

# KIRSTEEN

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MRS. OLIPHANT

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# KIRSTEEN

## *THE STORY OF A SCOTCH FAMILY SEVENTY YEARS AGO*

BY  
MRS. OLIPHANT

*IN THREE VOLUMES*  
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## PART III.

## CHAPTER I.

There were no inspectors to look after the workrooms of the dressmakers in those days, but perhaps also, at least with mistresses like Miss Jean, there was little need for them.

If the young women in the workroom had sometimes to work for a part of the night it was only what at that time everybody was supposed to do in their own affairs or in their masters', when business was very urgent, or *throng* as was said in Scotland. The head of the house sat up too, there were little indulgences accorded, and when the vigil was not too much prolonged, there was a certain excitement about it which was not displeasing to the workwomen in the monotony of their calling. One of these indulgences was that something was now and then read aloud to them as they worked.

Miss Jean herself had ceased to do much in the ordinary conduct of business. She gave her advice (which the workwomen now considered of the old school and wanting in sympathy with advancing taste), and now and then suggested a combination which was approved. But on the whole she took a less and less active share in the work during the morning and evening hours in which she was not wanted in the show-room to receive the ladies who were her patronesses, or whom she patronized (according to Kirsteen's new arrangements), with whom the younger partner had no desire to supplant her. And when Miss Jean resigned the needle and even the scissors, and no longer felt it necessary to superintend a fitting on, or invent a head-dress, she developed another faculty which was of the greatest use especially at moments of great pressure. She read aloud—I will not assert that she had any of the arts of the elocutionist, which were much esteemed in those days—but in a straightforward, plain way, with her Scotch accent, to which of course all the young women were accustomed, her reading was very distinct and satisfactory.

She read in the first instance stories out of the *Ladies' Museum* and kindred works, which were about as absurd as stories could be, but being continued from week to week, kept up a certain interest among the girls to know what happened to Ellen as an example of youthful indiscretion, or Emily as a victim of parental cruelty. What a jump it was when Miss Jean brought in with triumphant delight a book called *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, I can scarcely venture to describe. No doubt the young women accustomed only to Ellen and Emily were a little confused by the new and great magician with whom they were thus suddenly brought face to face; but they were greatly stirred by the Highland scenes and Fergus MacIvor's castle, and the beautiful Flora, for and against whom they immediately took sides, a certain party

hoping against hope that she would finally marry the hero, while the other faction strongly supported the claims of Rose Bradwardine. The humours of the tale scarcely penetrated perhaps those unaccustomed bosoms, and nothing in it was so important to the imagination of the workwomen as this. Miss Jean finished the book one night when all were working very late, the night before a state ball. It was an unusually heavy night because of Lady Chatty, now an acknowledged beauty and leader of fashion, who had invented a new mode a day or two before; that is to say Kirsteen, who was entirely devoted to her beautiful friend, had produced an effect by the looping up of a train or the arrangement of a scarf which had dazzled all beholders, and had become at once the object of a rage of imitation such as sometimes occurs in the not uneventful annals of fashion. So many ladies had argued and implored, adjuring Miss Jean by all her gods, pointing out to her the urgent duty of not leaving a client or countrywoman in the shade; of not crushing the hopes of a young *débutante*, perhaps spoiling a great marriage or bringing about some or other catastrophe, that the head of the establishment had been melted, and had indiscreetly consented to execute more orders than it was possible to do. Miss Jean had been very shy of meeting Kirsteen after, and had confessed her indiscretion almost with tears, but her young partner with no further remonstrance than a shake of her head had accepted the responsibility. To do something miraculous is always a pleasure in its way, and Kirsteen laid the circumstances before the young women and inspired them with her own energy. She herself was up the whole night never flagging, while the others managed it by relays, snatching an hour or two of sleep, and returning to work again. They had a tea-drinking at midnight, when the fine-flavoured tea which Miss Jean herself affected was served to the workwomen all round, with dainty cakes and cates, and, highest solace of all, Miss Jean herself sat up and finished *Waverley*, at the risk of making a few needles rusty by the dropping here and there of furtive tears. The excitement about Flora MacIvor and the gentle Rose, and the keen disappointment of Flora's partisans who had all along hoped against hope that she would relent, kept drowsiness at bay. This was not the chief point of interest in the book perhaps, but those young women regarded it from that point of view.

I tell this chiefly as an illustration of the manner in which Miss Brown and Kirsteen managed their affairs. But as a matter of fact Miss Jean often read aloud when there was no such urgent call for it. She read the newspapers to the girls when there was any news of interest. She had read to them everything about Waterloo, and all the dispatches and the descriptions of the field, and anecdotes about the battle, as they came out bit by bit in the small square newspaper of eight pages, which was all that then represented the mighty

*Times*. One of the young women lost a brother in that battle. This made the little community feel that all had something special to do with it, and brought tears into every eye, and justified them in shaking all their heads over the cost of blood by which the great victory had been achieved, even in the midst of their enjoyment of the illuminations and all the stir and quickened life of town at that great moment.

It was long after Waterloo, however, when the incident I am about to record occurred. Years had passed, and the newspapers were no longer so exciting as in those days of the Peninsula, when a fight or a victory might be always looked for. War died out from among the items of news, and the long calm, which ended only after the Great Exhibition of 1851 had made as people thought an end of all possibility of fighting, had begun—people had ceased to be afraid of the newspaper, and the tidings it might bring. It is true there was always fighting going on in India more or less, little battles now and then, skirmishes, expeditions of which the world did not know very much, but in which, without any demonstration, a few brave lives would end from time to time, and hearts break quietly at home, all to the increase and consideration of our great Indian territory, and the greatness of Great Britain in that empire upon which the sun never sets.

Some six years had passed from the time when Kirsteen came friendless to London knowing nobody but Marg'ret's sister. She was now a power in her way, supreme in the house in Chapel Street, Mayfair, feared and courted by many people who had once been sufficiently haughty to Miss Jean. At twenty-six, when a young woman has gone through many vicissitudes of actual life, when she has been forced into independence, and stood for herself against the world, she is as mature as if she were twenty years older, though in the still atmosphere of home twenty-six is very often not much more than sixteen. Kirsteen had become in some ways very mature. She had that habit of authority which was so well set forth long ago by the man who described himself as saying to one "‘Go,’ and he goeth, and to another ‘Come,’ and he cometh." She had but to speak and she was obeyed—partly from love, but partly also from fear: for Kirsteen was not the laird of Drumcarro's daughter for nothing, and she was very prompt in her measures, and quite indisposed to tolerate insubordination. And her young womanhood was so withdrawn from the usual thoughts and projects of her age that Kirsteen had put on something of the dignified manners of a person much older, although her fresh youthful colour, the milk-white brow and throat, the ruddy hair all curly with vigour and life, showed no premature fading, and her person, which was always beautifully clothed, and fitted to perfection, had improved in slenderness and grace. It was not that propositions of a sentimental kind had been wanting.



Lord John (but his name always brought a blush of displeasure to Kirsteen's cheek) had done his best to find her at unguarded moments, to beguile her into talk, and to use all the covert arts which were still supposed to be part of the stock-in-trade of a young man of fashion, to attain her interest if not her affection. What he intended perhaps the young man did not himself know, perhaps only to attain the triumph of persuading a young woman whom he admired to admire him. But Kirsteen considered that it was through his means alone that the difficulties of her position were really brought home to her, and the difference between a mantua-maker exercising her craft, and a young lady of family at home, made apparent. This was a mistake, for Lord John would have considered himself quite as free to attempt a flirtation with Drumcarro's daughter in Argyllshire as in London, and with as little intention of any serious result, the daughter of a poor laird however high in descent, being as entirely below the level of the Duke's son as the mantua-maker. But it gave a keen edge to Kirsteen's scorn of him, that she would have believed he was ready to take advantage of her unprotected state.

Also there was Miss Jean's friend the doctor, who would very willingly have made a sensible matrimonial alliance with a young person getting on so very well in the world—while Miss Jean's nephew, he who had already calculated how many years it would take him to reach the elevation of Lord Mayor, worshipped in silence the divinity whom he durst no more approach than he durst propose for one of the princesses, knowing well that Miss Jean would bundle him indignantly out of doors at the merest whisper of such a presumption. But none of these things touched Kirsteen, nor would have done had they been much more attractive. "Will ye wait for me till I come back?" was the whisper which was always in her ears. And since the arrival of Robbie's letter there had come a certain solidity and reality to that visionary bond. A man who was so near on the verge of return that in a year or two, "in two-three years" he might be back, was almost as close as if he were coming to-morrow—for what is next year but a big to-morrow to the faithful soul? The only feeling that ever marred for a moment the anticipation in Kirsteen's mind was a fear that when he came he might be wounded a little by this mantua-making episode. It vexed her to think that this might be the case, and cast an occasional shadow upon her mind from which she was glad to escape as from the sight of a ghost. He might not like it—his mother, who was a proud woman, would not like it. Kirsteen did not, if she could help it, think of this possibility, yet it crossed her mind from time to time.

And in the meantime in those weary years, the fortune that was for little Jeanie, and that which would make Ronald at ease even in his half-pay when he came back, was quietly growing.

With such a business, the most fashionable in London, and customers praying almost on their knees to be put on the lists of Misses Brown and Kirsteen, how could it do otherwise than grow?

Kirsteen was twenty-six, the season was at its climax, the workroom very *throng* when Miss Jean came in one morning with the newspaper in her hand. Her little air of satisfaction when there were news that would be interesting to read was very well known. Miss Smith touched Miss Robinson with her elbow saying, "Look at 'er," and Miss Robinson communicated to Miss Jones her conviction that there was something stirring in the paper. Miss Jean came in and took her seat at the lower end of the table with her back to the broad uncurtained window by which all possible light was admitted. She liked to have the light falling well upon her paper. "Now, my dears," she said, "I am going to read something to you—it's very touching, it's an account of a battle."

"I thought all the battles were done," said the forewoman who ventured to speak on such occasions.

"Oh, yes, on the Continent, heaven be praised—but this is in India," said Miss Jean as if nobody could ever expect battles to be over there. Kirsteen was at the other end of the table arranging some of the work. She was working with the rapidity of an inventor, throwing a piece of stuff into wonderful folds and platings of which no one could say what the issue was to be. She knew herself what she intended: but even when one knows what one means to do, the hand of genius itself has sometimes a great deal of trouble before the meaning can be carried out. She glanced up for a moment at the name of India, but only for a moment: for indeed there was always fighting in India, yet nothing had happened to any of those she cared for during all these years.

