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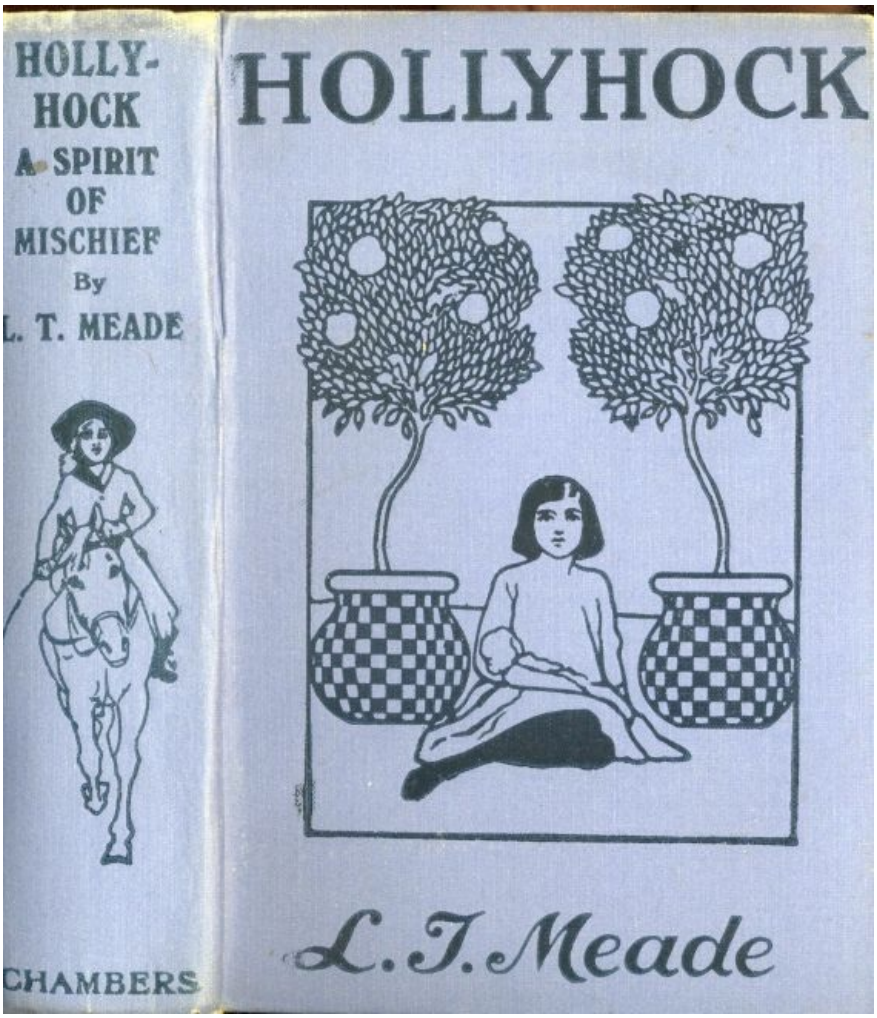

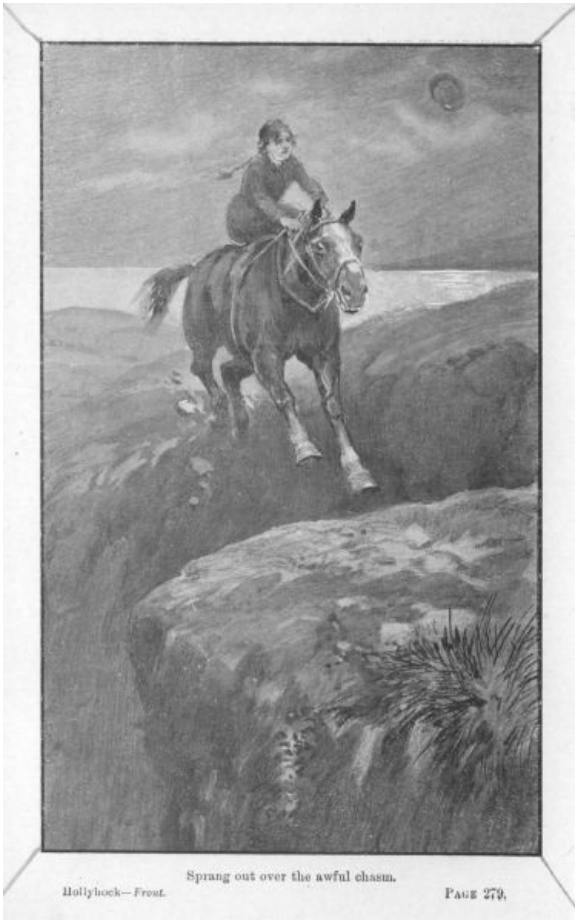

Sprang out over the awful chasm.

HOLLYHOCK

A SPIRIT OF MISCHIEF

BY

L. T. MEADE

AUTHOR OF 'BEVY OF GIRLS,' 'REBEL OF THE SCHOOL,' ETC.

ILLUSTRATED
by
W. Rainey

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CHAPTER I.

THE CHILDREN OF THE UPPER GLEN.

There was, of course, the Lower Glen, which consisted of boggy places and endless mists in winter, and a small uninteresting village, where the barest necessaries of life could be bought, and where the folks were all of the humbler class, well-meaning, hard-working, but, alas! poor of the poor. When all was said and done, the Lower Glen was a poor place, meant for poor people.

Very different was the Upper Glen. It was beyond doubt a most beautiful region, and as Edinburgh and Glasgow were only some fifty miles away, in these days of motor-cars it was easy to drive there for the good things of life. The Glen was sheltered from the worst storms by vast mountains, and was in itself both broad and flat, with a great inrush of fresh air, a mighty river, and three lakes of various sizes. So beautiful was it, so delightful were its soft and yet at times keen breezes, that it might have been called 'The Home of Health.' But no one thought of giving the Glen this title, for the simple reason that no one thought of health in the Glen; every one was enjoying that blessed privilege to the utmost.

At the time when this story opens, two families lived in the Upper Glen. There was a widowed lady, Mrs Constable, who resided at a lovely home called The Paddock; and there was her brother, a widower, who lived in a house equally beautiful, named The Garden.

The Hon. George Lennox had five young daughters, whom he called not by their baptismal names, but by flower names. Mrs Constable, again, called her five boys after precious stones.

The names of the girls were Jasmine, otherwise Lucy; Gentian, otherwise Margaret; Hollyhock, whose baptismal name was Jacqueline; Rose of the Garden, who was really Rose; and Delphinium, whose real name was Dorothy.

The boys, sons of gentle Mrs Constable, were Jasper, otherwise John; Sapphire, whose real name was Robert; Garnet, baptised Wallace; Opal, whose name was Andrew; and Emerald, christened Ronald.

These happy children scarcely ever heard their baptismal names. The flower names and the precious stones names clung to them until the day when pretty Jasmine and manly Jasper were fifteen years of age. On that day there came a very great change in the lives of the Flower Girls and the Precious Stones. On that very day their real story began. They little guessed it, for few of us do believe in sudden changes in a very peaceful—perhaps too peaceful—life.

Nevertheless, a very great change was at hand, and the news which heralded that tremendous change reached them on the evening of the birthday of Jasmine and Jasper. It was the custom of these two most united families to spend their evenings together—one evening at The Garden, the Flower Girls' home, and the next at The Paddock, Mrs Constable's house. On this special occasion the Flower Girls went with their father to The Paddock, and thus avoided receiving until late in the evening the all-important letter which was to alter their lives completely.

George Lennox, whose dead wife had been a Cameron—a near relative of the head of the great house of Ardshiel—bade his sister a most affectionate good-night, and returned to The Garden with his five bonnie lassies. They had passed a delightful evening together, and on account of the double birthday Lennox and Mrs Constable had made up a most charming little play, in which the Flower Girls and the Precious Stones took part. Ever true and kind of heart, they had invited from the Glen a number of children, and also their parents, to witness the performance. The play had given untold delight, and the guests from the Lower Glen finished the evening's entertainment with a splendid supper, ending with the well-known and beloved song of 'Auld Lang Syne.'

Mr Lennox and Mrs Constable taught their girls and boys without any aid from outside. All ten children were smart; indeed, it would be difficult to find better-educated young people for their ages. But Mrs Constable knew only too well that whatever the future held in store for her brother's Flower Girls, she must very soon part, one by one, with her splendid boys; for was not this the express wish of her beloved soldier-husband, Major Constable, who had died on the field of battle in Africa, and who had put away a certain sum of money which was to be spent, when the time came, on the children's education? He himself was an old Eton boy, and he wanted his young sons to go to that famous school if at all possible. But before any of the Precious Stones could enter Eton, he must pass at least a year at a preparatory school, and it was the thought of this coming separation that made the sweet gray eyes of the widow fill often with sudden tears. To part with any of her treasures was torture to her. However, we none of us know what lies in store for us, and nothing was farther from the hearts of the children and their parents than the thought of change on this glorious night of mid-June.

The moment Mr Lennox and his five girls entered the great hall, which was so marked a feature of the beautiful Garden, they saw a letter, addressed to The Hon. George Lennox, lying on a table not far from the ingle-nook. Mr Lennox's first impulse was to put the letter aside, but all the little girls clustered round him and begged of him to open it at once. They all gathered round him as they spoke, and being exceeding fond of his daughters, he could not resist their appeal.

After all, the unexpected letter might mean less than nothing. In any case, it must be read sometime.

'Oh, Daddy Dumps, do—*do* read the letter!' cried Hollyhock, the handsomest and most daring of the girls. 'We 're just mad to hear what the braw laddie says. Open the letter, daddy mine, and set our minds at rest.'

'The letter may not be written by any laddie, Hollyhock,' said her father in his gentle, exceedingly dignified way.

'If it's from a woman, we'd best burn it,' said Hollyhock, who had a holy contempt for members of her own sex.

'Oh! but fie, prickly Holly,' said her father. 'You know that I allow no lady to be spoken against in my house.'

'Well, read the letter, daddy—read it!' exclaimed Jasmine. 'We want, anyhow, to know what it contains.'

'I seem to recall the writing,' said Lennox, as he seated himself in an easy-chair. 'You *will* have it, my dears,' he continued; 'but you may not like it after I have read it. However, here goes!'

The children gathered round their father, who slowly and carefully unfolded the sheet of paper and read as follows:

'MY DEAR GEORGE,—It is my intention to arrive at the Garden to-morrow, and I hope, as your dear wife's half-sister, to get a hearty welcome. I have a great scheme in my head, which I am certain you will approve of, and which will be exceedingly good for your funny little daughters'——

'I do not like that,' interrupted Hollyhock. 'I am not a funny little daughter.'

'Dearest,' said her father, kissing her between her black brows, 'we must forgive Aunt Agnes. She doesn't know us, you see.'

'No; and we don't want to know her,' said Jasmine. 'We are very happy as we are. We are desperately happy; aren't we, Rose; aren't we, Delphy?'

'Yes, of course, of course,' echoed their father; 'but all the same, children, your aunt must come. She is, remember, your dear mother's sister.'

'Did you ever meet her, daddy?' asked Jasmine.

'Yes, years ago, when Delphy was a baby.'

'What was she like, daddy?'

'She wasn't like any of you, my precious Flowers.'

The five little girls gave a profound sigh.

'Will she stay long, daddy?' asked Gentian.

'I sincerely trust not,' said the Honourable George Lennox.

'Then *that's* all right. We don't mind *very* much now,' said Hollyhock; and she began to dance wildly about the room.

'You will have to behave, Hollyhock,' said her father with a smile.

Hollyhock drew herself up to her full height; her black eyes gleamed and glowed; her lips parted in a funny, yet naughty, smile. Her hair seemed so full of electricity that it stood out in wonderful rays all over her head.

'And why should I behave well *now*, daddy mine?' she asked.

'Oh, because of Aunt Agnes.'

'Catch me,' said Hollyhock.—'Who is with me in this matter, girls? Are you, Delphy? Are you, Jasmine? Are you, Gentian? Are you, Rose of the Garden?'

'We 're every one of us with you,' exclaimed Jasmine, snuggling up to her father as she spoke. 'Daddy,' she continued, 'I want to ask you a question. Even if it hurts you, I must ask it. Was our own, *ownest* mother the least like Aunt Agnes?'

'As the east is from the west, so were those two sisters apart,' he said.

'Then *that's* all right,' said Hollyhock. 'I'm happy now. I couldn't have endured being rude to a woman who was like my mother, but as it is'——

'You mustn't be rude to her, Hollyhock.'

'We 'll see,' said Hollyhock. 'Leave her to me. I think I'll manage her. Perhaps she's a good old sort—there's no saying. But she and her *scheme*—daring to come and disturb us and *our* scheme! I like that—I really do. Good-night, dad; I'm off to bed. I 've had a very happy day, and I suppose happy days end. Anyway, old darling, we'll always have you on our side, sha'n't we?'

'That you will, my darlings,' said Lennox.

'What fun it will be to talk to the Precious Stones about Aunt Agnes!' said Hollyhock. 'Flowers are soft things; at least *some* flowers are. But stones! they can *strike*—and ours are so big and so strong.'

'Whatever happens, girls,' said their father, 'we must be polite to your step-aunt, Agnes Delacour.'

'Oh, she's only a "step," poor thing,' said Hollyhock. 'No wonder they were as the east is from the west. Now good-night, daddy. Don't fret. I wish with all my heart we could go back to the Precious Stones to-night and prepare them for battle. They ought to be prepared, oughtn't they?'

'Well, you can't go to see them to-night, Hollyhock; and to-morrow, early, we shall be very busy getting the room ready for Aunt Agnes, for she *is* my half-sister-in-law, and she did her best to bring up your dearest mother. But I may as well say a few words to you, dear girls, before we part for the night.'

'What is that, dad?' asked Gentian.

'I wonder whether you remember what your real names are.'

'The names that were given us at the font?' said Jasmine.

'Yes; your baptismal names—your real names.'

'I 'll say them off fast enough,' said Jasmine. 'There's Jasmine, that's me; there 's Gentian, meaning the little gray-eyed girl in the corner; there's Rose, who always will be and can be nothing but Rose; there's Hollyhock; there's Delphinium. Delphinium is hard to say, but Delphy is quite easy.'

'And I suppose you think,' said their father in his half-humorous, half-serious voice, 'that you were really baptised by those names?'

'Why, of course, Dumpy Dad!' cried Hollyhock.

'Well, I must undeceive you, my dear Flower Girls. Your mother and I took a notion to have you baptised by certain names and called by others. Jasmine is really Lucy; Gentian is Margaret; Hollyhock, your real name is Jacqueline; Rose of the Garden is, however, *really* Rose; and Delphinium was baptised Dorothy.'

'Well, that is wonderful!' exclaimed Hollyhock. 'I must write down the names before they escape my memory. Give me a bit of paper and a pencil, Daddy Dumps, that I may write down at once our true church names.'

'Here you are, Hollyhock,' said Lennox; 'and do not forget that in the eyes of your step-aunt you are five little girls, not flowers.'

'In the eyes of the old horror,' whispered Hollyhock, who felt much excited at the change in the names.

'I wonder now,' said Gentian when Hollyhock's task was finished, and she passed her scribble to her father to see—'I wonder whether there is a similar mistake in the names of our cousins—or *brothers*, as they really are to us.'

'Yes, they are like brothers to you, my dears; and your aunt Cecilia was so taken by the notion of the flower names for you that she must needs copy my wife and me, and so it happens that Jasper is really John, Sapphire is Robert, Garnet is Wallace, called after his gallant father, Major Constable'——

'"Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled,"' sang Hollyhock in her rich, clear voice. 'Aweel, I love him better than ever, the bonnie lad with his black eyes.'

'Children,' said Lennox, 'it is high time for you all to go to bed. We must get through the boys' names as fast as possible. Opal's real name is Andrew.'

'Poor lad,' continued Hollyhock, 'fit servant to Wallace.'

'And,' added Mr Lennox, 'Emerald's baptismal name is Ronald. That is all—five Flower Girls, five Precious Stones, first cousins and the best of friends, even as sisters and brothers. But my Flower Girls must be off to bed without a single moment's further delay. Good-night.'

'"Scots wha hae,"' sang Hollyhock, as she danced lightly up the stairs of the big house. 'I guess, Flowers, that we are about to have a right *grand* time.'

'Never mind that now,' said Jasmine. 'Whatever happens, the Precious Stones will help us.'

'That's true,' cried Hollyhock. 'Talk to me of fear! I fear nought, nor nobody. The lads, I'm thinking, will be coming to *me* to help them, if there's fear walking around.'

She looked so bold and bright and daring as she spoke that the other Flower Girls believed her at that moment.

CHAPTER II.

AUNT AGNES DELACOUR

Miss Delacour was an elderly woman with somewhat coarse gray hair. She was not old, but elderly. She had a very broad figure, plump and well-proportioned. Miss Delacour thought little about so trivial a thing as fashion, or mere dress in any shape or form. She was fond of saying that she was as the Almighty made her, and that clothes were nothing but a snare of the flesh.

Agnes Delacour was exceedingly well off, but she lived in a very small house in Chelsea, and gave of her abundance to those whom she called 'the Lord's poor.' Her charities were many and wide-spread, and on that account she was highly esteemed by numbers of people, either very poor or struggling, in that upper class which needs help so much, and gets it so little. To these people Agnes Delacour gave freely, saving many young people from utter ruin by her timely aid, and drawing down on her devoted head the blessings of their fathers and mothers, who spoke of her as one of the Lord's saints. Nevertheless those who knew Miss Delacour really well did *not* love her. She was too cold, too masterful, for their taste, and these folks would rather live in great difficulties than accept her bounty.

After the death of her young half-sister, Lucy Cameron, who had married, against Miss Delacour's desire, the Hon. George Lennox, Miss Delacour took no notice whatsoever of the five sweet little daughters her half-sister had brought into the world. Miss Delacour left the broken-hearted widower and his little girls to their sorrow, not even answering the letters which for a short time the children, by their father's desire, wrote to their mother's half-sister, so that by-and-by, as they grew older, most of them forgot that they had an aunt Agnes. Lucy Lennox was as unlike her half-sister as it was possible for two sisters to be. In the first place, Agnes, compared with Lucy, was old, being many years her senior; in the second, Agnes was singularly plain, whereas Lucy was very lovely. She was far more than lovely; she was endowed with a wonderful charm which drew the hearts of all people, men and women alike, who saw her. Her beautiful dark eyes, her rosy cheeks, with their rare dimples, her gay laughter, her glorious voice in singing, her pretty way of talking French, almost like one born to the graceful tongue, the way she devoted herself to her husband first, next to her sweet girls, the whole appearance of her radiant face, and her conduct on each and every occasion, made her a favourite with all who knew her.

Alas! she was gone; for Lucy Lennox was one of those not destined to live long in this world. She died just after the birth of her youngest child, and Lennox felt that now his one duty was to do all in his power for the precious Flowers she had left behind her.

There were three great and spacious houses in the Upper Glen. One, we have seen, was occupied by Mr Lennox, one by his sister, Mrs Constable; but between The Paddock and The Garden was a house so large, so magnificent, so richly dowered with all the beauties of nature, that it more nearly resembled a palace than an ordinary house. This great mansion belonged to the Duke of Ardshiel, and was called the Palace of the Kings, for the simple reason that its noble owner was looked upon as a king in those parts. Further, King James the First of England and Sixth of Scotland had passed some time there, and 'Bonnie Prince Charlie' had taken refuge at Ardshiel in the time of his wanderings. The great castle belonged to the Duke, who had many other places of residence, but who had never gone near the Palace of the Kings since a terrible tragedy took place there, about twenty years before the opening of this story.

A kinswoman and ward of Ardshiel's, a charming girl of the name of Viola Cameron, had fallen madly in love with a gallant member of the great clan of Douglas, and the Duke somewhat unwillingly gave his consent to the marriage on condition that Lord Alasdair Douglas should add

Cameron to his own name. Lord Alasdair agreed, for great was his love for Viola Cameron. The Duke was now well pleased. He could not but see what a fine fellow Lord Alasdair was, and accordingly he gave the Palace of the Kings to the young pair, and had the whole house and grounds put into perfect order, all at his own expense. The fair young Viola Cameron and the brave Lord Alasdair were to be married on a certain day early in December. All went merry as a marriage bell. But, alas! tragedy was at the door, and early on the wedding morn Lord Alasdair was found cold and dead in the deep lake which formed such a feature of the property. How he died no one could tell; but die he did with life so fair and bright before him, and the girl he loved putting on her wedding clothes for the happy ceremony. There was no apparent reason for his death, for he passionately loved the Lady Viola, and was willing to give up his own proud name for her dear sake.

Viola Cameron mourned frantically for her lover for some time, and refused to go near the Palace of the Kings; but after a time she returned to London society, and eventually married a rich manufacturer, nearly double her age and far beneath her in station.

The Duke, who, on her marriage with Lord Alasdair, was about to settle a fortune upon her, now abandoned all such intentions, and Ardshiel became his once more. Nor would he ever again allow himself to speak of or talk to the Lady Viola. She was now beneath his notice.

The Lady Viola passes completely out of this story. The Palace of the Kings had lain empty and deserted for over twenty long years, and Miss Delacour knew this fact and intended to act accordingly. After making full inquiries she paid the old Duke a visit, taking with her a certain Mrs Macintyre. Mrs Macintyre was one of those women whom all men respect, if they do not love. She had lost both husband and children. She was of high birth and equally good education. She was now, however, in sore want, and Miss Delacour thought she saw a way of helping her and also adding to the lustre of her own name as a great philanthropist. Miss Delacour did most of the talking, and Mrs Macintyre all the sad, gentle smiles. In short, they won over the old Duke, and Miss Delacour arranged that she should call upon Lucy's husband in order to propound her scheme.

The little girls and the boys had time to meet before Miss Delacour's arrival. Although that lady was well off, she would not take a motor-car from Edinburgh to the Upper Glen. She believed that her brother-in-law had a motor-car, and thought it the height of selfishness on his part that he did not send it to town to meet her. But she had her pride, as she expressed it, and in consequence did not arrive at The Garden till about four o'clock in the day, having given the young Constables and the young Lennoxes time to have a very eager chat together, whilst Mrs Constable and Lennox himself had a serious conversation, in which they unanimously expressed the wish that Agnes Delacour would take her departure as soon as possible.

Miss Delacour arrived on the scene in a very bad temper. She was met by Lennox with his beautiful smile and courtly manner. He welcomed her kindly, and gave her his arm to enter the great central hall. Miss Delacour sniffed as she went in. She sniffed more audibly as her small, closely set brown eyes encountered the fixed gaze of five little girls, who, to judge from their manners, were all antagonistic to her.

'Come and speak to your aunt, my dears,' she said.—'George,' she continued, 'I should be glad of some tea.'

'It isn't time for tea yet,' said Hollyhock, but I 'll amuse you. Would you like to see a girl somersaulting up and down the hall? It's a *grand* place for that sort of exercise, and I can teach you if you like. You *are* a bit old, but I've seen older. You just have to let yourself go—spread yourself, so to speak—put your hands on the floor and then over you go, over and over. Oh, it's *grand* sport; we often do it.'

'Then you might do better,' said Miss Delacour, speaking in a very stern voice. 'I haven't quite caught your name, child, but you have evidently not learned respect for your elders.'

'My name is Hollyhock. I 'm a Scots lass frae the heather. Eh, but there's no air like the air o' the heather! Did you ever get a bit of it, all white? Yes, *there's* luck for you.'

'Do you mean seriously to tell me, George,' said Miss Delacour, 'that you have called that child Hollyhock—that impertinent, rude child, Hollyhock?'

'Well, yes, he has, bless his heart!' said Hollyhock, going up to her father and fondling his head. 'Isn't he a bit of a sort of a thing that you 'd love? Eh, but he's a *grand* man. He isn't afflicted with bad looks, Aunt Agnes.'

'Send that child out of the room, George,' said Aunt Agnes.

'I refuse to stir,' was Hollyhock's response.

'George, is it true that you have insulted my dead sister's memory by calling one of her offspring by such an awful name as Hollyhock?'

'I have not insulted my wife's memory, Agnes. I took a fancy to call my little girls after flowers. This is Jasmine—real name Lucy, after my lost darling. This is Gentian—real name

Margaret. This is Rose—also Rose of the Garden, queen of all flowers. Hollyhock's baptismal name is Jacqueline; and Delphinium, my youngest'—his voice shook a little—'is Dorothy.'

'The one for whom your wife laid down her life,' said Miss Delacour. 'Well, to be sure, I always knew that men were bad, but I did *not* think they were fools as well.—Understand, you five girls, that while I am here—and I shall probably stay for a long time—you will be Lucy, Margaret, Jacqueline, Rose, and Dorothy to me. I don't care what your silly father calls you.'

'He's not silly,' said Hollyhock. 'He's the best of old ducksy dumps; and if you don't want to learn somersaulting, perhaps you 'd like a hand-to-hand fight. *I'm* quite ready;' and Hollyhock stamped up to the good lady with clenched fists and angry, black eyes.

'Oh, preserve me from this little terror of a girl!' said Miss Delacour. 'I perceive that the Divine Providence has sent me here just in time.'

'You haven't met the *Precious Stones* yet,' said Hollyhock. 'Flowers are a bit soft, except roses, which have thorns; but when you meet Jasper and Sapphire and Garnet and Opal and Emerald, I can tell you you 'll have to mind your p's and q's. *They* won't stand any nonsense; they won't endure any silly speeches, but they 'll just go for you hammer and tongs. They 're boys, every one of them—and—and—we 're expecting them any minute.'

'Jacqueline, you must behave yourself,' said her father. 'You 're trying your aunt very much indeed.—Jasmine, or, rather, my sweet Lucy, will you take your aunt to her bedroom, and order the tea to be got ready a little earlier than usual in the hall to-day?'

Jasmine, otherwise Lucy, obeyed her father's command at a glance, and the old lady and the young girl went up the low broad stairs side by side. Miss Delacour gasped once or twice.

'What a terrible creature your sister is!' she remarked.

'Oh no, she's not really; she only wants her bit of fun.'

'But to be rude to an elderly lady!' continued Miss Delacour.

'She did not mean it for rudeness. She just wanted you to enjoy yourself. You see, we are accustomed to a great deal of freedom, and there *never* was a man like daddy, and we are so happy with him.'

'Lucy—your name is Lucy, isn't it?'

'I am called Jasmine, but my name is Lucy,' said the girl, with a sigh.

'That was your mother's name,' continued Miss Agnes. 'You remind me of her a little, without having her great beauty. You are a plain child, Lucy, but you ought to be thankful, seeing that such is the will of the Almighty.'

'Jasper says I am exceedingly handsome,' replied Lucy.

'Oh, that awful boy! What a man your father must be to allow such talk!'

'Please, please, auntie, don't speak against him. He's an angel, if ever there was one. I want to make you happy, auntie; but if you speak against father, I greatly fear I can't. Please, for the sake of my mother, be nice to father.'

'I mean to be nice to every one, child. I have come here for the purpose. You certainly have a look of your mother. You have got her eyes, for instance.'

'Oh yes, her eyes and her chin and the roses in the cheeks,' said Jasmine. 'Father calls me the comfort of his life. No one ever, ever said I was ugly before, Aunt Agnes.'

'I perceive that you are an exceedingly vain little girl; but that will be soon knocked out of you.'

'How?' asked Jasmine.

'When my dear friend, Mrs Macintyre, starts her noble school.'

'School!' said Jasmine, turning a little pale. 'But father says he will never allow any of us to go to school.'

'He will do what *I* wish in this matter. Dear, dear, what a dreary room, so large, and only half-furnished! No wonder poor Lucy died here. She was a timid little thing. She probably died in the very bed that you are putting me into—so thoughtless—so unkind.'

'It isn't thoughtless or unkind, Aunt Agnes, for father sleeps in the bed where mother died, and in the room where she died. But now I hear the boys all arriving. The water in this jug is nice and hot, and here are fresh towels, and Magsie'——

'Who is Magsie?'

'She's a maid; if you ring that bell just there, she 'll come to you, and unpack your trunks. By the way, what a lot of trunks you have brought, Aunt Agnes! I thought you were only coming for a couple of days.'

'Polite, I must say,' remarked Miss Delacour.

'We all thought it,' remarked Jasmine, 'for, you see, you would not come to darling mother's funeral—that *did* hurt father so awfully.'

'I could not get away. I was helping the sick. It was a case of cataract,' said Miss Delacour. 'I had to hold her hand while the operation went on, otherwise she might have been blind for life. Would you take away a living, breathing person's sight because of senseless clay?'

Jasmine marched out of the room.

CHAPTER III.

AUNT AGNES'S WAY.

If there was a person with a determined will, with a heart set upon certain actions which must and *should* be carried out, that was the elderly lady known as Agnes Delacour. She never went back on her word. She never relaxed in her charities. She herself lived in a small house in Chelsea, and, being a rich woman, could thereby spend large sums on the poor and the needy. She was a wise woman in her generation, and never gave help when help was not needed. No begging letters appealed to her, no pretended woes took her in; but the real sufferers in life! these she attended to, these she helped, these she comforted. Her universal plan was to get the sorrowful and the poor in a very great measure to help themselves. She had no idea of encouraging what she called idleness. Thrift was her motto. If a person needed money, that person must work for it. Agnes would help her to work, but she certainly would not have anything whatsoever to do with those whom she called the *wasters* of life.

In consequence, Agnes Delacour did a vast amount of good. She never by any chance gave injudiciously. Her present protégée was Mrs Macintyre. Mrs Macintyre was the sort of woman to whom the heart of Agnes Delacour went out in a great wave of pity. In the first place, she was Scots, and Miss Delacour loved the Scots. In the next place, she was very proud, and would not eat the bread of charity. Mrs Macintyre was a highly educated woman. She had lost both husband and children, and was therefore stranded on the shores of life. There was little or no hope for her, unless her friend Agnes took her up. Now, therefore, was the time for Agnes Delacour to attack that strange being, her brother-in-law, whom she had neglected so long.

She hardly knew his sister, Cecilia Constable, but she meant to become acquainted with her soon, to plead for her help, and in so great a cause to overlook the fact that this brother and this sister were a pair of faddists. Faddists they should not remain long, if *she* could help it. She, Agnes Delacour, strong-minded and determined, would see to that. The children of this most silly pair required education. Who more suitable for the purpose than gentle, kind, clever Mrs Macintyre? If George Lennox paid down the rent for Ardshiel, or, in other words, for the Palace of the Kings, and if Mrs Constable put down five hundred pounds for the redecorating of the grounds, and if the great Duke allowed them to keep the old, magnificent furniture, which had lain unused within those walls for over twenty years—and this he had practically promised to do, drawn thereto by Mrs Macintyre's sweet, pathetic smile and face—why, the deed was done, and she, Agnes, the noble and generous, need only add a few extra hundred pounds for the purchase of beds and school furniture. Thus the greatest school in the whole of Scotland would be opened under wonderfully noble auspices. Yes, all was going well, and the good woman felt better than pleased. Her great fame would spread wider and faster than ever. She lived to do good; she was doing good—good on a very considerable scale—supported by the highest nobility in the land.

Miss Delacour was not quite sure whether the school should be a mixed school or not. She waited for circumstances to settle that point. Mixed schools were becoming the fashion, and to a certain extent she approved of them; but she would not give her vote in that direction until she had a talk with her brother-in-law, and with Mrs Constable. Ardshiel was within easy reach of Edinburgh and Glasgow, but Miss Delacour made up her mind that the school, when established, should be a boarding-school. The very most she would permit would be the return of the children who lived within a convenient distance to their homes for week-end visits. But on that point also she was by no means sure. Providence must decide, she said softly to herself. She came, therefore, to The Garden determined to leave the matter, as she said, to Providence; whereas, in reality, she left it to George Lennox and his sister, Mrs Constable.

At any cost these people must do their parts. Be they faddists, or be they not, their children must be saved. Could there in all the world be a more horrible girl than Hollyhock—or, as her

real name was, Jacqueline? Even Lucy (always called Jasmine) was an impertinent little thing; but what *could* you expect from such a man as George Lennox?

Miss Delacour was, however, the sort of person who held her soul in great patience. After Jasmine had left her she stood and looked out of the window, observed the lake on which those silly little girls were rowing, noticed those absurd boys who were called after precious stones, forsooth! and made up her mind to be pleasant with Cecilia and her family, and to say nothing of her designs to her brother-in-law until the children had gone to bed. She presumed at least that they went to bed early. A little creature like Dorothy ought to be in her warm nest not later than half-past seven. Lucy and Margaret might be permitted to sit up till nine. Afterwards she, Miss Delacour, could have a good talk with George Lennox. She invariably spoke of him as George Lennox, ignoring the Honourable, for she had no respect for the semblance of a title.

By opening her window very wide, she was able to get a distant glimpse of the much-neglected Palace. She observed, with approval, the vast size of the house, the abundance of trees, the glass-houses, the hothouses, the remains of ancient splendour. Then she looked at the lake, which shone and gleamed in all its summer glory; but she turned her thoughts from the sad history of that lake. She was not a woman to romance over things. She was a woman to go straight forward in a matter-of-fact, downright fashion.

Happening to meet one of the girls at an hour between tea and dinner, she inquired at what time their father dined.

'We all dine at half-past seven,' replied Hollyhock.

'You *all* dine at half-past seven? How old are you, Jacqueline?'

'Nearly thirteen, Auntie Agnes,' replied the girl, tossing her black mane of lovely, thick hair.

'And do you mean to tell me that little Dorothy, who cannot be more than eight or nine years old, takes her last heavy meal at half-past seven in the evening? Such folly is really past believing.'

'Auntie, you must believe it, for wee Delphy always dines with the rest of us. And why shouldn't she?'

'Now, my dear child, as to your father's strange conduct, it is not my place to speak of it before his unhappy and ill-bred child, but I have one request to make. It is this—that you do not again in my presence call your sister by that sickening name.'

'But, auntie, *we* think it a very lovely name. We like our flower names so much. Auntie, I do wish that you'd go. We were so happy without you, auntie. Do go and leave us in peace.'

'You certainly are the most impertinent little girl I ever met in my life; but times, thank the good God, are changing.'

'Are they? How, may I ask?' inquired Hollyhock.

'That I am not going to tell you quite yet, but changing they are.'

'And I say they are *not*,' repeated Hollyhock with great zeal.

'Oh! what a bad, wicked little girl you are! What an awful trial to my poor brother-in-law!'

'And I say I 'm not. I say that I 'm the joy of his life, the poor dear! Auntie, you 'd best not try me too far.'

'May God grant me patience,' muttered Miss Delacour under her breath.

She went upstairs to the room where her sister had not died, and made up her mind that as, of course, this wild family would not know anything whatsoever of dressing for dinner, she need not trouble to change her clothes. That being the case, she need not ring for the objectionable young person called Magsie. 'Such a name for a maid!' thought Miss Delacour. 'I'll just wear my old brown dress; it will save the dresses which I have to keep for proper occasions in London. Dear, dear, what an *awful* house this is!'

She sank into a chair, saying to herself how much, how very much, Mrs Macintyre would have to thank her for by-and-by! She looked at the watch she wore in a leather wristlet, and decided that she might rest for at least a quarter of an hour. She was really tired as well as appalled at the state of things at The Garden. Presently, however, seated in her easy-chair—and a very easy and comfortable chair it was—she observed that all her trunks had been unpacked; not only unpacked, but removed bodily from the large apartment. She felt a sense of anger. That girl, Magsie, had taken a liberty in unpacking her trunks. She should not have done so without asking permission. It is true that she herself had left the keys of the said trunks on her dressing-table, for most maids did unpack for her, but that was no excuse for such a creature as Magsie.

Just then there came a tap at her door. She was beginning to feel drowsy and comfortable, and said, in a cross voice, for she preened herself on her French, '*Entrez!*'

Magsie had never heard '*Entrez*' before, but concluded that it was the strange woman's way of saying, 'Come in.' She accordingly entered, carrying a large brass can of boiling water.

'It has come to the bile, miss,' remarked Magsie, as she entered the room, 'but ye can cool it down wi' cold water.'

'Thank you. You can leave it,' said Miss Delacour.

'What dress would ye be likin' to array yerself in?' asked Magsie.

'I'm not going to dress for dinner.'

'Not goin' to dress for dinner! But the master, he dresses like most people i' the evenin', and the young leddies and gentlemen and Mrs Constable, they sit down at the table—ah, weel! as them as is accustomed to respec' their station in life. I was thinkin', miss, that your purple gown, which I have put away in the big cupboard, might do for to-night. Ye 're a well-formed woman, miss—out in the back, out in the front—and I jalouse all your bones are covered. It 'll look queer your not dressin'—more particular when every one else does.'

'I never heard of anything quite so ridiculous,' said Miss Delacour; 'but as those silly children are going to dress, I suppose I had better put on the gown which I call my thistle gown. The thistle is the emblem of Scotland. I suppose you know that, Margaret?'

'No me,' said Margaret. 'It's an ugly, prickly thing, is a thistle.'

'Well, you have learnt something from me to-night. You ought to be very glad when I instruct you, Margaret.'

'I 'd rather be called Magsie,' returned Margaret.

'I intend to call you just what I please.'

'Very weel, miss; but may I make bold to ask which *is* the thistle gown?'

'It is a rich, white silk, patterned over with thistles of the natural colour of the emblem of Scotland. Open the wardrobe and I shall show it to you. But you took a liberty when you unpacked my clothes without asking my permission, Margaret.'

'Leeberty—did I? I thocht ye'd be pleased, bein' an auld leddy, no less; but catch me doin' it again. Ay, but this thistle gown is gran', to be sure.'

'Can you dress hair?' inquired Miss Delacour.

'Naething special,' was Magsie's answer. 'Is it a wig ye wear or no? It looks gey unnatural, sae I tak' it to be a wig; but if it's yer ain hair, I beg yer humble pardon. There's nae harm dune in makin' the remark.'

'You are a very impertinent girl; but as my dress happens to fasten behind, and the people in this house are all foolish, I suppose I had better get you to help me. No, my hair is my own. You must make it look as well as you can. Do you understand back-combing?'

'Lawk a mercy, ma'am! I never heard tell o' such a thing; and speakin' o' my master and his family as fules is beyond a'. However, Miss Jasmine, the darlin', she comes to me and she says in her coaxin' way, "Mak' the auld leddy comfy, Magsie;" and I 'd risk mony a danger to please Miss Jasmine.'

'There isn't any Miss Jasmine. Her name is Lucy.'

'Ah, weel, ma'am, ca' the bonnie lass what ye like. Now stand up and let me at ye. That's the gown. My word! thae thistles are fine. Hoots! ye needna mind wearin' that gown, auld as ye be. The thistle 'll do its part.'

'I do wish, girl, you'd atop talking,' said Miss Delacour, and Magsie of the black hair and black eyes and glowing complexion glanced at her new mistress and thought it prudent to obey.

She did manage to arrange Miss Delacour's hair 'brawly,' as she called it, for, as it proved, she had a real talent for hairdressing, and the good lady inwardly resolved to train this ignorant Margaret for the school.

She went downstairs presently in her thistle dress. The five little girls were clad very simply all in white. The five boys wore Eton jackets, and looked what they were, most gentlemanly young fellows. Mrs Constable, in a pale shade of gray, was altogether charming; and nothing could excel the courteous manners of George Lennox.

Every one was inclined to be kind to the stranger, and as it was the stranger's intention to make a good impression on account of her scheme, she led the conversation at dinner, ignoring the ten children, and devoting herself to her brother-in-law and Mrs Constable.

When Miss Delacour was not present there were always wild games, not to say romps, after dinner, but she seemed in some extraordinary way to put an extinguisher on the candle of their fun. So deeply was this manifest that Mrs Constable went back to The Paddock with her five boys shortly after dinner; and Mr Lennox, seeing that he must make the best of things, gave a hint to Jasmine that they had better leave him alone with their mother's half-sister.

The boys had groaned audibly at this ending of their evening's fun. Hollyhock looked defiant and even wicked; but when daddy whispered to her, 'The sooner she lets out her scheme, the sooner I can get rid of her,' the little girls ran upstairs hand-in-hand, all of them singing at the top of their voices:

> And fare thee weel, my only Luve,
> And fare thee weel a while!
> And I will come again, my Luve,
> Tho' it were ten thousand mile.'

CHAPTER IV.

THE PALACE OF THE KINGS.

Miss Agnes Delacour was the last person to let the grass grow under her feet. She, as she expressed it to herself, 'cornered' her brother-in-law as soon as the five little girls tripped off to bed. There was nothing, she said inwardly, like taking the bull by the horns. Accordingly she attacked that ferocious beast in the form of quiet, courteous Mr Lennox with her usual energy.

'George,' she said, 'you are angry with your poor sister.'

'Oh, not at all,' he replied. 'Pray take a seat. This chair I can recommend as most comfortable.'

Miss Agnes accepted the chair, but pursued her own course of reasoning.

'You 're angry,' she continued, 'because I did not go to poor Lucy's funeral.'

'We will let that matter drop,' said Lennox, his very refined face turning slightly pale.

'But, my dear brother, we must *not* let it drop. It is my duty to protest, and to defend myself. There was a woman with cataract.'

'Dear Agnes, I know that story so well. I am glad the woman recovered her sight.'

'Then you are a good Christian man, George, and we are friends once again.'

'We were never anything else,' said Lennox.

'That being the case,' continued Miss Delacour, 'you will of course listen to the object of my mission here.'

'I will listen, Agnes; but I do not say that I shall either comprehend or take an interest in your so-called *mission*.'

'Ah, narrow, narrow man,' said Miss Delacour, shaking her plump finger playfully at her host as she spoke.

'Am I narrow? I did not know it,' replied Lennox.

'Fearfully so. Think of the way you are bringing up your girls.'

'What is the matter with my lasses? I think them the bonniest and the best in the world.'

'Poor misguided man! They are nothing of the sort.'

'If you have come here, Agnes, to abuse Lucy's children, *and* mine, I would rather we dropped the subject. They have nothing to do with you. You have never until the present moment taken the slightest notice of them. They give *me* intense happiness. I think, perhaps, Agnes, seeing that we differ and have always differed in every particular, it might be as well for you to shorten your visit to The Garden.'

'Thank you. That is the sort of speech a child reared by you has already made to me. She has, in fact, impertinent little thing, already asked me when I am going.'

'Do you allude to Hollyhock?'

'Now, George, is it wise—is it sensible to call those children after the flowers of the garden and the field? I assure you your manner of bringing up your family makes me *sick*—yes, sick!'

