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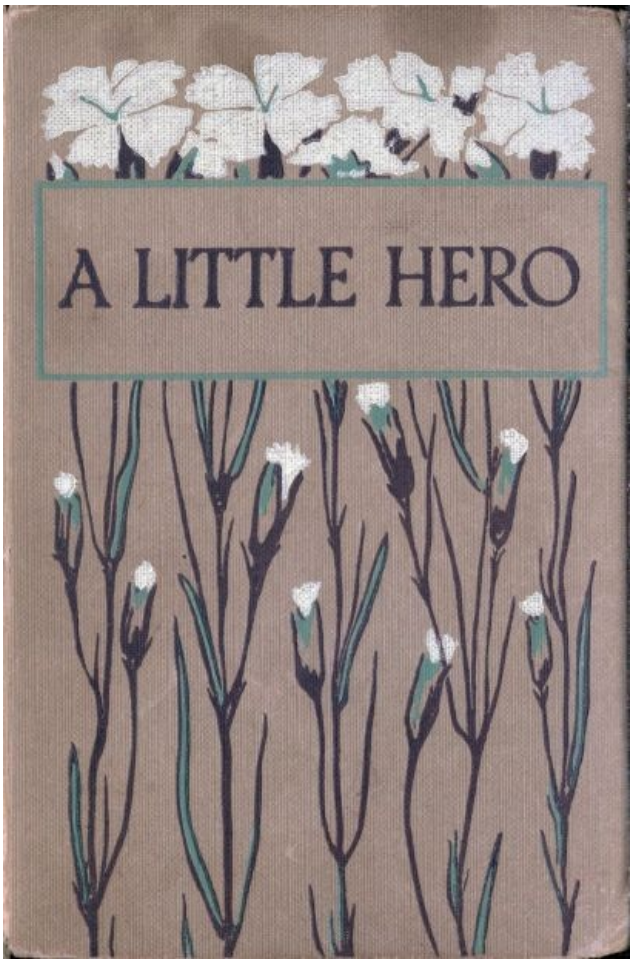

JEFF LEARNS THAT HE IS TO BE SENT TO ENGLAND

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A Little Hero

BY

MRS. MUSGRAVE

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BLACKIE AND SON, LIMITED

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A LITTLE HERO

CHAPTER I

He was eight years old, and his name was Geoffry. But everyone called him Jeff. The gentle lady who was his mother had no other children, and she loved him more than words can say; not because he was a good or pretty child—for he was neither—but because he was her one little child.

Jeff had big wide-awake, brown eyes, that seemed as if they never could look sleepy. His hair was yellow, but cut so short that it could not curl at all.

This was very sensible, for he lived in the hottest part of India. But his mother certainly thought more about keeping him cool and comfortable than about his good looks. His hair would have made soft and pretty curls all over his head if allowed to grow longer. Jeff had no black nurse, like most little boys have in India. An old Scotchwoman called Maggie, who had left her northern home with Jeff's mother when she was married, did everything for the little boy that was required. She certainly had a great deal of mending to do, for Jeff was active and restless, and tore his clothes and wore holes in his stockings very often. And Maggie was not always very good-tempered, and used to scold the little master for very trifling matters.

But she loved her lady's child dearly for all that, and Jeff very well knew that she loved him and that her cross words did not mean much.

I think everyone in his home loved the little lad. He was so merry and bright, so fearless of danger, so honest and bold in speech, that he won all hearts.

His life had been a very happy one till now. But one day all the brightness and happiness came suddenly to an end, and Jeff thought that he could never feel quite so light-hearted again. He could never be sure that anything would last.

"Mother dear, do tell me, why are you getting me so many new clothes?" he said one morning, resting his elbow on his mother's knee, and playing with the soft blue ribbons that trimmed her white dress.

Upon the table there was quite a big heap of new shirts and dozens of stockings all waiting to be marked.

"I am sure I cannot wear all these things here, because they are quite thick and warm, and I know we are not going to the hills this summer, for I heard father say he could not afford it."

Maggie came in at this moment with another tray piled up with collars and handkerchiefs. Then the mother put down her book and drew her little boy's head closer to her breast. He could hear her watch ticking now. Jeff heard, and felt too, that her heart was beating quickly. He smiled upwards at the loving grave eyes.

"But you know you haven't been running, mother." And he laid his little brown hand against her breast. Poor heart! aching with a grief it dared not express, bursting with an anguish it had long concealed.

"My little lad, how can I let you go from me?" she said very softly, still holding him near to her. He raised himself out of her arms quickly and looked with wondering eyes at Maggie and the heap of clothes.

"Where to? Where am I going?" he said, with all a child's eager curiosity shining in his eyes. "But not without you, mother?"

Then the poor mother turned away with a sob, saying,

"Maggie, you tell him. I can't—I can't."

And when Jeff recovered his astonishment he saw that his mother had gone out of the room.

"My bairn, we're going over the water together—you and me—to England—to your grandmother's."

Old Maggie's nose was rather red, and it seemed to Jeff, not used to associate her with sentiment, that her voice sounded queer and choky. What could it all mean?

"Who is going?" he demanded imperatively. "Father and mother, and you and me, I s'pose?"

"No," said Maggie, beginning to sniff, "your father isn't going."

"Then mother is going, and you too, Maggie, will be there to mend my clothes," he said in a satisfied way.

"Yes, yes, I'll gang wi' ye, my bairn, my bonnie laddie—I'll no leave ye in a strange land by yersel'—but not your mother."

Jeff threw a look of extreme disdain towards the guardian of his wardrobe, and cried out angrily:

"Not mother! I don't believe you, Maggie. You can't know anything about it. Mother *must* be going. You know she has never left me since I was born."

Then he flew to the door and shouted down the passage in a boisterous way, his pale face growing quite red and angry with excitement.

"Mother, you *are* going to England. Say you *are* going, and that Maggie doesn't know."

No answer came. Perhaps in that short silence a dim presentiment of the terrible truth was felt by this little boy, so soon to be separated from all he so fondly loved.

Jeff was soon rattling the door-handle of his mother's room in his usual impetuous way.

"Mother, mother, open quickly!"

There never was a repulse to that appeal. But the door was opened without even a gentle word of expostulation, and Jeff was drawn into a darkened room. The mother had got up from her sofa, for there was a mark on the cushion where her head had been. She stood in the middle of the room, now quite still, with her arms thrown about her boy. He did not see at once how very pale she looked, nor did he notice how her lips trembled.

"You will not send me away from you, mother. Oh, I will be good. I will never be naughty or troublesome any more if you will come to England with me. Mother, I *promise*. I cannot go without you; oh no, I cannot!"

Jeff was sobbing loudly now. The silence oppressed him. He felt instinctively that a solemn time had come in his life.

"Do not break my heart, my boy. Come on the sofa and sit beside me, and I will try and tell you what you must know."

Then as he sat very close to her, clasping her thin hands in his own feverish little fingers, she

told him why it must be. Jeff knew quite well that a great many children were sent to England from this station in the plains and that they never came back. He had lost many little companions in this way, not when they were quite babies, but just after they began to run about and to grow amusing. There were none as old as he was left here.

When his gentle mother began to remind him of the last summer's heat, and recalled how he sickened and drooped in the sultry breathless days, he remembered all he had suffered and how very tired and languid he felt. Now the summer would soon be here again, for it was the end of March already, and the doctor had said that if Jeff was not sent away to a cooler climate he would certainly die.

"We are not rich, my darling, your father and I, and he must stay here this year through the summer. I could not take you up to the hills as I did last year when you were so ill. You are everything to me—you are all I have got, my darling—" her voice broke a little. "You would certainly get ill again, and you might even leave me altogether—you might die—if I kept you here. Your grandmama knows my trouble, and she has written to ask me to send you to her. You will live with them all at Loch Lossie till some day we can come home." The pretty lady sighed and pushed her soft brown hair away from her forehead.

"Two or three years, Jeff, my darling, will pass soon—to you and me. I shall hope to hear that you are growing strong and well, and that you are mother's own brave lad, waiting patiently till she is able to meet you again. Be a man—do not grieve me now, my own little lad, by any tears. There are many things I want to say to you before you go, and if you cry—well—I cannot say them."