Miss Jean read out the details of the fight in her steady voice. It had been intended for nothing more than a reconnaissance and it turned into a battle which might have very important and momentous results. She read about the swarms of a warlike tribe who had been engaged by the Sepoys and a few British troops—and how well all had behaved—and how the enemy had been driven back and completely routed and dispersed, and the authority of the Company established over a large region. "Now," said Miss Jean looking up over her spectacles, "this is the interesting bit—

"The victory, however, was a costly one—the casualties among the officers were unusually great. Out of nine actually engaged no less than five brave fellows were left on the field dead or seriously wounded. One young officer of the greatest promise who had led his battalion through a great deal of hot work, and who was down for immediate promotion, is among the number

of the former. He was found lying struck through the heart by a native weapon. A curious and affecting incident is recorded of this unfortunate gentleman. After he had received his death-stroke he must have found means of extracting a handkerchief from the breast of his uniform, and lay when found holding this to his lips. The handkerchief was extricated from his grasp with some difficulty and was sent home to his mother, who no doubt will cherish it as a most precious relic. It was slightly stained with the brave young fellow's blood.' "

Miss Jean's voice faltered as she read that the handkerchief had been sent to the young man's mother. "Poor leddy, poor leddy!" she said, "the Lord help her in her trouble." And little exclamations of pity and emotion rose from various voices—but suddenly they were all stilled. No one was aware how the consciousness first arose. By means of a communication swiftly and silently conveyed from one to another, the eyes of all were suddenly turned towards Kirsteen who, with the light from the large window full upon her, sat surrounded by trails of the beautiful silk which she had been manipulating. She had looked up, her lips had dropped apart, her hands still holding the silk had fallen upon her lap. Her face was without a trace of colour, her bosom still as if she were no longer breathing. She looked like some one suddenly turned into marble, the warm tint of her hair exaggerating, if that were possible, the awful whiteness. They expected her every moment to fall down, like something inanimate in which no life was.

But she did not do this—and nobody dared interfere, partly from fear of this sudden catastrophe whatever it was, partly from fear of her. They all sat not venturing to move, looking at her, ready to spring to her assistance, not daring to take any step. After a moment, she drew a long breath, then with a little start as of awakening raised her hands and looked at them, all enveloped as they were in the silk. "What—was I—doing?" she said. She moved her hands feebly, twisting the silk round them more and more, then tore it off and flung it from her on the floor. "I can't remember what I was doing," she said.

"Oh, my dear," cried Miss Jean, coming towards her putting down the paper, "never mind what you were doing—come to your own room."

"Why should I come—to my own room? What's there?" A gleam of consciousness came over her colourless face. "It's not there!—it cannot be there!"

"Oh, my darling," cried Miss Jean, "come away with me—come away, where you can be quiet."

Kirsteen looked up in her face with quick anger and impatient sarcasm.

“Why should I be quiet?” she said. “Have I nothing to do that I should be quiet? That’s for idle folk. But read on, read on, Miss Jean. It’s a bonny story—and there will be more?” Miss Jean retired again to her seat, and all the workers bent over their work but not a needle moved. Kirsteen picked up the silk again. She tried to restore it to its form, plaiting and twisting with swift impatient movements now this way and now that. All the young women watched her furtively, not losing a movement she made. She twisted the silk about, trying apparently to recover her own intention, pulling it here and there with impatient twitches and murmurs of exasperation. Then she piled it all upon the table in a sort of rage, throwing it out of her hands. “Go on, go on with your paper,” she cried to Miss Jean, and took up a half-made dress from the table at which she began to stitch hurriedly, looking up every moment to cry, “Go on, go on. Will ye go on?” At length Miss Jean, exceedingly tremulous and miserable, began to read again in a broken voice. Kirsteen stitched blindly for half an hour, then she rose suddenly and left the room.

## CHAPTER II.

Kirsteen did not seclude herself for long. While the girls were still whispering to each other, not without some awe, of the sudden shock which she had evidently received, of her deathlike look, her struggle to maintain her composure, her rejection of all inquiries, she had returned among them, had taken up the silk again, and resumed what she was doing. There was scarcely a word said after Kirsteen came back. The young women all bent over their sewing, and their needles flew through their work. The presence among them of this one tragic face, perfectly colourless, self-commanded, silent, wrapped in an abstraction which nobody could penetrate, had the strangest impressive effect upon them. They did not dare to speak even to each other, but signed to each other for things they wanted, and worked like so many machines, fearing even to turn their eyes towards her. Miss Jean, quite unable to control herself after this mysterious blow which she had given without knowing, had retired to the parlour, where she sat alone and cried, she knew not why. Oh, if she had but held her tongue, if she had not been so ready to go and read the news to them! Kirsteen, so busy as she was, might never have seen it, might never have known. Miss Jean read the paragraph over and over again, till she could have repeated it by heart. She found lower down a list of the names of those who had been killed and wounded, but this brought no enlightenment to her, for she did not know Drumcarro, or the names of the neighbours near. She had to lay it away as an insoluble mystery, not able to comprehend how, from so few details as there were, and without even hearing any name, Kirsteen should have at once been killed, as it were, by this mysterious blow. How did she know who he was, the poor gentleman who had died with the white handkerchief pressed to his dying lips? It was a very touching incident, Miss Jean had herself thought. No doubt, she had said to herself, there was a story under it. She had shed a sudden, quick-springing tear over the poor young man on the field of battle, and then, in her desire to communicate the touching tale, had hurried to the work-room without further thought—how, she asked herself, could she have known that it would hurt any one? What meaning was there in it that Kirsteen alone could know?

It was late when the workwomen, who lived out of doors, went away. They had gone through a long and tiring day, with no amusement of any sort, or reading or talk to brighten it. But somehow they had not felt it so—they all felt as if they had been acting their parts in a tragedy, as if the poor young officer on the Indian plains had held some relationship to themselves. The silence which nobody enjoined, which nature herself exacted from them, burst into a tumult of low-breathed talk the moment they left the house. They discussed her

looks, the awful whiteness of her face, the shock of that sudden, unsoftened communication, without asking, as Miss Jean did, how she could have known. Miss Jean heard their voices, first low and awe-stricken, rising in eagerness and loudness as they got further from the house. But it was not till some time later that Kirsteen came in. She had been at work in a violent, absorbed, passionate way, doing with incredible swiftness and determination everything her hand had found to do. She had an air of great weariness, the exhaustion which means excitement and not repose, when she came in. She threw a glance round the room looking for the paper, which Miss Jean had put carefully out of sight. Kirsteen went to the table and turned over everything that was on it, groping in a sort of blind way.

“You are looking for something, my dear?”

“Yes—where is it?”

“What might ye be looking for?” said Miss Jean, trembling very much, and with the tears coming to her eyes.

“Where is it?” Kirsteen said. She was perfectly still and quiet, her voice low, her face very white, her eyes cast down. It was evident that she felt no need of explanation, nor power of giving one. There was but one thing for her in the world, and that was the paper with the news—which at the first hearing had gone like a stone to the bottom of her heart, like a sword piercing through and through.

Miss Jean had no power to resist or to pretend that she did not understand. She rose, trembling, and unlocked her escritoire and brought the paper out, fumbling in the depths of a pigeon-hole in which she had buried it, that it might never be seen more. She was very tremulous, her face drawn, her eyes full of moisture. “I canna think how you could make anything out of that,” she said almost querulously in the excess of her feeling. “There’s nothing, nothing in that, to say who it was. No person could divine. It might be somebody you never heard of.”

It is possible that after the utter and undoubting convictions of the first moment such a thought might have come to Kirsteen’s mind too. She put out her hand for the paper. Miss Jean kept on talking in a fretful tone. “You’ve had no tea, not a thing since two o’clock, and now it’s eleven at night—you’ve had no rest—work, work, as if your bread depended on it; and it’s no such thing. I suppose you think you’re made of something different from the ordinary, no mere flesh and blood.”

Kirsteen paid no attention. She did not hear, the words were as a vague accompaniment, like the sound of wheels and faint voices and footsteps out of

doors. She opened the paper with steady nervous hands that did not tremble, and read over again every word. Then she turned to the list “Casualties.” Casualties! Accidents!—was that a word to use for the list of the dead? When she had read it her hands dropped on her knee with the paper held in them, and from her colourless lips there came a faint sound, inarticulate, hoarse, the knell of hope. There had not been any hope in her heart: but to say that and to know that hope is over, are two things. In the one there was still a possibility—the other was death itself. Oh, the possibility had been very faint, very feeble! She had worked on all day, struggled on to preserve it, not asking for conviction. Sometimes to know the worst is what we desire. Sometimes we would prefer to put it from us, not to make sure, for a little. But there it was: no further doubt, “Captain Drummond;” his name and no other. “Will ye wait till I come back?” He was standing by her, saying it—and lying there—with the handkerchief. It was all past, the whole story, as if it had happened a hundred years ago.

“Miss Kirsteen—most likely you are making yourself miserable about nothing. How can ye tell by a story like that who it is? Oh, my bonny dear, I am asking no questions, but to see you like that just breaks my heart.”

Kirsteen smiled in spite of herself at the idea of any heart being broken but her own, of any one being miserable who had not known him, who had never seen him, who did not even know his name. She said nothing for a few moments and then she spoke with a voice quite tuneless and flat, but steady. “Miss Jean—I will have to go for a day or two—to the Highlands.”

“Certainly, my dear—whenever ye please,” said Miss Jean, though not without a catching of her breath; for who would look after the work, with herself so much out of the use of it, and the season still so *throng*?

“Not to leave you—with so much in hand—why should I?” said Kirsteen, “it’s not as if it was for anybody but me. But so soon as can be: just the time to go and to come back.”

“Oh, my dear young lady—whenever ye please, and for as long as ye please: but ye will come back?”

Kirsteen smiled again faintly, “Oh, yes, I will come back—there will be nothing more, no fighting nor battles—nothing to stop me—and nobody—to wait for me”—she added, “as I would have been content to wait—I was very content—just to think he was coming—some time. But that’s over—just an old story. It is time to shut up the house and go to our beds.”

“Oh, my darlin’ bairn! Dinna shut it all up like that. Tell me about it—or if you will not tell me, oh, dear Miss Kirsteen, let the tears flow!”

“My eyes are dry and so is my throat, Miss Jean, I cannot speak—I cannot cry—I’m not one for telling—Good-night—I will just go away to my bed.”

She lighted her candle which threw a strange new light upon her colourless face, and the rings of hair upon her milk-white forehead out of which nothing could take the colour. Kirsteen’s face even now had not the meekness and patience of a saint, but her hair was like an aureole round her wan countenance. She was going out of the room without saying any more, when she suddenly bethought herself, and coming back went up to Miss Jean, and kissed her—a very unusual ceremony between these two shy Scotswomen. The old lady coloured to the edge of her grey hair with pleasure and surprise. “Oh, Miss Kirsteen,” she said—

“You are very kind—you are just a mother. You are like my Marg’ret,” Kirsteen said. That name brought a rush of tears to her eyes for the first time. Marg’ret alone in all the world would know—Marg’ret would not need to be told. If she could lay her head on Marg’ret’s shoulder then her heart might break in peace. She had to bind it up now with bands of iron—for there was nobody in the world save him and her and Marg’ret that knew.