'Oh, don't trouble about us,' said Lennox. 'We get on uncommonly well. They are *my* children, you know.'

'And Lucy's,' whispered Miss Delacour, her voice slightly shaking.

'I am very sorry to hurt you, Agnes; but Lucy herself—dear, sweet, precious Lucy—liked the idea of each of the children being called after a flower; not baptismally, of course, but in their home life. One of the very last things she said to me before she died was, "Call the little one Delphinium." Now, have we not talked enough on this, to me, *most* painful subject? My Lucy and I were one in heart and deed.'

'Alas, alas!' said Miss Delacour. 'How hard it is to get men to understand! I knew Lucy longer than you. I brought her up; I trained her. The good that was in her she owed to me. She has passed on—a beautiful expression *that*—but I feel a voice within me saying—a voice which is her voice—"Agnes, remember my children. Agnes, think of my children. Do for them what is right. Remember their father's great weakness."'

'Thanks,' replied Lennox. 'That voice in your breast did not come from Lucy.'

Miss Delacour gave a short, sharp sigh.

'Oh, the ignorance of men!' she exclaimed. 'Oh, the silly, false pride of men! They think themselves the very best in the world, whereas they are in reality a poor, very poor lot.'

Lennox fidgeted in his chair.

'How long will this lecture take?' he said. 'As a rule I go to bed early, as the children and I have a swim in the lake before breakfast each morning.'

'How are they taught other things besides swimming?' asked Miss Delacour.

'Taught?' echoed Lennox. 'For their ages they are well instructed. My sister and I manage their education between us.'

'George, I suppose you will end by marrying again. All men in your class and with your disposition do so.'

'Agnes, I forbid you to speak to me on that subject again. Once for all, poor weak man as you consider me, I put down my foot, and will not discuss that most painful subject. Lucy is the only wife I shall ever have. I have, thank God, my sister and my sweet girls, and I do not want anything more. I am a widower for life. Cecilia is a widow for life. We rejoice in the thought of meeting the dear departed in a happier world. Now try not to pain me any more. Good-night, Agnes. You are a little—nay, *more* than a little—trying.'

'I've not an idea of going to bed yet,' said Miss Delacour, 'for I have not divulged my scheme. You have got to listen to it, George, whether you like it or not.'

'I suppose I have,' said George Lennox. He sat down, and made a violent struggle to restrain his impatience.

'I will come to the matter at once,' said Miss Delacour. 'You know, or perhaps you do not know, how I spend my life.'

'I do not know, Agnes. You never write, and until to-day you have never come to The Garden.'

'Well, I have come now with a purpose. Pray don't fidget so dreadfully, George. It is really bad style. I am noted in London for moving in the very best society. I see the men of culture and refinement, who are always remarked for the stillness of their attitudes.'

'Are they?' said George Lennox. 'Well, I can only say I am glad I don't live there.'

'How Lucy *could* have taken to you?' remarked Miss Delacour.

'Say those words again, Agnes, and *I* shall go to bed. There are some recent novels on the table, and you can read then till you feel sleepy.'

'Thanks; I am never sleepy when I have work to do. My work is charity; my work is philanthropy. You know quite well that I am blessed by God with considerable means. Often and often I go to the Bank of England and stand by the Royal Exchange and see those noble words, "*The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.*" George, those words are *my* text. Those words exemplify my work. "The earth is the Lord's." I therefore, George, give of my abundance to the Lord, meaning thereby the Lord's poor. I hate the Charity Organisation Society; but when I see a man or a woman or even a child in our rank of life struggling with dire poverty, when, after making strict inquiries, I find out that the poverty is real, then I help that man, woman, or child. I live, George, in a little house in Chelsea. I keep one servant, and one only. I do not waste money

on motor-cars or gardens or antiquated mansions like this. I give to the Lord's poor. George, I am a very happy woman.'

'I am glad to hear it,' said Lennox. 'Since you entered my house, I should not have known it but for your remark.'

'Ah, indeed, I have cause for sorrow in your ridiculous house, surrounded by your absurd children'——

'Agnes!'

'I must speak, George. I have come here for the express purpose. Dear little Lucy wrote to me during her short married life with regard to the Upper Glen. She wrote happily, I must confess that. She spoke of her children as though she loved them very dearly. Would she love them if she were alive now?'

'Agnes!'

'George, I say—I declare—that she would *not* love them. Brought up without discipline, without education; called after silly flowers; told by their father to be rude to me, their *aunt*! How could she love them?'

'Agnes, I try hard not to lose my temper; but if you go on much longer in your present vein of talk, I greatly fear that it will depart.'

'Then let it depart,' said Miss Delacour. 'Anything to rouse the man who is going so madly, so cruelly, to work with regard to his family. Now then, let me see. I am ever and always one who walks straight. I am ever and always one who has an aim in view. My present aim is to help another. There is a dear woman—a Mrs Macintyre—true Scotch. You will like that, George. She has been left destitute. Her husband died; her children died. She is alone, quite alone, in the world. She has been most highly educated, and I have taken that dear thing up. There are in the Upper Glen three houses, or, rather, palaces, I should call them—one where you live, one where your sister, Mrs Constable, lives. She seems a nice, sensible sort of woman, simple in her tastes and devoted to her sons, except for the silly names she has given them. But both The Paddock and The Garden are small in comparison with the middle house, which has been unoccupied since before your marriage, George. It is a spacious and beautiful place, and my intention—my *firm intention*, remember—is to place Mrs Macintyre there and establish a suitable school for your girls, for other girls. Your girls can go to her as weekly boarders. I am not yet *quite* sure whether I shall admit the young Constables; but I may. Mrs Macintyre is a magnificent woman. She will secure for your children, for the other children, for the Constables, if *I* permit it, the best masters and mistresses from Edinburgh. You have a motor-car, have you not?'

'Yes.'

'You did not send it to meet your sister.'

'I did not.'

'Polite, I must say; but I forgive your bad manners. I proceed in the true Christian spirit with my scheme. The middle house in the Upper Glen belongs, as you know well, to the great Duke of Ardshiel. It is sometimes called Ardshiel, but more often by the title The Palace of the Kings. Since the sad tragedy which took place there, it has stood empty, the Duke having many other country seats and avoiding this noble mansion because of its associations. Well, George, you know all that story; but when Mrs Macintyre came to me in her distress and poverty I immediately thought of Ardshiel. I thought of it as the very place in which to start a flourishing school, of which your girls could take full advantage.

'Accompanied by dear Mrs Macintyre, I went to see his Grace. I was surprisingly successful in my interview. The Duke was quite charmed with my suggestion. He was much taken also with Mrs Macintyre. In short, he agreed to let the Palace of the Kings to my friend. I do not think he will ask a high rent for the lovely place, and, from a very broad hint he threw out, I expect he will give us the present magnificent furniture. You will be expected to pay the rent—a mere trifle. Your sister, if I admit a mixed school, will be asked to subscribe five hundred pounds for the rearranging of the grounds. The Duke will put the Palace into full repair, and with our united aid —for, of course, I shall not keep back my mite—we shall have the most flourishing school in Scotland opened and filled with pupils by the middle of September. In fact, I consider the scheme settled. There will be a large and flourishing school in your midst, for his Grace would only do things in first-rate style. Now I consider the matter accomplished. The school will be opened in September, and as I really cannot stand any more of your fidgeting—such shocking style!—I will wish you good-night. Of course, not a word of *thanks* on your part. I overlook all *those* little politenesses. The righteous look for their reward on *High*! Good-night, good-night! No arguments to-night, pray. I do not wish to listen to your objections to-night. You will naturally have them, but they will be overcome. Mrs Macintyre is a pearl amongst women. Good-night, George; good-night.'

Miss Delacour left the room. George Lennox did not go to bed that night until very late.

'Well,' he said to himself at last, 'I did not know I could be snubbed by any one; but that woman, she drives me wild. However, I will call my own children by the names I wish, and will *not* assist her with her school. *I* to pay the rent, forsooth! I to send my darlings to school, when I long ago made up my mind that they should never go to one. Dear Cecilia to be robbed of five hundred pounds and that *pearl of a woman* established in our midst. Not quite, Agnes Delacour! We of the Upper Glen resist. How I wish Hollyhock had been here to-night when the woman attacked me! No wonder my Lucy could not abide her. However, I am the master of my own money, and the father of my own children. I must talk with Cecilia early to-morrow morning, or Agnes will be at her. Dear Cecil, she would starve herself and her boys to help any one, but she shall certainly get my views.'

Alas, however, his optimism proved ill-founded, and it so happened that Miss Delacour paid a very early call indeed on the following morning at The Paddock, for she slept well and woke early, whereas the Honourable George Lennox slept badly and awoke late.

Mrs Constable was rather amazed at so early a visit from her brother's sister-in-law. The boys rushed in, yelling the news. She was just pouring out milk for her collection of Precious Stones when the unabashed lady entered the spacious dining-room.

'Ah, upon my word, a nice house!' said Miss Delacour. 'How cheerful you make everything look, dear! As sister women we can appreciate the little niceties of life, can we not?'

'Yes, of course,' said Mrs Constable in her pleasant manner and with her pretty, bright look. 'But what a long walk to take before breakfast, Miss Delacour!'

'I have come on behalf of my brother-in-law.'

'Is George ill?' inquired Mrs Constable.

Miss Delacour put her finger to her lip. Then she significantly touched her brow. Going up to Mrs Constable, she begged to have a special talk with her all alone. Mrs Constable had thought the woman in the thistle gown very queer the night before, and the boys had frankly detested her; but when that admirable philanthropist went up and dropped a word into her ear she turned a little pale, and facing her sons, said, 'Laddies, you had best go into the back dining-room and sup your porridge. Run, laddies; run.'

The boys gave their mother an adoring glance, scowled ferociously at Miss Delacour, and left the room. Over their coffee, hot rolls, and marmalade, Miss Delacour propounded her scheme—her great, her wonderful scheme.

It is well to be first in the field, and Miss Delacour could speak with eloquence. She was a real philanthropist, and she appealed to the kind heart of Mrs Constable.

CHAPTER V.

THE EARLY BIRD.

There is, after all, nothing like being first in the field. The old proverb of the early bird that catches the worm is correct. Miss Delacour knew her ground. Miss Delacour had gauged her woman, and when, about eleven o'clock that day, George Lennox walked across to The Paddock, hoping to obtain the sympathy which he had never before been refused by his sister, he was much amazed to find that Mrs Constable was altogether on the other side.

'What has come over you, Cecilia?' he remarked. 'Is it possible that you have already seen my sister-in-law? Do you understand the sort of woman that she is?'

'I have seen her more than two hours ago, George,' replied Mrs Constable, 'and, to be frank with you, I admire her very much. There is no one to me like you, George, but women can see things which men cannot. It seems to me that Miss Delacour is a woman with a great heart, and she has taken pains to propound to me a scheme which I consider most noble. In fact, I fully agree with her in the matter. I cannot help doing so. Our children, our dear children, George, require by now to be taught the great things of the world. Hitherto you and I have taught them all we could. I do not deny that, until now, our instruction was sufficient; but a time has arrived when they all need the broader life. I, for one, will certainly help Miss Delacour to the extent of five hundred pounds. The Duke is quite in favour of the Palace of the Kings being made use of for so worthy an object, and will give us the furniture, if not for *nothing*, at least for a very trifling sum. Miss Delacour will herself provide the extra furniture required for a school, and I further understand that the Duke will let the old house and grounds for a merely nominal rent, which I think you, George, being his kinsman through your dear wife, ought to supply. Miss Delacour has secured the services of a most efficient head-mistress, and the school will be run on truly noble

lines—on the very best lines, or the Duke would have nothing to do with it. As I am willing to help Miss Delacour, she will allow my dear sons, for a longer or shorter period, to enter the school so as to prepare for Eton by-and-by. Home education is not enough, George, and the children will be educated for the broader world, at our very doors. They will be allowed to return to the home nest each Saturday until early Monday morning. What could by any means be more advantageous?'

'Oh dear,' exclaimed Lennox, '*what* a woman Agnes is!'

'What a noble woman! you mean.'

'I do not mean that, by any means. I mean that she is clever and very rich, and philanders with philanthropy. We know nothing, for instance, of the proposed head-mistress, Mrs Macintyre.'

'Yes, we do, through that really excellent woman, your sister-in-law. George, you are sadly prejudiced.'

'Cecil, you wrong me. Was she not my Lucy's half-sister, and did not my dearest one suffer tortures at her hands?'

'Ah! try to forget that part of the painful past. Well do I know what your Lucy was to you, to me, to her little girls. *Try*, my dearest brother, to be brave, and to take to your heart the text, "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord," and receive Miss Delacour's magnificent scheme with a good grace.'

'And the loss of a considerable yearly income, to say nothing of the far deeper pain of parting from my children. Really, Cecilia, I did think you would show more pity to a sadly lonely man.'

'And I, also, am a sadly lonely woman, George; but I must not think of myself in the matter of my beloved boys.'

'You never do, and never could, Cecil; but that woman drives me nearly wild.'

'Dear George, try to think more kindly of her. She spoke, oh! *so* kindly of you; indeed, she spoke most affectionately. I could not believe that you were inclined to be jealous, and even stingy.'

Lennox rose. 'If being unwilling to deprive myself of several hundreds a year for a total stranger, as well as parting from my dear little lasses, is stingy, then I *am* stingy, Cecilia; but let the matter drop. I bow to the decrees of two women. When two women put their heads together, what chance has poor man?'

'Oh George,' said Mrs Constable, 'since my beloved husband was killed, whom have I had to look to but you, my dearest brother? Believe me, this *is* a good cause. Your children and my children *need* to mix with the world. Jasper must soon go to a public school, but a year in a mixed school will do him no harm. I have been deeply puzzled of late as to what to do with my boys' future. Then comes unexpectedly a noble woman who opens up a plan. It seems right; it seems correct. Our children will mix with other children. They will know the world in the way they *must* first know it—namely, at school; and they will be, remember, George, within a stone's-throw of us.'

'You don't mean to say that they are to be weekly boarders?' remarked the stricken man.

'I do say it. That is her determination. The school will be a very large one, and I am going to-day to meet Miss Delacour at Ardshiel in order to see what improvements are necessary. Oh, dear, dear old boy, if I *could* remove that frown from your brow!'

'You can't, Cecilia; so don't try. I am worsted by two women, the fate of most men. I am very unhappy. I don't pretend to be anything else. My sister-in-law has stolen a march on me, but at least there is one thing on which I am determined. You, of course, Cecilia, can do as you please, but I positively *refuse* to send a child of mine to that place until I have first had an interview with Mrs Macintyre.'

'And that is most sensible of you, George. I shall wire to her and ask her to come to The Paddock to-day. I shall be so glad to put her up and make her happy. A woman in her case, with financial difficulties, having lost husband and children, is so deeply to be pitied. My whole heart aches for the poor, dear thing.'

'Cecilia, I would not know you this morning. I must go back now to my little girls. They at least are all my own; they at least dislike the woman who has conquered your too kind heart.'

'George, I have faithfully promised in your name and my own to visit Ardshiel immediately after luncheon to-day. We have to see for ourselves that the sad home of neglect and tragedy, which will soon be filled with young and happy life, is in all respects suited to our purpose.'

'Oh dear, oh dear!' said George Lennox. 'Well, if I must, I must. Two women against one man! I suppose I may be allowed to bring Hollyhock?'

'Best not, on the first occasion. She irritates Miss Delacour.'

'Oh, bother Miss Delacour!' exclaimed the Honourable George, who was now at last thoroughly out of humour. 'Well, I'll meet you at half-past two at Ardshiel, and I hope by then I may feel a little calmer than I do at present.'

As soon as George Lennox had gone, Mrs Constable sent a telegram to the bereaved and distracted Mrs Macintyre, inviting her to make a speedy visit to The Paddock. This telegram had only to go as far as Edinburgh, for Miss Delacour had put her friend up in a shabby room in a back-street in that city of rare beauty. The address had been given, however, to Mrs Constable; and Mrs Macintyre, who was feeling very depressed, and wondering if anything could come of her friend's scheme, replied instanter: 'Will be with you by next train.'

Mrs Constable made all preparations for her guest's arrival. The best spare room was got ready. The finest linen sheets, smelling of lavender, were spread on the soft bed. The room was a lovely one, and in every respect a contrast to any Mrs Macintyre had used of late.

As has been said, it was the custom for the Constables and the Lennoxes to dine and spend the evening together. This was the night for The Paddock, and Mrs Macintyre would therefore see not only the Honourable George Lennox, but a goodly number of her future pupils. Miss Delacour was a woman who in the moment of victory was not inclined to show off. Having gained Mrs Constable, she was merciful to George, and said nothing whatever to him with regard to the school, or with regard to the advent of Mrs Macintyre. She knew well that that really good woman would be at The Paddock that evening, and considered her task practically accomplished.

George Lennox, feeling sad at heart, but still trusting to the incapability of Mrs Macintyre to undertake so onerous a charge, went with his sister-in-law to meet Mrs Constable at the appointed hour at Ardshiel that afternoon. When they joined Mrs Constable at the lodge gate, he did not hear the one lady say to the other, 'The dear thing will be with me in time for dinner.'

'We dine at The Paddock to-night,' whispered Miss Delacour. 'How marvellous are the ways of Providence! I can get back to London to-morrow. Between ourselves, dear, I hate the Upper Glen, and heartily dislike my brother-in-law.'

'Oh! you must not speak of my brother like that,' said Mrs Constable. 'With the exception of my dear husband, there never was a man like my brother George.'

'As you think so much of him, perhaps he will help you by finding husband No. 2,' said Miss Delacour in a tone which she meant to be playful. She chuckled over her commonplace joke, having never succeeded herself in finding even No. 1. But Mrs Constable's gentle and beautiful gray eyes now flashed with a sudden fire, and the colour of amazed anger rose into her cheeks.

'Miss Delacour, you astonish and pain me indescribably when you speak as you have just done. Little you know of my beloved Wallace. Had you had the good fortune to meet so noble a man, you would perceive how impossible it is for his widow, indeed his *wife*, as I consider myself, to marry any one else. Never speak to me on that subject again, please, Miss Delacour.'

Miss Delacour saw that she had gone too far, and muttered to herself, 'Dear, dear, how *huffy* these handsome widows are! But, all the same, I doubt not that she *will* marry again. Time will prove. For me, I have no patience with these silly airs. But I see I must change the subject.' Accordingly she deftly did so, and even asked to see a portrait of the late gallant major. This request was, however, somewhat curtly refused.

'Only my laddies and myself see the picture of their blessed father,' was the reply; and Miss Delacour could not but respect Mrs Constable all the more for her gentle and yet firm dignity.

Meanwhile the unhappy and lonely George Lennox, hating his sister-in-law's scheme more and more, wandered away by himself, where he could think matters over.

'I never *could* have believed that Cecil would abide tittle-tattle,' he thought; 'but that woman Agnes would contaminate any one.'

The ladies had now reached Ardshiel. It was, of course, considerably out of repair, but was even now lovely, with the beauty of fallen greatness. The majesty of the spacious grounds, the reflection of the sun on the tragic lake, the fine effect of great mountains in the distance, were as impressive as ever. It was clear that the walks, the lawns, the terraces, the beds of neglected flowers, the great glass-houses, could all soon be put to rights.

Then within that house, where the footsteps of the young bride had never been heard, were treasures innumerable and furniture which age could only improve. The Duke had promised, if all turned out satisfactorily, to hand over the furniture, the magnificent glass and china, the silver even, and fine linen and napery of all sorts, as his present to the school; but he insisted on a small rent being paid yearly for the lovely place, and also demanded that a certain sum be paid for the restoration of the grounds. Mrs Constable would repair the grounds, while her brother would surely not refuse to pay the small rent expected by the Duke for this most noble part of his property. Miss Delacour hoped that she would establish her friend in the school without much loss of her own property, but she was willing to add the necessary school furniture, meaning the

beds for the children and the correct furniture for their rooms, also the downstairs school furniture, such as desks and so forth. She expected to get them for a sum equal to what Mrs Constable intended to spend—namely, five hundred pounds. In this matter she thought herself most generous, and poor George most mean.

While the ladies were examining the interior of the great house, the Honourable George Lennox walked through the place alone, taking good care to keep away from the women. He walked all the time like one in a dream. It seemed to him as though he saw ghosts all around him, not only the ghost of his own peerless Lucy, and the other ghost of the poor youth who early on his wedding morning was found, cold and dead, floating on the waters of the mighty lake. Lennox spent much of the time in the grounds of Ardshiel, and heard, to his delight, the wrangling voices of the two women, hoping sincerely that the scheme of having this house of almost royalty turned into a school would be knocked on the head; for when were women, even the best of them, long consistent in their ideas?

Finally, however, the ladies did leave Ardshiel, the whole scheme of turning Ardshiel into a school for lads and lasses marked out in Miss Delacour's active mind. The attics would do for the children's cubicles. The next floor would be devoted to class-rooms of all sorts and descriptions, the ground floor would form the pleasure part of the establishment, and the servants would have a wing quite apart. The school could certainly be opened not later than September. The place was made for a school for the upper classes. It seemed to grow under the eyes of the two women into a delightful resort of youth, learning, and happiness; but Mr Lennox became more opposed to the scheme each moment. His one hope was that Mrs Macintyre might turn out to be *impossible*, in which case these castles in the air would topple to the ground.

The three parted at the gates of Ardshiel, Miss Delacour and her brother-in-law going one way, and Mrs Constable the other.

'You won't forget, dear,' said Mrs Constable, nodding affectionately to her new friend, 'to be in time for dinner this evening?'

'Oh dear! I forgot that we were to dine with you, Cecilia,' said George Lennox.

'Well, don't forget it, George; and bring all the sweet Flowers with you.'

'Naturally, I should not come without them.' His tone was almost angry.

'What a charming—what a sweet woman Mrs Constable is!' remarked his sister-in-law.

Lennox was silent.

'George,' said Agnes, 'you're sulky.'

'Doubtless I am. Most men would be who are cajoled as I have been into paying the rent of that horrid house. Yes, you are a clever woman, Agnes; but I can tell you once for all that not a single one of my Flowers of the Garden shall enter that school if I do not approve of the head-mistress.'

'I said you were sulky,' repeated Miss Delacour. 'A sulky man is almost as unpleasant as a fidgety man.'

'To tell you frankly, Agnes, I keenly dislike being played the fool with. You saw Cecilia Constable this morning. You won her round to your views when I was asleep.'

'Ha, ha!' laughed Miss Delacour. 'I repeat, she is a sweet woman, and her boys shall go to the school.'

'I thought it was a girls' school.'

'For her dear sake,' replied Miss Delacour, 'it will be a mixed school. Oh, I feel happy! The Lord is directing me.'

They arrived at The Garden, where five gloomy little girls gazed gloomily at their aunt.

'I do wonder when she 'll go,' whispered Hollyhock. 'Look at Dumpy Dad; he's perfectly miserable. If she does not clear out soon, I 'll turn her out, that I will.'

When tea was over, the children and their father went into the spacious grounds, rowed on the lake, and were happy once more, their peals of merriment reaching Miss Delacour as she drew up plans in furtherance of her scheme.

By-and-by the children went upstairs to dress for dinner. Their dress was very simple, sometimes white washing silk, sometimes pink silk, equally soft, sometimes very pale-blue silk. To-night they chose to appear in their pink dresses.

'It will annoy the old crab,' thought Hollyhock.

They always walked the short distance between The Garden and The Paddock.

Miss Delacour put on her 'thistle' gown, assisted by Magsie, who ingratiatingly declared that she looked 'that weel ye hardly kent her.'

'You are a good girl, Margaret,' answered Miss Delacour, 'and if I can I will help you in life.'

'Thank ye, my leddy; thank ye.'

The entire family started off for The Paddock, and on arrival there, to the amazement and indeed sickening surprise of the Honourable George Lennox, were immediately introduced to Mrs Macintyre, who turned out to be, to his intense disappointment, a quiet, sad, lady-like woman, tall and slender, and without a trace of the Scots accent about her. She was perfect as far as speech and manner were concerned.

Mrs Macintyre, however, knew well the important part she had to play. At dinner she sat next to Mr Lennox, and devoted herself to him with a sort of humble devotion, speaking sadly of the school, but assuring him that if he *could* induce himself to entrust his beautiful little Flower Girls to her care, she would leave no stone unturned to educate them according to his own wishes, and to let them see as much of their father as possible.

Lennox began to feel that he preferred Mrs Macintyre to his sister-in-law or even to his sister, Mrs Constable, at that moment. The woman undoubtedly was a lady. How great, how terrible, had been her sorrow! And then she spoke so prettily of his girls, and said that the flower names were altogether *too charming*, and nothing would induce her to disturb them.

It was on the lips of Lennox to say, 'I am not going to send my girls to your school,' but he found, as he looked into her sad dark eyes, that he could not dash the hopes of such a woman to the ground. He was therefore silent, and the evening passed agreeably.

Immediately after dinner Mrs Macintyre sat at the piano and sang one Scots song after another. She had a really exquisite voice, and when 'Robin Adair' and 'Ye Banks and Braes' and 'Annie Laurie' rang through the old hall, the man gave himself up to the delight of listening. He stood by her and turned the pages of music, while the two ladies, Mrs Constable and Miss Delacour, looked on with smiling faces. Miss Delacour knew that her cause was won, and that she might with safety leave the precincts of the horrible Garden to-morrow. How miserable she was in that spot! Yes, her friend's future was assured, and she herself must go to Edinburgh and to London to secure sufficiently aristocratic pupils for the new school.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HEAD-MISTRESS.

It was, after all, Mrs Macintyre who made the school a great success. Her gentleness, her sweet and noble character, overcame every prejudice, even of Mr Lennox. When she said that she thought his children and their flower names beautiful, the heart of the good man was won. Later in the evening, when the lively little party of Lennoxes, accompanied, of course, by Miss Delacour, went back to The Garden, his sister-in-law called him aside, and informed him somewhat brusquely of the fact that she was leaving for London on the following day.

'Mrs Macintyre will remain behind,' she said. 'I gave her at parting five hundred pounds. You will do your part, of course, George, unless you are an utter fool.'

George Lennox felt so glad at the thought of parting from Miss Delacour that he almost forgave her for calling him a possibly utter fool; nay, more, in his joy at her departure, he nearly, but not *quite*, kissed his sister-in-law.

Every attention was now paid to this good lady. At a very early hour on the following morning the motor-car conveyed her to Edinburgh. It seemed to the Lennoxes, children and father alike, that when Aunt Agnes departed the birds sang a particularly delightful song, the roses in the garden gave out their rarest perfume, the sweet-peas were a glory to behold, the sky was more blue than it had ever been before; in short, there was a happy man in The Garden, a happy man with five little Flower Girls. How *could* he ever bring himself to call his Jasmine, Lucy; his Gentian, Margaret; his Hollyhock, Jacqueline; his Rose of the Garden, mere Rose; and his Delphinium, Dorothy?

'Oh, isn't it good that she's gone?' cried Jasmine.

'Your aunt has left us, and we mustn't talk about her any more,' said Lennox, whose relief of mind was so vast that he could not help whistling and singing.

'Why, Daddy Dumps, you *do* look jolly,' said Hollyhock.

'We are all jolly—it is a lovely day,' said Mr Lennox.

So they had a very happy breakfast together, and joked and laughed, and forgot Aunt Agnes and her queer ways. The only person who slightly missed her was Magsie, on whom she had bestowed a whole sovereign, informing her at the same time that she, Margaret, might expect good tidings before long.

'Whatever does she mean?' thought Magsie. 'She has plenty to say. I didn't tak' to her at first, but pieces o' gold are no to be had every day o' the week, and she has a generous heart, although I can see the master is not much taken wi' her.'

The Flower Girls and their father were rowing on the lake, when a shout from the shore called them to stop. There stood Mrs Constable; there stood Mrs Macintyre; there also stood in a group Jasper, Garnet, Emerald, Sapphire, and Opal.

'Come ashore, come ashore,' called Jasper; and the boat was quickly pulled toward the little landing-stage.

The ten happy children romped away together.

'Isn't it good that she's gone?' said Hollyhock. 'Isn't she a downright horror?'

'But mother says she means well,' said Jasper; 'and who could be nicer than Mrs Macintyre?'

'I suppose not,' said Hollyhock. 'Is she going to stay with Aunt Cecil long, Jasper?'

'Long? Why, don't you know the news?'

'What? Oh, do tell us!' cried Delphinium.

'She's going to stay for ever,' said Jasper, 'except of course in the holidays. She has taken Ardshiel, and she is going to turn it into a great school, a great, monstrous, magnificent school; and we are *all* going—we, and you, and heaps more children besides; and mother is nearly off her head with delight. Of course, as far as I am concerned, I shall only be able to stay at such a school for one year, for I must then go on to a public school. But Mrs Macintyre has been talking to mother, and says she can prepare me for Eton with perfect ease in a year from now.'

'Oh, bother!' said Jasmine. 'We don't want other boys and girls. We are quite happy by ourselves.'

'But mother thinks we must mix with the world, girls; and so does Mrs Macintyre,' continued Jasper.

'Well, I'm not going to school, anyhow,' said Hollyhock. 'You and your mother may go into raptures over Mrs Macintyre as much as ever you please, but I stay at home with Dumpy Dad. Why should *he* be left out in the cold? He is the dearest Dump in the world, and I 'm not going to have him slighted. You are very fond of romancing, Jasper, and I don't believe a word of your story.'

'All right,' said Jasper, looking with his honest, Scots face full into the eyes of Hollyhock. 'There they are—the principals, I mean.'

'Principals! What nonsense you do talk!'

'I mean my mother, your father, and Mrs Macintyre.'

'And what are they principals of?' asked the angry girl.

'Why, the school, of course.'

'The school? There's no school.'

'Well, let's run and ask them. Hearing is believing, surely.'

The ten children raced after Mrs Macintyre, Mr Lennox, and Mrs Constable.

'Daddy,' exclaimed Hollyhock, 'there's not going to be a school set up near here? You are not going to send your Flower Girls to school?'

'Wouldn't you like me to help you a little, darling?' said Mrs Macintyre in her gentle voice. 'You look such an intelligent, pleasant girl, and I would do all in my power for you; and although your father and Mrs Constable are quite wonderful in educating you so far, I think a little outside life, outside teaching, and the meeting with outside boys and girls would be for your benefit, dear child. I do, really! I don't think you'll oppose me, Hollyhock, when your father wishes it.'

'Dumpy Dad, do you wish it?'

'Well—ah, *yes*, I think it would be a good plan,' said George Lennox.

'Then I'm done,' said Hollyhock. 'Where's Magsie? She's the only bit of comfort left to me. Let me seek her out and put a stop to this madness.' Hollyhock really felt very, very angry. She was not yet under Mrs Macintyre's charm. 'Where's my brave Magsie?' she cried, and presently she heard an answering voice.

'Eh, but is that you, Miss Hollyhock? Why, lassie, you look pale. Your eyes waver. I don't like ye to look so white in the complexion. What may ye be wantin' wi' me, my lass?'

'They are trying to whip me off to school,' said Hollyhock; 'that's what they are after. That's what that horrid Aunt Agnes came about.'

'Eh, but she is a fine gentlewoman,' replied Magsie. 'She gave me a whole sovereign. What *I* ken o' her, I ken weel, and I ken kind. Eh, but ye 'll hae to soople your backbone, Miss Hollyhock, and think a pickle less o' your dainty self. It 'll be guid for ye to go to that schule.'

'*You* are no good at all,' cried Hollyhock. 'I 'm the most miserable girl in the world, and I hate Mrs Macintyre.'

'I haven't set eyes on her yet,' said Magsie. 'Suppose I go out and tak' a squint. I can always tell when women are good or the other thing. Why, Miss Hollyhock, you look for all the world as though you were scared by bogles; but I 'll soon see what sort the leddy is, and I 'll bring ye word; for folks canna tak' in Magsie Dawe.'

Hollyhock sat down, feeling very queer and stupid. She had not long to wait before Magsie dashed into her bedroom.

'Hoots, now, and what a fuss ye mak' o' nothing at a'! A kinder leddy never walked. What ails her? says I. Indeed, I think ye 'll enjoy schule, and muckle fun ye 'll hae there. Ye canna go on as ye are goin'. Hech! I wouldna be you, stayin' at hame, for a guid deal. It's richt for ye to gang; that's what I think, havin' seen the leddy and glowerin' at her as I did; but not one thocht but o' love could rise in my breast for her. I'd gie a guid deal for her to teach *me*, that I would. I wouldna sit down and greet like a bairn.'

Meanwhile Miss Delacour, having thoroughly propounded her scheme, returned first to Edinburgh, where she made known her plan of the great school, which was to be opened in September for the young sons and the daughters of the highest gentry and nobility. She was a woman who could speak well when she pleased. She said the terms for the school education would be high, as was to be expected where such excellent teaching would be given.

She spoke of Mrs Macintyre with tears in her eyes. 'That noble woman would win any heart,' she said. She then described her brother-in-law's daughters, and the sons of her brother-in-law's sister. She spoke of these ten children with enthusiasm. She spoke of the mother of the boys with delight. She was a little sad when she mentioned her brother-in-law. It was really necessary to save his pretty girls. He was a man who meant well, but acted foolishly. The school would be superb—the very first of its kind in Scotland. She wanted English children to come to it. She wanted it for a short time to be a mixed school, but that scheme would probably die out eventually. Her great object at the present moment was to secure worthy pupils for her dear friend, and to introduce the very best boys and girls into the Palace of the Kings, one of the most beautiful homes of the great Duke of Ardshiel. The terms for weekly pupils would necessarily be high—namely, two hundred pounds a year; while the terms for those boys and girls who spent all their time, excluding the holidays, at the great school would be still higher, even as much as two hundred and fifty pounds a year. But the education was worth the price, for where was there another school in the whole of the United Kingdom to compare with the Palace of the Kings? The very best teachers from Edinburgh would come, if necessary, to the school; and what centre so great as Edinburgh for learning? The best foreign governesses were to be employed. An elderly tutor or two were also to live in the house. These were to be clergymen and married men.

Having done her work in Edinburgh, Miss Delacour proceeded to London, and soon had the happiness of securing Master Henry de Courcy Anstel, the Lady Leucha Villiers, the Lady Barbara Fraser, the Lady Dorothy Fraser, the Hon. Daisy Watson, Miss Augusta Fane, Miss Featherstonhaugh, Miss Margaret Drummond, Master Roger Carden, Master Ivor Chetwode, Miss Mary Barton, Miss Nancy Greenfield, Miss Isabella Macneale, and Miss Jane Calvert. There were many more to follow, but she felt that she had done well for her friend with this number, and that the noble old Palace was well started.

After a few days spent first with Mrs Constable and then with Mr Lennox, and having heard the good news from her friend Miss Delacour, Mrs Macintyre went to London to select suitable teachers. The school was put into the hands of the best decorators, upholsterers, and builders. The furniture was polished; the gardens were remade; in short, all was in readiness for that happy day in September when the greatest private school in Scotland was to be opened, and opened with éclat.

The parents of the children were all invited to see the great school the day before lessons began, and they could not help expressing their delight with the lovely place. The gentlemanly little Constables and the charming little Flower Girls were present, and gave a delightful effect. Even Hollyhock condescended to go to the school on this one occasion to see what it was like,

more particularly as that horrid Magsie was going there as one of the maids. As for the rest of the Lennoxes, they were simply wild to go to school, and Mr Lennox was now as keen to see them there as he had at first been opposed to the whole idea. But he was the sort of man who would force none of his children, and if Hollyhock preferred to stay at home with him—why, she might. He rather suspected that she would soon come round.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OPENING OF THE GREAT SCHOOL.

The parents of the pupils were more than delighted at the thought of their children being educated in such a home of beauty and romance.

Now Ardshiel, by means of Miss Delacour and Mrs Macintyre, had been very much spoken of before the opening day. Those English girls and boys who were to go there, and the girls and boys from Edinburgh, were all wild with delight; and, in truth, it would be difficult to find a more lovely place than that which Ardshiel had been turned into. The story of the drowned man and the deep lake and the mourning bride was carefully buried in oblivion. Magsie of course knew the story, but Magsie wisely kept these things to herself; and even Mrs Macintyre, the mistress of the school, had not been told the story.

On a Monday in the middle of September Ardshiel looked gay of the gay. The sun shone with great brilliancy. The French mesdemoiselles, the Swiss fräuleins, and the gentle Italian signorinas were all present. In addition there were English mistresses and some teachers who had taken high degrees at Edinburgh University. Certainly the place was charming. The trees which hung over the tranquil lake, the lovely walks where girls and boys alike could pace up and down, the tennis-courts, the hockey-field, the football-ground reserved for the boys, and the lacrosse-field designed for both girls and boys, gave promise of intense enjoyment; and when the guests sat down to lunch—such a lunch as only Mrs Macintyre could prepare—they felt that they were indeed happy in having secured such a home for the education and delight of their darlings.

Hollyhock and her sisters sat in a little group at one side of the long table, and a lady, the mother of Master Roger Carden, spoke to Hollyhock, congratulating her on her rare good luck in going to such a school.

'I'm not going to this stupid old Palace,' said Hollyhock.

'Why, my dear, are you not going? Besides, I thought the name of the place was Ardshiel.'

'Oh, they re-called it,' replied Hollyhock, tossing her mane of black hair from her head. 'Anyhow, one name is as good as another, I 'm going to stay with my Dumpy Dad.'

'Who is "Dumpy Dad"?' asked Lady Jane Carden.

'Don't you dare to call him by that name,' said the indignant Hollyhock. 'He's my father; he's the Honourable George Lennox. I'm not going to leave him for any Ardshiel that was ever made.'

'What a pity!' said Lady Jane. 'My boy Roger will be so disappointed. He 's coming to the school, you know.'

'Is he? I don't think much of boys coming to girls' schools.'

'I'm afraid, my dear little girl,' said Lady Jane, 'that you yourself want school more than most. You don't know how to behave to a lady.'

'I know how to behave to Dumpy Dad, and that's all I care about.'

Nothing further was said to Hollyhock, but she noticed that Lady Jane Carden was speaking to another friend of hers, and glancing at Hollyhock with scant approval as she did so. It seemed to Hollyhock that she was saying, 'That's not at all a nice or polite little girl.'

Hollyhock was vexed, because she had a great pride, and did not wish even insignificant people like Lady Jane Carden to speak against her.

The great inspection of the school came to an end, and the children were to assemble there as soon as possible on the morrow. Mrs Macintyre, however, declared that there would be no lessons until the following day. This greatly delighted the four Flower Girls and the five Precious Stones, and they all started off in the highest spirits to their new school next morning. Oh, was it not fun, glorious fun, to go to Ardshiel and yet be close to mummy and daddy all the time? Their father had specially forbidden his Flower Girls to make any remarks to Hollyhock about her not going with the others to school.

'Leave her alone, children, and she 'll come round,' was his remark. 'Do the reverse, and we'll have trouble with her.'

As soon as the children had departed to Ardshiel, Hollyhock and her father found themselves alone. She looked wildly round her for a minute; then she dashed into the pine-wood, flung herself on the ground among the pine-needles, and gave vent to a few choking sobs. Oh, why was she so fearfully lonely; why was this horrid Ardshiel invented; why were her sisters taken from her, and her brothers, as she called the Precious Stones? Of course she still had Dumpy Dad, and he was a host in himself. She brushed violently away some fast-flowing tears, and then dashed into the hall. As a rule the hall was a very lively place. If it was at all cold weather there was a great fire in the ingle-nook, and a girl was sure to be found in the hall playing on the grand piano or on the beautiful organ, or singing in her sweet voice; but now all was deadly silence. Even the dogs, Curfew and Tocsin, were nowhere to be seen. There was no Magsie to talk to. Magsie had gone over to the enemy.

Hollyhock ran up to her own room, for each Flower Girl had a room to herself in the great house. She brushed back her jet-black hair; she tidied her little blouse as well as she could, and even tied a crimson ribbon on one side of her hair; and then, feeling that she looked at least a little bewitching, and that Ardshiel mattered nothing at all to her, and that if her sisters chose to be fools—well, let them be fools, she flew down to her father's study.

Now this was the hour when George Lennox devoted himself, as a rule, to his accounts; this was the hour when, formerly, Mrs Constable came over to fetch the children for their lessons. But there was no sign of Mrs Constable coming to-day, and Dumpy Dad only raised his head, glanced at his miserable child, and said sharply, 'I can't be interrupted now, Hollyhock. You'd better go out and play in the garden.'

'But I 've no one to play with,' said Hollyhock.

'You must leave me, my dear child. I shall be particularly busy for the next couple of hours. In the afternoon we can go for a ride together. It's rather cold to row on the lake to-day. Now go, Hollyhock. You are interrupting me.'

'Dumpy Dad!' faltered Hollyhock, her usually happy voice quavering with sadness.

Lennox took not the slightest notice, but went on with his accounts.

'This is unbearable,' thought Hollyhock. 'If dad chooses to spend his mornings over horrid arithmetic instead of looking after me, when I 've given up so much for his sake, I'll just run away, that I will; but as to going to Ardshiel, to be crowed over by Magsie, catch *me*!'

Hollyhock pulled the crimson bow out of her dark hair, let the said hair blow wildly in the breeze, stuck on her oldest and shabbiest hat, which she knew well did not become her in the least, and went to The Paddock. She was quite longing to do her usual lessons with Aunt Cecil. In order to reach The Paddock she had, however, to pass Ardshiel, and the shrieks of laughter and merriment that reached her as she hurried by were anything but agreeable to her ears.

'Jasmine *might* have more feeling,' thought the angry girl. 'Gentian might think of her poor lonely sister. Delphinium ought by rights to be sobbing instead of laughing. We were always such friends; but there, if this goes on, Scotland won't see much more of me. I used to be all for the bonnie Highlands, but I 'm not that any more. I 'll go to cold London and take a place as kitchen-maid. I won't be treated as though I were a nobody, I 'll earn my own bread, I will, and then perhaps Dump will be sorry. To do so much for a man, and for that man to absorb himself in arithmetic, is more than a girl can stand.'

Hollyhock reached The Paddock between eleven and twelve o'clock. She marched in boldly to see Mrs Constable employed over some needlework, which she was doing in a very perfect manner.

'I thought you were coming to teach me this morning, Aunt Cecilia,' said the girl in a tone of reproach.

Mrs Constable raised her soft gray eyes. 'My dear child,' she said, 'didn't you know that your father and I are not going to teach you any more? All the teaching in this place will be at Ardshiel.'

