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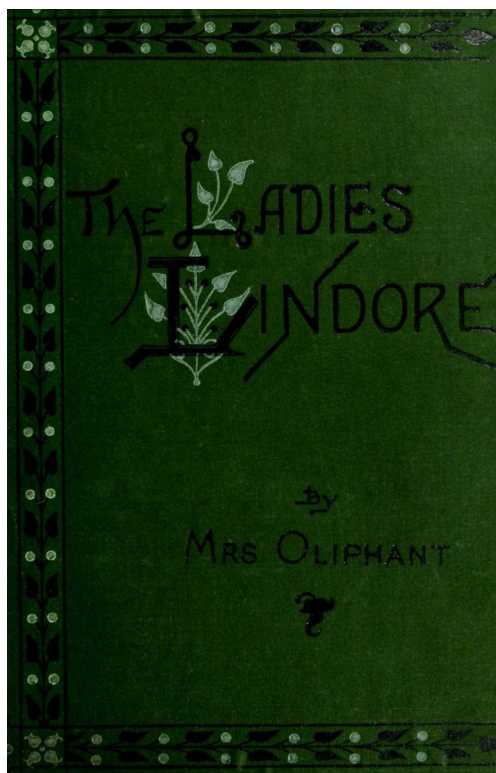

THE LADIES LINDORES

BY MRS OLIPHANT

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. III.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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"Two of the sweet'st companions in the world."

—*Cymbeline*.

THE LADIES LINDORES.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Left to themselves, Millefleurs and Beaufort stood opposite to each other for a moment with some embarrassment. To have anything to do with a quarrel is always painful for the third person; and it was so entirely unexpected, out of the way of all his habits, that Beaufort felt himself exceptionally incapable of dealing with it. "Millefleurs," he said with hesitation, "I don't understand all this. That was a very strange tone to take in speaking to—a friend."

He felt for the first time like a tutor discharging an uncomfortable office, knowing that it must be done, yet that he was not the man to do it, and that of all the youthful individuals in the world, the last person to be so lectured was Millefleurs.

"Naturally you think so. The circumstances make all the difference, don't you know," said Millefleurs, with his ordinary composure. "And the situation. In 'Frisco it might not have been of any great consequence. Helping a bully out of the world is not much of a crime there. But then it's never hushed up. No one makes a secret of it: that is the thing that sets one's blood up, don't you know. Not for Torrance's sake—who, so far as I can make out, was a cad—or poor Lady Car's, to whom it's something like a deliverance——"

"Torrance!" cried Beaufort, with a gasp. "Lady—Car! Do you mean to say——"

"Then——" said Millefleurs, "he never told you? That is a curious piece of evidence. They do things straightforward in Denver City—not like that. He never spoke of an event which had made the country ring——"

"Torrance!" repeated Beaufort, bewildered. The world seemed all to reel about him. He gazed at his companion with eyes wide opened but scarcely capable of vision. By-and-by he sat down abruptly on the nearest chair. He did not hear what Millefleurs was saying. Presently he turned to him, interrupting him unconsciously. "Torrance!" he repeated; "let there be no mistake. You mean the man—to whom Carry—Lady Caroline—was married?"

Millefleurs fixed upon him his little keen black eyes. He recalled to himself tones and looks which had struck him at the moment, on which he had not been able to put any interpretation. He nodded his head without saying anything. He was as keen after any piece of human history as a hound on a scent. And now he was too much interested, too eager for new information, to speak.

"And it happened," said Beaufort, "on Thursday—on the day I arrived?" He drew a long breath to relieve his breast, then waved his hand. "Yes; if that is all, Erskine told me of it," he said.

"You have something to do with them also, old fellow," said Millefleurs, patting him on the shoulder. "I knew there was something. Come along and walk with me. I must see it out; but perhaps we had better not meet again just now—Erskine and I, don't you know. Perhaps I was rude. Come along; it is your duty to get me out of harm's way. Was there anything remarkable, by the way, in the fact that this happened just when you arrived?"

Beaufort made no reply; he scarcely heard, so violently were his pulses beating in his ears, so high was the tide of new life rising in his veins. Who can think of the perplexities, even the dangers, of another, when something unparalleled, something that stirs up his very being, has happened to himself? But he allowed himself to be led out into the open air, which was a relief—to the road leading to Lindores, from which they soon came in sight of Tinto dominating the country round from its platform. Millefleurs stopped at the point where this first came in view, to point out how high it rose above the river, and how the path ascended through the overhanging woods. The Scaur itself was visible like a red streak on the face of the height. "You can see for yourself that horse or man who plunged over that would have little hope," Millefleurs said. But Beaufort did not hear him. He stood and gazed, with a sense of freedom and possibility which went to his head like wine. Even the ordinary bonds of nature did not seem to hold him. His mind seemed to expand and float away over the wide country. Of all people in the world he was the last who could cross that distance actually, who could present himself to the lady there—the widow—the woman who had married Torrance. He could not offer his services or his sympathy to Carry; he alone of all the world was absolutely shut out from her, more than a stranger: and yet he stood gazing at the place where she was, feeling himself go out upon the air, upon the empty space, towards her. The sensation dizzied his brain and bewildered all his faculties. Millefleurs flowed on, making a hundred remarks and guesses, but Beaufort did not hear him. He would have said afterwards, that as he never spoke, it was impossible he could have betrayed himself. But he betrayed himself completely, and something more than himself, to the keen little eyes of Millefleurs.

The day passed as days full of agitation pass—looking long, protracted, endless—blank hours of

suspense following the moment of excitement. Sir James Montgomery had gone away shaking his good grey head. He had not believed John Erskine's story—that is, he believed that there was something suppressed. He had listened with the profoundest interest up to a certain point, but after that he had shaken his head. "You would have done better to tell me everything," he said, as he went away. "It would have been more wise—more wise." He shook his head; the very truth of the story went against it. There was so much that fitted into the hypothesis of the country-side. But then there came that *suppressio veri* which took all the value from the statement. Sir James went away fully determined to repeat the story in the most favourable way—to give the best representation of it possible; but he was not satisfied. It was with a most serious face that he mounted his horse and rode away, shaking his head from time to time. "No, no," he said to himself, "that will never hold water—that will never hold water!" When this interview was over, John went back to his library and sat down in his usual chair with a sense of exhaustion and hopelessness which it would be difficult to describe. He had told his story as best he could, searching his memory for every detail; but he had not been believed. He had gone on, growing impassioned in his self-defence—growing indignant, feeling himself powerless in face of that blank wall of incredulity, that steady incapacity to believe. "Why should I tell you a lie?" he cried, at last. "Do not you see? Have you not said that it was for my interest to tell you the truth?" "I am not saying you have told a lie," Sir James said, always shaking his head. "No, no—no lie. You will never be accused of that." When he went away, he had laid his heavy old hand on John's shoulder. "My poor lad, if you had only had the courage to open your heart all the way!" he said. John felt like a victim in the hands of the Inquisition. What did they want him to confess? Half maddened, he felt as if a little more pressure, a few more twists of the screw, would make him accuse himself of anything, and confess all that they might require.

He did not know how long he sat there, silent, doing nothing, not even thinking anything, alone with himself and the cloud that hung over his life, with a consciousness that all his movements were watched, that even this would be something against him, a proof of that remorse which belongs to guilt. And thus the slow moments, every one slower than the other, more full of oppression, rolled over him. Beaufort had disappeared, and did not return till late in the afternoon, when the twilight was falling. A few words only passed between them, and these related solely to Beaufort's thoughts, not to Erskine's.

"It is *her* husband who has been killed," Beaufort said; "you never told me."

"I could not tell you. It was too extraordinary; it was an impiety," John said.

But neither did he ask himself what he meant, nor did Beaufort ask him. They said nothing more to each other, except such civilities as are indispensable when men eat together,—for they dined all the same, notwithstanding the circumstances. In every crisis men must still dine; it is the only thing that is inevitable, in trouble or in joy.

And then the night followed. Night is horrible, yet it is consolatory to those who are in suspense. John could not suppose that his trials were over, that nothing was to follow; but by ten o'clock or so he said to himself, with relief, that nothing could happen to-night. Rolls, too, had evidently arrived at the same conclusion. He was heard to close and bolt the door ostentatiously while it was still early, and there was something in the very noise he made which proclaimed the satisfaction with which he did it. But after this there was a long black evening still, and hours of darkness, to follow, which John did not know how to get through. Almost he had made up his mind to step out of the window at midnight, as Rolls had suggested, and withdraw from all this alarm and unjust suspicion. He did go out, and felt the cool freshness of the night caress him, hot and weary as he was, and thought with a sigh of distant places far away, where he might be safe from all these frets and passions. But he knew, if he did so, that his cause would be lost for ever—that nothing could save him or his reputation. Perhaps in no case could anything save him: but if he fled, his ruin was certain. "What did it matter," he thought, with bitterness, "that he had no witnesses to produce, that nobody would believe him? And if he were condemned, what would any one care? His mother, indeed, would feel the shame, but more the shame than anything else; and her name was not Erskine, nor that of any of her family. There was no one who actually belonged to him in the wide world, to whom his living or dying could be of any consequence." As he stood alone with these bitter thoughts, on the terrace, looking out upon the night, feeling the wind blow upon him from the fields of sleep, but no other trace in the darkness of the great wide landscape which he knew lay stretched out like a map under cover of the clouds, something breathed another name in his ear. Ah! how did he know if she would care? Sometimes he had thought so, hoped so, vaguely, with a tremor of alarmed delight. But if this shadow of crime came over him, would Edith stoop under it to say a word of consolation?—would she? could she? He stood still for a long time on the terrace, with the lighted window and common life behind him, and all the secrets of the hidden night before, and asked himself what she would do. What would she do? That question, and not the other, was, after all, the great one in life.

Next morning John awoke with the sense of a coming trial, which made his heart jump in his breast the moment he opened his eyes, though it was some time before he recollected what it was. But he did so at last, and accepted the certainty with outward calm. He came down-stairs with a steady conviction of what was about to happen. To make up his mind to it was something. He sat down at the breakfast-table opposite to Beaufort—who was restless and uncomfortable—with a calm which he felt to be fictitious, but which nevertheless was calm.

"You must remember," he said, "Beaufort, whatever happens, that Dalrulzian is altogether at your command."

"What can happen?" Beaufort asked.

"I scarcely know. I can be taken away, I suppose, and examined somewhere. You had better come with me. You are a barrister, and might help; and besides, it will always be for your advantage to get a little insight into Scotch law."

"I might be of use, perhaps; but in that case, you must tell me everything," Beaufort said.

"I ask no better," said the young man; and he repeated the narrative which he had told to Sir James Montgomery. "Don't you disbelieve me. What I say to you is the whole truth," he said,—"everything that there is to say."

"To disbelieve you would be impossible," said Beaufort, which was the first gleam of consolation he had. They had a long consultation, some of which was surprised by Rolls, who went and came, busy about the door, with sombre and undisguised anxiety.

Beaufort scouted the idea that there could be any question of murder. "Had you done as they suppose—seized the bridle in self-defence, and forced the horse a step too far—it would still only be accident," he said,—"at the very worst and bitterest, manslaughter; though I don't see how it could bear even such a verdict as that. There is no occasion for unnecessary alarm. Anything more is impossible."

At this moment Rolls came in; his countenance was lightened, yet excited. "There is one—that would like to speak to you, sir," he said.

There could be no doubt as to what the summons was. Rolls lingered behind when his master, with changing colour, but self-possession, left the room. He came up to Beaufort stealthily. "Sir," he said—"sir, will *yon* be all true?"

"What? Neither Mr Erskine nor myself is in the habit of saying what is not true."

"That's no doubt the case. I'm saying nothing of him; but you might have smoothed it off a bit, just to soothe him. Will it be all exact yon you said about manslaughter? Manslaughter is just culpable homicide, so far as I can see. And what's the punishment for manslaughter (as you call it), if you'll be so kind as say?"

"That depends on the gravity of the case, on the character of the judge, on many things. A year's, two years' imprisonment—perhaps only a month or two. I have known it but a day."

"And previous character would be taken into account?" said Rolls; "and aggravation, and—many a thing more?"

"No doubt; it is a thing upon which no certain rule can be observed. It may be next to no harm at all, or it may be close upon murder. In such a case as this, severity is very unlikely."

"But it will make a pairting," said Rolls, solemnly, "atween him and all he maist cares for. I'm no' of the young maister's mind myself. There are some would have set him far better, and in every way more suitable; but what a man likes himself, it's that will please him, and no' what another man likes. It takes us a' a lang time," said Rolls, shaking his head, "to learn that. Many's the one in my place would think here's just a grand opportunity to pairt him and—them; but you see I take his ain wishes into consideration."

The old servant spoke less to Beaufort than to himself; but the visitor was not accustomed to hold such colloquies with a family butler. He stared, then grew impatient, and disposed to resent the old fellow's familiarity. The next moment the bell rang, and Rolls hurried away. Beaufort followed him out into the hall, where a man was standing evidently on guard. John was at the door of the drawing-room, pale, but perfectly composed. "The dogcart immediately," he said to Rolls, and beckoned to Beaufort to come in. "I am going before the sheriff-substitute about this matter," he said. "Beaufort, you will come with me. Mr Granger, this is my friend Mr Beaufort, an English barrister. He may go with me, I suppose, to watch over my interests? You see that what we were threatened with yesterday has come to pass."

"I see, indeed," said Beaufort, "with sorrow and surprise. What is it that has to be done now?"

"The sheriff will make no objection," said the head of the county police, a plain, grave man, with regret in his face. "It's my duty to take Mr Erskine before the sheriff. The result of the examination will be, let us hope, that he'll come cannily home again, when all has been inquired into in due form. There is no reason to take a gloomy view. The sheriff will maybe find there's no case: and I'm sure I wish so with all my heart."

They all sat round with the utmost gravity to listen to this little speech. It was not a moment for light-heartedness. John sat between the table and the door, in perfect self-command, yet very pale. Notwithstanding all the respect shown to him, and the good feeling from which he had everything to hope, the most innocent of men may be excused a feeling of dismay when he is, to all intents and purposes, arrested on a criminal charge, with issues to his good fame and social estimation, even if nothing more, which it is impossible to calculate. They sat in silence while the dogcart was getting ready, a strange little company. After a while, the officer, to lessen the embarrassment of the moment, and make everything pleasant, began to address various little remarks about the weather and other commonplace topics to the two gentlemen, such as, "This is a very agreeable change from all the wet we've been having;" or, "The news this morning is more satisfactory about that Afghan business." The responses made, as may be supposed, were not

very effusive. It was a relief when the dogcart came to the door. Old Rolls stood and watched it go down the avenue, with his countenance firmly set, and a stern resolution gathering about his mouth. Bauby stole out and stood by his side in the morning light, with her apron to her eyes, and her capacious bosom convulsed with sobs. "Eh, that I should have lived to see this day, and shame come to oor dwallin'!" cried Bauby; "and as bonny a young lad as ever steppit, and as good!"

"Hold your peace, woman!" said her brother; "ye may see shame come nearer hame or a's done."

"Eh, Tammas, man! what do you ca' nearer hame? My heart's just broken; and what will his mammaw say?" the faithful creature cried.

Meanwhile it might have been a party of pleasure that threaded its way among the trees, somewhat closely packed in the dogcart, but no more than they might have been, starting for the moors. John Erskine drove himself to the examination which was to decide his fate one way or another, with all the appearance of a perfectly free agent. The horse was fresh, the morning bright; and though the four men were a heavy load, they skimmed along the country road as gaily as if all had been well. Tinto was visible for the greater part of the way. They passed by the very gates of Lindores. John had shaken himself together as he took the reins in his hand, and with perhaps a little unconscious bravado, paused now and then to indicate a favourite point of view to his friend. But he had harder work in store. Just before they reached Dunearn, he perceived drawn up by the roadside Lady Lindores's carriage, in which Edith was seated alone. Impossible to describe the feelings with which, as across a gulf of pain and trouble, the unfortunate young man, at this crisis of his fate, looked at the girl with whom, when he last saw her, he had been so near the edge of a mutual understanding. It was impossible for him now to do other than draw up by the side of the carriage to speak to her; and there, in the hearing of the two men who formed his escort, and whose presence was heavy on his heart, the following conversation took place. Edith looked up at him with a smile and an expression of pleasure which brightened her whole aspect. She was in mourning, and somewhat pale.

"I am waiting for mamma," she said. "One of her pensioners is ill in that cottage. I was glad of the chance of bringing her out for a little air. We are with poor Carry, you know."

"How is Lady Caroline?" John asked.

"Oh, well enough, when one considers all things," said Edith, hastily; and to escape that subject, which was not to be entered on before strangers, she said, "You are going to Dunearn?"

"On painful business," he said. "I wonder if I may ask you one thing?" She looked up at him with a smile which said much—a smile of trust and belief, which might have encouraged any man to speak. Edith had no fear of what he might ask her. For John it was more difficult to command himself and his voice at that moment than at any previous one since his trial began. He cleared his throat with an effort, and his voice was husky. "You will hear things said of me—that may make you turn from—an old friend altogether. I want you not to believe them. And tell Lady Lindores. Do not believe them. It is not true."

"Mr Erskine, what is it—what is it? You may be sure I shall believe nothing against you—nor mamma either! Is it—is it——" her eyes fixed upon him anxiously and upon the stranger beside him, whose face was unknown to her, and who sat blank and passive like a servant, yet who was not a servant. Edith rose in the carriage in her great anxiety, and gazed as if she would have read a volume in John's face. What it cost him to look at her and to keep a kind of smile on his, it would be hard to tell.

"I cannot enter into explanations now. I may not be able to do so soon. Only—tell Lady Lindores."

She held out her hand to him, which he stooped to touch—it was all he could do—and once more gave him an anxious, tender smile. "You may trust both mamma and me," she said.

And in another moment, so it seemed, the dogcart stopped again. John went over the streets of Dunearn like a man in a dream—in a sort of exquisite anguish, a mingled sweetness and bitterness such as never went into words. Their looks seemed to cling together, as, with a start, the horse went on; and now they stopped again and got down—for a very different encounter. Even now, however, John's progress was to be interrupted. Some one called to him as he was about to go into the sheriff's court in the little Town-house of Dunearn. "Is that you, John Erskine? and what has brought you here?" in peremptory tones. He turned round quickly. It was Miss Barbara in her pony-carriage, which Nora was driving. The old lady leaned across the young one and beckoned to him with some impatience. "Come here. What are you doing in Dunearn without coming to me? It's true I'm out, and you would not have found me; but Janet would have understood to be prepared for your luncheon. And what's your business in the Town-house this fine morning, and with strange company?" Miss Barbara said. She cast a keen glance at the man, who stood aside respectfully enough, and yet, backed by his assistant, kept a watchful eye on John.

"I am afraid I cannot wait to tell you now. It is not pleasant business," John said.

"Come round here," said the old lady, imperiously; "can I keep on skreighing to you before all the town? Come round here." Her keen eyes took in the whole scene: John's glance at his grave companion, the most imperceptible gesture with which that person made way for him. Miss Barbara's perceptions were keen. She gripped her nephew by the arm. "John Erskine, have ye

done anything to bring ye within the power of the law?"

"Nothing," he said firmly, meeting her eye.

"Then what does that man mean glowering at you? Lord guide us! what is it, boy? It cannot be money, for money has none of these penalties now."

"It is not money—nor anything worth a thought."

"Mr Erskine," said the officer, civilly, "the sheriff is waiting." And after that, there was no more to be said.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Rolls went up-stairs and dressed himself in his best—his "blacks," which he kept for going to funerals and other solemnities—not the dress in which he waited at table and did his ordinary business. The coat, with its broad, square tails, gave him an appearance something between that of a respectable farmer and a parish minister—a little too solemn for the one, too secular for the other; and to show that he was "his own man," and for to-day at least no man's servant, he enveloped his throat in a large black silk neckerchief, square in shape, and folded like a substantial bandage with a little bow in the front. His forehead was lined with thought. When he had finished his toilet, he opened the large wooden "kist" which stood in a corner of his room, and was the final receptacle of all his worldly goods. Out of that he took a blue-spotted handkerchief, in which a pocket-book was carefully wrapped up, and took from it a few somewhat dirty pound-notes. Then restoring the pocket-book, he locked the kist carefully, and went down-stairs with the key—a very large one—in his hand. This he gave to Bauby, who still hung about the door with her apron to her eyes. "You should go ben to your work, my woman," said Rolls, "and no make the worst of what's happened: in a' likelihood the master will be back afore the dinner's ready." "Do you think that, Tammas? do you really think that?" cried Bauby, brightening up and showing symptoms of an inclination to cry for joy as she had done for sorrow. "I'm no' saying what I think. I'm thinking mony things beyond the power o' a woman person to faddom," said Rolls, solemnly. "And if the maister should be back, it's real possible I mayna be back. You'll just behave conformably, and put forrit Marget. If she wasna so frightened, she's no' a bad notion at a' of waiting at table. And if there's ony question where I am, or what's become of me——"

"Oh, Tammas, what will I say? It will be the second time in a week. He'll no' like it," cried Bauby, diverted from one trouble to another. The absence of her brother when the dinner was ready was almost as extraordinary as her master's conveyance away to unknown dangers by the functionaries of the law.

"If he's here to be angry, a' will be well," said Rolls, grimly; and then he handed her the key. "If there should be any question about me, when I'm no', here to answer for myself, you'll inform whoever it concerns that the kist is yours and everything in it, in proof of which you'll produce the key. That's no' to say but what you'll respect the bits of things in it, and hand me back possession when I come, soon or late," said Rolls. "You'll mind what I say to you, Bauby. It's yours in the one case, but no' in the other. You'll take possession if there is ony other claimant; but me being back, you'll respect my rights."

"I wuss I would ken what you meant first," said Bauby, gazing at him wistfully. Rolls had an air of satisfaction on his face for the first time: he was pleased to have puzzled her. His face relaxed almost into a smile as he said, "According to a' probabilities, you'll soon understand that."

With these words he set out from the hall-door, walking very deliberately, and crushing the pebbles under his feet at every step. He had taken his best silk umbrella, which, loosened from its habitual folds, and used as a stick, made a sort of flapping accompaniment to his progress, like a large bird walking by him. As he turned from the door the solemnity of his aspect returned. He walked slowly, thinking as he went—thinking so profoundly that he scarcely saw Peggy at the lodge, and passed her, taking no notice of her in the gravity of his preoccupation. She said afterwards that it was awfu' evident he had something on his mind. She told Jean Tamson, who was in the lodge at the moment—come for a crack, and talking of nothing else but this very subject,—"I wouldna wonder," she said, "but Mr Rolls kens more about it than any of us." This at least was what she informed the world she had said to her gossip when all was known.

It was four miles to Dunearn; but old Rolls was a steady, good walker, with no irregularity about him. Every step he took was just of the same length as the step before. Yard for yard he did his four miles in the regulated time, neither shorter nor longer. When he arrived at the Town-house, there was a little flutter about the door as of people dispersing; but there had not been any number of people, and though the rumour of what had transpired had begun to blow about the place, there were not as yet many gazers. By-and-by, as he stood outside, his master came out, with one of the emissaries of the morning close by him, and Beaufort behind. John Erskine was pale; but there was a sort of smile on his face—a smile which had no pleasure in it, but some contempt, and that sort of outward looking to heaven and earth, with the head held high, and the nostrils somewhat dilated, which is so often the aspect of a man unjustly accused. He was making light of it to himself—persuading himself that it was nothing and meant nothing. He saw Rolls standing by, and waved his hand to him. "What! have you walked all this way," he said, "old

Truepenny,"—with something of the same levity of despair which dictated the same words to Hamlet,—"to see the last of me?"

"It's not come to that, sir, I hope," said Rolls, with a seriousness which was as solemn as if what John had said was real. The young man laughed.

"You will pack my portmanteau and send it after me: I suppose I may be allowed that?" he said. The officer who was in attendance bowed his head. The people about gathered round, staring at John with too much surprise to express any other emotion; and by-and-by the party drove off again, nobody apparently divining exactly what it all meant. There were a number of petty cases to be tried by the sheriff, who was in the Town-house, as it was called, and as many different interests as there were loungers about. Rolls went in with hesitating steps after his master had disappeared. The old man had come, in full expectation of the event which had happened; but fact is always different from anticipation. When he saw what he had only looked for, the effect upon him was something overwhelming. He stood staring and gaping in the little crowd which gradually drew together, realising only after it was over what had taken place before their eyes. "What's wrang with the young maister, Mr Rolls?" said one of the bystanders. "Let me be!" cried the old man, shaking himself free; and he went into the Town-house with tottering steps. He had intended taking certain bold and immediate steps, carrying out the project he had been framing in his mind; but his nerves were shaken when the moment came. The law terrified him. If his master, in all the strength and confidence of his youth, was thus peremptorily dealt with, what aggravations might not he, an old and humble individual—nothing but a servant—look for? He was cowed. He stole up to an attendant and made faltering inquiries. "What will they have settled about yon case?" he said. "About what case?—the sheep-lifting, or the unlawfu' wounding, or the robbery at Willyam Tamson's——" "Nane o' thae things—nane o' thae things," said old Rolls. "It's about young Mr Erskine of Dalrulzian." "Oh, ay, ay," said the attendant, shaking his head; "that's very serious. The circumstances a' point to some agent mair than accident—that's what the sherra says, and he canna see his way to discharging the panel." "The panel![1]—he's nae panel!—mind what you're saying," cried Rolls. "Well, maybe that's going owre fast. I would say the gentleman under suspicion. He maun just bide the result of a mair formal examination—that's a' I can tell ye; I have nae time to enter into particulars," the official said.

[1] *Scotticè*, accused.

Rolls, who had meant such heroic things, turned away tremulously. He went out again, scarcely knowing where he was going, into the streets of Dunearn. There everybody looked at him with curious eyes. The town had at last become conscious of what had happened: from a public-house in the environs a stone had been thrown at John Erskine as he went past, and hootings had risen on his path. This roused the population fully, and now the streets were full of groups discussing the matter. Torrance, as has been said, was popular in his way, especially now in that warmth of pity and charity which follows a sudden and unexpected death; and John Erskine was comparatively unknown. The tide was strongly against him, as a semi-foreigner—a man who had come from "abroad." "He'll find here that gentle and simple must keep the laws alike," said one. "A man daurna ride roughshod over his fellows here."

Old Rolls heard the growl of popular excitement, and it alarmed him still more. "If it was me they would tear me in bits," he said to himself. His alarm on this point, as much as his original intention, drove him in at Mr Monypenny's door, which was in his way. He was afraid of being recognised as the butler at Dalrulzian ("for everybody kens me," he said to himself, with mingled pride and panic), and he was anxious to consult the "man of business" who had Dalrulzian estate in his hands.

Mr Monypenny was out; and Rolls requested permission to sit down and wait. He had a long time of quiet to think over his plan again, and he did think it over, and recovered his courage. After a time Mrs Monypenny, hearing who it was, sent to request him to have some cold beef in the kitchen, an offer of which Rolls availed himself at once. "For what is the use of punishing yourself?" he said. "A man's more qualified for everything when he has eaten his dinner." He was very serious, and unlike his usual cheerfully communicative mood, in Mr Monypenny's kitchen. The maids did not know what had come over him. To have such a grand subject of discourse as his master's arrest, and yet to be so silent, struck them with astonishment; but they, too, remarked his perturbed countenance afterwards, and said to one another, "I told you there was mair in him than met the eye."

Meanwhile Miss Barbara and her young companion had been driving up and down in the pony-carriage in a state of great excitement. They had passed the Town-house half-a-dozen times, always looking for the reappearance of John; but he, as was to be expected, had come out and gone away in the interval between. Miss Barbara had maintained during the whole time a lively monologue, scarcely interrupted by her young companion. "I've heard what they daured to say," Miss Barbara cried; "as if one of my family would stoop to soil his fingers with any Tinto of them all! What were the Torrances but bonnet-lairds till old Torrance married the railway man's daughter? But I never thought they would have dared to do anything against an Erskine. Times are changed. (Go round by the Stone Bridge, Nora; it's an easier road for the pony.) What would my father have said if he had heard a descendant of his evened with one of that race? That's what your Radicalism comes to."

"But death is the same, whether it comes to a saint or—a bully; and life has to be protected," said Nora, fired with political ardour.

"Life—and death. They're grand words to use: a drunk man falling over a steep bank that it was the wonder of the whole country-side he had not gone over years and years before."

Nora did not say any more. She was not so warm a partisan as Miss Barbara's companion ought to have been. She drove along quietly, taking no further part in the talk, which the old lady maintained alone. "How can I go in to my peaceful house and eat my comfortable dinner, not knowing but my own flesh and blood may be shut up in a jail?" she said. Then she added quickly, "There's that lad, young Rintoul. I'm not fond of any of his family; but I suppose he's a gentleman. He'll go in and ask what has happened. Fast—to your right hand, Nora. Now draw up. He sees what I mean. Lord Rintoul," added Miss Barbara, "I have a favour to ask of you. You may have heard my nephew John Erskine's name bandied about these late days. He's been in the Town-house before the sheriff and the procurator-fiscal this hour and a half or more. It's not for me to ask the town-bodies about what has happened. Will you go and bring me word?"

Rintoul stood silent for a moment before he made any reply. Her voice seemed to have called him from painful reflections of his own, the chain of which he could not in a moment break. He gave her a half-bewildered look, then turned to Nora, who looked at him more gently, with sympathetic eyes. How haggard he looked, and worn!—he who had been so ruddy and manly, only too much flesh and blood, almost too little inclination to be moved by emotion or sentiment,—was all this because of the sudden death of his brother-in-law, a man for whom he cared nothing? Nora was extraordinarily impressed by Rintoul's changed appearance. Miss Barbara, preoccupied by her own anxieties, scarcely noticed him at all.

"In the Town-house with the sheriff? What does that mean?"

"I forgot you were English," said Miss Barbara with a touch of contempt. "It means some examination of witnesses anent the death of Pat Torrance, your brother-in-law. What my nephew should have to do with it, I cannot tell you. It's just that I would have you inquire."

"He can have nothing to do with it," said Rintoul; and then he stopped short, and the momentary animation died out of his face. He shivered as he stood in the sunshine, which was as warm as September ever is in Scotland. "It must be a mistake; we have heard nothing of this," he said. "I am sure Carry—would be averse to any fuss. It was such a thing for her that there was no coroner's inquest. I made sure we were all safe. You must be mistaken," he said.

"Lord Rintoul," said Nora, who was given to opposition, "though there is no coroner's inquest, there must be justice; and if they think Mr Erskine has anything to do with it——"

"He has nothing to do with it," said Rintoul, with petulant impatience. Miss Barbara stretched her hand over Nora to grasp his, but this gesture seemed to drive him back into himself. He withdrew a little from the side of the pony-carriage, and made a pretence of not seeing the old lady's outstretched hand. Miss Barbara was shocked, and gave him a curious look; but she was not prepared for disrespect, and did not expect it. She went on more eagerly than before—

"And here I am helpless," she said. "I cannot go in myself. I will not send Nora. Will you do my errand, Lord Rintoul? Bring me word, not here, but to my house. I am going home."

He gave a little bow of assent, and stood on the pavement looking after them as they drove away. He stood longer than was necessary for that, till they had disappeared round the corner of the High Street, till the children about—of whom there was always a large supply in Dunearn—began to gape at him with expectations of amusement. "Look at the man glowering frae him," these spectators cried, and a small pebble tumbled along the flags where he stood—a harmless experiment to see if there was any fun in him. He did not notice this, nor any other outside occurrence, but after a while got slowly under way again, as if the operation was difficult, and went on to the Town-house. When he got there, he went in reluctantly, with evident disinclination. The attendant who had talked to Rolls made way for him respectfully. The other people about opened the doors and took off their hats to the young potentate. A small case which was going on at the time was even suspended while the sheriff, not nearly so great a man, answered his lordship's questions in his own person. "Yes, there has been an examination," the sheriff said. "The circumstances are very suspicious. I have thought it best to order that young Erskine should be detained till there can be a more complete investigation. That, it is to be hoped, will clear the matter up; but if not——"

Lord Rintoul's fair and ruddy countenance was dark with anxiety and pain. "You cannot mean," he said, "that you believe Erskine——"

"I believe nothing but what there is evidence for," the sheriff said. "We are not men of theories, Lord Rintoul. Experience shows every day that men do the most unlikely things. I hear he's shown an *animus*,—and there are two or three points very strange. I saw it my duty to give orders that he should be detained——"

"You have sent him to prison, do you mean?" There was a sharp tone as of personal anguish in Rintoul's voice. "But you'll admit him to bail? My father, I, Millefleurs, any gentleman in the country——"

"Will be his bail? I doubt if it's a bailable offence: but if Lord Lindores were willing to do that, no doubt it would have a good effect. However, nothing can be done before the investigation," said the sheriff; "a day or two will do the young man no harm."

This was all he could elicit. The sheriff was a man who had a great idea of his office, and it was

not often that he had a case so interesting and important. The attendants thought Lord Rintoul had been drinking, as he stumbled out. He went along the quiet street with an uncertain step, now and then taking off his hat that the air might refresh him. He, too, stopped at Mr Monypenny's door, as Rolls had done a very short time before. It was afternoon now, and the shadows were lengthening as he reached Miss Barbara's house. What a sunny glimpse there was from door to door, across the little hall to the garden, where the brightness of the autumn flowers made a flush of colour! Rintoul saw a figure against the light which was not Miss Barbara's. There was in him a forlorn desire for consolation. "Don't tell Miss Barbara I am here just yet," he said hastily to the maid, and opened the glass-door, beyond which Nora stood among all the geraniums and mignonette. There was no agitation about her. She was not sufficiently interested in John Erskine to be deeply troubled by the idea of annoyance to him as his old aunt was, or alarmed by a passing shadow upon his name. She was serene and calm in this quiet world of flowers and greenness where no trouble was. She welcomed him with a smile. "Miss Barbara is very anxious," she said. "She has gone up-stairs to rest, but I am to let her know when you come."

"Wait a little," he said, glad of the interval; "*you* are not anxious."

"Not so much. Of course I am interested in my friends' friends—but I don't know very much of Mr Erskine," said Nora, unable to divest herself altogether of the imaginative offence that lay between John and her. "And it cannot do him much harm, can it? It will only be disagreeable—till the facts are known. Young men," she said, with a smile, "have a right to have something unpleasant happen to them now and then; they have so much the best of it in other ways."

"Do you think so," he said, with a seriousness which put her levity to shame. "To be sent to prison—to have a stigma put upon you—perhaps to be tried for your life!—that is rather worse than mere unpleasantness."

Nora was greatly impressed, not only by the gravity of what he said, but the air with which he said it. "It surely cannot be so bad as that: and he—is innocent, Lord Rintoul?"

"I have no doubt of it," cried Rintoul, eagerly,—"no doubt of it! If there is any one to blame, it is some one—whom most likely nobody suspects. What would you think of the man who had done it, and yet said nothing, but let John Erskine suffer for his fault?"

"I do not believe," said Nora, like Desdemona, "that there could be any such man. It is impossible. You think too badly of human nature. How can you suppose another would do what you know you would not do yourself? Oh no, no, never! Lord Rintoul——" She paused after this little outburst, and drawing a step nearer to him, asked in a low and horror-stricken tone—"Do you really think that poor Mr Torrance was—murdered?"

"No, no!" he cried almost violently—"no, no!" He stopped short, with a dryness in his throat, as if he could not speak; then resumed, in a quieter tone—"But I think in all likelihood there was, as people imagine, a quarrel, a scuffle—and that somebody—took hold of the mare's bridle——"

"Some tramp, no doubt," said Nora, sympathetically, much affected by his emotion, "who perhaps doesn't even know——"

"That is it," said Rintoul, eagerly—"who perhaps never dreamt at the moment. And even if he knows now, such a man might think, as you did, that it would come to nothing with Erskine. I believe it will come to nothing—a day, or two days, in prison."

"But if it should turn out more serious," said Nora, "even a tramp—would give himself up, surely—would never let an innocent man suffer?"

"We must hope so, at least," said Lord Rintoul. His countenance had never relaxed all this time. It was almost solemn, set, and rigid—the muscles about his mouth unmoving. "There should not be any question about right and wrong, I know," he said, "but such a man might say to himself—he might think—Young Erskine is a gentleman, and I'm only a common fellow—they will treat him better than they would treat me. He might say to himself——"

"I cannot believe it," cried Nora. "In such a case there could be no question of what any one would do. It is like A B C. What! let another man suffer for something you have done! Oh no, no—even in the nursery one knows better than that!"

"I don't think," said Rintoul, "that you ever can understand all the excuses a man will make for himself till you've been in the same position. Things look so different when you've done it—from what they do when some one else has done it. There are so many things to be taken into consideration. Punishment is not the same to all; it might ruin one, and not do much harm to another. A man might feel justified, or at least there would be excuses for him, if he let another bear the punishment which would not hurt *him* much, but would be destructive to himself. Of course it would be his business to make it up somehow."

"Lord Rintoul, this is dreadful doctrine!" said Nora; "if it were carried out, then you might do any wickedness you wished, and hire somebody to be punished instead of you." She laughed half nervously, shaking off the graver turn the conversation had taken. "But this is absurd," she said; "of course you don't mean that. I think I know what you mean;—but I must not delay longer, I must tell Miss Barbara."

"Don't disturb her now," said Rintoul, eagerly. "Besides, I really have not time. If you would say that it is unfortunately true—that Erskine is—detained till there can be a full investigation. I am

hurrying off to get bail for him, for of course they must accept bail—and it will only be for a few days. The investigation—at which we shall all be examined," he said, with a nervous tremor, —"will clear up everything, I hope."

"I hope so, with all my heart," said Nora, waving her hand to him as he hurried away. Rintoul had reached the garden door on his way out, when he suddenly paused, and came back to her, and took that hand, holding it for a moment between his own.

"All this is very hard upon me," he said, incoherently; "it gives me a great deal of misery. Feel for me—stand by me. Will you, Nora? I don't care for the rest, if you——"

And he wrung her hand almost violently, dropped it, and hurried away. The girl stood looking after him with wonder and dismay, and yet with a gush of a different kind of feeling, which filled her heart with a confusing warmth. "A great deal of misery!" Was it the tenderness of his heart for his sister, for the unfortunate man who had been summoned out of the world so abruptly—though he did not love him—and for his friend who was unjustly accused, which made Rintoul say this? But anyhow, Nora was not capable of resisting such an appeal. Poor Rintoul: though he did not show it to any one, how tender he was, how full of sympathy! John Erskine (against whom she could not help entertaining a little grudge) died out of her mind altogether. She was so much more sorry for the other, who felt it so deeply though it was not his concern.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Beaufort drove home on that eventful afternoon by himself. He had left his friend in the county jail, in a state in which surprise was still perhaps the predominant feeling. John had said little on the way, except to point out, with something which perhaps bore the character of bravado, the new features of the landscape beyond Dunearn. "It is an opportunity for you to see a little more of the country," he said, with a smile. Something of the same indignant amusement which had been his first apparent sensation on hearing the sheriff's decision was still in his manner now. He held his head high and a little thrown back, his nostrils were dilated, his eyes more widely open and alert than usual, and a smile in which there was a little scorn was upon his face. Those who did not know John or human nature might have thought him unusually triumphant, excited by some occurrence which enhanced instead of humiliating his pride. "I cannot tell you how surprised I am to see you here, Mr Erskine," said the governor of the jail with consternation. "You cannot be more surprised than I am," said John. He gave his orders about the things he wanted in the same tone, taking no notice of the anxious suggestion that it would only be for a few days. He was too deeply offended with fate to show it. He only smiled and said, "The first step is so extraordinary that I prefer not to anticipate the next." "But they must allow you bail," said Beaufort; "that must be my first care." John laughed. He would not condescend to be anxious. "Or hang me," he said; "the one just as sensible as the other." Beaufort drove away with the strangest feelings, guiding his friend's horse along the road with which he was so little acquainted, but from which presently he saw the great house of Tinto on one side, and on the other the towers of Lindores appearing from among the trees. How hard it was to keep his thoughts to John, with these exciting objects on either side of him! This country road, which all its length kept him in sight of the big castellated front of Tinto, with its flag half-mast high—the house in which she was who had been his love and promised bride—seemed to Beaufort to have become the very thread of his fate. That Carry should be there within his reach, that she should be free and mistress of herself, that there should be even a certain link of connection which brought him naturally once more within the circle of her immediate surroundings, was so wonderful that everything else seemed of less importance. He could not disengage his thoughts from this. He was not a man in whose mind generosity was the first or even a primary quality, and it is so difficult to think first of another when our own affairs are at an exciting stage. The only step which he could think of for John's advantage confused him still more, for it was the first direct step possible to put him once more in contact with Carry. He turned up the avenue of Lindores with a thrill of sensation which penetrated his whole being. He was relieved indeed to know that the ladies were not there—that he would not at least be exposed to their scrutiny, and to the self-betrayal that could scarcely fail to follow; but the very sight and name of the house was enough to move him almost beyond his errand. The last rays of the sunset had gone out, and the autumn evening began to darken by the time he got there. He went on like a man in a dream, feeling the very air about him tremulous with his fate, although he made an attempt to think of John first. How could he think of anything but of Carry, who was free? or recollect anything except that the mistress of this house had allowed him to call her mother; and that even its lord, before he was its lord, had not refused to permit the suggestion of a filial relationship? There was a carriage already standing before the door when he drove up, but his mind was by this time too much excited to be moved by any outside circumstance. But when he stepped into the hall upon his mission, and, following the servant to the presence of Lord Lindores, suddenly found himself face to face with the two ladies going out, Beaufort's agitation was extreme. They were returning to Tinto, after a day's expedition in search of those "things" which seem always necessary in every domestic crisis. Lady Lindores recognised him with a start and cry of amazement. "Mr Beaufort! you here!" she cried, unable to contain herself. She added, "at such a time!" in a lower tone, with the self-betrayal to which impulsive persons are always liable, and with so much indignation mingled with her astonishment, that a man in full possession of his faculties might have drawn from it the most favourable auguries. But Beaufort, to do him justice, was not cool enough for this. He said

hurriedly, "I came on Thursday—I knew nothing. I came—because it was impossible to help it." Edith had come close up behind her mother, and grasped her arm, half in support, half in reproof. "You knew Mr Beaufort was coming, mamma; why should you be surprised?" she said, with a certain disdain in the tone with which she named him. Edith was unreasonable, like all the rest. She would have had him throw away everything rather than come here to interfere with Carry's comfort, notwithstanding that her own father had invited him to come, and though it had been explained to her that all his prospects depended upon the favour of the Duke, Lord Millefleurs's gracious papa. Her idea was, that a man should have thrown away all that, rather than put himself in a false position, or expose a woman whom he had once loved to embarrassment and pain. They were all unreasonable together, but each in his or her characteristic way. After these first utterances of agitation, however, they all stopped short and looked at each other in the waning light, and awoke to a recollection of the ordinary conventionalities which in such circumstances are so great a relief to everybody concerned.