The workroom continued very *throng* for ten days or so longer, and during this time Kirsteen worked like two women. She had never been so inventive, so full of new combinations. With her white face, and without a smile, she stood over Lady Chatty, that grand lay-figure and advertising medium for the mantua-maker, and made her glorious with beautiful garments—beautiful according to the fashion of the time and all that Kirsteen knew: for no genius (in dress) can over-step these limits. Lady Chatty, full of affection and kindness, soon discovered the something which was wrong. She put her hands on either side of Kirsteen’s face and compelled her friend to look at her. “What ails you, Kirsteen? Oh, what ails you?” “Nothing,” Kirsteen said. “Oh, don’t tell me it is nothing. You look as if you had died and it was the ghost of Kirsteen that was here.” Kirsteen smiled up on the beautiful face looking so anxiously into hers, and said, “Maybe that is just true,” but would say no more. And the business in the workroom was done with a sort of passion by everybody there. They had heard that as soon as the press was over Miss Kirsteen was going away. They did not exchange any exhortations, but by one consent they addressed themselves to their work with an unspoken thought that the sooner they were done the sooner she would be released. It was partly that the sight of her became intolerable to these emotional spectators, who had each a private vision of her own of the tragedy. Had Kirsteen wept and raved and got over it they would have wept with her and consoled her; but the anguish which did not weep, which said nothing, was more than they could bear. They



were all silent round the long table, bending over their work, working as some one of them said, “as if it were a large mourning order and all for sum ‘un of one’s own.” And the season was just at its end—Kirsteen held her place till the last great ball was over, and then she went away.

No difficulty now about paying for the coach or procuring her seat. She was no longer afraid of any danger on the road, or of the world unknown. The whirl of progress through the great country, through the towns and villages, across the long level plains of England, no longer filled her with that vague mystery and ecstasy of being which belonged to her first journey. The movement, it was true, gave a certain solace to her pain. The complete silence in which no one could ask her a question, fenced off as that was by the surrounding of incessant sound, the tramp of the horses, the jar of the wheels, the murmurs of the voices, was a relief to her from the daily intercourse of ordinary life. After she got to Glasgow she had to think over her further route. She had no desire to reveal herself, to let any one know she had come. Her mission was almost a secret one; to make it known would have gone against all the sanctities of memory; therefore, Kirsteen would not even give herself the pleasure of seeing Marg’ret, of sending for her at some wayside corner, or in some village as she had once thought of doing. She drove from Glasgow in postchaises where it was possible, in country gigs or carts, where no better could be had, avoiding all the places where she might be recognized. She embarked in a smack upon the Clyde and sat forlorn upon the deck watching the hills and islands drifting by, as if they were part of a much prolonged and almost endless dream. It was July, the brightest month of the year, and the weather was one blaze of brightness, as if to mock Kirsteen whose heart was sick of the sunshine. There was nothing but sunshine everywhere, over the hills, bringing out the glistening of a hundred burns over their slopes, and making the lochs and the great river into shimmering paths of gold. It made her heart sick to see it all so bright, and him lying far away with that handkerchief to his lips.

And at last Kirsteen came in the gloaming, at the softened hour, the hour most full of love and longing, to his mother’s gate.

## CHAPTER III.

“Kirsteen!”

It was Agnes Drummond who made this astonished outcry coming into the old-fashioned drawing-room, where she had been told there was one who wanted a word with her. “Just say there is one that would fain speak a word” had been Kirsteen’s announcement of herself. Agnes was about Kirsteen’s age but she had never left the shelter of her home, nor ever thought for herself or taken any step in life alone—and she was in reality ten years younger than the matured and serious young woman who was her contemporary. She was tall and slim, a willowy girl gliding into the dim room in her deep mourning, like a shadow. Kirsteen was also in black, but without any of those insignia of crape which mark the legitimate mourner. She was standing in front of one of the dim windows, deep set in the thick wall, with small panes and heavy woodwork, intercepting as much light as possible. Agnes recognized Kirsteen rather from something characteristic in her figure and movement than by her face.

“It is just me,” Kirsteen said, with a quick drawing of her breath.

“Have ye come home?” Then Agnes paused, and with something of the importance of a person to whom a great and mournful distinction has come, added, “Ye know what great trouble we are in?”

“It is for that that I came here!”

“You are very kind!” said Agnes with some surprise, and then she added, “We knew that—ye were friends!”

“I am not come,” said Kirsteen, “to talk—for that I cannot do—I have come to ask you, travelling night and day—come to ask you—for the handkerchief he had in his hand!”

A sob escaped her as she spoke, but her eyes were dry.

“The handkerchief! Oh, Kirsteen, what are ye asking? Anything else; my mother will not part with it while she lives, there is upon it,” the girl stopped, struggling with her tears, “a stain—of his blood.”

For some minutes there was no sound in the dark room, but of Agnes’s voice weeping, and from Kirsteen now and then a sob which seemed to rend her breast.

“She must give it to me,” said Kirsteen at last, “for it is mine. He took it out for my sake. Oh, a mother’s dear, dear! she has had him all his days, his

name and his memory's hers, and no one can take him from her. But that's all I have, for my life. And I will have it, for it is mine!"

"Kirsteen, you need not be violent nor speak like that, for how could my mother give it up—the last thing he ever touched, that he put to his lips?—like a kiss to us—her and me!"

"No," said Kirsteen, "for none of you. It was mine, his name is marked in the corner in my coarse red hair, that nobody ever thought anything of. He said it was like a thread of gold. He bade me to wait till he came back. Now he'll never come back—but I'll wait—till I go to him. Give me my handkerchief with his kiss upon it; there's nobody has a right to touch it,—for it is mine!"

Agnes in her mild reasoning was no match for this fiery spirit. She could only cry helplessly standing like a ghost among the shadows, but the early moon came in at the window and shone full upon Kirsteen, who was neither ghost nor shadow. The aspect of command that was in her daunted the other. "I will go and ask my mother," she said.

"Tell her," said Kirsteen, "that I have come straight from London, travelling night and day. I have scarce tasted bite or sup, nor slept in my bed since the news came. I knew it was him without any name, for I knew that was what he would do. She has many, many a thing to mind her of him, the house he was born in, and his picture and all, and his dear name. And I have nothing but that. And I will have it, for it belongs to me!"

"I will go and ask my mother," Agnes said.

The moon shone in through the small window, throwing upon Kirsteen's figure the reflection of the solid wooden framework, so that she looked as if she were in a prison looking out upon the outside world through black iron bars. She stood quite still for some time with her white face turned to it looking through those bars to the light. And she never forgot that moment when she stood gazing up into the white orb in the clear summer sky which had looked down upon him lying silent upon the field. It seemed to Kirsteen in the fever of her weariness and exhaustion that she could see that scene, the awful silence, the other dead lying about in dark muffled heaps, and the moon shining upon the handkerchief in his hands. There were faint sounds in the house of doors opening and shutting, and of voices. A sudden cry—which perhaps was from his mother. It would be natural that his mother should resist, that she should wish to keep it. But Kirsteen felt that nothing could stand against herself and her right.

In a few minutes Agnes came back, still crying. "I am sorry," she said, "to keep you in this dark room, but I've told them to bring the candles!"

"The candles are not needed, there's nothing needed but one thing."

"Oh, Kirsteen," said Agnes, "be content with something less than that. My mother says she cannot—oh, she cannot!—give that up."

"Did ye tell her it was mine, and I've come to get my own?"

"Oh, Kirsteen! her heart's broken!"

"And what is mine? She will get away to him. She will go where he is. But I'm young and we are all dour livers, that will not die—I'll live—maybe a hundred years," cried Kirsteen with a hard sob and a wave of her hand as if in demonstration of the hardness of her fate.

Here a maid entered the room bearing two lighted candles which shone upon a rosy tranquil face, the common unconcerned life coming in upon the exaltation of the other. She closed the other windows one by one as if that had been the only thing to do, but, when she approached that at which Kirsteen stood with the bars of shadow upon her, drew back with a frightened look and went away.

This enforced pause made them both a little calmer. "Ye will stay all night," said Agnes, faltering, "now that you are here. Take off your bonnet, Kirsteen. And ye must take something."

"Do you think," said Kirsteen, "that I have come here to eat or to drink—or to bide?—oh, no, oh, no,—but get me the thing I have come for and let me go."

"How can I get it when my mother will not give it up," said Agnes overcome, falling into the natural refuge of tears.

"Let me see her," said Kirsteen.

"She has seen nobody, not even the minister. She will scarcely look at the light. She cannot cry like me. She's just like stone. He was her only son, and she just moans and says she never believed the Almighty would deal with her so." Agnes, with the impatience of a patient and gentler nature of this intolerable grief, was relieved to be able to make her plaint. But it did not seem unnatural to Kirsteen that the mother should be like stone.

"When she sees me," she said, "perhaps the tears will come."

"Oh, Kirsteen, but I dare not ask her."

"I will not bid you ask her, I will just go ben."

"Oh, Kirsteen!"

She knew the way well, across the outer room, which was not called a hall, to the door on the other side, within which Mrs. Drummond was sitting with her woe. There was nothing but the moonlight in the hall making a broad strip of whiteness as it came in unbroken by the open door. The two black figures passed across it like shadows, the daughter of the house following, the stranger leading. Mrs. Drummond sat by the side of the fire, which was a feeble redness in the grate, unneeded, supposed to add a little cheerfulness, but in its unnatural, untended smouldering making things rather worse than better. Her white widow's cap was the highest light in the room, which with its dark wainscot and faint candles looked like a cave of gloom. The windows were all closed and curtained, shutting out the lingering light of day. A large Bible was open on the table, and in Mrs. Drummond's lap lay the knitting with which her fingers were always occupied. But she was neither reading nor working; her white hair was scarcely distinguishable under the whiteness of her cap. Her face rigid with sorrow was grey in comparison. She sat without moving, like marble. Calamity had made her severe and terrible, she who had once been kind. She took no notice at first of the fact that some one had come into the room, believing it to be her gentle Agnes, who was nobody, the helpless handmaiden of this despair.

Kirsteen went round the table to the other side of the fire and stood before his mother, saying nothing. Mrs. Drummond raised her eyelids and perceived her with a faint cry. "Who is this come to disturb me? I gave no leave to anybody to come. I can see nobody. Kirsteen Douglas, what are ye wanting here?"