'Then how am I to learn?' said Hollyhock, in a tone of frightened amazement.

'Naturally,' replied Mrs Constable, 'by going to Ardshiel.'

'Never!' replied the angry girl. 'I 'm not wanted. I can make my own plans. Good-bye. I *hate* every one.'

Hollyhock made a dash toward the door, but Mrs Constable called her back.

'Won't you help me with this needlework, dear? I should enjoy your company. I miss my Precious Stones so much.'

'Fudge!' replied Hollyhock. 'I 'm not going to comfort you for your Precious Stones. Great boobies, I call them, going to a mixed school.'

She dashed away from The Paddock. Again, on her way home, Hollyhock was entertained by the sounds of mirth at Ardshiel. On this occasion a number of girls were playing tennis, and her own sisters, Jasmine and Gentian, blew rapturous kisses to her. This seemed to the unhappy child to be the last straw.

'Who is that girl?' asked Ivor Chetwode.

'She *is* my sister,' replied Jasmine.

'Your sister! Then whyever doesn't she come to this splendid school?'

'Oh, we 'll get her yet, Ivor.'

'We must,' said Ivor. 'I can see by her face that she 'll be no end of fun.'

'Fun!' replied Jasmine. 'She 's the very life of The Garden.'

'The Garden? What do you mean by The Garden?'

'That's where we happen to live,' replied Jasmine.

'You are not a weekly pupil, are you, Ivor?'

'No, alas! I 'm not. My home's too far away.'

'Well,' said Jasmine, 'I 'll beg Mrs Macintyre to let me invite you to dine with us at The Garden on Sunday.'

'But will your sister scowl at me, the same as when you kissed hands to her just now?' asked Ivor.

'Oh no; but you must be very polite to her. You must try to coax her in your manly way to become a pupil at the school.'

'Well, I 'll do my best,' said Ivor Chetwode. 'She is certainly handsome, but she has a scowl that I don't like.'

'Well, try not to speak against her, Ivor. Remember she is my sister.'

'I am awfully sorry, Jasmine, and I do think you 're a ripping kind of girl.'

Hollyhock sat down to the midday meal at The Garden in exceedingly low spirits, but her father had now got through what she called his arithmetic, and was full of mirth. He ate heartily and laughed heartily, and said in his most cheery voice, 'Well, my pet Hollyhock, you and your Dumpy Dad must make the best of each other.'

'Oh Dumps, do you *want* me to stay with you?'

'Why not? What do you think?'

'Dumpy, I've had a miserable morning.'

'I 'm sorry for that, my little Flower; but it need not happen again. You ought not to be unhappy. You 'll have holidays always from now onwards.'

'Oh daddy, am I never to learn anything more?'

'Well, I don't exactly know how you can. The teaching goes on at Ardshiel, and as you naturally wish to stay with your father, and as I naturally wish to keep you, and as the expense of sending my other Flowers to such a costly school is very great, I have undertaken some estate work, which must occupy a good deal of my time. Your aunt, too, dear woman, has secured a post as kindergarten teacher at the great school. Therefore, my little Hollyhock will have holidays for ever. She will be our little dunce. Think how jolly that will be!'

Hollyhock felt a dreadful lump in her throat. She managed, however, to eat, and she struggled hard to hide her great chagrin.

'For the rest of the afternoon I am entirely at your service, my child,' said Mr Lennox. 'I think it is just precisely the day for a good long ride on Lightning Speed and Ardshiel. There's a fine, bright, fresh air about, and it will put roses into your bonnie cheeks. Get on your habit and we 'll go for a long ride.'

This was better; this was reviving. The horses were led out by the groom. Hollyhock, who could ride splendidly, was soon seated on the back of her glorious Arab, Lightning Speed. Her father looked magnificent beside her on Ardshiel, and away they started riding fast across country.

They returned home after an hour or two with ravenous appetites, to find that Duncan, the old serving-man, had lit a great fire of logs in the hall, and that Tocsin and Curfew were in their usual places, enjoying the blaze.

Hollyhock tossed off her little cap and sat down to enjoy tea and scones to her heart's delight. She now felt that she had done right not to go to Ardshiel. Her voice rang with merriment, and her father joined her in her mirth.

But when tea came to an end Lord Ian Douglas, the gentleman of vast estates whom Mr Lennox was to help as agent, appeared on the scene, and Hollyhock was forgotten. She was introduced to Lord Ian, who gave her a very distant bow, and began immediately to talk to his new agent about crops and manures, turnips, cattle, pigs, all sorts of impossible and disgusting subjects, according to the angry little Hollyhock.

Lord Ian did not go away for some hours, and when at last he departed it was time to dress for dinner. But how Hollyhock did miss the Precious Stones and The Garden girls! How dull, how gloomy, was the house! She tried in vain to eat her dinner with appetite, but she saw that her father looked full of preoccupation, that he hardly regarded her; in fact, the one and only speech that he made to her was this: 'Douglas is a good sort, and he has given me a vast lot to do. It will help to pay for the Flowers' education; but I greatly fear, my Hollyhock, that you will be a great deal alone. In fact, the whole of to-morrow I have to spend at Dundree, Lord Ian's place. I wish I could take you with me, my darling; but that is impossible, and I must leave you now, for I have to look over certain accounts which Lord Ian brought with him. This is a very lucky stroke of business for me. Your Dumpy Dad can do a great deal for his Flower Girls by means of Lord Ian.'

'I hate the man!' burst from Hollyhock's lips.

If her father heard, he took no notice. He calmly left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOLLYHOCK LEFT IN THE COLD.

The fire burned brightly in the ingle-nook, and the dogs, Tocsin and Curfew, slept in perfect peace in close proximity to its grateful heat; but Hollyhock was alone—utterly alone. She felt more miserable than she had ever believed it possible to be in her hitherto joyous life. She drew up a chair near the hearth, and the dogs came and sniffed at her; but what were they, compared to Jasmine, Delphinium, and the Precious Stones? As to Dumpy Dad, she could never have believed that he would treat his little girl in such a heartless manner. Had she not given up all for him, and was this her reward?

She felt a great lump in her throat, and a very fierce anger burned within her breast. What right had Dumpy Dad and Aunt Cecilia to forsake the only child who was true to them? The others were off and away at their learning and their fun, perchance; but she, Hollyhock, the faithful and the true, had remained at home when the others had deserted it. She had been firm and decided, and here was her reward—the reward of utter desolation.

'Get away, Curfew,' she said, as the faithful greyhound pushed his long nose into her hand.

Curfew raised gentle, pleading brown eyes to her face; but being of the sort that never retorts, he lay down again, with a sigh of disappointment, close to Tocsin. He, too, was feeling the change, for he was a very human dog, and missed the Flower Girls and the Precious Stones, and the dear, dear master and Mrs Constable, just as Hollyhock did.

But what was the use of making a fuss? According to Curfew's creed, it was wrong to grumble. Hollyhock did not want him. He lay down with his long tail on Hollyhock's frock, and his beautiful head pressed against Tocsin's neck. Tocsin was a magnificent bloodhound, and he was the greatest support and comfort to Curfew at the present crisis.

By-and-by Mr Lennox passed hurriedly through the hall. He was going into his special library to get some books. He saw the melancholy figure of Hollyhock seated not far from the great fire, and the faithful dogs lying at her feet. He said in his most cheerful tone, 'Hallo, my little girl! you and the dogs do make a pretty picture; but why don't you play the organ or sing something at the piano?'

'You know, daddy, I have no real love for music,' said Hollyhock in a cross voice.

'Well, well, then, take a book, my child. Here 's a nice story I can recommend you—*Treasure Island*, by Louis Stevenson.'

'I hate reading,' she said.

'Well, I'm afraid I can't help you, dear. I'm frightfully busy, and shall not get to bed until past midnight. Taking up this new work means a great deal, and you know, my Flower Girl, your Dumpy Dad, as you like to call him, is the very last person in the world to do a thing by halves. If I have to sit up till morning, I must do so in order to be prepared for Dundree and Lord Ian to-morrow. Perhaps, dear, you had best kiss me and say good-night.'

'Daddy—daddy—I 'm so—miserable!'

'Sorry, my child; but I can't see why you should be. You have all the comforts that love and sympathy can bestow upon you.'

'No, no; I am alone,' half sobbed Hollyhock.

'Don't get hysterical, my child. That is really very bad for you; but, anyhow, I 've no time to waste now over a little girl who is surrounded by blessings.'

'If Daddy Dumps goes on much longer in that strain I shall absolutely begin to hate him,' thought the furious child. 'The bare idea of his *thinking* of talking to me as he has done.—No, Curfew, *don't*! Put your cold nose away.'

Curfew heaved another heavy sigh and lay closer to Tocsin, and with a smaller portion of his tail on Hollyhock's dress.

Now the olden custom at The Garden and The Paddock—that lovely custom which had suddenly ceased—was music, dancing, games, fun, shrieks of laughter from Precious Stones and Flower Girls, the hearty peal of a man's voice when he was thoroughly enjoying himself, the gentle, restrained merriment of a lady. This lady was Mrs Constable, who was now going to be a kindergarten teacher, forsooth! And this man was Dumpy Dad, who was going to be an agent, indeed! No wonder the girl and the dogs felt lonely. The end of the happy evenings had arrived. One evening used to be spent at The Garden, the next at The Paddock; and then the delightful good-byes, the cheerful talk about the early meeting on the morrow, and if it was the evening for The Paddock, the lively and merry walk home with Daddy Dumps and the other Flower Girls.

Oh, how things were changed! What an unbearable woman Aunt Agnes was! What a horror was Mrs Macintyre! Had not those two between them simply swept four of the Flower Girls out of sight, and *all* the Precious Stones; and, in addition, had not Dumpy Dad and Aunt Cecilia undertaken some kind of menial work with regard to Dundree and Ardshiel? It was solely and entirely because of Ardshiel that Dumpy Dad was going to be an agent. It was entirely on account of Ardshiel that Aunt Cecilia was going to stoop to be a sort of nursery-governess. Well and cleverly had those wicked women, Aunt Agnes and Mrs Macintyre, laid their plans. 'But the plans o' the de'il never prosper,' thought Hollyhock. 'They'll come to their senses yet; but meanwhile what am *I* to do? How ever am I to stand this awful loneliness?' Hollyhock was not a specially clever child. She was passionate, fierce, and loving; but she was also rebellious and very determined. There was a great deal in her which might make her a fine woman by-and-by; but, on the other hand, there was much in her which showed that she could be, and might be, utterly ruined.

Suddenly a wild and naughty idea entered her brain. Nothing, not all the coaxing, not all the petting, not all the language in all the world, would get her to go to Ardshiel as a pupil; but might she not go there now, and peep in at the windows and see for herself what was going on, what awful process was transforming the Flower Girls and the Precious Stones into other and different beings?

Her father had said good-night to her, but it was still quite early—between eight and nine o'clock. The Ardshielites, those wicked ones, would still be up. She would have time to go there, to look in and see for herself what was going on.

She was the sort of girl who did nothing by halves. The servants had no occasion to come into the hall again that night. Ah yes, here was Duncan; she had better say something to him in order to lull his suspicions.

The old man came in and began to close the shutters. 'Don't ye sit up ower long, Miss Hollyhock. Ye must be feelin' a bit dowy without the ithers, bless them.'

'No, I don't, Duncan,' replied Hollyhock. 'But, all the same, I 'd best go to bed, I expect.'

'Weel, that 's exactly what I 'm thinkin',' said the old man. 'Ye 'll gang to your rest and have a fine sleep. That's what a body wants when she's eaten up wi' loneliness. I ken fine that ye are missin' the ithers, lassie.'

'I'm not missing them a bit,' replied Hollyhock. 'As if I could miss *traitors*.'

'Come, come, noo; don't be talkin' that way.' Here Duncan shut the great shutters with a bang. 'Why should a young maid talk so ignorant? Ye 'll be a' richt yet, lassie; but there, ye 're lonesome, my bonnie dearie.'

'Suppose, now, you had been me, Duncan, what would you have done?' said Hollyhock

suddenly.

'Why, gone to Ardshiel, of course.'

'Duncan, I hate you. You 're another traitor.'

'No, I'm no,' said Duncan; 'but I ken what's richt, and I ken what's wrang, and when a little lass chooses betwixt and between, why, I says to myself, says I, "Halt a wee, and the cantie lass'll come round," says I. Shall I take the dogs or no, Miss Hollyhock?'

'Yes, take them; I don't want them,' said Hollyhock.

'The poor maister, he's that loaded wi' work.— Come away, doggies; come away.— Guid-nicht to ye, missie; guid-nicht. Bed's the richt place for ye. I 'm sorry that Magsie 's no here to cuddle ye a bit.'

'Thanks; I'm glad she's gone. I hate her,' said Hollyhock.

'Ay,' said the old man, coming close to the child and looking into her eyes. 'Isn't it a wee bit o' the de'il ye hae in ye the nicht, wi' your talkin' o' hatin' them that luves ye!—Come, doggies; come. My poor beasties, ye 'll want your rest; and there's no place like bed for missie hersel'.'

'You 'd best go to your own bed, too, Duncan,' called Hollyhock after him. 'You are a very impertinent old man, and getting past your work.'

'Past my work, am I, now? Aweel, ye 'll see! Guid-nicht, miss. I bear no malice, although I pity the poor maister.'

Duncan departed, taking the greyhound and the bloodhound with him. As soon as she was quite sure that he had gone, and silence, deep and complete, had fallen on the house, Hollyhock took down an old cloak from where it hung in a certain part of the hall, and wrapping it firmly round her shoulders, went out into the night. It was better out of doors—less suffocating, less lonely—and the girl's terribly low spirits began to rise. She was in for an adventure, and what Scots lassie did not love an adventure?

So she crept stealthily down the avenue, slipped through the smaller of the gates, and presently found herself on the highroad. It was still comparatively early, and certainly neither Lennox nor old Duncan missed her. Duncan thought she was in bed; Lennox was too absorbed in his heavy work to give his naughty little girl a thought. She had chosen to stay behind. It was very troublesome and awkward of her, but he was confident that her rebellious spirit would not last long. Accordingly Hollyhock went the short distance which divided Ardshiel from The Garden, entered by the great iron gates, and walked up the stately avenue toward the beautiful mansion, where her own sisters were traitorously and wickedly enjoying themselves.

'But let them wait until lessons begin,' thought Hollyhock; 'let them wait until that woman puts the birch on to them; then perhaps they 'll see who's right—I, the faithful, noble girl, who would not desert her father, or they, who have just gone off to Ardshiel for a bit of excitement.'

Ardshiel really looked remarkably pretty as Hollyhock drew near. It was illuminated by electric light from attic to cellar, and there was such a buzz of young voices, such an eager amount of talk, such peals of happy, childish laughter, that Hollyhock was led thereby in the right direction, and could peep into a very large room which was arranged as a vast playroom on the ground floor, and where all the children at present at Ardshiel were clustered together.

Hollyhock, wearing her dark cloak, looked in. The blinds had not yet been pulled down, and one window was partly open. She therefore saw a sight which caused her heart to ache with furious jealousy. Her own sister Jasmine was talking to a girl whom she addressed as Barbara. Her own sister Rose of the Garden was chatting bravely with a girl whom she addressed as Augusta. Hollyhock could not help observing that both Barbara and Augusta were particularly nice-looking girls, with fair English faces and refined English voices. All the children were dressed for the evening.

'So *affected* at a school,' thought Hollyhock; 'but the birch-rod woman will be on them soon, if I 'm not mistaken.'

There was, however, a boy present who specially drew her attention and even forced her admiration. He was a remarkably handsome boy, and his name was Ivor. What his surname was Hollyhock could not guess. She only knew that she had never seen such beautiful blue eyes before; and such a manner, too, he had—almost like a man. Why, Jasper, Garnet, Sapphire, Opal, and Emerald could not touch him even for a moment—that is, as far as appearance and ways went.

While she gazed in at the window, who should come up to this boy but her own sister Gentian! She took the boy by the arm and said, 'Now let's sit in a circle and think out our charade for Monday night.'

Ivor gave a smile. He looked with admiration at Gentian, whom Hollyhock always considered

very plain. Instantly chairs were drawn into a circle, and an excited conversation began.

The birch-rod woman was a long time in appearing! Hollyhock's black eyes were fixed on the blue eyes of Ivor. It would certainly *not* be unpleasant to talk to a boy of that sort; but he seemed quite devoted to Gentian—poor, plain, little Gentian—while she, Hollyhock, the beauty of the family, was standing out in the cold; and it *was* cold on that September night, with a touch of frost just breathing through the air. Hollyhock felt herself shiver; then, all of a sudden, her patience gave way. Those children should not be so happy, while she was so wretched. She got behind the window where no one could see her, and shouted in a loud, cracked voice, which she assumed for the purpose, 'Oh! the ghost! the ghost!'

She then rushed down the avenue, fearing to be caught and discovered. She ran so fast that her long cloak tripped her, and she suddenly fell and cut her lip. When she came to herself she had to wipe some stains of blood away from her injured lip with her handkerchief.

She just reached the lodge gates in time to shout once again, 'The ghost! the ghost!' when the woman who lived in the lodge came out, prepared to lock up for the night.

'Who may you be?' said the woman.

'I'm the ghost. Let me through!' screamed Hollyhock.

And she really looked so frightful, with her big black eyes, and blood-stained face, and streaming lip, that the woman, who was a stranger, and did not know her, called out, 'Get ye gone at once or I'll set the dogs on you. The shortest road ye can go'll be the best. Ye 're not a ghost, but a poor cracked body.'

Hollyhock was sincerely glad to find herself once again on the highroad, but in some mysterious way her dislike for Ardshiel had vanished, and she felt furiously angry with Ivor Chetwode for daring to take notice of her plain sister, Gentian.

She got into the house without much difficulty, bathed her swollen lip, and retired to bed to think of Ivor's blue eyes. What a nice boy he must be!—a real bonnie lad, one *worth* talking to. Why should a girl be a dunce all her days, when there was such a laddie at Ardshiel? Ah, well, she would know more about Master Ivor before long.

She slept soundly, and forgot the troubles of her miserable day. In her dreams she thought of the Precious Stones and Ivor, and imagined them all fighting hard to gain the goodwill of Gentian, who was a freckled little girl, not to be named with her, Hollyhock. If that was the sort of thing that went on at Ardshiel, and the birch-woman did *not* appear, it must be rather a nice place, when all was said and done.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WOMAN WHO INTERFERED.

There is nothing in its way more difficult than to start a new school; and Mrs Macintyre, with all her vast experience—for she had been mistress of more than one of the celebrated houses at Cheltenham College in the time of the great and noble Miss Beale, and had in fact, until her marriage, been a teacher—knew well what special difficulties she had before her, more particularly in a mixed school. There was no reason, however, why such schools should not exist, and do well. But she knew they had a fight before them, and that conflict lay in her path. She did not, however, know that this conflict was to take place so soon.

Mrs Macintyre was a good deal surprised by what followed Hollyhock's stolen visit to Ardshiel. The children—boys and girls alike—were now hard at work at their daily tasks. The first day passed splendidly. The Precious Stones became extremely great friends with Roger Carden, Ivor Chetwode, and Henry Anstel. There were also some other boys whose parents were negotiating to send their sons to Mrs Macintyre, for the fame of her school and the beauty of its surroundings were much talked of, and the idea of a mixed school highly pleased some people, while it equally annoyed others.

It was on the first Saturday morning, when the Precious Stones and the Flower Girls were to return home, that Mrs Macintyre was informed by one of her servants (Magsie, no less) that a lady, a Mrs Maclure, had called, and was waiting to see her in the white drawing-room. Mrs Macintyre's husband had been Scots, and she herself was Scots. She therefore knew many of the Edinburgh people, and had drawn upon this knowledge in getting pupils for her school. She wondered if Mrs Maclure was a certain Jane Scott whom she knew in her youth, and who had married a Dr Maclure. She felt not a little surprise at this visit at so early and important an hour.

'The leddy kens ye are busy, but will not keep you long,' said Magsie, who was struggling in vain to acquire an English accent.

'I will be with her immediately,' said Mrs Macintyre, and Magsie tripped away, her eyes very bright. She was enjoying herself immensely. As a matter of fact she had never known real life before.

Mrs Macintyre went at once into the drawing-room, having given different orders to her teachers to proceed with their work, and promising to be with them again before long. The moment she entered the drawing-room she gave a little gasp of pleasure.

'Why, Jane, is it indeed you?' she could not help remarking.

'Ah, yes, Elsie, it's no other.'

'Well, sit down, Jane, won't you?'

'I suppose I 've come at an inconvenient time, Elsie?'

'Well, I do happen to be busy.'

I can't help that, my dear,' said Mrs Maclure. 'The business that hurries me to your side is too urgent and important to brook a moment's delay.'

'Dear me, what can be wrong?' said Mrs Macintyre.

'I'm told that you keep a mixed school.'

'Yes, I do. I have a few small boys here.'

'Shocking!' said Mrs Maclure.

'What do you mean, Jane? Why shouldn't the boys be here?'

'This is a costly place,' said Mrs Maclure, looking round her. 'The laying out of it must have cost a deal of money.'

'It did; but generous friends helped, and the Duke was not stingy with his purse.'

'I don't want to know any of the financial particulars,' continued Mrs Maclure. 'But tell me one thing, Elsie. Do you want your school to pay?'

'Of course I do.'

'Ah, I thought as much. Now, I 'll tell you what it is, Elsie. I have come here with a scheme, and if you see your way to carry it out, why, the school will pay, and pay again and again; but there must be no mixing in it. I mean by that, the eggs must be in one basket and the butter in another.'

'You puzzle me very much, Jane.'

'Well, I was always outspoken, my dear, and I heard of your trials, and your noble courage, and the fact that you 'd got hold of one of the bonniest bits of land in the whole of Scotland. Why, Ardshiel could be full over and over again if it wasn't mixed. But mixed it must not be.'

'I 'm very sorry to displease you, Jane,' said Mrs Macintyre; 'but the thing cannot be altered now. I have, after all, at the present moment only got eight boys in my school, although others will probably arrive. I cannot turn those dear little fellows out.'

'Well, then, the girls must go.'

'No; I mean to keep my girls.'

'Elsie, you were always obstinacy personified. You've got a good school in a lovely spot, within easy reach of Glasgow and Edinburgh, and also capable of receiving children from different parts of England. The establishment is in working order. Now pray tell me how many you have got in the school?'

Mrs Macintyre said, 'Reckoning the boys first, I have got eight, as I said; but I have had letters this morning from several parents who wish to send their sons to my school.'

'Well, we 'll say eight boys,' said Mrs Maclure. 'I suppose they are quite babies?'

'Not at all. Jasper is fifteen. He is the eldest boy in the school, but will only stay for a year, as he has been very well taught by his gifted mother and by Mr Lennox, the father of my sweet little Flower Girls, as I call them.'

'Elsie, you are becoming sadly romantic. It runs in the blood. You must be careful. Fancy a big boy of fifteen in a girls' school.'

'He's a gentleman and my right hand,' said Mrs Macintyre.

'That has nothing whatsoever to do with it. He's fifteen, and ought to be in a public school.'

'He wants a year's training before he can go to Eton. He is a singularly gifted lad, and is the life of the house.'

'He must be the life of some other house. Now, then, for the girls. How many of them have you got?'

'To begin with, I've got Lucy, Margaret, Rose, and Dorothy Lennox; their father is the Honourable George Lennox, who lives in a house called The Garden close by.'

'Well, go on. I suppose you have more girls than that. That makes four. Now proceed with the rest.'

'Well, there's Lady Leucha Villiers.'

'You don't say so!'

'I do, my friend. Her mother, the Countess of Crossways, has entrusted her to my care.'

'You amaze me!'

'Perhaps I shall amaze you further. I have also got the Ladies Barbara and Dorothy Fraser, daughters of the Marquis of Killin.'

'You astound me!'

'Then I have the Honourable Daisy Watson. In addition I have Miss Augusta Fane, Miss Agnes Featherstonhaugh'——

'Good name that,' muttered Mrs Maclure.

'Miss Margaret Drummond.'

'I know them well—Scots to the backbone,' said Mrs Maclure.

'Miss Mary Barton,' continued Mrs Macintyre, 'Miss Nancy Greenfield, Miss Isabella Macneale, Miss Jane Calvert.'

'Now let 's count how many you have got in the school,' said Mrs Maclure. 'Everything *sounds* well, but the boys will ruin the whole affair.'

'Oh, nonsense, Jane. If only you were not so narrow-minded.'

'I know the world, my dear friend, and I don't want the best school in Scotland to be spoiled for the lack of a little care—care bestowed upon it at the right moment. Your girls, counting the Lennoxes, make fifteen. Altogether in the school you have therefore twenty-three children. How many teachers, pray?'

Mrs Macintyre was never known to be angry, but she felt almost inclined to be so now. She mentioned the number of her tutors, her foreign governesses, and her English teachers—the best-trained teachers from her own beloved Cheltenham.

'How many servants?' was Mrs Maclure's next query.

'Really, Jane, you are keeping me from my duties; but as you have come all the way from Edinburgh to question me so closely, I will confess that I have got ten indoor servants; that, of course, includes the housekeeper and a trained nurse in case of illness.'

'Dear, dear!' exclaimed Mrs Maclure. 'Prodigious! And then, I presume, you get special masters and mistresses from Glasgow and Edinburgh.'

'I certainly do. The school is a first-rate one.'

'My poor Elsie, it won't be first-rate long. You are taking all this enormous expense and trouble for twenty-three children. How many can your school hold?'

'My school could hold quite seventy pupils,' said Mrs Macintyre; 'but you must remember that it was only opened last Tuesday. Really, I greatly fear that I shall have to leave you, Jane. This is a half-holiday, and I have a special class to attend to.'

'Let your special class go. Listen to the words of wisdom. The fame of your school has spread to Edinburgh; it has been talked about; it has been commented on. It is for that reason, and that reason alone, that I have come here to-day. Put the boys into an annex, and provide them with the necessary teachers—men, of course, if possible. Keep the girls, and I'll engage to get you ten fresh pupils from Edinburgh early next week, twenty from London—that's thirty—and several more from Glasgow, also Liverpool, Manchester, and different parts of England; and when I say I

can engage to do this, and fill your school to the necessary number of seventy, I speak with confidence, *for I know*. The ladies are dying to send their lassies to you, but the mixed school prohibits it. I have no wish or desire to stop the co-education of girls and boys, but to have those of the upper classes mixing in the same boarding school won't go down in this country, Elsie Macintyre. No, it won't do. Now, let me think. You speak of five boys from the neighbourhood—who are their parents?'

'They are the sons of my dear friend Mrs Constable, whose husband, Major Constable, fell in the late war in South Africa.'

'And the eldest is fifteen?'

Yes.'

'Where does Mrs Constable live?'

'A very short way from here, at a place called The Paddock.'

'And you think well of the woman?'

'Cecilia Constable! She is delightful. Why, the dear soul has sent her boys to my school, and comes here herself daily to undertake kindergarten work in order to help her to pay the expenses of her children.'

'Bravo!' said Mrs Maclure. 'Why, of course, she can take them all. Is her house a good size? Has it a respectable appearance?'

'It is a beautiful house, the home of a true lady.'

'So much the better. The thing is as right as rain. Is she here now?'

'Yes, and very busy.'

'I must see her. I cannot lose this golden chance for you, Elsie. Her own five sons, and Master Henry de Courcy Anstel, Roger Carden, and Ivor Chetwode, shall all move to The Paddock on Monday next. She will, of course, be the head of the house, and tutors will be provided for the instruction of the boys. I can assure you, Elsie, that neither I nor my friends will have the least objection to your girls and her boys playing games together and meeting at each other's homes. And now I think I have done you a good turn. I have saved Ardshiel from ruin, and The Paddock, or, if you prefer it, the Annex, will hold the boys, old or young, who may wish to go there. Please send Mrs Constable to see me, for I must immediately communicate with my friends. Ardshiel will be packed by this day week, if Mrs Constable proves satisfactory.'

'Well, really, I don't know what to think,' said Mrs Macintyre. 'Perhaps you are right, and I know dear Cecilia would like to have her boys back with her again. I 'll send her to you.'

Nobody could look into the gentle, gray eyes of Cecilia Constable without feeling an instinctive trust in her, which was quickly, very quickly, to ripen into love. All those who knew her loved her, for she was made for love and self-sacrifice. Forgetting herself, she thought ever and always of others; and when, in her quiet, Quaker-like dress, she entered the room, Mrs Maclure said, under her breath, 'Good gracious, what a beautiful creature! How admirably she will manage the Annex!'

It was not likely that Mrs Constable had parted with her five boys with any sense of joy, and it was not lightly that she had undertaken the duties of kindergarten mistress at Ardshiel; but right to her was right, and it seemed the only way to pay expenses. As Mrs Maclure unfolded her scheme the gray eyes grew bright and the lips trembled.

'But does Mrs Macintyre consent?' she said at last. 'Your proposal truly amazes me; but, oh, am I worthy?'

'I feel you *are worthy*. Mrs Macintyre was loath at first to lose the boys, but the lads cannot stay in a mixed school. If you agree, you have only to say the word, and your sons will return to you. But please understand that they must look on you as their *mother, not* as their teacher. The Reverend James Cadell of the neighbouring parish will come to you every morning to instruct them in Latin and Greek. I will get other teachers for you from Mrs Macintyre's, and there is no earthly reason for keeping the boys and the girls apart. Only I protest that they shall not live in the same school. Why, now, there's Alan Anderson, and there's Davie Maclure, my own first cousin. Alan Anderson and Davie can live in the house, and Mr Cadell will come over every morning. He 'll ride his bicycle and be with you in good time. If you know of anything better, which I doubt, you have but to say the word. Now, then, I have my motor-car at the door. We 'll drive right away to The Paddock and see the rooms for the lads and teachers. Don't you fear, my dear; I'll help you with your Annex as heartily as I'll help Elsie Macintyre with her great school.'

'I must go and ask Mrs Macintyre's leave,' said Mrs Constable. 'This sounds like a wonderful and delightful dream.'

'My only dread,' thought Mrs Maclure to herself whilst waiting for Mrs Constable to join her,

'is that that good man, James Cadell, will lose his heart to her. I must give her a word of warning. He is a bit susceptible, and she's a rare and beautiful woman.'

On their way to The Paddock Mrs Maclure did impart her fears to Mrs Constable, but that dear lady's sweetest and gravest of eyes looked at her so reproachfully that she felt sorry she had spoken, and only pressed her hand.

The Paddock was large and roomy, and all arrangements for the Annex school could quickly be made. The boys were to be informed that they were not going home, but to an adjacent school; only the school was to be, for five of them, *mother's house*. Oh, was not that delightful?

So it came about that the Annex was established, and Cecilia Constable knelt down and thanked God most earnestly for His great mercies. Oh, how more than happy she would be once again! Now there was only one little black sheep to be put right. Poor, lonely, prickly Holly! She would see to it that the child entered Ardshiel, when her boys and the three strange boys left the Palace of the Kings.

CHAPTER X.

A MISERABLE GIRL.

Whether or not Hollyhock took a chill on that night when she peeped in at the gay group at Ardshiel can never be quite established, but certain it is that when her four sisters—those beloved and yet traitorous sisters—rushed wildly back to The Garden on the following Saturday afternoon, they found Hollyhock lying in bed, perhaps cross, perhaps ill; anyhow, to all appearance, quite indifferent to their presence.

Jasmine stood and stared at her sister in amazement. So also did Gentian and Rose and Delphinium. What could be the matter with their flower maid, their darling?

On their return home they were greeted by the information that the master was away on business, and that Miss Hollyhock was upstairs.

'In bed, I take it,' said old Duncan. 'It seems a pity for her not to be down to greet ye, my dearies, but I do declare I canna make out what ails her. She's poorly, the dear lass; but she 'll no say that she's ill.'

'But where is father, Duncan?' asked Jasmine in a dazed sort of voice.

'Oh, the maister! He is weel enough, but he is that taken up wi' the work o' Lord Ian Douglas that he canna gie much time to his lonesome child. You must get her to school, Miss Jasmine; you must get her to school, Miss Gentian.'

'Of course we must, Duncan,' said Jasmine; 'and, oh! it is a right splendid school.'

'I'm thinkin' that mysel',' said Duncan, 'for Magsie, she came ower one nicht and declared that there was not the like o' Ardshiel in the length and breadth o' bonnie Scotland. But dear, dear, I was like to forget. The maister, guid man, gave me a letter which he wrote this mornin' to you, Miss Jasmine, and you was to have it at once.'

'Thank you, Duncan. I 'll take the letter and go at once to Hollyhock.'

The letter in question was read by all four girls at once, and was simply to the effect that the young Precious Stones would dine with them on the morrow, as well as Master Ivor Chetwode. In fact, Mr Lennox had already written a letter to Mrs Macintyre, acquainting her with his desire.

'Then that's all right,' said Jasmine. 'Dad did get my letter. I was a bit surprised at his being so long in answering it. Well, we 'll go to Hollyhock now. Poor Ivor would have been terribly disappointed if he had been left out of The Garden treat.'

While this conversation was taking place Hollyhock was listening intently from her small bed. She would not for the world let the girls think that she missed school, and the only chance of keeping up this deception was by retiring to bed and feigning illness. Not that she felt *quite* well; she was altogether too lonely and miserable for that. She had not a book to read; she had not a thing to do. The dogs were off with their master, and she had hardly even an animal to speak to, with the exception of the kitchen cat, which came up and lay on her bed, until she shooed her off with quick, angry words.

Well, Saturday had come, and the girls had come, and she must keep up her supposed illness at any cost, or they would suspect that she was regretting her decision. But what a time they did take havering with old Duncan! Tiresome man, Duncan! He was nearly as tiresome as the dogs,

Tocsin and Curfew, and the kitchen cat, Jean.

When the children burst into the room, Hollyhock looked at them out of her black eyes with a dismal stare.

'Here we are back again,' said Jasmine. 'Haven't you a word of welcome for us, Holly?'

'Why should I?' replied Hollyhock. 'I 'm suffering from a reeling head, and can't stand any noise at all.'

'Dear, dear!' exclaimed Gentian.

'I don't want any of *your* fondling,' said Hollyhock in an angry tone, for was not Gentian the girl whom the beautiful blue-eyed boy had paid so much attention to?

'Whatever have *I* done?' said Gentian in amazement.

'Oh, I'll leave it to your conscience. I'm not going to enlighten you.'

'Dear, dear, what *can* the matter be?' said Delphy.

'Don't talk so loud. Keep your school manners for your school,' said Hollyhock.

'Dear, deary me!' cried Jasmine in an anxious tone, 'I think we ought to get the doctor to see her. There's Dr Maguire, and Duncan will fetch him. He 'll soon put you right, Hollyhock.'

'He won't, for I won't see him,' said Hollyhock. 'Don't you bring him to this room. I suppose, if I am faithful to my own Daddy Dumps, and my own dear home, I may at least have my own way with regard to a doctor. I 'm not ill *exactly*, but I 'm reeling in the head, and no one can force me to have a doctor except Daddy Dumps, and he's away with Lord Ian at Dundree until dinner-time.'

'All the Precious Stones are coming over for dinner,' said Rose, as softly as she could speak.

'Are they? I don't want them.'

'But they are coming all the same, Hollyhock, and so is Aunt Cecilia; and to-morrow they are coming again with that dear boy Ivor Chetwode.'

'Oh, is that his name?' said Hollyhock.

'How can you know anything about his name?' said Jasmine in astonishment.

'Ask Gentian; perhaps *she'll* tell you,' said Hollyhock with a wicked glance out of her black eyes at her sister's pale-gray ones.

But Gentian shook her head in bewilderment. 'She ought to see a doctor,' was her remark.

'Oh yes,' cried Hollyhock; 'but though she *ought*, she *won't*; and neither you nor that old Duncan can force me to; and I don't wish to hear a thing about your precious school, so for goodness' sake don't begin. You know the old proverb that new brooms sweep clean. Well, the school is a very new one, and the brooms are very new also. I expect you won't be in such *pretended* raptures after another week or two, while I, the faithful one, remain at home, to do my duty.'

The four Flower Girls gazed in consternation at one another. They were certainly distressed when Hollyhock refused to go to school with them, but her behaviour on the first day of their return altogether upset them; and as for poor little Delphy, it was with difficulty that she could keep the tears back from her eyes.

'There! Shoo! Get the cat out,' cried Hollyhock, as Jean was again putting in an appearance.

'Why, poor old darling!' exclaimed Gentian, 'she sha'n't be scolded, that she sha'n't. I 'll take her away to my room and pet her.'

'No, you won't; you'll do nothing of the sort. She's the only thing that now clings to me, and I 'm not going to have *you* sneaking round and winning her affections.'

'Why, you wanted her to go, Hollyhock. Really, I don't know you,' cried Gentian.

'I dare say you don't. You have "other fish to fry."'

The four girls felt for the first time in their lives really angry with their favourite sister. Hollyhock, simply to spite Gentian, called in a coaxing tone to Jean, who now jumped on the bed and purred loudly, while Hollyhock stroked her fur, doing it, however, very often the wrong way, which form of endearment tries all cats, even a kitchen cat.

'There, you see for yourselves, she 's the only one left to love me,' said Hollyhock. 'Oh, for goodness' sake, don't rush at me with your sham kisses! I can't abide them, or you. Get away, will you, and leave me in peace!—Jean, poor beastie! And do you love your little mistress? You are the

only one I have got, Jean, my bonnie pussie; the only one who, like myself, is faithful and true.'

It was just at that moment, when Jean had sunk into placid slumber and the Flower Girls were intending to leave the room, that there came a gentle, very gentle, knock at the door.

'Who can be there now?' said Hollyhock. 'Whoever it is will wake the cat.— There, my bonnie beastie, sleep away. Don't you know that you and I are the two lonely ones of the family?'

The amazed Jean cuddled up closer than ever to Hollyhock, and the next minute the door was quietly opened by Mrs Constable.

'Well, children,' she said, 'the boys are downstairs, so I thought you might like to see them. I 'm very sorry to perceive that our little Hollyhock isn't well. This is a sad blow, when one has a rare holiday and has looked forward to it. But I want to have a talk with Hollyhock all by myself.'

'You won't bring me round, so don't think it,' said Hollyhock.

But Mrs Constable, taking no notice of these words, motioned to the other four Flower Girls to leave the room. She then proceeded to make up the fire brightly and to straighten Hollyhock's disordered bed.

'Now, my child, what 's wrong with you?' she said in that voice so melting and so sweet that few could resist it.

'Oh, Aunt Cecil, I'm so unhappy—I'm alone. I have no one to love me now but Jean.'

'Poor little Jean! She seems very happy,' said Mrs Constable; 'but I'm afraid she'll make dirty marks on your white counterpane, child.'

'As if I cared. I'd stand more than that for love.'

'Now, Hollyhock,' replied Mrs Constable, 'I must get to the bottom of this. You are my own dear little girl, remember, and I must find out whether you are ill or not.'

'Of course I 'm ill; that is, I 'm a little ill.'

'I have a thermometer with me. I'll take your temperature,' said Mrs Constable.

'Auntie, I would so much rather you didn't.'

'I 'm afraid I must, child; for if you have a temperature, I must send for Dr Maguire.'

'I won't see him!'

'You need not, my child, if you have no temperature. Now, let me try; for afterwards I have some very exciting news to tell you. None of the other girls know it yet.'

'Oh, auntie, you do excite me! Yes, I 'll put the little thermometer into my mouth. I hope I sha'n't break it, though.'

'You must be careful, Hollyhock; for were you to swallow all that mercury, it would kill you.'

'Oh, auntie, what dreadful things you say! Well, stick it in, and then tell me the news that none of the others know.'

The thermometer was inserted. Hollyhock's temperature was perfectly normal, and she was then questioned with regard to her throat and her health generally. In the end Aunt Cecilia pronounced the girl quite well, and desired her to get up and dress.

'But I—the reeling in my head,' said Hollyhock.

'That will pass, after you have had a nice warm bath and put on one of your pretty frocks.'

'Oh, but, auntie, I do want to hear the news.'

'You shall hear it after you are dressed. I don't tell exciting news to little girls who lie in bed. The effect might be bad for them and bring on fever.'

'Oh, auntie, I don't want the servants to come near me.'

'They needn't, child. I'll turn on the hot water in the bath, and then help you to put on your prettiest dress. Why, Jasper is just pining to see you. Now, then, no more talk. The hours are passing, and quick 's the word.'

'Auntie, you have a nice way of saying things.'

'I 'm glad you think so, child.'

'Although you are only a governess at that horrid Ardshiel.'

Mrs Constable was silent.

In a very short time Hollyhock had had her bath. She dressed luxuriously by the fire in her bedroom, Aunt Cecilia brushing out her masses of black hair and fastening it back with a large crimson bow. Aunt Cecilia chose a very pretty dress of softest gray for the little maid, and then, when the last touch connected with the toilet had been given, there came a mysterious knock at the door.

'Who can that be?' said Hollyhock, who felt discontented once again.

'Only some one bringing a little food, dear, which I have ordered for you. You need not see the person who brings it. I will fetch it myself.'

Accordingly, tea in a lovely old Queen Anne teapot, accompanied by cream and sugar, hot buttered toast, and an egg, new laid and very lightly boiled, was placed before Hollyhock.

'But I haven't touched food for nearly twenty-four hours,' said the wilful child.

'Which accounts for the reeling in your head, my love. Now, then, set to work and eat.'

'But your news, auntie—your news.'

'After you have eaten, my child—after you have finished all the contents of this little tray, but not before.'

Hollyhock suddenly found herself furiously hungry. She attacked the toast and egg, and wondered at the sunshiny feeling which had crept into her heart.

'Now, remember that you are perfectly well, Hollyhock.'

'Yes, auntie dear, of course.'

'And there 'll be no more malingering.'

'Whatever's that, Aunt Cecilia?'

'Why, doing what you did—*pretending* to be ill, and keeping your family in a state of misery.'

'I won't do it again. Now for your news.'

'I want to make one last condition, Hollyhock.'

'What do you mean?'

'A lonely life does not suit you, my child. When you are forced to have recourse to the kitchen cat, that proves the case. Now I want you to go back to Ardshiel with the other girls on Monday.'

'Oh, oh, *auntie*!'

'No one wishes for you here, child, and you certainly won't get my great piece of news unless you make me that promise. You will be as happy as the day is long at that school.'

'They certainly do *look* happy,' said Hollyhock, 'and I should like to see the boy with the blue eyes.'