"We must not detain you, Mr Beaufort," Lady Lindores said; "you were going to my husband—or Lord Millefleurs—who is still here."

The last four words were said with a certain significance, as if intended for a hint,—persuade him, they seemed to say, that this is not a time to remain here. "It is getting late, mother," said Edith, with a touch of impatience.

"One moment, Lady Lindores. I must tell you why I have come: not for myself—to ask help for Erskine, whom I have just left in custody, charged with having occasioned somehow—I can't tell you how—the death of—the late accident—your son-in-law," Beaufort stammered out.

The next moment he seemed to be surrounded by them, by their cries of dismay, by their anxious questions. A sharp keen pang of offence was the first feeling in Beaufort's mind,—that John should be so much more interesting to them than he was! It gave him a shock even in the excitement of the moment.

"This was what he meant"—he could at last hear Edith distinctly after the momentary babel of mutual exclamations—"this was what he meant: that we might hear something, which he might not be able to explain, but that we were to believe in him—you and I, mamma."

"Of course we believe in him," cried Lady Lindores; "but something else must be done, something more. Come this way, Mr Beaufort; Lord Lindores is here."

She called him Mr Beaufort without any hesitation now—not pausing, as she had done before, with the more familiar name on her lips. It was John who was in the foreground now—John who, perhaps, for anything they knew, had caused the event which had put them in mourning. With a whimsical mortification and envy, Beaufort exaggerated in his own mind the distress caused by this event. For the moment he looked upon it as a matter of real loss and pain to this unthinking family who showed such interest in the person who perhaps——But the sentiment did not go so far as to be put into words; it resolved itself into a half-indignant wonder at the interest taken in John, and sense of injured superiority on his own account—he, of whom no man could say that he had been instrumental in causing the death even of a dog.

Lady Lindores led the way hastily into the library, where three figures were visible against the dim light in the window as the others came in. Lord Lindores, seated in his chair; little Millefleurs, leaning against the window, half turned towards the landscape; and in front of the light, with his back to it, Rintoul, who was speaking. "With you as bail," he was saying, "he may be set free to-night. Don't let him be a night in that place."

"Are you speaking of John Erskine, Robin, my dear boy? Oh, not a night, not an hour! Don't lose any time. It is too dreadful, too preposterous. Your father will go directly. Take the carriage, which is at the door. If we are a little late, what does it matter?" said Lady Lindores, coming forward, another shadow in the dim light. Millefleurs turned half round, but did not come away from the window on which he was leaning. He was somewhat surprised too, very curious, perhaps a trifle indignant, to see all this fuss made about Erskine. He drew up his plump little person, altogether indifferent to the pronounced manifestation of all its curves against the light, and looked beyond Lady Lindores to Edith,—Edith, who hurried after her mother, swift and silent, as if they were one being, moved by the same unnecessary excitement. Millefleurs had not been in a comfortable state of mind during these last days. The delay irritated him; though Lord Lindores assured him that all was well, he could not feel that all was well. Why should not Edith see him, and give him his answer? She was not so overwhelmed with grief for that brute. What did it mean? And now, though she could not see him on such urgent cause, she was able to interest herself in this eager way on behalf of John Erskine! Millefleurs was very tolerant, and when the circumstances demanded it, could be magnanimous, but he thought he had reason of offence here.

There was a momentary pause—enough to show that Lord Lindores did not share the feeling so warmly expressed. "I am surprised that you should all be so inconsiderate," he said; "you, at least, Rintoul, who generally show more understanding. I have understood that Erskine had laid himself under suspicion. Can you imagine that I, so near a connection of poor Torrance, am the right person to interfere on behalf perhaps of his—murd—that is to say, of the cause—of the instrument——"

"It is impossible," cried Edith, with such decision that her soft voice seemed hard—"impossible! Can any one suppose for a moment——"

"Be silent, Edith," cried her father.

"Why should she be silent?" said Lady Lindores. "Robert, think what you are saying. We have all known John Erskine for years. He is as incapable as I am—as unlikely as any one of us here. Because you are so near a connection, is not that the very reason why you should interfere? For God's sake, think of that poor boy in prison—in prison! and lose no time."

"I will do it, mother," said Rintoul.

"Oh, God bless you, my boy! I knew you were always right at heart."

"Rintoul," said his father, "enthusiasm of this sort is new in you. Let us take a little common-sense into the question. In the first place, nothing can be done to-night—that is evident. Then consider a moment: what does 'in prison' mean? In the governor's comfortable rooms, where he will be as well off as at home; and probably—for he is not without sense—will be taking the most reasonable view of the matter. He will know perfectly well that if he deserves it he will find friends; in short, that we are all his friends, and that everybody will be too glad to assist him—as soon as he has cleared himself——"

"As soon as he wants it no longer," cried Lady Lindores.

"My dear, you are always violent; you are always a partisan," said her husband, drawing back his chair a little, with the air of having ended the discussion; and there was a pause—one of those breathless pauses of helplessness, yet rebellion, which make sick the hearts of women. Lady Lindores clasped her hands together with a despairing movement. "This is the curse of our life," she cried. "I can do nothing; I cannot go against your father, Edith, and yet I am neither a fool nor a child. God help us women! we have to stand by, whatever wrong is done, and submit—submit. That is all that is left for us to do——"

"Submit!" Edith said. She was young and strong, and had not learned her lesson. It galled her beyond endurance. She stood and looked round her, seeing the whiteness of the faces, but little else in the evening gloom. Was it true that there was nothing—nothing in her power? In poetry, a girl can throw herself on her knees, can weep and plead—but only weep and plead; and she, who had not been trained to that, who was conscious of her individuality, her independent mind and judgment in every nerve—heaven above! was she as helpless still? She stood breathless for a moment, with wondering eyes fixed on the darkness, with a gasp of proud resistance to fate. Submit to injustice, to cruel heartlessness of those who could aid, to still more cruel helplessness—impotence, on her own part? She stood for a moment gazing at the blank wall that seemed to rise before her, as the poor, the helpless have to do,—as women have to do in all circumstances. It was her first experience in this kind. She had been proud to know that she was not as Carry, that no tyranny could crush her spirit: but this was different. She had not anticipated such a trial as this. There came from her bosom one sob of supreme pain which she could not keep in. Not for John only, whom she could not help in his moment of need, but for herself also—to feel herself impotent, helpless, powerless as a child.

Millefleurs came forward from the window hurriedly. Perhaps being so much a man of his time it was he who understood that gasp of suffering best. He said, "Lady Edith, if I can help——" quickly, on the impulse of the moment; then, thorough little gentleman as he was, checked himself. "Lady Lindores, though I am a stranger, yet my name is good enough. Tell me what to do and I will do it. Perhaps it is better that Lord Lindores should not commit himself. But I am free, don't you know," he said, with something of the easy little chirrup of more ordinary times. Why was it that, at such a moment, Edith, of all others, in her personal despair, should burst out into that strange little laugh? She grasped her mother's arm with both hands in her excitement. Here was a tragic irony and ridicule penetrating the misery of the crisis like a sharp arrow which pricked the girl to the very heart.

This sympathiser immediately changed the face of affairs. Lord Lindores, indeed, continued to hold himself apart, pushing back his chair once more; but even to Lord Lindores, Millefleurs made a difference. He said no more about enthusiasm or common-sense, but listened, not without an occasional word of direction. They clustered together like a band of shadows against the great window, which was full of the paleness of the night. Beaufort, who was the person most acquainted with all the circumstances, recovered his sense of personal importance as he told his story. But after all, it was not as the narrator of John Erskine's story that he cared to gain importance in the eyes of Carry's family, any more than it was as bail for John Erskine that Lord Millefleurs desired to make himself agreeable to the ladies at Lindores. Both of the strangers, thus caught in the net of difficulties and dangers which surrounded their old comrade, resented it more or less; but what could they do? Edith took no further part in the consultation. She retired behind her mother, whose arm she continued to hold firm and fast in both her hands. When she was moved by the talk going on at her side she grasped that arm tightly, which was her only sign of emotion, but for the rest retired into the darkness where no one could see, and into herself, a still more effectual retirement. Lady Lindores felt that her daughter's two hands clasping her were like a sort of anchor which Edith had thrown out in her shipwreck to grasp at some certainty. She bore the pressure with a half smile and sigh. She too had felt the shipwreck with keen passion, still more serious than that of Edith: but she had no one to anchor to. She felt this, half with a grateful sense of what she herself was still good for; but still more, perhaps, with that other personal sense which comes to most—that with all the relationships of life still round her, mother and wife, she, for all solace and support, was like most of us virtually alone.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Your master is just a young fool. Why, in the name of a' that's reasonable," cried Mr Monypenny, "did he not send for me?"

"Sir," said Rolls, "you're too sensible a man not to know that the last thing a lad is likely to do is what's reasonable, especially when he's in that flurry, and just furious at being blamed."

Mr Monypenny was walking up and down his business room with much haste and excitement. His house was built on the side of a slope, so that the room, which was level with the road on one side, was elevated on the upper floor at the other, and consequently had the advantage of a view bounded, as was general, by "that eternal Tinto," as he was in the habit of calling it. The good man, greatly disturbed by what he heard, walked to his window and stared out as Rolls spoke. And he shook his fist at the distant object of so many troubles. "Him and his big house and his ill ways—they've been the trouble of the country-side those fifteen years and more," cried the excited "man of business"; "and now we're not done with him, even when he's dead."

"Far from done with him," said Rolls, shaking his head. He was seated on the edge of a chair with his hat in his lap and a countenance of dismay. "If I might make so bold as to ask," he said, "what would ye say, sir, would be done if the worst came to the worst? I'm no' saying to Mr Erskine indiveedually," added Rolls—"for it's my belief he's had nothing ado with it—but granting that it's some person and no mere accident——"

"How can I tell—or any man?" said Mr Monypenny. "It depends entirely on the nature of the act. It's all supposition, so far as I can see. To pitch Pat Torrance over the Scaur, him and his big horse, with murderous intent, is more than John Erskine could have done, or any man I know. And there was no quarrel or motive. Culpable homicide——"

"That'll be what the English gentleman called manslaughter."

"Manslaughter is a wide word. It would all depend on the circumstances. A year; maybe six months only——If it were to turn out so—which I do not for a moment believe——" said Mr Monypenny, fixing his eyes upon Rolls with a determination which betrayed internal feebleness of belief.

"Nor me, sir—nor me!" cried Rolls, with the same look. They were like two conspirators regarding each other with the consciousness of the plot, which, even between themselves, each eyeing the other, they were determined to deny.

"But if by any evil chance it were to turn out so—I would advise a plain statement," said Mr Monypenny—"just a plain statement, concealing nothing. That should have been done at the moment: help should have been sought at the moment; there's the error. A misadventure like that might happen to any man. We might any of us be the means of such an accident: but panic is just the worst policy. Panic looks like guilt. If he's been so far left to himself as to take fright—to see that big man on his big horse thunderin' over the Scaur would be enough to make any man lose his head," the agent added, with a sort of apology in his tone.

"If you could think of the young master as in that poseetion," said Rolls.

"Which is just impossible," Mr Monypenny said, and then there was a little pause. "The wisest thing," he went on, "would be, just as I say, a plain statement. Such and such a thing happened. I lost my head. I thought there was nothing to be done. I was foolish enough to shrink from the name of it, or from the coolness it would make between me and my friends. Ay, very likely that might be the cause—the coolness it would make between him and the family at Lindores——"

"You're meaning always if there was onything in it at a'?"

"That is what I'm meaning. I will go and see him at once," Mr Monypenny said, "and that is the advice I will give. A plain story whatever it may be—just the facts; neither extenuate nor set down aught in malice. And as for you, Rolls, that seem to be mixed up in it yourself——"

"Ay, sir; I'm mixed up in it," said Rolls, turning upon him an inquiring yet half-defiant glance.

"It was you that found the body first. It was you that met your master at the gate. You're the most important witness, so far as I can see. Lord bless us, man!" said Mr Monypenny, forgetting precaution, "had you not the judgment, when you saw the lad had been in a tuilzie, to get him out of other folk's sight, and keep it to yourself?"

"There was John Tamson as well as me," said Rolls, very gravely; and then he added, "but ye canna see yet, Mr Monypenny, how it may a' turn."

"I see plenty," said the man of business, impatiently; and then he added, "the best thing you can do is to find out all you can about the ground, and other details. It was always unsafe; and there had been a great deal of rain. Very likely it was worse than ordinary that day. And call to mind any circumstances that might tell on our side. Ye had better come to me and make me acquainted with all your observations. Neglect nothing. The very way the beast was lying, if ye can rightly remember, might be a help. You're not without sense, Rolls. I've always had a high opinion of your sense. Now here's a chance for you to prove it——And come back to me, and we'll judge how

the evidence tends. There's no need," he said, standing at the window once more with his back to his pupil, "to bring out any points that might turn—the other way."

"I'm not just such a fool as—some folk think," said Rolls; "and yet," he added, in an undertone, "for a' that, you canna see, Mr Monypenny, how it may all turn——"

"Don't haver, Rolls," said the agent, turning upon him angrily; "or speak out what you mean. There is no man can say how a thing will turn but he that has perfect knowledge of all the circumstances—which is not my case."

"That's what I was saying, sir," said Rolls, with a tranquil assumption which roused Mr Monypenny's temper; but the old man was so solemn in his air of superior knowledge, so full of sorrowful decision and despondency, that anger seemed out of place. The other grew alarmed as he looked at him.

"For God's sake, man," he cried, "if there's anything behind that I don't know, tell it! let me hear the worst. We must know the worst, if it's to make the best of it. Hide nothing from me."

"I give ye my word, sir, I'll hide nothing—when the time comes," said Rolls, with a sigh; "but I canna just unburden my bozume at this moment. There's mair thought needful and mair planning. And there's one thing I would like to make sure of, Mr Monypenny. If I'm put to expenses, or otherwise laid open to risk and ootlay—there's no doubt but it would be made up to me? And if, as might happen, anything serious was to befall——without doubt the young maister would think himself bound to take good care o' Bauby? She's my sister, maybe you'll mind: an aixcellent housekeeper and a good woman, though maybe I should leave her praises to ither folk. You see he hasna been brought up in the midst o' his ain folk, so to speak, or I would have little doubt."

"I cannot conceive what you mean, Rolls. Of course I know Bauby and her cookery both; but what risk you should run, or what she can have to do with it! Your expenses of course," said the agent, with a contemptuous wave of his hand, "you may be sure enough of. But you must have done pretty well in the service of the Dalrulzian family, Rolls. I'm surprised that you should think of this at such a moment——"

"That's just what I expectit, sir," said Rolls; "but maybe I ken my ain affairs best, having no man of business. And about Bauby, she's just what I care for most. I wouldna have her vexed or distresst for siller, or put out of her ordinar. The maister he's but a young man, and no' attached to us as he would have been had he been brought up at hame. It's a great drawback to a young lad, Mr Monypenny"—Rolls broke off his personal argument to say sententiously—"not to be brought up at hame."

"Because he does not get the chance of becoming attached to his servants?" said Mr Monypenny, with an impatient laugh. "Perhaps it may be so, but this is a curious moment to moralise on the subject."

"No' so curious as you think, sir; but I will not weary you," said Rolls, with some dignity. "When I was saying ootlay, I meant mair than just a sixpence here or there. But Bauby's the grand question. I'm in a strange kind of a poseetion, and the one thing I'm clear in is my duty to her. She's been a rael guid sister to me; aye made me comfortable, studiet my ways, took an interest in all my bits o' fykes. I would ill like either scorn or trouble to come to Bauby. She's awfu' soft-hearted," said the old butler, solemnly gazing into vacancy with a reddening of his eyes. Something of that most moving of all sentiments, self-pity, was in his tone. He foresaw Bauby's apron at her eyes for him, and in her grief over her brother, his own heart was profoundly moved. "There will be some things that nobody can save her from: but for all that concerns this world, if I could be sure that nothing would happen to Bauby——"

"Well, Rolls, you're past my comprehension," said Mr Monypenny; "but so far as taking care of Bauby in case anything happens to you—though what should happen to you I have yet to learn."

"That is just so," said Rolls, getting up slowly. There was about him altogether a great solemnity, like a man at a funeral, Mr Monypenny said afterwards. "I cannot expect you to know, sir—that's atween me and my Maker. I'm no' going back to Dalrulzian. I cannot have my mind disturbed at this awfu' moment, as ye say, with weemen and their ways. If ye see the English gentleman, ye'll maybe explain. Marget has a very guid notion o' waitin'; she can do all that's necessary; and for me, I've ither work in hand."

"You must not look at everything in so gloomy a spirit, Rolls," said Mr Monypenny, holding out his hand. He was not in the habit of shaking hands with the butler, but there are occasions when rules are involuntarily broken through.

"No' a gloomy spirit, sir, but awfu' serious," said Rolls. "You'll tell the young maister no' to be down-hearted, but at the same time no' to be that prood. Help may come when it's little looked for. I'm no' a man of mony words, but I've been, as you say, sir, attached to the family all my days, and I have just a feeling for them more than common. The present gentleman's mother—her that married the English minister—was no' just what suited the house. Dalrulzian was nothing to her; and that's what I compleen o', that the young man was never brought up at hame, to have confidence in his ain folk. It would have been greatly for his advantage, sir," continued Rolls, "if he had but had the discernment to see that our bonnie Miss Nora was just the person;—but I mustna think now of making conditions," he said, hurriedly—"we'll leave that to his good

sense. Mony thanks to you, sir, for hearing me out, and shaking my hand as ye've done; though there's maybe things I have said that are a wee hard to understand."

"Ay, Rolls," said Mr Monypenny, laughing, "you're just like the other prophets; a great deal of what you've said is Greek and Hebrew to me."

"No doubt, no doubt," said Rolls, shaking his head; there was no smile in him, not a line in his countenance that marked even incipient humour. Whatever he meant it was deadly earnest to Rolls. Mr Monypenny stood and watched him go out, with a laugh gurgling low down in his throat. "He was always a conceited body," he said to himself. But his inclination to laughter subsided as his visitor disappeared. It was no moment for laughing. And when Rolls was gone, the temptation to speculate on his words, and put meaning into them, subsided also, and Mr Monypenny gave himself up with great seriousness to consider the position. He ordered his little country carriage—something of the phaeton order, but not elegant enough for classification—and drove away as quickly as his comfortable cob would consent to go, to where John was. Such a thing had not happened to any person of importance in the county since he could remember. Debt, indeed—debt was common enough, and plenty of trouble always, about money, Mr Monypenny said to himself, shaking his head, as he went along. There had been borrowings and hypothecations of all sorts enough to make a financier's hair stand on end; but crime never! Not that men were better here than in other quarters; but among the gentry that had never happened. The good man ran on, in a rambling inaudible soliloquy, or rather colloquy with himself, as he drove on, asking how it was, after all, that incidents of the kind were so rare among the gentry. Was the breed better? He shook his head, remembering himself of various details which interfered with so easy a solution. Or was it that things were more easily hushed up? or that superior education enforced a greater respect for the world's opinion, and made offences of this sort almost impossible? It was a strange thing (he thought) when you came to think of it. A fellow, now, like the late Tinto would have been in every kind of scrape had he been a poor man; but somehow, being a rich one, he had kept out of the hands of the law. Such a thing never happened from year's end to year's end. And to think now that it was not one of our ordinary Scots lairds, but the pink of education and good breeding, from England and abroad! This gave a momentary theoretical satisfaction to his musings by the way. But immediately after, he thought with self-reproach that it was young Erskine of whom he was permitting himself such criticism: young Dalrulzian, poor lad! all the more to be pitied that he had been brought up, as Rolls said, away from home, and with no father to look after him. The cob was used to take his own way along those roads which he knew so well, but at this point Mr Monypenny touched him with the indignity of a whip, and hurried along. He met Beaufort returning, driving, with a little hesitation at the corner of the road, John's dogcart homeward; and Mr Monypenny thought he recognised the dogcart, but he did not stop to say anything to the stranger, who naturally knew nothing of him. Nor was his interview with John at all satisfactory when he came to his journey's end. The young man received his man of business with that air of levity which, mixed with indignation, had been his prevailing mood since his arrest. He laughed when he said, "This is a curious place to receive you in," and for some time he would scarcely give any heed to the anxious questions and suggestions of Mr Monypenny. At length, however, this veil was thrown off, and John permitted the family friend, of whose faithfulness he could have no doubt, to see the depth of wounded feeling that lay below. "Of course it can be nothing to me," he said, still holding his head high. "They cannot prove a falsehood, however they may wish it; but to think that of all these men with whom I have eaten and drunk, who have professed to welcome me for my father's sake—to think that not one of them would step in to stand by a fellow, or give him the least support——"

"When you reflect that even I knew nothing about it," said Mr Monypenny—"not a word—till old Rolls came——"

"Did you hear none of the talk?" said John. "I did not hear it, indeed, but I have felt it in the air. I knew there was something. Everybody looked at me suspiciously; the very tone of their voice was changed—my own servants——"

"Your servants are very anxious about you, Mr Erskine, if I may judge from old Rolls. I have seldom seen a man so overcome; and if you will reflect that your other friends throughout the county can have heard nothing, any more than myself——"

"Then you did not hear the talk?" said John, somewhat eagerly. Mr Monypenny's countenance fell.

"I paid no attention to it. There's some story for ever going on in the country-side. Wise men just shut their ears," he said.

"Wise men are one thing and friends another," said John. "Had I no one who could have told me, at least, on how small a thread my reputation hung? I might have gone away," he said, with some vehemence, "at the height of it. If business, or even pleasure, had called me, no doubt I should, without a notion of any consequences. When I think of that I shiver. Supposing I had gone away?"

"In that case," said Mr Monypenny, clearing his throat; but he never got any further. This alarm affected him greatly. He began to believe that his client might be innocent altogether—an idea which, notwithstanding all the disclaimers which he and Rolls had exchanged, had not crossed his mind before; but when he heard John's story, his faith was shaken. He listened to it with the deepest interest, waiting for the moment when the confession would be made. But when it ended, without any end, so to speak, and John finally described Torrance as riding up towards the house,

while he himself went down, Mr Monypenny's countenance fell. He was disappointed. The tale was such as he expected, with this important difference—it wanted a conclusion. The listener gave a gasp of interest when the crisis arrived, but his interest flagged at once when it was over, and nothing had happened. "And then?" he said, breathlessly. And then?—but there was no *then*. John gazed at him wondering, not perceiving the failure of the story. "That is all," he said. Mr Monypenny grew almost angry as he sat gazing at him across the table.

"I have just been telling Rolls," he said, "that the best policy in such a case is just downright honest truth. To get into a panic and keep back anything is the greatest mistake. There is no need for any panic. You will be in the hands of those that take a great interest in you, Mr John—begging your pardon for using that name."

"You do not seem satisfied with what I have told you," John said.

"Oh, *me*! it's little consequence what I think; there's plenty to be thought upon before me. I would make no bones about it. In most things the real truth is the best, but most especially when you're under an accusation. I'm for no half measures, if you will let me say so."

"I will let you say whatever you please—so long as you understand what I am saying. I have told you everything. Do I look like a man in a panic?" said John.

"Panic has many meanings. I make no doubt you are a brave man, and ready to face fire and sword if there was any need. But this is different. If you please, we'll not fail to understand each other for want of plain speaking. Mr Erskine, I make no doubt that's all as true as gospel; but there's more to come. That's just a part of the story, not the whole."

"I don't mean to be offended by anything you say," said John, cheerfully. "I feel that it means kindness. There is nothing more to come. It is not a part, but the whole. It is the truth, and everything I know."

Mr Monypenny did not look up; he was drumming his foot softly against the table, and hanging his head with a despondent air as he listened. He did not stop the one nor raise the other, but went on working his under lip, which projected slightly. There is no such tacit evidence of dissatisfaction or unbelief. Some little sign invariably breaks the stillness of attention when the teller of a tale comes to its end, if his story has been believed. There is, if no words, some stir, however slight—movement of one kind or another, if only the change of an attitude. But Mr Monypenny did not pay this usual tribute when John's voice stopped. It was a stronger protest than if he had said, "I don't believe you," in ordinary words.

"I understand," said John, after a pause of a full minute, which seemed to him an hour. He laughed with something between despair and defiance. "Your mode of communication is very unmistakable, Mr Monypenny. It is Scotch, I suppose. One has always heard of Scotch caution and cannyness." If he had not been very bitter and sore at heart he would not have snatched at this aimless weapon of offence.

"Mr Erskine," said the agent, "a sneer is always easy. Gibes break no bones, but neither have they any healing in them. You may say what you like to me, but an argument like that will do you terrible little good with them that will have to judge at the end. I am giving no opinion myself. On my own account I will speak frankly. I would rather not have heard this story—unless I was to hear——"

"What?" cried John, in the heat of personal offence.

"More," said Mr Monypenny, regretfully—"more; just another dozen words would have been enough; but if there is no more to say——"

"I am not a man to make protestations of truth. There is no more to say, Mr Monypenny."

"Well-a-well," said the agent gloomily, shaking his head; "we must take just what is given—we must try to make the best of it. And you think there's nothing can be *proved* against you?" he said, with a slight emphasis. It required all John's self-command to keep his temper. He had to remind himself forcibly of the true and steady and long-tried kindness with which this doubter had stood by him, and cared for his interests all his life—a wise steward, a just guardian. These thoughts kept unseemly expressions from his lips, but he was not the less sore at heart. Even after the first blow of the criminal examination and his detention in prison, it had all seemed to him so simple. What could be necessary but to tell his story with sufficient distinctness (in which he thought he had failed before the sheriff)? Surely truth and falsehood were distinguishable at a glance, especially by those who are accustomed to discriminate between them. But the blank of unbelief and disappointment with which Mr Monypenny heard his story chilled him to the heart. If he did not believe him, who would? He was angry, but anger is but a temporary sentiment when the mind is fairly at bay and finds itself hemmed in by difficulties and danger. He began to realise his position, the place in which he was, the circumstances surrounding him, as he had not yet done. The sheriff himself had been very civil, and deeply concerned to be the means of inflicting such an affront upon a county family; and he had added encouragingly that, on his return to Dunearn, in less than a week, when all the witnesses were got together, there was little doubt that a different light might be thrown on the affair; but Mr Monypenny's question was not so consolatory. "You think there's nothing can be *proved* against you?" John had been gazing at his agent across the table while all these painful reflections went through his mind.

"I must be careful what I say. I am not speaking as a lawyer," he said, with an uncomfortable

smile. "What I meant was, that nothing could be proved which was untrue."

The agent shook his head. "When it's circumstantial evidence, you can never build upon that," he said. "No man saw it, you may say; but if all the facts point that way, it goes far with a jury. There are some other things you will perhaps tell me. Had you any quarrel ever with poor Tinto? Was there ill blood between you? Can any man give evidence, for example, 'I heard the panel say that he would have it out with Pat Torrance'? or——"

"For heaven's sake, what is the panel? and what connection is there between poor Torrance and——"

"Sir," said Mr Monypenny, sternly, "this is no time for jests; the panel is a Scotch law term, meaning the defender; or what you call the defendant in England. It's a terrible loss to a young man to be unacquainted even with the phraseology of his own country."

"That is very true," John said, with a laugh; "but at least it is no fault of mine. Well, suppose I am the panel, as you say—that does not make me a vulgar brawler, does it, likely to display hostile intentions in that way? You may be sure no man can say of me that I threatened to have it out with Pat Torrance——"

"It was inadvertent—it was inadvertent," said Mr Monypenny, waving his hand, with a slight flush of confusion; "I daresay you never said Pat—but what has that to do with it?—you know my meaning. Is there any one that can be produced to say——"

"I have quarrelled with Torrance almost as often as I have met him," said John, with obstinate decision. "I thought him a bully and a cad. If I did not tell him so, it was out of regard for his wife, and he was at liberty to find out my sentiments from my looks if it pleased him. I have never made the least pretence of liking the man."

Mr Monypenny went on shaking his head. "All this is bad," he said, "bad!—but it does not make a quarrel in the eye of the law," he added, more cheerfully; and he went on putting a variety of questions, of which John grew very weary. Some of these questions seemed to have very little bearing upon the subject; some irritated him as betraying beyond all a persistent doubt of his own story. Altogether, the first dreary afternoon in confinement was not made much more endurable by this visit. The room in which John had been placed was like the parlour of a somewhat shabby lodging-house—not worse than he had inhabited many a time while travelling. But the idea that he could not step outside, but was bound to this enclosure, was first ludicrous, and then intolerable. The window was rather higher than usual, and there were bars across it. When it became dark, a paraffin-lamp, such as is now universal in the country—smelling horribly, as is, alas! too universal also—was brought in, giving abundance of light, but making everything more squalid than before. And as Mr Monypenny made his notes, John's heart sank, and his impatience rose. He got up and began to pace about like a wild beast in a cage, as he said to himself. The sensation was more extraordinary than can be imagined. Not to be able, whatever might happen, to leave this shabby room. Whosoever might call to you, whatsoever might appeal to you, to be fixed there, all your impulses checked, impotent, unable for the first time in your life to do what you had done every day of your life, to move out and in, to and fro as you pleased! John felt that if he had been a theatrical felon in a play, manacled and fettered, it would have been easier, more comprehensible. But to know that these four walls were his absolute boundaries, and that he could not go beyond them, was more astounding than any other sensation that had ever happened to him in his life. And when Mr Monypenny, with his careful brow, weighted with doubts and fears, unable to clear his countenance from the disapprobation that clouded it, got up to take his leave, and stood holding his client's hands, overwhelmed with sympathy, vexation, dissatisfaction, and pity, the impatience and bitter sense of the intolerable in John's mind could scarcely be restrained. "Whatever there may be more to say, whatever may come to your mind, you have but to send me a word, and I'll be at your call night or day," Mr Monypenny said.

"It is very unlikely that I should have anything more to say," said John; "but must I stay here?" It seemed incredible to him that he should be left even by his own "man of business." He had seen Beaufort go away with a sort of contemptuous certainty of speedy liberation; but Mr Monypenny had said nothing about liberation. "Surely there is nothing to prevent bail being accepted?" he said, with an eagerness he could not disguise.

"I will see about it," Mr Monypenny said. But the good agent went away with a dissatisfied countenance; and with a feeling that he must break through the walls or the barred window, must make his escape somehow—could not, would not, endure this extraordinary intolerable new thing—John Erskine heard the key turn in his door, and was left shut up with the paraffin-lamp, flaming and smelling more than ever, a prisoner and alone. Whether it was more ludicrous or more terrible, this annoying impossible farce-tragedy, it was hard to say.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The day after John's incarceration was the funeral day at Tinto. The whole country was moved by this great ceremonial. The funeral was to be more magnificent than ever funeral had been before for hundreds of miles around; and the number of the procession which followed the remains was

greater than that of any assembly known in the country since the '45, when the whole district on one side or the other was "out." That everybody concerned should have found it impossible to think of John in the county jail, in face of the necessity of "showing respect" on this great occasion to the memory of Torrance, was natural. It was, indeed, out of the question to make any comparison between the two necessities. After all, what did it matter for one day? Those who were out of prison, and had never been in prison, and whose imagination was not affected like John's by that atmosphere of restraint, did not see any great harm that could happen. And the ceremony was one which could not be neglected. A Scotch funeral is somewhat terrible to those who have been accustomed to the pathetic and solemn ritual of the English Church; but there was something, too, impressive to the imagination, in that silent putting away of the old garment of humanity,—a stern submission, an acceptance of absolute doom, which, if it suggested little consolation, at least shed a wonderful awe on that conclusion no longer to be disturbed by mortal prayers or hopes. But Dr Stirling, the parish minister, was of the new school of the Scotch Church, and poor Torrance's body became, as it were, the flag of a religious party as it was laid in the grave. The great dining-room at Tinto, the largest room in the county, was crowded with a silent assembly gathered round the coffin while the first portion of the ceremony was carried out. It was such a scene as would have filled the heart of the dead man with exultation. Not one of the potentates of the county was absent; and behind them, in close ranks, with scarcely standing-room, came the smaller notabilities—bonnet lairds, village doctors, clergymen, schoolmasters, lost in the sea of the tenantry behind. At the upper end of the room, a very unusual group, stood the ladies. Lady Caroline in her widow's weeds, covered with crape from head to foot, her tall willowy figure drooping under the weight of those long clinging funeral robes, her face perfectly pale and more abstract and high-bred than ever, encircled by the whiteness of the cap—with her two little children standing by, and her mother and sister behind to support her—thrilled many an honest heart in the assembly. Women so seldom take part in funeral ceremonies in Scotland, that the farmers and country-folk were touched beyond measure by this apparition. It was described in scores of sympathetic houses for long after: "A snowdrift could not be whiter than the face of her; and the twa little bairns, puir things, glowering frae them, the image of poor Tinto himsel'." If there was any sceptic ready to suggest "that my leddy was never so happy a wife to be sic a mournin' widow," the spectators had a ready answer: "Eh, but she would be thinking to herself if I had maybe been a wee better to him——" Thus the popular verdict summed up the troubled story. Lady Caroline was pale enough for the *rôle* of the most impassioned mourner. She might have been chilled to stone by grief and pain for anything that was apparent. She did not speak or take notice of any one, as was natural. Even for her father she had not a word; and when her little boy was led away to follow his father to the grave, she sank into a chair, having, no doubt, the sympathetic bystanders thought, done all that her strength was capable of. This roused a very warm sympathetic feeling for Lady Car throughout all the country-side. If it had not been just perhaps a love-match, she had done her duty by Tinto, poor fellow! She had kept him in the right way as far as a woman could; and what was scarcely to be expected, but pleased the lookers-on most of all, she had presented an aspect of utter desolation at his funeral. All that a widow could feel was in her face,—or so at least the bystanders thought.

The solemn procession filed out of the room: little Tom Torrance clinging to his grandfather's hand, looking out with big projecting eyes like his father's upon all the wonderful scene, stumping along at the head of the black procession. Poor little Tommy! he had a feeling of his own importance more than anything else. His little brain was confused and buzzing. He had no real association in his mind between the black thing in front of him and papa; but he knew that he had a right to walk first, to hold fast hold of grandpapa's finger, and keep with his little fat legs in advance of everybody. It is difficult to say how soon this sense of importance makes up for other wants and troubles. Tommy was only four, but he felt it; and his grandfather, who was nearly fifteen times as old, felt it too. He felt that to have this child in his hands and the management of a great estate for so long a minority, was worth something in the list of his ambitions; and thus they all went forth, trooping into the long line of carriages that shone in the veiled autumnal sunlight, up and down the avenue among the trees in endless succession. Even to get them under way was no small matter; and at the lodge gates and down the road there was almost as great a crowd of women and poor people waiting to see them go by. John Tamson's wife, by whose very cottage the mournful line passed, was full of tragic consciousness. "Eh!" she said, with bated breath, "to think that yon day when our John brought ben young Dalrulzian a' torn and disjasket to hae the dirt brushed off o' him—that yon day was the beginning of a'——" "Hold your tongue, woman," said John Tamson; "what has the ane to do with the ither? Ye're pitting things thegither that hae nae natural sequence; but ye ken naething of logic." "No' me," said the woman; "and I wuss that poor young lad just kent as little. If he hadna been so book-learned he would have been mair friendly-like with them that were of his ain kind and degree." And as the black line went past, which after a while became tedious, she recounted to her gossips once more the story which by this time everybody knew, but all were willing to hear over again under the excitement of this practical commentary. "Losh! would he leave him lying there and never cry for help?" some of the spectators said. "It was never our master that did that," said Peggy Blair from the Dalrulzian lodge, who had declared boldly from the beginning that she "took nae interest" even in this grand funeral. "And if it wasna your maister, wha was it that came ben to me with the red moul on his claes and his coat a' torn?" said Janet Tamson. "I wasna here and I canna tell," Peggy said, hot and furious. "I would never say what might happen in a moment if a gentleman was angry—and Pat Torrance had an awfu' tongue, as the haill county kens—but leave a man groanin' at the fit o' a rock, that's what our maister never did, if I were to die for't," the woman cried. This made a little sensation among the beholders; but when it was remarked that Dalrulzian was the only gentleman of the county who was absent from the funeral, and half-a-

dozen voices together proclaimed the reason,—"He couldna be twa places at once; he's in the jyel for murder," Peggy was quenched altogether. Grief and shame were too much for her. She continued to sob, "No' our master!" till her voice ceased to be articulate in the midst of her tears.

Dr Stirling was seated in full canonicals—black silk gown and cambric bands—in one of the first carriages. It was he that his wife looked for when the procession passed the manse; and she put on her black bonnet, and covered herself with a veil, and went out very solemnly to the churchyard to see the burial. But it was not the burial she thought of, nor poor Tinto, nor even Lady Car, for whom all day she had been uttering notes of compassion: it was the innovation of the funeral service which occupied the mind of the minister's wife. With mingled pride and trembling she heard her husband in the silence begin his prayer by the side of the vault. It was a beautiful prayer—partly, no doubt, taken from the English liturgy, for which, she said, "the Doctor always had a high admiration;" but partly—"and that was far the best"—his own. It was the first time anything of the kind had been done in the county; and if ever there could be a funeral important enough for the introduction of a new ceremonial to mark it, it was this one: but what if the Presbytery were to take notice of the innovation? Perhaps the thrill of excitement in her enhanced the sense of the greatness of the step which the Doctor was taking, and his nobility in doing it. And in her eyes no ritual could have been more imposing. There were a great many of the attendants who thought it was "just Poppery," and a most dangerous beginning; but they were all hushed and reverential while the minister's voice went on.

When every one had left, and the house was perfectly silent after the hum and sound of so many feet, Lady Car herself went forward to the window and drew up the blind which covered it. The gloom disappeared, and the noonday sunshine streamed in in a moment. It was premature, and Lady Lindores was grieved that she had not been quick enough to forestall her daughter; for it would have been better, she thought, if her hand had been the first to let in the light, and not that of the new-made widow. Carry went further, and opened the window. She stepped out upon the heavy stone balcony outside, and received the light full upon her, raising her head to it, and basking in the sunshine. She opened her pale lips to draw in great draughts of the sweet autumn air, and threw up her arms to the sunshine and to the sky. Lady Lindores stepped out after her, laying her hand upon her arm, with some alarm. "Carry—my darling, wait a little——" Carry did not make any reply. She said, "How long is it, mother?" still looking up into the clear depths of the sky. "How long is what, my love?" They were a strange group. A spectator might have thought that the pale creature in the midst, so ethereal, so wan, wrapped in mourning so profound, had gone distraught with care; while her child at her feet sat on the carpet in front of the window, the emblem of childish indifference, playing with her new shoes, which glittered and pleased her; and the two attendant figures, the anxious mother and sister, kept watch behind. In Carry the mystery all centred; and even those two who were nearest to her were bewildered, and could not make her out. Was she an Ophelia, moved out of her sweet wits by an anguish beyond bearing? Was she a woman repentant, appealing to heaven for forgiveness? Carry was none of these things. She who had been so dutiful all her life, resisting nobody, fulfilling all requirements to the letter, bearing the burden of all her responsibilities without rebellion or murmur, had ceased in a moment to consider outside necessities, even the decorum of her sorrowful condition. She gave a long sigh, dismissing, as it were, a weight from her breast. "It is five years and a half," she said. "I ought to remember, I that have counted every day,—and now is it possible, is it possible?"

"What, my dearest? Carry, come in; you are excited——"

"Not yet, mother. How soft the air is! and the sunshine flooding everything. I have been shut up so long. I think the colours never were so lovely before."

"Yes, my darling; you have been shut up for a whole week. I don't wonder you are glad of the fresh air."

"A week!" Carry said. "Five years: I have got no good of the sunshine, and never tasted the sweetness of the air, for five years. Let me feel it now. Oh, how have I lived all this time! What a beautiful country it is! what a glorious sky! and I have been in prison, and have never seen them! Is it true? is it all over?—all, all?" She turned round and gazed into the room where the coffin had been with a gaze full of meaning which no one could mistake. *It* was gone—all was gone. "You must not be horrified, mother," she said. "Why should I be false now? I think if it had lasted any longer I must have died or run away."

"Dear Carry, you would have done neither; you would have done your duty to the end," her mother said, drawing Carry into her arms. "It is excitement that makes you speak so."

"Not excitement, but deliverance," said Lady Car with solemnity. "Yes, mother, you are right; I should have stood to the end; but do you think that would have been a credit to me? Oh, you don't know how hard falsehood is! Falsehood and slavery—they are the same thing; they make your heart like iron: you have no feeling even when you ought perhaps to have feeling. I am cruel now; I know you think I am cruel: but how can one help it? slaves are cruel. I can afford to have a heart now."

"Come to your room, Carry. It is too dismal for you here."

"No, I don't think it is dismal. It is a fine handsome room—better than a bedroom to sit in. It is not so much like a prison, and the view is lovely. There is poor Edith looking at me with her pitiful face. Do you think I ought to cry? Oh, I could cry well enough, if that were all—it would be quite easy; but there is so much to smile about," said poor Lady Car; then suddenly, leaning upon

her mother's shoulder, she burst into a flood of tears.