The little boy's face was quite hidden on his mother's knee. She felt him sob once or twice, and then all was quite still in this great shady room. So still that at last the poor mother thought her noisy active Jeff must have fallen asleep. Her hand was resting on his head, while her beautiful sad eyes gazed through the open window and across the parched bit of garden towards the high hills far away. Oh! if only she could take her child up there to the mountains and rest peacefully with him near the melting snows, and see the colour come back to his pale cheeks in the beautiful green gardens. She did hot weep, though her heart was very sore. For it seemed very cruel to send the child so far away to kinswomen who were strange to him—who she knew were not gifted with any loving tenderness towards childhood, any compassion or sympathy for waywardness. They would not understand Jeff. Might not the cold discipline warp all the noble generous instincts of her child's nature?

Then her hand began softly to stroke the quiet head. She could not see his face, but his little body quivered more than once at her touch, and she knew then that he could not be asleep. She did not speak to him any more—she had no words ready—her heart was so full.

Presently Jeff lifted himself slowly from her knee. His glance followed the direction of her eyes. He did not look her in the face at once.

"Mother, dear, indeed I will remember. I have been saying it over and over to myself, not to forget. I will be brave; it is a great thing to be a brave man father has always said. When you come to fetch me you shall see that I have not forgotten what you say, but—but do not let it be too long. It is so hard to be a man—for a boy to be a man—to be really brave—oh, so very hard! I wish I might cry, you know, but now you have asked me not to—I cannot—I *will not*."

The mother rose up quickly and paced the room backwards and forwards, with hands clasped and eyes bent on the floor. The little boy remained quite still where she had left him.

"Jeff, not to-morrow, but the day after is when you are to go. Your father will take you down to Bombay and see the steamer. We have so short a time together, you and I, and, dearest, I can never say all the things that are in my heart. You could not remember them if I did, and even if you could they would only sadden you. It would be a cruel burden to lay upon you, to tell you of my sorrow."

Jeff did not sob or cry when at last he lifted his brown eyes to his mother's face. Yet his voice was weak and trembling as he said slowly:

"I will go away from you bravely, mother, as you wish it. I have never been disobedient, have I? I will try and not forget till you come that you wish me to be brave—that it is a noble thing to be brave." Then, with a heart-rending sob, "Mother, oh mother, do not be very long before you come!"

CHAPTER II.

On the voyage home Jeff found many things to amuse him, and made friends in every part of the big steamer. The stewards, and the crew, and the stokers would all smile, or have some joke

ready, when his bright little face appeared round some unlikely corner. For Jeff soon knew his way about the ship, and was here, there, and everywhere all day long. Of course he was not always thinking of his home in India, or of the dear faces he had left behind. Even grown-up people easily forget their sorrows in new scenes. Still, Jeff would grow grave when he remembered he had seen the tears in his father's eyes for the first time, when he had said, "Good-bye, my little son."

Further back still, and yet more sacred, so sacred indeed that he only liked to think of it after his prayers, he cherished in his memory the picture of his sad mother, standing in the verandah of their bungalow, waving her hand to them as he and Maggie were driven away. The tight feeling at his heart came again at the bare recollection of the tall slim figure in white, the tearless pale face, the sad sweet smile.

When he lay in his berth at night time—above the creaking and groaning of machinery, above the din inevitable on a steamer—he heard a gentle voice bless him as on that last evening at home:

"God be with you, my own little lad. Be brave till I see you again. I shall be so proud to feel that my boy is a real hero."

On the way to Bombay Jeff had asked his father what a real hero was. Then he had been told that a hero was "one full of courage and great patience, and dauntless before difficulties; one who allowed no fear to overcome him, who fulfilled his duty, and something over it under hard and trying circumstances."

Jeff was unusually quiet and thoughtful for some little time after this explanation, and the father could not help wondering why he looked so grave and sad.

"It will be difficult to be a hero—very difficult," he said at length with a heavy sigh.

Then the gallant soldier, who was his father, sighed too.

It was not heroic—it was only a simple duty to send his little son so far from him, and yet how hard a thing it was.

There was nothing that Jeff liked better on the big steamer than going "forrard" to the men's quarters. He would sit huddled up on a sea-chest, with his elbows resting on his knees, or would climb into an empty hammock and remain for hours, listening to the wonderful tales told him by the crew.

"Captain Clark, I really don't think it possibly can all be true—those stories the men tell, I mean. They must be *quite* heroes."

The little boy's brown eyes were round and stretched in amazement. The captain did not take long to draw from him some of the marvellous narratives and chapters of accidents that had been told to him.

"No, my little fellow, I don't think much of it is true either. We allow sailors to spin yarns and only believe as much as we like." Jeff was much better satisfied to feel that a hero was not an impossible being, and that these rough and ready, hard swearing, rollicking men were not in reality the stuff out of which was moulded true heroism, endurance, and nobility. He took comfort now in laughing at their "make believe" tales of miracles and chivalry.

At last the voyage, which had been all pleasantness to Jeff, came to an end, and he felt very sorry to think of parting with so many kind friends.

On a fine April morning, with a deep blue sky and an easterly wind, the great steamer went up the Thames and was berthed in her dock. Naturally there was a great deal of stir and much excitement amongst the passengers, many of whom had not been home to their native country for long years. Most of the travellers had friends to meet them and were anxiously on the look-out. Those who had not were attending to their luggage. Very few were passive spectators of the busy scene. Jeff was greatly amused by all the bustle and agitation. He might have been even more so had he not felt so cold. The April winds blew very keenly on his sensitive little frame, unseasoned to such a piercing air. Still he tried to see all he could; it was novel and amusing, and he would write a long letter to mother to-night and should like to tell her all about it. She must know all these things of course, but then she might have forgotten.

"Well, my little man, and what do you think of London town?" said Captain Clark approaching Jeff and waving his hand towards a distant cloud of smoke.

"Is that London?" said Jeff with an air of deep disappointment. "Oh, how dirty it looks! it's nothing half as grand as Bombay."

A tall thin gentleman with whiskers beginning to turn gray had walked past Jeff twice, casting a scrutinizing glance towards him. The little boy had noticed the stranger because he was so oddly stiff and very stern looking. At this moment Maggie came up the companion steps and started towards this gentleman with a cry of recognition.

"Mr. Colquhoun, here we are, sir!"

The angular gentleman, who stepped so carefully over coils of rope and the obstacles of luggage, looked precisely as if he had come out of a bandbox. He was so very much starched, indeed, that Jeff could not help wondering if a summer in the plains would make him less stiff. As he came nearer and put out a hand to the little boy, who was his wife's nephew, it seemed like a piece of wood with mechanical joints.

"So this is Mary's son," he said in a formal way. "How do you do, little fellow. You're not much of a specimen to send home. I suppose they have spoilt you pretty well in India. What is your name? Ah, yes, Geoffry, to be sure; after your father's family, I suppose."

Jeff did not like the way in which Mr. Colquhoun spoke his father's name. He was quickly sensitive to a tone or look. In after days he wondered much why an attitude of hostility was always tacitly assumed towards his father.

"My father's people have always been brave soldiers. Two of his brothers were killed in the mutiny; they were heroes, I think. They were called Geoffry and Roger."

The little boy made up his mind that he should never like the new uncle. The disparaging accent on his father's name was an insult.

Mr. Colquhoun had married Jeff's aunt, his mother's eldest sister, and lived at Loch Lossie with grandmama, under whose roof Jeff was to be.

But Jeff did not know yet that grandmama was only the nominal ruler there.

The little boy began to wonder at once if his young cousins would speak in the same dry methodical way as their father. It was just like measuring off words by the yard. How very tiresome it would be to listen to all day.

And would all people in England be so clean and precise as this new uncle?

During the short railway journey up to London from the docks, Jeff watched Mr. Colquhoun with an uneasy stare that would have been embarrassing had the object of this attentive scrutiny become aware of it. Old Maggie's nudges and whispered remonstrance produced no effect.

By and by the travellers were taken to a big hotel near a railway station, and dinner was ordered for them in a great gilt coffee room. They were informed they would have to wait at the hotel till the night express started for Scotland. Jeff was much happier in his mind when Mr. Colquhoun drove away in a hansom to transact his business. Left alone with Maggie, he proposed a walk through those wonderful busy streets outside, and when he came back he sat down to write his Indian letter.