'The boy with the blue eyes'——

'Oh, nothing, auntie; nothing. I'll agree. The kitchen cat is poor company. Now, then, out with your news.'

'You shall have it, dear. God bless you, darling! You have done a brave thing. And I cannot describe to you the joys of that lovely school, which you have wilfully absented yourself from. Now sit quite close to me, and listen to my news.'

Certainly Aunt Cecilia *had* a winning way. She was always remarkable for that. She could fight her cause with any one—with man, woman, or child; and she could fight it in the best possible way, by not fighting it at all, by simply leaving the matter in the hands of Almighty Love, by just breathing a gentle prayer for Divine guidance and then going bravely forward.

This plan of hers had supported her when her beloved husband was killed in battle; when her bonnie laddies, her Precious Stones, were sent to Mrs Macintyre's school; and would support her when, according to the arrangement made between herself and her husband, Major Constable, the time came for her Precious Stones to go to Eton.

Major Constable had been an Eton boy, and he knew well the spirit of the gallant words:

> It's not for the sake of a ribboned coat,
> Or the selfish hope of a season's fame,
> But his captain's hand on his shoulder smote,

Play up! play up! and play the game!'
This is the word that year by year,
While in her place the School is set,
Every one of her sons must hear,
And none that hears it dare forget.
This they all with a joyful mind
Bear through life like a torch in flame,
And, falling, fling to the host behind—
'Play up! play up! and play the game!'

Mrs Constable, as she repeated these words to Hollyhock, noticed the flame in her cheeks and the radiance in her black glorious eyes; knew only too well that this fearless girl would play her part—yes, to the very letter. For one like Hollyhock there would most certainly be a conflict, and also most assuredly a victory. She would 'play up! play up! and play the game!' Her own heart beat as she watched the child. Eton, that princely school, would be the first training-ground for Major Constable's young sons; but for Hollyhock there would be both at school and afterwards in the world the greater battlefield. Her heart went out to the child, and she pressed her close for a moment to her heart. Mrs Constable felt very happy to-night. She knew well that she herself was a very efficient teacher; she was also a very persuasive teacher, and Mrs Macintyre had eagerly agreed to her suggestion that she should be her kindergarten mistress, thus helping Mrs Constable to pay in part for the enormous expense of sending five boys to Ardshiel. But, after all, this sum of money was but a drop in the ocean; and her delight was intense, her thanksgiving to Almighty God extreme, when she was told that she *herself* might get her laddies back and start an Annex School for the boys, who were really too old to be at Ardshiel. The departure of one would mean the departure of all; and now, as she sat by Hollyhock's side, holding her little brown hand, she had already secured for herself quite fourteen boys, who were all to arrive at the Annex, or the dear Paddock, as she loved to call it, on the following Monday morning. But this apparent breaking up of Mrs Macintyre's school had not been mentioned as yet to any of the children. Mr Lennox, of course, knew and approved, and Hollyhock was really the first of the Flower Girls to whom the news was broken.

'Well, my dear,' said Mrs Constable, 'I have news for you, which I expect will please you. What do you say to two schools in this neighbourhood?'

'Two schools!' said Hollyhock, looking with amazement at gentle Mrs Constable.

'Yes, my love, that's my news. And I 'm to be at the head of one, though by no manner of means the teacher. That wouldn't do. But I 'm to superintend, and guide, and influence, and what you may call "mother." I'm getting my own brave laddies back.'

'But'—— said Hollyhock, a startled look coming into her dark eyes.

'Yes, my dear, and more than that. I 'm getting a boy called Henry de Courcy Anstel from the big school; and another one, Roger Carden.'

'Oh, oh!' said Hollyhock, turning first white and then red, 'has he blue eyes—*has* he blue eyes?'

'That is more than I can tell you. The colour of the eyes does *not* trouble me, and they ought not to trouble a lass of your tender years. There 's another boy called Ivor Chetwode also coming. These with my own five make eight. In addition, I have got Andrew MacPen from Edinburgh, and Archie MacPen, his brother, and four little orphan boys, who are coming all the way from London. Their names are Johnnie and Georgie and Alec and Murray. I call them orphans because their father and mother have gone to India, and have had to leave them behind. So on Monday my little Annex will open with fourteen boys. They'll have the advantage of the fräuleins and mesdemoiselles from Ardshiel to give them lessons two or three times a week; and in addition, being manly boys, I have made arrangements that they shall be taught by the Reverend James Cadell and two resident tutors. So you see now for yourself, Hollyhock, that after your insisting so often that nothing would make you go to a mixed school, the thing has been taken out of your hands, my love. Mrs Macintyre has a large and flourishing school for girls, and I hope to do well with my boys. You must congratulate me, Hollyhock.'

'Well,' said Hollyhock haltingly, 'I—somehow—it seems hard on Mrs Macintyre, doesn't it?'

'Not a bit of it, dear. Why, it's the making of her school. She has got so many applications for girlies like yourself to go to Ardshiel that she soon will have to close her lists. Now that you have decided to go there, Hollyhock, it will bring the number of her pupils in the course of next week up to nearly seventy.'

Hollyhock sat very cold and still.

'You don't look pleased, my child, and yet you were so strong against a mixed school.'

'Well, yes, I was, and I am still. For that matter, I hate all schools.'

'But you faithfully promised me to go to Ardshiel, Hollyhock.'

'Oh yes, I 'll keep my word. I expect I 'm a bit of a dare-devil; there is something very wicked in me, Auntie Cecilia.'

'I know there is, child. You need Divine guidance.'

'I won't be lectured,' said Hollyhock, getting very cross all at once. 'Oh, auntie, those blue eyes!' and the excited, hysterical girl burst into tears.

'There must be something at the back of this, Hollyhock.'

'Oh, nothing—nothing indeed.'

'Well, I won't press for your confidence, dear. Little girls and little boys should be friends and nothing more for long years to come; and although I at first quite hoped that Mrs Macintyre's mixed school would be a great success, I now see that it is best for me to have my little corner in the Lord's vineyard alone. But don't for a moment imagine, Hollyhock, that you girls of Ardshiel and my boys of the Annex won't be the best of friends, meeting constantly and enjoying life and fun together. Think of your Saturday to Monday, Hollyhock! Think of my Precious Stones meeting you Flower Girls! Think of the old life being brought back again!'

'Yes, I suppose it is best,' said Hollyhock, but she heaved a sigh as she spoke. Her sigh was mostly caused by the fact that she had given in. She, who had made such a grand and noble stand, was going to Ardshiel after all.

CHAPTER XI.

SOFT AND LOW.

But when Hollyhock went downstairs, dressed so charmingly and with a rich colour in her cheeks, with the sparkle of excitement in her eyes, and when she saw Jasper, Garnet, and the other boys, who all rushed toward her with a cry of delight, she began to enjoy herself once more.

Old Duncan was moving about the great hall and whistling gently to himself. 'Soft and low, soft and low. It 's that that does it,' whispered the old man. Then he broke out again in his cracked old tones, 'And for bonnie Annie Laurie I wad lay me doun and dee!'

'Duncan, you might remember that we are in the room,' said Hollyhock.

'To be sure, lassies; and don't ye like the sound o' the grand old tunes and words? Did ye never hear me sing "Roy's Wife o' Aldivalloch"?'

'No; and I don't wish to,' said Hollyhock.

'Well,' said Duncan, who was never put out in his life, 'here are the doggies, poor beasties, and I guess, Miss Hollyhock, you 'll be a sicht better for a little company. I 'm reddin' up the place against the maister's return. Ay, but we 'll hae a happy evenin'. Old times come back again —"Should auld acquaintance be forgot"'——

'Duncan, you are incorrigible!'

But Duncan deliberately winked at Jasper, then at Garnet, then at his beloved Miss Jasmine, and finally catching Delphy in his arms, trotted up and down the great hall with her on his shoulder, while the child shrieked with delight and called him dear, darling old Duncan.

At last, however, the hall was in order. The ingle-nook was a blaze of light and cosiness. The boys and girls were chattering as they had never chattered before; and Duncan, assisted by a boy of the name of Rob, who wore the Lennox livery, brought in ponderous trays, which were laid on great tables. These trays contained tea and coffee, scones to make your mouth water, butter arranged like swans swimming in parsley, and shortbread made by that famous cook, old Mrs Duncan, who was also the housekeeper at The Garden.

The trays were followed, alas! by the kitchen cat, Jean, who smelt the good things and walked in with her tail very erect, and a look on her face as much as to say, 'I 'm monarch of all I survey!'

'Out you go, Jean!' cried Hollyhock.

'No, Hollyhock, don't be unkind to poor Jean,' said Mrs Constable. 'You were very glad to have her when you were alone. And now listen, my dear; I have something to whisper to you.'

Hollyhock dropped Jean, who was immediately snatched up by Gentian. Gentian provided the

kitchen cat with a rich mixture of cream, milk, and sugar. She lapped it slowly and gracefully, as all cats will, in front of the ingle-nook, the two great dogs watching her with envious eyes, but not daring to interfere.

Mrs Constable, meanwhile, continued to whisper in a distant corner to Hollyhock, 'My darling, I was the first to tell you the great news—I mean with regard to the boys' school, or, as we intend to call it, the Annex. No other child knows of it at present, and no other child knows that you are going to Ardshiel on Monday with your sisters. Now, what I propose is this. You must have a hearty tea and enjoy yourself as much as possible, and then you shall have the great honour of telling the news *first* about yourself, and then about my boys and the little school, to the others. *Only* Hollyhock shall tell. There, my pet, kiss me. See how I love you.'

'Oh, you do, and you are a darling,' said Hollyhock, who was keenly gratified by this distinction bestowed upon her.

The tea was disposed of with appetite. Never, surely, was there such shortbread eaten before, never such scones partaken of. Notwithstanding her private tea upstairs, Hollyhock was very hungry and happy, and the marked attentions which Jasper paid her gave her intense and unalloyed pleasure. Oh, what a pity he was leaving the school! What a dear boy was this Precious Stone! She even forgot the boy with the blue eyes when she looked at Jasper's honest, manly face. But the best of good teas come to an end.

Duncan came in with his soft whisper and gentle words in his cracked old voice, still singing softly, 'Should auld acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind?' Hollyhock gave him a haughty glance, but he did not observe it; and Jasper suddenly said, springing to his feet, 'Hurrah, old Duncan! you are the man for me. Let's all sing the jolly old song!'

'But, master,' faltered Duncan, 'I canna sing as once I sang.'

Jasper said, 'Nonsense; you forget yourself, Duncan. You lead off, and we 'll begin.'

All the children stood up; all the young voices, the middle-aged voice of Mrs Constable, and the aged voice of Duncan brought out the beloved words:

'Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
  And never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
  And auld lang syne?

'We twa hae paidl'd in the burn
  Frae morning sun till dine;
But seas between us braid hae roar'd
  Sin' auld lang syne.

For auld lang syne, my dear,
  For auld lang syne,
We'll tak' a cup o' kindness yet
  For auld lang syne.'

Just as the last words had echoed round the hall, who should enter but the father of the Flower Girls. There was a sudden cry of rapture. Jasmine's arms were round his neck; Delphy mounted to her accustomed place on his shoulder. He was their own, their darling. Gentian kissed his hand over and over again. Dark-eyed Rose of the Garden kissed him once more. Oh, how happy they were! for his little Hollyhock—the child who had troubled him all the week—overcome by varied emotions, sprang to his side, pushed both Jasmine and Gentian away, and said, 'Oh, daddy, I have been a bad, bad lassie, but I'm all right now; and if you'll listen, daddy mine, and if the others will hold their peace for a minute, I 'll let my great secret out.' There was a new sound in Hollyhock's voice. Old Duncan stood in a kind of trance of wonder. To be sure, things *were* coming round, and that week of misery was over. 'Daddy,' said Hollyhock, 'I didn't think you'd enjoy my absence as much as you will. I talked a lot of nonsense, and said I'd see to you, Daddy Dumps; but what's the use? I 'm not just entirely to blame, but I have *not* been happy this last week, so I think it is well that I should go back with Jasmine and the others to Ardshiel on Monday morning—that is, if *you* wish it, daddy?'

'Is the choice entirely your own, my child?' said George Lennox.

'Yes, it is. You 'll want me, perhaps, when you haven't got me, but I'm away to school with the others. It's right—it *is* right.'

'Well, my Hollyhock, I thank you,' said her father. 'I shall miss you, beyond a doubt; but work has set in for me to such an extent that I have no time to attend to you, and your being in the house and uneducated has been a sore trial to me, Holly. You 'll be a good lass at school, my child. You must promise me that.'

'You 'll have a right-down lovely time, Holly,' cried Jasmine.

'Yes, won't she?' echoed Gentian.

'But I haven't told you all the story yet,' said Hollyhock. She suddenly went up to Jasper and took his big hand. 'I was trusted by a lady, whose name I mustn't mention, with another bit of news, Jasper, boy—and, oh! it's sore it makes my heart. *You* have to go to the lady, Jasper, boy, and so has Garnet, and so has Sapphire, and so have Opal and Emerald. In addition, the boys at Ardshiel are to go to a new Annex—under protest, no doubt; but still it has to be. You 'll be taught by men, my bonnie Precious Stones, and we lassies will have to do with the women folk.'

'Well, this is astounding,' said Jasper. 'Is it true?—Can you explain, Uncle George?'

'Yes, my boy; and I don't think you 'll mind when it's explained to you. The "lady" whom my Hollyhock wouldn't mention is your *own* mother.'

'Mother!' cried Emerald, in a voice of rapture. 'Eh, mother, I have missed you!'

He was only a little fellow—the youngest of the Precious Stones—and he suddenly burst out crying.

'There, now, be a brave lad,' said Mrs Constable. 'No tears, my little son, for they don't become a gentleman. They don't become the son of Major Constable. Ho died fighting for his country, and no son of his and mine should be seen with tears in his eyes. You all do come back to your mummy, my children, and a lot of other boys come as well; and The Paddock is to be partly changed, so that I can mother you, my Emerald, but not teach you—no, no, none of that. There 'll be that fine gentleman, the Reverend James Cadell, to put Latin and Greek into you; and there'll be Alan Anderson to teach you games, as boys should play them; and there 'll be young Mr Maclure to help him with your English and your lessons all round. I 'll have my five Precious Stones sleeping again under my roof; and your food will be prepared by that maid of ours, Alison, of whom you have always been so fond; and old Mrs Cheke will be the housekeeper and look after your wants. And for foreign languages Mrs Macintyre will send over at certain hours each day some of her governesses. Now then, children, I think we are all going to be as happy as happy. It was decided by a wise woman that Mrs Macintyre's mixed school would eventually prove a mistake, for a good many mothers object to sending their girls to such places, although I myself see no harm in them whatsoever. But, my dear boys, we must think of Mrs Macintyre, who will have a very large school of girls. On Monday next you will see many new faces at Ardshiel, and the arrangement that you, my little loves, are to spend Saturday till Monday all together is to continue. So now do let us sing a fresh song of that wondrous bard, Robbie Burns, because I feel so absolutely Scots of the Scots to-day that I simply cannot stand any one else.

'Hark, the mavis' evening sang
Sounding Clouden's woods amang;
Then a-faulding let us gang,
My bonnie Dearie.

'Ca' the yowes to the knowes,
Ca' them whare the heather grows,
Ca' them whare the burnie rowes
My bonnie Dearie.

We'll gae down by Clouden side,
Through the hazels spreading wide,
O'er the waves, that sweetly glide
To the moon sae clearly.

'Yonder Clouden's silent towers,
Where at moonshine midnight hours,
O'er the dewy bending flowers,
Fairies dance sae cheery.

'Ghaist nor bogle shalt thou fear;
Thou 'rt to Love and Heaven sae dear,
Nocht of ill may come thee near,
My bonnie Dearie.

Fair and lovely as thou art,
Thou hast stown my very heart;
I can die—but canna part,
My bonnie Dearie.

'While waters wimple to the sea,
While day blinks i' the lift sae hie,
Till clay-cauld death shall blin' my e'e
Ye shall be my Dearie!'

'Oh, mother, mother!' cried one boy after another, as they clustered round her, 'indeed we are happy now, since *you* are the "lady."'

'We didn't rightly understand at first,' continued Jasper.—'But come for a walk, Hollyhock; come along; I have a lot to say to you.'

So Hollyhock and Jasper went out together into the old grounds in the old way, and the

sweet, yet sorrowful, week—so maddening to poor Hollyhock, so joyous to Jasper—was forgotten in the spirit of reunion. Oh, it was perfect for the Flower Girl to be with her precious Precious Stone again, and she even loved his dear Scots ways so much that she told him of her little adventure as a 'great secret,' and besought of him not to mention it to any one.

'And so you were taken with that English boy Ivor Chetwode,' he remarked. 'I didn't think you were so fickle. But it's all right now, Hollyhock, and you 'll have a right jolly time at the school.'

CHAPTER XII.

UNDER PROTEST.

Whatever Hollyhock's feelings may have been, she went to school on the following Monday morning with a good grace. She was the sort of girl who, when once she put her hand to the plough, would not take it back again. She refused, however, to listen to any of the stories which Jasmine, Gentian, and the others longed and pined to tell her of the great school.

'I 'll find out for myself,' was her remark; and Mrs Constable advised the other girls to leave this obstinate lass alone as far as possible.

'Under protest!' exclaimed Jasmine.

'If you think it right,' said Gentian.

'Yes, Jasmine; yes, Gentian. I do know what is really best for our little maid. She will find her own way best in the school if she is not interfered with. If she is in any sort of trouble, then she will have her dear Flower sisters to go to.'

'I doubt it myself,' said Gentian. 'That's just what Hollyhock will not do. I know Holly; she's a queer fish. Rare courage has she; I 'm not fit to hold a candle to her myself.'

'Oh, you have plenty of courage of your own,' said Mrs Constable. 'You can wile every girl in the place, but don't interfere with Hollyhock.'

'Well, I 'm longing to be off to school,' said Jasmine, 'and I only trust Holly will like the dear spot as much as we do.'

'She 's certain sure to, girlies, if you don't tell her so. If you do, I won't answer for the consequences. She 'd love to scare you all. There now, my darlings, let her be, let her be.'

So the girls, who dearly loved Aunt Cecilia, and who thought a lot of her counsel, were induced to be judicious in the matter of Hollyhock, and to walk with her to Ardshiel as though it were an ordinary stroll they were taking.

Hollyhock was certainly a very handsome little girl. With the exception of Rose of the Garden, she was the only one of the young Lennoxes who was really dark. Her great deep black eyes were surrounded by thick black lashes. Her hair grew low on her brow and curled itself into little rings here, there, and everywhere. In addition, it was extremely long and thick, and, when not tied up with a ribbon, fell far below her waist. Hollyhock had pearly-white teeth, a very short upper lip, and a certain disdainful, never-may-care appearance, which was very fetching to most girls.

The hour for the reassembling of the girls at Ardshiel was nine o'clock, and Hollyhock, although her heart was beating furiously, showed not a scrap of nervousness, but gazed dauntlessly and with a fine defiance around her. Everywhere and in all directions she found eyes fixed on her—blue eyes, gray eyes, brown eyes, light eyes, dark eyes, the eyes of the pale-faced English, the glowing eyes of a few French girls; but she felt quite assured in her own heart that there was not one in that great group who could compare with herself. Hollyhock, or, in other words, Jacqueline Lennox.

She resolved quickly (and Hollyhock's resolutions, once formed, were hard to break) that *she* would be *captain* of this great school; she would lead, and the others would follow, no matter the colour of their eyes, no matter the complexions, no matter the thin, pale faces, or the fat, rosy faces. These things were all one to Hollyhock. She would compel these girls; they would follow her willy-nilly where *she* wished and where *she* dared to go. She knew well that she was not clever in book-learning, but she also knew well that she had the great gift of leadership; she would be the leader here. She rejoiced in the fact that all the girls were staring at her. She would go carefully to work and soon secure a band of followers, who would increase by-and-by, becoming extremely obstreperous and doing all sorts of naughty things, for Holly had no intention when at school to be good or to learn much. She went solely and entirely for her own happiness, because she preferred the girls with the blue, gray, and nondescript eyes to the kitchen cat, Jean, and to the great loneliness which had descended on The Garden.

Such a girl as Hollyhock could not but attract attention, and the Lady Barbara Fraser, Miss Agnes Featherstonhaugh, and many others became fascinated on the very first day. But Hollyhock, on that first day, was outwardly meek. She was good, except for her flashing eyes; she was good, except for the sudden and very queer smile which played round her pretty lips.

The other Flower Girls had been liked very much indeed, but they had not stirred a certain naughty spirit in the breasts of the girls. They honestly, all four of them, wanted to learn hard and to repay their beloved father for all the expense he was put to on their account; but Hollyhock's was a totally different nature. She had come to school to lead, and lead she would.

On the afternoon of the first day, Lady Leucha Villiers, who was a delicate, refined-looking girl, came up to Jasmine. 'Well, what queer changes have taken place in the school!'

'What do you mean exactly?' replied Jasmine.

'Why, all those nice boys have vanished like smoke.'

'No, they haven't. They are alive and well. They are being taught at the Annex. It has been considered best.'

Lady Leucha gave a sigh. 'I miss that dear Ivor,' she said, 'and I also miss your cousin Jasper and that little chap you call Opal; but what puzzles me most of all is the crowds and crowds of new girls who have arrived at the school, and the newest of them all is your sister.'

'Yes,' said Barbara Fraser, 'your sister, Jasmine, is very new and very remarkable. Whyever did she not come with the rest of you last week?'

'She did not wish it,' replied Jasmine. 'Girls, had we not better get our French ready for Mam'selle?'

'Oh, bother Mam'selle!' said Lady Leucha. 'I am interested in your sister. Fancy a girl not coming to school because she doesn't wish it.'

'Father never forces any of us,' said Jasmine in her sweet voice. 'Hollyhock began by disliking the school—I mean the idea of it—and she was a bit lonesome with no one to talk to her, so she came back with us this morning.'

'Hollyhock,' said Lady Leucha. 'A queer name!'

'Oh, it isn't her real name; it is her home name. Her real name is Jacqueline.'

'That's much prettier,' said Leucha Villiers. 'Do tell her to come and sit with us, Jasmine. I shall always call her Jack. I have taken a great fancy to her.'

'Well, you'd best keep your fancy to yourself,' said Jasmine, 'for no one *will*, and no one *can*, coerce Hollyhock.'

'Oh, she's not going to lord it over me,' said Lady Leucha. 'Am I not an earl's daughter?'

'That will have no effect on Hollyhock, I can assure you.'

'Won't it? We'll see. My father has got a glorious mansion, and we belong to the very greatest nobility in the whole of England. Our cousins, the Frasers, are the daughters of the Marquis of Killin. So you 'd better not put on airs before me, Jasmine. Oh Jasmine, I do love you; you are such a downright dear little thing. I 'm going to ask you up to Hans Place at Easter if daddy and mother will give me leave.'

'Thank you,' said Jasmine; but I couldn't afford to spend one minute away from The Garden.'

'How queer of you! You seem devoted to your home.'

'I'm Scots,' replied Jasmine; 'and to the Scots there are no people like the Scots.'

'Oh, do, do watch her!' suddenly exclaimed Lady Leucha. 'Barbara, do you see—Dorothy, do you see?—she's walking up and down on the terrace with that ugly Mary Barton and that nobody, Agnes Featherstonhaugh. Why, Nancy Greenfield and Jane Calvert are hopping round her just as though they were magpies on one leg.'

'Why should she not talk to those girls? They are very nice,' said Jasmine. 'But, Leucha, Barbara, and Dorothy, do you not think you had better prepare your French lessons? At least I must and will.'

Jasmine skipped away and was soon lost to view, but the Ladies Barbara, Dorothy, and Leucha found themselves alone—alone and somewhat slighted. Slighted, too, by those commonplace Scots girls! They, who were the daughters of a marquis and an earl! The thing was not to be endured!

Leucha whispered to her companions, and soon they got up and went out in a little group into

the grounds. They saw black-eyed Hollyhock, surrounded by her adorers. She was talking in quite a gentle, subdued voice, and did not take the least notice of the marquis's and the earl's daughters. Never had Nancy Greenfield, Jane Calvert, Mary Barton, Agnes Featherstonhaugh, and last, but not least, Margaret Drummond felt so elated. Holly was talking in a very low, seductive voice. Her rich curls were tumbling about her face and far down her back. Her cheeks were like bright, soft fire, and the flash in her glorious black eyes it would be difficult to surpass.

'I say, Jack,' exclaimed Leucha.

——'And, girls, as I was telling you, that poor cat, wee Jean, she came and nestled on my bed'——

'I'm talking to you, Miss Lennox,' said Lady Leucha.

'Are you? I did not listen. You spoke to some one called Jack. That's a boy. I happen to be a girl.—Well, girls, let's proceed. I've *such* a jolly plan in my head. I 'm thinking—whisper—that young person must not hear.'

The whisper was to the effect that wee Jean was to be fetched from The Garden by Holly that very night and put comfortably into Lady Leucha's bed. A saucer of cream was to be placed in the said bed, and it was more than likely that bonnie Jean would spill it in her fright.

Lady Leucha, who knew nothing of this plan, said in a tone bristling with haughtiness, 'Some little Scotch girls can be very rude!'

'And some fair maids of England can be downright worse!' retorted Hollyhock.—'Come along, girls, let's go down this side-walk.'

Lady Leucha had never been spoken to in that tone before, but rudeness to a girl who had always been pampered made her desire all the stronger to win the fascinating Hollyhock to her side, and to deprive those common five, Agnes Featherstonhaugh, Mary Barton, Nancy Greenfield, Jane Calvert, and Margaret Drummond, of her company. Accordingly, accompanied by the two Frasers, she also went down the shady walk which led to the great lake. She began to talk in a high-pitched English voice of the delights of her home, the wealth of her parents, and the way in which the Marquis of Kilmarnock and his sons and daughters adored her.

Hollyhock heard each word, but *her* voice was no longer gentle. It was loud and a little penetrating. 'You would not dare to come out at night,' she said, looking at the devoted five.

'And whyever not?' asked Mary.

'You would not have the courage. It's here on moonlight nights that the ghost walks. He drips as he walks; and he's *very* tall and very strong, with a wild sort of light in his eyes, which are black and big and awful to see. He was drowned here in the lake on the night before his wedding. He's very unquiet, is that poor ghost! *I* do not mind him one little bit, being a sort of friend, almost a relative, of his. Many and many a night, when the moon is at the full, have I stood by the lake and said, "Come away, my laddie. Come, poor ghostie, and I 'll dry your wet hair." Poor fellow, he likes me to rub him dry.'

'It's here on moonlight nights that the ghost walks.'
Hollyhock. PAGE 132.

'It's here on moonlight nights that the ghost walks.'

The daughters of the marquis and the earl were now quite silent, their silly little hearts filled with horror. They never guessed that Hollyhock was making up her story.

'You *couldn't* have done that,' said Jane Calvert.

'Whist, can't ye? I want to get those girls away, so as to talk about the kitchen cat.'

The girls in question certainly did go away. They did more; they went straight to Mrs Macintyre and asked her if the awful story was true. Mrs Macintyre, having never heard of it, declared emphatically that it was not true; but, somehow, neither Lady Leucha nor the Fraser girls quite believed her. There was such a ring of truth in Hollyhock's words; and had they not all heard, on that first happy evening at the school, the cry, so shrill, so piercing, '*The ghost! the ghost!*'

They had tried not to think of it since, but Hollyhock seemed to confirm the weird words, and they began to wonder if they could stay long in this school, which, beautiful as it was, contained such an awful ghost—a ghost who required a little girl to dry his locks for him. Surely such a terrible thing could not happen! It was quite past belief.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SUMMER PARLOUR.

If there was a girl who was at once slightly frightened and extremely angry, that girl was Leucha Villiers, the daughter of the Earl of Crossways. Never, never before had any overtures on her part been treated as Hollyhock had treated them. If this saucy black-eyed imp intended to rule the school, she, Leucha, would show her what she thought of her conduct. She would not be ruled by her. She would, in short, show her once and for all her true position. Little Scotch nobody, indeed! Well, the angry Leucha knew how to proceed.

Leucha was considered by her friends and by her numerous acquaintances a most charming girl, a girl with such aristocratic manners, such a noble presence, such a gentle, firm, distinguished air. She had been, during her first week at school, very happy on the whole, for Jasmine, and Gentian, and Rose, and Delphinium had more or less bowed down to her and

admired her. But now there appeared on the scene a totally different character—Hollyhock! How ridiculous to call any human being by such a name! But then it wasn't her real name; her name was Jacqueline. She, Lady Leucha, would certainly not call her Hollyhock, or prickly Holly, or anything of that sort. She would call her Jack and Jacko, and tease her as much as possible. She had certainly spoken of the ghost in her ridiculous Scotch accent, but Leucha Villiers, after careful consideration, determined not to be afraid of pure nonsense. Was there ever a girl in creation who dried a ghost's dripping hair? The whole thing was too silly.

In accordance with Mrs Maclure's promise, a great many fresh girls had arrived, and the full number of seventy was now nearly made up. It would be quite made up by the end of the following week.

Leucha liked the boy element in the school, and was exceedingly sorry to part with it; but she perceived, to her intense satisfaction, that the English contingent of girls at Ardshiel was very strong, and that, notwithstanding all her audacity and daring, Jacko—of course she was Jacko—could be kept in a minority. She felt there was no time to lose, for Hollyhock looked at her with such flashing eyes, with such saucy dimples round her lips, with such a very rare and personal beauty, that Leucha felt she must get hold of her own girls at once, in order to sustain the school against the wicked machinations of Jacko.

Accordingly she got Lady Barbara Fraser and her sister Dorothy, also the Honourable Daisy Watson, to meet her in what was called the Summer Parlour, a very pretty arbour in the grounds, where materials for a fire were laid, and where a fire could be lit in cold weather.

Winter was approaching. It was now nearly October, and October in the North is often accompanied by frosts and fallen leaves, and by bitter, cold, easterly winds. Lady Leucha had, she considered, a very charming manner. Having collected her friends round her, she went off with them to seek for Mrs Macintyre. They found this good woman, as usual, very busy, and very gentle and full of tact.

'We have come with a request,' said Lady Leucha.

'And what is that, my child?' asked Mrs Macintyre.

'Mrs Macintyre,' said Lady Leucha, 'you have in your school far more English than Scotch girls.'

'That is true, my dear—at least, it is true up to the present. But I have heard to-day from my dear friend Mrs Maclure that fifteen new Edinburgh lassies will arrive on Saturday. You'll welcome them; won't you, Leucha?'

'I like English girls best,' said Lady Leucha.

'That's natural enough, dear child. Well, you have a goodly number of friends and relatives at the school.'

'I have,' said Leucha; 'but I have come in the name of my cousins, Dorothy and Barbara Fraser, and my great friend Daisy Watson, to say that we do not approve of the manners of the new pupil.'

'What new pupil, Leucha? There are a good many in the school.'

'I know that. But I allude to that wild-looking child with black eyes and hair, who talks the absurdest nonsense. Would you believe it, dear Mrs Macintyre, she talks of coming here on moonlight nights and wiping the hair of a ghost? Could you imagine anything so silly?'

'It is a very foolish thing to say,' remarked Mrs Macintyre—'so silly and impossible that if I were you, Leucha, I would not give it a second thought. The child must have said it in pure fun. You are doubtless alluding to Hollyhock, a splendid little girl.'

'Well,' said Leucha, tossing her head, 'I don't care for girls who tell untruths; and it is not only for that reason that I dislike her, it is also because she has been so terribly rude to my cousins the Frasers, and to my dear friend Daisy Watson. I can see that she intends to rule the school, or at least to take a very leading position in it. Now this I, for one, do not wish, and I do not intend to put up with it. I think that I, as Earl Crossways' daughter, and the Frasers, who are daughters of the Marquis of Killin'——

'And therefore Scots of the Scots,' interrupted Mrs Macintyre.

'Well, at least their mother is English of the English, and they have been brought up in English ways. They are *my* relatives, and I do not choose them to be treated rudely. There is also my very great friend Daisy Watson. We are most anxious, dear Mrs Macintyre, for you to allow us English girls, who at present are in a majority in the school, the entire use of the Summer Parlour, giving it out as your desire that no Scotch girl is to come into the parlour without our express permission.'

'I do not quite see how I can do that, Leucha. The Summer Parlour is for the use of all, and

why should my Scots lassies be excluded? I am sure, notwithstanding your remarks, Leucha, the children you speak of are both good and well-bred.'

'That horrid creature they call Hollyhock isn't well-bred,' said Leucha.

'She is a magnificent child,' said Mrs Macintyre. 'You don't know her story or you wouldn't speak of her like that.'

'*I* don't want to hear her story,' said Barbara Fraser. 'I dislike her appearance too much.'

'Barbara, my dear, I am the last to encourage vanity, but Hollyhock is quite the handsomest girl in the school.'

'Oh, Mrs Macintyre, I do wish we had never come here!' said Leucha, who looked extremely mournful and inclined to cry. 'Of course, I suppose, mother must give you a term's notice, but there are really *refined* schools in England without wild Scotch girls in their midst.'

'You must not speak against Scotland to me,' said Mrs Macintyre. 'Remember it is my native land—the land of the heather, and the lochs, and the glorious mountains. It is the land of brave men and brave women, and I will not have it run down by *any* impudent English girl. I've got so many other English girls coming to the school that the loss of you four won't affect me much, Leucha Villiers.'

This was taking matters with a very high hand, and Leucha, who had no great moral strength, was thoroughly subdued.

'I didn't mean to be rude to you, of course, dear Mrs Macintyre,' she said, nudging her cousins as she spoke. 'I only said I did not like that black-eyed girl. She's frightfully wild and rude, and I'm accustomed to girls of a different type. Naturally indeed, being born as I am. However, I ask now for permission to use the Summer Parlour. Do you refuse it?'

'If you don't want it for hatching plots or anything of that kind,' said Mrs Macintyre, 'you English girls can have it till Saturday—no longer, remember; and as the weather is turning very cold, you must pay for your own fire, and, what's more, light it. For all my maids have plenty of work to do in the house. Now, then, are you satisfied? The Summer Parlour will be yours, beginning from to-day.'

'Thank you, Mrs Macintyre; we are quite satisfied,' said Leucha, who knew well how furious her mother would be were she removed from Ardshiel, which, as the former home of *kings*, was considered most distinguished.

The girls went off quite mildly and gently. The day was drawing toward evening. Their idea was to light a great fire in the Parlour, and then go into the house for tea; after which they would prepare their lessons, and then go back in a body to the Parlour to discuss the enormities of that wicked girl who called herself Hollyhock. But, alack and alas! the daughter of the Earl of Crossways and the daughters of the Marquis of Killin had never lit a fire in their lives, and did not know in the least how to set about it. They were not particularly strong girls, and did not wish to sit in the Summer Parlour hatching mischief against their schoolfellow without the comfort of a glowing fire.

'How queer and cross Mrs Mac. is!' said Leucha, turning to her companions as they rushed off to the Parlour, knowing that they would have at least half-an-hour in which to make it ready for their evening talk.

'No, no; she's all right,' said Barbara Fraser; 'and mother thinks the world of her. If we left, girls, I don't know what father and mother would say. They've always been wild to get us into a proper Scottish school.'

'How are we to light the fire?' whispered Leucha. 'Do you know how it's done, Dorothy?'

'Not I. Who 's that singing?'

There was a wonderfully sweet contralto voice sounding from the cosy depths of the Summer Parlour. The words the girl sang were as follows:

> 'The great Ardshiel, he gaed before,
> He gart the cannons and guns to roar.

'Whisper now, lassies. Do you not know that "the oak shall go over the myrtle yet"? We will settle some of the poor English girls yet. All the same, I like the really nice English girls *ever* so well. They are so bonnie and so gentle, like my own sweet sister Jasmine. Where could you see her like anywhere? And there is my own kinsman, the Duke of Ardshiel! Ah! but I love him well!'

The voice was undoubtedly the voice of Hollyhock, who, without rhyme or reason, had lit a great fire in the old grate, and was comfortably established there, with her four sisters and a number of Scots and English girls scattered round.

These young people were seated round the roaring fire, and Holly, with her black locks and great glowing black eyes, was the centre of an animated group. She was about to expand her views on the nice and not-nice English girls, when in rushed Leucha and her friends.

'You clear out of this,' she said.

'Clear?' said Hollyhock. 'What is clear?'

'There's the door,' said Leucha. 'Go!'

'Not I,' said Holly. 'I find this little chair very comfortable.'

She established herself with much grace and dignity, and the others clustered round her.

'You have got to go,' said Leucha, who was now in a towering passion. 'We have got Mrs Macintyre's permission to consecrate the Summer Parlour to the English girls until Saturday.'

'That seems a pity,' said Holly, 'for, you see, we *must* put out the fire. We built it, we lassies of Scotland, and we do not leave it except to those English girls who are on our side. I rather think you are up to a conspiracy, and you sha'n't hatch your plot by *our* fire.—Come, girls, she wants the Parlour and the fire, but she does not want us. So, quick is the word. Stir yourself, Delphy; stir yourself, Augusta; stir yourselves, all the rest. It is mighty damp outside, so the faggots can cool themselves there. My word! I do not think much of *some* English maids. They have no manners at all. And I telling such a fine tale about Ardshiel and his bonnie men. Well, the Camerons are down now, but they will soon be up again. "The Camerons are coming," say I. Never mind, girls; we 'll find another place for our wee conspiracy.'

In less than two minutes the fire no longer glowed and roared. The coal smouldered feebly under the grate; the faggots were put in the dripping rain, for the evening happened to be a wet one; and, in order to make all secure, Hollyhock poured a jug of water over the rapidly expiring fire.

'There they lie,' she cried; 'but if any of you wants a proper fire lit, not in anger, but in the spirit of love, I can and will undertake the job. Ay! not a word!—Come away, girls. I know a little hut where we can light a fire for our own conspiracy—a sort of a "cubby hole," but loved by poor ghostie, and fit for our work. Come at once, girls. Come at once.'

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FIRE THAT WILL NOT LIGHT.

The Lady Leucha Villiers and her cousins, the daughters of the Marquis of Killin, assisted by their chosen companions, tried in vain to relight the fire in the Summer Parlour; but, alas! although even the kitchen cat might have understood so simple a job, being at least acquainted with *something* of the system, it was quite outside the powers of these ladies of high degree.

Naughty Hollyhock's last effort before she left the Parlour had been to pour a small jug of water over the fast-expiring coals.

'I 'm thinking this will settle matters,' she said to her adoring companions. 'Let them try their hardest now if they like, but we 'll find our own cubby hole and light our fire somewhere else.'

No sooner said than done, for Hollyhock was an adept at small manual jobs. She had observed in her rambles over the Palace of the Kings a small neglected hut, said to be haunted by the ghost from the neighbouring loch. As Hollyhock had not a scrap of fear of the ghost, knowing only too well that he did *not* appear, and knowing also that she could use him as a valuable weapon, she entered the hut, sent Gentian flying for some fresh faggots, and with the aid of Margaret Drummond and her own sisters, Mary Barton, Nancy Greenfield, Isabella Macneale, and Jane Calvert, she soon had a glowing fire. They put by in one corner a pile of faggots to place on the fire when tea was over, after which they would have quite an hour to work out their conspiracy. At tea, which was served on long tables in a beautiful old room, Hollyhock looked more brilliant and more beautiful than ever. Leucha, on the contrary, had a pale face and seemed chilled to the bone.

'Did you leave your fire burning well, Leucha, my hearty?' inquired Hollyhock.

Leucha, of course, refused to reply. She sat looking down at her plate, hardly eating the good things before her, but making up her mind to punish that horrible *Jack*, even if she herself died in the effort.

'Couldn't you find a small hut by the burnside; couldn't you now?' continued Hollyhock in a

coaxing tone. 'The Summer Parlour's grate is hard to light up—it has an artful way with it—but a small *hut* now, with you sitting by the fire, could be easily managed. I 'd bring you some faggots, if you said the word.'

'No, thank you. I don't choose you to help me in any way.'

'All right! I 'm not wanting to,' said Hollyhock. 'I'm very happy without you, my Lady Leucha.'

'Girls,' said one of the English mistresses, who felt quite certain there was mischief ahead, 'I think you ought to take your tea, and be quick about it. You will lose your recreation afterwards if you stop to wrangle.'

'What's wrangle, Miss Kent, dear?' asked Hollyhock in her sweetest tones. 'I like well to hear your pure English words. We Scots talk very differently, no doubt, but we are always willing to learn. So, please, what's wrangle? And will you pass me a fresh scone, Miss Kent, dear, for my appetite is far more than ordinary?'

'Vulgar little glutton,' muttered Leucha to Dorothy Fraser.

'She really *is* attractive, all the same,' answered Dorothy.

'Oh Dolly, you are not going round to her? That *would* be the final straw.'

'No, I 'm not, of course; but I can't help admiring her funny ways and her beautiful, noble sort of face.'

'Noble!' cried Lady Leucha.

'Yes, it is noble, although it is full of mischief too. You could have had her as a *great* friend, Leucha, and that girl is worth making a friend of. I never saw her like before. She really haunts me.'

'What haunts you, lassie?' cried Hollyhock. 'Is it my eyes so black, or my cheeks so rosy-red, or my hair so curly, and black as the blackest night? I 'm at your service. I'm willing to forgive and forget this blessed minute if you'll all hold out the paws of forgiveness.'

Both Dorothy and Barbara longed to do so, but Lady Leucha put the final extinguisher on their hopes by saying, 'No, never! Why, you are not even a lady!'

'Let's eat,' said Hollyhock. 'I waved the flag of peace, as the great Ardshiel did once; but never again—don't you fear, lassies. No lady, indeed! We 'll see who's the lady!'

In vain Miss Kent tried to stop the angry torrent of words, but this was the hour when the girls were allowed to talk freely. Mrs Macintyre was not present, and all eyes in the room were fixed with admiration on Hollyhock.

'First, we 'd like to know—just for a diversion—what *makes* a lady,' continued the obstreperous lass. ''Tisn't birth—my certie! no. It must be a sort of civilisation. It must be, to my way of thinking, a give and a take. It must belong to the sort of person who has the courage of her race, and will even wipe the hair of a ghost when he comes to you in his trouble. That's what *I* call a lady. Others may differ from me.'

'They do,' said Leucha. 'Liars are not ladies!'

'You 'd better not call *me* that.'

'But I do. You never wiped the hair of a ghost.'