It was at this moment that the housekeeper came in, solemn in her new mourning, which was almost as "deep" as Carry's, with a housemaid in attendance, to draw up the blinds and see that the great room was restored to order. The gentlemen were to return for the reading of the will, and it was meet that all should be prepared and made ready. And nothing could so much have touched the hearts of the women as to see their mistress thus weeping, encircled in her mother's arms. "Poor thing! he was not over good a man to her; but there's nae rule for judging marriet folk. It's ill to hae and waur to want with them. There's naebody," said the housekeeper, "but must respect my lady for her feeling heart." Lady Caroline, however, would not take the credit of this when she had retired to a more private room. She would not allow her mother and sister to suppose that her tears were tears of sorrow, such as a widow ought to shed. "You were right, mother—it is the excitement," she avowed; "every nerve is tingling. I could cry and I could laugh. If it had not been for your good training, mamma, I should have had hysterics; but that would be impossible to your daughter. When shall I be able to go away? I know: I will not go sooner than is right. I will do nothing I ought not to do;—but you could say my nerves are shattered, and that I want rest."

"And very truly, Carry," said Lady Lindores; "but we must know first what the will is. To be sure, your fortune is secured. You will be well off—better than any of us; but there may be regulations about the children—there may be conditions."

"Could the children be taken from me?" Carry said, but not with any active feeling; her powers of emotion were all concentrated on one thought. Lady Lindores, who was watching her with all a mother's anxious criticism, fearing to see any failure of right sentiment in her child, listened with a sensation of alarm. She had never been contented with herself in this particular. Carry's children had been too much the children of Pat Torrance to awaken the grandmother's worship, which she thought befitting, in her own heart. She felt a certain repulsion when she looked at these black-browed, light-eyed creatures, who were their father's in every feature—not Carry's at all. Was it possible that Carry, too, felt the same? But by-and-by Carry took up that little stolid girl on whom Lady Lindores could not place her tenderest affections, do what she would, and pressed her pale cheek against that undisturbed and solid little countenance. The child's face looked bigger than her mother's, Lady Lindores thought—the one all mind and feeling, the other all clay. She went and gave little Edith a kiss in her compunction and penitence for this involuntary dislike; but fortunately Carry herself was unconscious of it, and caressed her babies as if they were the most delicate and beautiful in the world.

Carry was not present at the reading of the will. She shrank from it, and no one insisted. There were father and brother to look after her interests. Rintoul was greatly shaken by the events of the day. He was ghastly pale, and very much excited and agitated. Whatever his sister might do, Rintoul certainly exhibited the truest sentiment. Nobody had given him credit for half so much feeling. He carried back his little nephew asleep after the long drive home, and thrust him into Carry's arms. "I am not much of a fellow," he said, stooping over her, with a voice full of emotion, "but I'll do a father's part to him, if I'm good enough for it, Carry." Carry by this time was quite calm, and wondered at this exhibition of feeling, at which Lady Lindores shed tears, though in her heart she wondered too, rejoicing that her inward rebellion against Torrance's children was not shared by her son. "Robin's heart was always in the right place," she said, with a warmth of motherly approval, which was not diminished by the fact that Rintoul's emotion made her still more conscious of the absence of "right feeling" in herself. There was not much conversation between the ladies in the small morning room to which they had withdrawn—a room which had never been used and had no associations. Carry, indeed, was very willing to talk; but her mother and sister did their best, with a natural prejudice and almost horror of the manner in which she regarded her own circumstances, to keep her silent. Even Edith, who would have dissolved the marriage arbitrarily, did not like to hear her sister's cry of satisfaction over the freedom which death had brought her. There was something impious and cruel in getting free that way. If it had been by a divorce or separation, Edith would have been as glad as any; but she was a girl full of prejudices and superstitions, and this candour of Carry's was a thing she shrank from as an offence to human nature. She kept behind-backs, often with her little niece on her knee, but sometimes by herself, keeping very quiet, revolving many thoughts in her heart; while Lady Lindores kept close to Carry, like a sick-nurse, keeping watch over all her movements. It was dusk when the reading of the will was over, and the sound in the house of footsteps going and coming began to cease. Then Lord Lindores came in with much subdued dignity of demeanour, like an ambassador approaching a crowned head. He went up to Carry, who lay back in a great easy-chair beside the fire with her hands clasped, pursuing the thoughts which she was not permitted to express, and gave her a formal kiss on the forehead: not that he was cold or unsympathetic as a father, but he had been a little afraid of her since her marriage, and she had not welcomed the condolences he had addressed to her when he saw her first after Tinto's death.

"My dear," he said, "this is not a moment for congratulations: and yet there is something to a woman in having earned the entire confidence of her husband, which must be a subject of satisfaction——"

Carry scarcely moved in her stillness. She looked at him without understanding what he meant. "It would be better, perhaps," she said, "father, not to speak of the circumstances."

"I hope I am not likely to speak in a way that could wound your feelings, Carry. Poor Patrick—has done you noble justice in his will."

A hysterical desire to laugh seized poor Lady Car. Lord Lindores himself was a little confused by the name he had coined on the spot for his dead son-in-law. He had felt that to call him Torrance would be cold, as his wish was to express the highest approval; and Pat was too familiar. But his "Poor Patrick" was not successful. And Carry knew that, even in the midst of her family, she must not laugh that day, whatever might happen. She stopped herself convulsively, but cried, "Papa, for heaven's sake, don't talk to me any more!"

"Do you not see, Robert, that she is exhausted?" said Lady Lindores. "She thinks nothing of the will. She is worn out with—all she has had to go through. Let her alone till she has had time to recover a little."

His wife's interposition always irritated Lord Lindores. "I may surely be permitted to speak to Carry without an interpreter," he said, testily. "It is no doubt a very—painful moment for her. But if anything could make up——Torrance has behaved nobly, poor fellow! It must be gratifying to us all to see the confidence he had in her. You have the control of everything during your boy's minority, Carry. Everything is in your hands. Of course it was understood that you would have the support of your family. But you are hampered by no conditions: he has behaved in the most princely manner; nothing could be more gratifying," Lord Lindores said.

Carry sat motionless in her chair, and took no notice—her white hands clasped on her lap; her white face, passive and still, showed as little emotion as the black folds of her dress, which were like a tragic framework round her. Lady Lindores, with her hand upon the back of her daughter's chair, came anxiously between, and replied for her. She had to do her best to say the right thing in these strange circumstances—to be warmly gratified, yet subdued by the conventional gloom necessary to the occasion. "I am very glad," she said—"that is, it is very satisfactory. I do not see what else he could have done. Carry must have had the charge of her own children—who else had any right?—but, as you say, it is very gratifying to find that he had so much confidence——"

Lord Lindores turned angrily away. "Nerves and vapours are out of place here," he said. "Carry ought to understand—but, fortunately, so long as I know what I am about—the only one among you——"

At this Carry raised herself hastily in her chair. She said "Papa," quickly, with a half gasp of alarm. Then she added, without stopping, almost running her words into each other in her eagerness, "They are my children; no one else has anything to do with them; I must do everything—everything! for them myself; nobody must interfere."

"Who do you expect to interfere?" said her father, sternly. He found himself confronting his entire family as he turned upon Carry, who was so strangely roused and excited, sitting up erect in her seat, clasping her pale hands. Rintoul had gone round behind her chair, beside his mother; and Edith, rising up behind, stood there also, looking at him with a pale face and wide-open eyes. It was as if he had made an attack upon her—he who had come here to inform her of her freedom and her rights. This sudden siding together of all against one is bitter, even when the solitary person may know himself to be wrong. But Lord Lindores felt himself in the right at this moment. Supposing that perhaps he had made a mistake in this marriage of Carry's, fate had stepped in and made everything right. She was nobly provided for, with the command of a splendid fortune—and she was free. Now at least his wisdom ought to be acknowledged, and that he had done well for his daughter. But notwithstanding his resentment, he was a little cowed "in the circumstances" by this gathering of pale faces against him. Nothing could be said that was not peaceful and friendly on the day that the dead had gone out of the house.

"Do you think I am likely to wish to dictate to her," he said, with a short laugh, "that you stand round to defend her from me? Carry, you are very much mistaken if you think I will interfere. Children are out of my way. Your mother will be your best adviser. I yield to her better information now. You are tired, you are unhappy—you are—left desolate——"

"Oh, how do you dare to say such words to me?" cried Carry, rising, coming forward to him with feverish energy, laying her hands upon his shoulders, as if to compel him to face her, and hear what she had to say. "Don't you know—don't you know? I was left desolate when you brought me here, five years—five dreadful years ago. Whose fault is that? I am glad he is dead—glad he is dead! Could a woman be more injured than that? But now I have neither father nor mother," she cried. "I am in my own right; my life is my own, and, my children; I will be directed no more."

All this time she stood with her hands on his shoulders, grasping him unconsciously to give emphasis to her words. Lord Lindores was startled beyond measure by this personal contact—by the way in which poor Carry, always so submissive, flung herself upon him. "Do you mean to use violence to me? do you mean to turn me out of your house?" he said.

"Oh, father!—oh, father! how can I forgive you?" Carry cried, in her excitement and passion; and then she dropped her hands suddenly and wept, and begged his pardon like a child. Lord Lindores was very glad to take advantage of this sudden softening which he had so little expected. He kissed her and put her back in her chair. "I would recommend you to put her to bed," he said to his wife; "she has been overdone." And he thought he had got the victory, and that poor Carry, after her little explosion, was safe in his hands once more. He meant no harm to Carry. It was solely of her good and that of her children that he thought. It could do no harm either to the one or the other if they served his aims too. He drove home with his son soon after, leaving his wife behind him: it was proper that Carry should have her mother and sister with her at so sad a time. And the house of Tinto, which had been so dark all these nights, shone demurely

out again this evening, at a window here and there,—death, which is always an oppression, being gone from it, and life resuming its usual sway. The flag still hung half-mast high, drooping against the flagstaff, for there was no wind. "But I'm thinking, my lord, well put it back to-morrow," said the butler as he stood solemnly at the carriage-door. He stood watching it roll down the avenue in that mood of genial exhaustion which makes men communicative. "It's a satisfaction to think all's gane well and everybody satisfied," he said to his subordinate; "for a death in a family is worse to manage than ony other event. You're no' just found fault with at the moment, but it's minded against you if things go wrong, and your 'want o' feelin'.' My lady will maybe think it want o' feelin' if I put up the flag. But why should I no'? For if big Tinto's gane, there's wee Tinto, still mair important, with all the world before him. And if I let it be, they'll say it's neglect."

"My lady will never fash her head about it," said the second in command.

"How do you ken? Ah, my lad, you'll find a change. The master might give you a damn at a moment, but he wasna hard to manage. We'll have all the other family, *her* family, to give us our orders now."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

It is a strange experience for a man whose personal freedom has never been restrained to find himself in prison. The excitement and amazement of the first day made it something so exceptional and extraordinary, that out of very strangeness it was supportable: and Erskine felt it possible to wind himself up to the necessity of endurance for one night. But the dead stillness of the long, long morning that followed, was at once insupportable and incomprehensible to him. What did it mean? He saw the light brighten in his barred window, and persuaded himself, as long as he could, that it was as yet too early for anything to be done; but when he heard all the sounds of life outside, and felt the long moments roll on, and listened in vain for any deliverance, a cold mist of amazement and horror began to wrap John's soul. Was he to be left there? to lie in jail like any felon, nobody believing him, abandoned by all? He could not do anything violent to relieve his feelings; but it was within him to have dashed everything wildly about the room,—to have flown at the window and broken it to pieces,—to have torn linen and everything else to shreds. He stood aghast at himself as this wild fury of impatience and misery swept over him. He could have beaten his head against the wall. To sit still, as a man, a gentleman, is compelled to do, restraining himself, was more hard than any struggles of Hercules. And those slow sunny moments stole by, each one of them as long as an hour. The sun seemed to be stationary in the sky: the forenoon was a century. When he heard some one at last approaching, he drew a long breath of satisfaction, saying to himself that now at last the suspense would be over. But when it proved to be Miss Barbara with her arms full of provisions for his comfort, her maid coming after, bearing a large basket, it is impossible to describe the disappointment, the rage that filled him. The effort to meet her with a smile was almost more than he was capable of. He did it, of course, and concealed his real feelings, and accepted the butter and eggs with such thanks as he could give utterance to; but the effort seemed almost greater than any he had ever made before. Miss Barbara, for her part, considered it her duty to her nephew to maintain an easy aspect and ignore the misery of the situation. She exerted herself to amuse him, to talk as if nothing was amiss. She told him of Tinto's grand funeral, with which the whole country-side was taken up. "Everybody is there," Miss Barbara said, with some indignation,—"great and small, gentle and simple, as if auld Torrance's son was one of the nobles of the land."

"They care more for the dead than the living," John said, with a laugh. It was well to laugh, for his lip quivered. No doubt this was the reason why no one had leisure to think of him. And his heart was too full of his own miseries to be capable of even a momentary compassion for the fate of Torrance—a man not very much older than himself, prosperous and rich and important—snatched in a moment from all his enjoyments. He had been deeply awed and impressed when he heard of it first; but by this time the honours paid to the dead man seemed to John an insult to his own superior claims—he who was living and suffering unjustly. To think that those who called themselves his friends should have deserted him to show a respect which they could not feel for the memory of a man whom they had none of them respected while he lived! He was no cynic, nor fond of attributing every evil to the baseness of humanity, but he could not help saying now, between his closed teeth, that it was the way of the world.

He had another visitor in the afternoon, some time after Miss Barbara took her departure, but not one of those he expected. To his great surprise, it was the white erect head of old Sir James which was the next he saw. The veteran came in with a grave and troubled countenance. He gave a shudder when he heard the key turn in the door. "I have come to see if there was—anything I could do for you?" Sir James said.

John laughed again. To laugh seemed the only possible way of expressing himself. It is permissible for a man to laugh when a woman would cry, and the meaning is much the same. This expressed indignation, incredulity, some contempt, yet was softened by a gentler sentiment, at sight of the old soldier's kind and benign but puzzled and troubled face. "I don't know what any one can do for me but take me out of this," he said, "and no one seems disposed to do that."

"John Erskine," said the old General solemnly, "the circumstances are very serious. If you had

seen, as I have seen, a young, strong man laid in his grave this day, with a little toddling bairn, chief mourner." His voice broke a little, as he spoke. He waved his hand as if to put this recollection away. "And your story was not satisfactory. It did not commend itself to my mind. Have patience and hear me out. I came away from you in displeasure, and I've done nothing but turn it over and over in my thoughts ever since. It's very far from satisfactory; but I cannot find it in my heart to disbelieve you," the old man cried, with a quiver of emotion in his face. He held out his large, soft, old hand suddenly as he spoke. John, who had been winding himself up to indignant resistance, was taken entirely by surprise. He grasped that kind hand, and his composure altogether failed him.

"I am a fool," he cried, dashing the tears from his eyes, "to think that one day's confinement should break me down. God bless you, Sir James! I can't speak. If that's so, I'll make shift to bear the rest."

"Ay, my lad, that's just so. I cannot disbelieve you. You're a gentleman, John Erskine. You might do an act of violence,—any man might be left to himself; but you would not be base, and lie. I have tried to think so, but I cannot. You would never deceive an old friend."

"If I had murdered poor Torrance in cold blood, and meaning it," said John, "there is no telling, I might have lied too."

"No, no, no," said Sir James, putting out his hand—"at the worst it was never thought to be that; but you have no look of falsehood in you. Though it's a strange story, and little like the truth, I cannot disbelieve you. So now you will tell me, my poor lad, what I can do for you. We're friends again, thank God! I could not bide to be unfriends—and my old wife was at me night and day."

"If Lady Montgomery believes in me too——"

"Believes in you! she would give me no rest, I tell you—her and my own spirit. She would not hear a word. All she said was, 'Hoots, nonsense, Sir James!' I declare to you that was all. She's not what you call a clever woman, but she would not listen to a word. 'Hoots, nonsense!' that was all. We could not find it in our hearts."

He was a little disposed, now that he had made his avowal, to dwell upon it, to the exclusion of more important matters; but when at last he permitted John to tell him what his expectations had been, and what his disappointment, as the long, slow morning stole over unbroken, Sir James was deeply moved. "Why did not Monypenny come to me?" he said. "He was taken up, no doubt, with what was going on to-day. But I would have been your bail in a moment. An old friend like me—the friend not only of your father, but of your grandfather before him!" But when he had said so much he paused, and employed a little simple sophistry to veil the position. "The sheriff will be round in the end of the week. I would not trouble him, if I were you, before that. What's three or four days? You will then come out with every gentleman in the county at your back. It's not that I think it would be refused. People say so, but I will not believe it, for one; only I would not stir if I were you. A day or two, what does that matter? *My* pride would be to bide the law, and stand and answer to my country. That is what I would do. Of course I'll be your caution, and any other half dozen men in the county; but I'll tell you what I would do myself,—I would stand it out if I were you."

"You never were shut up in a jail, Sir James?"

"Not exactly in a jail," said the old soldier; "but I've been in prison, and far worse quarters than this. To be sure, there's an excitement about it when you're in the hands of an enemy——"

"In the hands of an enemy," cried John—"a thing to be proud of; but laid by the heels in a wretched hole, like a poacher or a thief!"

"I would put up with it if I were you. There is nothing disgraceful in it. It is just a mistake that will be put right. I will come and see you, man, every day, and Lady Montgomery will send you books. I hope they will not be too good books, John. That's her foible, honest woman. You seem to be victualled for a siege," Sir James added, looking round the room. "That is Miss Barbara Erskine, I will be bound."

"I felt disposed to pitch them all out of the window," said John.

"Nothing of the sort; though they're too good to fall into the hands of the turnkeys. Keep up your heart, my fine lad. I'll see Monypenny to-night before I dine, and if we cannot bring you out with flying colours, between us, it will be a strange thing to me. Just you keep up your heart," said Sir James, patting John kindly on the back as he went away. "The sheriff will be round here again on the 25th, and we'll be prepared for the examination, and bring you clear off. It's not so very long to wait."

With this John was forced to be content. The 25th was four days off, and to remain in confinement for four days more was an appalling anticipation; but Sir James's visit gave him real cheer. Perhaps Mr Monypenny, too, on thinking it over, might turn to a conviction of his client's truth.

While Sir James rode home, pleased with himself that he had obeyed his own generous impulse, and pleased with John, who had been so unfeignedly consoled by it, Lord Lindores and his son were driving back from Tinto together in the early twilight. There was not a word exchanged between them as they drove down the long avenue in the shadow of the woods; but as they turned into the lighter road, Lord Lindores returned to the subjects which occupied his mind

habitually. "That is a business well over," he said, with a sigh of satisfaction. "It is always a relief when the last ceremonies are accomplished; and though Carry chose to meet me with heroics, it is very satisfactory to know that her position is so good. One could never be sure with a man of Torrance's temper. He was as likely as not to have surrounded his widow with annoyances and restraints. He has erred just a little on the other side now, poor fellow! Still he meant it, no doubt, for the best." Lord Lindores spoke to his son with an ease and confidence which he could not feel with the other members of his family. Rintoul himself, indeed, had been somewhat incomprehensible for a little time past; but indigestion, or any other trifling reason, might account for that. "And now that all is over, we must think of other matters," he continued. "This business about Edith must be settled. Millefleurs must have his answer. He has been very patient; but a young fellow like that knows his own importance, and Edith must hear reason. She will never have another such chance."

Rintoul made a little movement in his corner, which was all that stood for a reply on his part; and his father could not even see the expression of his face.

"I can only hope that she will be more amenable to his influence than to mine," said Lord Lindores, with a sigh. "It is strange that she, the youngest of my children, should be the one to give me the most trouble. Rintoul, it is also time that I should speak to you about yourself. It would give your mother and me great satisfaction to see you settled. I married early myself, and I have never had any reason to repent it. Provided that you make a wise choice. The two families will no doubt see a great deal of each other when things are settled between Edith and Millefleurs; and I hear on all hands that his sister, Lady Reseda—you met her several times in town——"

"Yes,—I met her," said Rintoul, reluctantly. He turned once more in his corner, as if he would fain have worked his way through and escaped; but he was secured for the moment, and in his father's power.

"And you admired her, I suppose, as everybody does? She is something like her brother; but what may perhaps be thought a little—well, comical—in Millefleurs, is delightful in a girl. She is a merry little thing, the very person I should have chosen for you, Rintoul: she would keep us all cheerful. We want a little light-heartedness in the family. And though your father is only a Scotch peer, your position is unimpeachable; and I will say this for you, that you have behaved very well; few young men would have conducted themselves so irreproachably in such a sudden change of circumstances. I feel almost certain that though a daughter of the Duke's might do better, you would not be looked upon with unfavourable eyes."

"I—don't know them. I have only met them—two or three times——"

"What more is necessary? You will be Millefleurs's brother-in-law——"

"Are you so sure of that?" asked Rintoul. There was something in his tone which sounded like nascent rebellion. Lord Lindores pricked up his ears.

"I do not willingly entertain the idea that Edith would disobey me," he said with dignity. "She has high-flown notions. They are in the air nowadays, and will ruin the tempers of girls if they are not checked. She makes a fight to have her own way, but I cannot believe that she would go the length of downright disobedience. I have met with nothing of the kind yet——"

"I think you are likely to meet with it now," said Rintoul; and then he added, hastily, "Carry has not been an encouraging example."

"Carry!" said Lord Lindores, opening his eyes. "I confess that I do not understand. Carry! why, what woman could have a nobler position? Perfect control over a very large fortune, a situation of entire independence—too much for any woman. That Carry's unexampled good fortune should be quoted against me is extraordinary indeed."

"But," cried Rintoul, taken by surprise, "you could not hold up to Edith the hope of what might happen if—Millefleurs were to——"

"Break his neck over a scaur," said Lord Lindores, almost with a sneer. He felt his son shrink from him with an inarticulate cry, and with instant perception remedied his error in taste, as he thought it. "I ought not to speak so after such a tragedy; you are right, Rintoul. No: Millefleurs is a very different person; but of course it is always a consolation to know that whatever happens, one's child will be abundantly and honourably provided for. My boy, let us look at the other matter. It is time you thought of marrying, as I say."

Rintoul flung himself against the side of the carriage with a muttered curse. "Marrying!—hanging is more what I feel like!" he cried.

"Rintoul!"

"Don't torture me, father. There is not a more wretched fellow on the face of the earth. Link an innocent woman's name with mine? Ask a girl to?——For heaven's sake let me alone—let me be!"

"What is the meaning of this?" Lord Lindores cried. "Are you mad, Rintoul? I am altogether unprepared for heroics in you."

The young man made no reply. He put his head out to the rushing of the night air and the soft darkness, through which the trees and distant hills and rare passengers were all like shadows.

He had looked stolidly enough upon all the shows of the external world all his life, and thought no more of them than as he saw them.

> "A primrose by the river's brim,
> A yellow primrose was to him."

There had been no images or similitudes in light or darkness; but now another world had opened around him. He had a secret with the silence—the speechless, inanimate things about knew something of him which nobody else knew: and who could tell when they might find a voice and proclaim it to the world? He uncovered his head to the air which blew upon him and cooled his fever. The touch of that cool fresh wind seemed the only thing in earth or heaven in which there was any consolation. As for Lord Lindores, he sat back in his corner, more angry than concerned, and more contemptuous than either. A woman has perhaps some excuse for nerves; but that his son, upon whose plain understanding he could always rely, and whose common-sense was always alive to the importance of substantial arguments, should thus relapse into tragedy like his sisters, was more than he could tolerate. He would not even contemplate the idea that there was any cause for it. Rintoul had always been well behaved. He was in no fear of any secrets that his son might have to reveal.

"Rintoul," he said, after a pause, "if you have got into any scrape, you should know well enough that I am not the sort of man to take it tragically. I have no faith in making molehills into mountains. I don't suppose you have done anything disgraceful. You must be off your head, I think. What is it? You have been out of sorts for some time past."

These words came like beatings of a drum to Rintoul's ears, as he leant out into the rushing and sweep of the night air. There was a composure in them which brought him to himself. Anything disgraceful meant cheating at cards, or shirking debts of honour, or cowardice. Practically, these were about the only things disgraceful that a young man could do. An "entanglement," a heavy loss at cards or on the turf, any other minor vice, could be compounded for. Lord Lindores was not alarmed by the prospect of an explanation with his son. But that Rintoul should become melodramatic, and appeal to earth and heaven, was contemptible to his father. This cool and common-sense tone had its natural effect, Lord Lindores thought. Rintoul drew in his head, sat back in his corner, and was restored to himself.

"I have been out of sorts," he said—"I suppose that's what it is. I see everything *en noir*. All this business—seeing to things—the black, the house shut up——"

"Let me warn you, Rintoul; don't cultivate your susceptibilities," said his father. "What is black more than blue or any other colour? This sort of thing is all very well for a woman; but I know what it is. It's stomach—that is really at the bottom of all tragedy. You had better speak to the doctor. And now, thank heaven, this Tinto business is over; we can get back to the affairs of life."

The rest of the drive passed in complete silence. And all the time they were together, Rintoul said not a word to his father about John Erskine. His situation was altogether ignored between them. It was not that it was forgotten. If these two men could have opened Dunnottar jail—nay, could they have swept John Erskine away into some happy island where he would have been too blessed to think anything more about them—they would have done it,—the one with joyous alacrity, the other with satisfaction at least. This gloomy incident was over, and Lord Lindores had no desire to hear any more of it. It was just the end that anybody might have expected Torrance to come to. Why could not the officious blockheads of the country-side let the matter alone? But he did not feel that desire to help and right John Erskine which his warm adoption of the young man to his friendship would have warranted. For why? such an incident, however it ended, would certainly spoil young Erskine's influence in the county. He would be of no more advantage to any one. A quarrel was nothing; but to escape from the consequences of that quarrel, to let a man die at the foot of a precipice without sending help to him, that was a thing which all the country-side turned against. It was this that had roused so strong a feeling against John, and Lord Lindores made up his mind philosophically, that though Erskine would probably be cleared of all imputation of blood-guiltiness, yet, innocent or guilty, he would never get over it, and, consequently, would be of no further use in any public projects. At the same time, his own views had changed in respect to the means of carrying these projects out. Lord Millefleurs was a better instrument than country eminence. A seat gained was of course always an appreciable advantage. But it was not certain even that the seat could have been gained; and a son-in-law in hand is better than many boroughs in the bush. The Duke could not ignore Lord Lindores's claims if Edith was a member of the family. This was far more important than anything that could concern John Erskine, though Lord Lindores would have been heartily thankful—now that he was good for nothing but to excite foolish sympathies—if he could have got John Erskine happily out of the way.

Millefleurs had reached Lindores some time before: he had returned direct from the funeral along with Beaufort, who, much marvelling at himself, had stood among the crowd, and seen Carry's husband laid in his grave. The sensation was too extraordinary to be communicated to any one. It had seemed to him that the whole was a dream, himself a spectre of the past, watching bewildered, while the other, whom he had never seen, who was nothing but a coffin, was removed away and deposited among the unseen. He had not been bold enough to go into the house to see Carry, even from the midst of the crowd. Whether she was sorrowing for her husband, or feeling some such thrills of excitement as were in his own bosom at the thought that she was free, Beaufort could not tell; but when he found himself seated at table that evening with

her father and brother, he could not but feel that his dream was going on, and that there was no telling in what new scene it might unfold fresh wonders. The four gentlemen dined alone, and they were not a lively party. After dinner they gathered about the fireplace, not making any move towards the forsaken drawing-room. "This is a sad sort of amusement to provide for you," Lord Lindores said. "We hoped to have shown you the more cheerful side of Scotch life."

"I have had a very good time: what you might call a lovely time," said Millefleurs. Then he made a pause, and drawing closer, laid his plump finger on Lord Lindores's arm. "I don't want to make myself a nuisance now; but—not to be troublesome—if I am not likely soon to have an opportunity of addressing myself to Lady Edith, don't you think I had better go away?"

"You may well be tired of us; a house of mourning," said Lord Lindores, with a smile of benevolent meaning. "It was not for this you came into those wilds."

"They are far from being wilds: I have enjoyed myself very much," said little Millefleurs. "All has been new; and to see a new country, don't you know, is always the height of my ambition. But such a thing might happen as that I wasn't wanted. When a lady means to have anything to say to a fellow, I have always heard she lets him know. To say nothing is, perhaps, as good a way of saying no as any. It may be supposed to save a man's feelings——"

"Am I to understand that you have spoken to my daughter, Millefleurs?"

"I have never had the chance, Lord Lindores. On the very evening, you will remember, when I hoped to have an explanation, this unfortunate accident happened. I am very sorry for the gentleman whom, in the best of circumstances, I can never now hope to call my brother-in-law; but the position is perhaps a little awkward. Lady Edith is acquainted with my aspirations, but I—know nothing; don't you know?" said the little Marquis. He had his hand upon his plump bosom, and raised himself a little on one foot as he spoke. "It makes a fellow feel rather small—and, in my case, that isn't wanted," he added, cheerfully. Nothing less like a despairing lover could be imagined; but though he resembled a robin-redbreast, he was a man quite conscious of the dignities of his position, and not to be played with. A cold chill of alarm came over Lord Lindores.

"Edith will return to-morrow, or next day," he said; "or if you choose to go to Tinto, her mother regards you so much as a friend and favourite, that she will receive you gladly, I am sure. Go, then——"

"No," said Millefleurs, shaking his head, "no, that would be too strong. I never saw the poor fellow but once or twice, and the last time I had the misfortune to disagree with him; no—I can't convey myself to his house to learn if I'm to be taken or not. It is a droll sort of experience. I feel rather like a bale of goods, don't you know, on approval," he said with a laugh. He took it with great good-humour; but it was possible that even Millefleurs's good-humour might be exhausted.

"I undertake for it that you shall not have to wait much longer," said Lord Lindores.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Rintoul had bad nights, and could not sleep. He had been in such constant movement that day that he was fatigued, and had hoped for rest; but after tossing on his uneasy bed, he got up again, as for several nights past he had been in the habit of doing, and began to pace up and down his room. The house was all buried in repose and silence—the woods rustling round, the river flowing, the silence outside tingling with the never altogether hushed movements of nature; but indoors nothing stirring—all dark; nothing but the heavy breath of sleep within the thick old walls. The fire was dying out on the hearth; the candles, which he lighted hastily, did not half light the room, but rather cleared a little spot in the darkness, and left all else in gloom. A nervous tremor was upon the young man,—he to whom nerves had been all folly, who had scoffed at them as affectation or weakness; but he had no longer that command of himself of which he had once been proud. His mind strayed involuntarily into thoughts which he would fain have shut out. They dwelt upon one subject and one scene, which he had shut his mind to a hundred times, only to feel it the next moment once more absorbing every faculty. His shadow upon the window paced up and down, up and down. He could not keep quiet. He did not care to have the door of his room behind him, but kept it in sight as if he feared being taken at a disadvantage. What did he fear? he could not tell. Imagination had seized hold upon him—he who had never known what imagination was. He could not rest for it. The quiet was full of noises. He heard the furniture creaking, as it does at night, the walls giving out strange echoes; and never having kept any vigil before, thought that these strange voices of the night had to do with himself, and in his soul trembled as if he had been surrounded by enemies or spies searching his inmost thoughts.

Thus he walked up and down the room, keeping his face to the door. Did he expect any one, anything to come in? No, no; nothing of the kind. But it is certain that sometimes along the long passage he heard sounds as of a horse's hoofs. He knew it was nonsense. It was the sound of the river, to which he was perfectly accustomed; but yet it sounded somehow like a horse's hoofs. He never would have been surprised at any moment to see the door pushed open and something come in. He knew it was ridiculous, but still he could not help the feeling. And the silence of the house was a pain to him beyond telling. One of these nights one of the servants had been ill, and Rintoul was glad. The sense that some one was waking, moving about, was a relief. It seemed

somehow to give him a sort of security,—to deliver him from himself. But while he thus felt the advantage of waking humanity near him, he was thankful beyond description that the society of the house was diminished—that his mother and Edith were away. He knew that they must have found him out—if not what was in his mind, at least that there was something on his mind. During the last twenty-four hours particularly they would have been worse spies than the trees and the winds. How could he have kept himself to himself in their presence, especially as they would have besieged him with questions, with incitements to do something. They would have assumed that they knew all about it in their ignorance. They! They were always assuming that they knew. There was a fierce momentary satisfaction in Rintoul's mind to think how completely out they would be, how incapable of understanding the real state of the case. They thought they knew everything! But he felt that there was a possibility that he might have betrayed himself in the very pleasure he would have had in showing them that they knew nothing. And it was better, far better, that they should be out of the way.

He did not, however, yield to this fever of the mind without doing what he could manfully to subdue it. He made a great effort now to fix his mind upon what his father had said to him—but the names of Millefleurs and Lady Reseda only swept confusedly through his brain like straws upon the surface of the stream. Sometimes he found himself repeating one of them vaguely, like a sort of idiotical chorus, while the real current of his thoughts ran on. Lady Reseda, Lady Reseda: what had she to do with it?—or Millefleurs, Millefleurs!—they were straws upon the surface, showing how rapidly the torrent ran, not anything he could catch hold of. There was one name, however, round which that dark current of his thoughts eddied and swirled as in a whirlpool—the name of John Erskine. There could not be any doubt that *he* had something to do with it. He had thrust himself into a matter that did not concern him, and he was paid for his folly. It was not *his* place to stand up for Carry, to resent her husband's rudeness—what had he to do with it? He was an intrusive, officious fool, thrusting himself into other people's business. If he brought himself into trouble by it, was that Rintoul's fault? Was he bound to lay himself open to a great deal of annoyance and embarrassment in order to save John Erskine from the consequences of his own folly? This was the question that would not let him rest. Nothing Rintoul had been a party to had compromised John Erskine. It was all his own doing. Why did he, for his pleasure, take the Scaur road at all? Why did he stop and quarrel, seeing the other was excited? Why rush down in that silly way with his coat torn to make an exhibition of himself? All these things were folly,—folly beyond extenuation. He ought to have known better; and whatever followed, was it not his own fault?

Along with this, however, there were other thoughts that flashed at Rintoul, and would not let him carry on steadily to the conclusion he desired. There are some things that are permissible and some that are not permissible. A gentleman need not betray himself: it is not indispensable that he should take the world into his confidence, if any accident happens to him, and he gets himself into trouble; but he must not let another get into trouble for him,—that comes into the category of the "anything disgraceful" which Lord Lindores was assured his son had never been guilty of. No! he had never done anything disgraceful. How was he to escape it now? And then, looking back upon all the circumstances, Rintoul sadly perceived what a fool he had been not to put everything on a straightforward footing at once. He reflected that he could have given almost any account of the occurrence he pleased. There was nobody to contradict him: and all would have been over without complication, without any addition from the popular fancy. It seemed to him now, reflecting upon everything, all the details that had filled him with an unreflecting panic then, that nothing could have been easier than to explain the whole matter. But he had lost that good moment, and if he made the confession now, every false conception which he had feared would be realised. People would say, If this was all, why make any mystery about it? Why expose another to disgrace and suffering? Rintoul had not intelligence enough, though he had always plumed himself on his common-sense, to thread his way among those conflicting reasonings. He grew sick as the harpies of recollection and thought rushed upon him from all quarters. He had no power to stand against them,—to silence her who cried, "Why did you not do this?"—while he held at bay the other who swooped down upon him, screaming, "How could you do that?" When it grew more than he could bear he retreated to his bed, and flung himself exhausted upon it, throwing out his arms with the unconscious histrionic instinct of excitement, appealing to he knew not what. How could he do this thing? How could he leave it undone? Rintoul in his despair got up again and found an opiate which had been given him when he had toothache, long ago, in days when toothache was the worst torture he knew. He swallowed it, scarcely taking the trouble to mark how much he was taking, though the moment after he took a panic, and got up and examined the bottle to assure himself that all was right. It was nearly daybreak by the time that this dose sent him to sleep,—and he scarcely knew he had been asleep, so harassing were his dreams, till he came to himself at last, to find that it was eleven o'clock in a dull forenoon, his shutters all open, and the dim light pouring in. The horrors of waking when the mind is possessed by great misery is a well-worn subject,—everybody knows what it is to have Care seated by his bedside, ready to pounce upon him when he opens his eyes; but Rintoul had scarcely escaped from that dark companion. She had been with him in his dreams: he felt her grip him now, with no surprise, if with a redoublement of pain.

It was nearly mid-day when he got down-stairs, and he found nobody. His father was out. Millefleurs was out. His breakfast was arranged upon a little table near the fire, his letters laid ready, the county newspaper—a little innocent broadsheet—by his plate. But he could not take advantage of any of these luxuries; he swept his letters into his pocket, flung the paper from him, then reflected that there might *be something in it*, and picked it up again with trembling hands. There was *something in it*. There was an account of the private examination before the sheriff of

Mr John Erskine of Dalrulzian on suspicion of being concerned in the death of the late lamented Mr Torrance of Tinto. "From circumstances which transpired," the sheriff, the newspaper regretted to say, had thought it right to relegate Mr Erskine to Dunnottar jail, there to await the result of a more formal inquiry, to be held on the 25th at Dunearn. "We have little fear that a gentleman so respected will easily be able to clear himself," it was added; and "a tribute of respect to the late Patrick Torrance,—a name which, for genial *bonhomie* and sterling qualities, will long be remembered in this county," wound up the paragraph. The greater portion of its readers, already acquainted with the news by report, read it with exclamations of concern, or cynical rustic doubt whether John Erskine was so much respected, or Pat Torrance as sure of a place in the county's memory, as the 'Dunearn Sentinel' said; but all Rintoul's blood seemed to rush to his head and roar like a torrent in his ears as he read the paragraph. He could hear nothing but that rushing of excitement and the bewildered half-maddened thoughts which seemed to accompany it. What was he to do? What was he to do?

There was a little interval, during which Rintoul literally did not know what he was doing. His mind was not prepared for such an emergency. He tossed about like a cork upon the boiling stream of his own thoughts—helpless, bewildered, driven hither and thither. He only came to himself when he felt the damp air in his face, and found himself setting out on foot on the road to Dunearn: the irregular lines of the housetops in front of him, the tall tower of the Town House pointing up to the dull skies, standing out from the rest of the buildings like a landmark to indicate what route he was to take. When he caught sight of that he came violently to himself, and began at once to recover some conscious control over his actions. The operations of his mind became clear to him; his panic subsided. After all, who could harm John Erskine? He had been very foolish; he had exposed himself to suspicion; but no doubt a gentleman so respected would be able to clear himself—a gentleman so respected. Rintoul repeated the words to himself, as he had repeated the names of Millefleurs and Lady Reseda the night before. And what would it matter to John Erskine to put off till the 25th his emancipation and the full recognition of his innocence? If he had a bad cold, it would have the same result—confinement to the house, perhaps to his room. What was that? Nothing: a trifling inconvenience, that any man might be subject to. And there could be no doubt that a gentleman so respected——There would be evidence that would clear him: it was not possible that any proof could be produced of a thing that never happened; and the whole county, if need be, would bear witness to John Erskine's character—that he was not quarrelsome or a brawler; that there was no motive for any quarrel between him and——

Rintoul's feet, which had been going rapidly towards Dunearn, went on slower and slower. He came to a pause altogether about a mile from the town. Was it necessary to go any farther? What could he do to-day? Certainly there would be no advantage to Erskine in anything he did to-day. He turned round slowly, and went back towards Lindores. Walking that way, there was nothing but the long sweep of the landscape between him and Tinto, to which his eyes could not but turn as he walked slowly on. The flag was up again—a spot of red against the dull sky—and the house stood out upon its platform with that air of ostentation which fretted the souls of the surrounding gentry. Rintoul could not bear the sight of it: it smote him with a fierce impatience. Scarcely conscious that his movement of hot and hasty temper was absurd, he turned round again to escape it, and set his face towards the emblem of severe justice and the law, the tower of the Town House of Dunearn. When this second monitor made itself visible, a kind of dull despair took possession of him. His steps were hemmed in on every side, and there was no escape.

It was while he was moving on thus reluctantly, by a sort of vague compulsion, that he recognised, with amazement, Nora Barrington coming towards him. It was a piece of good fortune to which he had no right. She was the only creature in the world whose society could have been welcome to him. They met as they might have met in a fairy tale: fairy tales are not over, so long as people do meet in this way on the commonplace road. They had neither of them thought of any such encounter—he, because his mind was too dolorous and preoccupied for any such relief; she, because Rintoul seldom came into Dunearn, and never walked, so that no idea of his presence occurred to her. She was going to fulfil a commission of Miss Barbara's, and anxious if possible to see Edith, which was far more likely than Edith's brother. They were both surprised, almost beyond speech; they scarcely uttered any greeting. It did not seem strange, somehow, that Rintoul should turn and walk with her the way she was going, though it was not his way. And now a wonderful thing happened to Rintoul. His ferment of thought subsided all at once,—he seemed to have sailed into quiet seas after the excitement of the head-long current which had almost dashed him to pieces. He did not know what it meant. The storm ended, and there stole over him "a sound as of a hidden brook, in the leafy month of June." And Nora felt a softening of sympathetic feeling, she did not know why. She was sorry for him. Why should she have been sorry for Lord Rintoul? He was infinitely better off than she was. She could not account for the feeling, but she felt it all the same. She asked him first how Lady Caroline was—poor Lady Caroline!—and then faltered a little, turning to her own affairs.

"I hope I shall see Edith before I go away. Do you know when they are coming back? I am going home—very soon now," Nora said. She felt almost apologetic—reluctant to say it,—and yet it seemed necessary to say it. There were many people whom she might have met on the road to whom she would not have mentioned the fact, but it seemed incumbent upon her now.

"Going away! No, that you must not do—you must not do it! Why should you go away?" he cried.

"There are many reasons." Nora felt that she ought to laugh at his vehemence, or that, perhaps, she should be angry; but she was neither the one nor the other—only apologetic, and so sorry for

him. "Of course I always knew I should have to go: though I shall always think it home here, yet it is not home any longer. It is a great pity, don't you think, to live so long in a place which, after all, is not your home?"