This was finished and posted before his uncle returned, and Jeff felt very much relieved that it was safe beyond recall. Those cold critical eyes might have glanced over the contents: and the little boy was aware that his candour regarding his newly found relative was not flattering. Maggie and Jeff slept in a Pullman car that night and arrived at Lossie Bridge early in the morning.

Tired and cold as was this delicate boy his mind was open to receive an impression of wild beauty in the surrounding country. He thought he had never seen or even dreamt of anything so beautiful and grand. His animated enthusiasm and undisguised pleasure seemed to warm something in his uncle's breast. He even smiled.

The tears rose to Jeff's eyes. Ah! yes, he could understand now why that dear mother, so far away, pined for her native hills and lakes.

The mists lifting from the rugged mountain sides, with the morning sun shining bravely on a glittering lake, was a sight most glorious. The sound of running brooks, the swish of cascades—sounds most strange to Jeff's ears—made music everywhere.

He was silent with wonder and enjoyment during the long drive from the station. Grandmother's house on Loch Lossie was a fine stone-built residence, facing the lake on the south.

It was backed up by the stern heather-clad hills, which sheltered it from rude north winds. A carriage drive wound along the side of the lake for nearly a mile, and Jeff was amazed at the orderly aspect of the shrubberies adjoining it. Everything was clipped and pruned. The wild luxuriant tangle of Indian jungles, the richly sweet smell of tropical growths, and the brilliant colouring of foreign flowers were all so different to this.

Maggie recognized the familiar features of the landscape with repeated cries of surprise or pleasure. Her hard and wrinkled face beamed with the joy of a returned exile.

"Why, Maggie, you never talked about Scotland to me at all," said Jeff in some astonishment as he saw actual tears glistening in her eyes.

"It isn't them as does the most talking as feels the most," she said sharply, dashing away the unusual moisture.

As they got nearer to the big house, which looked so cold and bare, Jeff saw that a boy and a little girl stood under the portico awaiting their arrival.

It was now past seven o'clock and the sun had dispersed the last thin veil of mist over the mountains, and was shining with might on the glittering windows of the big house which was to be Jeff's new home.

CHAPTER III.

"This is your cousin from India, children," said Mr. Colquhoun, as he lifted Jeff down from the back of the dog-cart, where he sat with Maggie.

Then the little traveller saw that the other boy wore a kilt, and was not at all like his father. The girl had on a sun-bonnet, and Jeff only got a glimpse of a pair of rosy cheeks.

"You are Brian and Jessie. I have heard about you often. Mother has your photographs. I cannot see if Jessie is as pretty as her picture; but how thin your legs are, Brian, like my *dhobees*. Uncle Hugh, do tell me why do *dhobees* always have thin legs? Father doesn't know."

Uncle Hugh was one of those very discreet people who never attempt a reply to children's questions.

"Go into the house, Brian, and take your cousin to have some breakfast in the nursery. Is your mother up yet? Mind you both come down tidy in time for prayers."

"But please, Uncle Hugh, I never have breakfast in the nursery. Father and mother think I am old enough to eat with them. Maggie, *do* tell him it is true. Must I really go with them? Can't I see grandmama or Aunt Annie, first? They are mother's own, her very own relations, you see. And she did send so many messages. I have said them over and over again to myself, not to forget. It is very important is it not, Uncle Hugh, to deliver your despatches?"

Alas for poor Jeff! His pleading was not heard. He had yet to learn the firm and obdurate nature of the starched gentleman with whiskers.

"Brian, obey me at once. Show your cousin the way upstairs."

And then Jeff, further constrained by old Maggie's hand, was marched away up two flight of stairs, through a long corridor and double baize doors, then down another narrower passage into a large square room. It seemed to Jeff that there was a great deal of heavy furniture everywhere, and thick carpets, and an excess of light flooding the rooms. In India the sunshine was always excluded.

Breakfast was laid on the table in the nursery. There were steaming bowls of porridge and a large glass dish of marmalade set out. An odour of bacon also was perceptible.

"Isn't my governor a stiff one?" said Brian in a jeering way, as his cousin drew near the great coal fire and drew off his little worsted gloves—the gloves which mother had knitted.

"Is your governor a tyrant too?"

Jeff shook his head in a fierce negative.

"My governor never bullies his men, if you mean that, Brian. Don't you care about your father? I don't call him a very nice sort of a father, but then of course I needn't like him particularly, because he is only my uncle—only a sort of an uncle too—not a real one."

Brian was a very pretty-looking boy, with auburn hair and large innocent blue eyes. People said he had a heavenly expression, and interpreted a mind to match.

Jessie had pulled off her sun-bonnet, and the nurse, Nan, a big bony woman, was tying a pinafore about her. She could hardly hear the conversation of the two boys on the other side of the room, as Maggie and Nan were carrying on a lively exchange of question and answer.

"Cousin Jeff, I'm *quite* sure you wouldn't like to have breakfast down-stairs. I did once when Nan was ill, and it was quite drefful," called out Jessie, nodding her head gravely at the recollection. "Papa won't let you drink if you have the least bit in your mouth, and he says everything that is nice isn't good for children. Kidneys and sausages, and herrings and bacon you're only allowed to smell down-stairs. Isn't our breakfast ready now, Nan? I am so hungry." Then the children were bidden to sit down to the table, and Jeff tasted porridge for the first time.

He did not care much about it, and watched Maggie devour it with no little astonishment.

"Did mother always eat it, Maggie?"

"Yes, my bairn; and it's fine stuff to make growing lads."

"Well, I'll *try* and like it," said Jeff rather doubtfully, as he made a second valiant attempt to swallow two or three spoonfuls.

In the course of a very few days Jeff found out that his cousin Brian was not nearly so angelic as he looked. He bullied Jessie, who was a good-tempered little girl, and deceived his father and mother with a wonderful amount of success.

With grandmama, who was really a keen-sighted old lady, his plausible excuses and affectionate embraces did not meet with the same acceptance. Not that he really cared, for he was impatient of her slow ways, and did not feel sorry for her failing sight or feeble limbs; only, he liked the five shillings and half-sovereigns she occasionally bestowed, and thought that he might receive more if he pretended a dutiful behaviour.

Jeff really, however, fell in love with the old lady at first sight. There are very few old people to be seen in India, and the dignity and pathos of her appearance touched a tender chord. He admired her fine white hair and handsome features, all furrowed with the countless little lines of time. And she wore such stiff brocades and silks, such beautiful old lace, and the funniest brooches, with pictures in them. Her soft white hands touched him in a loving way, and she had a gentle voice something like the dear mother's.

Poor Jeff yearned for the tenderness and affection that seemed so far off. How long it would be before the hunger in his heart would be satisfied he dared not think. But grandmama was old and feeble, and he might not stay long in her sitting-room.

It seemed rather hard to Jeff that she was never allowed to have her own way—that her life was ruled for her. Aunt Annie would always come and fetch away the little boy after ten minutes, even when grandmama had sent for him.

But after some weeks, when it was found that the little boy could sit still and not tease with too many questions or too much talking, he was allowed to stay longer; sometimes to play draughts with or read to the old lady.

About Aunt Annie Jeff did not at once make up his mind. She was a tall woman, with a strong voice and handsome features, who always seemed busy and in a hurry.

Brian said she knew Latin and Greek, so Jeff decided she must be clever. She did not wear pretty clothes or soft laces like his mother. Her dresses were very plain, of some harsh coarse stuff and dull ugly colours; her manner was always a little abrupt, and she seemed to have no patience to listen to anything that children said. Jeff supposed that she was so wise that she could not profit by anything they might say.

Perhaps nothing in Scotland surprised Jeff more than to find how busy everyone was, and how much one could do here. Even ladies and rich people did things for themselves, and their amusements generally seemed to be like hard work. Young men walked or rode, or played tennis and cricket incessantly. There was no mid-day sleep; no lying in hammocks smoking and reading novels. It was never too hot to go out and do something, though to Jeff it often seemed too cold. By degrees, however, he became accustomed to the climate, and before the summer had fully arrived his fair delicate face took a new bloom that would have gladdened the heart of his mother. He had been more than a month at Loch Lossie when the following letter was posted to India.