'Let's drop the subject,' said Hollyhock. 'My sisters and I, and Mrs Constable, and my father, and my five cousins, the Precious Stones, have views that differ from yours entirely. I know your sort of lady. I have read of her in books, but I never came across her till I met you, Leucha.'

'I 'd thank you to call me Lady Leucha.'

'I won't, then. You are only Leucha to me in this school. I have described what I call a lady. She's bountiful to the poor, and kindness sits in her bonnie eyes, and love shimmers round her lips, and her heart—why, it's pure gold; and she's all-forgiving, and all for making up. There 's never a quarrel that a real lady would nurse; but mayhap there's a different sort in England. They walk what you might call *mincingly*, and they drop their words slow, and there's no flash in their eyes, and no courage in them, and no daring in them. No doubt they are very respectable, and they are very proud of their family. Then they make their little curtsy, when their education is quite finished, to the Sovereign on the throne; and they go to many a party, and they dress like all the other girls—no individuality anywhere. That would not be thought right for such an English lady. She marries when she can get a man to have her. Many a time he's as old as her father; but that doesn't count with *her*, she being what she is, looking out for *respectability*. Ah, well! I 'm all for the Scots lady. I don't care for grand parties or grand dresses; but I want my bit of adventure, and I'll have it, too. Good-bye, Leuchy. I think I have explained myself.—Come along, girls; we have our work cut out for us. It would not do for that poor Leuchy to be cold this

night. She must have a living, warming thing to comfort her, poor Leuchy! Come along; there's no time to spare.'

The girls, headed by Hollyhock, left the room in a group, but for some reason Jasmine remained behind. She was very much distressed by her sister's manner of going on, and what followed would not have taken place had she gone to the ghost's hut and joined in the 'conspiracy;' but the other girls were now fairly mad with excitement, and Margaret Drummond, a Scots girl, was so much in love with Hollyhock that she would have done anything on earth for her.

The Conspiracy.

'You are splendid, lassie!' she cried.

The fire was quite out in the Summer Parlour, but it glowed warmly in the ghost's hut.

'It's here I dry his hair, poor fellow,' said Hollyhock, who was now nearly beside herself with delight. 'Listen to me, girls. You are a goodly group, and true to the heart's core, true to the soul of the thing; but I 'm not going to be ruled over by Leuchy, though I don't mind Barbara, or Dorothy, or that weak little Daisy looking on. It's Leuchy who 'll get a fright this very night. Now, then, we haven't long to lose, for the hours for pure enjoyment are few in number. I am much deceived if we don't find many impediments in our path. Now, lassies, I 'll show you on the spot what we have got to do. One of us must go to The Garden, my home, to fetch wee Jean, the kitchen cat; and another has to beg, borrow, or steal a saucer of cream for the little beastie. That's about all. I 'll start off at once for the cat; and you, Gentian, had best get the cream. I have been looking round the house—don't I know every stone of it?—and you have got to get into the larder. You know your way to the larder, don't you, Gentian?'

'Yes,' said Gentian, who looked rather frightened.

'Well, never mind, my lass. You have got to do it, and one of these girls will help you. You were always nimble-witted, and you won't fail your own sister-born in a conspiracy so innocent and so amusing. While I 'm off alone for the cat, you other girls will find out the number of Leuchy's room, and have the nice rich cream ready for poor Jean. She can sleep with me afterwards. Well, then, off I go! Good-bye, lassies; good-bye! Oh, I can tell you bogy stories that 'll make your hair stand up straight; but this is the night for wee Jean.'

Hollyhock, her head in the air, rushed quickly down the avenue. There was plenty of time still, for the gates would not be locked before nine o'clock. She went out, therefore, boldly, and reached the dear old Garden. She wrapped her cloak well about her, so as to disguise herself as much as possible, and went straight to the kitchen regions, where the housekeeper, having very little to do now that all the girls were out and the master was dining with Lord Ian Douglas, was sound asleep by the kitchen fire.

On her lap reposed Jean, also in profound slumber. Hollyhock whisked her up in a hurry, petting and cuddling her all the time. A row of baskets hung just outside the kitchen door. Hollyhock chose one, placed a warm bit of felt at the bottom, put in a lump of butter for Jean to lick, fastened her down securely in the basket, and was off and away, back to Ardshiel.

By that time the other girls had fully carried out the commands of their liege lady. The cream had been secured by Gentian, who had scraped her shins a little in climbing in at the window. She had put the cream into a small jug, and had further procured a saucer.

'That'll do fine,' said Hollyhock. 'Poor Jean, poor beastie, we mustn't frighten her, or she 'll be off like a flash. Have you got the number of the English lady's room?'

Yes, Leucha Villiers's room had been discovered. Hollyhock went boldly upstairs. The little room looked most luxurious. There were eider-down quilts on every bed in the house, and a particularly pretty silk one was on the bed of Leucha. Under the eiderdown was a snowy light counterpane. The room had been already arranged for the night, and would not be touched again by any one. Although the weather was beginning to get cold, Mrs Macintyre did not consider it necessary to have fires in the bedrooms just yet; but wee Jean, cuddled up in Hollyhock's arms, purred into Hollyhock's face, and presently lay contentedly down just under the eider-down.

It did not take her long to fall into a deep sleep, and, this done, Hollyhock placed the saucer brimfull of cream also under the eider-down, but she slightly raised the latter by means of a little pile of Lady Leucha's favourite books. When the cat awoke she would drink her cream, and then sleep on until she was disturbed.

Hollyhock was rejoiced to find that Lady Leucha's room was close to her own; in fact, it was next door. She could, therefore, be on the *qui vive*, and meant to be.

The 'conspiracy' had begun, and she had no idea of shifting any blame from her own shoulders. She wished to punish Leucha, and punish her she would. Yes, the 'conspiracy' had begun.

She went softly downstairs, followed by a trail of tittering girls, who hardly knew how to restrain themselves.

'Whist, can't you? Whist!' said Hollyhock. 'Do you want to spoil the whole thing by unseemly mirth? Now, then, mum's the word. Wee Jeanie shall sleep in my room to-night; but I somehow fancy that I have shown Leuchy who means to be head of the school.'

CHAPTER XV.

CREAM.

The kitchen cat was a very gentle beastie, except in the matter of killing birds and mice. She had the usual fascination of her species where these small victims were concerned; and she enjoyed life in the way cats do, eating when hungry, and sleeping the rest of her days. She slept now with the greatest comfort under the silken eider-down quilt. She rejoiced in the welcome warmth and purred softly to herself, not even troubling to regard the saucer of cream until she had had her snooze. By-and-by she would attack her cream, being partial to that beverage; but for the present she would slumber on, a creature without care, without fear; a gentle, admirable kitchen cat. She brought up her families when they arrived with all a mother's rectitude and propriety, and when they were old enough to leave her, got rid of them as quickly as possible—which means that she took no further notice of them. She regarded them no longer as hers; they were cats, and she preferred them out of the way. At the present time she had just reared and got rid of a large family, and was in that luxurious state of bliss when the good things of life appealed to her. Her purring went on for some time, then ceased, being followed by deep slumber.

Meanwhile Hollyhock and her chosen companions were amusing themselves in various ways downstairs. Supper would be to the minute at a quarter to nine. Supper was a very simple meal, a stand-up affair, consisting in winter of hot bread-and-milk, in summer of cold milk and biscuits.

The Lady Leucha thought her supper a very poor affair, but she was too cold, after her vain attempts to light the fire in the Summer Parlour, to resist the steaming-hot, delicious milk. She took it standing up not far from Hollyhock. She resolved in her own mind to take no notice whatever of Hollyhock. Jacko was to the Lady Leucha as one who did not exist, but in her busy, vain little brain she was forming schemes for the undoing of this impertinent Scots lass.

Lady Leucha was not specially clever, but she was what might be called 'cute,' and although during her first week at school she had had no special desire to push herself forward in any way

whatsoever, yet now that Hollyhock—or, rather, Jack—had come, she was fully determined to crush her, if not by guile, then by other means. She, a young lady of distinction, could not stand such impudence; she, the daughter of the Earl of Crossways, would *not* be bullied by a mere nobody like Jacko. But, unfortunately for herself, Leucha was not nearly so clever in forming plans for the destruction of her enemy as was the dark-eyed, flashing Hollyhock, who would dare and dare again until she showed by her ways and devices that she was invincible.

'Come, girls, it is time for you to take your supper and be off to bed,' said Miss Kent, who observed that Leucha was seated close to the fire in the great sitting-room, shivering not a little, and that Hollyhock, with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, had established herself at the far end of the large room, and was relating bogy tales with great rapidity to her ever-increasing host of adorers. One by one fresh girls crept up to join this group, and one by one, whatever their nationality, they were heartily welcomed by Hollyhock, who called out in her clear, sweet voice—for very clear and sweet it could be—'Lassies, make room for the stranger. Be you English or Scots, my lady dear, you are welcome to join my circle.'

Thus the circle began to grow very large, and the hushed, dramatic voice of the narrator caused her listeners to hold their breath, until occasionally they burst into fits of hearty laughter. But the hour had come. The bowls of bread-and-milk smoked on the sideboard, and all the girls hurried to begin and finish their food. After supper they went to say good-night to Mrs Macintyre, who prayed God to bless them and give them all 'a good and peaceful night.' Then, accompanied by Miss Kent, whose office it was to see them to their rooms, they went upstairs.

Leucha had slightly recovered her spirits, but not absolutely. As a matter of fact, she was wild with jealousy. She had sat by the fire with Dorothy and Barbara Fraser and Daisy Watson, but all the other girls had gone over to the large circle, where the voice was so mysterious and the eyes of the speaker so bright. In their heart of hearts, the daughters of the Marquis of Killin were keenly anxious to leave their dull friend Leucha, and join the merry, excited group at the other end of the room. This, however, they dared not do, for their mother would not have wished them to desert Leucha.

'Well, I'm glad this day is over,' exclaimed that young lady, as she reached her bedroom. 'I shall be glad to get between the sheets and forget that horrid, noisy Jack.'

'Ah, will you just?' thought Hollyhock, who overheard the word as she turned into her own snug apartment. Her heart was beating hard and fast. She was waiting for the *dénouement*.

Lady Barbara and Lady Dorothy Fraser bade Leucha good-night, and went much farther along the corridor.

Leucha entered her room and turned on the light. The moment she did this she began to sniff. What queer noise was this in the room? Was there a clock anywhere, and had it gone wrong? She looked around her and sniffed again.

Hollyhock, prepared for all events, kept her door a little ajar, and wee Jean, being slightly, very slightly, disturbed by the noise in the room and the light which penetrated faintly under her eider-down quilt, purred in a louder and more satisfied manner than ever. She thought she might rise a trifle and begin to lap her cream.

'What *can* be the matter?' said Lady Leucha. This sharp and angry tone slightly startled the kitchen cat, who raised herself slowly, making a great heave as she did so of her own body and of the eiderdown. The cream was close to her. The cream was sweet and luscious; the cream would suit her to perfection.

Lap, lap, lap, went her little tongue. In a fury—a blind fury—Leucha rushed to her bed, tore aside the eider-down, and tried to catch the wicked cat in order to fling her out of the window; but Hollyhock stood in the room.

'Don't,' she said. 'Poor beastie! I put her there for fun—for a bit of a lark. I'll take her now. Don't you *touch* my cat, or I 'll be at you. I 'm sorry she has spilt the cream, but it hasn't had time to get through to the blankets.—Here, come along, my pretty dear; come, my angel Jean; you shall sleep along with your own mistress.—See, Leuchy, the cream hasn't had time to get to the blankets, and it hasn't touched the eider-down. I'll just whip off this white covering. Now you see for yourself that you mustn't meddle with me. Best not. I 'm all fire, I am; I 'm all glow, I am; I 'm all spirit, I am. There 's no harm done, but would you like to hold the little cat while I remove the sheet? Then you 'll be as tidy as possible, and you 'd best get to bed, Leuchy. I 'll undress you after I have settled my cat. Here, hold the small thing for a minute while I straighten things up.'

But Leucha, who at first was speechless with horror, now raised her voice to a mighty roar of indignation.

'How dare you? How dare you? You wicked, ugly little girl! I can't abide the sight of you! And to put a cat in my bed—a cat and cream, forsooth! You don't get out of this scrape so easily as you think, Miss *Jack*. I 'm going down this minute to speak to Mrs Macintyre.'

'All right,' said Holly. 'I think you might do worse. I was willing to be friends with you, but you wouldn't have it, so now I 'm t' other way round, and I 'm thinking that I 'll carry most of the

lassies with me. But go, Leuchy. I meant to vex you, and I 'm not denying it. I would have been different, but your haughty spirit forbade it; so now I 'm your chosen enemy, and you 'll have to fight me along with those in the school who like me better than you.'

But Leucha's fury had risen to its height. She dashed up to Hollyhock and gave her a resounding smack on her right cheek. Hollyhock was holding the cat, who, in the struggle, gave Leucha a savage scratch on the hand, that lily-white hand of which she was so proud. It was a great scratch going right across the back of the hand. In a moment Leucha had fled from the room to seek Mrs Macintyre. Hollyhock flew into her own chamber, put wee Jean carefully and tenderly into the basket in which she had brought her from The Garden, stroked her for a minute to cause her to purr again, cut a hole or two in the lid of the basket to give the poor beast air, and then shoved cat and basket under her bed.

Instantly she returned to Leucha's room, took off the injured white covering, shoved it into the soiled clothes-basket, turned down the sheets, made the room look perfectly nice and tidy, removed the saucer, which she carried into her own room and hid, also under the bed.

She then sat and waited for events. They were not long in coming. Leucha's anger was something prodigious. She forgot all about the really frightful smack she had given Hollyhock on her rosy cheek. She thought of nothing but her own indignities—the indignities committed against an earl's daughter by a common Scots girl.

She found Mrs Macintyre in her study. The good lady looked up in amazement when the girl burst in.

'My dear Leucha, whatever *is* the matter? Why are you not in bed?'

'In bed, Mrs Macintyre! Is it likely that I should be in bed when a nasty, mean Scotch girl puts a horrid, common cat into it, and also a great saucer of cream, which the cat spilt, injuring my favourite edition of the works of Charles Dickens, which was given me by my father on my last birthday? Will you kindly, Mrs Macintyre, *expel* that girl in the morning?'

'Oh, my dear, I suppose you are alluding to Hollyhock?'

'I 'm not; I 'm alluding to ugly Jack Lennox, beneath me in station, beneath me in manners, beneath me in everything!'

'Well, as to that,' said Mrs Macintyre, 'I'm sorry you are annoyed, Leucha, but another girl would take the matter as a good joke, and win the friendship of Hollyhock by overlooking the whole affair.'

'I'm not that sort. I'm the daughter of the Earl of Crossways, and she—she is nothing but a mischievous cad. She 'll ruin your school, of course, Mrs Macintyre.'

'I don't think so, my dear. I'm delighted to have her. As she has annoyed you, and you wish it, I *must* punish her, of course; but whatever I do, I shall destroy neither her beauty nor her high rank.'

'Her high rank, forsooth! What next?'

'Yes; her father is the Honourable George Lennox, whose wife was a Cameron, a near relative of the Duke of Ardshiel. I don't think there is much difference between you in blood, Leucha, except the other way round. We think a great deal indeed of the Duke in our region.'

Leucha felt slightly stunned and more angry than ever. She knew well, too well, that the Earl of Crossways was only the second earl of his house, and that she had better not talk quite so loudly about her grand lineage.

'Do you *wish* me to punish Hollyhock?' said Mrs Macintyre, fixing her grave, gentle eyes on the angry girl's face.

'Yes, of course I do—of course I do. Look at my hand!'

'Oh, the poor cat has scratched it. I 'm sorry. I shall send Miss Kent to you presently with a little cold cream to rub on it. You had better keep it bandaged to-night, and it will be quite well to-morrow. You must have frightened the cat or she would not have treated you like that.'

Leucha said nothing. She did not mention the fact that she had smacked the cat's mistress.

'I wish that young person, whatever her rank, to be punished,' she said.

'Very well, my dear Leucha, come with me at once. I have now got to hear *her* side of the story.'

'But surely you believe me?'

'In a school like this, Leucha, I like to hear both sides. Whatever happens among my girls, I must be impartial. Now come, for it is getting late, and I myself must retire.'

They went first of all into Leucha's room, which looked perfectly snug and comfortable, all trace of the cat having been removed.

'I see nothing wrong here,' said Mrs Macintyre.

'She is too cute; she has hidden everything,' said Leucha.

'Well, we 'll go to her room. Her room is next to yours. I thought, being contrasts, you would be such friends.'

Leucha shrugged her shoulders contemptuously, then waited with a furiously beating heart while Mrs Macintyre knocked at Holly's door.

'May I come in, my dear child?' she said gently.

'Yes.' Hollyhock flew to the door and flung it open. 'Yes, please do, dear Mrs Macintyre. I know I am a bold, bad girl.—Come in, Leuchy; I don't mind you a bit.'

'But how swollen your cheek is, my child!' said the head-mistress.

'Oh, that's less than nothing. Poor little Jean is sleeping under my bed, and if we talk too loud we may disturb her. I did it for mischief. I 'm not going to deny it. I wanted to be friends with Leuchy, but she would not have it; so then the soul of mischief got into me, and I ran home to The Garden and fetched the cat, and put her into Leuchy's bed. Oh! I know it was wrong of me. I 'm a bad Scots lassie. But I love you, and I love the school, if only Leuchy there would be friendly.'

'Which I have no intention of being,' said Leucha. 'You see for yourself, Mrs Macintyre, she denies nothing. She ran away without leave to fetch that odious cat and put it in my bed.'

'How did her cheek get so swollen?' said Mrs Macintyre.

'Ah, well, we won't talk of that,' said Hollyhock. 'Girls that dare must also endure. I 'm sorry Leuchy was so vexed and wouldn't make it up.'

'You are going to punish her, Mrs Macintyre,' said Leucha, 'are you not?'

'Yes, Leucha; but I 'm going to punish you too.— Hollyhock, my darling, you did wrong, and this your first day at school, too. The punishment I am going to give you I 'm afraid you will feel. You may take the kitchen cat back yourself to The Garden in the morning. You had better start early, so as to be here again in time for breakfast, and then you can tell your father that you will not return with your sisters to The Garden on Saturday. I am sorry, my love; but order must be maintained in the school. As to Leucha here, the story of the cat will, I am sure, be known all over the school immediately; and Leucha, when she shows her wounded hand, will have to explain *how* she got it—by slapping *you* so violently on the cheek, thus rousing the temper of the faithful cat. I shall insist on her publicly telling what I know she did. Now, both girls, take your punishments like gentlewomen and don't make a fuss. Good-night, good-night! I 'll send Miss Kent to put a lotion on your cheek, Hollyhock, and to bind up your hand, Leucha. Good-night! After prayers to-morrow the story of the cat will be told, with, alas! Leucha's sad lack of forgiveness.'

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GIRL WITH THE WAYWARD HEART.

Hollyhock was a child who, with all her wildness, her insubordination, her many faults, bore no malice. She did not know the meaning of malice. The open look on her bonnie face alone proclaimed this fact. She was really sorry for Leucha, and did not give her own swollen cheek a serious thought. Of course it pained her, for Leucha had very hard, bony little hands, and she struck, in her fury, with great violence. But Hollyhock, as she termed it, would be but a poor thing if she couldn't bear a scrap of pain. Nothing would induce her to grumble, and although she bitterly regretted the punishment which lay before her of not going home on Saturday, she would take it, as she expressed it, 'like a woman of sense.'

Accordingly she got up early on the following morning, released poor Jean, and carried her back to The Garden. There she put her into the astonished arms of the old housekeeper, who said, 'Whatever ails ye, lassie; and where did you find the cat?'

'Here she is, and don't ask me any questions about her. Here she is, safe and sound. She has been feeding on the richest cream, and if you put her cosy by the fire, she 'll sleep off the effects. Is my Daddy Dumps in, Mrs Duncan?'

'Yes, my lassie; he 's at his breakfast.'

'Well, I'm glad of that,' said Hollyhock. 'I have got to speak to him for a minute, but I won't keep him long.'

'Richt ye are, my dear; but whatever swelled your bonnie cheek like that?'

'Well,' said Hollyhock, 'it wasn't me, and it wasn't the cat; so don't ask questions, for they won't be answered. I can't stop here. I must go at once to Daddy Dumps. I have been a bad, wicked girl, and my swollen cheek has been sent to me as a punishment.'

'Whoever *dare*'—— began the old retainer, who in her heart of hearts adored Hollyhock as the most precious of all the Garden Flowers. But Hollyhock had left her.

The cat was already asleep in her basket by the fire. George Lennox was enjoying his excellent breakfast, and was busily planning out his day. Lord Ian's work was remarkably heavy, and he missed his dear Flowers. He was startled, therefore, when Hollyhock dashed into the room.

'Daddy Dumps,' she exclaimed, 'do not be frightened now, and don't pass remarks on my swollen cheek. It was sent me as a punishment, and I 'm not going to say to any one how I got it; but I 've come here, my own Dumpy Dad, to tell you, darling, that your Hollyhock will not return on Saturday with the four other Flower Girls. It's right, and I 'm content. Good-bye, daddy; good-bye. I 'm struggling at that school, and in a fight you often get a scar. When didn't the Camerons get a scar, and weren't they proud of it, the bonnie men?'

Before Mr Lennox could utter a word Hollyhock had rushed out of the room, scarcely daring to speak any further or even to kiss her father, for, with all her bravery, tears were very near her black eyes.

She reached the big school in time for breakfast, where her swollen cheek caused her adorers to look at her with amazed distress and compassion, and Leucha and Daisy Watson to chuckle inwardly, whereas the Fraser girls were as sorry for Hollyhock as they could be.

Prayers followed breakfast; and then Leucha, by Mrs Macintyre's command, had to discharge her painful task. She loathed the thing unspeakably; but Mrs Macintyre had no idea of letting her off.

'Come, Leucha,' she said, 'you have got something to say to your companions. You are wearing a rag on your hand. Take it off.'

'It hurts,' said Leucha, meaning her hand, for she clung to the rag as a sort of flag of protection.

'Take the rag off, and we 'll see for ourselves how much it hurts,' said Mrs Macintyre.

The girls and teachers all stood wondering by. The only one who felt sorry was Hollyhock. The rag was removed, and Mrs Macintyre, gazing keenly at the scratch, said in a disdainful voice, 'I never heard such a fuss about nothing at all. Now, then, you will have the goodness to tell the school in as few words as possible how you got that scratch on your hand, and how Hollyhock got her poor face so swollen.'

'It was the cat,' muttered Leucha.

'The cat! What cat?' echoed from end to end of the long room.

'Leucha, hold your head up and tell your story. If you don't tell it at once, without any more shirking, I shall have you locked up for the day in your room.'

So Leucha, dreading this beyond anything—for a day in her room at the present moment might mean anything—was forced to tell the story of the previous night's adventure. She did tell it with all the venom of which she was capable. She told it with her pale-blue eyes gleaming spitefully. She was forced to go to the very bottom of the affair.

'It was a silly trick, girls,' said Mrs Macintyre when the tale had come to an end, 'and Hollyhock suffered, because the daughter of the Earl of Crossways very nearly broke her jaw. Well, I 'm here to do my duty. Leucha has had to explain. Another girl would have taken what occurred simply as a joke and made nothing of it; but I grieve to say that such is not Leucha Villiers's way; and as Hollyhock *did* do wrong, and as Leucha particularly *wishes* it, I am forced to punish her by not allowing her to go home on Saturday. It seems a pity; but justice is justice, and Hollyhock is the first to think that herself.'

'I am,' replied Hollyhock.

'That's a dear child; and now you will try not to get into further mischief.'

But to this speech of kind Mrs Macintyre's Hollyhock made no answer, for mischief was the breath of life to her, and to live without it was practically to live without air, without food,

without consolation. She looked round the large and wondering school, and observed that all eyes, with the exception of one pair, were fixed on her with great compassion.

'Hollyhock,' said Mrs Macintyre, 'is your cheek very painful?'

'It hurts a bit,' said Hollyhock.

'Then I think I must ask Dr Maguire to call round and look at it.'

'Oh, don't, Mrs Macintyre! I deserved it—I did, truly.'

But Mrs Macintyre had her way, and although she set the other girls to their tasks, she provided Hollyhock with an amusing book, and placed her near a great fire until Dr Maguire arrived and examined the much-swollen cheek.

'Why, you *have* got a nasty blow, Miss Hollyhock,' he said. 'Did you strike yourself against a tree, or something of that sort?'

'No; 'tis nothing,' replied Hollyhock.

'Well, however it happened is your secret; but I can only say that your jaw was very nearly broken. It isn't broken, however, and I 'll get a soothing liniment, which you are to keep on constantly during the day. I suppose I mustn't inquire how this occurred?'

'Best not,' said Mrs Macintyre; 'only get the dear child well.'

'I won't be long over that job, with one like Miss Hollyhock.'

So Hollyhock was petted very much all day; excused, by the doctor's express orders, from all lessons; and sat cosily by the fire, enjoying her new and very exciting story. By evening, however, the swelling had gone down a great deal, and her mischievous spirit awoke again. The girls, even the daughters of the Marquis of Killin, were positively furious with Leucha, and more than ever took the part of the brilliant, fascinating child, who had already won their hearts.

It was the final straw to Lady Leucha when Barbara and Dorothy Fraser declared boldly that they could not stand such a cruel fuss about nothing.

'If I were to tell our father, the Marquis, I really do not know what he 'd say,' remarked Lady Dorothy.

'*Almost* to break a girl's jaw just for a mere joke,' added Lady Barbara. 'Well, we intend to be friends with Hollyhock, whether you wish it or not, Leucha.'

So Lady Leucha felt herself to be the most desolate girl in the whole school, the one person who clung to her side being little Daisy Watson, whom she did not like and only put up with.

The next morning Hollyhock was as well as ever, and told her sisters that if Leuchy would make up with her, she was willing to extend the hand of forgiveness.

'You really are noble in your own funny way, Hollyhock,' said Jasmine. She repeated Hollyhock's words to Leucha, taking care to do so when a number of the girls were present. But Lady Leucha, whatever she was, was obstinate. On her father's side she was well-born; but her mother was a cross-grained lady, extremely ambitious and proud of nothing at all, and Lady Leucha took after her mother. She wondered if it was possible for her to get out of this odious school.

She turned her white face, with her small, pale eyes, and fixed them on Jasmine. 'I presume your silly sister wants an answer.'

'She 's not silly,' replied Jasmine; 'but she would like an answer.'

'Well, tell her from me that as far as the North Pole is from the South, so am I from her, and ever will be. There now, what do you think of that? I don't care who hears me. I 'm accustomed to ladies, not to common little Scotch girls who tell lies.'

Jasmine was too gentle, too firm, too really noble to make any response; but as she went out of the room she was followed by a crowd of girls, a few of whom turned round and hissed at Leucha. The hisses were very soft, but, at the same time, very distinct; and this was the final straw in the wretched girl's misery.

As to Hollyhock, she was, greatly owing to Leucha's conduct, now the ruling spirit in the school, not by any means as regards lessons, but as regards what schoolgirls treasure so much, popularity and good-fellowship. Even Barbara and Dorothy Fraser went boldly to her side, and congratulated her on her self-restraint, and even apologised for their cousin's unseemly conduct.

Hollyhock's fine eyes lit up with a great glow. 'I do not care,' she said. 'Poor lassie! I pity her; I do, truly!'

'You are a wonderful girl, Hollyhock,' said Dorothy; 'and may my sister and I join your circle to-night? And will you tell us some bogy tales?'

'I will that,' said Hollyhock.

'And here's a hand, my trusty frien's,
And gie's a hand o' thine.'

She sang the words, and they were taken up immediately by every girl in the school, with the exception of Leucha and the miserable, depressed Daisy. But Hollyhock knew that she had her punishment to undergo. Was not her own mother a Cameron of the great race, and would she disgrace herself by crying out and making a fuss? 'The de'il is in me all the same,' she whispered under her breath; 'but he 'll not show his little horns until the Flower Girls are back at The Garden.'

She was a passionate little poet, and she now sang softly under her breath:

The height of my disdain shall be
To laugh at him, to blush for thee;
To love thee still, but go no more
A-begging at a beggar's door.'

Then she burst forth in her really glorious voice with such fervour that every girl within reach heard her:

The meteor flag of England
Shall yet terrific burn,
Till danger's troubled night depart,
And the star of peace return.
Then, then, ye ocean-warriors!
Our song and feast shall flow
To the fame of your name,
When the storm has ceased to blow,
When the fiery fight is heard no more,
And the storm has ceased to blow!'

In spite of every effort, Hollyhock could not help putting a touch of her beloved Scots accent into the great and glorious words of Thomas Campbell.

'Hollyhock, you 'll promise not to do any mischief while we are away?' said Jasmine in her most coaxing voice when the hour for departure had arrived. She hated beyond words leaving her sister at this crisis.

'Ah, well,' replied Hollyhock, 'I'll make no promises. I 'll tell no stories, and if things happen, why, then, I am not to blame.'

'Oh, Holly darling, you frighten me!'

'Don't be frightened, Jasmine; I 'm learning to be *such* a good little girl.'

There was no help for it. The four Flower Girls departed, leaving the fifth, and the naughty one, behind.

Now it was as impossible for Hollyhock to keep out of mischief as it was for the kitchen cat at The Garden to refuse to drink cream, but Hollyhock meant at the same time to go warily to work. Some more fresh girls were coming on this special Saturday, which made it all the easier for her to carry out her little plan. The Fraser girls were now devoted to her, but her slave—the one who would do anything on earth for her—was Margaret Drummond.

Hollyhock arranged, therefore, that Margaret should be her accomplice on the present occasion. Her tales of bogies and ghosties—all of them with a slight soupçon of truth in them—had excited the wonder and fearful admiration of the schoolgirls, and when she suggested, as she *did* suggest, that 'poor little Leuchy might wipe the ghostie's hair for her,' there was a perfect chorus of delighted applause.

'But he won't come; he won't dare to come,' said Margaret Drummond.

'Meg, hist, dear; let's whisper. Keep it to yourself. There's no ghost; only they think, poor things, that there is, and that I dry his dripping locks. Well, I want you to impersonate the ghost to-night. I 'll dress you up, and you shall cross the path of Leuchy. Why, she'll turn deadly white when she sees you at it.'

'But, oh! I 'm frightened. I 'll get into trouble,' said Margaret.

'And you won't do that for me? I thought for sure you loved me.'

'I'd give my life for you,' said Margaret; 'but this is different.'

'It's easy to talk about giving the life, for that's not asked; but what I want is the love, and the proof of the love is that you shall dress as poor ghostie, and beg in a *mighty* mournful voice of Leuchy to dry your dripping hair. I have got an old cloak and a peaked hat that belonged to my grandmother's family, and I 'll alter your face a wee bit, and nobody'll recognise you like that. Now come, Meg, you won't refuse? I 'd do it myself, and do it well; only I *might* be discovered, but you wouldn't. Who'll think of Meg Drummond turning into the ghost? You must clasp your skeleton hands and say *very* mournfully, "Dry my locks, sweet maid of England!" That's all. She'll be sure to go out into the grounds, and the rest of us will be close by, ready to catch her up if she swoons; and she 'll never guess to her dying day but that she has seen a ghost.'

The plot was prepared with immense care. It was the most tremendously exciting thing that the girls had ever heard of, and even the Frasers were drawn in, more particularly as the worst it could possibly do was to give that naughty, proud Leucha a fright. They were very sick of their cousin, and very angry with her; and it was finally decided that the girl who was to come to her rescue in the moment of her terrible extremity was to be Hollyhock herself. The others were all to fly out of sight. Hollyhock was to desire ghostie to go, and was to support Leucha into the house. After that—well, no one quite knew what would come!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GREAT CONSPIRACY.

There was suppressed excitement in the school, that sort which cannot be described, but which most assuredly must be felt. Mrs Macintyre put it down to the advent of the fifteen girls who had just arrived from Edinburgh.

Leucha stirred herself and made a vain endeavour to become friends with them; but they were Scots to the backbone, and went over instantly in a body to Hollyhock's circle. This was so immense now that it actually comprised the entire school, except the poor miserable Daisy and the naughty Leucha, whose anger against Hollyhock, combined with a kind of undefined admiration, which she would not for the life of her admit, grew fiercer and stronger hour by hour. It was like a great flame burning in her breast. She would *do* for Hollyhock yet, but how and in what fashion?

Hollyhock, meanwhile, collected her forces round her. The days were getting very short. The nights were long and cold. Winter was on the English girls—a Scottish winter, which caused them to shiver, notwithstanding their comforts. Leucha was, however, far too proud to confess that she did not like the weather. She spoke of the school in tones of rapture to the new girls, who barely looked at her and scarcely listened. Then they wont, some of them silently, some of them with a rush, to Hollyhock.

Leucha forced herself to praise the place, and nudged Daisy to do likewise; but her praise was feigned, and the Scots girls did not pay this uninteresting Leucha much attention. The fact that she had now been a fortnight at the school did not affect them at all. The further fact that she was the daughter of the Earl of Crossways had not the least influence on them. They were jolly, merry, everyday sort of girls; there was nothing specially remarkable about them, but as they themselves said, 'Did not they belong to Old Scotia, and was not that fact sufficient for any lassie?' Hollyhock entertained them in her swift, bright way. She was not specially impressed by them, but they were Scots of the Scots, as she was herself.

So Leucha and the miserable Daisy spent their time alone, Leucha arguing and wrangling with Daisy, and saying to her once or twice, 'What earthly good are you, Daisy Watson? Can you not think of any plan by which to defeat that mischievous Scotch brat?'

'I know of nothing,' replied Daisy. 'How can two English girls fight against sixty and more? It isn't to be done, Leucha dear.'

'It shall be done; it must be done!' retorted Leucha.

'Well, I can't see my way,' replied Daisy. 'The best plan of all would be for you to sink your silly pride, Leucha, and to join the others.'

'And have *her* queen it over me,' said Leucha.

'Well, I don't see how you can help it,' answered Daisy. 'She *does* queen it over you, for it isn't only the Scots girls who turn to her, but the English and the French. I don't see for myself what

possible hope you have. Never yet since the world was made could two overcome sixty-eight. And, for that matter,' continued Daisy, 'I 'm feeling so dull that although I *am* fond of you, Leucha, I really am strongly tempted to join that merry group, who are always singing and laughing and making the hours go by on wings. It is very dull indeed for me to have no one but you to talk to, and you grumbling all the time.'

'Oh, I saw it would come to this,' said Leucha, rising in her rage. 'My last friend—my very last! I 'll write to mother and get her to remove me from this school.'

'Oh, I won't desert you, Leucha; only I do wish you were a little more cheerful, and that we might join the others in their sport. You made such a fuss just on the day Hollyhock came'——

'Don't mention her name; she makes me shudder!'

'Well, I needn't; but you made such a fuss about securing the Summer Parlour, and having a fire there, and concocting plans, and having a lot of the girls with you—a great deal more than half the school; but you never go near the Summer Parlour, and after to-night you won't have any further right to it. Do come out, Leucha dear, and make another effort to build up the fire. If the girls see us with a glowing fire, a good many of them will come in for certain sure. I have been asking the servants on the quiet how the thing is done, and it really seems to be quite easy. You collect faggots, which I know I can get for you, and small bits of coal; and I tell you what—whisper, Leucha—I have been saving up a few candle-ends, and they are grand for making a fire burn. Let's come along and try.'

'No lady ought to know how to light a fire,' said Lady Leucha.

'Oh, nonsense,' replied Daisy. 'It is a very good thing to learn; and, anyhow, you needn't spoil your dainty fingers if *I* undertake the job. Nothing will collect the girls round us—the English girls, I mean—like seeing us seated by the glowing fire.'

'Well, anything is better than this,' said Leucha. 'And if you have really collected the candle-ends and the faggots and the morsels of coal, why, perhaps we 'll succeed.'

'Yes, yes, of course we'll succeed,' said Daisy. 'What in the world is there to hinder us? We have got our wits, I presume; and when we sit in the Summer Parlour with a great blazing fire lighting up the place, I shouldn't be a scrap surprised if Mary Barton, Agnes Featherstonhaugh, and others joined us.'

'I wouldn't have those Frasers now if they went on their bended knees,' remarked Leucha; 'but if you will light the fire, Daisy, I don't mind sitting by and watching you. I really, as the daughter of the Earl of Crossways, cannot undertake so dirty a task.'

'All right,' replied Daisy, 'if you do think so—and I'm quite as good as you, remember—I 'll do my best. I 'll just run along now to the Summer Parlour and see that the materials for lighting the fire are there, Then I 'll come back and fetch you.'

'Yes,' replied Leucha; 'I may as well see you at the job. You are certain sure to fail, but conceit will have its way.'

'Dear, dear,' thought Daisy Watson, 'what a very unpleasant girl Leucha is becoming! I 'd leave her this blessed minute and go over to Hollyhock, only perhaps Lady Crossways might be angry. Leucha gets more like her mother each day—a kind of sneering look about her face, which really gives her a most disagreeable expression. But friendship is friendship, and I won't forsake her if I can help it.'

So Daisy flew to the Summer Parlour, which was just perceptible in the twilight. No place could look more cold and comfortless; but Daisy was so madly anxious to do something that she set about her task with a will. She had secretly purloined some faggots, bits of coal, and candle-ends; but she had quite forgotten to ascertain whether the faggots were dry or not; and she was equally ignorant of the fact that as a rule even dry faggots require a small supply of paper to enable them to 'catch' and attack the nice little black lumps of coal, which, with the aid of the candle-ends, might yield a glowing, gleaming, beautiful fire. She had made friends with one of the servants, and had therefore an idea how to lay her fire. She had also secured a candle, one solitary whole candle, which she placed in a brass candlestick.

To all appearance everything was now ready. She felt certain that her fire could not fail, and went back in high spirits to Leucha.

'Come,' she said, 'come. I 'm ready to set fire to the pile.'

A good many girls saw these two go out. They had wrapped themselves up in warm cloaks, which were quite suited to the frosty weather.

Leucha shivered as she walked in the direction of the Summer Parlour. The new girls were now busily engaged at a private and luxurious tea with Mrs Macintyre, which was the invariable tribute paid to each new pupil. They were, therefore, out of the way.

'The hour strikes,' said Hollyhock. 'Come along, Meg.'

Meg shrank and shivered. 'Oh, but, Holly, I'd much rather not.'

'It is too late to change now, dear Meg. You must just think of the ghost, and the ghost only. Come at once to the ghostie's hut, and I 'll dress you up.— Lassies, the rest of you had best keep out of sight, although you are welcome to linger in the shrubbery to see the fun. But now listen. When *I* give the words, "Go, ghostie! *Run*, ghostie, run! I cannot dry your wet hair this night, for I have a lassie lying in a swoon across my arms," then you must scatter, scatter with all the speed you have in you, or the sport will be spoiled.'

So, while Leucha and Daisy were struggling in vain with the fire in the Summer Parlour, which flared up occasionally with a woeful gleam, and then expired, and while Leucha felt crosser and crosser each moment, and the night fell over the land, in the ghost's hut Margaret Drummond was being dressed up to impersonate the hapless youth who had suffered death by drowning on the night before his wedding.

Hollyhock was in the wildest excitement as she arranged Margaret Drummond for her part. Margaret was fortunately extremely tall and thin. Her hands were made to represent those of a skeleton by means of a quantity of white chalk and black charcoal. Her face was likewise covered with this ghastly mixture. She was then wrapped from head to foot in an old Cameron cloak, which Hollyhock had secured from The Garden during the week. On her head she wore an old-fashioned peaked hat and a wig with long, dripping locks. Her own hair had been tied tightly out of sight.

'You are wonderful,' sighed Hollyhock. 'There isn't a boy in the land that could beat you. Now, then, stay where you are until I come to fetch you. Then, when I say, "Fly, ghostie! away, ghostie!" you can go back to the hut and take off the disguise which turns you into so fearsome an object. I have brought a jug of hot water, and here is a basin, and you can wash your face and hands. Leuchy will certainly not recognise you. And now I must be off, for the conspiracy—the best of all—has begun.'

Hollyhock, beside herself with mirth, had, however, not forgotten to give the poor ghostie an old-fashioned lantern, which she was to hold in such a position as to show off her skeleton hands and ghastly face. This was left lighted in the hut. There was little time to lose, for soon the girls would be expected to return to the house for their excellent Saturday supper, a special treat which was given to all those girls who could not go home.

Hollyhock rushed up to the Summer Parlour. The night was clear and cold, but there was not a breath of wind blowing. All in vain the two girls were bending over the fire, which refused to catch. Heaps of girls were peeping in and watching the efforts of the two who were trying to light the fire.

'I never did *such* dirty work in my life before,' said Lady Leucha. 'Come back to the house, Daisy. I shall be sick if I sit and shiver here any longer.'

'There 's one more bit of candle,' replied Daisy. 'Perhaps that will do the job. I never heard of a fire being so difficult to set glowing.'

'And I never heard of a girl being so vain and silly,' remarked Leucha.

Hollyhock whispered to her companions, who immediately dispersed into different parts of the grounds. The night was perfect for her purpose. She felt half-mad with delight. She was only sorry for Daisy, who meant no harm, but was in leading-strings to that proud Lady Leucha. Leucha deserved her fate richly. Daisy did not.

Hollyhock whispered certain directions to her followers to try to get Daisy out of the way. This they promised, feeling quite sure that they could easily manage it.

Just as Daisy's last morsel of candle expired a voice sounded from afar: 'Daisy Watson, you are wanted in the house. Go in as fast as you can!'

Two or three girls boldly entered the Summer Parlour, clasped Daisy by both arms, and dragged her toward the house. Leucha was now alone. She was wild with rage at this final desertion.

Wrapping her cloak round her, she prepared to step out of the Parlour. The Scots, the English, and the French girls all hid behind trees. Hollyhock was near, but not too near. Leucha wrapped her cloak tightly round her. It *was* cold! She would be glad to get in out of the bitter air. She made up her mind to write that very night to her mother to remove her at any cost from this horrible school; but although she made up her mind, she knew quite well that the said mother would pay no attention to her. Was it not the aim of her life to have her only girl educated in the Palace of the Kings? And she was the last person to be influenced by mere girlish sadness and loneliness.

All these thoughts flashed through Leucha's mind as she stepped into the still, frosty night. She went a few yards; then she stood motionless, transfixed, turned for the time being into stone.

