularly as I was wont to do, which annoyed me, and I did my best to get rid of the obstacles. When I did get down, Mad was not at home, and I had no right to follow her. We met seldomer; we grew stiffer and stranger to each other. You are acquainted with the process, Miss West, though perhaps not fully with my share in it. The impression which Mad had made on me, unique as it was, faded and was overlaid by others. I met another girl, whom I liked too, and whom it appeared so much simpler—more expedient and advantageous—for me to love and to marry. I married her, breaking no vows, not writing myself faithless, far less treacherous, but only fickle. Yet I had once known, if ever man knew, that I had made Mad's strong heart—I think it was strong, although it was soft to me—beat in tune with mine. I had done all I could, short of saying the words, to impress Mad with what were my wishes and intentions, I had preferred her in every company, followed her when I was down at the old place, like her shadow (her shadow, indeed!). I had elected her my confidante and adviser, and poured all my precious opinions and plans—my very scrapes—into her curious, patient ears. Mad, have you forgotten how once, like an old-fashioned, grandiloquent muff, I showed you the picture of a perfect woman in a book of poetry—'Paradise Lost' it might have been, and 'Eve' for any special appropriateness in the picture—and broadly hinted my private idea that the perfect woman was fulfilled in Mad!—lively, faulty Mad! Your sisters were very anxious to read the passage which I had selected for your study, and from which I was evidently pointing a moral; but you closed the book abruptly in the old seat behind the round tea-table with the brass rim. I suppose the sisters don't know the passage to this day?

"Having been fickle, I was a great deal better off in my wife than I deserved. Remember, Mad, my wife and the mother of my children was a good woman; I was reasonably happy with her, and I trust I bore her tender reverence. She died and left me with our children two winters ago. When we meet again, it will be where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage. Now, when I can do her no wrong, I think of another to whom I did wrong; than whom there was never another to me the same—no, nothing like it. Learning that Mad has been true—oh! Mad, *you* could never have been anything else but true—I have wondered whether I might not be allowed to do something to atone, whether I was not worth having still, and whether I could not—a bold phrase, but it will out—make it up to Mad, a solitary single woman, a teacher in a school. Oh! Mad, I say again, what a hard fate for you! "I cannot offer an immense inducement. I am not a merchant prince, though I am richer than I was in the old days; yet somehow I do not care to boast of my riches to Mad, and I am a widower with two small children—not models. I dare not send you my *carte*, and I don't want yours. You are always the same Mad to me that you have been

through all those years, and will be to the end of the chapter, whether you answer me yes or no. You will answer yes. You were always great for magnanimity, and flamed up on it, dark eyes, white cheeks, and all, when you were a wild lassie. Don't tell me you are less magnanimous as a brave, hard-working woman, or you will sap my faith in womankind.

"Mad, how this Christmas season stirs me with the far-off murmurs of another Christmas, when you and I pulled the holly and the other thing—the thing with the tiny, fair, frost-bitten clusters of blossom—some sort of laurel wasn't it? That old Christmas, who can describe? What glamour over the prosaic family dinner and carpet dance to see the old year out and the new year in? Say the word, Mad, and before the first full moon of this new year has waned to half a cheese she will shine down upon us, anew, with the old shining. I swear it on the part of your old friend,

BILL NAIRNE

What Miss West said when she read the letter was, "Make it up, indeed! Redeem me from such degradation! Crown me with such honour! Intolerable arrogance! How could he take it upon him? But it is like Bill; conceited fellow!"

Miss West was properly indignant. The letter was so unsuitable in every respect. All her life she had been famous as a woman of spirit—the spirit which will cause a woman to decline an obligation as long as independence is possible, and which will not have for pity what it cannot have for love. She would prove to Bill Nairne that it was no such hard fate as he supposed to teach a school under Miss Sandys, no such promotion, as he fondly imagined, to be placed at the head of the household of a pompous widower with a pair of spoilt children. She would convince him that a woman of her age is more difficult to please than a girl, and is not to be led off her feet by a few impertinently recalled reminiscences, nor to be won by the tardy wag of a finger. She would teach Bill Nairne a lesson undreamt of in his philosophy—that all the nonsense about old maids, their humiliations, their forlorn condition, and their desperate welcoming of late offers was wholly false.

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She selected the smallest sheet of note-paper from the packet lying beside the exercises in her desk, and wrote:—

"Dear Sir,—I am glad to be able to tell you that, on the whole, teaching in a school is not so hard a fate as you think. Miss Sandys is an excellent woman, a reliable friend, and an agreeable companion. The girls and their antecedents exhibit life to me under considerable variety of characters and circumstances, and as pupils they are mostly affectionate as well as interesting. I must remain indebted for your good opinion, and you have my best wishes for your future welfare, but I beg to decline your—gratuitous" (Miss West had written the word, but she changed it into—not gracious, but) "generous offer. Without offence to you, old times do not come again.

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"Believe me, yours very sincerely, M. WEST."