LOCH LOSSIE, *May 10th*.

Dear darling Mother,—I am not nearly a hero yet. I have not got even really brave, but I mean to. I don't like lots of things here at all, and I get angry and quarrel with Brian, because he tells lies—or sort of lies—and is very unkind to Jessie. He pinches her where it won't show when she won't do what he wants. Nobody ever believes that Brian does not tell truth. He seems so obedient, and he never asks questions or bothers people, and he is *so* clever with his lessons. He always seems to know them with hardly looking. The Rev. Mr. M'Gregor, who is our tutor, you know, says Brian is very intelligent; a most promising pupil he calls him to Aunt Annie. I think Mr. M'Gregor flatters Aunt Annie, because he wants to stay our tutor. But I don't think Brian knows *deep down* about the things what he learns. He never is tiresome wanting to see behind things, or to know *why*. You remember those questions always did come to me when I did lessons with you and father. Cousin Jessie is very pretty, and I know she has a very kind heart. She gave two shillings out of her money-box—all what she had saved in pennies—to a little beggar girl without any shoes that came to the door. Aunt Annie was angry about it, because she said, "No one need to beg or be poor."

Grandmama is a very nice person, but why does she never listen when I speak of father? I go

and read to her sometimes when she is feeling well, and she says she likes my reading better than Brian's; he gabbles on so quick and never stops, because he wants to get it over. Sometimes I stop altogether in the middle of a chapter and talk instead. We have very nice talks—we talk about you. Then grandmama always sighs and says how hard it is you are a soldier's wife, and are poor and are obliged to live in India. They seem to think a great deal about being rich here; but I think honour and glory is more, and I mean to be a soldier.

Aunt Annie does not seem to love her children much. She just kisses them in the morning and at night once on the cheek, *without any arms*, and she never goes to tuck them up.

It is funny, I think, but Jess and Brian don't seem to know it is queer. I call Uncle Hugh the bandbox man—to myself only, of course. He is never untidy, or hot, or cold. He seems to get up out of bed tidy; because I saw him in his night-shirt one morning, and his hair was all straight and smooth.

Mine isn't now when I get up, because they don't cut it so short here, and it has got all curly. I will ask Maggie to cut off a bit for you to see.

Maggie has got such a nice brother. He says he remembers you when you were a little girl, and my eyes are like yours. He is the head-keeper now, and lets me go out fishing with him. He has got straight red hair, and oh, such a red beard! and he talks in such a queer way—they all do here; but I am beginning to understand. Maggie is going to live at Sandy's cottage soon. He had a wife, but she is dead, and there is no one to work and cook for him. But I shall see Maggie nearly every day, and Nan—that is Jessie's nurse—will mend my clothes.

The primroses have been quite lovely. It will be all withered when it has been through the Red Sea, and will have no smell, but I send you one all the same. Mother, you forgot to tell me what English flowers were like—they are beautiful.

I hope the major is quite well, and I do hope he doesn't get any fatter, because of his poor little horse. I wish he could see how thin Uncle Hugh is—sometimes I wonder I can't see through him. He walks up the steepest hills and over the heather without ever stopping.

Tell father I can ride quite as well as Brian, and Uncle Hugh says I have a good seat. It must be true, because he never praises anybody.

Oh, dear darling mother, my hand is quite tired, and I have taken two afternoons to write this letter. I wish I could see you and feel you, though I *don't in the least* forget what you are like. I can't bear to look at your picture often, because it makes the tears come in my eyes, and you might not like me to cry. At night when I go to bed I shut my eyes very quick and very tight, and try not to remember anything in India. I generally go to sleep very quick. The next time I write perhaps I shall be nearly a hero. I am a long way off it yet. It would be dreadful if I was not one before you come. A thousand kisses to you and father from your own loving little boy,

JEFF.

The letter did not stand so irreproachably spelt, but that is what it said and meant.

CHAPTER IV.

My poor little boy sadly missed many things that were joys or daily events at home in India. Yet he did not magnify their importance unduly, and remembered that he must not grieve the loving heart which probably ached with just as keen a longing as his own. This was heroism of a negative kind, I fancy.

At Loch Lossie they were not at all demonstrative people. They never kissed each other in the day-time, or walked arm in arm, or sat very near together.

To Jeff these things had become natural, and his spontaneous, affectionate nature seemed suddenly frozen up by circumstances. The dull ache of longing for kindly, smiling eyes, for little playful speeches, at times seemed more than he could bear.

And to him who had lived in the constant presence of his mother the many restrictions laid upon the children at Loch Lossie seemed cruelly hard; and it was a discipline that seemed to have no meaning, that seemed to presuppose disobedience.

He might not go in the drawing-room or conservatory without leave, or look at the books in the library, or pick the commonest flowers in the garden, or walk near the loch. No promise was ever regarded as sacred by his seniors.

"But if I give you my word, Uncle Hugh," he had pleaded in early days, "not to go near the water, or touch the boats, surely I may go down the drive."

Uncle Hugh only looked down on him with cold denial.

"Little boys are not to be trusted; their promises are not worth much," he answered.

Then Jeff got very red, and burst out passionately:

"You must have known only boys who were liars. Did you not speak the truth yourself when you were young?"

Brian pulled at his jacket to modify his speech. Jeff wrenched it away.

"Don't touch me, Brian; I shall say what I like; and I know you don't always speak the truth. Uncle Hugh, don't you know it is only cowards who make false promises? Can't you trust me? No one who is brave—really brave—or who tries to be brave—would tell a lie."

But the appeal seemed to fall on deaf ears.

Not long after this little scene the Rev. Mr. M'Gregor had reason to complain of Jeff's negligence. He was very inattentive to instruction and his lessons were never properly prepared.

"The boy, moreover, Mr. Colquhoun, has a tiresome habit of reasoning with regard to actions, even my actions. This approaches disrespect. Logic, you are aware, cannot be conveniently applied to every circumstance of life."

"It ought to be," said rigid Mr. Colquhoun, with a certain degree of sternness.

"I respect the boy for his fearless questionings and outspoken sentiments, though I admit they are embarrassing at times."

"I am not sure, Mr. M'Gregor, if Geoffry does not teach us a lesson sometimes."

Uncle Hugh called him Geoffry, much to Jeff's amusement.

Secretly Uncle Hugh did not highly esteem the boy's tutor, though necessity compelled him to employ his services.

The Rev. Mr. M'Gregor was, no doubt, a clever man in his way, but he was not a man of high principle. He hated trouble of any sort, and expediency was usually his guide. Still he had had much experience in teaching, and Aunt Annie was quite equal to the task of sounding his knowledge of classics and mathematics.

These were beyond reproach, and she esteemed it a very fortunate accident which had thrown him in her way.

One of the most strict laws laid down at Loch Lossie was that the boys were never to make use of the boats moored at the little landing-stage.

It came to Jeff's knowledge that Brian repeatedly disobeyed this order. He knew that at dusk his cousin frequently went out alone in a little skiff that was easily managed. Finally, after many anxious days, he resolved to tell Brian that he was aware of his disobedience.

Brian turned on him fiercely, calling him "Spy," "Sneak," and "Holly."

Jeff did not lack in daring or intrepidity, and it was hard to be reproached with timidity by one he knew his inferior in the respect of courage. Then he remembered that to be patient was not the least part of a hero's task, and checked the angry words that were about to rise.

One morning Uncle Hugh came into the school-room, where the boys were always to be found at this hour. His face was graver than usual, and his voice sounded cold and cruel in Jeff's ears.

"One of you boys has disobeyed me. You have been out in the skiff. I suppose it was last evening while we were at dinner."

He looked steadily at the two lads, who were gathering their books together to take down to Mr. M'Gregor's house. Jeff coloured up to the roots of his curly hair, and looked down, unwilling to confront the guilty one's confusion. But Brian, with the angelic face and innocent aspect he habitually wore, was self-possessed enough to ask:

"Did somebody say they saw one of us, papa?"

Mr. Colquhoun looked at his own son, and never doubted his innocence.

"No, my boy, but I found a pocket-knife in the skiff and a coil of gut, with two fish. I know you have both knives exactly alike, and probably only one of you can tell me to which it belongs. Geoffry, have you your knife in your pocket?"