"I cannot think it a great pity that you should have lived here," he said. "The thing is, that you must not go. For God's sake, Nora, do not go! I never thought of that; it is the last drop. If you knew how near I am to the end of my strength, you would not speak of such a thing to me."

"Lord Rintoul! I—don't understand. What can it matter?" cried Nora, in her confusion. She felt that she should have taken a different tone. He had no right to call her Nora, or to speak as if he had anything to do with her coming or going. But the hurried tone of passion and terror in his voice overwhelmed her. It was as if he had heard of the last misfortune that could overwhelm a man.

"Matter! Do you mean to me? It may not matter to any one else; to me it is everything," he said, wildly. "I shall give in altogether. I shall not care what I do if you go away."

"Now, Lord Rintoul," said Nora, her heart beating, but trying to laugh as she best could, "this, you must know, is nonsense. You cannot mean to make fun of me, I am sure; but——I don't know what you mean. We had better say no more about it." Then she melted again. She remembered their last interview, which had gone to her heart. "I know," she said, "that you have been in a great deal of trouble."

"You know," said Rintoul, "because you feel for me. Nobody else knows. Then think what it will be for me if you go away—the only creature whom I dare to speak to. Nora, you know very well I was always fond of you—from the first—as soon as we met——"

"Don't, don't, Lord Rintoul! I cannot get away from you on this public road. Have some respect for me. You ought not to say such things, nor I to hear."

He looked at her, wondering. "Is it any want of respect to tell you that you are the girl I have always wanted to marry? You may not feel the same; it may be only your kindness: you may refuse me, Nora; but I have always meant it. I have thought it was our duty to do the best we could for the girls, but I never gave in to that for myself. My father has spoken of this one and that one, but I have always been faithful to you. That is no want of respect, though it is a public road. From the time I first knew you, I have only thought of you."

What an ease it gave him to say this! All the other points that had so occupied him before seemed to have melted away in her presence. If he had but some one to stand by him,—if he had but Nora, who felt for him always. It seemed that everything else would arrange itself, and become less difficult to bear.

As for Nora, she had known very well that Rintoul was, as he said, fond of her. It is so difficult to conceal that. But she thought he would "get over it." She had said to herself, with some little scorn, that he never would have the courage to woo a poor girl like herself,—a girl without anything. He had a worldly mind though he was young, and Nora had never allowed herself to be deluded, she thought.

"Don't you believe me?" he said, after a moment's pause, looking at her wistfully, holding out his hand.

"Yes, I believe you, Lord Rintoul," said Nora; but she took no notice of his outstretched hand, though it cost her something to be, as she said to herself, "so unkind." "I do believe you; but it would never be permitted, you know. You yourself would not approve of it when you had time to think; for you are worldly-minded, Lord Rintoul: and you know you ought to marry—an heiress—some one with money."

"You have a very good right to say so," he replied. "I have always maintained that for the girls: but if you had ever taken any notice of me, you would have found out that I never allowed it for myself. Yes, it is quite true I am worldly-minded; but I never meant to marry money. I never thought of marrying any one but you."

And now there was a pause again. He did not seem to have asked her any question that Nora could answer. He had only made a statement to her that she was the only girl he had ever wished to marry. It roused a great commotion in her breast. She had always liked Rintoul, even when his sisters called him a Philistine; and now when he was in trouble, under some mysterious shadow, she knew not why, appealing to her sympathy as to his salvation, it was not possible that the girl should shut her heart against him. They walked on together for a few yards in silence, and then she said, faltering, "I had better go back now——I—did not expect to—meet any one."

"Don't go back without saying something to me. Promise me, Nora, that you will not go away. I want you! I want you! Without you I should go all wrong. If you saw me sinking in the water, wouldn't you put out your hand to help me?—and that is nothing to what may happen. Nora, have you the heart to go back without saying anything to me?" cried Rintoul, once more holding out his hand.

There was nobody visible on the road, up or down. The turrets of Lindores peeped over the trees in the distance, like spectators deeply interested, holding their breath; at the other end the long thin tower of the Town House seemed to pale away into the distance. He looked anxiously into her face, as if life and death hung on the decision. They had come to a standstill in the emotion of

the moment, and stood facing each other, trembling with the same sentiment. Nora held back still, but there was an instinctive drawing closer of the two figures—irresistible, involuntary.

"Your father will never consent," she said, with an unsteady voice; "and my father will never allow it against his will. But, Lord Rintoul——"

"Not lord, nor Rintoul," he said.

"You never liked to be called Robin," Nora said, with a half malicious glance into his face. But poor Rintoul was not in the humour for jest. He took her hand, her arm, and drew it through his.

"I cannot wait to think about our fathers. I have such need of you, Nora. I have something to tell you that I can tell to no one in the world but you. I want my other self to help me. I want my wife, to whom I can speak——"

His arm was quivering with anxiety and emotion. Though Nora was bewildered, she did not hesitate—what girl would?—from the responsibility thus thrust upon her. To be so urgently wanted is the strongest claim that can be put forth upon any human creature. Instinctively she gave his arm a little pressure, supporting rather than supported, and said "Tell me," turning upon him freely, without blush or faltering, the grave sweet face of sustaining love.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Rolls disappeared on the evening of the day on which he had that long consultation with Mr Monypenny. He did not return to Dalrulzian that night. Marget, with many blushes and no small excitement, served the dinner, which Bauby might be said to have cooked with tears. If these salt drops were kept out of her sauces, she bedewed the white apron which she lifted constantly to her eyes. "Maister John in jyal! and oor Tammas gone after him; and what will I say to his mammaw?" Bauby cried. She seemed to fear that it might be supposed some want of care on her part which had led to this dreadful result. But even the sorrow of her soul did not interfere with her sense of what was due to her master's guest. Beaufort's dinner did not suffer, whatever else might. It was scrupulously cooked, and served with all the care of which Marget was capable; and when it was all over, and everything carefully put aside, the women sat down together in the kitchen, and had a good cry over the desolation of the house. The younger maids, perhaps, were not so deeply concerned on this point as Bauby, who was an old servant, and considered Dalrulzian as her home: but they were all more or less affected by the disgrace, as well as sorry for the young master, who had "nae pride," and always a pleasant word for his attendants in whatever capacity. Their minds were greatly affected, too, by the absence of Rolls. Not a man in the house but the stranger gentleman! It was a state of affairs which alarmed and depressed them, and proved, above all other signs, that a great catastrophe had happened. Beaufort sent for the housekeeper after dinner to give her such information as he thought necessary; and Bauby was supported to the door by her subordinates, imploring her all the way to keep up her heart. "You'll no' let on to the strange gentleman." "Ye'll keep up a good face, and no' let him see how sair cast down ye are," they said, one at either hand. There was a great deal of struggling outside the door, and some stifled sounds of weeping, before it was opened, and Bauby appeared, pushed in by some invisible agency behind her, which closed the door promptly as soon as she was within. She was not the important person Beaufort had expected to see; but as she stood there, with her large white apron thrown over her arm, and her comely countenance, like a sky after rain, lighted up with a very wan and uncertain smile, putting the best face she could upon it, Beaufort's sympathy overcame the inclination to laugh which he might have felt in other circumstances, at the sight of her sudden entrance and troubled clinging to the doorway. "Good evening," he said, "Mrs——" "They call me Bauby Rolls, at your service," said Bauby, with a curtsey, and a suppressed sob. "Mrs Rolls," said Beaufort, "your master may not come home for a few days; he asked me to tell you not to be anxious; that he hoped to be back soon; that there was nothing to be alarmed about." "Eh! and was he so kind as think upon me, and him in such trouble," cried Bauby, giving way to her emotions. "But I'm no alarmt; no, no, why should I be?" she added, in a trembling voice. "He will be hame, no doubt, in a day or twa, as ye say, sir, and glad, glad we'll a' be. It's not that we have any doubt—but oh! what will his mammaw say to me?" cried Bauby. After the tremulous momentary stand she had made, her tears flowed faster than ever. "There has no such thing happened among the Erskines since ever the name was kent in the country-side, and that's maist from the beginning, as it's written in Scripture." "It's all a mistake," cried Beaufort. "That it is—that it is," cried Bauby, drying her eyes. And then she added with another curtsey, "I hope you'll find everything to your satisfaction, sir, till the maister comes hame. Tammas—that's the butler, Tammas Rolls, my brother, sir, if ye please—is no' at hame to-night, and you wouldna like a lass aboot to valet ye; they're all young but me. But if you would put out your cloes to brush, or anything that wants doing, outside your door, it shall a' be weel attended to. I'm real sorry there's no' another man aboot the house: but a' that women can do we'll do, and with goodwill." "You are very kind, Mrs Rolls," said Beaufort. "I was not thinking of myself—you must not mind me. I shall get on very well. I am sorry to be a trouble to you at such a melancholy moment." "Na, na, sir, not melancholy," cried Bauby, with her eyes streaming; "sin' ye say, and a'body must allow, that it's just a mistake: we manna be put aboot by suchlike trifles. But nae doubt it will be livelier and mair pleesant for yoursel', sir, when Mr John and Tammas, they baith come hame. Would you be wanting anything more to-night?" "Na, I never let on,"

Bauby said, when she retired to the ready support of her handmaidens outside the door—"no' me; I keepit a stout heart, and I said to him, 'It's of nae consequence, sir,' I said,—'I'm nane cast down; it's just a mistake—everybody kens that; and that he was to put his things outside his door,' He got nothing that would go against the credit of the house out of me."

But in spite of this forlorn confidence in her powers of baffling suspicion, it was a wretched night that poor Bauby spent. John was satisfactorily accounted for, and it was known where he was; but who could say where Rolls might be? Bauby sat up half through the night alone in the great empty kitchen with the solemn-sounding clock and the cat purring loudly by the fire. She was as little used to the noises of the night as Lord Rintoul was, and in her agony of watching felt the perpetual shock and thrill of the unknown going through and through her. She heard steps coming up to the house a hundred times through the night, and stealing stealthily about the doors. "Is that you, Tammas?" she said again and again, peering out into the night: but nobody appeared. Nor did he appear next day, or the next. After her first panic, Bauby gave out that he was with his master—that she had never expected him—in order to secure him from remark. But in her own mind horrible doubts arose. He had always been the most irreproachable of men; but what if, in the shock of this catastrophe, even Tammas should have taken to ill ways? Drink—that was the natural suggestion. Who can fathom the inscrutable attractions it has, so that men yield to it who never could have been suspected of such a weakness? Most women of the lower classes have the conviction that no man can resist it. Heart-wrung for his master, shamed to his soul for the credit of the house, had Rolls, too, after successfully combating temptation for all his respectable life, yielded to the demon? Bauby trembled, but kept her terrors to herself. She said he might come back at any moment—he was with his maister. Where else was it likely at such a time that he should be?

But Rolls was not with his master. He was on the eve of a great and momentous act. There were no superstitious alarms about him, as about Rintoul, and no question in his mind what to do. Before he left Dalrulzian that sad morning, he had shaped all the possibilities in his thoughts, and knew what he intended; and his conversation with Mr Monypenny gave substance and a certain reasonableness to his resolution. But it was not in his nature by one impetuous movement to precipitate affairs. He had never in his life acted hastily, and he had occasional tremors of the flesh which chilled his impulse and made him pause. But the interval, which was so bitter to his master, although all the lookers-on congratulated themselves it could do him no harm, was exactly what Rolls wanted in the extraordinary crisis to which he had come. A humble person, quite unheroic in his habits as in his antecedents, it was scarcely to be expected that the extraordinary project which had entered his mind should have been carried out with the enthusiastic impulse of romantic youth. But few youths, however romantic, would have entertained such a purpose as that which now occupied Rolls. There are many who would risk a great deal to smuggle an illustrious prisoner out of his prison. But this was an enterprise of a very different kind. He left Mr Monypenny with his head full of thoughts which were not all heroic. None of his inquiries had been made without meaning. The self-devotion which was in him was of a sober kind, not the devotion of a Highland clansman, an Evan Dhu; and though the extraordinary expedient he had planned appeared to him more and not less alarming than the reality, his own self-sacrifice was not without a certain calculation and caution too.

All these things had been seriously weighed and balanced in his mind. He had considered his sister's interest, and even his own eventual advantage. He had never neglected these primary objects of life, and he did not do so now. But though all was taken into account and carefully considered, Rolls's first magnanimous purpose was never shaken; and the use he made of the important breathing-time of these intervening days was characteristic. He had, like most men, floating in his mind several things which he intended "some time" to do,—a vague intention which, in the common course of affairs, is never carried out. One of these things was to pay a visit to Edinburgh. Edinburgh to Rolls was as much as London and Paris and Rome made into one. All his patriotic feelings, all that respect for antiquity which is natural to the mind of a Scot, and the pride of advancing progress and civilisation which becomes a man of this century, were involved in his desire to visit the capital of his own country. Notwithstanding all the facilities of travel, he had been there but once before, and that in his youth. With a curious solemnity he determined to make this expedition now. It seemed the most suitable way of spending these all-important days, before he took the step beyond which he did not know what might happen to him. A more serious visitor, yet one more determined to see everything and to take the full advantage of all he saw, never entered that romantic town. He looked like a rural elder of the gravest Calvinistic type as he walked, in his black coat and loosely tied white neckcloth, about the lofty streets. He went to Holyrood, and gazed with reverence and profound belief at the stains of Rizzio's blood. He mounted up to the Castle and examined Mons Meg with all the care of a historical observer. He even inspected the pictures in the National Collection with unbounded respect, if little knowledge, and climbed the Observatory on the Calton Hill. There were many spectators about the streets who remarked him as he walked about, looking conscientiously at everything, with mingled amazement and respect; for his respectability, his sober curiosity, his unvarying seriousness, were remarkable enough to catch an intelligent eye. But nobody suspected that Rolls's visit to Edinburgh was the solemn visit of a martyr, permitting himself the indulgence of a last look at the scenes that interested him most, ere giving himself up to an unknown and mysterious doom.

On the morning of the 24th, having satisfied himself fully, he returned home. He was quite satisfied. Whatever might now happen, he had fulfilled his intention, and realised his dreams: nothing could take away from him the gratification thus secured. He had seen the best that earth

contained, and now was ready for the worst, whatever that might be. Great and strange sights, prodigies unknown to his fathers, were befitting and natural objects to occupy him at this moment of fate. It was still early when he got back: he stopped at the Tinto Station, not at that which was nearest to Dalrulzian, and slowly making his way up by the fatal road, visited the scene of Torrance's death. The lodge-keeper called out to him, as he turned that way, that the road was shut up; but Rolls paid no heed. He clambered over the hurdles that were placed across, and soon reached the scene of the tragedy. The marks of the horse's hoofs were scarcely yet obliterated, and the one fatal point at which the terrified brute had dinted deeply into the tough clay, its last desperate attempt to hold its footing, was almost as distinct as ever.

The terrible incident with which he had so much to do came before him with a confused perception of things he had not thought of at the time, reviving, as in a dream, before his very eyes. He remembered that Torrance lay with his head down the stream—a point which had not struck him as important; and he remembered that Lord Rintoul had appeared out of the wood at his cry for help so quickly, that he could not have been far away when the accident took place. What special signification there might be in these facts Rolls was not sufficiently clear-headed to see. But he noted them with great gravity in a little notebook, which he had bought for the purpose. Then, having concluded everything, he set out solemnly on his way to Dunearn.

It was a long walk. The autumnal afternoon closed in mists; the moon rose up out of the haze—the harvest moon, with a little redness in her light. The landscape was dim in this mellowed vapour, and everything subdued. The trees, with all their fading glories, hung still in the haze; the river tinkled with a far-off sound; the lights in the cottages were blurred, and looked like huge vague lamps in the milky air, as Rolls trudged on slowly, surely, to the place of fate. It took him a long time to walk there, and he did not hurry. Why should he hurry? He was sure, went he ever so slowly, to arrive in time. As he went along, all things that ever he had done came up into his mind. His youthful extravagances—for Rolls, too, had once been young and silly; his gradual settling into manhood; his aspirations, which he once had, like the best; his final anchorage, which, if not in a very exalted post, nor perhaps what he had once hoped for, was yet so respectable. Instead of the long lines of trees, the hedgerows, and cottages which marked the road, it was his own life that Rolls walked through as he went on. He thought of the old folk, his father and mother; he seemed to see Bauby and himself and the others coming home in just such a misty autumn night from school. Jock, poor fellow! who had gone to sea, and had not been heard of for years; Willie, who 'listed, and nearly broke the old mother's heart. How many shipwrecks there had been among the lads he once knew! Rolls felt, with a warmth of satisfaction about his heart, how well it was to have walked uprightly, to have "won through" the storms of life, and to have been a credit and a comfort to all belonging to him. If anything was worth living for, that was. Willie and Jock had both been cleverer than he, poor fellows! but they had both dropped, and he had held on. Rolls did not want to be proud; he was quite willing to say, "If it had not been for the grace of God!——" but yet it gave him an elevating sense of the far superior pleasure it was to conquer your inclinations in the days of your youth, and to do well whatever might oppose. When the name of Rolls was mentioned by any one about Dunearn, it would always be said that two of them had done very well—Tammas and Bauby: these were the two. They had always held by one another; they had always been respectable. But here Rolls stopped in his thoughts, taking a long breath. After this, after what was going to happen, what would the folk say then? Would a veil drop after to-day upon the unblemished record of his life? He had never stood before a magistrate in all his days—never seen how the world looked from the inside of a prison, even as a visitor—had nothing to do, nothing to do with that side of the world. He waved his hand, as if separating by a mystic line between all that was doubtful or disreputable, and his own career. But now——Thus through the misty darkening road, with now a red gleam from a smithy, and now a softer glimmer from a cottage door, and anon the trees standing out of the mists, and the landscape widening about him, Rolls came on slowly, very seriously, to Dunearn. The long tower of the Town House, which had seemed to threaten and call upon Lord Rintoul, was the first thing that caught the eye of Rolls. The moon shone upon it, making a white line of it against the cloudy sky.

Mr Monypenny was at dinner with his family. They dined at six o'clock, which was thought a rather fashionable hour, and the comfortable meal was just over. Instead of wine, the good man permitted himself one glass of toddy when the weather grew cold. He was sitting between the table and the fire, and his wife sat on the other side giving him her company and consolation,—for Mr Monypenny was somewhat low and despondent. He had been moved by Sir James Montgomery's warm and sudden partisanship and belief of John Erskine's story; but he was a practical man himself, and he could not, he owned, shaking his head, take a sensational view. To tell him that there should have been just such an encounter as seemed probable—high words between two gentlemen—but that they should part with no harm done, and less than an hour after one of them be found lying dead at the bottom of the Scaur—that was more than he could swallow in the way of a story. To gain credence, there should have been less or more. Let him hold his tongue altogether—a man is never called upon to criminate himself—or let him say all. "Then you must just give him a word, my dear, to say nothing about it," said Mrs Monypenny, who was anxious too. "But that's just impossible, my dear, for he blurted it all out to the sheriff just as he told it to me." "Do you not think it's a sign of innocence that he should keep to one story, and when it's evidently against himself, so far as it goes?" "A sign of innocence!" Mr Monypenny said, with a snort of impatience. He took his toddy very sadly, finding no exhilaration in it. "Pride will prevent him departing from his story," he said. "If he had spoken out like a man, and called for help like a Christian, it would have been nothing. All this fuss is his own doing—a panic at the moment, and pride—pride now, and nothing more."

"If ye please," said the trim maid who was Mr Monypenny's butler and footman all in one—the "table-maid," as she was called—"there's one wanting to speak to ye, sir. I've put him into the office, and he says he can wait."

"One! and who may the one be?" said Mr Monypenny.

"Weel, sir, he's got his hat doon on his brows and a comforter aboot his throat, and he looks sore for-foughten, as if he had travelled all the day, and no' a word to throw at a dog; but I think it's Mr Rolls, the butler at Dalrulzian."

"Rolls!" said Mr Monypenny. "I'll go to him directly, Jeanie. That's one thing off my mind. I thought that old body had disappeared rather than bear witness against his master," he said, when the girl had closed the door.

"But oh, if he's going to bear witness against his master, it would have been better for him to disappear," said the sympathetic wife. "Nasty body! to eat folk's bread, and then to get them into trouble."

"Whesht with your foolish remarks, my dear: that is clean against the law, and it would have had a very bad appearance, and prejudiced the Court against us," Mr Monypenny said as he went away. But to tell the truth, he was not glad; for Rolls was one of the most dangerous witnesses against his master. The agent went to his office with a darkened brow. It was not well lighted, for the lamp had been turned down, and the fire was low. Rolls rose up from where he had been sitting on the edge of a chair as Mr Monypenny came in. He had unwound his comforter from his neck, and taken off his hat. His journey, and his troubled thoughts, and the night air, had limped and damped him; the starch was out of his tie, and the air of conscious rectitude out of his aspect. He made a solemn but tremulous bow, and stood waiting till the door was closed, and the man of business had thrown himself into a chair. "Well, Rolls—so you have come back!" Mr Monypenny said.

"Ay, sir, I've come back. I've brought you the man, Mr Monypenny, that did *yon*."

"Good Lord, Rolls! that did what? You take away my breath."

"I'll do it more or I'm done. The man that coupit yon poor lad Tinto and his muckle horse ower the brae."

Mr Monypenny started to his feet. "Do you mean to tell me—Lord bless us, man, speak out, can't ye! The man that——Are ye in your senses, Rolls? And who may this man be?"

"You see before you, sir, one that's nae better than a coward. I thought it would blow by. I thought the young master would be cleared in a moment. There was nae ill meaning in my breast. I did the best I could for him as soon as it was done, and lostna a moment. But my courage failed me to say it was me——"

"You!" cried Monypenny, with a shout that rang through the house.

"Just me, and no other; and what for no' me? Am I steel and airn, to take ill words from a man that was no master of mine? Ye can shut me up in your prison—I meant him no hairm—and hang me if you like. I'll no' let an innocent man suffer instead of me. I've come to give myself up."

CHAPTER XL.

"Dear Mr Erskine,—I do not know what words to use to tell you how pained and distressed we are—I speak for my mother as well as myself—to find that nothing has been done to relieve you from the consequence of such a ridiculous as well as unhappy mistake. We found my brother Robin as anxious as we were, or more so, if that were possible, to set matters right at once; but unfortunately on the day after, the funeral took up all thoughts: and what other obstacles intervened next day I cannot rightly tell, but something or other—I am too impatient and pained to inquire what—came in the way; and they tell me now that to-morrow is the day of the examination, and that it is of no use now to forestall justice, which will certainly set you free to-morrow. Oh, dear Mr Erskine, I cannot tell you how sick and sore my heart is to think that you have been in confinement (it seems too dreadful, too ludicrous, to be true), in confinement all these long days. I feel too angry, too miserable, to think of it. I have been crying, as if that would do you any good, and rushing up and down abusing everybody. I think that in his heart Robin feels it more than any of us: he feels the injustice, the foolishness; but still he has been to blame, and I don't know how to excuse him. We have not dared to tell poor Carry—though, indeed, I need not attempt to conceal from you, who have seen so much, that poor Carry, though she is dreadfully excited and upset, is not miserable, as you would expect a woman to be in her circumstances. Could it be expected? But I don't know what she might do if she heard what has happened to you. She might take some step of her own accord, and that would be not prudent, I suppose; so we don't tell her. Oh, Mr Erskine, did you ever think how miserable women are? I never realised it till now. Here am I, and, still more, here is my mother. She is not a child, or an incapable person, I hope! yet she can do nothing—nothing to free you. She is as helpless as if she were a baby. It seems to me ridiculous that Robin's opinion should be worth taking, and mine not; but that is quite a different matter. My mother can do nothing but persuade and plead with a boy

like Robin, to do that which she herself, at her age, wise as she is, good as she is, cannot do. As you are a man, you may think this of no importance; and mamma says it is nature, and cannot be resisted, and smiles. But if you suppose she does not feel it!—if she could have been your bail, or whatever it is, you may be sure you would not have been a single night in *that* place! but all that we can do is to go down on our knees to the men who have it in their power, and I, unfortunately, have not been brought up to go down on my knees. Forgive me for this outburst. I am so miserable to think where you are, and why, and that I—I mean *we*—can do nothing. What can I say to you? Dear Mr Erskine, our thoughts are with you constantly. My mother sends you her love.

"EDITH."

Edith felt perhaps that this was not a very prudent letter. She was not thinking of prudence, but of relieving her own mind and comforting John Erskine, oppressed and suffering. And besides, she was herself in a condition of great excitement and agitation. She had been brought back from Tinto, she and her mother, with a purpose. Perhaps it was not said to her in so many words; but it was certainly conveyed to the minds of the female members of the family generally that Millefleurs was at the end of his patience, and his suit must have an answer once for all. Carry had been told of the proposal by her mother, and had pledged herself to say nothing against it. And she had kept her promise, though with difficulty, reserving to herself the power to act afterwards if Edith should be driven to consent against her will. "Another of us shall not do it," Carry said; "oh, not if I can help it!" "I do not believe that Edith will do it," said Lady Lindores; "but let us not interfere—let us not interfere!" Carry, therefore, closed her mouth resolutely; but as she kissed her sister, she could not help whispering in her ear, "Remember that I will always stand by you—always, whatever happens!" This was at Lindores, where Carry, pining to see once more the face of the outer world since it had so changed to her, drove her mother and sister in the afternoon, returning home alone with results which were not without importance in her life. But in the meantime it is Edith with whom we have to do. She reached home with the sense of having a certain ordeal before her—something which she had to pass through, not without pain—which would bring her into direct antagonism with her father, and convulse the household altogether. Even the idea that she must more or less vex Millefleurs distressed and excited her; for indeed she was quite willing to admit that she was "very fond of" Millefleurs, though it was ridiculous to think of him in any other capacity than that of a brotherly friend. And it was at this moment she made the discovery that, notwithstanding the promises of Rintoul and Millefleurs, nothing had been done for John. The consequence was, that the letter which we have just quoted was at once an expression of sympathy, very warm, and indeed impassioned—more than sympathy, indignation, wrath, sentiments which were nothing less than violent—and a way of easing her own excited mind which nothing else could have furnished. "I am going to write to John Erskine," she said, with the boldness produced by so great a crisis; and Lady Lindores had not interfered. She said, "Give him my love," and that was all. No claim of superior prudence, or even wisdom, has been made for Lady Lindores. She had to do the best she could among all these imperfections. Perhaps she thought that, having expressed all her angry glowing heart to John, in the outflowing of impassioned sympathy, the girl would be more likely, in the reaction and fear lest she had gone too far, to be kind to Millefleurs; for who can gauge the ebbings and flowings of these young fantastic souls? And as for Lady Lindores's private sentiments, she would not have forced her daughter a hairbreadth; and she had a good deal of pain to reconcile herself to Millefleurs's somewhat absurd figure as the husband of Edith. But yet, when all is said, to give your child the chance of being a duchess, who would not sacrifice a little? If only Edith could make up her mind to it! Lady Lindores went no further. Nevertheless, when the important moment approached, she could not help, like Carry, breathing a word in her child's ear, "Remember, there is no better heart in existence," she said. "A woman could not have a better man." Edith, in her excitement, grasped her mother's arms with her two hands; but all the answer she gave was a little nervous laugh. She had no voice to reply.

"You will remember, Millefleurs, that my daughter is very young—and—and shy," said Lord Lindores, on the other side. He was devoured by a desire to say, "If she refuses you, never mind—I will make her give in;" which indeed was what he had said in a kind of paraphrase to Torrance. But Millefleurs was not the sort of person to whom this could be said. He drew himself up a little, and puffed out his fine chest, when his future father-in-law (as they hoped) made this remark. If Edith was not as willing to have him as he was to have her, she was not for Millefleurs. He almost resented the interference. "I have no doubt that Lady Edith and I will quite understand each other—whichever way it may be," Millefleurs added with a sigh, which suited the situation. As a matter of fact, he thought there could not be very much doubt as to the reply. It was not possible that they could have made him stay only to get a refusal at the end—and Millefleurs was well aware that the girls were very few who could find it in their hearts to refuse a future dukedom: besides, had it not been a friendship at first sight—an immediate liking, if not love? To refuse him now would be strange indeed. It was not until after dinner that the fated moment came. Neither Lord Lindores nor Rintoul came into the drawing-room; and Lady Lindores, having her previous orders, left the field clear almost immediately after the entrance of the little hero. There was nothing accidental about it, as there generally is, or appears to be, about the scene of such events. The great drawing-room, all softly lighted and warm, was never abandoned in this way in the evening. Edith stood before the fire, clasping her hands together nervously, the light falling warm upon her black dress and the gleams of reflection from its jet trimmings. They had begun

to talk before Lady Lindores retreated to the background to look for something, as she said; and Millefleurs allowed the subject they were discussing to come to an end before he entered upon anything more important. He concluded his little argument with the greatest propriety, and then he paused and cleared his throat.

"Lady Edith," he said, "you may not have noticed that we are alone." He folded his little hands together, and put out his chest, and made all his curves more remarkable, involuntarily, as he said this. It was his way of opening a new subject, and he was not carried out of his way by excitement as Edith was.

She looked round breathlessly, and said, "Has mamma gone?" with a little gasp—a mixture of agitation and shame. The sense even that she was false in her pretence at surprise—for did she not know what was coming?—agitated her still more.

"Yeth," said Millefleurs, drawing out his lisp into a sort of sigh. "I have asked that I might see you by yourself. You will have thought, perhaps, that for me to stay here when the family was in—affliction, was, to say the least, bad taste, don't you know?"

"No," said Edith, faltering, "I did not think so; I thought——"

"That is exactly so," said Millefleurs, seriously. "It is a great bore, to be sure; but you and I are not like two nobodies. The truth is, I had to speak to your father first: it seemed to be the best thing to do,—and now I have been waiting to have this chance. Lady Edith, I hope you are very well aware that I am—very fond of you, don't you know? I always thought we were fond of one another——"

"You were quite right, Lord Millefleurs," cried Edith, nervously; "you have been so nice—you have been like another brother——"

"Thanks; but it was not quite in that way." Here Millefleurs put out his plump hand and took hers in a soft, loose clasp—a clasp which was affectionate but totally unimpassioned. He patted the hand with his fingers as he held it in an encouraging, friendly way. "That's very pleasant; but it doesn't do, don't you know? People would have said we were, one of us, trifling with the other. I told Lord Lindores that there was not one other girl in the world—that is, in this country—whom I ever could wish to marry but you. He was not displeased, and I have been waiting ever since to ask; don't you think we might marry, Lady Edith? I should like it if you would. I hope I have not been abrupt, or anything of that sort."

"Oh no!—you are always considerate, always kind," cried Edith; "but, dear Lord Millefleurs, listen to me,—I don't think it would do——"

"No?" he said, with rather a blank air, suddenly pausing in the soft pat of encouragement he was giving her upon the hand; but he did not drop the hand, nor did Edith take it from him. She had recovered her breath and her composure; her heart fluttered no more. The usual half laugh with which she was in the habit of talking to him came into her voice.

"No?" said Millefleurs. "But, indeed, I think it would do very nicely. We understand each other very well; we belong to the same *milieu*" (how pleased Lord Lindores would have been to hear this, and how amazed the Duke!), "and we are fond of each other. We are both young, and you are extremely pretty. Dear Edith—mayn't I call you so?—I think it would do admirably, delightfully!"

"Certainly you may call me so," she said, with a smile; "but on the old footing, not any new one. There is a difference between being fond of any one, and being—in love." Edith said this with a hot, sudden blush; then shaking her head as if to shake that other sentiment off, added, by way of reassuring herself, "don't you know?" with a tremulous laugh. Little Millefleurs's countenance grew more grave. He was not in love with any passion; still he did not like to be refused.

"Excuse me, but I can't laugh," he said, putting down her hand; "it is too serious. I do not see the difference, for my part. I have always thought that falling in love was a rather vulgar way of describing the matter. I think we have all that is wanted for a happy marriage. If you do not love me so much as I love you, there is no great harm in that; it will come in time. I feel sure that I should be a very good husband, and you——"

"Would not be a good wife—oh no, no!" cried Edith, with a little shudder, shrinking from him; then she turned towards him again with sudden compunction. "You must not suppose it is unkindness; but think,—two people who have been like brother—and sister."

"The only time," said Millefleurs, still more seriously, "that I ever stood in this position before, it was the relationship of mother and son that was suggested to me—with equal futility, if you will permit me to say so;—brother and sister means little. So many people think they feel so, till some moment undeceives them. I think I may safely say that my feelings have never—except, perhaps, at the very first—been those of a brother,—any more," he added in a parenthesis, "than they were ever those of a son."

What Edith said in reply was the most curious request ever made perhaps by a girl to the man who had just asked her to marry him. She laid her hand upon his arm, and said softly, "Tell me about her!" in a voice of mild coaxing, just tempered with laughter. Millefleurs shook his head, and relieved his plump bosom with a little sigh.

"Not at this moment, dear Edith. This affair must first be arranged between us. You do not mean to refuse me? Reflect a moment. I spoke to your father more than a week ago. It was the day before the death of poor Mr Torrance. Since then I have waited, hung up, don't you know, like Mahomet's coffin. When such a delay does occur, it is generally understood in one way. When a lady means to say No, it is only just to say it at once—not to permit a man to commit himself, and leave him, don't you know, hanging on."

"Dear Lord Millefleurs——"

"My name is Wilfrid," he said, with a little pathos; "no one ever calls me by it: in this country not even my mother—calls me by my name."

"In America," said Edith, boldly, "you were called so by—the other lady——"

He waved his hand. "By many people," he said; "but never mind. Never by any one here. Call me Wilfrid, and I shall feel happier——"

"I was going to say that if you had spoken to me, I should have told you at once," Edith said. "When you understand me quite, then we shall call each other anything you please. But *that* cannot be, Lord Millefleurs. Indeed you must understand me. I like you very much. I should be dreadfully sorry if I thought what I am saying would really hurt you—but it will not after the first minute. I think you ought to marry *her*——"

"Oh, there would be no hindrance there," said Millefleurs; "that was quite unsuitable. I don't suppose it could ever have been. But with you," he said, turning to take her hand again, "dear Edith! everything is as it should be—it pleases your people, and it will delight mine. They will all love you; and for my part, I am almost as fond of dear Lady Lindores as I am of you. Nothing could be more jolly (to use a vulgar word—for I hate slang) than the life we should lead. I should take you *over there*, don't you know, and show you everything, as far as San Francisco if you like. I know it all. And you would form my opinions, and make me good for something when we came back. Come! let it be settled so," said Millefleurs, laying his other hand on Edith's, and patting it softly. It was the gentlest fraternal affectionate clasp. The hands lay within each other without a thrill in them—the young man kind as any brother, the girl in nowise afraid.

"Do you think," said Edith, with a little solemnity, from which it cost her some trouble to keep out a laugh, "that if I could consent (which I cannot: it is impossible), do you think it would not be a surprise, and perhaps a painful one, to—the other lady—if she heard you were coming to America *so*?"

Lord Millefleurs raised his eyes for a moment to the ceiling, and he sighed. It was a tribute due to other days and other hopes. "I think not," he said. "She was very disinterested. Indeed she would not hear of it. She said she regarded me as a mother, don't you know? There is something very strange in these things," he added, quickly forgetting (as appeared) his position as lover, and putting Edith's hand unconsciously out of his. "There was not, you would have supposed, any chance of such feelings arising. And in point of fact it was not suitable at all. Still, had she not seen so very clearly what was my duty——"

"I know now," said Edith; "it was the lady who—advised you to come home."

He did not reply directly. "There never was anybody with such a keen eye for duty," he said; "when she found out I hadn't written to my mother, don't you know, that was when she pulled me up. 'Don't speak to me,' she said. She would not hear a word. I was just obliged to pack up. But it was perfectly unsuitable. I never could help acknowledging that."

"Wilfrid," said Edith, half in real, half in fictitious enthusiasm,—for it served her purpose so admirably that it was difficult not to assume a little more than she felt—"how can you stand there and tell me that there was anything unsuitable in a girl who could behave so finely as that. Is it because she had no stupid little title in her family, for example? You have titles enough for half-a-dozen, I hope. Are you not ashamed to speak to one girl of another like that——"

"Thank you," said Millefleurs, softly,—"thank you; you are a darling. All you say is quite true. But she is not—exactly a girl. The fact is—she is older than—my people would have liked. Of course that was a matter of complete indifference to me."

"O—oh! of course," said Edith, faintly: this is a point on which girls are not sympathetic. She was very much taken aback by the intimation. But she recovered her courage, and said with a great deal of interest, "Tell me all about her now."

"Are you quite decided?" he said solemnly. "Edith,—let us pause a little; don't condemn me, don't you know, to disappointment and heartbreak, and all that, without sufficient cause. I feel sure we should be happy together. I for one would be the happiest man——"

"I could not, I could not," she cried, with a sudden little effusion of feeling, quite unintentional. A flush of hot colour ran over her, her eyes filled with tears. She looked at him involuntarily, almost unconscious, with a certain appeal, which she herself only half understood, in her eyes. But Millefleurs understood, not at the half word, as the French say, but at the half thought which he discovered in the delicate transparent soul looking at him through those two involuntary tears. He gazed at her for a moment with a sudden startled enlargement of his own keen little eyes. "To be sure!" he cried. "How was it I never thought of that before?"

Edith felt as if she had made some great confession, some cruel admission, she did not know what. She turned away from him trembling. This half comic interview suddenly turned in a moment to one of intense and overwhelming, almost guilty emotion. What had she owned to? What was it he made so sure of? She could not tell. But now it was that Millefleurs showed the perfect little gentleman he was. The discovery was not entirely agreeable to his *amour propre*, and wounded his pride a little; but in the meantime the necessary thing was to set Edith at her ease so far as was possible, and make her forget that she had in any way committed herself. What he did was to set a chair for her, with her back to the lamp, so that her countenance need not be revealed for the moment, and to sit down by her side with confidential calmness. "Since you wish it," he said, "and are so kind as to take an interest in her, there is nothing I should like so much as to tell you about my dear Miss Nelly Field. I should like you to be friends."

Would it were possible to describe the silent hush of the house while these two talked in this preposterous manner in the solitude so carefully prepared for them! Lord Lindores sat breathless in his library, listening for every sound, fixing his eyes upon his door, feeling it inconceivable that such a simple matter should take so long a time to accomplish. Lady Lindores in her chamber, still more anxious, foreseeing endless struggles with her husband if Millefleurs persevered, and almost worse, his tragical wrath and displeasure if Millefleurs (as was almost certain) accepted at once Edith's refusal, sat by her fire in the dark, and cried a little, and prayed, almost without knowing what it was that she asked of God. Not, surely, that Edith should sacrifice herself? Oh no; but that all might go well—that there might be peace and content. She did not dictate how that was to be. After a while both father and mother began to raise their heads, to say to themselves that unless he had been well received, Millefleurs would not have remained so long oblivious of the passage of time. This brought a smile upon Lord Lindores's face. It dried his wife's eyes, and made her cease praying. Was it possible? Could Edith, after all, have yielded to the seductions of the dukedom? Her mother felt herself struck to the heart by the thought, as if an arrow had gone into her. Was not she pleased? It would delight her husband, it would secure family peace, it would give Edith such a position, such prospects, as far exceeded the utmost hopes that could have been formed for her. Somehow, however, the first sensation of which Lady Lindores was conscious was a humiliation deep and bitter. Edith too! she said to herself, with a quivering smile upon her lips, a sense of heart-sickness and downfall within her. She had wished it surely—she had felt that to see her child a duchess would be a fine thing, a thing worth making a certain sacrifice for; and Millefleurs had nothing in him to make a woman fear for her daughter's happiness. But women, everybody knows, are inaccessible to reason. It is to be doubted whether Lady Lindores had ever in her life received a blow more keen than when she made up her mind that Edith was going to do the right thing, the prudent wise thing, which would secure family peace to her mother, and the most dazzling future to herself.

When a still longer interval had elapsed, and no one came to tell her of the great decision, which evidently must have been made, Lady Lindores thought it best to go back to the drawing-room, in which she had left Edith and her lover. To think that Edith should have found the love-talk of Millefleurs so delightful after all, as to have forgotten how time passed, and everything but him and his conversation, made her mother smile once more, but not very happily. When she entered the drawing-room she saw the pair at the other end of it, by the fire, seated close together, he bending forward talking eagerly, she leaning towards him, her face full of smiles and interest. They did not draw back, or change their position, as lovers do, till Lady Lindores, much marvelling, came close up to them, when Millefleurs, still talking, jumped up to find a chair for her. "And that was the last time we met," Millefleurs was saying, too much absorbed in his narrative to give it up. "An idea of duty like that, don't you know, leaves nothing to be said."

Lady Lindores sat down, and Millefleurs stood in front of the two ladies, with his back to the fire, as Englishmen love to stand. There was a pause—of extreme bewilderment on the part of the new-comer. Then Millefleurs said, in his round little mellifluous voice, folding his hands,—"I have been telling dear Edith of a very great crisis in my life. She understands me perfectly, dear Lady Lindores. I am very sorry to tell you that she will not marry me; but we are friends for life."

CHAPTER XLI.