Kirsteen put out her hands with a gesture of supplication. "It is mine," she said, "it was for me. It is all I have to keep my heart. You are his mother. And I am nothing to him—but for that—"

"No, you were nothing to him," said the mother looking at her fixedly.

"Except just this," cried Kirsteen, roused to the full assertion of her claim, "that it was me he thought upon—yonder—that he had my handkerchief—and took it from his breast—and put it to his mouth."

"Lassie," said Mrs. Drummond, "how dare ye tell that like an idle tale and put it into common words? It's written there," putting her hand on the Bible, "so that I cannot see the word of God; and it's written here," she added, laying it on her breast, "on the bosom that nursed him and the heart that's broken. What are you, a young thing, that will love again and mairry another man, and have bairns at your breast that are not his." She broke off here, and said again after a moment abruptly, "'He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow'—but the Lord took no notice of him nor of me!"

Kirsteen sank down upon her knees before this tearless mourner. "Will I tell ye what I am?" she said. "I am young, and we're a long-lived race—I will maybe live to be a hundred. No bairn will ever be at my breast—no man will ever take my hand. He said to me, 'Will ye wait till I come back?' and I said to him, 'That I will,' and he took the little napkin from the table that had R. D. on it for Robbie (but yet I thought on him all the time) in my red hair. My mother said her colour was best, but he said it was like a thread of gold—and he touched my arm and made me look, and he put it to his mouth. And he said, 'Will ye wait?' And here we sit forlorn!" said Kirsteen, her voice breaking into a shrill and heart-piercing cry.

There was a long pause. And then the rigid woman in the chair rose up like a marble image, her white cap and pallid countenance awful in the dim room like the face and head-coverings of one who had died. She took her keys from a pocket which hung by her side and went across the room to an old-fashioned cabinet, which lent a little glimmer of inlaid mother-o'-pearl and foreign woods to the dim glimmering wainscot. From this she took a box which she carried back with her to her seat, and unlocking it with a trembling hand, took from it again a little packet wrapped in a piece of faded silk. She held it for a moment as if she would have opened it, then suddenly thrust it into Kirsteen's hands. "Take it," she said, "and not another word. But if ye're ever unfaithful to him send it back to me—or bury it in my grave if I'm not here."

"In yours or in mine," was all that Kirsteen could say. She put her lips trembling to the hand that had given this treasure: then being hastily dismissed by a gesture of that hand rose from her knees and went away. In a moment more she was outside in the mild delightful summer night, all made up of pleasures which knew no chill, no fading, no sorrow, the young moon softly shining as if for pure joy, the unseen burns softly tinkling, the graceful birch trees waving their feathery branches in the soft air. Such a night! a visionary daylight lingering in the west, against which rose the fantastic majestic outline of the hills—the glen penetrating far into the soft gloom towards the east, caught by a ray of moonlight here and there; the wind upon the face of the wayfarer like a caress—the air all full of love and longing and sweet dreams. Kirsteen passed through it holding her treasure against her breast, a kind of happiness possessing her, her bosom lightened for the moment by reason of the very climax of emotion through which she had passed, the exhaustion of sorrow which at times feels like ease to the worn-out soul. She had a long walk to the village where her postchaise waited for her. The road came out upon the sides of the loch which shone like a sheet of burnished silver in the moonlight. As she approached the village one or two people met her and turned to look

back at the unknown figure which it was evident did not “belong.” There was a little commotion in the small village public-house where her carriage was waiting, the horses harnessed and the lamps lighted as she had ordered. A postchaise with an unknown lady in it was a strange occurrence in such a place. The people at the little alehouse were very anxious to see her veil lifted, to know if she would have anything. Just outside the village was the road that led to Drumcarro. Kirsteen did not even remark it as she drove past in the soft darkness. There was no room in her mind for any thought but one.

Posting all through the summer night which so soon expanded into a glorious summer morning, revealing her to herself as a veiled and pallid shadow fit rather for the darkness than the light, Kirsteen reached Glasgow in time to take the coach again for London. Then followed two days more of monotonous, continual motion, with villages and fields whirling past in one long continuous line. She arrived the second night dazed with fatigue and exhaustion in the great gleaming city throwing all its lights abroad to the evening sky, which was now her only home. It had been but a temporary dwelling-place before, to be replaced by a true home, perhaps in her own Highlands, perhaps,—what did it matter?—in the incomprehensible Indian world, when he came back. Now he would never come back; and Kirsteen recognized that this was her established place, and that her life had taken the form and colour which it must now bear to the end. She had accepted it for his sake that she might be faithful to him, and now it was to be for ever, with no break or change. There had sometimes crossed her mind a dread that he would not like it—that the mantua-maker in Mayfair would wound the pride of all the proud Drummonds if not of himself. Now that fear was buried like the rest. There was no one to object any more than to praise. She was independent of all the world, and bound to that work for ever.

It was not till Kirsteen had reached the house, which she recognized as now her permanent resting-place, that she undid out of its case the precious thing she had gone to seek. She bought a little silver casket, a gem of workmanship and grace, though she knew nothing of this but only that it seemed to suit the sacred deposit, and unfolded the little “napkin” to take from it once, like a sacrament, the touch of his dying lips. There was the mark, with her thread of gold shining undimmed, and there, touching the little letters, the stain—and even the traces of his dead fingers where he had grasped it. She folded it up again in his mother’s cover and put with it the little blue Testament with the intertwined initials. The silver casket stood in Kirsteen’s room during her whole life within reach of her hand. But I do not think she opened it often. Why should she? She could not see them more clearly than she did with the eyes of her mind had they been in her hands night and day. And she did not

profane her sacred things by touch; they were there—that was enough.

And thus life was over for Kirsteen; and life began. No longer a preparatory chapter, a thing to be given up when the happy moment came—but the only life that was to be vouchsafed to her in this earth so full of the happy and of the unhappy. She was to be neither. The worst had happened to her that could happen. No postscriptal life or new love was possible to her. Her career was determined, with many objects and many affections, but of that first enchantment no more. She took up her work with fresh vigour, and immediately began to make many alterations in the house, and to change the workroom according to her own ideas and re-organize everything. Miss Jean looked on well pleased. She was the nominal head, but Kirsteen was her head, her strength, and soul. She was as well satisfied with all the plannings and alterings as a mother is with things that please and occupy her child. “It takes off her thoughts,” Miss Jean said. She herself was a happy woman. She was like the woman in Scripture whose reproach is taken away, and who becomes a joyful mother of children when all hope is over. She had no need to do anything but to be happy in her child.



## CHAPTER IV.

Some time after this, when everything connected with this incident was over, Kirsteen received one morning a visitor, very different from the usual frequenters of the house. The subsequent mails had brought no further details of Ronald's fate, at least to her. His mother had done everything of which a woman's magnanimity was capable in giving her that sacred relic; but to make further communication of the further news that came in fragments from one correspondent and another was not in either of their thoughts. Information was not what these women thought of. They had no habit of learning every detail as we have now. The event came like a bombshell upon them, shattering their hearts and hopes—and that was all, they looked for no more. It was accordingly with no expectations of any kind that Kirsteen received the visitor who was Major Gordon, the young Waterloo man whom his mother had brought to honour the little gathering at Miss Jean's house. He had been in India since all the fighting had ceased in Europe, for his living and fortune depended upon active service, and India meant increased pay and increased opportunities under the liberal sway of the Company, without any derogation from the pretensions of the King's officers who thought more of themselves than the leaders of the Company's troops. Major Gordon was a brave officer, and had been in as much fighting as any man of his years could boast. But he was somewhat shy when he called on Kirsteen, and stood with his hat in his hand moving from one foot to another as if he had not been a perfect master of his drill. He said that his mother had thought he had better call to see Miss Douglas after his return—that he had been so fortunate as to meet Colonel Douglas in India, who was hoping soon to have a furlough home—and that he hoped he saw Miss Douglas well and Miss Brown too, who had always been so kind to his mother. Kirsteen in her black gown was a somewhat imposing figure, and the thought that this visitor had come straight from India took the colour, which had begun to come back, from her cheek. A black dress was not then, as in our days, the commonest of feminine garments—and his eyes seemed to take an expression of anxiety as they returned again and again to her, which Kirsteen did not understand. He told her that he had come home with his regiment sooner than he had expected, for that India was now the only place in which a soldier could push his fortune.

“Or lose his life,” she said.

“One may lose one's life anywhere—but to vegetate without the means of doing anything, without being able to take a step of any kind—to settle—to marry,” said the young soldier with a slight blush and laugh—“to take a place

of one's own."

"Oh," said Kirsteen, "to live and do well will be enough to make your mother happy—and others that belong to you—if you think of them that have been left lying on many a field—"

"I acknowledge that," he said, "many and many a better man than I—but to die a soldier's death is always what one looks forward to—better than living an idle life and cumbering the ground."

"You will not do that," said Kirsteen with a smile. She might have been his mother's contemporary instead of his own, so far remote did she feel from all such agitation as was expressed in the young man's awkwardness and earnestness. It did not occur to Kirsteen as it might have done to an ordinary young woman of her age that these agitations could have any reference to herself. She smiled upon him as over a long blank of years—"You are not one that will ever stay still long enough to cumber the ground."

"Miss Douglas," he said, "I have seen several of your family—I feel a great interest. Will you forgive me if I take a liberty? You are in mourning?"

The light faded altogether out of Kirsteen's face. She made a little pause for a moment clasping her hands. "Not for any of my family," she said. He begged her a thousand pardons, brightening up in a moment. She fell back into the pale shadows; he roused up to pleasant brightness of life. These two different moods do not understand each other. They are almost antagonistic without some special bond of sympathy. He went on after a moment—

"I saw much of your family—in Argyllshire—before I went to India. You will perhaps remember that Glendochart invited me for the shooting—which was very kind."

Kirsteen's attention flagged. She assented merely with a bow.

"I have been three years in India," said the young man. "She was nearly seventeen when I saw her last."

"Who was nearly seventeen?"

"Oh, Miss Douglas, forgive me!—your lovely little sister—a flower that seemed born to blush unseen."

The light came back to Kirsteen's face. "Jeanie!" she said with a little flush of pleasure, "is she so bonny? I always thought she would be so—but it's long, long since I have seen her."

"Bonny is not the word," said the young soldier, "though bonny is a very

bonny word. She is—she is—I wish,” he cried, breaking off abruptly with a nervous laugh, “that I could show you her picture—in my heart.”

“Is that so?” Kirsteen raised her head and looked at him with a searching glance from head to foot: the young man instinctively squared himself, drawing up his head as under inspection. “Ye are well to look at, Major Gordon—but I cannot see into your heart.”