Silence, and no movement on Jeff's part. In a moment Jeff looked up, and in his steady brown eyes there was something which Uncle Hugh could not read.

It was a bold glance, but not a defiant one; a resolute gleam, but yet a sad one. For days afterwards Mr. Colquhoun remembered that dauntless look.

"No, Uncle Hugh," he said firmly.

"Brian, where is yours?"

Obedient to his father's command Brian brought one from his pocket. That very morning, not an hour ago, he had asked Jeff to lend him his knife, and had not returned it to its rightful owner. Jeff's lips closed tightly and his eyes fell.

"Then I must believe, Geoffry, that it is you who have disobeyed me. Have you anything to say for yourself?"

"I did *not* go in the boat," he said doggedly, picking up some books and strapping them together, with despair at his heart. Surely this was being a hero.

"Do not add a lie to your offence and make it worse."

"I have not told you a lie, Uncle Hugh. I—did—*not*—go," he almost shouted, shouldering his books.

Mr. Colquhoun did not argue or seek to prolong the interview, but in a few words spoke the sentence of punishment.

"I will give orders that you are not to use your pony for a month, and that Sandy is not to take you rabbiting or fishing for the same length of time. You are not to be seen anywhere in the gardens or grounds except on your way to Mr. M'Gregor's. I have never restricted you boys in any reasonable pleasures, but I am fully determined to make you understand that I intend to be implicitly obeyed when I think it necessary to lay down a rule."

Then Mr. Colquhoun went away, and Jeff threw down his books with a bang.

"I'll fight you, Brian, you coward, you false witness! You're worse than Ananias," he said, squaring himself for the combat and reddening all over his face.

"All right. Come on. I'm twice as strong as you, and Sandy has taught me how to box."

With this invitation Jeff began the battle in a very unscientific way. Of course he came out of the fray with a bleeding face and torn clothes. There was no one near to pity him, and he could only wash his face and hope that the rents would escape Aunt Annie's notice till Nan had mended them.

For a fortnight this poor little boy moped about the upstairs rooms and passages in a very miserable way. Jessie was his best consolation, bringing him news from the garden and stable which interested him. She also paid a daily visit to Sandy in order to glean little details of sport, and came back usually with her small face puckered up in anxiety to forget nothing.

It was really very sad for poor Jeff that the otter hounds should visit the neighbourhood at this juncture. He had to watch Uncle Hugh and Brian starting at daybreak three times a week to participate in the sport. His poor heart was very sore all the time, for Uncle Hugh had not believed him, and there was no one in whom he could confide. It was a terrible anguish to bear all alone, and the injustice of his punishment was the sorest part of his trouble.

Maggie had gone away to live at her brother Sandy's cottage soon after her return, and he might not even go down and see her now.

Meanwhile, Brian kept the knife that really belonged to Jeff, for Uncle Hugh had not given back the delinquent's implement. It seemed to Jeff that his cousin took delight in parading his possession and assuming innocence. He went out of his way to assert his virtue.

One evening, watching the waning light from an upstairs window, Jeff saw a little skiff shoot out into the open space of water, not shadowed by the hills. There was a little figure in it. Here was a glorious opportunity to go down and tell Uncle Hugh and establish his own truth. For a few seconds a conflict went on in his breast, and then with a heavy sigh he laid his head on the window sill and burst into passionate sobbing. When it was almost dark the fit of weeping had passed off. But he remained at the open window, breathing the balmy air. Suddenly he was startled by a cry from the water. In vain his eyes sought to pierce the gathering gloom. Again the cry. Forgetting all restrictions, with a sudden uncontrollable impulse, he rushed down the stairs and out into the garden to the lake side.

CHAPTER V.

"Papa, papa! oh, come quickly! There's some one drowning in the lake. And oh! I was standing in the hall when Jeff rushed down-stairs and out of the front door, with his face all white and his eyes staring. He must have seen from upstairs—he was standing at the window, you know. Oh papa, perhaps it is Brian; he never came in to tea."

Little Jessie, with eyes distended and panting breath, astonished Mr. Colquhoun and her mother by the unusual impropriety of bursting open the dining-room door at dinner-time. In a moment her father was on his feet and out of the door, followed by the butler and footman. A presentiment of how it had all happened flashed upon him as he hurried down to the edge of the water. There were cries, muffled cries, growing gradually fainter, and splashes as though of some one struggling; a scream, and then what seemed an ominous silence.

It did not take a minute to launch a boat, and row out a few yards from the shore. An upturned skiff told its tale of a repeated disobedience. Clinging to it by one hand was Jeff, with the other he gripped Brian's hair; but his little hand had just relaxed its hold as Mr. Colquhoun approached. The effort to hold up his cousin had taxed his strength to the utmost, and unconsciousness stole over him at the moment of rescue.

They were both saved. In five minutes, time the butler and footman had carried in the two insensible forms and laid them safely on the rug in the library.

It was not long before Brian gave signs of life. A gasp, a sigh, a fluttering breath, and his eyes opened to see his mother hanging over him. They wandered round the room and saw his father watching beside Jeff for some sign of returning consciousness.

There was an ugly contraction of Brian's brow at this moment. To Mr. Colquhoun the moments of doubt were full of anguish. Perchance Jeff had given his life for his son's, for life seemed long in returning to the little face that lay so still and white, with the pretty yellow curls dripping wet. At last Jeff opened his eyes, but it was with no rational gaze.

"Mother—I did try—they will tell you that I did try," he said faintly. Then his eyelids closed again, and he muttered, "I will say it now—'as we forgive them that trespass against us.'"

Mr. Colquhoun understood at last. Here was verily a little hero who had suffered the guilt and punishment of another—a weak and sensitive child who had borne a wrong silently, and had finally all but lost his life to save the life of one he knew had sacrificed him.

By and by the doctor came, and Jeff was undressed and taken upstairs without any other revival. Maggie had been sent for at once, to her brother's cottage, and was installed in Jeff's little room as his nurse. The doctor had lifted the wet curls above Jeff's temple, and had revealed a dark bruise there. Evidently the boy had come in contact with some obstacle in his wild plunge from the shore to the skiff, only a few yards off. Jeff and Brian had both been learning to swim with Sandy this summer; but Brian had made no progress, whereas Jeff could manage a few strokes.

That was a very anxious night for the household at Loch Lossie. Even little Jessie was suffered to wander about the passages till after ten o'clock; and there was no assembly for prayers in the dining-room as usual. A great shadow and fear seemed to hang over the house. Brian was taken away by his mother to his own room and put to bed.

"Take him out of my sight. He is the cause of all this," Mr. Colquhoun had said sternly, seeing he was fully recovered and inclined to make explanations.

Mr. Colquhoun and Maggie sat up together by Jeff's bedside. He lay most of the night still and white. Towards daybreak a pink spot came into each cheek, and he breathed more quickly and grew restless. At last he began to speak:

"Oh, mother, I cannot bear it—*indeed* I cannot bear it! No one loves me here, it is lonely—and they won't even believe me or trust me—they think I am a liar. Brian looks so good, and he is never found out—they think he must be true. When will you come, mother?—oh, I want you, I want you."

All the pent-up sorrow of weeks and months went out in the last bitter cry. Then, as if awakened by his own intensity of feeling, Jeff opened his eyes and was suddenly conscious of his surroundings.

"Uncle Hugh, where am I? Why are you sitting here? Have I been ill? Oh, yes, I remember all now. I heard Brian scream, and I ran down to the lake. He was not drowned, was he? Oh, if I had saved him! mother would be so glad; because he is my enemy, you know. Why does my head ache so much; it all seems confused too. I wish you would believe me, Uncle Hugh; indeed I told the truth."

The man of starch bent down till his face was very near to Jeff. His voice was a little husky:

"I believe you now, my little lad. I could never doubt you again; you have behaved like a hero!"

Then Jeff half raised himself on his pillows, and the dim morning light revealed an elastic [Transcriber's note: ecstatic?] smile on his pale face.

"Oh, say that again. I do want to be a hero before mother comes."