Carry drove away from Lindores in the afternoon sunshine, leaning back in her corner languidly watching the slanting light upon the autumnal trees, and the haze in which the distance was hid, soft, blue, and ethereal, full of the poetry of nature. She had about her that soft languor and delicious sense of freedom from pain which makes convalescence so sweet. She felt as if she had got over a long and painful illness, and, much shattered and exhausted, was yet getting better, in a heavenly exemption from suffering, and perfect rest. This sense of recovery, indeed, is very different from the languor and exhaustion of sorrow; and yet without any intention of hers, it veiled with a sort of innocent hypocrisy those feelings which were not in consonance with her supposed desolation and the mourning of her widowhood. Her behaviour was exemplary, and her aspect all that it ought to be, everybody felt; and though the country-side was well aware that she had no great reason to be inconsolable, it yet admired and respected her for appearing to mourn. Her fragility, her paleness, her smile of gentle exhaustion and worn-out looks, did her unspeakable credit with all the good people about. They were aware that she had little enough to mourn for, but there are occasions on which nature demands hypocrisy. Any display of satisfaction at another's death is abhorrent to mankind. Carry in her convalescence was no

hypocrite, but she got the credit of it, and was all the better thought of. People were almost grateful to her for showing her husband this mark of respect. After all, it is hard, indeed, when a man goes out of this world without even the credit of a woman's tears. But Carry had no sorrow in her heart as she drove away from the door of her former home. It had not been thought right that she should go in. A widow of not yet a fortnight's standing may, indeed, drive out to get a little air, which is necessary for her health, but she cannot be supposed to be able to go into a house, even if it is her father's. She was kissed tenderly and comforted, as they took leave of her. "My darling Carry, Edith and I will drive over to see you to-morrow; and then you have the children," her mother said, herself half taken in by Carry's patient smile, and more than half desirous of being taken in. "Oh yes, I have the children," Carry said. But in her heart she acknowledged, as she drove away, that she did not even want the children. When one has suffered very much, the mere absence of pain becomes a delicious fact, a something actual, which breathes delight into the soul. Even when your back aches or your head aches habitually, to be free of that for half an hour is heaven; and Carry had the bewildering happiness before her of being free of it for ever. The world bore a different aspect for her; the air blew differently, the clouds floated with another motion. To look out over the plain, and away to the blue hills in the distance, with all their variety of slopes, and the infinite sweet depths of colour and atmosphere about them, was beyond all example delightful, quite enough to fill life and make it happy. In the heavenly silence she began to put her thoughts into words, as in her youth she had done always when she was deeply moved. Oh, who are they that seek pleasure in the world, in society, in feasts and merrymakings, when it is here, at their hand, ready for their enjoyment? This was her theme. The sunset upon the hills was enough for any one; he who could not find his happiness in that, where would he find it? Carry lay back in her corner, and felt that she would like to kiss the soft air that blew upon her, and send salutations to the trees and the sun. What could any one want more? The world was so beautiful, pain had gone out of it, and all the venom and the misery. To rest from everything, to lie still and get better, was of itself too exquisite. Carry had not for a long time written any of those little poems which Edith and Nora and some other choice readers had thought so lovely. Her tears had grown too bitter for such expression—and to feel herself flow forth once again into the sweet difficulties of verse was another delight the more. She was all alone, in deep weeds of widowhood, and almost every voice within twenty miles had within the last fortnight more than once uttered the words "Poor Lady Car!" but oh, how far from poor she felt herself! In what exquisite repose and peace was she mending of all her troubles!

Sometimes she would ask herself, with a wonder which enhanced the sweetness, Was it really all over—all over—come to an end, this nightmare which had blotted out heaven and earth? Was it possible? never to come back to her again round any corner, never to have any more power over her. Henceforward to be alone, alone—what word of joy! It is a word which has different meanings to different people. To many in Carry's position it is the very knell of their lives—to her there was a music in it beyond the power of words to say. Her weakness had brought that misery on herself: and now, was it possible that she was to fare so much better than she deserved, to get rid of it for ever? She drew a long breath, and imagined how different things might have been: she might have lived to be an old woman under that yoke; she might never have got free—her mind, nor her imagination, nor her life. She shuddered to think what might have been. But it was over, ended, finished, and she was free—done with it for ever. She had not deserved this; it was a happiness which it was scarcely possible to realise. Poor Carry, futile even in her anticipations of relief! It never occurred to her that the two little children to whom she was returning—now all her own, she was so foolish as to think—were pieces of Torrance, not done with, never to be done with as long as her life lasted; but she was as unconscious of that, as incapable of thinking of any harm to come from those round-faced, stolid babies, as—any other mother could be.

Thus she was driving along, very happy, very still, exhausted and languid and convalescent, with all the beautiful world before her, full of consolation and peace, when Trouble set out to meet her upon her way. Poor Lady Car! she had suffered so much,—did not life owe her a little quiet, a breathing moment—long enough to get better in—quite better, as we say in Scotland—and get the good of her deliverance? Indeed it seemed so: but to different souls different experiences. Some would have escaped, would have gone on softly, never quite getting over the dismal preface of their life to the sight of spectators, but in reality tasting the sweetness of repose—till the inevitable moment came, as it does to all, when the warfare has to be taken up again. But to Carry there was left no interval at all. She so delicate, so sensitive, all her nerves so highly strung, quiet would have been everything for her. But quiet she was not to have. Trouble set out from the gate of Dalrulzian while she rolled softly along to meet it, unconscious, thinking of nothing which could justify that sudden apparition—not a feeling in her going out towards it, or provoking the sight. The trouble which thus approached Lady Car was in the shape of Edward Beaufort, his tall figure slightly stooping, yet in the full vigour of manhood, his countenance gently despondent, a habitual sigh hanging, as it were, about him; the ends of his luxuriant beard lightly moved by the breeze. He walked somewhat slowly, musing, with nothing particular to do, and Carry caught sight of him for some time before they met. She gave a low cry and sat upright. Her convalescent heart lying so still, so sweetly silent and even in its gentle beatings, like a creature that had been hurt, and was coming softly to itself, leaped up with a bound and spring, and began to go again like a wild thing, leaping, palpitating, pulling at its leash. The first movement was terror—for though her tyrant was gone, the tradition of him was still upon her, and she could not get rid of the instinct all at once. "My God!" she said to herself in the silence, clasping her hands, "Edward!" with something of the wild passion of alarm which John Erskine had once seen. But then all in a moment again this terror subsided. Her sense of convalescence and repose flew away like the wind. A wild flood of joy and happiness rushed into her heart.

"Edward!"—for the first time, feeling herself carried away by a drowning and dazzling tide of life, which blinded and almost suffocated her, Carry realised in one moment what it meant to be free. The effect was too tremendous for any thought of prudence, any hesitation as to what his sentiments might be, or what was suitable to her own position. She called to the coachman to stop, not knowing what she did, and with her head and her hands stretched out from the window, met him as he came up.

For the first moment there was not a word said between them, in the excess of emotion, he standing below, she looking out from above, her white face surrounded by the widow's livery of woe, but suddenly flushed and glowing with life and love, and a kind of triumphant ecstasy. She had forgotten what it meant—she had not realised all that was in it; and now it burst upon her. She could not think, scarcely breathe—but held out her hands to him, with that look beyond words to describe. And he took them in the same way, and bent down his face over them, silent, not saying a word. The coachman and footman on the box thought it was excess of feeling that made this meeting so silent. They were sorry for their mistress, who was not yet able to meet any one with composure; and the low brief conversation that followed, sounded to them like condolence and sympathy. How astounded the men would have been, and the still landscape around them, with its houses hidden in the trees, and all its silent observers about, had they known what this colloquy actually was.

"Edward!" was the first word that was said—and then "Carry! Carry! but I ought not to call you so."

"Oh, never call me anything else," she cried; "I could not endure another name from you. Oh, can you forgive me, have you forgiven me? I have paid for it—bitterly, bitterly! And it was not my fault."

"I never blamed you. I have forgiven you always. My suffering is not older than my forgiveness."

"You were always better than I;" and then she added eagerly, not pausing to think, carried on by that new tide that had caught her, "it is over; it is all over now."

It was on his lips to say Thank God—but he reflected, and did not say it. He had held her hands all the time. There was nobody to see them, and the servants on the box were sympathetic and silent. Then he asked, "Will they let me go to you now?"

"You will not ask any leave," she said hastily—"no leave! There are so many things I have to say to you—to ask your pardon. It has been on my heart to ask your pardon every day of my life. I used to think if I had only done that, I could die."

"No dying now," he said, with her hands in his.

"Ah," she cried, with a little shudder, "but it is by dying I am here."

He looked at her pitifully with a gaze of sympathy. He was prepared to be sorry if she was sorry. Even over his rival's death Edward Beaufort felt himself capable of dropping a tear. He could go so far as that. Self-abnegation is very good in a woman, but in a man it is uncalled for to this degree. He could put himself out of the question altogether, and looked at her with the deepest sympathy, ready to condole if she thought proper. He was not prepared for the honesty of Carry's profound sense of reopening life.

"You have had a great deal to bear," he said, with a vague intention of consoling her. He was thinking of the interval that had elapsed since her husband's death; but she was thinking of the dismal abyss before, and of all that was brought to a conclusion by that event.

"More than you can imagine—more than you could believe," she said; then paused, with a hot blush of shame, not daring to look him in the face. All that she had suffered, was not that a mountain between them? She drew her hands out of his, and shrinking away from him, said, "When you think of that, you must have a horror of me."

"*I* have a horror of you!" he said, with a faint smile. He put his head closer as she drew back. He was changed from the young man she had known. His beard, his mature air, the lines in his face, the gentle melancholy air which he had acquired, were all new to her. Carry thought that no face so compassionate, so tender, had ever been turned upon her before. A great pity seemed to beam in the eyes that were fixed with such tenderness upon her. Perhaps there was not in him any such flood of rosy gladness as had illuminated her. The rapture of freedom was not in his veins. But what a look that was! A face to pour out all your troubles to—to be sure always of sympathy from. This was what she thought.

Then in the tremor of blessedness and overwhelming emotion, she awoke to remember that she was by the roadside—no place for talk like this. Carry had no thought of what any one would say. She would have bidden him come into the carriage and carried him away with her—her natural support, her consoler. There was no reason in her suddenly roused and passionate sense that never again must it be in any one's power to part them. Nor did she think that there could be any doubt of his sentiments, or whether he might still retain his love for her, notwithstanding all she had done to cure him of it. For the moment she was out of herself. They had been parted for so long—for so many miserable years—and now they were together. That was all—restored to each other. But still, the first moment of overwhelming agitation over, she had to remember. "I have so much to tell you!" she cried; "but it cannot be here."

"When shall I come?" he said.

Carry's impulse was to say "Now, now!" It seemed to her as if parting with him again would be tempting fate. For the first time since she had got her freedom, she put forth all her powers consciously, and controlled herself. It seemed to her the utmost stretch of self-denial when she said, "To-morrow," with a long-drawn breath, in which her whole being seemed to go out to him. The next moment the carriage was rolling along as it had done before, and Carry had dropped back into her corner, but not as she was before. Her entire world was changed. The glow of life which had come back to her was something which she had not known for years. It belonged to her early bloom, when she had no thought of ever being Lady Car or a great personage. It belonged to the time when Edward Beaufort was the lord of the ascendant, and nobody thought him beneath the pretensions of Carry Lindores. The intervening time had rolled away and was no more. She put her hands over her eyes to shut out everything but this that had been, and was, in spite of all obstacles. Her heart filled all the silence with tumultuous joyful beating. It was all over, the prison-time of her life—the evil time—gone like a bad enchantment—past and over, leaving no sign. It seemed to her that she could take up her life where she laid it down six years ago, and that all would be as though this interruption had never been.

CHAPTER XLII.

No morning ever broke which brought more exciting expectations than the morning of the 25th September in the various houses in which our history lies. Of the dozen people whose interests were concerned, not one but awoke early to the touch of the warm autumnal sunshine, and took up with a start of troubled energy, painful or otherwise, the burden of existence, of which for a few hours they had been partially oblivious. The women had the best of it, which is not usual; although in the mingled feelings of Lady Lindores, glad that her child had carried out her expectations, yet half sorry, now it was over, that Edith had not accepted the great matrimonial prize put into her hands—and in those of Edith herself, happy in having so successfully surmounted the incident Millefleurs, yet greatly disturbed and excited about the coming events as concerned John Erskine, and doubtful whether she ought to have written to him so very frank and undisguised a letter,—there was as much pain as pleasure. As for Carry, when she woke in the gloomy magnificence of Tinto, and all the warmth and glowing hopes of yesterday came back to her mind with a bound, there was nothing in her thoughts which prevented her lying still upon her pillows and letting the flood of light sweep into her heart, in a luxury of happiness and peace which was past describing. She did not for the moment even need to think of the meeting to come. Blessedness seemed suddenly to have become habitual to her once more. She woke to the delight of life. "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive." The past had flown away like a dream: was it a dream altogether, a nightmare, some dark shadow of fear and pain, from which the oppressed soul, having at last awoke, was free? Beaufort at Dalrulzian got up a similar feeling. He had been obliged to find himself something of a failure—but he, too, seemed to be restored to the hopes and the standing-ground of youth. He would now have no excuse to himself for his absence of energy and ambition. His youthful strength was still unimpaired, though he had made so much less of it than he ought. And now here were all the occasions for a fresh beginning—sympathy to support him and to inspire him. Not only would he be happy, but at last he would do something—he would carry out all hopes and prophecies of him now.

This was the brighter side—but in Lindores the sentiments of the chief personages in the house were not so pleasant. Lord Lindores was angry and humiliated, furious with his daughter and still more with his wife, who, he had no doubt, with her ridiculous romance, had filled the girl's head with follies—and not much less with Millefleurs, who had thus suffered himself to be foiled. But his disturbed cogitations were as nothing to the tumult of pain and alarm which rose up in Rintoul's mind when he opened his eyes to the morning light. When the young man awoke he had first a moment of bewildered consideration, what was the meaning of the confused sense of disaster of which he became instantly conscious—and then he sprang from his bed unable to rest, eager for movement or anything which would counterbalance the fever of the crisis. This was the day. He could delay no longer; he could not trifle with the situation, or leave things to chance after to-day. It would be a new beginning in his life. Hitherto all had gone on serenely enough. He had gone with the stream, he had never set himself in opposition to the world or its ways, never done anything to draw men's eyes upon him. But after to-day all would be changed. To-morrow his name would be telegraphed over all the world in newspaper paragraphs; to-morrow every fellow he had ever known would be saying: "Rintoul! what Rintoul? You never can mean?——" No, they would all feel it to be impossible. Rintoul who was so safe, who never got into scrapes, whom they even laughed at as a canny Scot, though he did not feel a Scot at all. It would be incredible to all who had ever known him. And what a scandal, what an outcry it would make! In his own family even! Rintoul knew that Carry was not a broken-hearted widow, and yet it seemed to him that, after she knew, she would never speak to him again. It made his heart sink to think of all the changes that in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, would become inevitable. His father, with what rage, and misery, and confusion of all his plans and hopes, would he hear it! with what consternation his mother and sister! As for himself, everything would be interrupted and set aside, his life in every way turned upside-down, his ambition checked, his hopes destroyed. And all this to save John Erskine from a certain amount of inconvenience! That was how at least it appeared to him—really from inconvenience, nothing more. John was not a man of rank like

himself, full in the eyes of the world—he was not responsible to a proud and ambitious father. A short term of imprisonment to him would be like a disagreeable visit, nothing more. Many people had to spend a certain part of every year, for instance, with an old uncle or aunt, somebody from whom they had expectations. It really would be little or nothing more than this. And it was not as if it had been anything disgraceful. The county would not think the worse of him; it was an accident, a thing that might have happened to any one. But to Rintoul how much more terrible! he the brother-in-law of the man, with a sort of interest in his death. He would have to leave his regiment. All his projects for life would be interrupted. By the time he was free again, he would be forgotten in society, and his name would be *flétri* for ever. These thoughts sent him pacing about his room with hasty steps, the perspiration standing on his forehead. All to save John Erskine, who was just as much to blame as he was—for the first quarrel was the one which had excited that unfortunate fellow; all to save from a little inconvenience another man!

Perhaps if he had been placed simply in front of the question whether he would let another man be punished for what he had done, Rintoul would have had spirit enough to say No; certainly if it had been put to him quickly for an instant decision, without time to think, he would have said No, and held by his honour. But something else more determined than himself stood before him. Nora! He might use sophistries for the confusing of his own intellect—but not hers. She would look at him, he knew how. She would turn away from him, he knew how. The anticipation of that glance of high scorn and unspoken condemnation made Rintoul tremble to the depths of his being. When he thought of it he braced himself up with a rapidity and certainty much unlike the previous hesitating strain of his thoughts. "It must be done," he said to himself. He might beguile himself with argument, but he could not beguile *her*. The thought might intrude upon him whether he had been wise to let her know—whether it might not have been better to keep it to himself; but, having done it, the question was now not only whether he was content to lose Nora —but if he was content to put up with her scorn and immeasurable contempt.

They all remarked how pale he was when he came to breakfast—ghastly pale, lines under his eyes, the corners of his mouth drooping; his hair, which he had tried hard to brush as usual, hung limp, and would not take its accustomed curl. Lady Lindores tortured him by useless inquiries about his health. "You are ill—I am sure you are ill. You must let me send for the doctor." "For goodness' sake, mother, let a fellow alone. I am as well as you are," had been his amiable answer. He all but swore at the servants, all but kicked the dog, who thrust with confiding importunity his head under his master's arm. The situation was intolerable to him—his thoughts were buzzing in his ears and all about him, so that he did not hear what the other people said; and they talked—with what frivolous pertinacity they talked!—about nothing at all, about the most trivial things; while he was balancing something that, in his excitement, he felt inclined to call life or death.

But, indeed, Rintoul's impressions as to the gaiety and lively conversation going on were as far as possible from the truth. There was scarcely any conversation, but a general embarrassment. Millefleurs was the only one who said much. He bore his disappointment so sweetly, and was so entirely master of the situation, that Lord Lindores grew more and more angry. He made various sharp replies, but the little Marquis took no heed. He gushed forth, like a flowing stream, a great many pleasant details about his going home. He was going home in a day or two. His visit to Lindores was one which he could never forget; it had gained him, he hoped, friends for life. Wherever he went he would carry with him the recollection of the kindness he had received. Thus he flowed forth, doing his best, as usual, to smooth down the embarrassment of the others. But the hour of the repast was somewhat terrible to everybody. Decorum required that they should all sit a certain time at the table, and make a fashion of eating. People have to eat will they nill they, that they may not betray themselves. They all came to the surface, so to speak, with a gasp, as Millefleurs said in his round and velvety voice, "I suppose you are going to Dunearn to this examination, Lord Lindores?"

"It is a private affair, not an open court; but to show an interest, I suppose I ought to be somewhere near——" was the answer; and there arose at that moment a howl of fright and pain from the dog, upon whom Rintoul had spilt a cup of tea. He got up white and haggard, shaking off the deluge from his clothes. "These brutes get insufferable," he cried; "why can we never have a meal without a swarm of them about?"

The proceedings had begun at Dunearn before any of the party from Lindores arrived there. Rintoul, who was the first to set out, walked, with a sort of miserable desire of postponing the crisis; and Lord Lindores, with a kind of sullen friendliness towards John, followed in his phaeton. They were both late, and were glad to be late; which was very different from Miss Barbara, who, wound up by anxiety to an exertion which she could not have believed herself capable of, had walked from her house, leaning on Nora's arm, and was waiting on the spot when John was driven up in a shabby old fly from Dunnottar. The old lady was at the door of the fly before it could be opened, putting out her hand to him. "My bonnie lad, you'll come to your luncheon with me at half-past one; and mind that you're not late," she said, in a loud, cheerful, and confident voice, so that every one could hear. She took no notice of the lookers-on, but gave her invitation and her greeting with a fine disdain of all circumstances. Nora, upon whom she was leaning, was white as marble. Her eyes were strained with gazing along the Lindores road. "Who are you looking for, Nora?" Miss Barbara had already asked half-a-dozen times. It was not much support she got from the tremulous little figure, but the old lady was inspired. She stood till John had passed into the Town House, talking to him all the time in a voice which sounded over all the stir of the little crowd which had gathered about to see him. "Janet cannot bide her dishes to be spoilt. You will be sure and come in time. I'll not wait for you, for I'm not a great walker; but

everything will be ready at half-past one."

When she had thus delivered her cheerful message, Miss Barbara turned homeward, not without another remark upon Nora's anxious gaze along the road. "You are looking for your fine friends from Lindores; we'll see none of them to-day," said the old lady resolutely, turning her companion away. She went on talking, altogether unaware how the girl was suffering, yet touched by a perception of some anxiety in her. "You are not to be unhappy about John Erskine," she said at last. These words came to Nora's ears vaguely, through mists of misery, anger, bitter disappointment, and that wrath with those we love which works like madness in the brain. What did she care for John Erskine? She had almost said so, blurting out the words in the intolerance of her trouble, but did not, restrained as much by incapacity to speak as by any other hindrance. To think that he for whom she was watching had proved himself incapable of an act of simple justice! to think that the man whom she had begun by thinking lightly of, but had been beguiled into loving she did not know how, sure at all events of his honour and manliness—to think that he should turn out base, a coward, sheltering himself at the cost of another! Oh, what did it matter about John Erskine? John Erskine was a true man—nothing could happen to him. Then there arose all at once in poor Nora's inexperienced brain that bitterest struggle on earth, the rally of all her powers to defend and account for, while yet she scorned and loathed, the conduct of the man she loved. It is easy to stand through evil report and good by those who are unjustly accused, who are wronged, for whom and on whose behalf you can hold your head high. But when, alas! God help them, they are base, and the accusation against them just! Nora, young, unused to trouble, not knowing the very alphabet of pain, fell into this horrible pit in a moment, without warning, without escape. It confused all her faculties, so that she could do nothing save stumble blindly on, and let Miss Barbara talk of John Erskine—as if John Erskine and the worst that could happen to him were anything, anything! in comparison with this passion of misery which Nora had to bear.

And she was so little used to suffering. She did not know how to bear. Spartans and Indians and all those traditionary Stoics are bred to it—trained to bear torture and make no sign; but Nora had never had any training, and she was not a Spartan or a Red Indian. She was a woman, which is perhaps next best. She had to crush herself down; to turn away from the road by which Rintoul might still appear; to go in to the quiet rooms, to the ordinary morning occupations, to the needle-work which Miss Barbara liked to see her do. Anything in the world would have been easier; but this and not anything else in the world was Nora's business. And the sunny silence of the gentle feminine house, only disturbed by Miss Barbara's ceaseless talk about John, closed round her. Janet came "ben" and had her orders. Agnes entered softly with her mistress's cap and indoor shawl. All went on as it had done for years.

This calm, however, was soon interrupted. The Lindores' carriage drew up at the door, with all the dash and splendour which distinguishes the carriage of a countess when it stops at a humble house. Miss Barbara had a standing prejudice against these fine half-foreign (as she supposed) people. She rose up with the dignity of an archduchess to receive her visitors. Lady Lindores was full of anxiety and sympathy. "We are as anxious as you can be," she said, kissing Miss Barbara warmly before the old lady could draw back.

"'Deed I cannot say that I am anxious at all," said Miss Barbara, with her head high. "A thing that never happened cannot be proved against any man. I am expecting my nephew to his luncheon at half-past one. As there's nothing against him, he can come to no harm. I will be glad to see your ladyship and Lady Edith to meet him—at half-past one," the old lady said, with marked emphasis. She had no inclination to allow herself to be intruded upon. But Edith attained what her mother failed to achieve. She could not conceal her agitation and excitement. She grew red and pale a dozen times in a minute. "Oh yes, Miss Barbara, I feel with you. I am not anxious at all!" she cried.

Why should she be anxious? what had she to do with John? Her flutter of changing colour touched Miss Barbara's heart in spite of herself. No, she would not be a suitable wife for John Erskine; an earl's daughter was too grand for the house of Dalrulzian. But yet——Miss Barbara could not help being mollified. She pushed an easy-chair towards the mother of this bonnie creature. "It will be a pleasure to him to hear that there are kind hearts caring for what happens to him. If your ladyship will do me the honour to sit down," she said, with punctilious yet suspicious respect.

"Papa is there now," said Edith, whispering to Nora; "and Lord Millefleurs came with us, and will bring us word how things are going. Rintoul started before any of us——"

"Rintoul!" said Nora—at least she thought she said it. Her lips moved, a warm suffusion of colour came over her, and she looked wistfully in Edith's face.

"He thought he would get to Dunearn before us,—but, after all, horses go faster than men. What is the matter? Are you ill, Nora?"

Nora was past making any reply. The cessation of pain, that is more, a great deal more, than a negative good. For the first moment, at least, it is bliss, active bliss—more than anything else known to men. Of course Nora, when she came to herself, explained that it was a sudden little spasm, a feeling of faintness,—something she was used to. She was quite well, she declared; and so it proved by the colour that came back to her face. "She has not been herself all the morning," said Miss Barbara; "she will be the better of young company—of somebody like herself."

After this the ladies tried to talk on indifferent subjects. There were inquiries to be made for Lady Caroline, "poor thing!" and she was described as being "better than we should have dared to hope," with as near an approach to the truth as possible; and then a scattered fire of remarks, now one, now another, coming to the front with sudden energy; while the others relapsed into the listening and strain of curiosity. Miss Barbara held her head high. It was she who was the most steady in the conversation. She would not suffer it to be seen that she had any tremor as to what was going on. But the girls were unequal to this fortitude. They fluctuated from red to white, and from white to red. They would stop in the middle of a sentence, their voices ending in a quaver, as if the wind had blown them out. Why should they be so moved? Miss Barbara noted it keenly, and felt with a thrill of pleasure that John was getting justice. Two of them!—the bonniest creatures in the county! How their rival claims were to be settled afterwards she did not inquire; but in the meantime, at the moment when he was under so dark a cloud, it warmed her heart to see him so much thought of: the Erskines always were so; they were a race that women loved and men liked, and the last representative was worthy of his sires.

Hours seemed to pass while the ladies thus held each other in a wonderful tension and restraint, waiting for the news: until a little commotion in the stair, a hurried step, brought them all to their feet with one impulse. It was little Millefleurs who rushed in with his hat pressed to his breast. "Forgive the intrusion," he cried, with pants of utterance; "I'm out of breath; I have run all the way. Erskine is coming after me with Lord Lindores." He shook hands with everybody vehemently in his satisfaction. "They let me in because I was the Duke's son, don't you know; it's convenient now and then; and I bolted with the news. But nobody presents me to Miss Erskine," he said, aggrieved. "Madam, I am Millefleurs. I was Erskine's fag at Eton. I have run miles for him to buy his buns and jam; but I was slimmer in those days."

Miss Barbara had sunk upon a chair. She said, with a panting of her ample bosom as if she had been running too, "You are too kind, my Lord Millefleurs. I told John Erskine to be here at half-past one to his luncheon. You will all wait and meet him. You will wait and meet him——" She repeated the words with a little sob of age, half laughter half tears. "The Lord be praised!—though I never had any doubt of it," the proud old lady said.

"It has all come perfectly clear," said Millefleurs, pleased with his position as the centre of this eager group. "The right man, the person to whom it really happened, has come forward most honourably and given himself up. I don't clearly understand all the rights of the story. But there it is; the man couldn't stand it, don't you know. I suppose he thought nothing would ever be found out; and when he heard that Erskine was suspected and taken, he was stunned at first. Of course he should have produced himself at once; but all's well that ends well. He has done it now."

"The man—that did it?" It was Nora that said this, gazing at him with perfectly colourless cheeks, standing out in the middle of the room, apart from the others, who were for the moment too completely satisfied with the news to ask more.

"Don't think it is crime," said Millefleurs, soothingly. "There is every reason to conclude that accident will be the verdict. In the meantime, I suppose he will be committed for trial; but all these are details, don't you know," he said, in his smooth voice. "The chief thing is, that our friend is clear and at liberty; and in a few minutes he'll be here."

They scarcely noticed that Nora disappeared out of the room in the joyful commotion that followed. She went away, almost suffocating with the effort to keep her emotion down. Did he know of whom it was that he was speaking? Was it possible that he knew? the son of one, the brother of another—to Nora more than either. What did it mean? Nora could not get breath. She could not stay in the room, and see all their relieved, delighted faces, the undisturbed satisfaction with which they listened and asked their questions. Was the man a fool? Was he a creature devoid of heart or perception? An hour ago Nora had thought that Rintoul's absence from his post would kill her, that to see him do his duty was all she wanted on earth. But now the indifference of everybody around to what he had done, the ease with which the story was told, the unconsciousness of the listeners, was more intolerable to her than even that despair. She could not bear it. She hurried away, not capable of a word, panting for breath, choked by her heart, which beat in her throat, in her very ears—and by the anguish of helplessness and suspense, which was more than she could bear.

CHAPTER XLIII.

John Erskine had received Edith's letter that morning in his prison. His spirits were at a very low ebb when it was put into his hand. Four days' confinement had taken the courage out of him more effectually than any other discipline could have done; and though the prospect of his examination had brought in a counterbalancing excitement, he was by no means so sure that everything would come right as he had been at first. Having once gone wrong, why should it come right? If the public and the sheriff (or whatever the man was) could entertain such an idea for four days, why not for four years or a lifetime? When Edith's letter was put into his hand he was but beginning to awake, to brace himself up for an encounter with the hostile world. He had begun to say to himself that he must get his wits about him, and not permit himself to be sacrificed without an effort. And then, in a moment, up his heart went like a shuttlecock. *She* had no doubt about him, thank heaven! Her "dear Mr Erskine," repeated when it was not exactly

necessary, and which she had drawn her pen through, but so lightly that the cancelling of the words only made them emphatic, seemed to John to say everything that words could say. It said more, in fact, than Edith would ever have said had he not been in trouble and in prison; and then that outbreak about feminine impotence at the end! This was to John the sweetest pleasantry, the most delightful jest. He did not think of her indignation or bitterness as real. The idea that Lady Lindores and she would have been his bail if they could, amused him so that he almost shed tears over it; as well as the complaint that they could do nothing. Do nothing! who could do so much? If all went well, John said to himself, with a leap of his heart—if all went well! It was under the elation of this stimulant that he got ready to proceed to Dunearn; and though to drive there in the dingy fly with a guardian of the law beside him was not cheerful, his heart swelled high with the thought that other hearts were beating with anxiety for him. He thought more of that than of his defence; for to tell the truth, he had not the least idea how to manage his defence. Mr Monypenny had visited him again, and made him feel that truth was the last thing that was likely to serve him, and that by far his wisest plan would be to tell a lie and own himself guilty, and invent a new set of circumstances altogether. But he did not feel his imagination equal to this. He would have to hold by his original story, keep to the facts, and nothing more. But surely some happy fortune would befriend him. He was more excited, but perhaps less hopeful, when Miss Barbara met him at the door of the Town House. Her words did not give him the encouragement she intended. Her luncheon and her house and her confidence were for the moment intolerable to John, as are so often the well-meant consolations of his elders to a young man driven half frantic by warmer hopes and fears. He came to himself altogether when he stepped within the place in which he felt that his fate was to be decided. Though it was contrary to custom, several of his friends, gentlemen of the county, had been admitted by favour of the sheriff to be present at the examination, foremost among them old Sir James, who towered over the rest with his fine white head and erect soldierly bearing. Lord Lindores was admitted under protest when the proceedings were beginning; and after him, white with dust, and haggard with excitement, Rintoul, who kept behind backs, standing—so that his extremely agitated countenance, his lips, with a slight nervous quiver, as though he were about to speak, and eyes drawn together with a hundred anxious lines about them, were clearly apparent. John remarked this face over all the others with the utmost surprise. Rintoul had never been very cordial with him. What could be the reason for this extraordinary manifestation of interest now? John, from his too prominent place as the accused, had this agitated face confronting him, opposed to him as it seemed, half defying him, half appealing to him. Only the officials concerned—the sheriff, who was a little slow and formal, making unnecessary delays in the proceedings, and the other functionaries—could see as John could the face and marked position of Rintoul; and none of these personages took any notice. John only felt his eyes drawn to it instinctively. If all this passionate sympathy was for him, how could he ever repay Rintoul for friendship so unexpected? No doubt this was *her* doing too.

Just as the witnesses were about to be called who had been summoned—and of whom, though John was not aware of it, Rintoul, who had (as was supposed) helped to find the body, was one—an extraordinary interruption occurred. Mr Monypenny, who to John's surprise had not approached him or shown himself in his vicinity, suddenly rose, and addressing the sheriff, claimed an immediate stoppage of the proceedings, so far as Mr Erskine was concerned. He was a very clear-headed and sensible man; but he was a country "man of business"—a Scotch solicitor—and he had his own formal way of making a statement. It was so formal, and had so many phrases in it only half comprehensible to unaccustomed ears, that it was some time before the little group of friends were fully aware what the interruption meant.

Mr Monypenny announced, however, to the perfect understanding of the authorities present, that the person who had really encountered the unfortunate Mr Torrance last, and been concerned in the scuffle which no doubt unfortunately was the cause of the accident, had come to his house on the previous night and given himself up. The man's statement was perfectly clear and satisfactory, and would be supported by all the circumstantial evidence. He had kept back nothing, but displayed the most honourable anxiety to clear the gentleman who had been so unjustly accused and put to so much personal inconvenience.

"Is the man in court?" the sheriff asked.

"The man is here," said Mr Monypenny. The good man was conscious of the great effect he was producing. He looked round upon the group of gentlemen with thorough enjoyment of the situation; but he, too, was startled by the extraordinary aspect of Lord Rintoul. The young man was livid; great drops of perspiration stood on his forehead; the lines about his eyes were drawn tight, and the eyes themselves, two unquiet watchers, full of horror and astonishment, looked out wildly, watching everything that was done. His lips had dropped apart; he stood like a man who did not know what the next word might bring upon him.

"This is the man," Mr Monypenny said. Rintoul made a sudden step forward, striking his foot violently against the bench in front of him. The sheriff looked up angrily at the noise. There is something in a great mental struggle of any kind which moves the atmosphere around it. The sheriff looked up and saw three men standing at unequal distances before him: Mr Monypenny in front of his chair with somebody tranquil and insignificant beside him, and in the distance a face full of extraordinary emotion. "Will you have the goodness to step forward?" the sheriff said: and then stopping himself peevishly, "This is all out of order. Produce the man."

Rolls had risen quietly by Mr Monypenny's side. He was not like a brawler, much less an assassin. He was somewhat pale, but in his professional black coat and white tie, who could have

looked more respectable? He had "cleaned himself," as he said, with great care that morning. Haggard and unshaven as he had been on the previous night after his wanderings, he would scarcely have made so great a sensation as he did now, trim as a new pin, carefully shaved, carefully brushed. There was a half shout, half cry, from the little band of spectators, now thoroughly demoralised and incapable of keeping order. "Rolls, old Rolls!" John Erskine cried with consternation. Could this be the explanation of it? As for Rolls himself, the outcry acted upon him in the most remarkable way. He grew red and lost his temper. "It's just me, gentlemen," he said; "and can an accident not happen to a man in a humble condition of life as well as to one of you?" He was silenced at once, and the stir of amazement repressed; but nothing could prevent the rustle and whisper among the gentlemen, which would have become tumultuous had their presence there been more than tolerated. They all knew Rolls, and to connect him with such an event was impossible. The tragedy seemed over, and at the utmost a tragi-comedy, a solemn farce, had taken its place.

Rolls's statement, however, was serious enough. It was to the effect that he had met his master coming down from Tinto in the condition of which so much had been made, when he himself was going up to make a request to Mr Torrance about a lease—that he met Torrance close to the Scaur "coming thundering down the brae" in a state of excitement and temper such as it was well enough known Tinto was subject to. Rolls acknowledged that in such circumstances he ought not to have stopped him and introduced his suit—but this was merely an error of judgment. Tinto, he said, received his request very ill, and called his nephew—for whom he was going to plead—a ne'er-do-weel—which was not the case, let him say it that would. And here again Rolls was wrong, he allowed—it was another error of judgment—but he was not going to have his own flesh and blood abused. He stood up for it to Tinto's face that Willie Rolls was as respectable a lad as ever ploughed land. It was well known what Tinto was, a man that had no thought but a word and a blow. He rode at Rolls furiously. "I took hold of the beast's bridle to push her back,—what I could do. She would have had her hoofs on me in a moment." Then he saw with horror the rear, the bound back, the false step; and then horse and man went thundering over the Scaur. Rolls declared that he lost no time in calling for help—in trying all he could to save the victim. Lord Rintoul would bear him witness, for his lordship met him in the wood, routing like a wild beast. Nothing could be more consistent, more simple, than the whole story—it bore the stamp of truth on every line—or such at least was the conclusion of the sheriff, and the procurator, and the crier, and the town officer, and every official about the Town House of Dunearn.

The formidable examination which had excited so much interest terminated by the return of John's fly to Dunnotter, with the butler in it, very grave and impressive in the solemn circumstances. Rolls himself did not choose to consider his position lightly. He acknowledged with great respect the salutations of the gentlemen, who could not be prevented from crowding to the door of the fly after him. Sir James, who was the first, thrust something secretly into Rolls's hand. "They'll not treat you so well as they treated your master. You must fee them—fee them, Rolls," said the old general. "It'll be better than I deserve, Sir James," Rolls said. "Hoot! nothing will happen to you, man!" said Sir James. "He was well inspired to make a clean breast of it," Mr Monypenny said. "The truth before all—it's the best policy." "You're very kind to say sae, sir," said Rolls, solemnly. As he spoke he met the eye of Lord Rintoul, who stood behind fixing his regard upon the face of John's substitute. It was a trouble to Rolls to understand what the young lord could mean, "glowering" as he did, but saying nothing. Was he better aware of the facts of the case than any one suspected? might he come in with his story and shatter that of Rolls? This gave the old servant a little anxiety as he sat back solemnly in his corner, and was driven away.

It would be impossible to enumerate all the visitors who thronged into Miss Barbara Erskine's house that day. She had three more leaves put into her dining-table, and Janet added dish to dish with the wildest prodigality. Sir James Montgomery was one of those who "convoyed" John to his old relative's house. He walked upon one side of the hero, and Lord Lindores upon the other. "I will not conceal my fault from you, Miss Barbara," he said. "I thought when I heard his story first it was just the greatest nonsense. But it worked upon me—it worked upon me; and then Lady Montgomery, she would not hear a word."

"Women understand the truth when they hear it; it's none so often," Miss Barbara said, flushed with triumph and happiness. Rintoul had come in with the rest—or rather after the rest. He and John were the two who were somewhat out of all this tumult and rejoicing. They had not spoken to each other, keeping apart with an instinctive repugnance, silent in the midst of the rejoicing. But the rest of the company made up the deficiency. Such a luncheon! a duke's son from England, an earl, all the best men in the county: and Janet's dishes praised and consumed to the last morsel, and the best wine brought up from the cellar, and the house not big enough to contain the guests. Miss Barbara sat at the head of the table, with a little flush of triumph on her cheek. "It's like a marriage feast," she said to Sir James when they rose from the table.

"And I cannot see what should hinder it to be the forerunner—but the breakfast shall be at my house, Miss Barbara, since her parents have no house of their own here."

"Oh, who are you calling *her*?" said Miss Barbara, shaking her head; and as she spoke she turned towards a group in a corner—two young figures close together. Sir James's countenance grew long, but Miss Barbara's bloomed out in genial triumph. "It's not the first time," she said, "that we have had a lady o' title in Dalrulzian—and it will not be the last." The magic of rank had triumphed even over prejudice. There could be no denying that Lady Edith Erskine would be a bonnie name—and a bonnie creature too.

"I got your letter," John said. "I suppose an angel must have brought it. There is no telling how wretched I was before, or how happy after."

"No angel, but my mother's footman. I am afraid you thought it very bold, Mr Erskine. I was afraid after, that I had said too much."

"I think so too,—unless you mean it to kill me like a sweet poison; which it will do, unless there is more——"

"Mr Erskine, you have not quite come to yourself,—all this excitement has gone to your head."

"I want more," said John—"more!" And Edith's eyes sank before his. It was not like the affectionate proposals of Millefleurs, whose voice was audible now even through those low syllables so different in their tone. And Lady Lindores at that moment took her daughter by the arm. "Edith," she said, in a tone of fright, "Edith!" Oh foolish, foolish mother! had she never thought of this till now?

The window of the dining-room looked out into the garden. Nevertheless, it was possible to find a covert where two could talk and not be seen. And while the gentlemen rose from the table, and Lady Lindores came to her daughter's rescue, a very different group, two very agitated pale young people, stood together there, without a single demonstration of tenderness or even friendship, looking at each other with eager eyes. Or rather the girl looked at the man, whose courage had failed him, who stood before her like a culprit, not venturing to raise his eyes to her face. "What is the meaning of it?" she cried. "Oh, what is the meaning of it?" She stamped her foot upon the ground in her excitement and the intolerable trouble of her thoughts. "You told me—one thing; and now another has happened. What does it mean?"

"Nora," he said, clasping his hands, "don't be so hard upon me!"

"What does it mean?" she cried, her soft face growing stern, her nostrils dilating. "Either what you said is false, or this is false; and anyhow, you, you are false, Lord Rintoul! Oh, cannot you tell me what it means? Is it that you are not brave enough to stand up by yourself—to say, It was I——"

"For God's sake, Nora! I was ready, quite ready to do it, though it would have been ruin to me. I had made up my mind. But what could I do when this man stood up before me and said——He told the whole story almost exactly as—as it happened. I was stupefied; but what could I do? I declare to you, Nora, when old Monypenny got up and said 'The man is here,' I jumped up, I stood forward. And then I was confounded, I could not say a word." Here he approached a little nearer and put out his hand to take hers. "Why should I, Nora—now tell me why should I? when this other man says it was he. He ought to know," Rintoul added, with a groan of faint tentative humour in his voice. He did not know how far he might venture to go.

Once more Nora stamped her foot on the ground. "Oh, I cannot away with you!" she cried. It was one of Miss Barbara's old-fashioned phrases. She was at the end of her own. She would have liked, she thought, to strike him as he stood before her deprecating, yet every moment recovering himself.

"If another man chooses to take it upon him, why should I contradict him?" Rintoul said, with good sense unanswerable. "I was stunned with astonishment; but when you reflect, how could I contradict him? If he did it for John Erskine's sake, it would have spoiled the arrangement."

"John Erskine would never make any arrangement. If he had been to blame he would have borne it. He would not have shirked or drawn back!"