“No,” he said, “and how can I tell you what I think of her? It’s not her beauty—she’s just as sweet as the flowers. I wish I had the tongue of Robbie Burns—or some of those new poets that would wile a bird from the trees—” and he began to murmur some words that were not so familiar to the ear as they have come to be since then.

“She shall be sportive as the fawn  
That wild with glee across the lawn  
Or up the mountain springs;  
And hers shall be the breathing balm,  
And hers the silence and the calm  
Of mute insensate things.

“The floating clouds their state shall lend  
To her; for her the willow bend.  
Nor shall she fail to see  
E’en in the motions of the storm  
Grace that shall mould the maiden’s form  
By silent sympathy.

“The stars of midnight shall be dear  
To her; and she shall lean her ear  
In many a secret place  
Where rivulets dance their wayward round,  
And beauty born of murmuring sound  
Shall pass into her face.”

The major paused a moment, and then he added, with a rising colour, another verse—

“Three years she grew in sun and shower,  
Then Nature said, ‘A lovelier flower  
On earth was never sown:  
This child I to myself will take;  
She shall be mine, and I will make  
A lady of my own.’ ”

Kirsteen, though she was in London where everything that is new should be best known, had little acquaintance with the new poets. She had heard part of the *Ancient Mariner*, which was to her like a great piece of music, thrilling her being, but imperfectly understood of her intelligence. She had heard much of Byron, who was raved of by every apprentice, and whom consequently this high aristocrat in verse, as in all other things, held in a certain scorn. She listened surprised to the lines which Gordon stammered forth somewhat shamefacedly, finding himself embarked in a kind of recitation which he had not intended.

“Who said it?—they are very bonny words. I am much beholden to him, whoever he is, for such a bonny picture of my little sister—if it is not yourself?”

“I!” cried the major. “Oh, be not profane! It is one Wordsworth that lives on the Borders—but she is like that.”

“I can well believe it,” said Kirsteen; “nevertheless, if it was Jeanie he was meaning, though it may be all true, it did not need that to make a lady of my sister,” she said with an ineffable visionary pride.

The major did not argue, or make any stand for his part, though he had all the enthusiasm of an early member of the sect. He would have indeed sacrificed Wordsworth and all the poets without a thought at the shrine he was approaching. “That is, alas, what daunts me,” he said. “How am I, a poor man, to make your father hear me? He will want, and well I know how justly, what I have not to give.”

“I am no authority as to what my father will do, Major Gordon. You may have heard why I, a Douglas, and not the least proud of the family, am here.”

“But she adores you, Miss Kirsteen!”

“Does she that? My bonny Jeanie! And well I wot she is the dearest thing to me.” Kirsteen paused with a flood of pleasure and anguish inundating her heart. The visions of the past rose up before her. Ah, why had the image of the little sister come so persistently into all her dreams of a future that was never to be? Because, she said to herself, putting down that climbing sorrow, it was a life that was never to be—and Jeanie was the consolation that remained.

“Major Gordon,” she said, “if it may so be that Jeanie’s happiness is bound up in yours, all that I can do will be too little. But what is there that I can do? She is in the hands of her parents; and I that have broken my bonds, and am a rebel, having nothing to say.”

“It will not last like that between them and you.”

“It has lasted for six years. My father is a dour man and does not change. If Alexander were to come back, that is the next in the family to my father—”

“He is coming, he is coming—when men in India speak of two or three years they think it is nothing—but it’s an eternity to me.”

“And sometimes it is an eternity,” Kirsteen said solemnly. She asked then suddenly, without intending it, if he had ever been at Ahmednugger where the battle was.

“I was in the battle,” he said simply. “I had my orders home, but I was there. It was a kind of chance, no one expected it.”

Major Gordon was much surprised when Miss Douglas, who was so reserved and dignified, caught him by the arm and made him sit down by her side. She was as white as the cambric kerchief on her neck. She said with a little moan, “Oh, not a chance, not a chance, but God’s grace, I must think that. And tell me all ye know. Oh, tell me all ye know!” He began to say (with astonishment, and so startled that it was difficult to put his recollections in order) that it had all been caused by a mistake, that no one knew how strong the native powers were, and that on the British side all might have been lost, but Kirsteen stopped him with an imperative movement of her hand. “Begin,” she said, “where it began, and tell me who was there and all. Oh, tell me everything—for I have heard nothing—except that so it was.” Her intent face, her trembling clasped hands, the tragic eagerness with which she set herself down to listen, overwhelmed the young soldier who knew nothing of her connection with that fatal field. With a rapid review and calculation he made out to himself that no Douglas had been there. It was then some one else in whom she was interested: he looked at her again and her black dress, her composed gravity as of one whose life was set apart, and an indefinable change that he had remarked without comprehending it, showed him, as by a sudden revelation, that whoever it was in whom Kirsteen was interested he was dead. But who was it? And how was he to give her dead hero the place her heart would crave for, if he did not know who that was?

He began however as best he could his story of the fight. As was made very apparent afterwards, Major Gordon had a soldier’s skill in the arrangement of his tale. He made the listener see the movements of the troops, the gradually growing alarm, the scouts coming in with news, the officers anxious and harassed gathering to their rapid council, the bold advice that was first received with a sort of horror, then adopted. “We should all have been cut to pieces but for that—not one would have escaped to tell the tale; but he did

not live to get the benefit himself, poor fellow. His name was Drummond, a Peninsula man who had seen a great deal of fighting. He and I were old friends. We had gone through many a hot moment together. His plan was adopted after a great deal of discussion. And by the blessing of God it saved many a man's life—but not his own!”

He gave a start as he looked up at her, for Kirsteen's countenance was transfigured. Her paleness glowed as if with a light behind, though there was not a particle of colour in her face. He had found the way to her heart without knowing, without meaning it, his testimony all the more prized and valuable for that. He went on with details which I cannot repeat, setting all the field before her. And then with his voice trembling he told her the end. How he had seen his friend fall, and then the little story of the handkerchief. “None of us knew what it meant,” he said, “for Drummond never was one to talk much of himself, but we were all sure there was some story. He lay there on the field with that white thing on his lips. It was hard—to take it out of his hand.”

The major's voice was a little strained. A man cannot cry like a girl, but he had to stop and swallow something that was in his throat. Then to his great surprise Miss Douglas rose and without a word went out of the room. He asked himself in his astonishment had he been wrong after all? Had he been talking of some one for whom she did not care, leaving out the name she wanted to hear? He sat wondering, listening while her steps went up stairs to a room above. Then he heard her coming down again. She came back into the room with a silver box in her hand, and opening it without a word took out something wrapped in a piece of faded silk. The young soldier felt his heart in his throat, an intolerable overwhelming pang of sympathy taking all voice and utterance from him. He knew the little handkerchief which he had taken from Ronald's dead hand. She did not say a word, but looked at him with a faint mournful smile and that transfiguration on her face. Then putting back her treasure locked it away again in its shrine, and gave him her hand.

“Now,” she said after some time, speaking with difficulty, “you know, and there will be no need of words between you and me. I will never forget what you have told me. It's been like a bit of God's word, all new. And ye will never doubt that if I can serve ye, it's in my heart to do—whatever a woman can do. Oh,” cried Kirsteen, “take the blessing of God from a heartbroken woman and go away, Major Gordon! He was but Captain—never more, and he's lying yonder, and you standing here. Oh, go! and let me see ye no more.”

When the rapture of sorrow that was in her had softened again, Kirsteen sent many messages to the young officer by his mother; but she could not endure the sight of him at that time. Everything she could do—with Jeanie or

any one—but not to see him, not to see him, he who had come home living and loving and promoted and with everything that had not come to the other. She could not bear that.

## CHAPTER V.

During the six years which had passed since she left Drumcarro, Kirsteen had heard but little of the home which she had sacrificed perhaps too passionately, too hastily. Marg'ret's letters indeed were very regular, if few and scanty in detail, but these were conditions natural to the time, and Kirsteen had never expected more. "Your mother is just in her ordinary." This seemed satisfaction enough to a mind unaccustomed to correspondence, brought up in the philosophy of long silences, of little intercourse, of blank years which went over on all sides in an understood routine, and in which the nearest relations when they met each other, remarked upon the external "ageing" of so many additional years with a placid sense that it must be so. Mary also, dutiful to all the necessities of the family, communicated periodically to Kirsteen the course of events in her own particular family, as well as a more or less vague report of the paternal house. She had by this time three little children in whom, naturally, all her chief interests centred. Old Glendochart had become "papa" to his wife, and was reported as being very hale and hearty for his time of life, and very much taken up with his young family. While "my mother is just in her ordinary," remained the habitual report, differing only from Marg'ret's in the pronoun employed. Now and then indeed Mary would open out into a report of the company that had been at Glendochart "for the shooting," and there was one subject on which she was even eloquent, and that was the beauty of Jeanie, the younger sister in whom her family pride was gratified, as well as perhaps the only bit of romantic and generous feeling which was in Lady Glendochart's well-regulated bosom. "Our Jeanie!" From her babyhood the sisters had all been proud of her. And Mary was pleased with the distinction she herself had over Kirsteen in having a house to which she could invite Jeanie, and where the praises of the young beauty could delight her ears, ever reflecting back again as she felt an honour upon herself. There was nobody far and near who had not heard of Drumcarro's lovely daughter. She was the Lily of Loch Fyne. The visitors at the Castle took long rides all about Drumcarro, and the linn had been elevated into one of the sights of the district, all with a view of procuring a glimpse, if possible, of the beautiful Highland girl. And Lord John, Mary had reported, was particularly civil, and a very great admirer, words which were deeply underlined, and which filled Kirsteen with indignation. To think that after all the rebuffs she had herself given him he should endeavour to beguile the guileless Jeanie! Kirsteen had at once written a warning letter to Mary, informing her very decisively that Lord John was not a man to be allowed the enjoyment of Jeanie's company. "For he can have no right meaning, and is only a useless, idle person," Kirsteen said. This had



produced a warm reply from Mary under a frank received from the Duke, by means of the same Lord John.

“You are very ready with your letters, and a heavy postage to pay,” Mrs. Campbell wrote, aggrieved, “when you have really no news to give us. And as for the warning about Lord John, I hope me and Glendochart have sense enough to take care of Jeanie; and what can you, a mantua-maker in London, know about a young gentleman of such high family, the best of our name? I would advise you, my dear Kirsteen, not to encourage a spirit of envy. For if you never received such attention yourself it is partly the fault of Providence that gave you red hair, and no beauty, and partly your own that cast away all the advantages of your family. But you cannot think that me and Glendochart are likely to go to you for counsel upon affairs of which you can have no experience.”