What—what was this horror coming to meet her? A tall figure with skeleton hands and face, wearing a very mournful expression in the eyes—a figure that walked slowly, solemnly, such as she had certainly *never* seen before. She felt herself alone and a long way from home, for the Summer Parlour was quite a distance from the house. The figure held a lantern in its skeleton hands, which was so cleverly arranged that it lit up the worn features and revealed the dripping locks.

'Dry my hair, my wet hair!' cried the ghost in a deep sepulchral voice. 'Kind English maid, be so kind as to dry my hair!'

Leucha gave vent to an irrepressible shriek of horror. She had always hitherto laughed at the bare idea of the ghost; but now most truly she believed it. The ghost—the ghost in very truth—was there. He was facing her; he stood before her; he stood in her very path. How mournful, how horrible, was his voice! How more than fearful was his appearance! Her blood ran cold; her hair seemed to stand upright on her head. Indescribable was her horror.

'Go, ghostie!' suddenly cried a familiar voice, 'You have no right to torment an English maid. I 'll come out presently and dry your locks; but be off with you now, be off! Get away, or I'll never dry your dripping locks again!'

The ghost gave a hollow moan. There was the sound of many feet running in different directions, and Leucha would certainly have fainted had not Hollyhock put her firm young arm round her.

Oh, how she hated Hollyhock! And yet how she loved her at that moment! The warm feeling of human flesh and blood was delicious. Lady Leucha clung to Hollyhock and laid her head on her shoulder.

'Come, girlie; come,' said Hollyhock in her most seductive tones. 'My Lord Alasdair had no right to ask *you* to dry his locks. Lean on me, lassie; lean on me. You did get an awful shock.'

'Oh, oh,' sobbed Leucha, 'then I did see a ghost!'

'You saw what you saw. Come along home now. I 'll see to you.'

'You are—Hollyhock,' said Leucha.

'Yes; and whyever not?'

'Then there *is* a ghost, and you are going to dry his hair! How *can* you—how *can* you?'

'Poor ghost! I must do my little bit to comfort him,' said Hollyhock. 'Eh, but you are a real brave lass, that you are, Leuchy, my pet. Now lean on me, and I 'll bring you in to the cosy house, and the warm fire, and the good supper. There's no malice in Hollyhock. She's only a bit wild. Oh, but won't I give it to that ghost; he had no right to ask those services of an English girl!'

Firmer and firmer did Hollyhock support her trembling companion, and the girl who hated her, but who clung to her so tightly at that moment, entered the house with Hollyhock's arms about her.

There were a number of girls in the great hall—the most magnificent hall in the country.

'Poor thing!' said Hollyhock, 'the ghostie walks this night, and I must run to dry his wet locks; but get something hot for Leuchy to drink, and comfort her all you can, lassies. A Scots ghost—my word! he had no right to beg for the services of a maid from England. I of Caledonia will go out and dry his wet locks!'

CHAPTER XVIII.

LEUCHA'S TERROR.

While Leucha was undergoing her heavy punishment, and while the supposed ghostie was walking in the grounds of the Palace of the Kings, a very different group had assembled at the dear old Garden. Mrs Constable's school, her Annex, was filling fast with the bonniest boys that England and Scotland could produce.

Mr Lennox kept a holiday for the great occasion, and on Saturday night there were high jinks at The Garden. The only one of that happy party who felt, in spite of herself, a little anxious, a little nervous, was Jasmine, for she could not help being concerned about the defiant expression in the bright eyes of Hollyhock. She thought of Holly notwithstanding all the fun and the merriment, but the delight of talking again to her dear brother-cousin Jasper dispelled her fears.

She had little time for serious thought. This was surely a right good day, and she was soon enjoying it as fully as the rest. Of course, Mrs Constable brought her strange laddies with her, as well as her own dear boys, and many and gay were the songs they sang and the games they played. Two of the songs they sang were the following, from the beloved lips of Robert Burns:

Ae fond kiss, and then we sever;
Ae fareweel, and then for ever!
Deep in heart-wrung tears I 'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

Had we never loved sae kindly!
Had we never loved sae blindly!
Never met—or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.

Fare-thee-weel, thou first and fairest!
Fare-thee-weel, thou best and dearest!
Thine be ilka joy and treasure,
Peace, enjoyment, love, and pleasure.

This pathetic song was immediately followed by the well-known strains of 'Bonie Lesley:'

O saw ye bonie Lesley,
  As she gaed o'er the Border!
She's gane, like Alexander,
  To spread her conquests farther!

To see her is to love her,
  And love but her for ever;
For Nature made her what she is,
  And never made anither!

Return again, fair Lesley,
  Return to Caledonie!
That we may brag we hae a lass
  There's nane again sae bonie!

'Come, children,' said Mrs Constable, 'we 'll not have any more Scots songs at present. Some of us are not Scots, remember. I now propose a really good game of charades. Who is agreed?'

All went well, and better than well, and even Jasmine forgot her undefined fears, until a little past ten o'clock, when a wild-looking, half-scared girl rushed in and said, 'Oh, the poor thing—the poor thing—and I meant no harm—I did not, really!'

'What is the matter?' said Mr Lennox.

'I am called Margaret Drummond, and there's such an awful to-do at the Palace of the Kings that I 'm afraid to go back there!'

'But what have *you* to do with it? What can be wrong?' said Lennox.

'Oh, I had a great deal to do with it; but, please, I 'd rather not say, for the one I speak of bade me not to say. Oh, but there is a fuss! It's poor Leucha. She's screaming and crying, and nothing will help her. The doctor has been there, but he can't quiet her a bit. She clings to Hollyhock and says, "Save me from the ghost; save me from the ghost!" And the doctor says that if she is not quieted, she may get really bad before the morning.'

'Father,' said Jasmine suddenly, 'I know Margaret Drummond well, and she's a fine girl; and if you'll allow me, I 'll go straight back with her to the Palace of the Kings.'

'But why should you, my love? Our Hollyhock has had nothing to do with this!'

'Nothing; less than nothing,' muttered Margaret Drummond.

'She could not have had, for this girl, Leucha, or some such name, is clinging to her. But still, if you wish to go, Jasmine, and think that you can do any good, start away at once, my lass. You can come back to-morrow morning.'

So Jasmine went with Margaret, who looked really sick with terror, and clung to her companion as Leucha had clung to Hollyhock.

'There now, there now, we'll soon put things right,' said Jasmine. 'It's an awful pity that you don't tell the truth, Meg!'

'I do tell the truth—I do. I cannot go back on my word.'

'Well, then, you must leave the matter to me. The only thing I can do is to soothe Leucha as

best I can; while you must walk boldly into the house. It's your bed-hour and past it, isn't it?'

'Yes, yes; but I have no heart to eat or to sleep.'

'Well, you go straight up to your room, Meg, and get into bed as fast as you can, and I 'll bring you up something. If you have sworn secrecy you must keep it; but whatever happens, don't be frightened. Leucha is very weak of nerve, and has been feeling our desertion most cruelly, I 'm thinking.'

'Not a bit of it,' said Meg. 'She's a perfectly horrid girl. Even Daisy has left her now!'

'Dear, dear, poor thing!' said Jasmine. 'Then she must be lonely!'

'She is, I have no doubt; but she has got our Hollyhock with her now.'

'That is altogether too remarkable,' said Jasmine. 'I fear I shall have to look into the mystery. But get you to bed, Meg. Don't appear at all. I 'll see that some supper reaches you soon. In the meantime I must attend to Leuchy and her new nurse, Hollyhock! My word! Hollyhock turned into a nurse!'

Accordingly, the two girls entered the great hall, which was empty except for one or two teachers, who were still sitting up with anxious expressions on their faces.

Meg took the opportunity to fly to her room, where presently a great bowl of Scots gruel was brought to her. She had long ere now carefully removed the last traces of the ghostie. There was no sign of the ghost about this commonplace girl any longer. She was glad to get her gruel, and tumbled into bed, trusting that Jasmine, who was so wise and clever, would put wrong right. But, alas for Margaret Drummond! wrong is seldom put right in this world of ours without pain, and although she slept soundly that night, her task of confession lay before her on the following morning.

Jasmine, entering the house, went boldly up to her sister's room, which she found empty. She then, without knocking, opened the door of Leucha's bedroom. Leucha was supported in bed by Hollyhock, who was feeding her with morsels of choice and nourishing food, and was talking to her in the gentlest and most soothing way.

'Who is that?' said Leucha in an angry tone.

Hollyhock looked annoyed for a moment, but then the irrepressible fun in her nature sparkled in her bold, black eyes. She sat in such a position that the pale-eyed Leucha was resting against her shoulder. Her soft hands were gently soothing Leucha's long, thin hair, and she kept on saying, 'Whist, lassie; whist! He did a daring thing, but he 'll never do it again to you, my bonnie bit of London town.'

'Are you sure, Hollyhock? Are you certain he won't come back?'

'Haven't I dried his hair and sent him to his rest in the bottom of the lake, and didn't I tell him not to dare to speak to a lady again who was not Scottish born and bred? He was frightened, was the poor ghost, and he went away *so* humble. He would not go without my drying his hair. No, no, you have nothing to fear!'

'Oh Hollyhock, I hated you so much; but I love you now. I do really. Couldn't you sleep in the bed with me?'

'To be sure, my lassie; and whyever not? You got a nasty stroke of a fright; but he 'll come no more. I wish with all my heart I could put a bit of flesh on his skeleton hands and skeleton face. I do pity him so much, so lonesome he is and so sad. But he won't trouble *you* any more, my little lass, and I 'll sleep beside you this night.'

'Who is that coming into the room?' said Leucha, as Jasmine appeared on the scene.

'I've heard a great talk about a ghost,' said Jasmine.

'Well,' cried Hollyhock, 'we had better drop the subject. The poor thing is so frightened, she doesn't know what she's doing. I feel, somehow, my whole heart drawn out to her. Leave her to me, for goodness' sake, Jasmine. I'm just quieting her off. She's too excited to talk about the ghost any more to-night.'

'I 've seen the ghost—the real ghost,' said Leucha, looking with hollow eyes at Jasmine. 'He does walk, and he's very tall, and has skeleton hands and a skeleton face; and he asked me—*me*—to dry his wet hair!'

'Oh, do leave us alone now!' said Hollyhock. 'Am I not trying to quieten her down, and you disturb everything?'

'I must speak to you, Hollyhock; I really must.'

'No, no; you mustn't leave me for a minute!' cried Leucha. 'You are the only one with courage

in the school. I 'd go mad if you were to leave me now.'

'I'll talk to you in the morning,' said Hollyhock. 'I cannot leave her; see for yourself how excited she is.'

Jasmine certainly saw that Leucha was terribly excited, that she had got a fearful shock; and although *she* could put Leucha's mind at rest, on the other hand, Hollyhock, for the time, had won her round. Hollyhock, the soul of mischief, whom Leucha had so openly defied, was now her one support, her sole comfort. Jasmine made up her mind with some reluctance to let the matter lie over until the morning; then, of course, it must be told, and by Hollyhock herself. She felt sorry; for this mischievous little sister had won the coldest heart of the coldest girl in the school, and if justice was not done, she would cling to Hollyhock for ever. Was it necessary that justice should be done?

Jasmine went slowly away to her own room, determined to think matters over very gravely, wondering if she would do a wise thing, after all, in declaring Hollyhock's guilt.

'What a girlie she is!' thought the sister. 'There never was her equal. She really has achieved a marvellous victory; but, oh, it was naughty; it was wrong! I do wonder what I ought to do!'

CHAPTER XIX.

JASMINE'S RESOLVE.

The whole circumstances of the case kept Jasmine wide awake during the greater part of the night. She slept and woke again, and each time she slept she saw a picture of her naughty sister Hollyhock and of that unpleasant girl, Leucha Villiers, clinging together as though they were, and always would be, the very greatest of friends.

Now Leucha, in her way, was quite as troublesome an inmate of the school as was Hollyhock; but whereas Hollyhock was the life and darling of the school, Leucha, the uninteresting, the lonely, the proud, the defiant, the cold, cold English girl, chose to be alone with the single exception of a friend, who was as uninteresting as herself.

Hollyhock, in the most extraordinary—yes, there is no doubt of it—in the most *naughty* way, had brought Leucha round to her side. But if Leucha were told the truth that a hoax had been played upon her, that there was no real ghost, then indeed her wrath would burn fiercely; and, in fact, to put it briefly, there would start in the school a profound feud. Several of the girls, more especially the English girls, would go over to Leucha's side. Yes, without the slightest doubt, a great deal of mischief would be done if she were told. Poor little Jasmine had never before been confronted by so great a problem. Hitherto in her sweet, pure life right had been right and wrong wrong; but now what was right?—what *was* wrong?

She turned restlessly and feverishly on her pillow, and got up very early in the morning, hoping to have a quiet talk first with Hollyhock, then with Margaret Drummond. She was not particularly concerned about Margaret, who naturally followed the lead of a strong character like Hollyhock's. Nevertheless, she had left her the night before in such stress of mind that whatever happened, whatever course they pursued, she must be soothed and comforted.

Jasmine was relieved to find Hollyhock standing outside Leucha's door. Hollyhock looked quite wild and anxious.

'Oh, but it's I that have had an awful night, Jasmine!' she exclaimed. 'She has gone off into a sleep now, poor thing; but I never, never did think that she would take this matter so to heart. We mustn't tell her, Jasmine. It would kill her if she knew.'

'But, Holly, you really are incorrigible. How am I to go on in the school if you play these terrible pranks?'

'It's the mischief in me joined to a bit o' the de'il,' retorted Hollyhock. 'But she must *never* know—never. I have been up with her the whole night, and she has just dropped off into slumber. I must go back to her immediately. You won't tell, Jasmine darling? It would do her a cruel wrong. I have brought her round to me at last, the poor, ugly thing; but if she was to learn—to learn! Oh Jasmine, it would be just too awful!'

'Well,' said Jasmine, 'I do not see how we are to keep it from her; but you have certainly won her in a most remarkable way. You must promise me, Holly darling, that you 'll never play such a wicked prank again.'

'Never—never to *her*, poor Leuchy! I can make no further promises, being chock-full of mischief as an egg is full of meat.'

'Well, I 'll allow it to remain as it is at present. I doubt if I 'm doing right; and I doubt if it can be kept from her, for so many girls in the school know.'

'Oh, I 'll manage the girls. You leave them to me, Jasmine, and go back to The Garden.'

'It father knew what you had done he would not allow you back to The Garden until the end of term,' replied Jasmine.

'What! when I have won the bit speck of a heart of the coldest girl in the school?'

'Well, at any rate, we will let things be at present; but I must go up and speak to Margaret Drummond. She is fretting like anything about the whole affair.'

'Meg,' said Hollyhock in a tone of contempt—'let her fret; only tell her from me to keep her tongue from wagging. Why, she was cut out for a ghostie, so thin and tall she is. I had only to use a wee bit of chalk and a trifle of charcoal, and the deed was done. A more beautiful live ghost could not be seen than Meg Drummond. She did look a fearsome thing. I have put the old cloak and the Cameron's cocked hat in a wee oak trunk in the ghost's hut. Here is the key of the trunk, Jasmine. You run along and lock it. Now run, run, for I hear Leucha twisting and turning in her sleep. I must get back to her. You manage Meg, and lock the trunk, and we are all right—that we are.'

Jasmine felt, on the contrary, that they were all wrong; but, overcome by Hollyhock's superior strength, she obeyed her young, wild sister to the letter. She found, however, that her task with Meg Drummond was no easy one. Meg had a very sensitive conscience, and now that the fun was over, and she was no longer acting as poor ghost with his dripping locks, she felt truly horrified at what she had done. The only road to peace was by confession. Of course she would confess and put things all right; there was nothing else to be done. Nevertheless, after a vast amount of arguing on the part of Jasmine, who assured her that if she told the simple truth *now*, Leucha might and probably would become most alarmingly ill, and that she would certainly hate poor Hollyhock to her dying day—for Jasmine well grasped the true character of the English girl—Meg began to waver.

'Still, I *ought* to confess,' said Margaret Drummond. 'I 'm willing to accept any punishment Mrs Macintyre chooses to put upon me.'

'Oh, dear Meg,' exclaimed Jasmine, 'I've been thinking the matter over all night—backwards and forwards have I been twisting it in my mind—and though I do think you did wrong, and Holly did *worse* than wrong, yet she has achieved a wonderful victory. She has secured for herself the passionate love of the coldest and most uninteresting girl in the school.'

'I do not care for that,' said Margaret. 'She's just nothing at all to me; and I did wrong, and I ought to confess, for the good of my soul.'

'Oh, nonsense, Meg; don't be such a little Puritan. Leucha is far from well now, and the only person who can calm and control her is Holly. If you take Holly away from her, which you will do by confession, you may possibly have to answer for Leucha's very life. Be sensible, Meg dear, and wait at any rate until I come back on Monday morning.'

'I 'll wait till then,' said Meg; 'but it's a mighty heavy burden, and Holly had no right to put it on to me, and then to act the part of comforter herself. My word! she is a queer lassie.'

'Well, let things bide as they are till to-morrow at least,' said Jasmine. 'And now I *must* go home or father will wonder what is the matter.'

Jasmine, having made up her mind that Leucha was not to be told, went with her usual Scots determination to work. She visited poor ghostie's trunk in the hut, and having secured from her favourite Magsie a large sheet of brown paper and some string, she not only locked the trunk, but took away all signs of the adventure of the night before. The bits of chalk, the sticks of black charcoal, the cloak, the pointed hat, the wig, were all removed. The hut looked as neglected as ever, and the trunk, empty of all tell-tale contents, had its key hung on a little hook on the wall.

Then Jasmine returned to The Garden, bearing ghostie's belongings with her. All this happened at so early an hour that Jasmine had time to put away the cloak of the Camerons, the peaked hat, the wet wig, into a certain cupboard where they were usually kept in one of the attics. She then went downstairs, had a hot bath, put on her prettiest Sunday frock, and joined the others at breakfast. Of course, there were innumerable questions asked her with regard to her sudden departure the night before, and also with regard to the distracted-looking girl who had burst into their midst in the great hall in The Garden. But Jasmine, having made up her mind, made it up thoroughly.

'I did not expect it of a Scots girl,' she remarked, 'but I 'm thinking that all is right now, and we can enjoy our Sabbath rest without let or hindrance.'

Sunday was a day when Cecilia Constable and her brother brought up their children with a strictness unknown in England. Games and fairy tales were forbidden; but when kirk was over, they were all allowed to enjoy themselves in pleasant and friendly intercourse.

Meanwhile matters were not going well at the Palace of the Kings; for Leucha, never strong mentally, had got so serious a fright that she was now highly feverish, and neither the doctor nor Mrs Macintyre could make out what was the matter with her. The girls were requested to walk softly and whisper low. The house, by Dr Maguire's order, was kept very still, and Hollyhock took possession of the sickroom. There she nursed Leucha as only she could, soothing her, petting her, holding her hand, and acting, according to Dr Maguire, in the most marvellous manner.

'Never did I see such a lassie,' was his remark. 'She has the gift of the real nurse in her.—But, Miss Hollyhock,' he continued, 'you must not be tied to this sickroom all day. I must 'phone to Edinburgh and get a nurse to attend to the young lady.'

'I 'll have no one but Hollyhock,' almost shrieked the distracted Leucha.

'Yes, doctor dear, I think you had best leave her to me. I 'm not a bit tired, and we understand one another.'

'I do believe this poor child has been up with her all night,' said Mrs Macintyre.

'And what if I have?' cried Holly. 'Is a friend worth anything it she can't give up her night's rest? I 'll stay with my friend. We understand one another.'

So Hollyhock had her way; and although the girls whispered mysteriously downstairs, and Meg Drummond looked ghastly and miserable, neither Mrs Macintyre nor any of the teachers had the slightest suspicion of what had really occurred.

Daisy Watson, it is true, ventured to peep into Leucha's room; but the excited girl told her, with a wild shriek, to go away and never come near her again, and Hollyhock and Magsie managed Leucha between them.

Hollyhock was now the soul of calm. She coaxed the sick girl to sleep, and when she awoke she told her funny stories, which made her laugh; and she herself sat during the greater part of that day with her hand locked in the hot hand of Leucha. It was she who applied the soothing eau de Cologne and water to Leucha's brow. It was she who swore to Leucha that their friendship was to be henceforth great and eternal. On one of these occasions, when Hollyhock had to go downstairs to one of her meals, Leucha welcomed her back with beaming eyes.

'Oh Hollyhock, I used to hate you!'

'Don't trouble, lassie. You have taken another twist round the other way, I 'm thinking.'

'I have—I have. Oh Hollyhock, there never was anybody like you in the world!'

'I 'm bad enough when I like,' said Holly. 'Shall I sing you a bit of a tune now? Would that comfort you?'

'I 'm thinking of that awful ghost,' said Leucha.

'Do not be silly, Leucha, my pet. Didn't I tell you he will not try his hand again on an English girl? Now, then, I 'm going to sing something so soothing, so soft, that you cannot, for a moment, but love to listen.'

The rich contralto voice rose and fell. The girl in the bed lay motionless, absorbed, listening. This was sweet music indeed. Could she have believed it possible that Hollyhock could put such marvellous tenderness into her wonderful voice?

'Ye Hielands and ye Lowlands,
  Oh! where hae ye been!
They hae slain the Earl o' Murray,
  And hae laid him on the green.

'Now wae be to thee, Huntley,
  And whairfore did ye say
I bade ye bring him wi' you,
  But forbid you him to slay!

'He was a braw gallant,
  And he rid at the ring,
And the bonnie Earl o' Murray,
  Oh, he might hae been a king!

He was a braw gallant,
  And he played at the ba';
And the bonnie Earl o' Murray
  Was the flower amang them a'!

'He was a braw gallant,
  And he played at the gluve;
And the bonnie Earl o' Murray,
  Oh, he was the Queen's luve!

'Oh, lang will his lady

Look owre the Castle downe,
Ere she see the Earl o' Murray
Come sounding thro' the town!'

Leucha's eyes half closed, half opened, and she was soothed inexpressibly by the lovely voice. Hollyhock, holding her hand, continued:

'Oh, waly, waly up the bank,
And waly, waly doun the brae,
And waly, waly yon burnside,
Where I and my luve were wont to gae!

'Oh, waly, waly, gin luve be bonnie,
A little time while it is new!
And when 'tis auld it waxeth cauld,
And fades awa' like mornin' dew.'

The voice was now so soft, so altogether enticing, that it seemed to the feverish girl as though angels were in the room. Hollyhock dropped her notes to a yet lower key:

'Over the mountains
And over the waves,
Under the fountains
And under the graves;
Under floods that are deepest,
Which Neptune obey,
Over rocks that are steepest,
Love will find out the way!'

There was no sound at all in the room. The sick girl was sleeping gently, peacefully—the unhappy, miserable girl—for *love had found out the way*.

When the doctor came in the evening, he was amazed at the change for the better in his young patient. All the fever had left her, and she lay very calm and quiet. Hollyhock suggested that a little camp-bed should be put up in the room, in which she might sleep; and as her power over Leucha was so remarkable, this suggestion was at once acceded to both by Dr Maguire and Mrs Macintyre. They had been really anxious about the girl in the morning; but now, owing to Hollyhock's wonderful management, Leucha slept all night long, the beautiful sleep of the weary and the happy.

Once in the middle of the night Hollyhock heard her murmur to herself, 'Love will find out the way,' and she stretched out her hand immediately, and touched that of Leucha, with a sort of divine compassion which was part of the instinct of this extraordinary child.

During the next few days Leucha was kept in bed and very quiet, and Hollyhock was excused lessons, being otherwise occupied. But a girl, a healthy girl, even though suffering from shock, quickly gets over it if properly managed, and by the middle of the week Leucha was allowed to go downstairs and sit in the ingle-nook, while the girls who had hitherto detested her crowded round to congratulate their beloved Hollyhock's friend.

'Yes, she's all that,' said Hollyhock; 'and now those who want me to talk with them and make myself agreeable must be friends with my dear Leuchy, for where I go, there goes Leuchy. Eh, but she's a bonnie lass, and she was treated cruel, first by our deserting her, and then by what will not be named. But she 's all right now.—You belong to me, Leuchy.'

'That I do,' replied Leucha; and so marvellously had love found out the way that the very expression of her unpleasant little face had completely altered. As Hollyhock's friend, she was now admitted into the greatest secrets of the school; but the real secret of the ghost was still kept back.

CHAPTER XX.

MEG'S CONSCIENCE.

All went well for a time in the school, and all would have gone well for a much longer period had it not been for Meg Drummond. Meg did not mean to make mischief; but, alas! she was troubled by a conscience. This she considered very virtuous and noble on her part; but she was

also troubled by something else, which was neither virtuous nor noble. She seemed jealous—frantically jealous—of Leucha Villiers.

Lady Crossways had spoken of her young daughter as 'my cold, distinguished child, who never wears her heart on her sleeve.' Lady Crossways was very proud of this trait in Leucha, and Leucha herself was proud of it, and treasured and fostered it until she came across Hollyhock. From the first she was attracted by Hollyhock—a queer sort of attraction, a mingling of love and jealous hate; but now it was all love, all devotion. As a matter of fact, she tried Hollyhock very much, following her about like the kitchen cat when she smelt cream, fawning upon her in a way which soon became repulsive to Hollyhock, refusing to have any other friend, and over and over again in the day kissing Hollyhock's hands, her brow, her cheeks, her lips. All this sort of thing was pure torture to Hollyhock. But although she was terribly tried, she determined to go through with her mission, and hoped ere long to train Leucha into finer and grander ways. By their father's permission, Leucha was invited to accompany the Flower Girls to The Garden on a certain Saturday. The boys looked at her with undisguised disdain, and expressed openly their astonishment at Hollyhock's taste; but when she begged of them to be good to the poor girlie, the Precious Stones succumbed, as they ever did, to bonnie Hollyhock.

The school had been open now for some time, and the full number of seventy was made up. Leucha was now so infatuated with Hollyhock that she no longer regretted her being the queen of the school. Hollyhock, for her part, held serious conversations with her sisters about the girl whom she had so strangely conquered.

'We must make a woman of her,' said Hollyhock. 'She is naught in life but a cringing kitchen cat at present, but it is our bounden duty to turn her into something better. How shall we set to work, lassies?'

The Flower Girls considered. Jasmine inquired anxiously if Leucha was clever in any particular branch.

'No,' said Hollyhock; 'she could not even make a ghostie.'

'Well, can we not pretend that she is clever?' said Gentian.

'That's a good notion,' exclaimed Hollyhock. 'I have heard whispers that there are big prizes to be given in the school by the Duke to the girls that are best in different subjects. *We* don't want prizes, not we; but that little Leuchy, she 'd be up to her eyes with joy if we were to set her trying for a prize. I 'm thinking that Mrs Macintyre will declare the nature of the prizes very soon. After prayers to-morrow I 'll set Leuchy on to try for one. I 'll help her, if I can, privately. She has got what I have not, and that's ambition. I can work on that; and, lassies, it will be a great relief to me, for I hate—I *hate* being purred on and kissed all day long. I must put up with it; but it's trying, seeing my own nature is contrariwise to that.'

The five girls talked a while of the coming prizes.

Leucha was now under the charge of Jasper, and they got on tolerably well, for Jasper would do anything in the world for Hollyhock, and as Hollyhock was the only love of Leucha's life, she talked on no other subject whatsoever to the lad.

'Well,' he exclaimed, 'you surely don't tell me that you kiss her—*kiss* Holly!—and she so prickly with thorns?'

'Indeed, I do, Jasper. She loves my kisses; she would not take them from any one else.'

'Wonders will never cease,' said Jasper. 'I would not disgrace the bonnie dear by stupid old kisses.'

'But you are a boy, Jasper. You 're quite different,' said Leucha.

'Well, I'm thinking not so very. I'm first cousin to her, remember, which happens to be next door to brother. But there, let's talk of something else. What mischief is the dear up to now?'

Leucha related a few harmless little pranks, for Hollyhock did not dare to give vent to her real spirit of mischief while Leucha clung round her like the kitchen cat.

The next day Leucha and the Flower Girls returned to the school, and, as Hollyhock had predicted, Mrs Macintyre called her flock around her and said that she had an announcement to make regarding an arrangement winch would be a yearly feature in the school. Six prizes of great magnificence were to be awarded at the Christmas 'break-up.' These were as follows:

(1) For efficiency in learning.

(2) For those games now so well known in schools.

(3) For the best essay of about one thousand words, the subject to be selected by each girl herself. The only proviso was that she must not tell the other girls who were competing what subject she had chosen; otherwise an absolutely free choice was given, and even Mrs Macintyre was not to know the subjects selected before the momentous day when the papers were given in.

(4) A prize for good conduct generally.

(5) A prize for progress made in French, German, and Italian history and conversation, the girls choosing, however, only one of these three great languages.

(6) And, greatest of all, a prize was to be given—and here the head-mistress could not help glancing for a brief moment at her dearly loved Hollyhock—to one of the girls who was so brave that she feared nothing, and so kind-hearted that she won the deep affection of the entire school.

The prizes were the gift of the great Duke of Ardshiel, and were to take the form of lockets with the Duke's own crest set on them in sparkling diamonds. The girls were to choose their own subjects, and in especial were to choose their own ordeal for the final test of valour, no one interfering with them or influencing their choice.

These prizes the Duke promised to present year after year. One condition he made—that a girl who won a gold and diamond locket might try again, but could not win a second locket; if successful, she would receive in its place what was called 'A Scroll of Honour,' which was to be signed by the great Ardshiel himself.

Mrs Macintyre after this announcement requested her pupils to go at once to their several tasks, only adding that she hoped to receive the names of the girls who meant to try for the six lockets by the following evening at latest.

The great and thrilling subject of the prizes was on every one's lips, and each and all declared that Hollyhock was certain to get the prize for valour and good-fellowship. What the test would be nobody knew, and Hollyhock kept her own thoughts to herself. She was deeply concerned, however, to set Leucha to work, and had a long talk with her friend on the evening of that day.

'You can try for the essay, Leuchy dear,' she said.

'No, I can't; I haven't got the gift. I have got *no* gift except my love for you. Oh, kiss me, Hollyhock; kiss me!'

Hollyhock endured a moat fervent embrace. A voice in the distance was heard saying, 'Little fool. *I* cannot stand that nonsense!'

'Who is talking?' said Leucha, standing back, her face assuming its old unpleasant expression.

'Oh, nobody worth thinking of, dear,' said Hollyhock, who knew quite well, however, that Margaret Drummond was the speaker. Margaret had not been friendly to her—not in the old passionate, worshipful way—since the night of the ghostie. Hollyhock's present object, however, was to get Leucha to put down her name for the essay, explaining to her how great would be the glory of the happy winner of the diamond locket.

'You may be sure it is worth trying for,' said Hollyhock, 'for the brave old Duke never does anything by halves.'

'Ah, kiss me, kiss me,' said Leucha. 'I'd do anything for you; you know that.'

'I do; but we won't have much time for kissing when we are busy over our different tasks. I 'll help you a good bit with your essay, Leuchy. There's no name given to the subject, so what do you say to calling it "The Kitchen Cat"?'

'Oh, my word! I was angry with you then,' said Leucha.

'So you were, my bonnie dearie, and I only did it out of the spirit of mischief; but I can instruct you *right* well in the ways of the kitchen cat.'

'I 've always hated cats,' said Leucha.

'You cannot hate wee Jean, and I'll tell you all her bonnie ways.'

'What subject are you going to take yourself, Holly?'

'Oh, I—I 'm in the *danger zone*,' said Hollyhock, with a light laugh.

'It terrifies me even now to think of that ghost!'

'Don't be frightened, Leuchy. He means no harm, and he will not trouble you again. So don't you trouble your bonnie head, but win the glorious prize by an essay on the kitchen cat. I can assure you no one else will choose *that* subject, so you have the field to yourself, and well you'll do the work. Don't I *know* that you 'll get the beauteous prize with the Duke's crest on it, in the stones that sparkle and shine?'

'Mother would like that well,' said Leucha. 'She would be just delighted.'

'Then try for your mother's sake, as well as your own.'

'And you *will* help me, Holly?'

'To be sure I will. There 's no rule against one girl helping another. I 'll show you the way it 's to be done, and with your brains, Leuchy, you'll easily win the prize. Listen now; I 'll put my name down this very night for the *danger zone*, and you put your name down for the essay. Then we 'll both be all right.'

The six subjects for competition were taken up by quite half the school, the girls sending in their names under *noms de plume* to Mrs Macintyre, and in sealed envelopes. Never, surely, was there such an exciting competition before, and never was there such eagerness shown as by the various pupils who had resolved to try for the locket and diamond crest of Ardshiel.

All was indeed going smoothly, and all would have gone smoothly to the end but for the jealous temperament of Margaret Drummond. For a time she had remained faithful to Hollyhock, but, as she said to Jasmine, the immortal soul in her breast troubled her, and as the days went by and jealousy grew apace that immortal soul troubled her more and more. The final straw came in an unlooked-for and unfortunate way. Leucha had been asked to spend from Saturday to Monday at The Garden, and on the following Saturday Margaret Drummond was to accompany the Flower Girls to their home. The thought of going there and arguing about her precious soul occupied her much during the week. She was also a fairly clever girl, and was absorbed in the contest she had entered for—'General Attainment of Knowledge.' But on Saturday morning there came a disappointment to her, which roused her ire extremely. It was news to the effect that Aunt Agnes Delacour was coming to The Garden, and that she had written a peremptory letter asking that on the occasion of this rare visit she herself should be the only guest.

It was impossible not to accede to this request. Holly felt both angry and alarmed, for she was not at all sure of Margaret Drummond; but there was no help for it. On receiving her father's letter she went at once to Margaret, who was packing her clothes for the great event, and begged of her most earnestly to take the matter like a good lass, and postpone her visit to The Garden until the following Saturday, giving the true and only reason for this delay.

'Oh!' said Margaret, 'I don't believe you, not for a minute. No woman would wish to keep a poor girl from her promised enjoyment.'

'You don't know Aunt Agnes, and at least it is not my fault, Margaret,' said Hollyhock.

'For that matter, I know a lot more than you think,' retorted Meg. 'But times have changed—ay, and much changed, too. I try to keep my soul calm, but I am not a fool. You don't care for me as you did, Hollyhock, and I imperilling my immortal soul all for you. You *are* a queer girl, Hollyhock Lennox, to forsake one like me, and to take up with another, and she the shabbiest-natured pupil in the school.'

'Indeed, indeed you mistake, Margaret,' said Hollyhock. 'I did wrong—we both did wrong that night.'

'Oh, *you* did wrong, did you? You are prepared to confess, I take it?'

'Oh Meg, to confess would be to ruin all. Have I not won her round? Is she not better than she was?'

'For my part,' said Meg, 'I see no change, except that she sits at your feet and smothers you with kisses; but I have my own soul to think of, and if you don't confess, Hollyhock Lennox, I have at least my duty to perform.'

'Please, please be careful, Meg. You don't know what awful mischief you 'll do.'

'I have to think of my soul,' replied Meg; 'but go your ways and enjoy yourself. No, thank you, I don't want to go to your house this day week. Perhaps I also can come round wee Leuchy. There's no saying what you 'll see and what you 'll hear on Monday morning!'

'Meg, you make me so wretched. Are you really going to tell her our silly little trick?'

'I make no promises; only I may as well say to you, Hollyhock, that my mind is made up.'

Hollyhock felt almost sick with terror. She flew to Jasmine and got her to talk to Margaret Drummond, but Margaret had the obstinacy of a very jealous nature. She was obstinate now to the last degree, and the departure of the Flower Girls gave her a clear field.

Leucha was extremely lonely without Hollyhock. In her presence she was cheerful and bright, but without her she was lonely. Tears stood in her eyes as she bade Hollyhock good-bye, and Hollyhock clasped her to her heart, feeling as she did so that all was lost, that all efforts were in vain, that she herself would be publicly disgraced, and that Leucha would naturally never speak to her again. These things might come to pass at once. As it was, they did come to pass a little later on, but on this special Saturday there was a slight reprieve both for Leucha and for Hollyhock.

Mrs Drummond drove over from Edinburgh in a luxurious motor-car and took her daughter away, promising to send her back to the school on the following Monday morning.

Margaret devotedly loved her mother, and was not long in her presence before the entire story of the ghost and her part therein was revealed. Mrs Drummond was a most severe Calvinist, a puritan of the narrowest type. She was shocked beyond measure with her daughter's narrative. She sat down at once and read her a long chapter out of the Holy Book on all liars and their awful fate.

Margaret shivered as she listened to her mother's words.

'My dear,' said Mrs Drummond, 'if you do not confess and get that wicked Hollyhock—what a name!—into the trouble she deserves, you have your share with those of whom I'm reading. I'll come with you on Monday morning, and you 'll stand up in front of the entire school and tell what you and Hollyhock did. Mrs Macintyre will lose her school if such a thing is allowed.'

'But, oh, mother, I do love Hollyhock. Is there no other way out?'

'Having sinned,' said Mrs Drummond, 'you must repent. Having done the wicked thing, you must tell of it. Mrs Macintyre will be very shocked, but I think nothing of that. It is my lassie I have to think of. It was Providence sent me to fetch you home to-day! There's no other way out. Confession—full confession—is the only course. You must stand up and do your part, and that wicked girl will as likely as not be expelled.'

CHAPTER XXI.

THERE IS NO WAY OUT.

Hollyhock did not exactly know how she felt during that visit to the dearly beloved old Garden. Besides the unwelcome presence of Aunt Agnes, there was a fear over her which was wholly and completely moral, for Hollyhock had, as may well be remarked, no physical fear whatsoever. She was the sort of girl, however, to keep even moral fears to herself, and she returned to the Palace of the Kings on Monday morning, hoping for the best. So far everything seemed to be all right.

Leucha rushed to her friend, clasped her and kissed her, said how deeply she had missed her, and how she had longed beyond words during the latter half of Saturday and on Sunday for Hollyhock's return.

Meg, then, had been better than Hollyhock expected. When all was said and done, Meg was good and true. Hollyhock made up her mind to be specially good to Meg in future, to compensate her for her late neglect—in short, to soothe her ruffled feelings and to feel for her that love and admiration which the Scots girl had given to her in the past. But where was Meg?

Hollyhock's quick eyes looked round the room, looked round the spacious hall, looked round the vast breakfast parlour. There was no sign of Meg anywhere. This puzzled her a little, but did not render her uneasy; and as no other girl in the school said a word about Meg Drummond—she was not a favourite by any means, and never would be—Hollyhock came to the conclusion that the poor thing must be ill, and must have taken to her bed, in which case she would inquire for her tenderly when the right time came, and thank her affectionately for her loving forbearance.

But, alack and alas! just as breakfast was coming to an end, there was a whir and a hoot, and a motor-car was heard rushing up the spacious avenue and stopping before the great front-door.

A girl who was seated next to Hollyhock said, 'That must be Meg Drummond coming back. About an hour after you left us, Hollyhock, her mother came and fetched her. Why, there she is, to be sure, and her mother along with her. Whatever can be wrong?'

Hollyhock felt a fearful sinking at her heart. She longed to rush Leucha, poor little Leucha, out of the school, to hide her, to screen her from what was certain to follow. But she was too stunned by these unexpected events to say a word or take any action.

'You are a little white, Hollyhock,' said Leucha, who was seated at her side. 'Don't you feel well?'

'Oh, Leucha darling, don't ask me. It's all up with me,' groaned Hollyhock. 'Oh Leucha, say once again that you love me!'

'Love you, Holly? I love no one in the world as I love you!'

'Well, you have said it for the last time,' thought poor Hollyhock to herself. Her little victory, her little triumph, was at an end, for Hollyhock knew Leucha far too well to believe for an instant that she would forgive a horrible hoax played upon her.

If Meg Drummond was a cold, severe-looking girl, she was not nearly so severe or so cold as her mother. Mrs Drummond, accompanied by her daughter, entered the great hall, where prayers were to be said, with a face of icy marble. Proud indeed was she in spirit; determined was she in action. She would save her precious daughter's soul alive, come what might. No other girl was of any importance to Mrs Drummond. Meg was her all, and she was wrecked—yes, wrecked—on the ghastly rock of sin. The Devil would claim Meg, unless she, her mother, came to the rescue.

Mrs Macintyre was somewhat surprised at the arrival of Mrs Drummond, a woman to whom she did not at all take. For that matter, she had never been enamoured of Meg herself, considering her beneath the other girls in the school; but when Mrs Drummond whispered to her, 'I have come on a matter of awful importance, and I'll thank you to conduct the Lord's Prayer and the hymns and the other religious exercises, and *then* you 'll know why I have come.'

This was such a very remarkable speech that Mrs Macintyre bowed stiffly and offered the good lady a chair.

Prayers were conducted as usual, the girls singing and joining in the Lord's Prayer. Then Mrs Macintyre made a brief petition that God Almighty might help her and her teachers and her beloved pupils to work harmoniously through the hours of the week just beginning.

The moment she rose from her knees, she was about to dismiss the pupils to their different tasks, when Mrs Drummond, tall and gaunt, stood up and waved a menacing hand.

'One moment, girls; I have something to say to you, or, rather, my young daughter has something to say, which is in the nature of a black confession. It relates principally to herself and a girl in this school called Hollyhock. She has now to go through an awful confession, which will hurt her more than a little; but if she holds nothing back, her immortal soul may be saved in the Great Day. But there is *another* who has sinned far deeper than my Meg, and I leave it to Mrs Macintyre to settle with her by expelling her from this school. Now then, Meg, think of the Judgment Seat and tell your tale.'

Meg, who would be precisely like her mother at her mother's age, now stood up, flung a vindictive glance at Hollyhock, and began her story.

'I was drawn into it. That Hollyhock had a way with her, and I was drawn in. I consented to an awful sin. It has lain on my conscience until I felt nearly mad. Well, Mrs Macintyre and my dear teachers and you girls, listen and beware. You may recall a certain night when there was great agitation in this school, because it was said that the poor ghostie had walked. The thought of that ghostie nearly drove an English girl out of her mind; but I am prepared to clear up the matter.

'Now for the true story. The ghost was no ghost. It was me, my own self, who, ruled by Hollyhock there, went into what we call the ghost's hut, and allowed myself to be chalked and then blackened with charcoal on the hands and face so as to look like a skeleton, and then wrapped in a cloak of the Camerons, and my hair tied up tight, and a peaked hat put on me over a wig which had been flung into water. I 'm told that I looked something *fearful*; and the one who did the deed, and drew me, an innocent girl, into this mess, was Hollyhock Lennox. A poor English girl went almost raving mad, and no one could tell but that a real ghost had been about. Well, *I'm* the ghost, and the wicked one who led me astray was Hollyhock Lennox. After that she was frightened, seeing the effect of the ghost on poor Leucha, and she got me for a long time not to tell, and she won the heart of Leucha, coming round her as only she knows how. But if *I* know Leucha, she won't put up any more with what was nothing but a hoax.— Will you, Leucha; will you?'