Miss West read her letter, and considered it was, perhaps, too brief. She did not want to part with him in an unfriendly fashion. Her last words to Bill Nairne must be such as she herself could think of without pain. So she rummaged among her Christmas gifts, and found a dancing Dervish and a brightly-embroidered ball. These she wrapped up with the letter, and made a small parcel of the whole, after she had added this postscript: "Please give the enclosed toys as cheap New Year's playthings to the children. Tell them, if you choose, that they come from an old friend of papa's, whose name was—Mad."

IV.

Miss West took the letter to the post-office herself after dinner, as she was going to inquire for a pupil who lived near Carter Hill, and who was sick—unhappy child!—from holiday junketing. Miss West could not recover her equanimity till that letter was out of the house. It had shaken her, satirical and discreet though she was. It had also given her a guilty sensation towards Miss Sandys. She could not endure that even the servants should read the address:—"W. Nairne, Esq., Waterloo Lodge, Bridgeton, Strokeshire," though W. Nairne, Esq., might have stood for her brother-in-law, her uncle by marriage, or her maternal grandfather for aught they could tell. She held her hand over the superscription as if to hide it from herself as she walked along under the newly-risen moon, as it cast its light on a crisp sprinkling of snow. It was true Christmas weather at last, and this was something like a Christmas adventure for her. But not the less did she wish the Christmas ended, and the moon replaced by gas jets of the smallest size. "A pretty story for the girls if they should get hold of it," she thought, and shuddered. She did not recover altogether till she had posted her packet, and walked half a mile further on. At length she passed through a creaking gate and a shrubbery, and was shown up to a smart drawing-room. She was there to ask for the health of Miss Victoria Middlemass, the daughter of a gentleman who led a country gentleman's life on the proceeds of a sleeping partnership in a mercantile house in a large town at some distance.

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Mrs. Middlemass came in hurriedly. She had only time to wish Miss West a merry Christmas and a good New Year, and to announce that Vicky was quite herself again, except that the bun fever had left her rather pale, and she had not got back all her appetite. She could not, however, make the same complaint of Mr. Middlemass, who had just come in ravenously hungry from the train. He had been accompanied by another gentleman, who had been introduced to him before he left the north, and whom Mr. Middlemass would not allow to go over to the inn at Stoneham, where he was to spend a few days with a friend. Mr. Middlemass and his new acquaintance were still at dinner.

Miss West was hurrying away after having discharged her commission, in order not to detain Mrs. Middlemass from her husband and his guest, and not to impose on master or servant the trouble of seeing her home. [Page 355]

But as they were exchanging smothered good-byes near the open dining-room door, Mr. Middlemass, who was frank and hospitable, broke through the clatter of knives and forks, and called out unceremoniously, "My dear, who is that you are taking leave of?"

"It is only Miss West, my dear," his wife replied softly to quiet him.

"Miss West!" and he banged from his seat and bounced to the door. "Miss West! the very woman in the nick of time. Stay, Miss West, and thank your stars; here's an old friend come a long way to see you."

Miss West turned, and there, behind the cordial face of the master of the house, who suspected nothing, and was only happy to be helpful to a brother merchant, were the perfectly recognizable lineaments of that old personable fellow, Bill Nairne.

Miss West for a second fancied that the letter she had posted to him ten minutes before had sped like a telegram to its destination, and that he had sped back on the telegraphic wires to remonstrate with her and expose her. The next instant she was sensible that the accident of his being there in person must be a result of a previous change of mind on his part.

Bill Nairne had stared, and stammered in mechanical accents, after Mr. Middlemass supplied him with the keynote, "Miss West, the very person, let us thank our stars!" But he soon recovered himself, and then shook her hand warmly, and declared, in his old, off-hand manner, "I shall see you home, Miss West;" for Miss West had no sooner recovered her breath and her small share of colour, than she combated Mr. Middlemass's pressing invitation to remain and spend the evening with them. No; Miss Sandys was expecting her; she thanked him and Mrs. Middlemass, but she could not stay on any account, so that there would be no use in sending over a message or a note to Carter Hill. Neither was it on Miss West's cards that Bill Nairne should escort her to Carter Hill, or, indeed, that she should have any escort at all. "Do not think of such a thing; I could not allow it." Mrs. Middlemass came to Miss West's aid, and alleged in her ignorance, "There is no occasion for it, Mr. Nairne; it is only a step to Carter Hill, and Miss West is accustomed to walk across after dinner, when Miss Sandys has a message for us. Remember, we are very quiet people here compared to what you are in the north. Besides, if Miss West is timid, I can manage to send a servant, or," she went on with greater hesitation, "Mr. Middlemass will be delighted to go, he knows the way; but you must not put yourself about on any consideration." [Page 356]

Miss West rather indignantly denied being timid, timidity being out of her *rôle*, and then she judged prematurely that the matter was settled. She had got so accustomed to order about girls that she had fallen into the bad habit of expecting that her will should be law to all the world, with the exception of Miss Sandys. As for Mr. and Mrs. Middlemass, they at least knew that she could take care of herself.