"You think better of John Erskine than of me, Nora. I do not know what it is, but I have no right to interfere. I'll give the old fellow something when it's all over. It is not for me he is doing it, whatever is his reason. I should spoil it all if I said a word. Will you forgive me now?" said Rintoul, with a mixture of calm reason and anxiety. He had quite recovered himself. And Nora, still in a flutter of slowly dissipating excitement, could find no argument against that sturdy good sense of his. For he was strong in sense, however worldly it might be.

"I cannot understand it at all. Do you know who the man was?" she said.

And then he laughed—actually laughed—though he was on the borders of desperation an hour ago. The echo of it seemed to run round the garden among the listening trees and horrified Nora. But at his next word she threw up her hands in consternation, with a cry of bewilderment, confusion, almost amusement too, though she would have thought that impossible,—"Old Rolls!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

John Erskine returned to Dalrulzian alone after this wonderful morning's work. He could scarcely believe that he was free to walk where he pleased,—to do what he liked. Four days is not a long period of time. But prison has an extraordinary effect, and his very limbs had seemed to tingle when he got the uncontrolled use of them again. Lord Lindores had driven him back as far as the gates of Lindores, and from thence he walked on, glad of the air, the sense of freedom and movement,—the silence in which to realise all that had passed. Enough had passed, indeed, to

give full occasion for thought; and it was only now that the extraordinary character of the event struck him. Rolls! to associate Rolls with a tragedy. In his excitement John burst into a wild fit of laughter, which echoed along the quiet road; then, horrified by the sound, drew himself quickly together, and went on with the gravest countenance in the world. But it must be added that this thought of Rolls was only momentary,—it came and went, and was dropped into the surrounding darkness, in which all accidents of common life were heaped together as insignificant and secondary, in comparison with one central consciousness with which his whole firmament was ablaze. He had demanded "More! more!" but had not received another word. No explanation had ensued. The mother had come in with soft authority, with a steadfast blank of all understanding. Lady Lindores would not see that they wanted to talk to each other. She had not ceased to hold her daughter by the arm, affectionately leaning upon her, until they went away: and Edith had not spoken another word—had not even met his anxious looks with more than the most momentary fugitive glance. Thus John had withdrawn in that state of half certainty which, perhaps, is more absorbing to the faculties and more transporting to the heart than any definite and indisputable fact ever can be. His whole being was in movement, agitated by a delicious doubt, by an eager breathless longing to know, which was sweeter than knowledge. All the romance and witchcraft of passion was in it, its most ethereal part

> "Hopes, and fears that kindle hopes—
> An indistinguishable throng;
> And gentle wishes long subdued,
> Subdued and cherished long."

Such was the potency of this charm, that, after he had thrown one thought at Rolls, and perceived the absurdity of the event, and given vent to the excited commentary of that laugh, John abandoned himself altogether to the sea of fancies, the questions, the answers, the profound trains of reasoning which belonged to that other unresolved and all-entrancing problem. He discussed with himself every word of Edith's letter, turning it over and over. Did it mean this? or peradventure, after all, did it only mean *that*? But if it meant that and not this, would she have so replied to his looks? would not she have said something more definitely discouraging when he appealed to her for More! more? She had not given him a word more; but she had replied with no stony look, no air of angry surprise or disdain, such as surely——Yet, on the other hand, might it not be possible that compassion and sympathy for his extraordinary circumstances, and the wrong he had undergone, might keep her, so sweet and good as she was, from any discouraging word? Only, in that case, would she have cast down her eyes *like that*? would they have melted into that unspeakable sweetness? So he ran on, as so many have done before him. He thought no more of the matter which had affected him so deeply for the last week, or of Torrance, who was dead, or of Rolls, who was in jail, than he did of last year's snow. Every interest in heaven and earth concentrated to him in these endless delightful questions. When a man, or, for that matter, a woman, is in this beatific agitation of mind, the landscape generally becomes a sort of blurr of light around them, and, save to the inward eye, which more than ever at such a moment is "the bliss of solitude," there is nothing that is very clearly visible. John saw this much, but no more, in Miss Barbara's old-fashioned dining-room—the genial gentlemen still at table, and Miss Barbara herself, in her white shawl, forming only a background to the real interest; and he perceived no more of the country round him as he walked, or the glow of the autumn foliage, the distance rolling away in soft blueness of autumnal mists to Tinto. He managed to walk along the road without seeing it, though it was so familiar, and arrived at his own gate with great surprise, unable to comprehend how he could have come so far. When he opened the gate, Peggy Fleming came out with her apron folded over her hands; but when she saw who it was, Peggy, forgetting the soap-suds, which showed it was washing day, flung up her red moist arms to the sky, and gave utterance to a wild "skreigh" of welcome and joy. For a moment John thought nothing less than that he was to be seized in those wildly waving and soapy arms.

"Eh, it's the master!" Peggy cried. "Eh, it's himsel'! Eh, it's lies, every word; and I never believed it, no' a moment!" And with that she threw her apron over her head and began to sob—a sound which brought out all her children, one after another, to hang upon her skirts and eagerly investigate the reason why.

The warmth of this emotional welcome amused him, and he paused to say a word or two of kindness before he passed on. But he had not anticipated the excitement with which he was to be received. When he came in sight of his own house, the first sound of his step was responded to by the watchers within with an anxious alacrity. A head popped out at a window; a white-aproned figure appeared from the back of the house, and ran back at the sight of him. And then there arose a "skreigh" of rapture that threw Peggy's altogether into the shade, and Bauby rushed out upon him, with open arms, and all her subordinates behind her, moist and flowing with tears of joy. "Eh, Mr John! Eh, my bonny man! Eh, laddie, laddie—that I should call you sae! my heart's just broken. And have you come hame? and have you come hame?"

"As you see," said John. He began to be rather tired of this primitive rejoicing, which presupposed that his detention had been a very serious matter, although by this time, in the crowd of other thoughts, it had come to look of no importance at all. But he remembered that he had a communication to make which, no doubt, would much lessen this delight; and he did not now feel at all disposed to laugh when he thought of Rolls. He took Bauby by the arm, and led her with him, astonished, into the library. The other maids remained collected in the hall. To them, as to Peggy at the lodge, it seemed the most natural thing to imagine that he had escaped, and might be pursued. The excitement rose very high among them: they thought instantly of all the

hiding-places that were practicable, each one of them being ready to defend him to the death.

And it was very difficult to convey to the mind of Bauby the information which John had to communicate. "Oh ay, sir," she said, with a curtsey; "just that. I was sure Tammas was at Dunnotter to be near his maister. He has a terrible opinion of his maister; but now you're back yoursel', there will be nothing to keep him."

"You must understand," said John, gently, "that Rolls—it was, I have no doubt, the merest accident; I wonder it did not happen to myself: Rolls—caught his bridle, you know——"

"Oh ay,—just that, sir," said Bauby; "but there will be nothing to keep him, now you're back yoursel'."

"I'm afraid I don't make myself plain," said John. "Try to understand what I am saying. Rolls—your brother, you know——"

"Oh ay," said Bauby, smiling broadly over all her beaming face, "he's just my brother—a'body kens that—and a real good brother Tammas has aye been to me."

John was at his wits' end. He began the story a dozen times over, and softened and broke it up into easy words, as if he had been speaking to a child. At last it gradually dawned upon Bauby, not as a fact, but as something he wanted to persuade her of. It was a shock, but she bore it nobly. "You are meaning to tell me, sir, that it was Tammas—our Tammas—that killed Pat Torrance, yon muckle man? Na,—it's just your joke, sir. Gentlemen will have their jokes."

"My joke!" cried John in horror; "do you think it is anything to joke about? I cannot understand it any more than you can. But it is fact;—it is himself that says so. He got hold of the bridle——"

"Na, Mr John; na, na, sir. What is the good of frightening a poor lone woman? The like of that could never happen. Na, na."

"But it is he himself who has said it; no one else could have imagined it for a moment. It is his own story——"

"And if it is," said Bauby—"mind ye, Mr John, I ken nothing about it; but I ken our Tammas,—if it is, he's just said it to save—ithers: that's the way of it. I ken him and his ways——"

"To save—others?" The suggestion bewildered John.

"Oh ay—it's just that," said Bauby again. She dried her eyes carefully with her apron, pressing a tear into each corner. "*Him* pit forth his hand upon a gentleman, and a muckle man like Pat Torrance, and a muckle beast! Na, na, Mr John! But he might think, maybe, that a person like him, no' of consequence—though he's of awfu' consequence to me," said Bauby, almost falling back into tears. She made an effort, however, and recovered her smile. "It's just a thing I can very weel understand."

"I think you must be out of your mind," cried her master. "Such things are not done in our day. What! play with the law, and take upon him another man's burden? Besides," said John, impatiently, "for whom? In whom could he be so much interested as to play such a daring game?"

"Oh ay, sir, that's just the question," Bauby said composedly. From time to time she put up her apron. The shock she had received was comprehensible, but not the consolation. To follow her in this was beyond her master's power.

"That is the question indeed," John said gravely. "I think you must be mistaken. It is very much simpler to suppose what was the case,—that he gripped at the brute's bridle to save himself from being ridden down. It is the most wonderful thing in the world that I did not do it myself."

"I'm thinking sae, sir," said Bauby, drily; and then she relapsed for a moment to the darker view of the situation, and rubbed her eyes with her apron. "What will they do with him?—is there much they can do with him?" she said.

She listened to John's explanations with composure, broken by sudden relapses into emotion; but, on the whole, she was a great deal more calm than John had expected. Her aspect confounded her master: and when at last she made him another curtsey, and folding her plump arms, with her apron over them, announced that "I maun go and see after my denner," his bewilderment reached its climax. She came back, however, after she had reached the door, and stood before him for a moment with, if that was possible to Bauby, a certain defiance. "You'll no' be taking on another man," she said, with a half-threatening smile but a slight quiver of her lip, "the time that yon poor lad's away?"

This encounter was scarcely over when he had another claim made upon him by Beaufort, who suddenly rushed in, breathless and effusive, catching him by both hands and pouring forth congratulations. It was only then that it occurred to John as strange that Beaufort had not appeared at Dunearn, or taken any apparent interest in his fate; but the profuse explanations and excuses of his friend had the usual effect in directing his mind towards this dereliction from evident duty. Beaufort overflowed in confused apologies. "I did go to Dunearn, but I was too late; and I did not like to follow you to your aunt's, whom I don't know; and then—and then——The fact is, I had an engagement," was the end of the whole; and as he said this, a curious change and movement came over Beaufort's face.

"An engagement! I did not think you knew anybody."

"No,—nor do I, except those I have known for years."

"The Lindores?" John said hastily,—"they were all at Dunearn."

"The fact is——" Here Beaufort paused and walked to the fire, which was low, and poked it vigorously. He had nearly succeeded in making an end of it altogether before he resumed. "The fact is,"—with his back to John,—"I thought it only proper—to call—and make inquiries." He cleared his throat, then said hurriedly, "In short, Erskine, I have been to Tinto." There was a tremulous sound in his voice which went to John's heart. Who was he that he should blame his brother? A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind.

"*Déjà!*" was all that John said.

"*Déjà*—yes; perhaps I ought to have waited. But when you reflect how long—how long it is: and all that has happened, and what we both have suffered——"

"Do you mean that you have gone over all that already?" John asked, amazed. But Beaufort made him no reply. The fumes of that meeting were still in his head, and all that he had said and all that had been said to him. The master of the house was scarcely out of it, so to speak; his shadow was still upon the great room, the staircases, and passages; but Carry had lived, it seemed to her years, since the decree of freedom was pronounced for her. If there was indecorum in his visit, she was unaware of it. To feel themselves together, to be able each to pour out to the other the changes in their minds, the difference of age and experience, the unchangeableness of the heart, was to them both a mystery—a wonder inscrutable. Beaufort did not care a brass farthing for John's escape; he had heard all about it, but he had not even taken it into his mind. He tried to put on a little interest now, and asked some confused questions without paying any attention to the answers he received. When they met at dinner they talked upon indifferent subjects, ignoring on both sides the things that were of the deepest interest. "Has not Rolls come back with you? Oh, I beg your pardon,—I forgot," said Beaufort. And John did not think very much more of Rolls, to tell the truth.

Lord Millefleurs went away a few days after; but Beaufort considered that, on the whole, it would suit him better to remain in Scotland a little longer. "What can I do for you?" he said; "the Duke is deceiving himself. You are quite as well able to look after yourself as I am. Why should I pretend to exercise functions which we all know are quite unnecessary? I have only just come, and Erskine is willing to keep me. I think I shall stay."

"My dear fellow," said little Millefleurs, "your sentiments are mine to a T; but we agreed, don't you know, that the Duke has a great many things in his power, and that it might be as well to humour him. You have eased his mind, don't you know,—and why shouldn't you get the good of it? You are too viewy and disinterested, and that sort of thing. But I am a practical man. Come along!" said Millefleurs. When Beaufort continued to shake his head, as he puffed out solemn mouthfuls of smoke, planting himself ever more deeply, as if to take root there, in his easy-chair, Millefleurs turned to John and appealed to him. "Make that fellow come along, Erskine; it will be for his good," the little Marquis said. There was a slight pucker in his smooth forehead. "Life is not plain sailing," he went on; "*les convenances* are not such humbug as men suppose. Look here, Beaufort, come along; it will be better for you, don't you know——"

"I am sick of thinking what is better for me," said Beaufort. "I shall please myself for once in my life. What have the *convenances* to do with me?" He did not meet the look of his junior and supposed pupil, but got up and threw away his cigar and stalked to the window, where his long figure shut out almost all the light. Little Millefleurs folded his plump hands, and shook his round boyish head. The other was a much more dignified figure, but his outline against the light had a limp irresolution in it. He knew that he ought to go away; but how could he do it? To find your treasure that was lost after so many years, and then go straight away and leave it—was that possible? And then, perhaps, it had flashed across Beaufort's mind, who had been hanging on waiting for fortune so long, and never had bestirred himself,—perhaps it flashed upon him that now—*now*—the Duke's patronage, and the places and promotions in his power, might be of less importance. But this was only a shadow flying like the shadows of the hills upon which he was gazing, involuntary, so that he was not to blame for it. Millefleurs went away alone next day. He took a very tender farewell of the ladies at Lindores, asking permission to write to them. "And if I hear anything of *her*, don't you know? I shall tell you," he said to Edith, holding her hand affectionately in both of his. "You must hear something of her—you must go and find her," said Edith. Millefleurs put his head on one side like a sentimental robin. "But it is quite unsuitable, don't you know?" he said, and drove away, kissing his hand with many a tender token of friendship. Lord Lindores could scarcely endure to see these evidences of an affectionate parting. He had come out, as in duty bound, to speed the parting guest with the proper smile of hospitable regret; but as soon as Millefleurs was out of sight, turned upon his heel with an expression of disgust. "He is a little fool, if he is not a little humbug. I wonder if he ever was in earnest at all?" This was addressed to Rintoul, who of late had avoided all such subjects, and now made no reply.

"I say, I wonder whether he ever meant anything serious at all?" said Lord Lindores, in a tone of irritation, having called his son into the library after him; "and you don't even take the trouble to answer me. But one thing he has done, he has invited you to Ess Castle; and as I suggested to you before, there is Lady Reseda, a very nice girl, in every way desirable——"

"I have had my leave already," said Rintoul, hastily. "It was kind of Millefleurs; but I don't see

how I can go——"

"I never knew before that there was any such serious difficulty about leave," said his father. "You can cut off your last fortnight here."

"I don't think that would do," said Rintoul, with a troubled look. "I have made engagements—for nearly every day."

"You had better speak out at once. Tell me, what I know you are thinking, that the Duke's daughter, because your father suggests her, is not to be thought of. You are all alike. I once thought you had some sense, Rintoul."

"I—I hope I have so still. I don't think it is good taste to bring in a lady's name——"

"Oh, d——n your good taste," cried the exasperated father; "a connection of this kind would be everything for me. What I am trying to obtain will, remember this, be for you and your children as well. You have no right to reap the benefit if you don't do what you can to bring it about."

"I should like to speak to you on—on the whole subject—some time or other," said the young man. He was like a man eager to give a blow, yet so frightened that he ran away in the very act of delivering it. Lord Lindores looked at him with suspicious eyes.

"I don't know any reason why you shouldn't speak now. It would be well that we should understand each other," he said.

But this took away all power from Rintoul. He almost trembled as he stood before his father's too keen—too penetrating eyes.

"Oh, don't let me trouble you now," he said, nervously; "and besides, I have something to do. Dear me, it is three o'clock!" he cried, looking at his watch and hurrying away. But he had really no engagement for three o'clock. It was the time when Nora, escaping from her old lady, came out for a walk; and they had met on several occasions, though never by appointment. Nora, for her part, would not have consented to make any appointment. Already she began to feel herself in a false position. She was willing to accept and keep inviolable the secret with which he had trusted her; but that she herself, a girl full of high-mindedness and honour, should be his secret too, and carry on a clandestine intercourse which nobody knew anything of, was to Nora the last humiliation. She had not written home since it happened; for to write home and not to tell her mother of what had happened, would have seemed to the girl falsehood. She felt false with Miss Barbara; she had an intolerable sense at once of being wronged, and wrong, in the presence of Lady Lindores and Edith. She would no more have made an appointment to meet him than she would have told a lie. But poor Nora, who was only a girl after all, notwithstanding these high principles of hers, took her walk daily along the Lindores road. It was the quietest, the prettiest. She had always liked it better than any other—so she said to herself; and naturally Rintoul, who could not go to Dunearn save by that way, met her there. She received him, not with any rosy flush of pleasure, but with a blush that was hot and angry, resolving that to-morrow she would turn her steps in a different direction, and that this should not occur again; and she did not even give him her hand when they met, as she would have done to the doctor or the minister, or any one of the ordinary passers-by.

"You are angry with me, Nora," he said.

"I don't know that I have any right to be angry. We have very little to do with each other, Lord Rintoul."

"Nora!" he cried; "Nora! do you want to break my heart. What is this? It is not so very long since!——"

"It is long enough," she said, "to let me see——It is better that we should not say anything more about that. One is a fool—one is taken by surprise—one does not think what it means——"

"Do you imagine I will let myself be thrown off like this?" he cried, with great agitation. "Nora, why should you despise me so—all for the sake of old Rolls?"

"It is not all for the sake of old Rolls."

"I will go and see him, if you like, to-day. I will find out from him what he means. It is his own doing, it is not my doing. You know I was more surprised than any one. Nora, think! If you only think, you will see that you are unreasonable. How could I stand up and contradict a man who had accused himself?"

"I was not thinking of Rolls," cried Nora, who had tried to break in on this flood of eloquence in vain. "I was thinking of——Lord Rintoul, I am not a person of rank like you—I don't know what lords and ladies think it right to do—but I will not have clandestine meetings with any one. If a man wants me, if he were a prince, he must ask my father,—he must do it in the eye of day, not as if he were ashamed. Good-bye! do not expect me to see you any more." She turned as she spoke, waved her hand, and walked quickly away. He was too much astonished to say a word. He made a step or two after her, but she called to him that she would not suffer it, and walked on at full speed. Rintoul looked after her aghast. He tried to laugh to himself, and to say, "Oh, it is that, is it?" but he could not. There was nothing gratifying to his pride to be got out of the incident at all. He turned after she was out of sight, and went home crestfallen. She never turned round, nor looked back,—made no sign of knowing that he stood there watching her. Poor Rintoul crept

along homeward in the early gloaming with a heavy heart. He would have to beard the lions, then —no help for it; indeed he had always intended to do it, but not now, when there was so much excitement in the air.

CHAPTER XLV.

Rolls in the county jail, sent hither on his own confession, was in a very different position from John Erskine, waiting examination there. He was locked up without ceremony in a cell, his respectability and his well known antecedents all ignored. Dunnotter was at some distance from the district in which he was known, and Thomas Rolls, domestic servant, charged with manslaughter, did not impress the official imagination as Mr Rolls the factotum of Dalrulzian had long impressed the mind of his own neighbourhood and surroundings. And Rolls, to tell the truth, was deeply depressed when he found himself shut up within that blank interior, with nothing to do, and nothing to support the *amour propre* which was his strength, except the inborn conviction of his own righteousness and exemplary position,—a sight for all men. But there is nothing that takes down the sense of native merit so much as solitude and absence of appreciation. Opposition and hostility are stimulants, and keep warm in us the sense of our own superiority, but not the contemptuous indifference of a surly turnkey to whom one is No. 25, and who cared not a straw for Rolls's position and career. He felt himself getting limp as the long featureless days went on, and doubts of every kind assailed him. Had he been right to do it? Since he had made this sacrifice for his master, there had come into his mind a chill of doubt which he had never been touched by before. Was it certain that it was John who had done it? Might not he, Rolls, be making a victim of himself for some nameless tramp, who would never even know of it, nor care, and whose punishment would be doubly deserved and worthy of no man's interference? Rolls felt that this was a suggestion of the devil for his discomfiture. He tried to chase it out of his mind by thinking of the pleasures he had secured for himself in that last week of his life—of Edinburgh Castle and the Calton Jail and the Earthen Mound, and the wonders of the Observatory. To inspect these had been the dream of his life, and he had attained that felicity. He had believed that this would give him "plenty to think about" for the rest of his life—and that, especially for the time of his confinement, it would afford an excellent provision; but he did not find the solace that he had expected in musing upon Mons Meg and the Scottish Regalia. How dreadful four walls become when you are shut up within them; how the air begins to hum and buzz after a while with your thoughts that have escaped you, and swarm about like bees, all murmurous and unresting—these were the discoveries he made. Rolls grew nervous, almost hysterical, in the unusual quiet. What would he not have given for his plate to polish, or his lamps to trim! He had been allowed to have what are called writing materials,—a few dingy sheets of notepaper, a penny bottle of ink, a rusty steel pen—but Rolls was not accustomed to literary composition; and a few books—but Rolls was scornful of what he called "novelles," and considered even more serious reading, as an occupation which required thought and a mind free of care. And nobody came to see him. He had no effusion of gratitude and sweet praise from his master. Mr Monypenny was Rolls's only visitor, who came to take all his explanations, and get a perfect understanding of how his case ought to be conducted. The butler had become rather limp and feeble before even Mr Monypenny appeared.

"I'm maybe not worthy of much," Rolls said, with a wave of his hand, "but I think there's one or two might have come to see me—one or two."

"I think so too, Rolls; but it is not want of feeling. I have instructions from Mr Erskine to spare no expense; to have the very best man that can be had. And I make no doubt we'll carry you through. I'm thinking of trying Jardine, who is at the very top of the tree."

"And what will that cost, if I may make so bold, Mr Monypenny?"

When he heard the sum that was needed for the advocate's fee, Rolls's countenance fell, but his spirit rose. "Lord bless us!" he said,—"a' that for standing up and discoursing before the Court! And most of them are real well pleased to hear themselves speak, if it were without fee or reward. I think shame to have a' that siller spent upon me; but it's a grand thing of the young master, and a great compliment: it will please Bauby too."

"He ought to have come to see you,—so old a servant, and a most faithful one," said Mr Monypenny.

"Well-a-well, sir, there's many things to be said: a gentleman has things to do; there's a number of calls upon his time. He would mean well, I make no doubt, and then he would forget; but to put his hand in his pocket like that! Bauby will be very well pleased. I am glad, poor woman, that she has the like of that to keep up her heart."

"Well, Rolls, I am glad to see that you are so grateful. Thinking over all the circumstances, and that you lost no time in giving the alarm, and did your best to have succour carried to him, I think I may say that you will be let off very easy. I would not be astonished if you were discharged at once. In any case it will be a light sentence. You may keep your mind easy about that."

"It's all in the hands of Providence," said Rolls. He was scarcely willing to allow that his position was one to be considered so cheerfully. "It will be a grand exhibition o' eloquence," he said; "and

will there be as much siller spent, and as great an advocate on the other side, Mr Monypenny? It's a wonderful elevating thought to think that the best intellects in the land will be warstlin' ower a simple body like me."

"And that is true, Rolls; they will just warstle over ye—it will be a treat to hear it. And if I get Jardine, he will do it *con amore*, for he's a sworn enemy to the Procurator, and cannot bide the Lord Advocate. He's a tremendous speaker when he's got a good subject; and he'll do it *con amore*."

"Well-a-well, sir; if it's con amoray or con onything else, sae long as he can convince the jury," said Rolls. He was pleased with the importance of this point of view; but when Mr Monypenny left him, it required all his strength of mind to apply this consolation. "If they would but do it quick, I wouldna stand upon the honour of the thing," he said to himself.

Next day, however, he had a visitor who broke the tedium very effectually. Rolls could not believe his eyes when his door suddenly opened, and Lord Rintoul came in. The young man was very much embarrassed, and divided, apparently, between a somewhat fretful shame and a desire to show great cordiality. He went so far as to shake hands with Rolls, and then sat down on the only chair, not seeming to know what to do next. At length he burst forth, colouring up to his hair, "I want to know what made you say that?—for you know it's not true."

Rolls, surprised greatly by his appearance at all, was thunderstruck by this sudden demand. "I don't just catch your meaning, my lord," he said.

"Oh, my meaning—my meaning is not very difficult. What are you here for? Is it on Erskine's account? Did he make any arrangement? What is he to do for you?" said Rintoul hurriedly. "It is all such a mystery to me, I don't know what to make of it. When I heard you say it, I could not believe my ears."

Rolls looked at him with a very steady gaze—a gaze which gradually became unbearable to the young man. "Don't stare at me," he cried roughly, "but answer me. What is the meaning of it?—that's what I want to know."

"Your lordship," said Rolls, slowly, "is beginning at the hinder end of the subjik, so far as I can see. Maybe ye will tell me first, my lord, what right ye have to come into a jyel that belangs to the Queen's maist sacred Majesty, as the minister says, and question me, a person awaiting my trial? Are ye a commissioner, or are ye an advocate, or maybe with authority from the Procurator himsel'? I never heard that you had anything to do with the law."

"I'm sure I beg your pardon," said Rintoul, subduing himself. "No; I've nothing to do with the law. I daresay I'm very abrupt. I don't know how to put it, you know; but you remember I was there—at least I wasn't far off: I was—the first person that came. They'll call me for a witness at the trial, I suppose. Can't you see what a confusing sort of thing it is for me. I *know*, you know. Don't you know I *know*? Why, how could you have done it when it was——Look here, it would be a great relief to me, and to another—to—a lady—who takes a great interest in you—if you would speak out plain."

The eyes of Rolls were small and grey,—they were not distinguished by any brightness or penetrating quality; but any kind of eyes, when fixed immovably upon a man's face, especially a man who has anything to hide, become insupportable, and burn holes into his very soul. Rintoul pushed away his chair, and tried to avoid this look. Then he perceived, suddenly, that he had appropriated the only chair, and that Rolls, whom he had no desire to irritate, but quite the reverse, was standing. He rose up hastily and thrust the chair towards him. "Look here," he said, "hadn't you better sit down? I didn't observe it was the only seat in the—room."

"They call this a cell, my lord, and we're in a jyel, not a private mansion. I'm a man biding the course of the law."

"Oh yes, yes, yes! I know all that: why should you worry me?" cried Rintoul. He wanted to be civil and friendly, but he did not know how. "We are all in a muddle," he said, "and don't see a step before us. Why have you done it? What object had he in asking you, or you in doing it? Can't you tell me? I'll make it all square with Erskine if you'll tell me: and I should know better what to do."

"You take a great interest in me—that was never any connection, nor even a servant in your lordship's family. It's awfu' sudden," said Rolls; "but I'll tell you what, my lord,—I'll make a bargain with you. If you'll tell me what reason you have for wanting to ken, I will tell you whatfor I'm here."

Rintoul looked at Rolls with a confused and anxious gaze, knowing that the latter on his side was reading him far more effectually. "You see," he said, "I was—somewhere about the wood. I—I don't pretend to mean that I could—see what you were about exactly,—but—but I *know*, you know!" cried Rintoul confusedly; "that's just my reason—and I want you to tell me what's the meaning? I don't suppose you can like being here," he said, glancing round; "it must be dreadful slow work,—nothing to do. You remember Miss Barrington, who always took so great an interest in you? Well, it was she——She—would like to know."

"Oh ay, Miss Nora," said Rolls. "Miss Nora was a young lady I likit weel. It was a great wish of mine, if we ever got our wishes in this world, that Dalrulzian and her might have drawn together. She was awfu' fond of the place."

"Dalrulzian and——! I suppose you think there's nobody like Dalrulzian, as you call him," cried Rintoul, red with anger, but forcing a laugh. "Well, I don't know if it was for his sake or for your sake, Rolls; but Miss Nora—wanted to know——"

"And your lordship cam' a' this gait for that young lady's sake? She is set up with a lord to do her errands," said Rolls. "And there's few things I would refuse to Miss Nora; but my ain private affairs are—well, my lord, they're just my ain private affairs. I'm no' bound to unburden my bosom, except at my ain will and pleasure, if it was to the Queen hersel'."

"That is quite true—quite true, Rolls. Jove! what is the use of making mysteries?—if I was ignorant, don't you see! but we're both in the same box. I was—his brother-in-law, you know; that made it so much worse for me. Look here! you let me run on, and let out all sort of things."

"Do you mean to tell me, Lord Rintoul, that it was you that pushed Pat Torrance over the brae?"

The two men stood gazing at each other. The old butler, flushed with excitement, his shaky old figure erecting itself, expanding, taking a commanding aspect; the young lord, pale, with anxious puckers about his eyes, shrinking backward into himself, deprecating, as if in old Rolls he saw a judge ready to condemn him. "We are all—in the same box," he faltered. "He was mad; he would have it: first, Erskine; if it didn't happen with Erskine, it was his good luck. Then there's you, and me——" Rintoul never took his eyes from those of Rolls, on whose decision his fate seemed to hang. He was too much confused to know very well what he was saying. The very event itself, which he had scarcely been able to forget since it happened, began to be jumbled up in his mind. Rolls—somehow Rolls must have had to do with it too. It was not he only that had seized the bridle,—that had heard the horrible scramble of the hoofs, and the dull crash and moan. He seemed to hear all that again as he stood drawing back before John Erskine's servant. Erskine had been in it. It might just as well have happened to Erskine; and it seemed to him, in his giddy bewilderment, that it had happened again also to Rolls. But Rolls had kept his counsel, while he had betrayed himself. All the alarms which he had gone through on the morning of the examination came over him again. Well! perhaps she would be satisfied now.

"Then it was none of my business," said Rolls. The old man felt as if he had fallen from a great height. He was stunned and silenced for the moment. He sat down upon his bed vacantly, forgetting all the punctilios in which his life had been formed. "Then the young master thinks it's me," he added slowly, "and divines nothing, nothing! and instead of the truth, will say till himself, 'That auld brute, Rolls, to save his auld bones, keepit me in prison four days.'" The consternation with which he dropped forth sentence after sentence from his mouth, supporting his head in his hands, and looking out from the curve of his palms with horror-stricken eyes into the air, not so much as noticing his alarmed and anxious companion, was wonderful. Then after a long pause, Rolls, looking up briskly, with a light of indignation in his face, exclaimed, "And a' the time it was you, my lad, that did it?—I'm meaning," Rolls added with fine emphasis, "my lord! and never steppit in like a gentleman to say, 'It's me—set free that innocent man'——"

"Rolls, look here!" cried Rintoul, with passion—"look here! don't think so badly till you know. I meant to do it. I went there that morning fully prepared. You can ask her, and she will tell you. When somebody said, 'The man's here'—Jove! I stepped out; I was quite ready. And then——you might have doubled me up with a touch;—you might have knocked me down with a feather—when I saw it was *you*. What could I do? The words were taken out of my mouth. Which of us would they have believed? Most likely they would have thought we were both in a conspiracy to save Erskine, and that he was the guilty one after all."

It was not a very close attention which Rolls gave to this impassioned statement. He was more occupied, as was natural, with its effect upon his own position. "I was just an auld eediot," he said to himself—"just a fool, as I've been all my born days. And what will Bauby say? And Dalrulzian, he'll think I was in earnest, and that it was just me! Lord be about us, to think a man should come to my age, and be just as great a fool! Him do it! No; if I had just ever thought upon the subjik; if I hadna been an eediot, and an ill-thinking, suspicious, bad-minded——Lord! me to have been in the Dalrulzian family this thirty years, and kenned them to the backbone, and made such a mistake at the end——" He paused for a long time upon this, and then added, in a shrill tone of emotion, shame, and distress, "And now he will think a' the time that it was really me!"

Rintoul felt himself sink into the background with the strangest feelings. When a man has wound himself up to make an acknowledgment of wrong, whatever it is, even of much less importance than this, he expects to gain a certain credit for his performance. Had it been done in the Town House at Dunearn, the news would have run through the country and thrilled every bosom. When he considered the passionate anxiety with which Nora had awaited his explanation on that wonderful day, and the ferment caused by Rolls's substitution of himself for his master, it seemed strange indeed that this old fellow should receive the confession of a person so much his superior, and one which might deliver him from all the consequences of his rashness, with such curious unconcern. He stood before the old butler like a boy before his schoolmaster, as much irritated by the carelessness with which he was treated as frightened for the certain punishment. And yet it was his only policy to ignore all that was disrespectful, and to conciliate Rolls. He waited, therefore, though with his blood boiling, through the sort of colloquy which Rolls thus held with himself, not interrupting, wondering, and yet saying to himself there could be no doubt what the next step must be.

"I am no' showing ye proper respect, my lord," said Rolls at last; "but when things is a' out of the ordinar like this, it canna be wondered at if a man forgets his mainners. It's terrible strange all

that's happened. I canna well give an account o't to myself. That I should been such an eediot, and you——maybe no' so keen about your honour as your lordship's friends might desire." Here he made a pause, as sometimes a schoolmaster will do, to see his victim writhe and tempt him to rebellion. But Rintoul was cowed, and made no reply.

"And ye have much to answer for, my lord," Rolls continued, "on my account, though ye maybe never thought me worth a thought. Ye've led me to take a step that it will be hard to win over—that has now no justification and little excuse. For my part, I canna see my way out of it, one way or another," he added, with a sigh; "for you'll allow that it's but little claim you, or the like of you, for all your lordship, have upon me."

"I have no claim," said Rintoul, hastily; and then he added, in a whisper of intense anxiety, "What are you going to do?"

Rolls rose up from his bed to answer this question. He went to the high window with its iron railings across the light, from which he could just see the few houses that surrounded the gates, and the sky, above them. He gave a sigh, in which there was great pathos and self-commiseration, and then he said, with a tone of bewilderment and despair, though his phraseology was not, perhaps, dignified,—"I'm in a hobble that I cannot see how to get out of. A man cannot, for his ain credit, say one thing one afternoon and another the next day."

"Rolls," said Rintoul, with new hope, coming a little closer, "we are not rich: but if I could offer you anything,—make it up to you, anyhow——"

"Hold your peace, my lord," said the old man testily—"hold your peace. Speak o' the vulgar!" he added to himself, in an undertone of angry scorn. "Maybe you think I did it for siller—for something I was to get!" Then he returned to his bed and sat down again, passing Rintoul as if he did not see him. "But the lad is young," he said to himself, "and it would be shairp, shairp upon the family, being the son-in-law and a'. And to say I did it, and then to say I didna do it, wha would put ony faith in me? I'm just committed to it one way or another. It's not what I thought, but I'll have to see it through. My Lord Rintoul," said Rolls, raising his head, "you've gotten me into a pretty pickle, and I canna see my way out of it. I'm just that way situate that I canna contradict mysel'—at least I will not contradict mysel'!" he added, with an angry little stamp of his foot. "They may say I'm a homicide, but no man shall say I'm a leear. It would make more scandal if I were to turn round upon you and convict ye out of your ain mouth, than if I were just to hold my tongue, and see what the High Court of Justeeciary will say."

"Rolls!" Rintoul could not believe his ears in the relief and joy. He wanted to burst forth into a thousand thanks, but dared not speak lest he should offend rather than please. "Rolls! if you will do me such a kindness, I shall never forget it. No words can tell what I feel. If I can do anything—no, no, that is not what I mean—to please you—to show my gratitude——"

"I am not one to flatter," said Rolls. "It would be for none of your sake—it would be just for myself, and my ain credit. But there are twa-three things. You will sign me a paper in your ain hand of write, proving that it was you, and no' me. I will make no use o't till a's blown over; but I wouldna like the master to go to his grave, nor to follow me to mine—as he would be sure to do—thinking it was me. I'll have that for a satisfaction. And then there's another bit maitter. Ye'll go against our young master in nothing he's set his heart upon. He is a lad that is sore left to himself. Good and evil were set before him, and he—did not choose the good. And the third thing is just this. Him that brings either skaith or scorn upon Miss Nora, I'll no' put a fit to the ground for him, if he was the king. Thir's my conditions, my Lord Rintoul. If ye like them, ye can give your promise—if no', no'; and all that is to follow will be according. For I'm no' a Lindores man, nor have naething to do with the parish, let alane the family: ye needna imagine one way or another that it's for your sake——"

"If you want to set up as overseer over my conduct," cried Rintoul hastily, "and interfere with my private concerns——"

"What am I heedin' aboot your lordship's private concerns? No me! They're above me as far as the castle's above the kitchen. Na, na. Just what regards young Dalrulzian, and anything that has to do with Miss Nora——"

"Don't bring in a lady's name, at least," cried Rintoul, divided between rage and fear.

"And who was it that brought in the lady's name? You can do it for your purpose, my lord, and I'll do't for mine. If I hear of a thing that lady's father would not approve of, or that brings a tear to her bonnie eyes, poor thing! poor thing!——"

"For heaven's sake, Rolls, hold that tongue of yours! Do you think I want an old fellow like you to teach me my duty to—to—the girl I'm going to marry! Don't drive a man mad by way of doing him a favour. I'm not ungrateful. I'll not forget it. Whatever I can do!——but for God's sake don't hit a fellow when he's down,—don't dig at me as if I hadn't a feeling in me," cried Rintoul. He felt more and more like a whipped schoolboy, half crying, half foaming at the mouth, with despite and humiliation. It is impossible to describe the grim pleasure with which Rolls looked on. He liked to see the effect of his words. He liked to bring this young lord to his knees, and enjoy his triumph over him. But there are limits to mortal enjoyment, and the time during which his visitor was permitted to remain with him was near an end. Rolls employed the few minutes that remained in impressing upon Rintoul the need for great caution in his evidence. "Ye maun take awfu' care to keep to the truth. Ye'll mind that a' ye have to do with is after you and me met. An oath is no' a

thing to play with,—an oath," said Rolls, shaking his grey head, "is a terrible thing."

Rintoul, in his excitement, laughed loud. "You set me an excellent example," he said.

"I hope so," said Rolls gravely. "Ye'll mind this, my lord, that the accused is no' on his oath; he canna be called upon to criminate himself—that's one of the first grand safeguards of our laws. Whatever ill posterity may hear of me, there's no' one in the country can say that Thomas Rolls was mansworn!"

Rintoul left Dunnotter with feelings for which it would be difficult to find any description in words. There was a ringing in his ears as he drove across the bare moorland country about Dunnotter, a dizzying rush of all his thoughts. He had the feeling of a man who had just escaped a great personal danger, and scarcely realises, yet is tremblingly conscious in every limb, of his escape. He threw the reins to his groom when he approached Dunearn, and walked through the little town in the hope of seeing Nora, notwithstanding her disavowal of him, to pour out into her ears—the only ones into which he could breathe it—an account of this extraordinary interview. But it was in vain that he traced with eager feet every path she was likely to take, and walked past Miss Barbara's house again and yet again, till the lamps began to be lighted in the tranquil streets and to show at the windows. The evening was chilly, and Rintoul was cold with agitation and anxiety. He felt more disconsolate than any Peri as he stood outside, and looking up saw the windows all closed so carefully, the shutters barred, the curtains drawn. There was no chance for him through these manifold mufflings, and he did not venture to go and ask for her, though she was so necessary to him,—not only his love and his affianced wife, as he said to himself, but his only confidant—the sole creature in the world to whom he dared to speak of that which filled his mind and heart. It was with the most forlorn sense of abandonment and desolation that he turned his face towards the house in which he was so important, and so much love awaited him, but where nobody knew even the A B C of his history. His only confidant was offended Nora, who had vowed to see him no more.

CHAPTER XLVI.

After this there ensued a brief pause in the history of the family in all its branches: it was a pause ominous, significant—like the momentary hush before a storm, or the torrent's smoothness ere it dashes below. The house of Lindores was like a besieged stronghold, mined, and on the eve of explosion. Trains were laid in all directions under its doomed bastions, and the merest breath, a flash of lightning, a touch of electricity anywhere, would be enough to bring down its defences in thunders of ruin. It seemed to stand in a silence that could be felt, throwing up its turrets against the dull sky—a foreboding about it which could not be shaken off. From every side assaults were preparing. The one sole defender of the stronghold felt all round him the storm which was brewing, but could not tell when or how it was to burst forth. Lord Lindores could scarcely have told whence it was that this vague apprehension came. Not from any doubt of Rintoul, surely, who had always shown himself full of sense, and stood by him. Not from Edith—who had, indeed, been very rebellious, but had done her worst. And as for Carry: Carry, it was true, was left unfettered and her own mistress, so to speak; but he had never found any difficulty with her, and why should he fear it now? An uneasiness in respect to her future had, however, arisen in his mind. She had made that violent protest against interference on the night of the funeral, which had given him a little tremor of alarm; but why should he anticipate danger, he said to himself? It might be needful, perhaps, to proceed with a little delicacy, not to frighten her—to go very softly; but Carry would be amenable, as she had always been. And thus he endeavoured to quiet the apprehensions within him.