This letter did not please Kirsteen as may well be supposed. We are all made up of great feelings and of petty ones, and are not always at our best. Kirsteen had a heart of the noblest constancy, and held the contents of her little silver casket above all that the world could give. But at more vulgar moments it sometimes gave her a sting to know that, notwithstanding all her passion of love and faithfulness, prosaic Mary, who had never known a throb of profound feeling in her life, would assume airs of superior importance, and pity the sister who had no man, and would be an old maid all her life. A woman may be capable of taking her part in a tragedy such as Kirsteen’s yet resent the comedy, generally more or less contemptuous, that winds itself about an unmarried woman’s life, and more at that period than now. She was very angry at the neglect of her warning, but this was only an incident and soon dropped into oblivion.

One day, however, late in the year in which she had performed her rapid and melancholy journey, Kirsteen received, “by private hand,” and in the shape of a small brown paper parcel, concealing a letter in many wrappings, news of a very distressing kind. It was supposed in those days of dear postage to be illegal to send a letter by the “private hand,” which most simple country people infinitely preferred as at once surer and cheaper than the post. This, as Marg’ret informed her in the hurried scrawl enclosed, was to be taken by a lad from the village who was going straight to London, and had promised to deliver it at once. It was to tell Kirsteen that her mother was very ill, so ill that Marg’ret had given up all hope. “I have never done so before,” Marg’ret wrote, “so you may trust me that this is not a fright on my part. And she just yammers for Kirsteen night and day—little, little has she ever said till now—she’s full of complaints, poor body, but yet she’s more patient than words can say. Ye

must just come without a moment's delay; and if he will not let you in, I will let you in, for she shall not be crossed in her last wish by any man, if he was three times her husband—so, my dear bairn, just come and let there be no delay.” Kirsteen obeyed this summons, as she was commanded at once. To go so soon again over the same ground, and undertake once more such a wearisome and protracted journey was very unusual, and was thought something dreadful by all who heard of it. “You will feel as if you were always on the road,” Miss Jean said; and she felt an inclination to blame her sister who thought that the pleasure of her dying mistress was worth the great disturbance of Kirsteen's life which must result. “What good will it do her, a dying woman? It will just disturb her when her mind should be taken up with other things,” said Miss Jean.

But it was perhaps natural that Kirsteen should not take it in the same way. She set off that evening, by the night coach, arriving in Glasgow on the morning of the second day. But this time Kirsteen remembered her kindred, and finding with difficulty the new house of Dr. Dewar, now a fine tall “self-contained” house with a main door and a brass plate upon it, suddenly appeared at the breakfast table where Anne and her doctor presided over a party consisting of two tall children of nine and ten, and two more set up in high chairs to reach the board. Anne was so much absorbed in the feeding of those small creatures that she scarcely observed the stranger whom Dr. Dewar rose with an apology and a little embarrassment to meet, thinking her a patient improperly introduced into the domestic scene. An exclamation “It's your sister Kirsteen, Anne!” roused the absorbed mother, at that moment holding a spoonful of porridge to the mouth of one of the babies. Anne had developed much since her sister had seen her last. She had become stout, yet not unpleasantly so, but in a manner which suggested the motherly hen whose wings can extend over many chickens. She wore a cap with plaited lace borders tied under her chin, encircling a rosy face, which, though still young, was losing its higher aspect a little in the roundness of comfort and ease. Her soul was absorbed in the little ones, and in domestic cares. She thrust the spoon into the baby's mouth before she rose with a wondering cry of “Kirsteen!” And all the children stared, knowing nothing of aunts, except some on the side of the doctor who were not of the same kind as the fashionably dressed London lady in her black fur-trimmed pelisse. Kirsteen was still in something of the solemnity of her first mourning. Her natural colour was subdued, she was slighter than ever she had been, graver, more pale. Her hair once so rebellious was smoothed away. She looked many years older, and very grave, serious and imposing. The two elder children looked at each other with mingled pride and alarm. This grand lady! The doctor was the only one who

fully retained his wits. He put a chair to the table for the new comer. "You will have arrived this morning by the coach? And the first thing wanting will be a good cup of tea?"

"Yes, I will take the tea thankfully, for it is very cold, but what I have come for is Anne. There will be a postchaise at the door in an hour."

"Are you going to run away with my wife?" said the doctor with a smile.

"A postchaise!" cried Anne in dismay.

"Anne!—my mother is dying."

"God save us, Kirsteen!

"I want you to come with me, take your warmest cloak: there will be no change of clothes necessary that I know of, for we will most likely be back to-morrow."

"To go with ye?" faltered Anne—"to—to Drumcarro, Kirsteen?" All the blood forsook her face.

"Where else? My mother is there, and she's dying, and crying for us."

"Oh, I dare not—I dare not! Oh, I cannot go with ye, Kirsteen! You don't know, you've got great courage—but me, I'm just a coward. Oh, I canna go."

"My mother is dying," said Kirsteen, "and crying for you and me. Can we let her go down to her grave without a word?"

"We've both left her in her life, and maybe we were to blame; but to leave her to die is more than I can do. Anne, you must come."

Anne fell back in her chair, her rosy face the colour of ashes, her plump person limp with terror and dismay. "Oh, I canna go. Oh, I canna leave the bairns! Oh, David!" She turned to him with a gasp, terrified by the blazing of Kirsteen's eyes.

"Well, my dear," said the doctor, "your sister's right and ye ought to go. But when ye get there," he added turning to Kirsteen, "have you any surety that they will let you in? To go all that way for nothing would be little good to your mother: and I will not have my wife insulted with a door steekit in her face—even if it is her father's door."

"I have this surety," said Kirsteen, feeling herself to tower over them though she was not very tall, "that I will see my mother, whoever steeks the door in my face, nor think twice if it was the King himself."

"The King's the first gentleman in the country," said the doctor shrugging

his shoulders, "but your father?"

"He is just my father, Dr. Dewar, and Anne's father, and we will say no more; the question is my mother that never harmed living creature nor said an unkind word. How can ye stop to consider, Anne? Your mother! The more ye cherish your bairns the more ye should mind upon her."

"I think, my dear," said the doctor, "that it's your duty to go. It might pave the way to a reconciliation," he added, "which would be good for us all and good for the bairns. I think you should go."

"Oh, David!" was all that Anne said.

Kirsteen stood and looked upon them all with a flash of scorn. Was this the effect of marrying and being happy as people say? The little plump mother with her rosy face no longer capable of responding to any call outside of her own little circle of existence, the babies delving with their spoons into the porridge, covering their faces and pinafores, or holding up little gaping mouths to be fed. It had been a delightful picture which she had come in upon before at an earlier stage, when Anne had wept at her mother's name, and cried wistfully for a message from home, and longed to show her children. That had all been sweet—but now it was sweet no longer. The prosaic interior, the bondage of all these little necessities, the loosening of all other bonds of older date or wider reach, was this what happiness meant? Sometimes a sudden *aperçu* of this kind will flash through the mind of one for whom those ties are forbidden and give a consolation, a compensation to the fancy. But the thought only passed as swiftly as a breath through the mind of Kirsteen.

However when the postchaise came to the door, Anne, who had been hurried into her black silk gown and cloak more by pressure of the doctor than by any will of her own, was ready to step into it with her sister. Kirsteen did not quite know how it was done. She would have retired from the conflict and left her sister with the children and their porridge, but Dr. Dewar was of a different mind. He had never given up the hope of having it fully recognized that his wife was one of the old Douglasses; and here there seemed to him an opportunity of bringing about that hope. He half led, half followed her, into her room, having himself summoned one of the maids to look after the children. "Ye must just put the best face upon it, Anne; your sister is right. It would be unnatural, and a thing that would be generally blamed if you did not try to see your mother. And as for your father he won't bite you whatever he does."

"Oh, David! he'll just say things that would make you tremble; he'll take me and put me to the door," said Anne crying with fright and reluctance.

"Nonsense, woman; and if he does you must just put up with it. You have a

good home to come back to, and you will be none the worse, and ye'll have done your duty; but he'll maybe be much softened by the circumstances," said the doctor, "and there is no saying what might happen. It would have a very good effect if it were known you had gone to Drumcarro, and think what a fine thing it would be for the bairns. Take your warmest cloak as your sister said, and my plaid to put over your knees. It will be a very cold journey."

"Oh," cried Anne, "I will just be perished, I know. And very likely turned to the door in the cold, and never see my mother at all."

"Well, ye must just try," said Dr. Dewar, bringing her out of her room triumphantly, and fully equipped. Anne cried for an hour, sobbing by Kirsteen's side over her deserted children and home, and with a certainty that everything would go wrong while she was away. "David will get no right dinners, and the two eldest will be late for the school in the morning, and the little bairns neglected all the day. There's no confidence to be put in servants when the mistress is not there. And most likely I will never get a glimpse of my mother, and my father will put me to the door."

"Oh, Anne, is that all you think of her that never was hard upon any of us—that always was kind—and suffering so long, weary in body and in soul?"

"You need not instruct me about my mother, Kirsteen. I am the eldest, and I am a mother myself, and who should know if I don't?" said Anne roused at last. Kirsteen was glad to accept the position of inferiority thus allotted to her on all sides. She was neither mother nor wife, nor ever would be so. The others took a higher position than hers. She acquiesced without a word, with a faint smile, and was thankful to be allowed to sit silent listening to Anne's querulous murmurs, and still more thankful when in the unusual movement and silence Mrs. Dewar dropped to sleep. The journey was doubly sad to her who had so lately travelled along the same road in the first force of her passionate misery. That seemed to be long, long ago, as if a dull subduing lifetime had passed between. The dreadful thing was to think of the long life to come, which might go on and on for so many years.

## CHAPTER VI.

“What will ye do now?” said Anne.

Once more Kirsteen had left her carriage in the village where so short a time before she had paused on a different mission. Every detail of that journey had been brought back to her by this. The six months had softened a little the burning of that first bitter wound. The calm of acknowledged loss had settled down, deep and still upon her life—but all the breathless excitements of the previous quest, when she knew not whether the only satisfaction possible to her now might be given or not, and saw in anticipation the relic that was to make assurance sure, and felt in her breast the burning of the murderous steel—all these returned to her soul with double and almost intolerable force as she retraced the same road. An ailing and feeble mother not seen for years,—who would not hasten to her bedside, weep over her failing days, and grieve—but not with the grief that crushes the heart—? That anguish is soft, even after a time sweet. It is the course of nature, as we say. The life from which ours came must fade before ours. The light of day is not obliterated by that natural fading. Kirsteen had set out at an hour’s notice, and was prepared to risk any encounter, any hardness or even insult in order to answer her mother’s call. She was not reluctant like Anne, nor did she grudge the trouble and pain. But as she returned in thought to her previous lonely flight into these glens the acuter pang swallowed up the lesser. She had not spoken to her sister for a long time. Her recollections grew more and more keen, as in another twilight, yet so different, she again approached the glimmering loch, the dimly visible hills. Anne’s unsteady grasp upon her arm brought her to herself.