It was another shock to Miss West, another tumultuous, inopportune return to the experience of half a score years back, to find that she could no more dictate to Bill Nairne on this small matter than she could have done it as Mad of the old days. [Page 357]

"Say no more about it, Miss West. I'll go home with you, of course." Bill thus put her down with an intrepidity, if anything, increased with his increased weight physically and commercially.

This completely confounded Miss West, and made a greater muddle of her former and her present identities than had yet been effected.

"I'll see Miss West home, and we'll have a talk together of our old friendship as we walk along," Bill maintained with the confident coolness of power, towards the self-contained, self-sustained teacher.

It was something unprecedented for Miss West to be walking to Carter Hill on a man's arm, an old friend's arm. She felt an odd sensation stealing over her as if she were no longer able to take care of herself, as if she were no longer herself, her late self, at all; and the moon helped the illusion.

Silence descended on Miss West and Bill Nairne, after the first forced commonplaces. He glanced furtively at her, and lost his confidence and coolness, and hung his head—the respectable prosperous merchant!—but not at what *he* saw. What did she see? Nothing but that the sword had worn the scabbard. Mad had been true to herself. Mad could not have been otherwise than true, as he had written. But the consciousness of what Mad would see when she lifted up her eyes and looked him in the face made him droop his head. He had got a glimpse of it that morning, when, as the thought of Mad grew more and more vivid in his mind, he saw something [Page 358]

reflected in the glass which did not necessarily belong to bodily maturity. The conviction returned to him with fresh, poignant regret, in the peaceful hush and subdued splendour of the winter night. There were lines in his face which Mad should never have seen there, without which he would have been nearer heaven. There were hard, unbelieving lines, supercilious lines, self-indulgent lines, lines of the earth, earthy, corresponding to hard and gross lines in the spirit within. The respectable, prosperous merchant, had fallen from his original level. He had not attained to the chivalrous, Christian manhood which he had the prospect of when he was Mad's promising lover. He had lowered his standard, forsaken his principles, lost his faith a few times since then. The gulf between Mad and him was wider now. He felt this walking on the moonlight December night by Mad's side again.

It was in a somewhat different tone from that of his letter that Bill Nairne said at last, "Mad, will you have the worst of me? Will you do something for me and mine after all? I might have been another man if I had got you long ago, Mad."

"Would you have been a better and a happier man, Bill? Could I do anything for you yet? Answer me truly," she said, hurriedly heaping the self-forgetful, quivering sentences one upon another.

"Anything!" exclaimed big Bill Nairne with intense conviction and hyperbole, more excusable than his old prudence and fickleness, "Anything! Mad, you could do everything with me, and with little Bill and Bob. We should no longer be egotistical and frivolous, with you to keep us right, you good, single-hearted Mad."

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Miss Sandys was entitled to say, "You have come out this Christmas, Miss West. I shan't allow my assistant to be taken off her satirical staid feet another Christmas. I'll lock the next one up for the holidays. It is all those holidays; you would never have thought of such foolish things had you been busy teaching. I'll lock the next one up, or I'll send her to her friends, who will live, I trust, in some peaceful valley, where there are no old acquaintances, or for that matter, men of any kind. I shall, indeed, Miss West, for I hate changes." Miss Sandys had not to dread changes much longer. A sister of Miss West came and supplied her place, and lived so long with Miss Sandys that she closed her superior's eyes like a dutiful daughter, and succeeded to the goodwill of Carter Hill School.

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Transcriber's Notes

- Page 21—"everyday" changed to "every-day"
- Page 30—"common-place" changed to "commonplace"
- Page 45—"lifelong" changed to "life-long"
- Page 62—duplicate "it" removed
- Page 77—"face was white" changed to "face was as white"
- Page 81—"confided in her; the" changed to "confided in her; she"
- Page 85—"Fox-holes" changed to Foxholes
- Page 110—"she "bridled" well," changed to "she "bridled" well."
- Page 112—"company travelled," changed to "company travelled."
- Page 152—"It had been a sen" changed to "It had been a sent"
- Page 186—"sea-weed" changed to "seaweed"
- Page 186—"careworn" changed to "care-worn"
- Page 201—"praise God and he" changed to "praise God and be"
- Page 215—"canary bird," changed to "canary bird."
- Page 222—"selfishnesss" changed to "selfishness"
- Page 241—"suspense?" changed to "suspense!"
- Page 247—"powr" changed to "power"
- Page 248—"their mother," changed to "their mother."
- Page 255—"to the pathos" changed to "to the pathos of"
- Page 293—"circnmstances" changed to "circumstances"
- Page 297—"small-pox" changed to "smallpox"
- Page 307—"horseflesh" changed to "horse-flesh"
- Page 342—duplicate "a" removed
- Page 344—"New-Year's" changed to "New Year's"
- Page 348—"themsevles" changed to "themselves"

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