'Is it true?' said Leucha, turning a ghastly-white face and looking at Hollyhock.

'Oh Leuchy,' half-sobbed Hollyhock, 'it is true, every word of it. It was the spirit of mischief that entered into me. But, oh, Leuchy, Leuchy, when you were so bad my whole heart went out to you, and you 'll forgive your own Holly? For, see for yourself, I love you, Leuchy—see it for yourself.'

'And I *don't* love you,' said Leucha. 'You have played on me the vilest trick I ever heard of, and I'll never believe in you again, or speak to you again!—Please, Mrs Macintyre, this is too much; my head reels badly, so may I go out of the room for a few minutes?'

'I had to save my immortal soul,' said Meg, casting down her pious eyes, and rejoicing in the mischief which she had effectually achieved.

'My precious one, you are safe now,' said Mrs Drummond. 'I have stood by and listened to a full confession. But what'll you do to that bad, black-haired girl, Mrs Macintyre? To have her publicly expelled is what *I 'd* recommend.'

'Yes, my dear lady,' replied Mrs Macintyre; 'but you do not happen to be the mistress of the school. I shall take my own course. You can remove your own daughter if you wish, Mrs Drummond, whose behaviour, in my opinion, was many degrees worse than Hollyhock's.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'Hollyhock certainly did wrong to allow your girl to impersonate the ghost; but afterwards, in the most noble way, she won the affections of the must difficult girl in the school. Now I fear, I greatly tear, we shall have much trouble with Leucha Villiers; but nothing will induce me to expel Hollyhock.— No, my dear little girl; you did wrong, of a certainty, but you are too much loved in this school for us to do without you.— Now, Mrs Drummond, do you wish to remove Margaret from the school? Because, if so, it can easily be done, and I shall send up my maid, Magsie, to pack her clothes.'

'It *might* be right,' said Mrs Drummond, who was considerably amazed at Mrs Macintyre's manner of taking the whole occurrence, 'but at the same time I have no wish to deprive my daughter of the chance of getting the Ardshiel diamond crest locket. It would be the kind of thing that her father would have taken pride in. I myself have no wish for worldly pride and precious stones and such like. Nevertheless, it would be hard to rob my child of the chance of getting the locket.'

'As you please,' said Mrs Macintyre with great coldness. 'Only I have one thing to insist upon.'

'Indeed, madam! And what may that be?'

'It is that Margaret Drummond shall have no dealings whatsoever with Leucha Villiers. As to Hollyhock, I can manage her myself. Now perhaps, madam, you will return to Edinburgh and allow the routine of the school to go on under *my* guidance, I being the head-mistress, *not* you!'

Mrs Drummond went away in a wild fury. She certainly would have taken Meg with her, but the pride of having her commonplace daughter educated in the Palace of the Kings, joined to her pride in the very great possibility—in fact, the certainty in her imagination—of Meg's winning one of the gold and diamond lockets, made her swallow her indignation as best she could. She kissed Meg after her icy fashion, and said some furious words in a low tone to the young girl.

'You managed things badly, Meg. That dark girl ought to have been expelled.'

'But, mother, I should have loved to see the day,' said Meg. 'I don't seem to have got much good out of my confession after all.'

'Your soul, child, the salvation of your soul, is gained;' and with these last words the self-righteous woman went away.

Certainly that was a most confusing morning at the school. Poor Mrs Macintyre had never felt nearer despair. The trick which had been played she regarded with due and proper abhorrence, but the way in which it had been declared by Meg made her feel sick, and worse than sick, at heart. She sent for Hollyhock first, and had a long talk with her.

'Ah, my child, my child,' she said, 'why will you let your naughty and mischievous spirit get the better of you?'

'I couldn't help it,' replied Hollyhock, who felt as near to tears as a daughter of the Camerons could be; 'but you see for your own self what Leuchy was before I played my prank, and what she has been since. Now I'm much afraid that all is up, and she 'll never love me any more—poor Leuchy!'

'Hollyhock, you really have been exceedingly naughty, but your conduct to Leucha *after* her terrible fright has been *splendid*; and although I greatly fear, knowing Leucha's character, that you will find it difficult to get back her love, yet there are many others in the school, my child, who love you, and who will love you for ever.'

'Yes; but it was Leuchy I wanted,' said Hollyhock. 'The others were so easy to win. I could always win love; but Leuchy, she's so cold, and now she's frozen up, like marble, she is.'

'You must take that as your punishment, for no other punishment will I give you, except to ask you not to play that kind of practical joke again.'

'Oh my!' exclaimed Hollyhock, 'but the mischief is in me. I dare not make a promise. You would not, if you had a wild heart like mine.'

'Well, Hollyhock, I shall expect, for the honour of the school, that you will do your *best*. And one thing I must ask of you—it is this. Meg feels herself very superior, with the superiority of the Pharisee. Most of the girls in the school will hate her for what she said to-day; but I want you, as a dear friend, to take her part.'

'Oh, but that 'll be hard,' said Hollyhock.

'The divine grace can help you, my child. I 'm not one of the "unco guid," but I believe most fully in the all-prevailing love of the great God and His Son, our blessed Saviour. Now kiss me, and go to your lessons as though nothing had happened.'

'But Leuchy!' exclaimed Hollyhock.

'I'll manage Leucha. I greatly fear that I shall have a difficult task, but I shall let you know to-morrow at latest what attitude she intends to take up. A girl of broader, nobler views would, of course, see the joke and make fun of it; but Leucha, in her way, is as narrow as Meg is in hers.'

'Oh dear, oh dear!' sighed Hollyhock. 'Well, at all events, I 'll get rid of her kisses. Oh, they were *so* trying!'

'I saw that you hated them, my child.'

'Did you notice that, Mrs Macintyre? How wonderful you are!'

'No, my dear baby. But I, who equally hate being kissed, saw what you were enduring in a noble cause. It *may* come right in the end, Hollyhock. We must hope for the best.'

'Oh, but you are a darling!' said Hollyhock, flinging her arms round the head-mistress's neck. 'Oh, but I love you!'

'And for my sake you 'll abstain from tricks in the school?'

'I 'll not promise; but, at the same time, I 'll do my level best.'

Hollyhock, notwithstanding Mrs Macintyre's great kindness, spent a really wretched day. She kept her word, however, as she had promised, with regard to Meg, and during morning recess went to her side, and tried with all that wonderful charm she possessed to be kind to her. She did not allude to Meg's confession, but spoke to her with all her old affection. Meg stared at the girl whom she now considered her enemy in haughty surprise, refused to reply to any of Hollyhock's endearments, and walked away with her head in the air.

'You dare,' she exclaimed at last, 'when you know too well that you ought to be expelled!'

Meg then turned her back on Hollyhock, but was followed in her self-imposed exile by the laughter and jeers of most of the girls in the school, who flocked eagerly round their favourite, telling her that they at least would ever and always be her dearest friends. Many of the said girls assured poor Hollyhock that they were glad that the nasty *kissing* English girl was no longer to divide them from their lively favourite. But Hollyhock's most loving heart was really full of Leucha. Her nature could not by any possibility really suit Leucha's, but Holly had taken her up, and it would be very hard now for her to withdraw her love. Besides, she had done wrong—very wrong—and Leuchy had a right to be angry.

During the whole of that miserable day Leucha absented herself from the school, and all Mrs Macintyre's words proved so far in vain. She had no good news to give Hollyhock; therefore she told her nothing. But toward evening she had a very grave conversation with Jasmine, who made a proposal of her own. If this idea fell through, Mrs Macintyre felt that the mean nature of Meg, joined to the yet meaner nature of Leucha herself, must for the present at least win the day. She had some hope in this plan, but meanwhile her warm heart was full of sorrow for her bonnie Hollyhock.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE END OF LOVE.

The plan was carried into effect. Mr Lennox was consulted, and being the best and most amiable of men, after talking for a short time to his young daughter Jasmine, he went over and had a consultation with Mrs Macintyre. Mrs Macintyre agreed most eagerly to Jasmine's suggestion, and accordingly, two days after Meg had 'saved her immortal soul,' Leucha and Jasmine were excused lessons—Leucha on the plea of ill-health, Jasmine because she wished to help her darling Hollyhock's friend.

The two girls were excused lessons; as for preparation for the prize competition, that they might go on with or not, as they wished. Jasmine had no love for gems, but she would like to gain one of the lockets containing the great crest of her mother's people, her own ancestors. But if she lost it, she would be the last girl to fret. She had as little ambition in her as had Hollyhock herself. Leucha, on the other hand, was keenly anxious to get the famous crest locket, and when Jasmine assured her that she would have ample opportunities of studying the ways of wee Jean, she condescended to accompany Jasmine to The Garden.

She found The Garden, however, very dull. She found the kitchen cat, whenever she came across her, intolerable; she scared wee Jean away from her, saying, 'Get away, you ugly beast!' and took not the slightest pains to make herself agreeable.

Hollyhock, with tears very, very near her black eyes, had implored of Jasper to come to her

assistance and tell home truths in his plain Scots way to the English girl. This Jasper promptly promised to do, and his mother gave him leave to go over from the Annex to The Garden, in order to help Leucha.

Jasmine, with all her strength of character, was too gentle for the task she had undertaken; but there was no gentleness about fierce young Jasper. He naturally thought that Holly, the dear that she was, had gone too far; but he could not stand a common-place girl like Leuchy making such a row.

Now the facts were simply these. Leucha hated, with a violent, passionate, wicked hate, all the terrible past; but she still loved—loved as she could not believe possible—that black-eyed lass Hollyhock. Hollyhock had played a horrid trick on her; nevertheless Leucha loved her, and mourned for her, and was perfectly wretched at The Garden without her.

Oh no, she would never be *friends* with her again—*never*! Such a thing was impossible; but nevertheless she loved—she loved Hollyhock, with a sort of craving which caused her to long to see the bright glint in her eyes and the bonnie smile round her lips. As for Jasmine, she was less than nothing in Leucha's eyes. Hollyhock, although she would not say it for the world, was all in all to the miserable, proud, silly girl.

Hollyhock's heart was also aching for Leucha, and her anxiety was great with regard to what was taking place at The Garden. Would Jasmine and Jasper between them have any effect on Leuchy? Hollyhock felt for the first time in her life feverish, miserable, and anxious. She could not sleep well at nights; her nights were haunted by dreams of Leucha and the wicked things she herself had done as a mere frolic. But there was no news from The Garden, and she had to bear her restless suffering as best she could. Gladly now would she have submitted to Leuchy's kisses, if Leuchy would come back to her friend.

Meg walked with pious mien about the grounds of Ardshiel; her conscience was at rest. She won the affections of a certain number of the new Scots girls, and tried her best to set them against Hollyhock; but there was a magical influence about Hollyhock which prevented any girl being set against her; and although the girls *did* say that Meg had a sturdy conscience, and that she must be very happy to have made her confession, yet as the evening hour drew on they returned, as though spell-bound, to Hollyhock's side to listen with fascinated eyes and half-open mouths to her tales of bogies and ghosties.

Poor Hollyhock was feeling so restless and despairing that she threw extra venom into her narratives, making the ghosts worse than any ghosts that were ever heard of before, and the bogies and witches more subtle and more vicious. Meg did not dare to come near, but she looked with contempt at her friends who were so easily drawn to Hollyhock's side.

Meanwhile, at The Garden the days and hours were passing. Mr Lennox was entirely absorbed with his work, and saw little or nothing of his children. What little he did see of Leucha he disliked, and he thought his dear Hollyhock far too kind to her. On the following Sunday he would speak to Hollyhock, and tell her not to play those silly tricks again. Otherwise he had no time to consider the matter.

But, on a certain day—Thursday, to be accurate—Jasper, having been prepared beforehand by Jasmine, had a talk alone with Leucha. He was really sick of Leucha by this time, and meant to use plain words.

'Well, you are a poor thing,' he began.

'What do you mean?' said Leucha, turning white in her anger.

'Why, here you are in one of the grandest and best houses in the country, petted and fussed over, and just because my cousin Hollyhock chose to play a prank on you. My word! she might play twenty pranks on me and I 'd love her all the more.'

'You're a boy; you are different! She nearly killed me, if that's what you call love!'

'Nearly killed you, indeed! Not a bit of it! I 'm thinking it would take a lot to finish you off. Many and many a trick would have to be played before you 'd expire.'

'You are talking in a very rude way,' said Leucha.

'I 'm not. I know what I 'm about!'

'Then you surely do not dare to tell me to my face that your cousin did right in frightening me so terribly?'

'I 'm not saying anything so silly. I know too well the kind you are made of, Leuchy Villiers. Hollyhock did wrong, and Meg did, to my thinking, a sight worse.'

'Meg was really noble,' said Leucha.

'If *that's* your idea of nobleness, keep it and treasure it all your life.'

'Meg had to save her soul,' said Leucha.

'Oh, my word!' cried Jasper; 'and is our darling Hollyhock's soul of no account?'

'Well, she thinks nothing of the freak which nearly killed me.'

'Nothing of it? Little you know! Do you forget she sat up with you resting against her breast the whole of the first night, and had a camp-bed put into your room by doctor's orders and your own wish, and sang you to sleep with that voice of hers that would melt the heart of a stone, no less? If she loved you? But it has not melted your heart. If she was what you think her to be, would she have troubled herself as she did about you? Would she give up her sport and her fun and her joy, her pleasures, for one like you?'

'I 'm the daughter of the Earl of Crossways,' said Leucha.

'Well,' answered Jasper, 'I can't say much for his daughter. I tell you frankly and truly, Leucha, that if you were a brave lass and well-bred, you 'd take a joke as a joke, and think no more about it; but, being what you are, I have little hope of you. It's the best thing that could have happened to Hollyhock to have got rid of one like you. You are not fit to hold a candle to her. I have no liking for you, and now I'm going back to the Annex. I cannot stand the sight of you, with your sulks and your obstinacy. Oh! the bonnie lass, that you think so cruel. I can only say that I hope she will get a better friend than *you*, Leucha Villiers.'

After this speech, Leucha was found by Jasmine in a flood of tears. Jasper had returned to the Annex, his sole remark to his mother being that he was wasting his precious time at The Garden over the conversion of a hopeless girl.

Late that evening Leucha went into Jasmine's bedroom. 'I 'm very unhappy here and everywhere,' she said; 'but this place is worse even than the school. At school I shall doubtless find many friends to welcome me, so I 'm returning to the Palace of the Kings to-morrow.'

'Well, I 'm glad, for my part,' said Jasmine; 'and I hope you have made up your mind to be nice to my sister.'

'If that is your hope, you 're mistaken,' said Leucha. 'I wouldn't touch her with a pair of tongs. Nasty, sinful girl, to play such a trick on an innocent maid!'

'Well,' said Jasmine, 'I shall be very glad to get back to school early to-morrow.'

'And I to my friends,' said Leucha.

'I have remarked,' said Jasmine, 'that you haven't taken much trouble in studying the habits of the kitchen cat. I know that you have made puss your subject for the grand essay, for Hollyhock thought it best to tell me, in order that you might see the poor beastie. But you have been so unkind to her, Leucha, that she'd fly now any distance at your approach.'

'And let her; let her,' said the angry Leucha. 'I don't want her, you may be sure of that. And as to my essay, of course I must stick to it; but I may as well tell you, Jasmine, that it will be from beginning to end on the *vices* of the kitchen cat, encouraged by her deceitful and silly mistress, Hollyhock!'

'Have your way,' said Jasmine; 'but I don't think you'll be getting the Duke's locket. The Duke is our kinsman and he knows us lassies, and Hollyhock is a *prime* favourite with him, so speaking against one like her will not please his Grace. But now let me go to bed; I 'm sleepy and worn-out.'

The next day the girls unexpectedly arrived at the school. Leucha was certain that she would have the same warm welcome that she had received when she came downstairs after her illness caused by Hollyhock's mischievous prank, but she did not remember that she was now Holly's enemy. She did not even recall the fact that Meg Drummond was forbidden to have dealings with her. In short, the school received her with extreme coldness. The only one whose eyes lit up for a moment with pleasure was that beloved one called Hollyhock; but she soon turned her attention to a group of girls surrounding her, and as Leucha would not give her even the faintest ghost of a smile, she tossed her proud little black head and absorbed herself with others, who were but too eager to talk to her.

Leucha, in fact, found herself in her old position in the school, and the only one who timidly made advances towards her was Daisy Watson.

'I don't want you; go away,' said the angry Leucha.

'I 'm going,' said Daisy. 'I have plenty of friends in the school now myself, for Hollyhock has taken me up.'

'What!' cried Leucha. 'How dare she?'

'Well, she chooses to. I 'm to act in a charade to-night which she has composed, and which will be rare fun. She's so sweet and so forgiving, Leucha, that I think she 'd love you as much as

ever, if only you weren't so desperately jealous.'

'I'm not jealous. I'm a terribly wronged girl. There was a trick played on me which might have cost me my life. I'll have to tell my poor mother that this is a very wicked school.'

'Well, please yourself,' said Daisy. 'I must be off. It's rather fun, the part I have to play. I 'm to be called the *kitchen cat*!'

'You—you—how dare you?'

'We are all acting as different animals. There are twelve of us who are taking parts in the charade, and dear Hollyhock is to be the ghost. She 'll stalk in, in her ghostly garments, and create a great sensation amongst the animals. We would not have done it if we had known that you were coming back, Leuchy, being but too well aware of your terrible nervousness about ghosts, even when the ghosts are only make-believe.'

'Well, what next?' cried Leucha. 'I never heard of anything so wicked. I must speak at once to Mrs Macintyre, and have the horrid thing stopped.'

'All right. But I do not think your words will have any effect now,' said Daisy. 'The matter is arranged, and cannot be altered. Mrs Macintyre thinks the whole thing the greatest fun in the world. I can tell you that I am enjoying myself vastly, although I was so miserable at first when you and I sat all alone; but now I am having a first-rate time. I have told you about the charade, Leucha, because I thought it only right to warn you. If you prefer it, you need not be a spectator.'

'What next?' repeated Leucha. 'I am to lose the fun of seeing Hollyhock disgrace herself. I shall certainly do nothing of the kind. I will be present, and perhaps take her down a peg. But leave me now, Daisy; only let me inform you that you are a nasty, mean little brat.'

'Thanks,' said Daisy; 'but I am enjoying myself mightily all the same.'

Daisy scampered away all too willingly; and Hollyhock, advised by her sister, took no notice of Leucha, although her heart ached very badly for her. But she felt that the reconciliation must, at any cost, now come from Leucha's side; otherwise there would be no hope of peace or rest in the school. The fact was this, that Hollyhock was feeling very wild and restless just now. She had quite got over her fit of repentance, and was full to the brim of fresh pranks.

'There's no saying what sin I 'll commit,' she said to herself, 'for the de'il 's at work in me. With my rebellious nature, I cannot help myself. I did wrong, and I owned it. I helped her and loved her; but I could not bear her kisses. It may be that Providence has parted us, so that I really need not be tried too far. Oh, but she is an ugly, uninteresting lass, poor Leuchy! And yet once I loved her; and I 'd love her again, and make her happy, if she 'd do with only two kisses a day —*not* otherwise; no, not otherwise. They're altogether too *cloying* for my taste!'

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GREAT CHARADE.

Mrs Macintyre was more vexed, more hurt, more annoyed than she could possibly express. She had been willing—indeed, under the circumstances, only too glad—to send sulky Leucha to The Garden; but Leucha's unexpected return on the evening when the animal charade was to be acted put her out considerably. She saw at a glance that Leucha was unrepentant; that whereas Hollyhock was more than ready to forgive, Leucha belonged to the unforgiving of the earth. Being herself a fine, brave woman, Mrs Macintyre had little or no sympathy for so small and mean a nature.

Of course, she regretted Hollyhock's practical joke; but then Hollyhock had so abundantly made up for it by her subsequent conduct, and was even now the soul of love and pity for the desolate, deserted, obstinate girl.

Mrs Macintyre felt that she could not altogether side with Hollyhock, but she had no intention of interfering with the charade because Leucha, in her weak obstinacy, chose to return to the school on that special day. She determined, however, to speak to the girl, and to tell her very plainly what she thought about her and her conduct.

Leucha was in her pretty bedroom, where a bright fire was blazing, for the weather was now intensely cold. She was alone, quite alone, all the other girls in the school, both the actors and those who were to look on, being far to busy to attend to her. She took up a book languidly and pretended to read. She had already read the said book. It was one of Sir Walter Scott's great novels. But Leucha hated Sir Walter Scott; she hated his dialect, his long descriptions; she was not interested even in this marvellous work of his, *Ivanhoe*, and lay back in her easy-chair with

her eyes half shut and her mind halt asleep. There came a sharp, short knock at her door. It roused Leucha to say, 'Who's there?'

'It's me, Magsie, please, miss,' replied a voice.

Leucha muttered something which Magsie took for 'Come in.' She entered the luxurious chamber.

'You are called, Lady Leucha, to the mistress on business immediate and most important. You are to go to her at once. My certie! but you are comfortable here.'

'Are you speaking of Mrs Macintyre?' inquired Leucha.

'I am—the head-mistress of the school herself.'

'Say I will come, and leave my room at once yourself,' said Leucha.

'You had best no keep *her* waitin' long, I 'm thinkin'. It's no her fashion to be kept waitin' when she gives forth her royal commands. In the Palace of the Kings she 's like a royal lady, and you dare not keep her waitin'.'

Magsie had now a most violent hatred for Leucha, having helped Hollyhock to nurse her through her illness, and being far more concerned for her own young lady than for that miserable thing, who had not the courage of a mouse.

'You had best be quick,' said Magsie now; and she went out of the room noisily, slamming the door with some violence after her. 'I don't think I ever saw so wicked a girl,' thought Magsie to herself.

The wicked girl in question thought, however, that prudence was the better part of valour, and went downstairs without delay to Mrs Macintyre's beautiful private sitting-room. She looked cross; she looked sulky; she looked, in short, all that a poor jealous nature could look, and there was not a trace of repentance about her.

Mrs Macintyre heaved an inward sigh. Outwardly her manner was exceedingly cold and at the same time determined.

'I have sent for you, Leucha Villiers,' she said, 'to ask you if you now intend to restore peace and harmony to the school.'

'What do you mean, Mrs Macintyre?' said Leucha.

'My child, you know quite well what I mean. Your dear and noble young friend'——

'I don't know of any such,' interrupted Leucha.

'Then you have a lamentably short memory, Leucha,' said Mrs Macintyre, 'or it could not have passed from your mind—the weary nights and long days when that brave young girl devoted herself to you.'

'You mean that naughty Hollyhock, of course—the one who played on me that wicked, wicked joke. A nice school this is, indeed.'

'Leucha, I forbid you to speak in that tone to your head-mistress. I acknowledge that Hollyhock did wrong; but, oh, how humbly, how thoroughly, she has repented! I fully admit that she had no right to dress up Meg Drummond as a ghost and to frighten such a nervous, silly girl as you are; but afterwards, when she saw the effect, who could have been more noble than Hollyhock; who could have nursed you with more splendid care, and—and *loved* you, Leucha—you, who are *not* popular in the school?'

'I don't care! I won't stay here long,' muttered Leucha. 'If you think I am going to eat humble pie to that Hollyhock, you are mistaken, Mrs Macintyre.'

Mrs Macintyre was silent for a moment; then she spoke.

'I am sorry. A nobler nature would have taken the thing as a joke; but you, alas! are the reverse of noble. You have a small nature, Leucha, and you must struggle against it with all your might if you are to do any good in life.'

'I am not accustomed to being spoken to in that strain,' said Leucha.

'Perhaps not; it would have been good for you if you had been. Oh, my child, if I could but move your hard heart and show you the blessed spirit of Love pleading for you, and the Holy Spirit full to the brim with perfect forgiveness, stretched out even to *you*.'

'You talk to me,' said Leucha, 'exactly as if *I* were the sinner. It's Hollyhock, mean little scamp, who is the sinner, and yet you call her brave and noble.'

'Hollyhock has most fully repented, and therefore is noble. I intend always to love her as she

deserves to be loved.'

'Well, I don't care,' said Leucha. 'She is nothing to me in the future. I 'll have nothing to do with her—nothing at all.'

Again Mrs Macintyre was silent.

After another long pause she said, 'Then you will not forgive the sweet girl, who nursed you back to life?'

'Never, never,' answered Leucha. 'Why should I be tortured in this way?'

'My dear, I must torture you for your good. You will not grant Hollyhock forgiveness?'

'I said before that I would *never* do so.'

'Very well. Hollyhock is the last girl in the world who needs pleading for; but suppose, Leucha —I don't say for a moment I shall succeed—but *suppose* I were to go to Hollyhock, who feels that she has done her part and has shown her sorrow for her little childish freak in every possible way, would you, my child, accept her words of contrition, and when I brought her to meet you, receive her as one so noble ought to be met?'

'No; I would turn from her with scorn. I would tell the humbug what I think of her.'

'Then, Leucha, I have nothing further to say. I doubt if I *could* get Hollyhock to humble herself to this degree; but certainly, after your last words, I shall not try. Now, you have returned to the school on an awkward day, when a charade introducing various animals is to be acted in the great hall. Twelve girls will play different animals, and the crisis and crux of the whole thing will be the appearance of "poor ghostie," which part Hollyhock will undertake herself. I warn you beforehand that, as you are so *very* timid in the presence of false ghosts—for, of course, I personally do not believe in real ghosts—it would be wise for you to remain in your bedroom, and thus keep out of the way. I believe Hollyhock is going to do the ghost very well. I have no desire to interfere with the games of the school. The games teacher, Miss Kent, manages these, and your unexpected and, I must add, *unwished-for* return cannot stop to-night's programme. You had better promise me, therefore, to go to your room, where one of the servants will bring you up some supper. I really advise you for your own good, my child, for I understand that ghost will look very awful to-night, and you, being so terribly nervous, may not be able to bear the sight.'

Don't fear for me, Mrs Macintyre,' said Leucha. 'I 'm not quite such a fool as you think me, and I certainly will sit in the hall with the other girls, and, if possible, put Holly to shame.'

'That I strictly forbid,' said Mrs Macintyre. 'A game is a game; a charade is a charade. While the acting proceeds no looker-on must interfere except under my intense displeasure. In fact, my dear Leucha, after what I have said, I shall write to your mother asking her to remove you from the school, unless you promise not to make any fuss or show any fear to-night. Go back to your room now.'

'And you really tell me, Mrs Macintyre, that the Earl of Crossways' daughter will be dismissed from the school?'

'There will be no difficulty about that,' replied Mrs Macintyre. 'I have six fresh girls anxious to be admitted. You are not popular; your character does not suit us. The fact of your being Earl Crossways' daughter has no effect in a school which is the gift of the Duke of Ardshiel; so don't fancy it. Act sensibly, as you cannot bring yourself to forgive, and stay in your bedroom. I am not talking nonsense when I predict that the nerves of the strongest will be tested to-night.'

'I refuse. You can't turn me out,' said Leucha.

'Very well,' said Mrs Macintyre. 'I have put the case fully before you, and can do no more.'

Leucha went back to her bedroom, where she really felt very troubled and, as a matter of fact, terribly frightened. If Meg Drummond, acting as the ghost, had nearly sent her into the other world, what effect could not Hollyhock produce? And Hollyhock meant to produce an effect unknown before in the great school.

Hollyhock was roused at last. Her forgiving nature had reached its limit. She felt naughty and wilful, and with a spice, as she expressed it, o' the de'il stirring in her breast. She was told by one of the girls that Mrs Macintyre's intercession with Leucha had proved all in vain, and she determined, therefore, to make poor ghostie more terrible in appearance than he had ever been before. She rejoiced, in fact, in her naughty little mind at the thought of Leucha insisting on being one of the spectators, and resolved on no account whatsoever to spare her.

The charade was to take place immediately after light supper. The great hall was arranged for the occasion. A stage was erected at the farther end, in the darkest and most shadowy spot. Across the stage a great curtain was drawn, and footlights had been secured to throw up the antics of the different animals the twelve girls were to act. One was the kitchen cat. Daisy was to be dressed exactly to fit the part by Miss Kent's and Hollyhock's clever contrivance. The kitchen

cat must have a poor thin body, all dressed in shabby fur of a nondescript sort. She was to wear over her head the mask of a real cat. A long scraggy tail was stuck on behind, which by an ingenious device could jerk up and down and from side to side.

Daisy Watson rejoiced in her part, and had learned the miauw, the mew, the hiss, the dash forward, the howl of rage, and the purr to perfection. She had stalked across the stage again and again that day as kitchen cat, each time evoking shrieks of laughter. By her side walked a timorous dog, who looked at the kitchen cat with awe. The dog was purposely made to imitate Leucha, and whenever this lean and ugly brute appeared the kitchen cat said, 'Hiss-phitz-witz!' whereupon the lean animal retired in mortal terror, his mongrel tail tucked under his mongrel legs.

The resemblance to Leucha was really so marvellous as to be laughable, and all the girls had declared that they would not have allowed this beastie to appear if Leucha had been expected to be in the school. But Leucha had come back unexpectedly, and her conduct to Hollyhock had so roused the ire of that generally good-natured girl that she made up her mind that no change should now take place in the programme.

Besides the ordinary cat and dog, there was one ferocious-looking beast managed with great skill, a lion. A very tall girl in the school took this part. The lion's mane was magnificent, his growls such as to terrify any one. These were produced in reality by a little toy instrument concealed in the mouth. He growled and stalked about, and looked so like the real thing that more girls than Leucha shrank back in alarm as he approached the frail barrier which separated the actors from the spectators.

Who *was* this enormous beast? Could it possibly be a *real lion*?

Then there were the wild panther, the fierce tiger, a pony, an ox, a sheep, a goat, a pig, a long, wriggling thing to represent a snake, and finally a most enormous cock-a-doodle-doo, who seemed to fear none of the awful forest beasts and reptiles, but sang out his lusty crow right heartily with all the goodwill in the world.

But the three characters who excited most mirth or fear amongst the spell-bound spectators were, first and foremost, the kitchen cat; second, the timorous mongrel dog; and third, the lion with his mighty mane and terrible roar. The mongrel dog gave faint yelps and howls of anguish whenever he was approached by the lion or the kitchen cat. The lion made a valiant attempt, growling savagely as he did so, to demolish the cat; but the agile cat leaped on his back, stuck her claws, which were really crooked pins, into his hide, and sent the king of beasts howling to a distant part of the stage. She then proceeded to torment the mongrel dog, and to draw out, as she well knew how, Leucha's peculiarities in the dog.

Leucha sat in the audience, rather far back, nearly stunned with horror. Oh, the cruelty of the whole thing! Of course she recognised Daisy; of course she recognised the caricature of herself. Oh! it was a wicked, wicked thing to do, and she had no sympathy, and no friend anywhere. She sat, it is true, amongst the girls, but she was not one of them. They were absolutely yelling with laughter over the pranks of the cat and the terror of the dog. They had never seen so fine a piece of acting in their lives before.

One girl was heard to say distinctly to another, 'Why, if that wee doggie is not Leucha to the life, I 'm very much mistaken;' and Leucha heard the words and knew that the mongrel dog was meant for her, and yet she dared not do anything. She clung to her seat in abject misery.

Suddenly the lights on the stage were lowered. They were made strangely, weirdly dim; a kind of blue light pervaded the scene; the different animals crouched together; and ghostie, very tall, very skeleton-like, very fearsome, with his jet-black eyes, walked calmly on. Oh, but he was a gruesome thing to see! There was a look of horror on his face, and when he spoke, his words were awful.

'I have come from the bottom of the cold lake. Dry my wet locks. Which of you all will dry my locks? The poor beasties cannot. I must jump over the enclosure and walk among the lassies and see which of them will dry my dripping locks!'

The blue light now pervaded all parts of the room, and the ghost went straight up to Leucha.

'You are brave; do this favour for poor ghostie. See how my black eyes glitter into yours! Will not one of you come forward and dry my sleekit locks? I thought the bravest lass in the school would do it, so I came straight to wee Leuchy; but she has turned her head aside. What ails the lassie? What can be coming over her, and she so brave and so noble?'

The intense sarcasm in these words caused the entire school to shriek with laughter, in the midst of which Leucha flew to her room, vowing that even the Duke's locket and crest would not keep her another day in this fearful school.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WARM HEART ROUSED AT LAST.

Now the forgiving nature of Hollyhock Lennox has been often mentioned; but just now she felt very nearly as angry with Leucha as Leucha was with her. It was a strange sort of anger, an anger mingled with love, for had Leucha said the slightest word, that warm, warm heart of the Scots girl would have been hers once again.

But Leucha would not say the word, although, strange as it may seem, she also, down deep in her heart, was longing for Hollyhock, longing as she had never longed for a human being before. She had been brought up in a stiff, cold home, by a stiff, cold mother, and it was hard for her to go against her nature. The girls of Ardshiel were altogether on the side of Hollyhock, and Leucha was more lonely than ever. Her angry boast that she would write to her mother and ask to be taken from the school she had certainly not courage enough to carry out. Lady Crossways would have been furious, and would have come quickly to Ardshiel to punish her rebellious child, and as likely as not to fall under Hollyhock's charm.

Leucha had, therefore, to remain at the school, and as she had now literally no friends (for even the girl who had played the kitchen cat in the charade had completely deserted her, and her cousins, the Frasers, had given her up long ago), she was forced to remain in terrible isolation.

Poor Mrs Macintyre was most unhappy about the girl; and as for Hollyhock, she was downright wretched, but also, as she herself described it, very wicked-like and full of a big slice o' the de'il. The intense unhappiness of her mind caused her to be most freakish in her behaviour, to tell impossible ghost-stories, and as she could not sleep at nights and was really not at all well, to spend her time in planning fresh plots for the annoyance of Leucha.

Hollyhock, with all her loving nature, was also most defiant and most daring, and there were few things she would pause at to punish the English girl.

How queer is life! These two girls loved each other, and yet neither would succumb, neither would yield to the desires of the other.

Hollyhock tried to forget her constant headaches, her bad nights, her restless spirit, by employing her satellites in all sorts of mischievous tasks. No one noticed that she was not well, for her cheeks were apple-red with the glow of apparent health, and her lovely, dark, affectionate eyes had never looked more brilliant than at present.

Nevertheless, she *would* pay Leuchy out—Leuchy, who had now no one to protect her, as even the pious Meg Drummond was not allowed to make special friends with her. Meg, in her way, was as commonplace as Leucha, and she thought it a fine thing to know the daughter of an English nobleman; but Meg was strictly forbidden to show any preference for Leucha, who would have gladly received her, and been even now slightly comforted by her dull society. But the fiat had gone forth. Meg had made immense mischief in the school by her confession. She was detested by all the other girls for having made this mischief, and was as lonely in her way as Leucha herself. The one thing that sustained the school at this painful juncture was the hard work necessitated by the competitions for the Duke of Ardshiel's lockets.

Leucha had a dim hope that if she won one of these great prizes and could bring it back at Christmas to her mother, she might be allowed to leave this hateful school. Accordingly, she worked hard at her theme.

Hollyhock's choice, as she herself expressed it, was 'The Zone of Danger.' It seemed in some ways a strange thing for Mrs Macintyre to suggest, and she repented it after she had done so; but Hollyhock's dancing eyes, and her brilliant cheeks, her smiles, her fascinating way of saying, 'I 'm not frightened,' had obliged the head-mistress to keep to her resolve.

The competitions were of a somewhat peculiar nature. The six prizes were more or less open ones. For instance, the girls who chose to compete in the essay competition might choose their own subject. The girls who went in for foreign languages might select French, German, or Italian. The girls who struggled to attain general knowledge had a very wide field indeed to select from. The only thing they had to do was carefully to select their subject and hand it under a feigned name to Mrs Macintyre, the envelope being sealed, and the lady herself not knowing its contents until the day before the prizes were to be given by the Duke of Ardshiel himself to the school.

Her idea with regard to the competition which Hollyhock called 'The Zone of Danger' was that the Scots lassie or English girl, as the case might be, should perform a brilliant deed, a feat demanding skill, endurance, and nerve. But Hollyhock intended her zone of danger to be one really great and very terrible, something that was to take place at night. Very few girls in the school chose to compete for this prize, as they knew only too well that Holly would beat them into 'nothing at all,' her magnificent bravery being so well known.

One day, about a fortnight before the general break-up at the school, when Mrs Macintyre

was preparing to have a joyful time with her friends in Edinburgh, and the Palace of the Kings was to be shut up, a band—a very large band—of girls were collected round the fire in the ingle-nook in the great hall, and were listening to Hollyhock's fascinating words.

Suddenly Agnes Featherstonhaugh spoke. She was a very reserved English girl, and had only been won over to Hollyhock by slow degrees. But, once she was won over, her heart was in a state of intense and passionate devotion. She would, in short, do anything for this radiant young creature.

'Holly,' she said, as a slight pause in the animated conversation gave her the chance she required, 'confession is good for the soul. Meg knows that.— Don't you, Meg?'

Meg shrugged her shoulders, looked sulky, and made no reply. But when Hollyhock touched her gently on the arm, she snuggled up to her in a kind of passionate love. She felt inclined to weep, for she knew that she—yes, *she*—had caused the terrible discord and unhappiness which now reigned in the school.

'I wish to say,' continued Agnes, 'that I am following in the footsteps of a much finer character than my own. Leucha Villiers belongs to the school'——

Hollyhock stirred restlessly.

'And Leucha is alone morning, noon, and night, except when she is busy over her essay.'

'I—I'm *willing*'—— began Hollyhock.

'No, Holly darling, you are not to be put upon any more than you have been!'

Similar remarks were made by a chorus of girls, who were really sick of Leucha and her ways.

'I—I'm *willing*,' said Hollyhock, bringing out the words with a great effort. 'But there, let things slide. I have my own troubles, and what I do, I do alone; only you all hear me say, lassies, that I'm *willing*.— Now, then, Agnes, go on with your speech.'

'It's only this,' said Agnes, 'that, following in the steps of that most noble creature, Meg Drummond, I also am confessing a little sin, a small one at that; but I too must save my soul, girls, just as Meg had to save hers.'

'Go ahead,' said Hollyhock.

'It was this very afternoon,' continued Agnes, 'when we were all busy in the great warm schoolroom, no teachers being present, and we were all occupied over our different competitions, each of us, of course, hoping to win the prize given by the great Ardshiel. Well, it so happened that Leucha Villiers's desk was next to mine, and Leucha suddenly went out of the room, and a temptation swift and frightful came over me. Nobody saw me do it, and why I did it I can never tell, but do it I did; and if you 'll believe me, girls, I opened Leucha's desk, no one seeing me at the job, and took out her paper on the kitchen cat. I don't myself think she 'll get a prize from his Grace for *that* paper; and, what's more, I don't care, for venom is in the girl, and in every word of her poor, stupid little paper. She compares the kitchen cat to our dear Hollyhock, and abuses Hollyhock in such a way'——

'Stop—say no more,' cried Hollyhock. 'You did wrong to read, and I won't be told what was said of me. No, the daughter of a Cameron isn't that sort.— You can go on with your talk, lassies; but I 'm for my bed. I have a bit of a headache, and the sleep so beauteous will take it away.'

With these words Hollyhock left the room, and Agnes found she had done very little good by her confession. The other girls, however, who were less scrupulous, crowded round her and implored her to tell them what that 'wicked one' had said.

'No; I 'll tell no more,' said Agnes. 'Holly wouldn't wish it. But, oh, to think of that noble girl being spoken of like that! Oh, the cruel, cruel, angry girl! My heart bleeds for our darling!'

'She 'll not get the prize,' said a Scots girl. 'Think you now that Ardshiel would give a prize to one who abuses his kinswoman?'

'She has put her foot in it by so doing,' said another.

'We'd best let her alone, Agnes; and you keep your confession to yourself. You had no right to read the paper,' said Meg Drummond in her solemn voice.

'I had not,' replied Agnes; 'but seeing that you were so troubled by a bit of a lark on account of your poor soul, Meg, I thought I 'd follow suit.'

'Well,' said Meg, who came out a good deal when Hollyhock was absent, 'my mother tells me my immortal soul is safe now. I can pray again, and I 'm happy; but yours is a different case altogether, Agnes. Anyhow, you have done the deed, and one of the lockets will never go to Earl Crossways' daughter.'

The girls talked together for a little longer, all of them rejoicing in the thought that Leucha had now no possible chance of a locket. She was so thoroughly disliked in the school that they positively rejoiced in this certainty, and forgave Agnes her mean trick of looking at the essay.

But Hollyhock, up in her room, having bluntly refused to listen to any of the words of the naughty girl who had read a part of the essay, was nevertheless wild with rage, and could not possibly rest. That sense of forgiveness which she had felt when seated with her companions round the ingle-nook had now absolutely vanished. She would not demean herself by listening to words which were not meant for her to hear; but for the time being at least her little heart was sore, very sore, with anger. 'Oh Leuchy, whyever are you so spiteful, and why does my head split, and why does my heart ache for love of one who could be so cruel to me? Did I not repent over and over and over again? She has done for herself; but when I go into the danger zone, I go into it now in very truth. Perhaps when poor Hollyhock is no longer flitting about the place you 'll think more kindly of me, Leuchy. I was willing for your sake to make a final effort to be good, but the wish has died. I 'm a bad lass, and you 'll describe me as I am, when the essay on the kitchen cat is read aloud. Oh Leuchy, *I* would not be so mean!'

All night long Hollyhock tossed from side to side on her restless couch, thinking and planning how she would perform that feat which would stamp her as the bravest lassie in the school.

There was one action which she could perform, one action which was so full of danger that no other girl in the school would attempt it. It was, in short, the following. On the night when she entered the danger zone, she would enter it on her own Arab horse, Lightning Speed. She could easily get this brilliant little animal over to the Palace of the Kings by the aid of Magsie, who was more devoted to her than ever. She would ride her horse, Lightning Speed, in the dead of night, with the moon shining brightly, up a certain gorge which led to the source of one of the streams that kept the great lake supplied with water.

Lightning Speed was a high-spirited little animal, a thoroughbred Arab no less, and Hollyhock knew that at the top of the gorge, when all things looked so ghostly, he would start at every shadow and at the slightest sound. He was all nerves, was Lightning Speed—all nerves and gallant bearing, and devotion to Hollyhock.