“What must we do? We must just leave the chaise here, it can go no further. To drive to the door would frighten them all, and perhaps betray us. It is not a very long walk.”

“Are ye going to walk? I am not a good walker, Kirsteen. And in the dark by that wild road? I never could get so far—Oh, I’m so used to town ways now—I couldna take such a long, dreadful walk.”

“Anne!”

“It would be far better to leave me here. You could send for me if I was really wanted; I’m very tired already, and not fit—oh, not fit for more. You’re younger—and ye always was so strong—not like me.”

“Would you like your bairns to leave ye to die alone—for the sake of a two miles’ walk? Would ye like them to lie down and sleep and rest, and you dying

two miles away?"

"Oh, Kirsteen, you are very cruel to me! What can I do for her?" cried Anne. "She will have plenty without me."

It was no time for controversy, and as Anne trembled so that she could scarcely stand Kirsteen had to consent to take the postchaise on, as far as was practicable without rousing the household at Drumcarro. For herself the chill of the wintry night, the cold freshness in the air, the wild sweep of sound all round her, in the swelling burn, and the rustle of the naked trees and all those inarticulate murmurs of silence which come down from the heights of unseen hills were salutary and sweet. When they paused at last upon the lonely road and stepped out into the blackness of the night with the lantern that was to guide them on their further way, that descent into the indecipherable dark, with all the roaring of wind and stream about them, had indeed something in it that was appalling. Anne, not able even to complain more, clung to Kirsteen's arm with a terrified grasp, and listened among all the other storms of sound to the rolling of the wheels going back as if her last hope was thus departing from her. She that ought to have been warm and safe at home, putting the children to bed, sitting between the bright fire and the pleasant lamp waiting for David, to think that she should be here in a darkness that might be felt, with the burn on one side rushing like some wild beast in the dark, and the wind lashing the bare branches on the other, and only Kirsteen, a woman like herself, to protect her! A weak woman with a strong husband loses all faith in other women. How could Kirsteen protect her? She shivered with cold and terror clinging to her sister's arm but without any faith in it, and thinking of nothing but her own terrors and discomfort. Kirsteen on her side felt the stimulus of the cold, the tumult of natural sounds, the need of wary walking, and the responsibility of the burden upon her arm as something that subdued and softened the storm of recollections in her heart.

When they came suddenly upon the house of Drumcarro, almost unexpectedly, although the added roar of the linn coming nearer made them aware that the house could not be far off, Anne broke down altogether. The house was faintly lighted, one or two windows up stairs giving out a faint gleam through the darkness in honour of the approaching event. The house door stood half open, the shutters were not closed in the dining-room. That air of domestic disarray, of the absorption of all thoughts in the tragedy going on up stairs which is habitual to such moments, had stolen into the house. The two wayfarers standing outside, both of them trembling with the strangeness of it, and fear and emotion, could see some one sitting by the fire in the dining-room with a bowed head. They grasped each other's hands when they saw it was

their father. He was sitting by the side of the fire bending forwards, his profile brought out against the dark mantelpiece by the ruddy glow. Even Kirsteen's stronger frame trembled a little at sight of him, and Anne, no better than a helpless lay figure, hung upon her sister's arm without power of movement, stifling by force a terrified cry. It would not have reached him in the tumult of natural noises outside, but she became more frightened and helpless still when this cry had burst from her lips. "Oh! come away, come away, I dare not face him," she said in Kirsteen's ear. And Kirsteen too was daunted. She abandoned the intention of entering by the open door, which had been her first thought, and softly took the path which led to Marg'ret's quarters behind. Drumcarro heard the faint click of the latch as she opened the gate. He rose up and listened while they shrank into the shelter of the bushes. Then he came out of the door, and stood there looking out into the darkness with a faint candle showing his own lowering countenance to the watchers outside, but to him nothing. "I thought it might be the doctor," he said to himself, then went again to his seat by the dull fire. Anne was no more than a bundle upon Kirsteen's arm. She dragged her as softly as might be to the lighted kitchen behind, and looking in at the uncurtained window had the good fortune to catch Marg'ret's eye.

"Ye have brought her with ye," said Marg'ret half reproachfully when Anne had been placed in a chair before the fire.

"She had the same right as I. We have both deserted the old house."

"Oh, my bonny dear, but not the same. Kirsteen, my lamb—ye're all well, all well?"

Marg'ret searched with longing eyes the face that had so long been lost to her. Some things she knew, many she divined. She asked no question but looked and saw, and sighed and shook her head. The face was not the girl's face she knew; but she was not aware that the change in it had come within the last six months, the setting of the mobile lines with a certain fixedness, the mysterious depths that had come into the laughing, flashing, soft, fierce eyes she knew, the eyes that were made of light. Behind the light there was now a deep sea, of which the meanings were hidden and manifold.

"There's no question of me," said Kirsteen, meeting her look steadfastly, "but of my mother—"

"She is just herself," said Marg'ret, "just herself, poor body. The end is coming fast and she has little fear of it. Oh, I think very little fear; but taken up with small things as she always was."

"I will just go up—"



“Will ye go up? The Laird is about the house: and I am feared he will make some stramash when he sees ye. If ye were to wait till he is in bed? She has not said a word about ye all day, but I’ve seen her as if she was listening. She’ll maybe have had some inkling from the Lord that her bairn was coming. She’s real peaceable and contented,” said Marg’ret, putting her apron to her eyes. “The Almichty is just dealing with her like a petted bairn. She’s no feared—her that aye thought the grasshopper a burden—I ken fine that she has been looking for ye the livelang day.”

“I will just go up,” said Kirsteen again.

“And what am I to do with *her*?”

“Marg’ret, it’s Anne.”

“I ken weel who it is, Dr. Dewar’s wife; you might just have let her bide with her bairns. What am I to do with her? It’s no her mother she’s thinking o’. The Laird will never thole her in the house. He’ll just take her with his foot like a bundle of claes, which is what she is, and put her to the door.”

“You will take care of her, Marg’ret,” said Kirsteen. There was some justice in Marg’ret’s description. Anne sat huddled up in a chair by the fire holding out her hands to it now and then, moaning a little. She had asked no question as they came in; perhaps she had heard the reply to Kirsteen’s anxious inquiry. She was cold no doubt and miserable, and beyond all afraid. When there was any sound in the house she drew herself together with a shudder. “You will just take care of her, Marg’ret; let her lie down upon your bed, and keep her warm, and when my father has gone to his bed”—

“You will not wait for that yoursel’?”

Kirsteen’s answer was to walk away. She went through the passage with her heart beating, and mounted the dark stair; there were few lights about the house, a solitary miserable candle at the top of the stair waving about in the wind that blew in from the open door, and another placed on a small table near the head of Mrs. Douglas’s bed. The invalid herself was quite in the dark shade with a curtain between her and this light. The whiteness of her worn face on the pillow betrayed where she was but little more. But by the bedside with the gleam of the candle upon her soft, beautiful hair, and her face, which Kirsteen thought was like the face of an angel, stood Jeanie, Jeanie woman-grown, the beauty that all her sisters had expected her to be, radiant in colour and expression. For the first moment the light that seemed to ray from Jeanie was the only thing that Kirsteen saw. It was what she had expected. It gave her almost a pang of sudden exquisite pleasure by her mother’s deathbed.

“Did ye hear somebody, Jeanie, coming up the stair?”

“It will be Merran, mother, with the things for the night.”

“It canna be Merran; I know one foot from another though I’m a little dull, just a little dull in my hearing. Look out and see if your sister’s come.”

“Do you mean Mary, mother?”

“No, I’m not meaning Mary. She’s the one of all my bairns most like me, folk say—the same coloured hair—not like your red heads—and Alexander he was aye a brown-haired laddie. Eh, to think that I will never see one of them again!—and I’m just quite content, not frettin’ at all. They’ll be taken care of—they’ll get wives of their own. When they get wives—or men either—there’s but little room for their mother. But I’m not heeding—I’m just not heeding. I’m quite content. Look out, Jeanie, and see if that was your sister at the door.”

Jeanie turned to do her mother’s bidding and found herself almost face to face with a lady whom she thought at first she had never seen before. She gave a little cry of instinctive alarm.

“Is she there?” said the mother faintly from the bed. “I knew she would be there. Come to the other side, Kirsteen, that I may get the light upon ye, and see it’s you. Ay, it’s just you—my bonny woman!—but you’ve changed, you’ve changed.”

“No, mother—just the same Kirsteen.”

“In one way. I dinna doubt ye, my dear; but ye’ve come through trouble and sorrow. I’m thinking there was something I had to say, but it’s clean gone away out of my mind.” She had put out her hand to Kirsteen, and was smiling faintly upon her from amidst the pillows. “I knew ye were coming—I just heard the coach rattling all the day.”

“But, mother, tell me how you are? That’s the most important thing—you’re easy, at least in no pain?”

“Oh, I’m just very easy. I’m easy about everything. I’m no tormenting myself any more. I aye told ye I would never live to see my boys come back. Ye would not believe me, but ye see it’s true. One thing’s just a great blessing—I’ll be away myself before the next laddie goes.”

“Oh, mother, never mind that; tell me about yourself.”

Mrs. Douglas lay silent for a little while, and then she asked in her soft, small voice, no longer querulous, “Kirsteen, have ye got a man?”

“No, mother.”

“It’s maybe just as well—it’s maybe better. You’ll give an eye to the rest. Ye were always more like a mother than Mary. Give an eye to them. This puir lassie here; she’ll be a wee forlorn when I’m away.”

“Oh, mother!” cried Jeanie, with an outburst of vehement tears.

“There’s something I wanted to tell ye—but it’s gone out of my mind. Eh, when I think how many of ye have lain at my breast, and only the two of ye here; but it’s no matter, it’s no matter. I’ve aye been a complaining creature. Fourteen bairns is a heavy handful, and three of them dead. My first little girlie of all I lost, and then one between you and Robbie, and then—all of you weel in health, and like to live, but just thae three. But that’s plenty to keep a woman’s heart. I have a notion I’ll find them still little things when I win up yonder,” said the dying woman, with a flicker of her feeble hand towards the dim roof. A faint, ineffable smile was upon her face. “She was Alison, after my mother,” she said.

The two daughters, one on each side of the bed, stood and watched while this little monologue went on, Jeanie shaken now and then by convulsive fits of weeping, Kirsteen too much absorbed in her mother for any other sensation.