He fell back once more, murmuring,

"I am so tired and sleepy, and so happy now. Uncle Hugh, will you hear me say my prayers? After I had been unhappy mother always heard me say my prayers. And I think—perhaps I have cheated God lately—since you punished me, for I would not say 'forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.' I did not forgive you or Brian, and I could not say it. Now I can, and it will be all right. God will understand."

Soon after Jeff fell into a deep and dreamless sleep. He slept far into a bright morning, and when the doctor came he pronounced his little patient as convalescent.

"You may get up to-morrow, and we shall have you out with the otter hounds on Saturday, my little man," he said with a kind smile.

Jeff's eyes sought Mr. Colquhoun's face with an eager look of inquiry.

"We will see, Jeff"—he called him Jeff for the first time—"but you must make haste and get well."

And Jeff did get well and rode right bravely. Better sport was never seen.

CHAPTER VI.

Jeff was now ten years old, for nearly two years have gone by since he came to England. He has grown very much, and is a tall muscular boy, with a bright smiling face; only when he is alone or unconscious of observation he is sometimes subdued, and there is a yearning wistful look in his big brown eyes that seems to declare he is not quite happy.

"You have news from India to-day, Geoffry," said Uncle Hugh one morning rather stiffly as he met the boy coming down the stairs with a letter in his hand. "Your Aunt Annie has also had a letter from your mother."

Jeff looked rather as if he had been crying, and his voice trembled a little when he answered Mr. Colquhoun:

"Yes, there is news. *She* is coming—*at last*. But oh, she is ill!"

Jeff nearly broke down here. "Uncle Hugh, I may go to London and meet her next week."

The passionate pleading of the boy's voice in the last words was indescribable.

He had grown used to negatives presented to his requests during his stay at Loch Lossie, but this was a widely different and an urgent matter.

"I think, my boy, it will be better not. Your aunt has fully discussed the matter with me, and she does not wish it. She thinks that her meeting with her sister will be a painful one; she did not part on very friendly terms with your mother. A reconciliation will be more pleasant at Loch Lossie."

Jeff coloured deeply. He knew what all this meant. Uncle Hugh's carefully-worded speech was clear to him.

"Yes, I know—Sandy told me. You and Aunt Annie did not want her to marry father, because he was poor and only a soldier in a marching regiment. You were all unkind to her about it and made her very unhappy; but she did not care for money and a grand house—and—and she loved father. She is very happy with him—we were all happy together till I had to be sent home. Think of it only, Uncle Hugh, two whole years without seeing her. Didn't you love your mother too? And now to lose a single day or hour, after so long! Oh, do let me go, Maggie will take me if you can't."

Mr. Colquhoun stood a moment in silence looking out of the window. His heart went with the boy, for Jeff had grown dear to him, with his frank impulsive ways and deep strong affections.

"Well, well, perhaps something may be done. You had better go and have a little talk about it

to your aunt before you go to Mr. M'Gregor's."

Jeff looked very blank and despairing as he turned round and went slowly up the stairs again. Aunt Annie was one of those superior people who never change their mind. She took a vast amount of pride in her own prompt judgment, and not for worlds would have admitted herself in the wrong. Jeff was sure that the most urgent pleading would not prevail to alter her decision.

No sympathetic throb for the child and mother once more to be united would alter her resolution.

"No, Jeff, I have told your uncle that I have fully made up my mind that the reconciliation to take place between your mother and her family shall be under this roof. It is impossible for a child of your age to understand this matter, and I beg that you will cease to argue. Your mother and I parted in great bitterness, but that is past and forgiven."

Jeff made a little gesture of anger.

"*My* lips will be closed with regard to bygones, and when Mary is once here I shall never recur to painful matters."

This was all very grand and magnanimous in words, but the effect it had upon Aunt Annie's auditor was anything but soothing.

"But surely mother, when she comes by herself and is ill, would think it kinder of you to meet her at once," he said in hot indignation.

But no words availed, and Mrs. Colquhoun kept to her determination. She probably did not observe the set and dogged look upon the boy's face as he turned to leave the room. He was of the same blood as herself, and something of her own resolute nature formed part of his character.

But Aunt Annie turned back complacently to the translation of her German novel, without giving another thought to the deep strong child-nature with which she came daily in contact. The persistence of her small adversary had, indeed, ruffled her serenity for a few minutes, but her emphatic denial of his request must certainly have convinced him of her strength of purpose. What was the bitter disappointment to the little aching heart in comparison with the maintenance of her own dignity and authority!

But Jeff went brooding down the avenue with his books slung over his back, and on his face there was a set look of despair, which boded no good to Mr. Colquhoun's authority.

The week passed quietly, and without any further pleading on Jeff's part; only, he was unusually quiet and thoughtful.

On the morning before the expected arrival of the steamer from India, Jeff was missing from Loch Lossie. Brian came in hot haste to his father, eager to inform him of the unwarranted disappearance. Brian was fond of establishing his own virtue by declaring the faults of others.

"Mr. M'Gregor must not be kept waiting, Brian. You go down to him at once. Never mind your cousin." This was not what Brian had anticipated, and he departed in great disgust.

"I do believe he's gone up on the moor," said this youngster vindictively as a parting shot, sincerely hoping that Jeff might be called to account for some serious delinquency. He had never forgiven him for having been found out himself in a serious fault last year. The recollection of Jeff's endurance under a false accusation was a continual mortification to his small soul. He knew that his father had never forgotten that episode, and from time to time regarded him with suspicion of a new deception.

All that day till nightfall, though keepers and scouts were sent about in all directions, no word came of the missing lad. Inquiry was made in the nearest township and at Lossie Bridge station in vain. No little traveller had been seen to arrive or depart. Late at night a porter from the next station down the line came up to the house and informed Mr. Colquhoun that a little boy answering to the description of Jeff had taken that morning's mail to London from Drumrig.

It was too late for Mr. Colquhoun to set off in pursuit of the culprit that night, but all preparations were made for his departure the next morning.

Meanwhile Jeff had arrived in the great city, to which he was a stranger, towards evening. A little waif and stray in London, with only five shillings in his pocket! But no fears assailed him. He was encouraged by the great hope of the meeting on the morrow. His heart began beating at the very thought of the loving arms into which he would nestle.

Naturally he was puzzled to know what to do with himself. It was more than probable that the great hotel at the railway station would swallow up his five shillings and leave him without the means of getting to the steamer. He addressed himself to a friendly-looking porter who was staring at him with a certain amount of curiosity, seeing he had no luggage:

"What does it cost to get a bed in there for the night?" he said.

The porter grinned satirically.

"More nor such as you can pay. Yer wouldn't get much change out of a sovereign, I'll be sworn."

He walked down the platform, and Jeff saw that he was making merry with one of his friends over his inquiry. In terror lest some detaining hand might even yet be stretched forth, he hurried out of the station and was soon lost in the small streets about King's Cross.

He at length found a humble-looking lodging, attracted thereto by a card in the window, to the effect that "Lodgings for single men" were to be had.

The woman who opened the door to him looked doubtfully at this youthful customer, but the production of a couple of shillings and an offer from Jeff to pay in advance settled all difficulty.

"I am going down to the docks to-morrow to meet my mother, who is coming from India," he said, giving a frank explanation of his plans. "I shall have to leave quite early and I will pay you to-night."

The woman smiled at the dignified attitude of her would-be lodger, and bade him come in and she would find him a bed to suit.

She saw very well that this was no roughly-nurtured child, and possibly guessed partly at the truth.

There were two or three labouring men taking supper in a back kitchen, and a strong smell of onions and frying fat pervaded the atmosphere.

Jeff felt it would not do to appear squeamish in such company, and drew near to the fire, making a pretence of warming his hands.

"Here's a new lodger, Timothy; you make room for him," said the woman with a broad grin.

"Runned away from school, young marster, I'll be bound," said one rough giant, catching hold of Jeff by the arm. The boy turned his brown eyes steadily on his captor.

"No, I have never been at any school," he said with composure. "But they would not let me meet my mother, who is coming home from India, so I took all the money out of my savings-box and came by the train without telling anyone."

The navvy released him.

"From Ingy! That's a long way to come. And they wouldn't let you meet her! It was a darned shame. You're a well plucked one for your size. Can ye stand treat, young maister? We'll drink to the health of the lady from Ingy."

Jeff took his few coins out of his pocket with a dubious frown.