At the top of the gorge was a sudden break in the cliffs, below which roared the mountain stream. The bold girl resolved to leap from the rock on the one side to the opposite rock. She was determined that Lightning Speed would and *should* obey her, for did not he love her, the bonnie beastie?

She would not have attempted this deed, because she loved the brave steed; but now she had heard of Leucha's conduct to her, her mind was made up. She and Lightning Speed would leap the gorge, and she had little doubt that they would both land safe on the opposite side.

But this plan of hers, meaning certain death if it failed, was to be kept a profound secret from every one in the school except Magsie, who would be able to confirm what Hollyhock had done when the day and hour arrived.

Hollyhock, having quite made up her mind, at last fell asleep, and next morning went downstairs very calm and peaceful to her usual lessons. She had the calm, heroic look of Brunhilda, the favourite of all Wagner's great heroines. She even muttered to herself, 'If I die, I die, and the fire spirits of the great Brunhilda will surround me. I 'll die rejoicing; but I 'll never, never do a mean deed. No, my bonnie Lightning Speed and I couldn't bring ourselves so low. We are meant for better things, my good steed, and better things we 'll do. I have no fear. Hollyhock is very happy this day of days.'

Her chosen chums and companions couldn't help looking with fresh wonder at her radiant and lovely face. They little knew what was before them. She was kind and sweet to every one, but a little quiet, not quite so restless as usual, but with a wondrous light glowing in her eyes.

The other Flower Girls looked at her in astonishment, but no one had any fear for Hollyhock. She was not the sort of girl to stir fear about herself in others.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FIRE SPIRITS.

A fortnight with so much excitement in the air passes very quickly. The girls felt this excitement, although they did not talk of it one to the other.

Leucha sat alone when she was not engaged at her school tasks, and made her essay on the kitchen cat as venomous as she knew how. Luckily for poor Leucha, she had not the ability to do

much in the way of sarcasm, and although every single girl in the school must know at a glance that this feeble caricature was meant for their beloved Hollyhock, it would certainly not injure the dear Hollyhock in the least.

Meanwhile Holly, absorbed in helping the other girls to make the time pass as pleasantly as possible, and in doing mysterious things on Sunday with Lightning Speed, also forgot Leucha for the time being. Whenever she did think of her she was sorry for her; but she had not time to think much of any single person just at present. The horse, the darling horse, the Arab, the treasure of her life, must be trained to the task which lay before him. Hollyhock had the knack of making all animals love her, and the pure-bred Arab is noted for being a most affectionate creature. He was sulky, and disinclined to obey big grooms or any one except Hollyhock. But for her he would have given his life.

The eyes, so flashing black; the coat, black also and of such a silken sheen; the tail, a little longer than that of most horses; and the great lovely mane, all gave to the gallant animal a look of determination and of spirit, which drew the remarks of the neighbours, who could not imagine why Hollyhock had been presented by her father with so much finer a horse to ride than the other Flower Girls. But the fact was that the four other Flower Girls did not so greatly care for riding, and although they often went out accompanied by their father on the Saturday and Sunday afternoons, yet they preferred steeds less spirited in nature than Lightning Speed.

Hollyhock had, therefore, her own way entirely with her precious treasure, and for his sake she would not, if possible, endanger the life of Lightning Speed. She knew well that the leap of twelve feet which she intended to take would be a mere nothing to Lightning Speed in the ordinary hours of daylight; but with the moon shining brilliantly and casting strange lights and also queer black shadows, and with the terrific noise made by the foaming torrent below, the horse, brave as he was, might refuse the leap at the last moment.

'At any cost he must not do that,' thought Hollyhock.

'You must not disgrace me, my bonnie beastie,' she whispered into his sensitive ear; and certainly the Arab looked as if he had no intention of disgracing the girl he loved.

She took him to the gorge on two Saturdays and Sundays in succession, and gave him imperious orders to leap across, which he did without a moment's hesitation, leaping back again with equal ease. But this was daylight. Things looked different at night. Animals were known to see strange, uncanny things at night; the shadows were not mere shadows to them. They were monsters beckoning them to destruction. The light, too, of the full moon—for it would be full moon that night—would add to the terrors of Lightning Speed. That intense white world would be as terrifying to him as the blackness of the gorge and the sudden awful gap over which he was expected to leap.

Now the prizes were to be presented to the girls of the school by the great Duke himself, and Mrs Macintyre assumed that the three or four young maids who were to perform their deeds of daring would choose the daytime for the display of their courage.

As a matter of fact, very few girls did go in for this prize—five or six at the most—and these, so far as Mrs Macintyre could tell, chose the broad light of day to show the stuff they were made of. It never entered her wildest dreams that Hollyhock would perform her feat, her daring adventure, about midnight. It was *then* that the moon would be at the full.

Hollyhock could not have carried out the design without the help of Magsie, who had got her sweetheart, Joey Comfort, one of the grooms at The Garden, to bring Lightning Speed to the Palace of the Kings. But even Magsie, who knew the horse was there, had not the faintest idea that her young mistress would take out so spirited a steed in the uncanny hours of the night. She did, however, wonder during the day on which the other competitors were performing their feats of bravery why her favourite, Miss Hollyhock, was holding back. One by one the different girls did different small things, which were brave enough in their way, and all the time a mistress stood by and marked the girl and her achievement. But Hollyhock had not come forward. She, who was so extraordinarily brave, kept in the background. The girls were not allowed to be questioned as to their intentions in this open competition, and the teachers therefore assumed that although the different essays had gone to the head-mistress in their sealed envelopes under feigned names, and the other prizes had been competed for and were waiting a judgment in Mrs Macintyre's room, Holly would doubtless have plenty of time to perform something brilliant, and they only hoped not too reckless, early on the following day. That would be quite time enough for her deed of courage, and no one thought of a midnight ride—a wild, half-despairing girl, and a horse so full at once of timidity and courage, who would go forth to perform their feat of all feats at the hour of midnight.

As usual, the girls crowded round Hollyhock that evening and asked for bogy and ghost stories. She told them with a *verve* which she had never shown before, and they listened with awed and loving admiration. Oh, was there ever the like of this girl before in the wide world? thought those who loved her. Never, never had she spoken as she did to-night. They shrank together under the spell of her words. A few of them even wept as they listened, and the one who wept most sadly was Meg, that pious maid, who had done such mischief to save her soul.

'Oh Holly, but I do love you!' said Meg, laying her head for a minute on Hollyhock's shoulder.

Hollyhock, who, as is well known, could not bear kisses, gently patted Meg's hand, and then stood up.

'Well, girls,' she said, 'to-morrow will be the great day, the grand day, when the Duke gives prizes to the school. I think nothing myself of the prizes, having a right on my mother's side to the grand crest of the Camerons; but I 'm drowsy. Most of you have done your best, and even Leuchy will be put about if she does not get a prize. Listen to me, lassies. I have yet to perform my feat, and no one knows what the feat is.'

'I suppose it will be to-morrow morning that you will do it?' said Meg. 'Please don't run into danger, Holly, for that would break the heart of every girl in the school.'

'*Me*—run into danger! Is it like me, now? Do you think I 'm the sort who 'd wilfully imperil my life? No, not me! But I 'm tired of these constant headaches, and I 'd like a wee bit of rest. You say I'll perform my feat in the morning. Some are clever at guessing—let that be. But whatever happens in the future—and no one can tell—I want Leuchy to know that I bear her no malice, and that if she thinks me like poor Jean, the kitchen cat at The Garden, why, I'm satisfied. You are all here round me with the exception of Leuchy, and I 'm thinking of her loneliness. Well, whatever happens—and I don't think for a moment anything *will* happen—I'd like Leuchy to know that all through this bitter, sad time, while Meg here was saving her soul—and quite right you were, Meg —I have never ceased to love Leuchy—never. She was not the sort of girl I 'd take up; but I did her a wrong, and so I took her up; and I want her to forgive me, if indeed there is anything to forgive. Now, good-night; I 'm off to my bed to ease my troubled head. There's nothing like sleep for that, is there?'

To the astonishment of the girls, Hollyhock kissed one and all, and said, 'I'm getting sentimental. I must to bed to cure my headache. A very good night to you!'

She flitted out of the room, the girls looking after her in startled amazement.

'I don't like it, for my part,' said Meg Drummond.

'Oh, but it's all right,' said Gentian. 'It's only our Holly's way. She's excited, that's all.'

'Yes, I expect that's about all,' said Jasmine, but she spoke with a certain uneasiness, which was not, however, apparent in her voice.

By-and-by the girls followed Hollyhock to their rooms. It has been said already that Hollyhock's room and Leucha's were side by side. Hollyhock went up to bed on this special night before nine o'clock. She guessed well that Leucha would be in her room. In case anything happened—*in case!* but of course nothing would happen—she had left a message for Leuchy with the other girls of the school; but now, as she passed her door, a desire to make one last effort to speak to her, to be friends with her once more, came over the brave child with a passionate force.

She tapped at the door, and without waiting for an answer opened it softly and went in. She had spent days in that room as sick-nurse. How uncomfortable that camp-bed was, too; how restless and exigent was Leucha! But the room looked tidy enough now with the camp-bed removed and a brilliant fire blazing in the grate. Certainly the Duke's school did not lack for luxury.

Leucha was seated by the fire. Her face was pale, and her light, thin hair was unbecomingly dressed. She had been forced, of course, to dress for the evening; but she was now wearing an old tea-gown, which had been made for her out of one of Lady Crossways' worn-out garments. The tea-gown was of a light brown; the make was poor, but it was warm and comfortable, although nothing could be more trying to Leucha's appearance. Holly could have worn it, as she could wear anything with effect; but Leucha, with her pale eyes and scanty locks, was a different sort of being. The brown tea-gown certainly did not suit her. Hollyhock, who was wearing a dress of soft silk and brightest crimson in colour, looked a magnificent young figure beside the dowdy Leucha.

Leucha knew at once that she looked dowdy, and hated Holly all the more for showing herself off, as she expressed it.

'What have you come for?' she said. 'I haven't invited you.'

'I only thought, Leuchy dear, I 'd like to say good-night,' said Holly in her rich, gentle tones.

'Oh, good-night, good-night. But surely you are not going to bed yet?'

'Yes, that I am. My head aches, and there's no place for an aching head like bed. I thought perhaps, perhaps'—Hollyhock's voice trembled—'you'd give me one kiss, Leuchy.'

'Don't be such a goose,' said Leucha. 'I don't want to kiss you.'

'Very well; good-night, Leuchy dear!'

Hollyhock went into her own room. The moment she had gone Leucha became possessed by a tremendous desire to give that kiss so sweetly asked for. But her obstinate and silly pride prevented her. Besides, how could Leucha possibly kiss a girl whom she had made such a rare fool of? No, it could not be.

The fact was that Leucha was exceedingly pleased with her own work, and quite hoped to take the Duke of Ardshiel's locket to her mother, and thus get away from the horrid school. She had not the least suspicion of its contents being known, or at least partly known, to several girls in the school. But even she could not kiss Hollyhock to-night; even she could not give that Judas kiss.

She snuggled into her chair, wrapped her ugly tea-gown round her, and wondered what possessed Hollyhock to go to bed so early, and why she was always suffering from headaches. So unlike her, too, for she looked the very picture of rosy health. Leucha made up her mind that Hollyhock was putting on these headaches to enlist the sympathy of the school.

'Just like her,' thought Leucha; and yet through all her angry thoughts and all through the writing of the vicious and silly essay she knew well that she loved Hollyhock as she loved no one else in the school. Yes, Hollyhock was the only girl she loved. She might bring herself to make up the quarrel with her next term, but she could not give her a Judas kiss to-night.

Hollyhock crept into bed without undressing fully. Her habit lay ready beside her, but in such a position that no one would notice it. She had taken off her pretty crimson frock, and had plaited her masses of black hair into two thick tails, the ends of which she secured with scarlet ribbons.

Half-dressed, she hid under the bedclothes. She could slip into her habit and go downstairs with noiseless feet when the moon was near its height. The adventure would be quickly over, and she would be free, she would be happy. She would have done the bravest deed of all the girls in the school, and her beloved, her best-beloved, Lightning Speed would not come to harm. Mistress and horse loved each other too well for that to happen. She could control him by a look, a touch, a word.

But the time was long in coming. Hollyhock had done her part as far as girl could. She must now keep calm and try to ease that ever-aching head.

One by one the girls went up to bed; but still Hollyhock had to lie awake, waiting, waiting, pining for the weary hours to pass, for there was no use in attempting the dangerous task before the moon was at its full, and that would not be until midnight.

The dressing of herself, the arranging of her sidesaddle on Lightning Speed, the starting for the celebrated gorge, would take her altogether about half-an-hour, the gorge being some distance from the Palace of the Kings.

At half-past eleven, therefore, she might safely get up and prepare for her task. Every other girl in the school was long in bed and sound asleep. The servants had retired to their rooms, the teachers had gone to their rest, for to-morrow was to be a great day, as the Duke himself was expected to present the lockets to the six successful candidates for the prizes. The great Ardshiel would be at the school to-morrow at mid-day, and Mrs Macintyre thought she had better go to bed early. She was always the last to sit up in the Palace of the Kings; but to-night she went to her room at sharp eleven, a little weary, a little perplexed, a little sorry, for she had read Leucha's vindictive essay, and felt that she could not possibly keep such a girl any longer in the school.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOLLYHOCK'S DEED OF VALOUR.

Little did any one in that great house suspect what was going on during those hours devoted to peaceful slumber. Mrs Macintyre was dreaming of the Duke, and of the great honour he was about to confer on her school. Leucha, worn-out and unhappy, was sleeping peacefully at last. Every girl in the school was at rest, with the exception of the one girl who had yet to perform her feat of valour. There was, however, one exception to the intense peace of the school, and that exception was Magsie, who, although she never imagined such an awful catastrophe as might occur, still was full of a latent uneasiness with regard to Miss Hollyhock. Magsie slept, of course, because she was tired; but she woke again because her dreams were bad. They were all about bonnie Miss Hollyhock and Lightning Speed. She felt so anxious that after some time she rose softly, left the other servants, and crept out into the moonlight night.

It was now past midnight, and the moon was setting. Magsie's steps first took her in the direction of the stables. She peeped into one stall after another. There was no sign anywhere of

Lightning Speed. This was quite sufficient for the brave Scots lass. She made up her mind and acted accordingly.

Meanwhile Hollyhock, a little before half-past eleven o'clock, had risen very gently, and carefully adjusted her habit and her little scarlet cap, which she was fond of wearing when she rode with Dumpy Dad. Her scarlet ribbons kept her hair tied tightly back—those long, thick, magnificent black locks of hers. As a rule, when she rode with her father she wore her hair unbound, floating wildly in the breeze; but she thought Lightning Speed would like her best to-night in her present attire. She had chosen an old habit of dark Lincoln green. She glanced at herself for a moment in the glass. Why *would* her head keep aching, aching, when she *looked* so well, when her cheeks were so bright and her great black eyes so sparkling?

It is true that when she touched her forehead she felt it feverishly hot, but she could not be in any way ill; that was impossible. She had never looked better, and looks would sometimes show signs of illness. How bad, for instance, poor Leuchy had looked after she, Hollyhock, had played the prank on her; how withered up, like an apple all overripe—her eyes so dim, her scanty locks so faded! Well, she must not think of Leuchy now; only she would have been a little happier if Leuchy had given her the kiss she had asked for.

The maids of England were cold. She, Hollyhock, could not understand them, could not attempt to fathom them. She crept softly downstairs, gathering her habit over her arm.

The moon was now full and at its height. She would reach the gap in the gorge just at the critical moment. The adventure *was* a wee bit dangerous—she had to acknowledge that to herself —a wee bit, no more!

She reached the stable where Lightning Speed was waiting for her. She had put two or three apples into the pocket of her habit. She gave one to her darling Arab as she prepared him for his ride. Quickly he was ready. The girl saw that the girths of the side-saddle were right, tight, and sure. She took all possible precautions, for if she were to die or hurt herself it would be bad; but if Lightning Speed were to hurt his precious self, it would be, according to Hollyhock, a thousand times worse. The horse neighed at the caress and the apple, and Hollyhock let him peep into the little reserve of apples in the pocket at her side, which were all to be his when the great feat was accomplished.

It seemed to her that Lightning Speed knew her very thoughts. He sniffed gratefully. She sprang lightly on his back, having first secured the door of the stable.

A minute later they were off and away. She thought of young Lochinvar; she thought of the splendid ballads of her native land; she felt thrilled with the excitement of the moment; but how ghastly white was the moon, and how tremendously big and black the shadows where the moon did not fall! Both girl and horse felt these brightnesses and these shadows.

'Well,' thought Hollyhock, 'it will be soon over, my bonnie Lightning Speed;' and the horse, disturbed a little at first by the unearthly glamour over everything, soon calmed down and made straight for the gorge up which rider and steed were to mount, in order to accomplish that awful leap from rock to rock, which they must take twice in order that Hollyhock might really feel that she had done a deed worthy of the prize.

The horse evidently did not like the intense whiteness of the moon; but when he got into the comparative darkness of the gorge, he calmed down and became his usual self. Hollyhock did not attempt to urge him in any way; she simply let him go his own gait, patting him several times on his glossy coat. She knew well that the crucial moment would arrive when they left the shadow of the gorge and stood forth, girl and horse, prepared to take the leap, which, if by any chance Lightning Speed rebelled, must be fatal to them both.

How terribly her head ached; how giddy, how almost silly, she felt! But at any cost she must carry through her task, that task of hers to which she had given her whole mind.

The ascent into the intensely bright moonlight was certainly not good for the nerves of Lightning Speed, and when Hollyhock headed him for the leap which he must take, just for a brief, very brief, moment he hesitated. But he loved his mistress. Ah, how *much* he loved her! Would *he* disobey when *she* ordered him to do a certain deed? He had never disobeyed her yet, never from the time she first mounted his back and held his reins.

Her own eyes felt slightly dazzled by the pain in her head and the intense whiteness of the scene. The roaring torrent below had never sounded so ferociously loud. Holly leant forward and looked into Lightning Speed's jet-black eyes, those eyes as soft as they were black, as wonderfully full of feeling as were Holly's own bright, loving eyes. The black eyes of the girl looked into the black eyes of the horse.

She said aloud in her soft magnetic whisper, 'You 'll *do* it, my bonnie lad; you 'll take the leap, for the love of me, my bonnie, bonnie lad;' and the horse seemed to answer her back, for he gave a gentle neigh and prepared himself for the leap.

Any one else he would have resisted, but not Hollyhock, not his beloved mistress. He knew exactly how to accomplish the exploit required of him. He bounded a bit back, then a bit forward,

then sprang across with a noble endeavour, and reached the opposite bank.

They were both in safety.

'Oh, but you are good, Lightning Speed,' said Hollyhock. 'You have done the worst now, and shall have an apple for your pains. Then we must turn back; but the backward leap will not be so dangerous by half as was the forward.'

By this time Lightning Speed felt as excited as his young mistress. He could scarcely bring himself to eat the apple, so anxious he seemed to complete his task and get back to the safety and shelter of the gorge. He was not frightened now, not he. He would have leaped double that distance if he could for Hollyhock the brave. He prepared himself for the return leap. He sprang out over the awful chasm.

But what ailed Hollyhock herself? The horse showed no fear; but the girl trembled and reeled. Just as they had almost reached the opposite side, and, as far as Lightning Speed was concerned, were in absolute safety, Hollyhock found herself slipping from the saddle. The horse was safe as safe could be; but she—she had slipped and rolled headlong down the steep bank. The aching in her head was so tremendous that she had absolutely no strength to keep her seat. She felt herself falling, falling, bruised and battered by sharp rocks. And then all was a merciful blank. She knew no more.

When she came to her senses again she sat up with a great shiver, and found herself perilously perched on a narrow ledge of rock, while away above her head Lightning Speed looked down at her and whinnied in the deepest distress. To get down to her, to help, to reach her, was for him impossible. His whole heart was hers; but he could do nothing for her, nothing at all!

She saw his gallant head looking down at her, and she managed to call out to him, 'Go home, my bonnie Lightning Speed; go home, and get some one to bring ropes for poor Hollyhock. Oh, but you are a brave and noble beastie!'

The horse was puzzled whether to obey or not. Home to him was not the Palace of the Kings, but his own comfortable loose-box at The Garden. The stable would be locked now; but he might go to the front-door and scrabble with his feet and make a loud and piercing whinny. Then, of a surety, the Lennox man, Hollyhock's father, would come out, and he, Lightning Speed, would lead him to the scene of danger.

Now there was one fact that both girl and horse forgot. In order to get out and in Hollyhock had taken pains early in the day to secure the gate keys of the Palace of the Kings; but both horse and girl forgot that the gates of The Garden, the beloved home of Lightning Speed, would be locked until early in the morning. It would be all in vain for Lightning Speed to try to surmount those high iron gates, in order to secure the services of George Lennox.

But while Hollyhock thus clung desperately to the narrow ledge of rock, which was at least twenty feet down from the top of the famous leap, and forty feet above the roaring torrent of water, Magsie had not been idle. She wasted no time in waking the house. She concluded at once that Miss Hollyhock was away, because Lightning Speed was away. In a flash she guessed why the girl had done no feat that day. She also felt almost certain where she would take Lightning Speed. For horse and rider to leap a chasm of twelve feet in the bright moonlight would be a fine act of courage, a mighty act, just the thing that Miss Hollyhock would attempt, and Magsie now recalled with dismay certain hints about the gorge dropped by that intrepid young horse-woman.

It has been said that the Palace of the Kings lay between The Paddock and The Garden, but if anything it was a trifle nearer to The Paddock than it was to The Garden. Magsie therefore determined to go to The Paddock and get the help of Master Jasper and any others she could find, in the vague and almost forlorn hope of rescuing Hollyhock.

There seemed no hope for her; but Magsie must do her best. How she blamed herself now for allowing Joey Comfort to bring the horse to Ardshiel! But it was too late for praise or for blame. All Magsie could do was to act, and act promptly. Accordingly, flying like a wild creature, she made for the lodge gates, which, as she had feared, she found unlocked. Hollyhock had the keys. She soon reached The Paddock, entered by the smaller gate, and flung gravel at the window of Master Jasper's room.

In an instant Jasper put out his head. 'Why, Magsie, whatever is wrong?' he said.

'Why, *all* is wrong, and mighty wrong,' said Magsie. 'Come along this minute, Master Jasper, and bring wi' ye a coil o' rope and as many other strong lads as ye can find in the school. Be quick, for it is Miss Hollyhock, no less, that we are tryin' to save.'

Jasper felt a sick, terrible fear creeping over him; but he was a lad of fine courage. In a very few minutes he had roused Andy Mackenzie, John Meiklejohn, and his own brother Wallace, and, with a great coil of rope, joined Magsie outside the window.

'I don't want my mother frightened,' said Jasper; 'but whatever is wrong, Magsie?'

'Didn't I tell ye? Isn't my heart like to break? She would do it, the wild lassie; she would take

out Lightnin' Speed to the gap between the twa rocks and put him to the leap at this time o' nicht. Eh, but what horse wad stan' such doin's and the moon at the full?'

'However did she get Lightning Speed?' asked Jasper.

'That was my fault! She coaxed me, and coaxed Joey Comfort, my young man, to get Lightnin' Speed into the stables o' the Palace o' the Kings. They were havin' prizes—thochts o' the de'il, I think them—and what must she do but make up her mind to leap across the rocks when the moon was at the full! Ah, I ken I'm richt! I went to the stables, and Lightnin' Speed was not there. She's that bold! She may even now be floatin' in the water. Oh, I 'm afeared; I 'm near mad wi' fear.'

'Well, come along, come along,' said Jasper. 'We haven't a second to lose. Why, if there is not Lightning Speed his very self! Hollyhock, as like as not, is close behind him.—Lightning Speed, my bonnie beastie, wherever is your mistress?'

Lightning Speed—who had to pass The Paddock on his way back to the Palace of the Kings and The Garden—turned like a flash and led the way up the gorge. He was much relieved in his dear horsy mind by this goodly assembly of young rescuers. Much he wished he could speak, but that gift was denied him.

At last, however, panting and puffing, Magsie and the boys reached the cleft in the rocks. Lightning Speed, still wearing his side-saddle, which was pulled a little crooked, bent over the chasm and turned his black eyes to Jasper, as much as to say, 'Now this work is yours. Call out to her; call out to her!'

Lightning Speed whinnied very gently, and then Jasper knelt down and looked into the great hole. The noise of the rushing water made his voice difficult to hear for the girl, who was still clinging to the ledge of rock.

But at last, to his infinite delight, Jasper heard her answer very weakly, 'I 'm here, Jasper; but I 'm nigh to slipping. It's my head, Jasper, and the giddiness that is over me. Good-night, good-night, Jasper dear; you cannot save me!'

'Don't say that,' replied Jasper. 'Keep up your courage for a minute or two longer, Holly, and *I'll* come to you. Thank goodness I have plenty of rope.'

The Rescue.

Jasper had an earnest and very rapid conversation with John Meiklejohn and Andy Mackenzie and Wallace. Quickly a rope was passed under his arms and round his waist, and before she could believe it possible, Hollyhock, weak, giddy, helpless, was caught in the boy's arms.

He gave the words, '*Right you are; pull away!*' and in a trice the three lads and Magsie pulled the girl and the boy up to the summit of the rock.

Hollyhock lay like one dead, but the boys carried her straight back to the Annex, which was the nearest house, and there she could at once receive her aunt's most tender care and treatment.

CHAPTER XXVII.

ARDSHIEL TO THE RESCUE.

Wild indeed was the excitement when the facts of that terrible night were known; when the Duke of Ardshiel himself, who was to give away the prizes—the beautiful prizes with his Grace's crest—arrived on the scene and found no Hollyhock, but a distracted head-mistress and a lot of miserable-looking girls.

Now, as it happened, Ardshiel loved Hollyhock as he had never loved a girl since Viola Cameron, long ago, had disappointed him. He was often at another great castle of his, close to the Palace of the Kings, and on these occasions he frequently saw his little kinswoman riding on Lightning Speed beside her father, who looked very noble himself on his great black charger, which he called Ardshiel, after the Duke.

The Duke used to nod civilly enough to Lennox; but his eyes and his thoughts were all for Hollyhock, the black-eyed lass who rode so superbly. When she was with her father he never spoke to her; but on the occasions when she happened to be alone, he invariably drew up and had a 'crack' with the lass, admiring her sparkling eyes, her smart appearance, her wonderful life and love and bravery, all of which shone in her face. The Duke, alas! had no children, and whenever he saw Hollyhock he sighed at the thought of the joy which would have been his had he possessed so fine a lass.

Hollyhock had that sort of nature which thought nothing at all of rank for rank's sake, but she admired the dear old man, as she called the Duke, and flashed her bright, sparkling, naughty eyes into his face, and talked nonsense to him, which filled his Grace with delight. Little did Miss Delacour guess or Mrs Macintyre conceive that it was because of this brave lassie, and because of her alone, that the great Palace of the Kings had been turned into a school.

The Duke came to Ardshiel on this occasion with his heart beating a trifle loud for so old a man. He cared little or nothing for the other girls; but he would see his favourite, and secretly he had resolved that the diamonds in the locket which she was sure to win should be larger, finer, more brilliant than those which were presented to the other girls.

But, alack and alas, what horrible news met him! The head-mistress, Mrs Macintyre, came out with tears in her eyes to tell him what had occurred in the watches of the night. The Duke, a white-haired old man, looked very solemn as he listened. His heart was sick within him.

'Now, listen,' he said when he could find his voice. 'Is there danger of her life?'

'We don't know; we are not sure,' said Mrs Macintyre. 'She is at present in a very high fever, and the doctor has been to see her, your Grace.'

'I tell you, madam, that I 'll send, at my own expense, for the best doctors in Edinburgh, even in London. That lassie's life has *got* to be saved, and my pocket is wide open for the purpose. I wonder, now, if I could peep at her. I 'd very much like to.'

'I greatly fear not to-day, your Grace. She has to be kept very quiet.'

'Ah, well! The bravery of the girl! Who else but herself would ride Lightning Speed with the moon at the full? Here's her locket. I chose it a little finer than the others, because she 's a finer lass, and I guessed her deed of daring would *be* a deed of daring, truly. Keep it for her, madam, and send for the specialists.'

The Duke abruptly left the house, and Mrs Macintyre, with her eyes full of tears, put Hollyhock's special locket aside without even opening it, and gave orders in the Duke's name that the greatest doctors be summoned to the bedside of the sick girl. Then she called her most esteemed English teacher to her side.

'You must do it, my dear,' she said.

'Do what, dear Mrs Macintyre?'

'Why, I'm nearly as much broken down as the Duke. The poor lassie! You have read the essays, and know the deeds of daring, and have gone through the different subjects very carefully, Miss Graham. Then, will you now give the lockets to the girls you think most deserving? The locket given for valour is Hollyhock's by every right. The Duke desires that she shall have it,

and I 'll put it away for her until she is well enough to receive it.'

The Duke, who hated motor-cars, and still kept to the old-fashioned magnificent carriage with its pair of spirited horses, was driving down the avenue. He was nearly heart-broken with grief. If that girlie died, he felt that his gray hairs would go down with sorrow to the grave. He had come up that avenue so full of hope, he was driving down equally full of despair. He was not content to trust wholly to Mrs Macintyre. He himself would telephone immediately to the best doctors in the land. On his way down the avenue he was startled by hearing the bitter sobbing of a girl. The sobbing was so terrible in its intensity that he could not forbear from drawing the check-string, pushing his snowy head through the open window of the great carriage, and calling out, 'Who 's there? Who's making that noise?'

Immediately a very frightened and plain little girl stepped into view. It was Leucha Villiers. All things possible had been tried to win her stubborn heart, but it was melted at last. It was she —she felt it was she—who had been the means of destroying Hollyhock.

'What ails you, girl?' asked the Duke. 'I'm Ardshiel, and I am in a hurry. What makes you weep such bitter tears?'

He looked her up and down with some contempt.

'Oh, your Grace, it was really my fault. I 'm sure it was.'

'What—what?' said the Duke. 'Speak out, lass.'

'I've always been unkind to Hollyhock, although she was so good to me—oh! so good; but I—I was jealous of her; and now she is going to be taken away, and last evening she came to my room and asked me for one kiss, and I refused—I refused. Oh! my heart is broken. Oh! I am a bad girl. There never was Hollyhock's like in the school.'

'Keep your broken heart, lass,' said the Duke. 'I cannot waste time with you now. I'm off for the doctors.'

Leucha crawled back toward the house, and the Duke went immediately to his own stately palace and telephoned to the cleverest medical men he knew: 'Come at once to Constable's, a place they call The Paddock or the Annex. There's a lass there like to die. She's a near relative of mine, and I 'll save her if it costs me half of my fortune.'

A couple of famous specialists accepted the Duke's command; and, having so far relieved his soul, he went to Mrs Constable and begged to be allowed to remain at The Paddock until the arrival of the physicians.

During this long time of waiting he had an interview with Jasper, who gave him a vivid and most modest account of what had occurred the night before.

'You are a brave lad,' said the Duke. 'I 'll never forget it—never. And that fine horse—that bonnie beastie—if *she* doesn't ride him again, no one else shall. He 'll browse in my grounds, and live happy till his dying day.'

'Oh, but he 'd die!' cried Jasper. 'Dear Duke of Ardshiel, I *think*, down deep in my heart, that Hollyhock will recover.'

Meanwhile, in the sickroom, the girl who had gone through so much raved and moaned, and went over and over again the terrible feat she had achieved, and over and over again one special name came to her lips. 'Leuchy, you *might* have kissed me. I do think you *might* have kissed me. I 'm wondering if she 'd kiss me *now*, before I go away.'

Hollyhock kept up this fearful moaning until both the great doctors arrived. They saw that Hollyhock was quite delirious, and they listened to her wild and rambling words. Of course, George Lennox was in the child's room, his heart in truth nearly broken; but Hollyhock did not know that he was there. She was thinking more of that kiss which had been refused than of anything else just then.

Ah! why was Leuchy *so* hard—harder than a rock?'

The doctors noticed the constant repetition of the girl's remark, and having spoken very gravely of the case to Mrs Constable, and to the poor stricken father, went down to interview the Duke.

'Well, your Grace,' Sir Alexander Macalister said, 'we have no good news for you. The lassie is ill—very ill. She's fretting over and over for a girl she calls Leucha. We think that if, perhaps, she saw Leucha, it might do her good, and calm her, and tend to bring down her fever. It runs very high at present. She talks of a girl who refuses to *kiss* her.'

'My word!' said Ardshiel; 'and you think she ought to see *that* creature?'

'It might be wise,' said Sir Alexander Macalister. 'It might be the means of saving her life.'

'Then run, my lad, run for your bare life, and bring that girl to her. I met the girl in the avenue crying like anything. I gave her no sort of comfort; but if the doctors think that she may save brave Hollyhock, she shall come. Go at once, laddie; go at once. You know who she is.'

'Oh yes, I know,' said Jasper. 'She's a horrid, detestable girl.'

'There, you hear him,' said the Duke. 'I thought so myself; but if a poor worm can help to pull *her* round, why, that worm shall come and do her duty. Bring her along with you, Jasper, my boy.'

Thus it happened, to the astonishment of the unhappy school, that young Jasper Constable arrived on the scene, took Leucha roughly by the hand, gave her a look of the most unutterable contempt, and told her to come away at once.

Nobody interfered, for nobody was doing her ordinary work that day in the school; and on their way between the Palace of the Kings and The Paddock, Jasper had the pleasure of giving Leucha a piece of his mind. He did it with all his boyish wrath.

'She asked to kiss you, and you *refused*. She wonders now on her *deathbed* whether you 'll *still* refuse.'

'Oh Jasper, have pity on me—have pity! I 'm in agony,' said Leucha; but neither Jasper nor the Duke of Ardshiel had any pity to spare for Leucha. She was, however, by order of the doctors, who remained to see the effect, allowed to enter the spacious sickroom where Hollyhock was lying.

Hollyhock felt confused. She did not recognise her father or Jasper or Aunt Cecilia, and she was not in the least put out by the great doctors; but when Leucha entered, a quick and quieting change came over her face.

'Well, Leuchy, perhaps you'll kiss me *now*,' she muttered; and Leucha knelt down by her bedside and kissed her softly, gently, tears pouring from her eyes.

'Oh Holly, Holly, I love you, I love you,' sobbed Leuchy; 'I love you!'

'Gently, gently; that's enough, my lass,' said Sir Alexander. 'Don't cry, or make a fuss, but sit softly by her, and if she asks for another kiss, why, give it; but no tears, mind.'

So Leucha, the hopelessly naughty one, was established in the sickroom. Oh, how happy she felt again; how glad, how more than glad, that Hollyhock should have called out to *her* in her illness and trouble!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHAT LOVE CAN DO.

Why and wherefore the fever went down and the girl got better no one could quite tell. Of course, it was supposed to be the work of Leucha, and perhaps in a measure it was; for when a very warm heart longs for one thing, and that thing is denied her by passion, ill-temper, and spite, and then at the critical moment—the most critical moment of all—is given to her, the effect cannot but be immense. It began by a great soothing, a happy light in the troubled eyes, a smile round the sweet, nobly formed lips, the words coming again and yet again, 'Leuchy, Leuchy, I have got you, after all!'

In less than a week Hollyhock was quite out of danger. She recognised her father; she recognised Jasper; she recognised dear Aunt Cecilia. She was gentle and sweet to every one. Only once she asked in an anxious tone, 'Leuchy, is my Lightning Speed all right?'

'Oh yes, you may be sure of that,' replied Leucha. 'There never was a horse so fussed over.'

'Then I 'm happy,' whispered Hollyhock. 'Hold my hand, Leuchy.' Leucha did so, and the sick girl dreamt happy dreams, during which her fever quite departed.

The doctors—for the Duke insisted on their coming constantly—said that it was a strange and remarkable case of recovery by the power of love. They looked with a puzzled expression at the object of that love, but held their peace, for Leucha had done what none of them could have achieved.

Just before Christmas-time the Duke of Ardshiel insisted on having an interview with Hollyhock.

'Oh, my dear, my darling,' he said; and his old lips trembled and his great, dark, magnificent

eyes flashed with a very subdued and very softened fire. 'Oh, my love, the Almighty has given you back to the old man.'

'Sit close to me, Ardshiel,' exclaimed Hollyhock, 'and hold my hand. I love you so well, Ardshiel.'

'I want you to do something for me, my Hollyhock, I have got your father's consent and also the doctors' consent, and they say—the doctors do—that a long, long rest will be best for you; so I have my plans all formed. I want you to come, to come away to be company to the old man for Christmas; and afterwards, when you are a bit stronger, I mean to take you to the Riviera, where the sun shines all day and the flowers bloom. Will you come with the old man, my dear?'

'Oh Ardshiel, I would, I would; but listen, Ardshiel dear, and don't be angry. I cannot leave Leuchy behind, for you know she saved my life, no less.'

'I 'll have her at the Castle, but I 'll not take her to the Riviera,' said the Duke. 'You'll be strong enough, my bonnie lass, to be back at the Palace of the Kings at Easter; but, to tell the honest truth, I have no liking for the maid you call Leucha. However, she has done good work for you, and I have a special locket and crest to give her. I 'll take Jasmine to keep you company when we go to the Riviera, and you 'll meet your friend again at Easter. Will you oblige a very old man so far, my blessing?'

'Oh Duke, oh Ardshiel, you are the blessedest and the best,' said Hollyhock. 'How pleased Leuchy will be about the locket! And may I tell her my own self? And may she really come to your castle with me?'

'Yes, my bonnie one, she may. She 'll come with you as a sort of nurse, I take it; and you may tell her what you like, Holly, for there 's nought that I wouldn't do for you.'

So Hollyhock was moved on Christmas Eve to Ardshiel's great castle, and the Duke was nearly beside himself with delight. He was a little sharp, however, with wee Leuchy, for he had managed to pick out all her poor story by now, and had learned how Hollyhock had once frightened and then nursed her, and he guessed by the look on her face that Leuchy belonged to the unforgiving of the earth.

Nevertheless, she had saved Hollyhock now, and he was bound to be good to her for that reason. His nephew, the next heir to the title, was staying at the Castle, and this Cameron had a son of his own, 'the bonniest lad you could clap eyes on,' who would, all in good time, be Duke and owner of great possessions.

The old Duke twinkled his eyes when he saw Leucha making up to the goodly youth; but he said no words, for he had other plans for his grand-nephew—very different plans. As for young Cameron, he took such a very violent dislike to poor Leucha on the spot that she soon ceased to pay him attention.

Lady Crossways, hearing of this delightful visit, had sent down a whole boxful of gaudy and unsuitable clothes for Leucha; but Hollyhock, with her true and rare eye for colour, would not let Leucha be so attired. She spoke privately to the Duke.

'Ardshiel,' she remarked, 'is your purse still wide open?'

'For *you*, my lassie; for *you*.'

'But I want it to be wide open for another,' said Holly.

'Well, I must do as you wish, Hollyhock, my blessing. I suppose you want me to'——

'Hark and I 'll tell you,' said Hollyhock, putting her pretty mouth to the old man's ear.

The result of that whisper was that two boxes of clothes arrived from the most expensive dressmaker in London, and the old Duke, who had a passion for dress and for good taste in all respects, presented the contents of one box to his beloved Holly, and the contents of the other to Leucha.

'There, lass; there,' he said. 'Your mother won't mind your wearing a present from the Duke of Ardshiel. Take them and wear them while you are here. They were chosen by Holly, who has the best taste in the whole country round.'

Leucha forced herself to admire the rich, quiet clothing which the Duke and Hollyhock had chosen for her, and wonderful was the change for the better in her appearance. She had her own maid, too, while at the Castle, who managed to make the most of her scanty locks.

On the whole Leucha was not quite unhappy while at this noble mansion, but neither was she quite happy. The Duke had a piercing eye, and when it flashed on her she seemed to shrink into herself.

Young Cameron, the next heir but one to the dukedom, endeavoured to be polite to her, but found the task too much for him; whereas Hollyhock's gay black eyes and more than merry peals

of delight charmed the young man's heart.

Before long Hollyhock was strong enough to go out of doors; and then, in a very few days, to her exquisite delight, she was permitted to ride once again on Lightning Speed. Oh, the joy of mounting her beloved horse! Oh, the joy of the meeting between that horse and his mistress!

The Duke was, as he expressed it, in high feather. The young Lennoxes—that is, the rest of them—and the young Constables were all invited to spend many days at the Castle, until at last the Christmas holidays passed by, and Leucha went back to school; and the Duke, the Duke's nephew, that nephew's son, and dear, gentle Jasmine, as well as Hollyhock, all went off on an expedition to the Riviera. There, at the favoured spot called Beaulieu, the Duke had a villa—a most magnificent place. Never, never had Hollyhock even dreamed of such splendour, such sunshine, such joy.

The two men walked about a good deal together. Young Cameron accompanied Jasmine and Hollyhock wherever they went; but there was an unmistakable look in his eyes when he glanced at Hollyhock—Hollyhock, the maid so brave, so beautiful. The Duke read that secret in his eyes and chuckled inwardly to himself; but Hollyhock was far too young to notice it, and the wise old Duke kept his secret to himself. 'Time enough,' he muttered; 'time in plenty; let them remain children yet for many a long day. Oh, but my old heart feels young again when I look at her. No wonder the rascal feels as he does, but time—*the* time has not come yet—"My love she's but a lassie yet." Why, here she is, her very self, coming to meet me.'

'Ardshiel,' exclaimed Hollyhock, 'may I walk with you a wee while? You are such a dear old man, Ardshiel, and I like to feel the touch of your hand on my shoulder. Oh, but I love you, Ardshiel.'

'And what have you done with my grand-nephew and Jasmine?' asked the old Duke.

'I do not know,' replied Hollyhock. 'He's a bonnie lad, but I like you the best of all, Duke of Ardshiel! I love my own people, and the Precious Stones, and my schoolmates, and the English lass that saved my life—you are not hurt, Ardshiel? for I cannot but love the English lass—but of all men, except my Daddy Dumps, you come first, Ardshiel, my darling man!'

THE END.

COSEY CORNER
PRINCESS OF THE REVELS
SCAMP FAMILY
SUE
BUNCH OF COUSINS
PLAYMATES
LITTLE MARY
SQUIRE'S LITTLE GIRL
POOR MISS CAROLINA
DICKORY DOCK

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