There was one thing, however, which the whole family agreed upon, which was, in an uneasy sense, that the presence of Beaufort in their neighbourhood was undesirable. If they agreed in nothing else they agreed in this. It was a shock to all of them to find that he had not departed with Millefleurs. Nothing could be more decided than Rintoul was in this respect. So far as that went, he was evidently disposed to take to the full the same view as his father. And Edith, though she had been so rebellious, was perfectly orthodox here. It was not for some time after the departure of Millefleurs, indeed, that the ladies made the discovery, not only that Beaufort was still at Dalrulzian, but that he had been at Tinto. The latter fact had been concealed from Lord Lindores, but it added sadly to the embarrassment and trouble of the others. They were all heavy with their secrets—all holding back something—afraid to divulge the separate course which each planned to take for themselves. A family will sometimes go on like this for a long time with the semblance of natural union and household completeness, while it has in reality dropped to pieces, and holds together only out of timidity or reluctance on the part of its members to burst the bonds of tradition, of use and wont. But on one point they were still united. Carry was the one subject upon which all were on the alert, and all agreed. Rintoul had no eyes for Edith's danger, and Edith—notwithstanding many an indication which would have been plain enough to her in other circumstances—never even suspected him; but about Carry the uneasiness was general. "What is that fellow doing hanging about the place?—he's up to no good," Rintoul said, even in the midst of his own overwhelming embarrassments. "I wonder," was Lady Lindores's way of putting it—not without a desire to make it apparent that she disapproved of some one else—"I wonder how John Erskine, knowing so much as he does, can encourage Mr Beaufort to stay." "Mamma! how can you suppose he encourages him—can he turn him out of his house?" cried

Edith, flaming up in instant defence of her lover, and feeling her own guilt and hidden consciousness in every vein. There was no tender lingering now upon Beaufort's name, no hesitation or slip into the familiar "Edward." As for Rintoul, he had been providentially, as he felt, delivered from the necessity of speaking to his father of his own concerns, by being called away suddenly to the aid of a fellow officer in trouble. It tore his heart, indeed, to be out of reach of Nora; but as Nora would not see him, the loss was less than it might have been, and the delay a gain. Edith's story was in abeyance altogether; and their mourning, though it was merely of the exterior, brought a pause in the ordinary intercourse of social life. They did not go out, nor receive their neighbours—it was decorous to refrain even from the very mild current of society in the country. And this, indeed, it was which made the pause possible. Lord Lindores was the only member of the family who carried on his usual activities unbroken, or even stimulated by the various catastrophes that had occurred. He was more anxious than ever about the county hospitals and the election that must take place next year; and he began to employ and turn to his own advantage the important influence of the Tinto estate, which he, as the little heir's grandfather, was certainly entitled, he thought, to consider as his own. Little Tommy was but four; and though, by a curious oversight, Lord Lindores had not been named as a guardian, he was, of course, in the circumstances, his daughter's natural guardian, who was Tommy's. This accession of power almost consoled him for the destruction of his hopes in respect to Millefleurs. He reflected that, after all, it was a more legitimate way of making himself indispensable to his country, to wield the influence of a great landed proprietor, than by any merely domestic means; and with Tinto in his hands, as well as Lindores, no man in the county could stand against him. The advantage was all the greater, since Pat Torrance had been on the opposite side of politics, so that this might reasonably be concluded a county gained to the Government. To be sure, Lord Lindores was far too high-minded, and also too safe a man, to intimidate, much less bribe. But a landlord's legitimate influence is never to be undervalued; and he felt sure that many men who had been kept under, in a state of neutrality, at least, by Torrance's rough and brutal partisanship—would now be free to take the popular side, as they had always wished to do. The influence of Tinto, which he thus appropriated, more than doubled his own in a moment. There could not have been a more perfect godsend to him than Torrance's death.

But the more he perceived and felt the importance of this, the more did the presence of Beaufort disturb and alarm him. It became daily a more urgent subject in the family. When Lord Lindores got vague information that Carry had met somewhere her old lover on the roadside—which somebody, of course, saw and reported, though it did not reach his ears till long after—his dim apprehensions blazed into active alarm. He went to his wife in mingled anger and terror. To him, as to so many husbands, it always appeared that adverse circumstances were more or less his wife's fault. He told her what he had heard in a tempest of indignation. "You must tell her it won't do. You must let her know that it's indecent, that it's shameful. Good heavens, just think what you are doing!—letting your daughter, your own daughter, disgrace herself in the sight of the whole county. Talk about the perceptions of women! They have no perceptions—they have no moral sense, I believe. Tell Carry I will not have it. If you don't, I must interfere." Lady Lindores received this fulmination with comparative silence. She scarcely said anything in her own defence. She was afraid to speak lest she should betray that she had known more than her husband knew, and was still more deeply alarmed than he was. She said, "You are very unjust," but she said no more. That evening she wrote an anxious note to John Erskine; the next day she drove to Tinto with more anxiety than hope. Already a great change had come over that ostentatious place. The great rooms were shut up; the less magnificent ones had already begun to undergo a transformation. The large meaningless ornaments were being carried away. An air of home and familiar habitation had come about the house. Carry, in her widow's cap, had begun to move lightly up and down with a step quite unlike the languor of her convalescence. She was not convalescent any longer, but had begun to bloom with a soft colour and subdued air of happiness out of the cloud that had enveloped her so long. To see her so young (for her youth seemed to have come back), so fresh and almost gay, gave a wonderful pang of mingled pain and delight to her mother's heart: it showed what a hideous cloud that had been in which her life had been swallowed up, and to check her in her late and dearly bought renewal of existence was hard, and took away all Lady Lindores's courage. But she addressed herself to her task with all the strength she could muster. "My darling, I am come to—talk to you," she said.

"I hope so, mother dear; don't you always talk to me? and no one so sweetly," Carry said, with her lips upon her mother's cheek, in that soft forestalling of all rebuke which girls know the secret of. Perhaps she suspected something of what was coming, and would have stopped it if she could.

"Ah, Carry! but it is serious—very serious, dear: how am I to do it?" cried Lady Lindores. "The first time I see light in my child's eye and colour on her cheek, how am I to scold and threaten? You know I would not if I could help it, my Carry, my darling."

"Threaten, mamma! Indeed, that is not in your way."

"No, no; it is not. But you are mother enough yourself to know that when anything is wrong, we must give our darlings pain even for their own dear sakes. Isn't it so, Carry? There are things that a mother cannot keep still and see her dear child do."

Carry withdrew from behind her mother's chair, where she had been standing with one arm round her, and the other tenderly smoothing down the fur round Lady Lindores's throats. She came and sat down opposite to her mother, facing her, clasping her hands together, and looking at her with an eager look as if to anticipate the censure in her eyes. To meet that gaze which she had not seen for so long, which came from Carry's youth and happier days, was more and more

difficult every moment to Lady Lindores.

"Carry, I don't know how to begin. You know, my darling, that—your father is unhappy about you. He thinks, you know,—perhaps more than you or I might do,—of what people will say."

"Yes, mother."

Carry gave her no assistance, but sat looking at her with lips apart, and that eager look in her eyes—the look that in old times had given such a charm to her face, as if she would have read your thought before it came to words.

"Carry, dear, I am sure you know what I mean. You know—Mr Beaufort is at Dalrulzian."

"Edward? Yes, mother," said Carry, a blush springing up over her face; but for all that she did not shrink from her mother's eyes. And then her tone sunk into infinite softness—"Poor Edward! Is there any reason why he shouldn't be there?"

"Oh, Carry!" cried Lady Lindores, wringing her hands, "you know well enough—there can only be one reason why, in the circumstances, he should wish to continue there."

"I think I heard that my father had invited him, mamma."

"Yes. I was very much against it. That was when he was supposed to be with Lord Millefleurs—when it was supposed, you know, that Edith—and your father could not ask the one without asking the other."

"In short," said Carry, in her old eager way, "it was when his coming here was misery to me,—when it might have been made the cause of outrage and insult to me,—when there were plans to wring my heart, to expose me to——Oh, mother, what are you making me say? It is all over, and I want to think only charitably, only kindly. My father would have done it for his own plans. And now he objects when he has nothing to do with it."

"Carry, take care, take care. There can never be a time in which your father has nothing to do with you: if he thinks you are forgetting—what is best in your position—or giving people occasion to talk."

"I have been told here," said Carry, with a shiver, looking round her, "that no one was afraid I would go wrong; oh no—that no one was afraid of that. I was too proud for that." The colour all ebbed away from her face; she raised her head higher and higher. "I was told—that it was very well known there was no fear of that: but that it would be delightful to watch us together, to see how we would manage to get out of it,—and that we should be thrown together every day. That—oh no—there was no fear I should go wrong! This was all said to your daughter, mother: and it was my father's pleasure that it should be so."

"Oh Carry, my poor darling! No, dear—no, no. Your father never suspected——"

"My father did not care. He thought, too, that there was no fear I should go wrong. Wrong!" Carry cried, starting from her seat in her sudden passion. "Do you know, mother, that the worst wrong I could have done with Edward would have been whiteness, innocence itself, to what you have made me do—oh, what you have made me do, all those hideous, horrible years!"

Lady Lindores rose too, her face working piteously, the tears standing in her eyes. She held out her hands in appeal, but said nothing, while Carry, pale, with her eyes shining, poured forth her wrong and her passion. She stopped herself, however, with a violent effort. "I do not want even to think an unkind thought," she said—"now: oh no, not an unkind thought. It is over now—no blame, no reproach; only peace—peace. That is what I wish. I only admire," she cried, with a smile, "that my father should have exposed me to all that in the lightness of his heart and without a compunction; and then, when God has interfered—when death itself has sheltered and protected me—that he should step in, *par example*, in his fatherly anxiety, now!——"

"You must not speak so of your father, Carry," said Lady Lindores; "his ways of thinking may not be yours—or even mine: but if you are going to scorn and defy him, it must not be to me."

Carry put her mother down in her chair again with soft caressing hands, kissing her in an *accès* of mournful tenderness. "You have it all to bear, mother dear—both my indignation and his—what shall I call it?—his over-anxiety for me; but listen, mother, it is all different now. Everything changes. I don't know how to say it to you, for I am always your child, whatever happens; but, mamma, don't you think there is a time when obedience—is reasonable no more?"

"It appears that Edith thinks so too," Lady Lindores said gravely. "But, Carry, surely your father may advise—and I may advise. There will be remarks made,—there will be gossip, and even scandal. It is so soon, not more than a month. Carry, dear, I think I am not hard; but you must not—indeed you must not——"

"What, mother?" said Carry, standing before her proudly with her head aloft. Lady Lindores gazed at her, all inspired and glowing, trembling with nervous energy and life. She could not put her fears, her suspicions, into words. She did not know what to say. What was it she wanted to say? to warn her against—what? There are times in which it is essential for us to be taken, as the French say, at the half word, not to be compelled to put our terrors or our hopes into speech. Lady Lindores could not name the ultimate object of her alarm. It would have been brutal. Her lips would not have framed the words.

"You know what I mean, Carry; you know what I mean," was all that she could say.

"It is hard," Carry said, "that I should have to divine the reproach and then reply to it. I think that is too much, mother. I am doing nothing which I have any reason to blush for;" but as she said this, she did blush, and put her hands up to her cheeks to cover the flame. Perhaps this sign of consciousness convinced the mind which Lady Lindores only excited, for she said suddenly, with a tremulous tone: "I will not pretend to misunderstand you, mamma. You think Edward should go away. From your point of view it is a danger to me. But we do not see it in that light. We have suffered a great deal, both he and I. Why should he forsake me when he can be a comfort to me now?"

"Carry, Carry!" cried her mother in horror—"a comfort to you! when it is only a month, scarcely a month, since——"

"Don't speak of that," Carry cried, putting up her hands. "What if it had only been a day? What is it to me what people think? Their thinking never did me any good while I had to suffer,—why should I pay any attention to it now?"

"But we must, so long as we live in the world at all, pay attention to it," cried Lady Lindores, more and more distressed; "for your own sake, my dearest, for your children's sake."

"My children!—what do they know? they are babies; for my own sake? Whether is it better, do you think, to be happy or to be miserable, mother? I have tried the other so long. I want to be happy now. I mean," said Carry, clasping her hands, "to be happy now. Is it good to be miserable? Why should I? Even self-sacrifice must have an object. Why should I, why should I? Give me a reason for it, and I will think; but you give me no reason!" she cried, and broke off abruptly, her agitated countenance shining in a sort of rosy cloud.

There was a pause, and they sat and gazed at each other, or, at least, the mother gazed at Carry with all the dismay of a woman who had never offended against the proprieties in her life, and yet could not but feel the most painful sympathy with the offender. And not only was she anxious about the indecorum of the moment, but full of disturbed curiosity to know if any determination about the future had been already come to. On this subject, however, she did not venture to put any question, or even suggest anything that might precipitate matters. Oh, if John Erskine would but obey her—if he would close his doors upon the intruder; oh, if he himself (poor Edward! her heart bled for him too, though she tried to thwart him) would but see what was right, and go away!

"Dear," said Lady Lindores, faltering, "I did not say you might not meet—whoever you pleased—in a little while. Of course, nobody expects you at your age to bury yourself. But in the circumstances—at such a moment—indeed, indeed, Carry, I think he would act better, more like what we had a right to expect of him, if he were to consider you before himself, and go away."

"What we had a right to expect! What had you a right to expect? What have you ever done for him but betray him?" cried Carry, in her agitation. She stopped to get breath, to subdue herself, but it was not easy. "Mother, I am afraid of you," she said. "I might have stood against my father if you had backed me up. I am afraid of you. I feel as if I ought to fly away from you, to hide myself somewhere. You might make me throw away my life again,—buy it from me with a kiss and a smile. Oh no, no!" she cried, almost violently; "no, no, I will not let my happiness go again!"

"Carry, what is it? what is it? What are you going to do?"

Carry did not reply; her countenance was flushed and feverish. She rose up and stood with her arm on the mantelpiece, looking vaguely into her own face in the mirror. "I will not let my happiness go again," she said, over and over to herself.

John Erskine carried his own reply to Lady Lindores's letter before she returned from this expedition to Tinto. He, too, was one of those who felt for Lady Car an alarm which neither she nor Beaufort shared; and he had already been so officious as to urge strongly on his guest the expediency of going away,—advice which Beaufort had not received in, as people say, the spirit in which it was given. He had not been impressed by his friend's disinterested motives and anxiety to serve his true interests, and had roundly declared that he would leave Dalrulzian if Erskine pleased, but no one should make him leave the neighbourhood while he could be of the slightest comfort to *her*. John was not wholly disinterested, perhaps, any more than Beaufort. He seized upon Lady Lindores's letter as the pretext for a visit. He had not been admitted lately when he had gone to Lindores—the ladies had been out, or they had been engaged, or Lord Lindores had seized hold upon him about county business; and since the day when they parted at Miss Barbara's door, he had never seen Edith save for a moment. He set off eagerly, without, it is to be feared, doing anything to carry out Lady Lindores's injunctions. Had he not exhausted every argument? He hurried off to tell her so, to consult with her as to what he could do. Anything that brought him into contact and confidential intercourse with either mother or daughter was a happiness to him. And he made so much haste that he arrived at Lindores before she had returned from Tinto. The servant who opened the door to him was young and indiscreet. Had the butler been at hand, as it was his duty to be, it is possible that what was about to happen might never have happened. But it was a young footman, a native, one who was interested in the family, and liked to show his interest. "Her ladyship's no' at home, sir," he said to John; "but," he added, with a glow of pleasure, "Lady Edith is in the drawing-room." It may be supposed that John was not slow to take advantage of this intimation. He walked quite decorously after the man, but he felt as if he were tumbling head over heels in his eagerness to get there. When the door was

closed upon them, and Edith, rising against the light at the end of the room, in front of a great window, turned to him with a little tremulous cry of wonder and confusion, is it necessary to describe their feelings? John took her hands into both of his without any further preliminaries, saying, "At last!" with an emotion and delight so profound that it brought the tears to his eyes. And Edith, for her part, said nothing at all—did not even look at him in her agitation. There had been no direct declaration, proposal, acceptance between them. There was nothing of the kind now. Amid all the excitements and anxieties of the past weeks, these prefaces of sentiment seemed to have been jumped over—to have become unnecessary. They had been long parted, and they had come together "at last!"

It may probably be thought that this was abrupt,—too little anxious and doubtful on his part, too ready and yielding on hers. But no law can be laid down in such cases, and they had a right; like other people, to their own way. And then the meeting was so unexpected, he had not time to think how a lover should look, nor she to remember what punctilios a lady should require. That a man should go down on his knees to prefer his suit had got to be old-fashioned in the time of their fathers and mothers. In Edith's days, the straightforwardness of a love in which the boy and girl had first met in frank equality, and afterwards the man and woman in what they considered to be honest friendship and liking, was the best understood phase. They were to each other the only possible mates, the most perfect companions in the world.

"I have so wanted to speak to you," he cried; "in all that has happened this is what I have wanted; everything would have been bearable if I could have talked it over,—if I could have explained everything to *you*."

"But I understood all the time," Edith said.

There is something to be said perhaps for this kind of love-making too.

And the time flew as never time flew before—as time has always flown under such circumstances; and it began to grow dark before they knew: for the days were creeping in, growing short, and the evenings long. It need not be said that they liked the darkness—it was more delightful than the finest daylight; but it warned them that they might be interrupted at any moment, and ought to have put them on their guard. Lady Lindores might come in, or even Lord Lindores, which was worse: or, short of those redoubtable personages, the servants might make a sudden invasion to close the windows, which would be worst of all: even this fear, however, did not break the spell which enveloped them. They were at the end of the room, up against the great window, which was full of the grey evening sky, and formed the most dangerous background in the world to a group of two figures very close together, forming but one outline against the light. They might, one would think, have had sense enough to recollect that they were thus at once made evident to whosoever should come in. But they had no sense, nor even caution enough to intermit their endless talking, whispering, now and then, and listen for a moment to anything which might be going on behind them. When it occurred to Edith to point out how dark it was getting, John had just then entered upon a new chapter, and found another branch of the subject upon which there were volumes to say.

"For look here," he said, "what will your father say to me, Edith? I am neither rich nor great. I am not good enough for you in any way. No—no man is good enough for a girl like you—but I don't mean that. When I came first to Dalrulzian and saw what a little place it was, I was sick with disgust and disappointment. I know why now—it was because it was not good enough for you. I roam all over it every day thinking and thinking—it is not half good enough for her. How can I ask her to go there? How can I ask her father?"

"Oh how can you speak such nonsense, John. If it is good enough for you it is good enough for me. If a room is big or little, what does that matter? And as for my father——"

"It is your father I am afraid of," John said. "I think Lady Lindores would not mind; but your father will think it is throwing you away; he will think I am not good enough to tie your shoe—and he will be quite right—quite right," cried the young man, with fervour——

"In that case," said a voice behind them in the terrible twilight—a voice, at the sound of which their arms unclasped, their hands leapt asunder as by an electric shock; never was anything more sharp, more acrid, more incisive, than the sound,—"in that case, Mr Erskine, your duty as a gentleman is very clear before you. There is only one thing to do—Go! the way is clear."

"Lord Lindores!" John had made a step back in his dismay, but he still stood against the light, his face turned, astonished, towards the shadows close by him, which had approached without warning. Edith had melted and disappeared away into the gloom, where there was another shadow apart from the one which confronted John, catching on the whiteness of its countenance all the light in the indistinct picture. A sob, a quickened breathing in the background, gave some consciousness of support to the unfortunate young hero so rudely awakened out of his dream, but that was all.

"Her father, at your service,—entertaining exactly the sentiments that you have attributed to him, and only surprised that with such just views, a man who calls himself a gentleman——"

"Robert!" came from behind in a voice of keen remonstrance; and "Father!" with a cry of indignation.

"That a man who calls himself a gentleman," said Lord Lindores deliberately, "should play the

domestic traitor, and steal into the affections—what she calls her heart, I suppose—of a silly girl."

Before John could reply, his outline against the window had again become double. Edith stood beside him, erect, with her arm within his. The touch filled the young man with a rapture of strength and courage. He stopped her as she began to speak. "Not you, dearest, not you; I," he said: "Lord Lindores, I am guilty. It is true what you say, I ought to have gone away. Had I known in time, I should have gone away—('Yes, it would have been right:' this in an undertone to Edith, who at these words had grasped his arm tighter); but such things are not done by rule. What can I do now? We love each other. If she is not rich she would be happy with me—not great, but happy; that's something! and near home, Lord Lindores! I don't stand upon any right I had to speak to her—perhaps I hadn't any right—I beg your pardon heartily, and I don't blame you for being angry."

Perhaps it was not wonderful that the father thus addressed, with his wife murmuring remonstrance behind him, and his daughter before him standing up in defiance at her lover's side, should have been exasperated beyond endurance. "Upon my soul!" he cried. He was not given to exclamations, but what can a man do? Then after a pause,—"that is kind," in his usual sharp tone, "very kind; you don't blame me! Perhaps with so much sense at your command you will approve of me before all's done. Edith, come away from that man's side—this instant!" he cried, losing his temper, and stamping his foot on the ground.

"Papa! no, oh no—I cannot. I have chosen him, and he has chosen——"

"Leave that man's side. Do you hear me? leave him, or——"

"Robert! Robert! and for God's sake, Edith, do what your father tells you. Mr Erskine, you must not defy us."

"I will not leave John, mother; you would not have left my father if you had been told——"

"I will have no altercation," said Lord Lindores. "I have nothing to say to you, Edith. Mr Erskine, I hope, will leave my house when I tell him to do so."

"Certainly I will,—certainly! No, Edith darling, I cannot stay,—it is not possible. We don't give each other up for that; but your father has the best right in his own house——"

"Oh, this is insupportable. Your sentiments are too fine, Mr Erskine of Dalrulzian; for a little bonnet laird, your magnanimity is princely. I have a right, have I, in my own——"

Here there suddenly came a lull upon the stormy scene, far more complete than when the wind falls at sea. The angry Earl calmed down as never angry billows calmed. The pair of desperate lovers stole apart in a moment; the anxious, all-beseeching mother seated herself upon the nearest chair, and said something about the shortening of the days. This complete cessation of all disturbance was caused by the entrance of a portly figure carrying one lamp, followed by another slimmer one carrying a second. The butler's fine countenance was mildly illuminated by the light he carried. He gave a slight glance round him, with a serenity which made all these excited people shrink, in his indifferent and calmly superior vision. Imperturbable as a god, he proceeded to close the shutters and draw the curtains. John Erskine in the quiet took his leave like any ordinary guest.

The mine had exploded;—the mines were exploding under all the ramparts. This was the night when Rintoul came home from his visit; and Lady Lindores looked forward to her son's composure of mind and manner, and that good sense which was his characteristic, and kept him in agreement with his father upon so many points on which she herself was apt to take different views. It was the only comfort she could think of. Edith would not appear at dinner at all; and her mother was doubly afraid now of the explanation of Carry's sentiments which she would have to give to her husband. But Rintoul, she felt with relief, would calm everything down. He would bring in a modifying influence of outdoor life and unexaggerated sentiment. The commonplace, though it was one of the bitternesses of her life to recognise her son as its impersonification, is dearly welcome sometimes; and she looked forward to Rintoul's presence with the intensest relief. She gave him a hint when he arrived of her wishes: "Occupy your father as much as you can," she said. "He has had several things to think of; try and put them out of his head to-night."

"I think I can promise I will do that, mother," said Rintoul. The tone of his voice was changed somehow. She looked at him with a certain consternation. Was Saul also among the prophets? Had Rintoul something on his mind? But he bore his part at dinner like a man, and talked and told his stories of the world—those club anecdotes which please the men. It was only after she had left the dining-room that Rintoul fell silent for a little. But before his father could so much as begin to confide to him what had happened in the afternoon, Rintoul drew his chair close to the table, planted his elbow upon it to support himself, and looked steadily into his father's face. "I should like to talk to you, if you don't mind—about myself," he said.

CHAPTER XLVII.

The profoundest of the many wounds inflicted upon Lord Lindores, at this terrible period of his life, was that which he thus received at the hands of Rintoul: it was so altogether unexpected, so

unlike anything that he had imagined of his son, so sudden, that it took away his breath. For the first moment he could not speak in the bitterness of his disappointment and outraged expectations. Rintoul had always been the strictly reasonable member of his family,—he had never given in to any sentimental nonsense. His reasoning had all been upon substantial data, and led to distinct conclusions. He had not looked at things in any visionary way, but as they were contemplated by the world in general. From the point of view of personal advantage and family progress, nothing could have been more judicious or sound than his opinions in respect to Carry and Edith. He had supported the Tinto marriage (which had on the whole turned out so well, better than could have been hoped—the man, the only objectionable feature in it, being now dead and out of the way, and all the substantial advantages secured) quietly but firmly. He had been very earnest about Millefleurs. It was no fault of his if that arrangement had proved unsuccessful. In all these concerns, Lord Lindores had found his son his right hand, supporting him steadily. He could not help reminding him of this now, after the first outburst of his wrath and mortification. "You," he said at length, "Rintoul! I have been prepared for folly on the part of your sisters, but I have always felt I had a tower of strength in you."

"There is no difference in me," said Rintoul,—"I should be just as ready to back you up about the girls as ever I was; but if you will recollect, I never said a word about myself. I consider it as our duty to look after the girls. For one thing, they are not so well qualified to judge for themselves. They see things all from one side. They don't know the world. I wouldn't let them sacrifice their prospects to a bit of silly sentiment; but I never said a word about myself. That's different. A man has a right to please himself as to who he's going to marry, if he marries at all. Most fellows don't marry at all—at least it's usual to say so; I don't know that it's true. If you'll remember, when you spoke to me of Lady Reseda, I never said anything one way or another. I have never committed myself. It has always been my determination in this respect to take my own way."

Lord Lindores was subdued by this calm speech. He was almost cowed by it. It was very different from Carry's tears, and even from Edith's impassioned defiance. Rintoul knew perfectly well what he was about. There was no excitement to speak of in his steady confidence in his own power. And his father knew very well that there was nothing to be done. A family scandal might indeed be made: a breach in their relations,—a quarrel which would amuse the world. He might withdraw Rintoul's allowance, or refuse to increase it, but this, though vexatious, was not in any way final; for the estates were all strictly entailed, and his heir would have little difficulty in procuring what money he needed. It was like fighting against a rock to struggle with Rintoul. When their father worked himself up into a rage, and launched sharp phrases at the girls, bitter cuts and slashes of satire and fierce denunciations, these weapons cut into their tender flesh like knives, and they writhed upon the point of the paternal spear. But Rintoul did not care. A certain amount of vituperation was inevitable, he knew, and he did not mind it. His father might "slang" him as much as he pleased; fierce words break no bones, and he knew exactly how far it could go. Lord Lindores also knew this, and it had the most curious composing and subduing effect upon him. What is the use of being angry, when the object of your anger does not care for it? There is no such conqueror of passion. If nobody cared, the hastiest temper would learn to amend itself. Lord Lindores was aware that Rintoul would hear him out to the end,—that he would never, so to speak, turn a hair,—that he would reply with perfect coolness, and remain entirely unmoved. It would be like kicking against a blank wall,—a child's foolish instinctive paroxysm of passion. Therefore he was not violent with Rintoul, nor sharply satirical, except by moments. He did not appeal to his feelings, nor stand upon his own authority. If indeed he could not keep his exasperation out of his voice, nor conceal his annoyance, he did this only because he could not help it, not with any idea of influencing Rintoul. But it was indeed a very serious blow which he had received,—the most telling of all.

"After this," he said, "why should I go on struggling? What advantage will it be to me to change Lindores into a British peerage? I could not enjoy it long in the course of nature, nor could I afford to enjoy it. And as for my son, he will have enough to do to get bread and butter for his numerous family. A season in town, and a seat in the House of Lords, will after this be perfectly out of the question."

"I suppose it's just as likely as not that the House of Lords will be abolished before my time," said Rintoul calmly,—"at least they say so."

"They say d——d nonsense, sir," cried the earl, touched at his tenderest point. "The House of Lords will outlive you and half a hundred like you. They don't know Englishmen who say so. I had hoped to see my family advancing in power and influence. Here was poor Torrance's death, for instance, coming in providentially to make up for Edith's folly about Millefleurs." Here Lord Lindores made a little pause and looked at his son. He had, beyond expectation, made, he thought, an impression upon him. "Ah," he said, "I see, you forgot the Tinto influence. You thought it was all up with my claims when Millefleurs slipped through our fingers. On the contrary, I never felt so like attaining my point as now."

"That is not what I was thinking, father," said Rintoul in a slightly broken voice. He had risen from his chair and walked to the window, and stood there, keeping his face averted as he spoke. "I cannot tell you," he said more earnestly, "the effect it has upon me when you speak of getting an advantage from—what has happened. Somehow it makes my blood run cold. I'd rather lose everything I have than profit by that—accident. I can't bear the idea. Besides," he added, recovering himself, "I wouldn't build so upon it if I were you. It's all in Carry's hand, and Carry will like to have things her own way."

"This exhibition of sentiment in respect to Pat Torrance takes me altogether by surprise," said Lord Lindores. "I was not aware you had any such friendship for him. And as to Carry. Pooh! Carry has not got a way of her own."

This subject, though it was so painful to Rintoul, brought the conversation to an easier level. But when the young man had left him, Lord Lindores remained for a long time silent, with his head in his hands, and a bitterness of disappointment pervading his mind, which, if it had not a very exalted cause, was still as keen as any tragedy could require. He had let things go much as they would before he came to his kingdom; but when Providence, with that strange sweep of all that stood before him, had cleared his way to greatness, he had sworn to himself that his children should all be made instrumental in bringing the old house out of its humble estate—that they should every one add a new honour to Lindores. Now he said to himself bitterly that it would have been as well if his brothers had lived,—if he had never known the thorns that stud a coronet. What had the family gained? His son would have been quite good enough for Nora Barrington if he had never been more than Robin Lindores; and John Erskine would have been no great match for his daughter, even in the old times. It would have been as well for them if no change had come upon the fortunes of the family,—if all had remained as when they were born. When he thought of it, there was a moment when he could have gnashed his teeth with rage and mortification. To have sworn like a trooper or wept like a woman, would have been some relief to his feelings; or even to clench his hands and his teeth, and stamp about the floor like a baffled villain on the stage. But he did not dare to relieve himself by any of these safety-valves of nature. He was too much afraid of himself to be melodramatic or hysterical. He sat and gnawed his nails, and devoured his own heart. His house seemed to be tumbling about his ears like a house of cards. Why should he take any further trouble about it? Neither money nor importance, nothing but love, save the mark! idiocy—the passing fancy of boys and girls. Probably they would all hate each other in a year or two, and then they would understand what their folly had done for them. He thought of this with a vindictive pleasure; but even of that indifferent satisfaction he could not be sure.

Meanwhile there was, as may easily be supposed, the greatest excitement in the house. Rintoul told his mother and sister, and was half angered by their sympathy. Edith, who was herself in great agitation, received the intimation with delight; but this delight was quite distasteful to her brother, who stopped her by a wrathful request to her not to think this was a nonsensical affair like her own. "I know what I'm about; but as for you, it is just a piece of idiocy," he said: at which poor Edith, aghast, retired into herself, wounded beyond description by this rejection of her sympathy. Having thus snubbed his sister, he defied the alarmed surprise and tempered disapprobation with which his mother heard his story. "I know that you were never a very great friend to Nora," he said. "I suppose when another girl cuts out your own, you can't be expected to be quite just. But my father and I understand each other," said Rintoul. He went out after having thus mowed down the ranks on either side of him, in a not uncomfortable frame of mind, carrying with him, in order to post it with his own hand, the letter to Colonel Barrington, which he had informed his father had been written on the previous day. And this was quite true; but having written it, Rintoul had carefully reserved it till after his interview with his father. Had Lord Lindores been very violent, probably Colonel Barrington would not have had his letter; not that Rintoul would have given Nora up, but that he had, like most wise men, a strong faith in postponement. Wait a little and things will come right, was one of the chief articles of his creed; but as Lord Lindores—kept down by the certainty that there was very little to be made of Rintoul except by giving him his own way—had not been violent, the letter went without delay.

Thus, as it sometimes happens, the worst of the family misfortunes was the one that was condoned most easily; for certainly, in the matrimonial way, Rintoul's failure was the worst. Daughters come and daughters go—sometimes they add to the family prestige, sometimes they do the reverse; but at all events, they go, and add themselves to other families, and cease to be of primary importance as concerns their own. But the eldest son, the heir, is in a very different position. If he does nothing to enrich the race, or add honour to it, the family stock itself must suffer. Nora Barrington would bring some beauty with her to Lindores; but not even beauty of an out-of-the-way kind—honest, innocent, straightforward, simple beauty, but no more,—and no connections to speak of; her uncle, the head of her family, being no more than a Devonshire M.P. This was very sad to think of. Rintoul, in his matter of fact way, felt it as much as any one. There were moments even when he seemed to himself to have been unfairly dealt with by Providence. He had not gone out of his way to seek this girl,—she had been put down before him; and it was hard that it should have so happened that one so little eligible should have been the one to catch his heart. But to do him justice, his heart being caught, he made no material resistance. He was entirely steadfast and faithful to his own happiness, which was involved. But it did not occur to him as it might have done to a feebler mind, that he was in any way disabled from opposing the unambitious match of his sister in consequence of the similar character of his own. He held to his formula with all the solidity of judgment which he had always shown. When his mother pointed out to him his inconsistency, he refused to see any inconsistency in it. "I never would, and never did, say anything as to myself. I never meant to give up my own freedom. The girls—that's quite different. It was your duty and my duty to do the best we could for the girls. I say now, a stop should be put to Edith. Erskine's a gentleman, but that's all you can say. She will never be anybody if she marries him; whereas, if she had not been a fool, what a far better thing for her to have had Millefleurs. I should put a stop to it without thinking twice; and I can't imagine what my father means not to do it." This was Rintoul's opinion upon his sister's affairs.

"And supposing Colonel Barrington had been of the same opinion in respect to Nora?" Lady

Lindores said.

"In respect to Nora? I consider," said Rintoul, "that Nora is doing very well for herself. We are not rich, but the title always counts. A fellow can't shut his eyes. I know very well that there are a good many places where I—shouldn't have been turned away: though you don't think very much of me, mother. Colonel Barrington is not a fool; he knows Nora couldn't have been expected to do better. You see cleverness is not everything, mamma."

"I think you are very clever, Robin," his mother said, with a smile and a sigh—a sigh of wonder that *her* son (always such a mystery to a woman) should feel and talk and think so unlike herself; a smile that he should be so much justified in doing so, so successful in it. Both the smile and the sigh were full of wonder and of pain. But she was comforted to think that Rintoul at least was capable of something heavenly—of true love and disinterested affection. That was something, that was much, in the dearth of fame.

Thus Rintoul's marriage was consented to, while Edith's was first peremptorily denied, then grudgingly entertained, and made the subject of delays and procrastinations enough to have wearied out any pair of lovers. But they had various consolations and helps to support them, the chief of which was that they lived so near each other, and were able to meet often, and talk over in infinite detail every step that was taken, and all the objections seen by others, and all the exquisite reasons in favour of their love which were known to themselves. And Lady Lindores was from the first upon their side, though she respected her husband's unwillingness to bestow his daughter so humbly. Carry was to her mother a standing admonition against any further weakness on this point. In every word and step by which the young widow showed her thankfulness for her deliverance, she struck with horror the fine sense of fitness and reverence which was in her mother's mind. Lady Lindores had not been false in the sentiments of pity and remorseful regret with which she had heard of the death of Torrance. There are some souls which are so finely poised that they cannot but answer to every natural claim, even when against themselves. Had she been Torrance's wife, all the privileges of freedom would not have emancipated her from that compassion for the man struck down in the midst of his life, which took almost the shape of tenderness and sorrow. And when Carry exulted, it gave her mother a pang with which her whole being shivered. God forbid that she should ever be instrumental in placing another creature in such a position as Carry's! She stood very gently but very firmly against her husband on Edith's behalf. She would not consent to interfere with the love and choice of her child.

Carry adopted her sister's cause with a still warmer devotion. She promised her support, her help in every possible manner, would have sanctioned an instant rebellious marriage, and settled half of her own large jointure upon Edith to justify the step, if she could have had her own way, and would scarcely listen to the suggestions of prudence. This nervous partisanship was not of any great advantage to the lovers, but still it gave them the consolation of sympathy. And by-and-by the whole county became aware of the struggle, and took sides with the warmest feeling. Old Sir James Montgomery, as everybody knows, had entertained other views; but when he heard of Nora's promotion, and of the position of affairs in general, his kind old heart was greatly moved. He went off instantly to talk over the matter with Miss Barbara Erskine at Dunearn, from whose house Nora had just departed. "To think that this should have been going on all the time, and you and me never the wiser," the old General said,—"the little cutty! But no doubt they were left in great tribulation as to what my lord the Earl's majesty would say."

"Young persons have a great notion of themselves nowadays," said Miss Barbara; "they will not hear of advice from the like of you or me. Yet I think Nora might have said a word to an old friend. I am getting blind and doited. I never suspected anything. What my heart was set on was to get her for my nephew John."

"Just that," said Sir James, nodding his head; "that was my own idea. But you see John, he has chosen for himself—and a bonnie creature too, if she is as good as she is bonny."

"I am not very fond of the family. What are they but strangers? My heart is most warm to them that I know," said Miss Barbara. But this was a very mild statement, and uttered with little vehemence, for Miss Barbara was not insensible to the pleasure of having an earl's daughter in the family. "There is no doubt about the beauty," she added, "and there's a great deal of good in her, from all I hear."

"With those eyes ye may be sure there's no harm," said Sir James, growing enthusiastic. "And I like the lad that had the sense to see what was in my little Nora. She'll make a bonny countess, and I wish she was here that I might give her a kiss and tell her so. But this Lady Edith is a bonny creature too; and as for Lord Lindores himself, he's no stranger, you know—he's just little Robby Lindores that both you and me mind. The one that has raised a prejudice, I make no doubt, is just that foreign wife of his——"

"She is not foreign that ever I heard——"

"Well, well—maybe not according to the letter; but she has foreign ways, and without doubt it is her influence that has kept the family from settling down as we had a right to expect. My Lady Rintoul will set that right again. Bless me, who would have thought that little Nora——But we must let by-gones be by-gones, Miss Barbara. We must just stand up for the young couple, and defeat the machinations of the foreign wife."

Sir James laughed at this fine sentence of his; but yet he meant it. And even Miss Barbara agreed

that this stranger woman was no doubt at the bottom of the mischief. When Sir James departed, the old lady felt herself nerved to a great exertion. By this time it was winter, and she went out but seldom, the pony-chaise being a cold conveyance. But that night she electrified her household by ordering the "carriage"—the old carriage, never produced but on occasions of great solemnity—for the next day. "Where will ye be going?" Janet asked, open-mouthed, after she had got over the shock of the announcement. But her mistress did not condescend to give her any answer. It was through Agnes, at a later hour, that information descended upon the household. "Sae far as I can make out, she is just going to Lindores to settle a' about thae two marriages," Agnes said in great excitement. "What two marriages? Ye think of nothing but marriages," said Janet. But nevertheless that excellent person was as much excited as any one when the huge vehicle drew up at the door next morning, and stood out in the rain to hear the orders which were given to the coachman. Agnes, seated within in attendance on her mistress, gave her a little nod with her eyelids, as much as to say, Who's in the right now? "To Lindores." "Bless me!" said Janet, "single women are aye so keen on that subject. They would ken better if they had ever had a man o' their ain."

And indeed Miss Barbara's magnificent intention was to make a proposal to Lord Lindores, which must, she could not doubt, make everything smooth. Lord Lindores was a gentleman, and took pains not to show the old lady, to whom the credit of the house of Dalrulzian was so dear, that he did not think the Erskines good enough to mate with his family: which was also a laudable exercise of discretion; for Miss Barbara was very strong in dates, and knew when the earldom of Lindores was founded, and who was the first of the family, as well as the exact period when the Erskines were settled at Dalrulzian. Lord Lindores forbore, partly out of good feeling, partly from alarm, and partly because Miss Barbara's offer was not one to be refused. If it should so happen that he might be compelled to give in, then the settlement upon Edith of Miss Barbara's fortune would make a very distinct difference in the case. He did not intend to give in, but still——The proposal was received with great politeness at least. "There are many things to be taken into consideration," he said. "I had other plans——You will excuse me if I cannot give up my intentions in a moment, because two young people have chosen to fall in love with each other——" "It is what we all have to do, my lord," said Miss Barbara, who was old-fashioned, and gave every man his title. "It is the only thing, in my experience, that it is useless to fight against." Then Lord Lindores made her a fine bow, and declared that this was a most appropriate sentiment from a lady's lips; but a man must be excused if he took a graver view. There was a sharp accent in his voice which not all his politeness could quite disguise. "For my part," Miss Barbara said, "I have just had to swallow my own disappointment, and think nothing of it; for what I had set my heart upon was to wed my nephew John to Nora Barrington, that now it appears, in the arrangements of Providence, is to be your lordship's daughter-in-law, my Lady Rintoul." Lord Lindores jumped up at this as if a knife had been put into him. He could scarcely trust himself to speak. "I can't allow it to be an arrangement of Providence," he cried bitterly, but recovered himself, and forced a smile upon his angry countenance, and assured Miss Barbara that her proposal was most generous. He gave her his arm to the drawing-room, in which Lady Lindores and Edith were sitting, and withdrew, with his face drawn into a certain wolfish expression which his wife was aware meant mischief, but without betraying himself in speech. When he got back to his library, he launched a private anathema at the "old witch" who had taken it upon herself to interfere. But nevertheless, in Lord Lindores' mind there arose the conviction that though he never would consent, yet if he did——why, that Miss Barbara and her proposal were worth making a note of: and he did so accordingly. Miss Barbara, on her part, left the Castle half affronted, half mollified. She was angry that her proposal did not settle everything in a moment; but she was touched by the sweetness of Edith, and a little moved out of her prejudices in respect to Lady Lindores. "She has no foreign accent," she said suddenly, in the midst of the drive, to the astonishment of Agnes—"no more than any of us. And she has none of that sneering way,—my lord yonder, he just cannot contain himself for spite and illwill—but I cannot see it in her. No doubt she's one of them that is everybody's body, and puts on a fine show—but nothing from the heart."