"There's my bed to pay for here, and some supper, and I've got to get to the docks to-morrow by ten o'clock. This is all I've got; perhaps I can spare you a shilling."

They were honest labourers, though rough, and took his shilling, and no more, and went off to the public-house.

Jeff asked for an egg and some tea and bread and butter, and then said he would go to bed.

"I'll put you along of my boy 'Arry. He sleeps wonderful quiet, and some of them is roughish customers to lie alongside of when they comes in from the 'Lion,'" said the woman as she lighted a candle.

Jeff sighed when he was ushered into the dingy attic where he was to pass the night, thinking of his own little white bed at Loch Lossie and all the dainty arrangements of bath and dressing paraphernalia.

The next morning he was astir at day-break, and without casting a glance at his sleeping companion he went softly down the stairs and laid his payment on the kitchen table. He had some difficulty in unbarring the door, but succeeded after many endeavours.

Though it was an April morning the air was very raw and bleak at this early hour, and the boy shivered repeatedly.

At a coffee-stall in an adjoining street he bought a thick slice of bread and butter and a steaming cup of what was called tea, sweet and strong, if not particularly fragrant. Fortified by such nourishment against the biting air, he inquired of the first policeman he met the nearest way to the station, and reached it soon after seven o'clock. There was an hour and a half to wait before his train started, but he sat down on a sheltered bench and remained an unnoticed little figure till the train drew up. At about the same hour Mr. Colquhoun was crossing the border in a southern express in pursuit of the runaway.

CHAPTER VII.

It was the same steamer that Jeff had come home in two years ago. Much the same sort of scene was going on on the deck as on a former occasion.

The burly form of Captain Clark might be descried from afar pacing up and down. It seemed all like a dream to the boy, vividly recalling his own arrival. He rubbed his eyes hard, scarcely feeling sure of his own identity.

The great steamer had been in dock over half an hour, and those passengers who had not disembarked at Gravesend were busy with their luggage.

"Captain Clark, don't you remember me? It is Jeff Scott."

The boy had taken off his cap in a salute to his old friend. The beauty of his yellow curls was fully revealed. All the sickly paleness resulting from tropical heats had disappeared from Jeff's face, and he stood now on the deck a fair specimen of a healthy English lad.

Captain Clark instantly recognized the steady brown eyes. They recalled another pair of eyes, infinitely sadder, but oh, how like! The golden-haired lady down-stairs had been put under his especial charge, with many injunctions to see to her welfare. But the voyage had not brought back the expected health to her cheek or light to her eyes. It was with a heart full of pity that this good man turned to the boy.

"Eh, my boy, and is it really you? I am glad to see you. Have you come to take a passage back with me?"

But Jeff was not in the mood for any joking this morning.

"I have come to see mother," he said with infinite gravity. "I know she is one of your passengers. Let me go to her at once. Who will tell me which is her cabin?"

The good old sailor's weather-beaten face changed a little.

"You will perhaps take her by surprise, my lad. She is ill—very weak—she cannot stand any shock. Which of her friends or relatives has come to meet her?"

"I have come—only," said Jeff, "I ran away to do it. She would expect me, of course."

Captain Clark looked at the boy, whose fair face flashed at some painful recollection.

"Well done, Jeff." The old captain's voice was husky. "Come with me at once. We will find your mother's maid or the stewardess, but you must promise to be very gentle and not to agitate her."

Jeff smiled with superior wisdom. How could his presence agitate his beloved mother?

At one of the state-room doors off the saloon Captain Clark knocked gently.

An elderly woman answered the summons at once, and held up her finger with a warning "Hush! she is asleep, poor lady! do not wake her."

Then Jeff came a little forward, trembling with eagerness, his eyes full of yearning.

"This is her boy, Mrs. Parsons, who has come alone from Scotland to meet her."

Jeff's steadfast eyes met the woman's, but he did not understand the look of pity in them. Why should anyone be sorry for him, now that the sad years of separation had come to an end?

"Come in then, laddie, very softly. She's been talking day and night of her bairn; but you must, mind, let her have her sleep out. She lay awake the long night through."

Then Jeff was cautiously admitted.

Child as he was, he staggered a little at the aspect of the white still form extended on a berth. He drew his breath quickly for a few seconds as his eyes rested on the dear familiar face—familiar, and yet how altered!

The fine oval face had indeed fallen away sadly, and the soft golden hair waved away from a brow like marble. Deep dark lines beneath the closed eyes hollowed the cheeks and seemed to speak of pain and sleepless nights. Slow tears welled up to Jeff's eyes and fell silently one by one.

He turned to the woman and spoke in a whisper:

"She has been very ill? She never told me."

"Very ill," said the elderly matron curtly. It was difficult to restrain her own tears.

Then Jeff sat down quietly and remained half-hidden by the curtain that sheltered the sleeper. Presently the noise of trampling overhead seemed to rouse the invalid. She stirred and sighed without opening her eyes.

"Mrs. Parsons, will you ask if any letters or telegrams have come for me. I shall never get ashore without my friends. *Surely* someone will come." Again a long-drawn sigh.

Jeff's little brown hand stole round the curtain and very softly clasped the thin white fingers.

"Mother, *I* am here—your own little lad. Mother, oh, mother! Mother dear—"

The soft brown eyes opened with a startled look. Then suddenly the intensity of yearning mother-love met Jeff's gaze. In a moment he was on his knees beside her with his arms about her neck.

"Never, never to leave you any more, mother—to feel your hands—to kiss your cheek every night—to nurse you—to make you well—to cover you with love. Oh, how *could* I ever bear it all! There is none like you—none—none."

The sweet pale face flushed in an ecstasy of gratitude and passionate feeling beneath the endearing epithets and the loving touches.

"My lad—my little lad," she kept repeating to herself in a low murmur, "he has come to meet me, to make me well."

In the few moments that succeeded, Jeff poured forth the tale of his adventurous flight from Loch Lossie. He made haste to soften the neglect of his mother's relatives.

"They did not know you were very ill, mother. They only thought you were a little bit ill before you left India. Aunt Annie said your maid would bring you down to Scotland quite well; but oh, I had the ache in my heart. It was a real pain, and I felt I could not wait, and I knew you would not be angry."

"Angry, my darling!" the mother said with a wondering smile, touching his hair with her weak fingers. "How pretty your hair has grown, Jeff, and you are so tall and look so well! Your father would be pleased to see you so big and strong. He will come home soon now. We are not so poor as we were. His uncle has left us some money, you know; that is why I was able to come to England."

It flashed across Jeff's mind that Mrs. Colquhoun must have been aware of his parents' improved circumstances when she invited her sister to Loch Lossie. He put away the thought from him.

"And your grandmama, tell me all about her, Jeff, and your little cousins. I have longed to hear from your own lips about everyone."

There was a lovely pink flush on the mother's face now, and her beautiful eyes were as bright as stars. Mrs. Parsons came forward, and, looking at her anxiously, said gently:

"Indeed, ma'am, but I think you had better talk no more just now. I will fetch your beef-tea, and just let the laddie sit quietly beside you, where you can see him."

Mrs. Scott smiled gently, clasping Jeff's brown fingers more closely.

"He will not leave me, Mrs. Parsons—promise—even if I go to sleep."

And so Jeff sat through the morning hours hardly speaking or stirring.

At about twelve o'clock Captain Clark came to the door and was bidden to enter. He had come to say that he had made every arrangement to get Mrs. Scott comfortably conveyed to London, and that Mrs. Parsons must get her mistress ready early in the afternoon.

"And here is a telegram, Mrs. Scott, just come for you," he said, holding out the brown envelope. Languid fingers went out to receive the missive. Was not all her world beside her?

From Mr. Colquhoun, York Station, to Mrs. Scott, S.S. Jellalabad, Albert Docks.

"Will be at St. Pancras Hotel this evening. Send reply there. Say where you are staying. Is Geoffry with you?"

The answer was soon written, and the kind captain took it away to despatch. Preparations for

Mrs. Scott's removal were carried on as quickly as possible, and Jeff made himself useful by running backwards and forwards with messages.

In the evening the sick lady and the boy, under Captain Clark's care, reached the apartments in Brook Street that had been secured for them. About seven o'clock Uncle Hugh made his appearance. He forbore to speak one word of anger or reproach to Jeff; even greeting him with a certain degree of kindness. The poor boy was alone in the sitting-room turning over the pages of an old *Graphic*. His eyes bore traces of recent tears.

"And how is your mother getting on, Jeff? I hope we shall be able to take her back to Scotland to-morrow."

"To-morrow, Uncle Hugh? oh, no! She is very ill—much worse than we thought. Perhaps she will be ill a long time. The doctor is here now. The railway tried her so much. She has fainted thrice since we got here."

All Jeff's stoical fortitude broke down when he began to speak—the tears could not be kept back, and he sobbed bitterly.

"Uncle Hugh, what shall I do? She does not look like the mother she used to be! She cannot walk across the room or even sit up."

Mr. Colquhoun had not realized anything seriously the matter with his sister-in-law, and this was the first intimation he had received of her critical condition.

By and by, when he had seen the doctor, he was made to recognize the gravity of the case. There was very little hope of the gentle mother's recovery. All the anticipations of convalescence in Scotland, and a reconciliation at Loch Lossie, were at an end. He remembered his wife's last injunction, "Be sure you bring Mary down here at once, and don't have any excuses."

Alas! poor Mary would never travel any more to her old home. Her days of rest were at hand.

Uncle Hugh was very gentle and considerate towards Jeff that night and during the ensuing days that dragged so slowly. The boy could hardly be persuaded to leave the house for half an hour, and always hurried back with feverish impatience after the shortest absence. He came in mostly laden with primroses and violets—her favourite flowers; often going into two or three shops to get them, never sufficiently satisfied with their freshness.

One night Jeff had gone to bed earlier than usual, for he mostly lingered about the passages or wandered restlessly from room to room till it was late. This evening he had been greatly comforted by some fancied improvement in the poor invalid's appearance.

"Mother darling, you are better—say you are better to-night, and that you will soon be well enough to go back to Loch Lossie," he said as he hung over her at saying "good-night."

She smiled fondly upon him.

"You wish me to get better so very much, Jeff, I almost feel as if I must."

"You must, you must," he repeated vehemently.

It hardly seemed any time since he had gone to bed when Jeff was roused by Uncle Hugh touching him on the shoulder.

"Get up, my boy, quickly, your mother wishes you to come to her."

Mr. Colquhoun's face was very grave, and his habitually cold voice had a thrill of sympathy in its tones. The boy was up in a moment. Nothing was surprising now. When he had put on his clothes he went down-stairs to his mother's room. The door was ajar and he pushed it open. There was a solemn hush here, though there were plenty of lights about, and a kettle steaming on the hearth. Jeff noticed at once an overpowering smell of drugs. There was a strange man in the room. The boy with a cold chill at his heart recognized him as a doctor. How still the figure on the bed was! How marble-white the face propped up by many pillows! The mother heard the gentle footfall of her beloved child, and the soft brown eyes unclosed at his approach—unclosed with the ever-loving glance. A fleeting smile passed over her face.

"My little lad," said a voice, oh, so faintly, but with such infinite tenderness, "you have been quick in coming. I have sent for you to say another good-night. Jeff, darling, try and understand—I am going—where it is always morning—I am going to leave you—after such a little stay—"

The boy had thrown himself beside her on the big bed. He had never seen the approach of death. He could not understand it.

"Mother, why should you go? why should they take you away from me again? Oh, no, no! Please, sir, do not be so cruel; I'm so lonely without her."

He turned with anguished eyes to the grave gentleman who had placed a hand on the dear mother's pulse.

Again she spoke:

"My boy, you must understand, God has called me—I am dying. In the morning I shall not see your dear eyes; I shall never touch your head again. Oh, dear, dear head—oh, soft curls!" She paused a minute and a little sob broke from her.

"Jeff, Uncle Hugh has been telling me about you the past few days. It has been a great happiness—a great comfort to know that you are so brave and truthful. There are faults, my darling, still; but I think, my own, that you will be a hero some day." She smiled upon him with indescribable content. "I have no fears for you. You will bear what is given you to bear patiently. You will not grieve your father—you will remember that—" Her voice failed.

"Oh, mother, stay with me. I can never be great or good without you—things are so hard. Only stay with me a little while. No one has ever loved me as you love me."

A glow of light passed over the sweet face.

"Darling, no one *will* ever love you like I have loved you. Jeff, you have been a great happiness to me. By and by, when you come to me, I shall know, perhaps, that you have remembered all that I have said to you. Oh, doctor, the pain—again."

She gasped for breath, and Mrs. Parsons lifted her up and put some cordial to her lips. When she spoke again she wandered a little:

"I was so happy in India—we were all so happy together. Dear husband—our little son—is growing up all that we could wish him—by and by—he will comfort you. I shall know—perhaps that you speak of me—sometimes."

"Mother, you *shall* know," burst from Jeff. He spoke in a hoarse way. Only by a supreme effort could he choke back his sobs. Now he had raised himself and was gazing into the beloved eyes, which seemed to see some far-off vision.

"And, mother, I promise, when you are gone—I will be—all you wish. I will never, never forget—all my life through—and when—I see you again—I shall see you again, you know—you will know how much I have gone on loving you—and remembering. Oh, mother, can't I go with you?—must I wait here alone? You will never kiss me, never touch me—and when—I am a real hero—your voice will not praise me. Take me with you, mother, mother!" Then Jeff fell back unconscious, and was carried out of the room by Uncle Hugh, who was sobbing like a child. The angel of death did not tarry. In the morning Jeff knew that his sweet mother had said her last "good-night."

Years have gone by, and Jeff Scott is a man now. He is reckoned a real hero in these days, one whose name has been a household word. He is a soldier like all the men of his race—a right gallant soldier who wears a V.C. upon his broad breast. He has seen much service, and done brave deeds by flood and field, under the roar of cannon, and in instant fear of death.

His fiery impetuous spirit is in a measure subdued, but still his rash acts of bravery have been reproved with a smile by his superior officers.

In one campaign he had swam a river under hot fire of the enemy, carrying despatches between his teeth—he had rallied his regiment by picking up the colours dropped by two wounded comrades, though his own right arm was shattered by a shot—he had defended the sick and wounded in a quickly thrown up fort with desperate bravery against a host of attacking enemies.

He seemed to hold his life only to spend it for others. No privations were hard to him. He bore with a smiling face heat or cold, and encouraged with a cheerful word dispirited soldiers.

"Sir," said a gallant general, "you have won a Victoria Cross three times over. I honour you for your heroic bravery. Your mother may be proud to hear of such a son."

Ah! what a tender chord was touched by those words. In the darkness of the African night Jeff went out with a heavy heart from his tent, and, looking up at the silent stars, wondered if *she* knew, if *she* approved.

And when he went home, and was sent for to Osborne to receive his decorations from the Queen's hand, the honour heaped upon him seemed more than he could bear. When the greatest lady in the land spoke a few kind words of praise the tears started to his brave brown eyes. Perchance the aspect of such a stripling moved her womanly heart to a special throb of sympathy, he looked so young to have achieved such deeds of valour.

But the applause of the world in general will never sound attractively in Jeff's ears; society will never claim him as one of her pet lions.

At Loch Lossie they speak of him with respectful admiration, and Aunt Annie no longer holds out any opinions against such a distinguished young man. She loses no opportunity of proclaiming her kinship to young Captain Scott. But Jeff only spends a short time occasionally in

Scotland; most of his leave is generally passed with his father.

The deep strong affection between father and son seems to become a closer bond as the years rolls on. They speak sometimes of the dead mother, and even now Jeff's voice hushes and his steady eyes are misty at the mention of her name or the recalling of her words. He loves her with a love that time has no power to weaken; he has kept all her sayings faithfully in his heart; her letters to him are his most cherished possessions.

The passionate intensity of his nature has deepened and strengthened with his manhood. He never forgets. Oh, brave, true heart! oh, loyal breast! oh, faithful hero! guarding well the noble standard of courage and truth that was given you to guard in boyhood's days.

"Her little lad" that she loved so well is indeed "one full of courage and great patience, and dauntless before difficulties; one who allows no fear to assail him, who fulfils his duty and *something over it* under hard and difficult circumstances."

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