Some time after this another incident, which had no small bearing upon the story of one of these young pairs, occurred at Dalrulzian. Rintoul had never concealed his opposition, but neither had it ever become a subject of personal conflict between John Erskine and himself. He had gone away after his own explanation, for time did not stand still while these events were going on, and even a Guardsman has periods of duty. Shortly after he returned to Lindores, some question about the boundaries of the estates made it expedient that there should be formal communications between the two houses. Rintoul undertook to be the messenger. He had been with his regiment for the last two months, and he had not inquired into local events. He was, therefore, not in the least prepared for the sight that encountered him when he knocked at John Erskine's door. It was opened to him by Rolls, in all the glory of shining "blacks" and snowy neckcloth, as composed, as authoritative, as fully in command of himself and everything about him, as he had ever been. Rintoul, though he was a lord and a soldier and a fine fellow, gave a jump backwards, which scattered the gravel on the path. "Good lord, Rolls!" he cried. It was not an agreeable surprise. He had done his best to forget Rolls, and he had succeeded. To have so many painful associations thus recalled was unpleasant; and the sight of him, so suddenly, without warning, an undeniable shock.

"Ay, my lord, it's just Rolls," said the butler, barring, as it were, his entrance. Rolls regarded the young man with a stern air; and even when Rintoul, recovering himself, began to express pleasure at his return, and great interest in hearing how it was, the face of Rolls remained unmoved. He changed his mind, however, about barring the entrance, and slowly showed Rintoul into the vacant dining-room, which he entered after him, shutting the door.

"I'll easy tell your lordship how I got out," he said; "but there's mair pressing matter in hand. They tell me, my lord, that ye will not yield to have my maister, John Erskine of Dalrulzian, for Lady Edith's man. I would like to hear if that's true."

"It's a curious sort of question to ask," said Rintoul. "I might ask what's that to you, Rolls?"

"Ay, so ye might—it would be just like you, my lord; but I do not think it would be politic in all the circumstances. What for are you opposing it? Ye're to marry Miss Nora, and get your ain will and pleasure. I wish her much joy, poor thing, and strength of mind to bear a' that's before her. What is your lordship's objection to my maister, if I may make so bold as to ask?"

"You are not very complimentary," said Rintoul, growing red.

"No, I'm no' complimentary, my lord; it's no' my line. Will you tell me what's set you against this marriage? for that is what I would like to ken."

Rintoul tried to laugh, though it would have pleased him better to knock his monitor down. "You must see, Rolls, that a thing like this is my own concern," he said.

"It's my concern as well," said Rolls. "There's mair between you and me, my lord, than I'm wanting to tell; but if I was in your lordship's place, I would not rin counter to them that has proved themselves your best friend——"

"Rolls! what are you doing here?" cried John Erskine, with amazement, suddenly opening the door.

The countenance of Rolls was quite impassive. "I was giving my Lord Rintoul an account of my marvellous deliverance out o' my prison, sir," he said, "and how it was thought I had suffered enough in my long wait for the trial. And that was true. Much have I suffered, and many a thought has gone through my head. I'm real ripened in my judgment, and awfu' well acquaint with points o' law. But I hope I may never have anything more ado with such subjects—if it be not upon very urgent occasion," Rolls said. And he withdrew with a solemn bow to Rintoul, in his usual methodical and important way.

Rintoul had come to see John Erskine upon a matter of business; but they had never ceased to be friends—as good friends, that is, as they ever had been. And the similarity of their situation no doubt awakened new sympathies in their minds. At least, whatever was the cause, this meeting did much to draw them together. It was now that Rintoul showed to John the real good feeling that was in him. "I have not been on your side, I confess," he said. "I have thought Edith might do better. I don't hide it from you. But you need not fear that I will stand in your way. I'm in the same box myself. My lord likes my affair just as little as he likes yours. But of course if she sticks fast to you, as she'll certainly do, what can he make of it? Everything must come right in the end."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Thus between threats and promises, and patience and obstinacy, it came gradually to pass that Lord Lindores had to yield. He made that winter a very unhappy one to his family—and it was not more agreeable to himself; for it was not long before he arrived at the conviction that he could make nothing by his opposition. In Rintoul's case, this had been evident to him from the very first, but he had tried for some time to delude himself with the idea that Edith would and must yield to his will. The successive stages of wrath, bewildered surprise, impatient certainty, and then of a still more disagreeable conviction that whatever he might say or do he would not overcome this girl, went over him one after another, irritating and humiliating his arbitrary spirit. A father may consent to the fact that beyond a certain point he cannot coerce his full-grown son; but to be opposed and vanquished by a chit of a girl, is hard upon him. To see a soft, small creature, whom he could almost blow away, whom he could crush in his hand like a butterfly, standing up in all the force of a distinct and independent being before him, and asserting her own will and judgment against his,—this was almost more than he could bear. He came, however, gradually to a perception of what can and what cannot be done in the way of moral compulsion. It had succeeded with Carry, and he had not been able at first to imagine that it would not succeed equally with Edith; but gradually his mind was undeceived. He had in reality given up the contest long before he would confess to himself, and still longer before he would allow to the world that it was so. If he could do nothing else, he would at least keep his household in suspense, and make the cup as bitter as possible to them before they should be allowed to touch the sweet.

Lord Lindores, with all these vexations upon his head, experienced for a moment an absolute pause in his individual career and prospects. He was assailed with that disgust which is one of the curses of age and experience. *Cui bono?* it is the oldest of reflections and the most persistent. To what good is all the work and labour under the sun? What did it matter to him to gain an empty distinction, if his children were to melt away on all sides of him, and merge into the lower classes—which was how, in a moment of natural exasperation, he represented the matter to himself. But afterwards there was a reaction, as was equally natural. He reflected that he was only fifty-five, and that what a man enjoys himself is more to him than anything his grandchildren are likely to enjoy. If he was sure of never having any grandchildren, it would still be worth his

while to be Lord Dunearn in the peerage of Great Britain, and take his seat and wear his robes in Westminster. Till these glories were attained, what was he?—a mere Scots lord, good for nothing. A man's children are not the only interests he has in life; especially when they are married he can shake them off—he can re-enter the world without encumbrance. And Lord Lindores remembered that life and the pleasures of his rank could be enjoyed soberly with his wife at a moderate expense if the young people were all off his hand. He had been but an uncomfortable husband of late years, and yet he loved his wife as she loved him, in frequent disagreements, in occasional angers and impatiences, and much disappointment. What would become of the world if love did not manage to hold its footing through all these? The boys and girls of the high-flown kind are of opinion that love is too feeble to bear the destruction of the ideal. But that is all these young persons know. Love has the most robust vitality in the world—it outlives everything. Lord Lindores was often irritated beyond description by his wife, who would not understand his ways, and was continually diverging into ridiculous by-paths of her own. And she was more disappointed in him—more hurt and mortified by his shortcomings than words can say. But yet they loved each other. So much, that it gradually began to dawn upon him with a sense of solace, that when the House of Lords called him, as he hoped, he and she together, without any young people to trouble them, would yet take their pleasure together, and enjoy it and their elevated position, and be able to afford it, which was the best of all. She, at fifty, was still a handsome woman; and he had a presence which many younger men might have envied. It is doubtful whether the imagination of Lady Lindores would have been equally delighted with this dream: but it would have pleased her to know that he looked forward to it, which is next best. Animated by this thought, Lord Lindores gathered himself together and returned to public business with all his heart and soul. He took possession unhesitatingly, as has been said, of the Tinto power and influence. Torrance had opposed him in politics, and thus neutralised the advantage of a family union against which nothing in the county could stand. But now, with a sigh of satisfaction, Lord Lindores drew into his hand the influence of Tinto too.

This went on for some time with little warning of the insecurity of tenure by which he held his power. Beaufort had at last withdrawn from Dalrulzian, though it was not absolutely certain that he had left the neighbourhood. The minds of the family were, however, eased by his abandonment of the ground so far. And Lady Car lived very quietly, seldom making her appearance out of her own grounds, and never once appearing at Lindores. She would not, indeed, on any argument, return to her old home. Though she was urged by her mother and sister with many soft entreaties, Carry would never yield on this point. Her countenance seemed to blanch when it was suggested, though, she would give no reason but a tremulous oft-repeated "No, no; oh, no, no." When she drove out, she would sometimes call at the door to fetch them, sometimes to convey them home, but they could not induce her to cross the familiar threshold. She was uneasy even in the very neighbourhood of the house, and breathed more freely when it was out of sight. This extraordinary objection to her father's house kept her almost a prisoner in her own; for where could a widow of but a few months go, except to her parents? No other visiting was possible. She was not even, they thought, very desirous of Edith's society, but liked to be alone, interesting herself in the alterations of furniture and new arrangements she was making; a great many of the faded grandeurs upon which Pat Torrance prided himself had already been put away. For the moment this was the only sign of feeling herself her own mistress which Lady Car displayed.

Other revolutions, however, were at hand. There came a moment when it happened that one of the orders Lord Lindores had given was disobeyed, and when an explanation was asked, the answer given was that Lady Car herself had given other orders. This irritated her father greatly, and he made up his mind that the uncertainty in which things were could exist no longer—that he must have an explanation with his daughter. He set out for this purpose with a little impatient determination to bring Carry to her senses. He had been tolerating much which it was ridiculous to go on tolerating. All the family had humoured her, he felt, as if she had been an inconsolable widow, broken-hearted and incapable of any exertion. At this, he could not but smile within himself as he thought of it. It was a pity, perhaps, for Torrance, poor fellow, but it could not be doubted that it was a most fortunate accident for Car. To be his wife, perhaps, had its disagreeables, but there could be no more desirable position than that of his widow; and to indulge Carry's whims as they had all been doing, and keep every annoyance out of her way as if she had been heart-broken, was too absurd. He decided that it would be well to have a clear understanding once for all. She was left by the will in uncontrolled authority, and it was full time to show her that this did not, of course, interfere with the authority of her father, who was her natural guide and protector. "Your husband, of course, took this into consideration," he intended to say. But it cannot be denied that he had to brace himself up for the interview with a clear sense that it might be a painful one; and that as he went along Lord Lindores did, what was a great tribute to the altered position of Carry—arranged the subjects of their interview in his mind, and settled with himself what he was to say.

A great deal can happen in a neighbourhood even when it is full of gossiping society, without reaching the ears of the persons most intimately concerned, and Lord Lindores had been kept in ignorance of much which had alarmed and disquieted his wife. She was aware, but he was not, that Beaufort still lingered in the vicinity, not living indeed in one place, but making frequent expeditions from Edinburgh, or from the further north, sometimes to the little hotel at Dunearn, sometimes to other little towns in the neighbourhood, from which he could come for the day, or even for a few hours, to see Carry in her solitude. Lady Lindores had discovered this with all the pain of anxiety and wounded disapproval,—wounded that Carry could think it right to do what seemed to herself so little suited to the dignity and delicacy of her position: and though scarcely a

word had been said between them on the subject, it had brought pain and embarrassment into their intercourse; for Carry was irritated and wounded beyond measure by the consciousness of her mother's disapproval. She, of whom Torrance had declared in his brutal way that she was too proud to go wrong, was incapable indeed even of conceiving the possibility that "going wrong" should be in any one's thought of her. In her own mind, the fervour with which she had turned back to the love of her life, the eagerness with which, at the very earliest moment, she had sought his pardon, were the only compensations she could give him for the falsehood into which she had been forced and the sufferings that had been inflicted upon him. How could she pretend to build a wall of false delicacy around herself and keep him at a distance, while her heart was solely bent upon making up to him for what he had suffered, and conscious of no sentiment but an overwhelming desire for his presence and society? That she should be obliged to enjoy this society almost by stealth, and that her mother, even her mother, should object and remonstrate, gave Carry the keen and sharp offence with which a delicate mind always resents a false interpretation of its honest meaning. It seemed to her that her first duty now was to be true—always true. She had been false with horrible consequences: to conceal now the eager bound of her heart towards her true lover would be a lie—especially to him who had suffered, as she also had suffered, from the lies of her life. But Lord Lindores, when he made up his mind that Carry must be brought to her senses, was in no way aware how difficult the position was, and how far those senses had gone astray.

He had taken a considerable round to think over the subject, so that it was getting towards evening when he rode up the long avenue to Tinto,—so late that the workmen whom Carry employed in the changes she was making were leaving their work, when Lord Lindores went into the house and made his way towards Carry's sitting-room. He sent away the butler, who, with an air of alarm and surprise, started out of the partial twilight to conduct him to his daughter. It was, he felt, something of a reproach to him that the man looked so much startled, as if his mistress's father could be an unwelcome visitor. The room was not lighted, save by the glow of a large fire, when Lord Lindores opened the door, after a knock to which no answer was returned. There was a sound of several voices, and he was surprised to see the tall figure of a man standing against the firelight. Who was the man who was visiting Carry? It was not Rintoul, nor any one else he knew in the neighbourhood. Nobody about was so tall, so slight, though there was something in the outline of the figure that was familiar to him. But there was an agitated conversation going on, which made the speakers scarcely distinguishable in the twilight, unconscious of the knock of the new-comer or his entrance. To his surprise it was his wife's voice which he heard first, saying tremulously: "Mr Beaufort, I can do nothing but return to what I said before. *Qui s'excuse s'accuse.* You may have the very best of reasons, but it is an injury to Carry that you should stay here."

"An injury to me! How can it be an injury to me? It is my only consolation, it is the only help I have. I have told you from the first, mamma. Edward has been wronged, only not so cruelly wronged as I was myself; oh, nobody could be that! And now that we can make it up to each other —and learn to forget it,—you would chase him away a second time—for what?—because of what *people*—the world—those who know nothing about us—may say!"

Carry was standing by the mantelpiece, her tall figure in its black clinging dress scarcely distinguishable at first, but the animation with which she spoke, and the natural eloquence of her gestures, brought it out against the white marble. Then there came Beaufort's deeper voice: "You know, Lady Lindores, I am ready to do whatever is best for her. If I can comfort her after all that has happened to her, how can I go away? I wish to do only what is best for her."

"I beg to remark," said Lord Lindores, coming forward, "that I knocked before coming in. This, I suppose, is why your servant looked alarmed when he admitted me. Is this gentleman, may I ask, living here?"

Carry drew back at the sound of his voice as if she had received a blow. She clung to the edge of the tall white mantelpiece, shrinking, her figure drawn together, an impersonation of terror and trouble. Beaufort started too, but slightly, and stood instinctively out of the way to make room for the new-comer. Lord Lindores went straight forward to the fire and took up his position with his back to it, with a certain straightforward ease and authority, like a man in his own house, who has no doubt of his right to do his pleasure there. But as a matter of fact, he was by no means so certain as he looked.

"We did not hear you," said Carry, with a breathless gasp in her voice. "We were talking—over points on which my mother does not agree with me."

"I can easily imagine that," he replied.

And then there was a dreadful pause. Lady Lindores, on the other side of the fire, did not move or speak. It was the crisis of Carry's fate, and except in defence or help of her child, the mother vowed to herself that she would take no part. It was hard, but it was best for Carry. Whatever was going to happen to her, she must decide for herself now.

"I asked," said Lord Lindores in that calm, clear, collected voice, which was so strange a contrast to the agitation of the others, "whether this gentleman is living here? If so, it is very inappropriate and unsuitable. Your mother would prefer, I am sure, if Mr Beaufort is here about any business, to offer him a bed at Lindores."

There was a universal holding of the breath at this extraordinary proposition. Had he burst into

all the violence of passion, they would have been prepared, but not for this politeness and calm.

"I am not living here, Lord Lindores," said Beaufort, with some confusion. "I am on my way from the North. I could not resist the temptation of staying for an hour or two on my way to inquire——"

"That was very kind," he said; "and kindness which interferes with personal comfort is very rare. If you are going to Edinburgh, you must remember you have two ferries to cross."

"Probably," Beaufort cried, faltering a little, "I shall stay all night in Dunearn. Lady Caroline—had some commissions for me."

"You had much better come to Lindores. Commissions, Carry! I suppose Mr Beaufort is acting as a sort of agent for you in your new arrangements. Is it *bric-a-brac*? You young men are all learned in that."

Nobody made any reply, but the very air seemed to tingle with the extraordinary tumult of feeling. To accept Beaufort as an ordinary caller, and to invite him to Lindores, was a master-stroke. But the two people between whom he stood were so surcharged with passionate feeling, that any touch must produce an explosion of one sort or another. This touch was given inadvertently by Lady Lindores, who,—terribly bewildered by the course that things were taking, but feeling that if Beaufort could be induced to go to Lindores, it would cut the thread better than any other expedient,—rose softly out of the twilight, and coming forward to him, laid her hand upon his arm: "Yes, yes, that is much the best. Come to Lindores," she said.

At which Carry lost the control of herself which people in their ordinary senses have. Between panic and passion she was beside herself. Fear has a wild temerity which goes far beyond courage;—her tall straight figure seemed to fling suddenly out of the shade, and launch itself upon this milder group. She put Lady Lindores away with a vehement gesture.

"Mother," she cried, "do not you meddle. Edward! do not go, do not go; it is a trap, it is a snare. If you go it will all be over, all over!" Her voice rose almost to a scream. She had reached the point at which reason has no longer any hold, and all the reticence and modesty of nature yields to the wild excitement of terror. She was trembling all over, yet capable of any supreme effort of desperation,—ready to defend to the last, against the same powers that had crushed her before, her last hope.

"Carry," said Lord Lindores,—he kept up, at incalculable cost to himself, his tone of conciliation,—"I do not understand what you fear. Is it I that am to lay traps or snares? I forgive you, my poor child; but this is a strange way to talk to Mr Beaufort,—he cannot stay here——"

"I have no intention of staying here, Lord Lindores," said Beaufort hastily. "You may be sure I will not expose her to any comment."

"I am very sure, nevertheless, that you are doing so," said Lord Lindores.

The contrast of this brief dialogue with Carry's impassioned tones was extraordinary. She felt it through the haze of excitement that surrounded her, though her intelligence of all outside matters was blurred by the wild strain of her own feelings, which would have utterance. "Father," she said hoarsely, putting her hand on his arm, "go away from us—do not interfere. You know what you made of me when I was in your hands. Oh, let us alone now! I am not a girl—I am a woman. I am the same as you, knowing good and evil. Oh," she said suddenly, "if you want to keep any respect for me, go away, go away, for I don't know what I am saying. My head is turning round. Mother,—Edward; don't you see that I am losing my reason? Oh, don't let him interfere—let him go away." Lady Lindores caught her daughter in her arms, in a trembling effort to control and calm her. "Carry, my dearest! you will be sorry afterwards——"

"Oh yes, I shall be sorry," cried poor Lady Car, drawing herself out of her mother's hold,—"sorry to have been unkind, sorry to have betrayed myself; but I must, I must. I cannot hold my peace. Oh, father, let me alone! What good will that do you to make me wretched? What good has it done you? Nothing, nothing! I might have been poor and happy, instead of all I have come through; and what difference would it have made to you? You have killed me once; but oh, think how cruel, how tyrannous, if you tried to kill me again! And you see nobody speaks for me; I am alone to defend myself. Father, you shall not interfere again."

She had resumed her hold on his arm, grasping it half to support herself, half to enforce what she was saying. He now put his hand upon hers and detached it gently, still keeping down his anger, retaining his tone of calm. "My poor child, you are overdone; let your mother take care of you," he said compassionately. "Mr Beaufort, we are both out of place here at this moment. Lady Caroline has had a great deal to try her; we had better leave her with her mother." Nobody could be more reasonable, more temperate. His compassionate voice and gentle action, and the way in which he seemed about to sweep away with him the somewhat irresolute figure of the man who had no right to be there, filled Carry with a wild pang. It seemed to her that, notwithstanding all her protest and passion, he was about to be victorious once more, and to rob her of all life and hope again. She stretched out her arms wildly, with a cry of anguish: "Edward, are you going to forsake me too?"

Edward Beaufort was very pertinacious in his love, very faithful, poetically tender and true, but he was not strong in an emergency, and the calmness and friendliness of Lord Lindores' address deceived him. He cried "Never!" with the warmest devotion: but then he changed his tone a little:

"Lord Lindores is perhaps right—for the moment. I must not—bring ill-natured remark——"

Lady Car burst into a little wild laugh. "You have no courage—you either," she said, "even you. It is only I, a poor coward, that am not afraid. It is not natural to me, everybody knows; but when a soul is in despair——Then just see how bold I am," she cried suddenly, "father and mother! If there is any holding back, it is his, not mine. I have been ready—ready from the first, as I am now. I care nothing about remark, or what anybody says. I will hear no reason; I will have no interference. Do you hear me, all? Do you hear what I say?"

"I hear—what I am very sorry to hear, Carry,—what you cannot mean. Mr Beaufort is too much a gentleman to take advantage of this wild talk, which is mere excitement and overstrained feeling."

She laughed again, that laugh, which is no laugh, but an expression of all that is inarticulate in the highest excitement. "I am ready—to fulfil our old engagement, our old, old, broken engagement, that we made before God and heaven. I have been like Dante," she said; "I have lost my way, and made that dreadful round before I could find it, through hell and purgatory; yes, that is it—through hell——And now, whenever Edward pleases. It is not I that am holding back. Yes, go, go!" she said; "oh, though I love you, you are not like me, you have not suffered like me! go—but don't go with my father. He will find some way of putting everything wrong again."

The two gentlemen walked solemnly, one behind the other, to the door: on the threshold Lord Lindores paused. "I don't suppose you will suspect me of any designs upon your life," he said, with a bitter smile, "if I repeat that you will be welcome at Lindores."

"I had made all my arrangements," said Beaufort, with some confusion, "to stay at Dunearn."

Lord Lindores paused for a moment before mounting his horse. "All that she has been saying is folly," he said; "you may be certain that it will not be permitted——"

"Who is to stop it? I don't think, if we are agreed, any one has the power."

"It will not be permitted. It would be disgraceful to you. It would be a step that no gentleman could take. A foolish young woman, hysterical with excitement and exhaustion and grief——"

"Lord Lindores, you forget what that young woman has been to me—ever since I have known her. I have never wavered——"

"Then you have committed a sin," the Earl said. He stood there discomfited, in the darkness of the night, scarcely remembering the servants, who were within hearing,—not knowing what further step to take. He raised his foot to put it in the stirrup, then turned back again. "If you will not come with me—where we could talk this out at our leisure—at least you will go away from here," he said. Beaufort did not reply in words, but hastened away, disappearing in the gloom of the avenue. Lord Lindores mounted his horse, and followed slowly, in a tumult of thought. He had not been prepared for it,—he was unable now to realise the power of wild and impassioned resistance which was in Carry. He was giddy with astonishment, as if his horse or his dog had turned round upon him and defied him. But he tried to shake off the impression as he got further from Tinto. It was impossible; it was a mere bravado. She would no more hold to it than——And since there was delicacy, decorum, propriety—every reason that could be thought of, on the other side—no, no! He would forgive poor Carry's passion, for she could no more hold to it——Even her mother, who had been so difficult to manage before, her mother would fully support him now. He tried to console himself with these thoughts; but yet Lord Lindores rode home a broken man.

Lady Lindores sat and cried by the fire, while Carry swept about the room in her passion, crossing and recrossing the firelight. The servants at Tinto were more judicious than those at Lindores. They were accustomed to scenes in the drawing-room, and to know that it was indiscreet to carry lights thither until they were called for. In the late Tinto's time the lamps, when they were carried in abruptly, had lit up many an episode of trouble,—the fierce redness of the master's countenance, the redness so different of his wife's eyes. So that no one interrupted the lingering hour of twilight. Lady Lindores sat like any of the poor women in the cottages, unable to stand against the passion of her child. How familiar is the scene,—the mother crying by the fireside, descended from her dignity and power to sway (if she ever possessed any), to sheer helplessness and pathetic spectatorship, unable, with all the experience and gathered wisdom of her years, to suggest anything or do anything for the headstrong life and passion of the other woman, who could learn only by experience as her mother did before her. Carry paced up and down the room from end to end; even the shadowy lines of her figure, even her step, revealed the commotion of her soul: when she came full into the firelight she stood still for a moment, her hands clasped, her head thrown back, confronting the dim image of herself in the great mirror against a ruddy background of gloom. And Carry in her passion was not without enlightenment too.

"No," she said passionately, "no, no. Do you know why I am so determined? It is because I am frightened to death. Oh, don't take an advantage of what I am saying to you. How do I know what my father might do this time? No, no. I must keep out of his hands. I will rather die."

"Carry, I will not interfere. What can I do between you? But these are not all conventionalities, as you think—there is more in them."

"There is this in them," she said, with a strange pathetic smile, "that Edward thinks so too. He is not ready like me to throw away everything. He might be persuaded, perhaps, if my father put

forth all his powers, to abandon me, to think it was for my interest——"

"Carry, I do not wish to support you in your wild projects: but I think you are doing Edward injustice."

"Thank you, mother dear; your voice is so sweet," she said, with a sudden softening, "why should you cry? It is all a black sea round about me on every side. I have only one thing to cling to, only one thing, and how can I tell? perhaps that may fail me too. But you have nothing to cry for. Your way is all clear and straight before you till it ends in heaven. Let them talk as they like, there must be heaven for you. You will sit there and wait and watch to see all the broken boats come home,—some bottom upwards, and every one drowned; some lashed to one miserable bit of a mast—like me."

"Carry," said Lady Lindores, "if that is the case,—if you do not feel sure—why, in spite of everything, father and mother, and modesty and reverence, and all that is most necessary to life, your own good name, and perhaps the future welfare of your children—why will you cling to Edward Beaufort? You wronged him perhaps, but he did nothing to stop it. There were things he might have done—he ought to have been ready to claim you before—to oppose your——"

Carry threw herself at her mother's feet, and laid her trembling hand upon her lips. "Not a word, not a word," she cried. "Do you think he would wrong my children? Oh no, no! that is impossible. His fault, it is to be too good. And if he did nothing, what could he do? He has never had the ground to stand on, nor opportunity, nor time. Thank God! they will be his now; he will prove what is in him now."

Which was it that in her heart she believed? But Lady Lindores could not tell. Carry, when she calmed down, sat at her mother's feet in the firelight, and clasped her close, and poured out her heart, no longer in fiery opposition and passion, but with a sudden change and softening, in all the pathos of trouble past and hope returned. They cried together, and talked and kissed each other, once more mother and child, admitting no other thought. This sudden change went to the heart of Lady Lindores. Her daughter's head upon her bosom, her arm holding her close, what could she do but kiss her and console her, and forget everything in sympathy. But as she drove home in the dark other fears came in. Only one thing to cling to—and perhaps that might fail her—"one miserable bit of a mast." What did she mean? What did Carry believe? that her old love would renew for her all the happiness of life, as she had been saying, whispering with her cheek close to her mother's—that the one dream of humanity, the romance which is never worn out and never departs, was now to be fulfilled for her?—or that, even into this dream, the canker had entered, the sense that happiness was not and never could be?

CHAPTER XLIX.

When a pair of lovers are finally delivered from all those terrible obstacles that fret the current of true love, and are at last married and settled, what more is there to be said about them? One phase of life is happily terminated,—the chapter which human instinct has chosen as the subject of romance, the one in which all classes are interested,—those to whom it is still in the future, with all the happy interest of happiness to come,—those to whom it is in the past, with perhaps a sigh, perhaps a smile of compassion, a softening recollection, even when their hopes have not been fulfilled, of what was and what might have been. The happinesses and the miseries of that early struggle, how they dwindle in importance as we get older,—how little we think now of the crisis which seemed final then—things for which heaven and earth stood still; yet there will never come a time in which human interest will fall away from the perennial story, continually going on, ever changing, yet ever the same.

Before proceeding to the knotting up of other threads, we must first recount here what happened to Lord Millefleurs. He did not take any immediate steps in respect to Miss Sallie Field. They corresponded largely and fully at all times, and he told her of the little incident respecting Edith Lindores in full confidence of her sympathy and approval. Perhaps he gave the episode a turn of a slightly modified kind, representing that his proposal was rather a matter of politeness than of passion, and that it was a relief to both parties when it was discovered that Edith, as well as himself, considered fraternal much better than matrimonial relations. Miss Sallie's reply to this was very uncompromising. She said: "I think you have behaved like a couple of fools. You ought to have married. You can tell her from me that she would have found you very nice, though your height may leave something to be desired. I don't myself care for girls—they are generally stupid; but it would have been exceedingly suitable, and pleased your parents—a duty which I wish I saw you more concerned about." Lord Millefleurs, in his reply, acknowledged the weight and sense "as always" of his correspondent's opinion. "I told dear Edith at once what you said; but it did not perhaps make so much impression on her as it would otherwise have done, since she has got engaged to John Erskine, a country gentleman in the neighbourhood, which does not please her parents half so well as a certain other union would have done. Pleasing one's parents after all, though it is a duty, is not paramount to all other considerations. Besides, I have never thought it was a commandment to which great attention was paid *chez nous*." Miss Field's reply was still more succinct and decided: "I don't know what you mean by *chez nous*. I hate French phrases when simple American will do as well. If you think we don't love our fathers and mothers, it just shows how far popular fallacy can go, and how easily you bigoted Englishmen are taken in. Who

was it that first opened your eyes to the necessity of considering your mother's feelings?" Peace was established after this, but on the whole Lord Millefleurs decided to await the progress of circumstances, and not startle and horrify those parents whom Miss Sallie was so urgent he should please. Some time after she informed him that she was coming to Europe in charge of a beautiful young niece, who would have a large fortune. "Money makes a great deal of difference in the way in which dukes and duchesses consider matters," she wrote, enigmatically, "and so far as I can make out from your papers and novels (if there is any faith to be put in them), American girls are the fashion." Lord Millefleurs informed his mother of this approaching arrival, and with some difficulty procured from her an invitation to Ess Castle for his Transatlantic friends. "I wish there was not that girl though," her Grace said; but Lady Reseda, for her part, was delighted. "She will go to Paris first and bring the very newest fashions," that young lady cried. The ducal mansion was a little excited by the anticipation. They looked for a lovely creature dressed to just a little more than perfection, who would come to breakfast in a diamond necklace, and amuse them more than anybody had amused them in the memory of man. And they were not disappointed in this hope. Miss Nellie F. Field was a charming little creature, and her "things" were divine. Lady Reseda thought her very like Daisy Miller; and the Duchess allowed, with a sigh, that American girls were the fashion, and that if Millefleurs *would* have something out of the way——.

But in the meanwhile Millefleurs left this lovely little impersonation of Freedom to his mother and sister, and walked about with her aunt. Miss Sallie was about eight or nine and thirty, an age at which women have not ceased to be pleasant—when they choose—to the eye as well as to the heart. But the uncompromising character of her advice was nothing to that of her toilette and appearance. She wore short skirts in which she could move about freely when everybody else had them long. She wore a bonnet when everybody else had a hat. Her hair was thin, but she was scrupulous never to add a tress, or even a cushion. She was not exactly plain, for her features were good, and her eyes full of intelligence; but as for complexion, she had none, and no figure to speak of. She assumed the entire spiritual charge of Millefleurs from the moment they met, and he was never absent from her side a moment longer than he could help. It amused the family beyond measure, at first almost more than Nellie. But by and by the smile began to be forced, and confusion to take the part of hilarity. It was Miss Sallie Field herself at last who took the bull by the horns, if that is not too profane a simile. She took the Duke apart one fine evening, when the whole party had strolled out upon the lawn after dinner—"Your son," she said, "is tormenting me to marry him," and she fixed upon the Duke her intelligent eyes. His Grace was confounded, as may be supposed. He stood aghast at this middle-aged woman with her Transatlantic accent and air. He did not want to be uncivil. "You!" he said, in consternation, then blushed for his bad manners, and added, suavely, "I beg you a thousand pardons—you mean—your niece." That of itself would be bad enough. "No," said Miss Sallie, with an air of regret, "it does not concern Nellie. I have told him that would be more reasonable. Nellie is very pretty, and has a quantity of money; but he doesn't seem to see it. Perhaps you don't know that this was what he wanted when I sent him home to his mother? I thought he would have got over it when he came home. I consider him quite unsuitable for me, but I am a little uneasy about the moral consequences. I am thirty-eight, and I have a moderate competency, not a fortune, like Nellie. I thought it better to talk it over with you before it went any further," Miss Sallie said.

And when he took this middle-aged and plain-spoken bride to Dalrulzian to visit the young people there, Millefleurs did not attempt to conceal his consciousness of the objections which his friends would no doubt make. "I told you it was quite unsuitable," he said, turning up his little eyes and clasping his plump hands. "We were both perfectly aware of that; but it is *chic*, don't you know, if you will allow me to use a vulgar word." Edith clasped the arm of John when the Marquis and Marchioness of Millefleurs had retired, and these two young people indulged in subdued bursts of laughter. They stepped out upon the terrace walk to laugh, that they might not be heard, feeling the delightful contrast of their own well-assorted youth and illimitable happiness. The most delightful vanity mingled with their mirth—that vanity in each other which feels like a virtue. It was summer, and the air was soft, the moon shining full over the far sweep of the undulating country, blending with a silvery remnant of daylight which lingered far into the night. The hills in the far distance shone against the lightness of the horizon, and the crest of fir-trees on Dalrulzian hill stood out against the sky, every twig distinct. It was such a night as the lovers babbled of on that bank on which the moonbeams lay at Belmont, but more spiritual than any Italian night because of that soft heavenly lingering of the day which belongs to the north. This young pair had not been married very long, and had not ceased to think their happiness the chief and most reasonable subject of interest to all around them. They were still comparing themselves with everything in earth, and almost in heaven, to the advantage of their own blessedness. They were amused beyond description by the noble couple who had come to visit them. "Confess, now, that you feel a pang of regret," John said—and they stood closer and closer together, and laughed under their breath as at the most delightful joke in the world. Up-stairs the Marchioness shut the window, remarking that the air was very cold. "What a fool that little thing was not to have you," she said; "you would have done very well together." "Dear Edith!" said Millefleurs, folding his hands, "it is very pretty, don't you know, to see her so happy."

The observations made down-stairs, upon the actors in this little drama, were very free, as was natural. Rolls himself, who had held a more important *rôle* than any one knew, was perhaps apt to exaggerate the greatness of his own part, but with an amiable and benevolent effect. His master, indeed, he looked upon with benevolent indulgence, as knowing no more than a child of the chief incident. If Rolls had not been already bound to the house of Dalrulzian by lifelong fidelity and by that identification of himself and all his interests, his pride and self-regard, with

his "family," which is something even more tenacious and real than faithfulness, he would have been made so by the fact that John, without in the slightest degree realising that Rolls was suffering for him, had given orders to Mr Monypenny to secure the most expensive assistance for his trial. The pride, contempt, satire, and keen suppressed emotion with which this act filled the old servant's bosom, were beyond description. "It was just downright extravagance," he said to Bauby; "they're a' fuils, thae Erskines, frae father to son. Laying out all that siller upon me; and no' a glimmer o' insight a' the time. An' he had had the sense to see, it would have been natural; but how could he divine my meaning when there was no conscience in himsel'? and giving out his money all the same as if notes were things ye could gather on the roadside?" "He mightna understand ye, Tammas, but he ken't your meaning was good," said Bauby. Their position was changed by all the changes that had happened, to the increase of their grandeur if not of their happiness. Rolls had now a tall and respectful youth under his orders, and Bauby was relieved, in so far as she would allow herself to be relieved, of the duties of the kitchen. It was gratifying to their pride, but there is little doubt that they sighed occasionally for the freedom of the time when Rolls was alone in his glory, dictator of the feminine household, and Bauby's highest effort of toilette was to tie a clean apron round her ample waist. She had to wear a silk gown now, and endeavour to be happy in it. Rolls's importance, however, was now publicly acknowledged both out of doors and in. He was looked upon with a kind of admiring awe by the population generally, as a man who had been, as it were, like Dante, in hell, and came out unsinged—or in prison, which was nearly as bad, issuing forth in a sort of halo of innocence and suffering. It might have been possible that John Erskine or any of the gentlemen of the country-side had quarrelled with Tinto and meant mischief; but Rolls could not have meant anything. The very moment that the eyes of the rural world were directed to him, it was established that accident only could be the cause of death, and everybody felt it necessary to testify their sympathy to the unwilling instrument of such an event. The greatest people in the county would stop to speak to him when occasion offered, to show him that they thought no worse of him. Even Lord Lindores would do this; but there was one exception. Rintoul was the one man who had never offered any sympathy. He turned his head the other way when Rolls approached him,—would not look at him when they were, perforce, brought into contact. While Rolls, for his part, regarded Lord Rintoul with a cool and cynical air of observation that was infinitely galling to the object of it. "Yon lord!" he said, when he spoke of him, contemptuous, with a scoff always in his tone. And Rolls had grown to be a great authority in legal matters, the only person in the neighbourhood, as was supposed, that knew the mysteries of judicial procedure. But his elevation, as we have said, was modified by domestic drawbacks. Instead of giving forth his sentiments in native freedom as he went and came with the dishes, direct from one table to another, it was necessary to wait until the other servants of the household were disposed of before the butler and the housekeeper could express confidentially their feelings to each other. And Bauby, seated in her silk gown, doing the honours to the Marquis's man, of whom she stood in great awe, and the Marchioness's woman, whom she thought a "cutty," was not half so happy as Bauby, glowing and proud in the praises of a successful dinner, with her clean white apron folded over her arms.

"This is the lord that my leddy would have been married upon, had all gone as was intended," Rolls said. "He's my Lord Marquis at present, and will be my Lord Duke in time."

"Such a bit creature for a' thae grand titles," said Bauby, yawning freely over the stocking which she was supposed to be knitting. "Eh, Tammas, my man, do ye hear that clatter? We'll no' have an ashet left in the house."

"It's a peety she didna take him—it would have pleased a' pairties," said Rolls. "I had other views mysel', as is well known, for our maister here, poor lad. Woman, cannot ye bide still when a person is speaking to ye? The ashets are no' your concern."

"Eh, and wha's concern should they be?" cried Bauby; "would I let the family suffer and me sit still? My lady's just a sweet young thing, and I'm more fond of her every day. She may not just be very clever about ordering the dinner, but what does that maitter as lang as I'm to the fore? And she's an awfu' comfort to my mind in respect to Mr John. It takes off the responsibility. Me that was always thinking what would I say to his mammaw!"

"I have nothing to say against my lady," said Rolls, "but just that I had ither views. It's a credit to the house that she should have refused a grand match for *our* sake. But it will be a fine ploy for an observer like me that kens human nature to see them a' about my table at their dinner the morn. There will be the Earl himsel', just girning with spite and politeness—and her that would have been my ain choice, maybe beginning to see, poor thing, the mistake she's made. Poor thing! Marriages, in my opinion, is what most shakes your faith in Providence. It's just the devil that's at the bottom o' them, so far as I can see."

"Hoot, Tammas—it's true love that's at the bottom o' them," Bauby said.

"Love!" Rolls cried with contempt: and then he added with a grin of malice—"I'm awfu' entertained to see *yon lord* at our table-end. He will not look the side I'm on. It's like poison to him to hear my voice. And I take great pains to serve him mysel'," he said with a chuckle. "I'm just extraordinar attentive to him. There's no person that I take half as much charge of. I'm thinking his dinner will choke him some day, for he canna bide the sight o' me."

"Him that should go upon his knees to ye every day of his life!" cried Bauby indignant.

"We'll say nothing about that; but I get my diversion out o' him," said Rolls grimly, "though he's a lord, and I'm but a common man!"

The marriage of Lady Car took place a little more than a year after Torrance's death. It was accomplished in London, whither she had gone some time before, with scarcely any one to witness the ceremony but her mother. She preferred it so. She was happy and she was miserable, with the strangest mingling of emotions. Lady Lindores made vain efforts to penetrate into the mind which was no longer open to her as her own. Carry had gone far away from her mother, who knew none of the passions which had swept her soul, yet could divine that the love in which she was so absorbed, the postponed and interrupted happiness which seemed at last to be within her grasp, was not like the love and happiness that might have been. When Beaufort was not with her, her pale countenance, that thoughtful face with its air of *distinction*, and sensitive delicacy, which had never been beautiful, would fall into a wan shadow and fixedness which were wonderful to see. When he was with her, it lighted up with gleams of ineffable feeling, yet would waver and change like a stormy sky, sometimes with a lightning-flash of impatience, sometimes with a wistful questioning glance, which gave it to Lady Lindores all the interest of a poem united to the far deeper, trembling interest of observation with which a mother watches her child on the brink of new possibilities. Were they for good or evil?—was it a life of hope fulfilled, or of ever increasing and deepening disappointment, which lay before Carry's tremulous feet? They were not the assured feet of a believing and confident bride. What is love without faith and confidence and trust? It is the strangest, the saddest, the most terrible, the most divine of human passions. It is seldom that a woman begins with such enlightenment in her eyes. Usually it is the growth of slow and much-resisted experience, the growing revelation of years. How sweet, how heavenly, how delightful, when love is blind! How wise the ancients were to make him a child—a thing of caprice and sweet confusion, taking everything for granted! But this to Carry was impossible. When her mother took her into her arms on her wedding morning, dressed in the soft grey gown which was the substitute for bridal white, they kissed each other with a certain solemnity. At such a moment so much is divined between kindred hearts which words can never say. "I want you to remember," said Carry, "mother dear—that whatever comes of it, this is what is best." "I hope all that is most happy will come of it, my darling," said Lady Lindores. "And I too—and I too——" She paused, raising a little her slender throat, her face, that was like a wistful pale sky, clear-shining after the rain—"But let it be what it may, it is the only good—the only way for me." These were the sole words explanatory that passed between them. Lady Lindores parted with the bridal pair afterwards with an anxious heart. She went home that night, travelling far in the dark through the unseen country, feeling the unknown all about her. Life had not been perfect to her any more than to others. She had known many disappointments, and seen through many illusions: but she had preserved through all the sweetness of a heart that can be deceived, that can forget to-day's griefs and hope again in to-morrow as if to-day had never been. As she drew near her home, her heart lightened without any reason at all. Her husband was not a perfect mate for her—her son had failed to her hopes. But she did not dwell on these disenchantments. After all, how dear they were! after all, there was to-morrow to come, which perhaps, most likely, would yet be the perfect day.

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