“So ye have no man?” said Mrs. Douglas again. “It’s maybe just as well; you will be a stand-by for them all, Kirsteen, my bonny woman. I’m thankful there’s one that is not marriest. You will just tell them all when they come hame that I knew I would never see them more, but just wore away at the last very easy, very easy and content. I’m waik, but just bye ordinar comfortable, awfu’ light like, as if I could just mount up on angels’ wings, ye mind, and flee——”

“It’s wings like eagles, mother,” said Jeanie, anxious for accuracy.

“Well, well, there’s little difference. Kirsteen, she’s very young, younger than you were at her age. Ye’ll aye give an eye to Jeanie. She may have need of it when her auld mother’s away. I’ve not been much protection, ye’ll think, but still it’s a loss to a woman bairn. Jeanie’s my youngest and Alison my first-born, and yet Jeanie’s a woman and Alison a little playing bairn at heaven’s gate. Isna that strange?” A little sound of laughter came from the bed. Never was dying so easy, so pleasant and gentle. The sand was ebbing out a grain at a time. Suddenly she roused herself a little, and put out again her hand to Kirsteen. A little change came over her face. “I hear your father’s step coming up the stair. But ye’ll no forsake me, Kirsteen—ye’ll not go away?”

“Never while you want me, mother.”

“It will not be for long,” said the dying woman. Her gratitude was

disturbed by a little alarm; she grasped Kirsteen with her shadowy hand, and held her fast.

## CHAPTER VII.

“Weel—how are ye now?” said Drumcarro, coming to his wife’s bedside. His shaggy eyebrows were drawn together, so that his eyes gleamed small from among the manifold puckers round them. He was not altogether without feeling. He was sorry now that she was dying. He had never taken much notice of her constant illness before. His voice was still gruff and abrupt, and he had no kind things to say, but in his way he was a little affected by the fact that she was lying, this weak creature to whose presence and complaints he had been accustomed for so many years, on the brink of the grave.

“I’m just very comfortable. Never you mind me, Neil, my man. Just go to your bed, and if anything should happen Jeanie will give ye a cry. Your father was never a man that could do without his night’s rest. And there’s no need; I’m just as easy as I can be, and well taken care of.” Mrs. Douglas was past the little wiles which women fall into when there is a domestic despot to deal with. She forgot that it was a sin against her husband that Kirsteen should be there. She turned her head from one side to the other with a smile. “Real weel taken care of—between them,” she said.

Drumcarro lifted his head and gazed fiercely at the figure on the other side; the folds of his eyelids widened and opened up, a fierce glance of recognition shot out of them. “How dared ye come here?” he said.

“To see my mother,” said Kirsteen.

“How dared ye come into my house?”

“I would have gone—to the gates of death when my mother wanted me. Let me be, as long as she wants me, father; she’s so quiet and peaceable, you would not disturb her. Let her be.”

He looked at her again, with a threatening look, as if he might have seized her, but made no other movement. “Ye’ve done less harm than you meant,” he said; “ye’ve brought no canailye into my house; ye’ll just pass and drop with no importance, and have no mention in the family. Be it so. It’s no worth my while to interfere; a lass here or a lass there maitters nothing, so long as there’s no canailye brought into my house.”

“Neil,” said the mother from the bed, “we must just pray the Lord to bless them a’ before we pairt. Fourteen of them between you and me—I’ve just been naming them a’ before the Lord. Alison, she was the first; you were terrible disappointed thinking there might maybe be no more.” Mrs. Douglas once more laughed feebly at this mistake. “And then there was Alexander, and ye

were a proud man. And then Donald and William, and then Anne, my bonny Anne, my first lass that lived—”

“Hold your peace, woman. Put out that name, damn her! confound her! She’s none o’ mine.”

“And Neil that ye called Nigel, but I like it Neil best,” said the low voice rippling on without interruption. “And syne Mary, and syne—But eh, it wearies me to name them a’. Their Maker just knows them a’ well, puir things, some in heaven, and some in India—and some——. Just say with me, God bless them a’, fourteen bonnie bairns that are men and women now—and some of them with bairns of their ain. To think all these lads and lassies should come from me, always a waik creature—and no a blemish among them all—not a thrawn limb, or a twisted finger, straight and strong and fair to see. Neil, my man, take my hand that’s a poor thin thing now, and say God bless them all!”

“What good will that do them? I’m for none of your forms and ceremonies,” said Drumcarro, putting his hands deep in his pockets, “ye had better try and get some sleep.”

“I’ll get plenty sleep by and by. Kirsteen, I would like to turn upon my side, to see your father’s face. Neil, ye’ve been a good man to me.”

He started a little, evidently not expecting this praise.

“On the whole,” said the dying woman. “I was a silly thing when I was young, but the bairns were always a great pleasure. But you’re a dour man, Neil—ye canna forgive nor forget. Kirsteen, that ye put your curse upon, she’ll be the stand-by for the whole house. Mind you what I say. She’ll have no man, and she’ll be the stand-by——”

“No man will ever have her, ye mean. She’ll just live and die an auld maid,” said Drumcarro, with a hoarse laugh.

“Shell be the stand-by,” said Mrs. Douglas, “and maybe my poor Anne——” She paid no attention to the interruption he made. “I would not wonder,” she said with a faint smile, “if my poor Anne——Eh, I would like to see her little bairns, Kirsteen. Why are they not here?”

“If one of the confounded set comes to my door——”

“Oh, father,” cried Kirsteen, “hold your peace, and let her be.”

“That minds me,” said the dying woman; “give me your hand, Neil—or rather take a hold of mine, for I’m very waik—like the time we were marriet. Ay, that’s the way.” Though she was so weak her faint fingers closed over the hard hand that unwillingly humoured her whim, and took hers. “Now,” she

said, “ye know it’s the man that’s the priest and king in his own house. I’ll just say the amen. Neil, God bless them a’ every one, and all belonging to them, for Jesus Christ’s sake, amen—amen! that’s for His Son’s sake, ye know, in whom He is ever well pleased. Amen! And many thanks to ye, my man, for doing my last bidding. The Lord bless them a’, and all belonging to them, in heaven and in earth, and the far places of the earth, for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen!”

Drumcarro said no more, his rugged countenance lowered like a thunder cloud, yet there were workings in the muscles of the weather-beaten cheeks and throat half covered with grizzled hair. He drew his hand out of hers, and looked for a moment at the marks of the weak fingers which had so closed upon it, leaving an impress which died out as he gazed, like the fingers themselves disappearing out of sight.

“Now we’ll all go to our beds,” said the faint voice cheerfully. “I’m real glad we’ve just had that moment; for the man’s the priest—the man’s the priest. I just said, amen—ye all heard me, just amen. Neil, my man, go away to your bed.”

He hesitated a moment, then turned away. “Ye can give me a cry if there’s any change,” he said to Jeanie as he passed; and then they could hear his heavy steps going slowly along the passage, stopping for a moment to blow out the flickering candle, and then the closing of his door.

“I’m going to my bed too. I’m real happy and easy, and just ready for a sleep; was it no a grand thing to get your father in such a good key, and hear him bless them all?” said the patient with a little proud flutter of joy, and then her eyes closed like the eyes of a child. Kirsteen sent her younger sister also to bed, and made what arrangements she could for the comfort and quiet of the dying woman. Many of the appliances of nursing did not exist in those days, but affection and good sense are perhaps after all the best appliances.

She sat down by the bedside, with a strange sensation as if she were in a dream. The peacefulness about her was wonderful, so different from anything she had expected. She had feared to find her mother as querulous and wailing as ever, and to have probably a struggle over her bed; possibly to be expelled from the house. Instead of this all was quiet; everything given over into her hands. She sat going over the wonderful things that had happened since she had left the place, her terror of the step she had felt herself bound to take, her trembling helplessness, the sustenance of her sweet and tender hope. And now that hope was gone for ever, and all dreams, and every inspiring expectation. Her life was blank though so full—no hidden heart in it any longer. She would be the stand-by of her family. “That I will!” Kirsteen said to herself; the same words she had said to him when he had whispered, “Will ye wait?” She

remembered this too with a forlorn sense of her own life as of a thing apart, which went on shaping itself different from all anticipations. She to be the stand-by of the family who had fled from it so helpless and unfriended! And she to have that dim blank before her, with no light ever to come out of it, whose heart had been fixed so early upon such a hope! Perhaps the second pledge might end too in unfulfilment like the first. At least she would have soothed the conclusion of her mother's fading life.

It was in the middle of the night that Anne was introduced to her mother's bedside. She had fallen asleep in Marg'ret's bed, and had not awakened for hours, sleeping the heavy sleep of fatigue and unaccustomed excessive emotion. To travel in a postchaise all day, to take a terrible walk in the dark with the light of a lantern, she who was accustomed to Glasgow streets, to lie down to sleep fully dressed on a strange bed, she who was used to retire punctually to rest at ten o'clock, with the baby in its cradle beside her, and her husband to see that all was right! When Anne woke and realized all the horrors of her position, come here to attend a deathbed (of which, as of other painful things, she had a great terror), and with the risk of being seen and seized by her father, perhaps exposed to personal violence, perhaps turned out into the dark night—and everything she was used to out of her reach—her sensations were almost those of despair. If it had not been for the superadded horrors of the dark road, she would have stolen out of the house, and escaped. But she dared not alone face the darkness and solitude, and the raging burn and roaring wind, which were like two wild beasts on either side of the way. She thought of David sleeping quietly at home, and all the children in their beds, with a wild pang of mingled longing and injury. They could sleep while she was surrounded by these terrors; and David had made her come in spite of herself, in spite of her certainty that it would kill her. She got up in the wildest feverish nervousness and misery, and looked at herself in Marg'ret's little looking-glass—a wild, pale, red-eyed, dishevelled creature, so entirely unlike Mrs. Doctor Dewar. Oh, what should she do? The terrors of the cowardly and ignoble are perhaps more dreadful than anything that can be experienced by minds more highly endowed. No barrier of reason or possibility appeared to Anne to limit the horrors that might happen to her. She might be murdered there for anything she knew.

And it was with the greatest difficulty that she was got up stairs. She was afraid of everything, afraid of the creak of the stairs, of her father's door, lest it should open upon her suddenly, and of her mother's death-bed. Anne was terribly afraid of death—always with a personal terror lest she should see or hear something ghastly and dreadful. "Oh, Kirsteen, it will just kill me," she said. "What will kill ye?" cried Kirsteen in indignation. "It is just a sight for



the angels.” But Anne was beyond the verge of such consolation. She dropped down a helpless heap of clothes and tears by her mother’s bedside, scarcely venturing a glance at the blanched and shrunken white image that lay in her mother’s bed. And by this time the dying woman had wandered beyond the consciousness of what was about her. She smiled and opened her eyes for a moment when she was appealed to, but what she said had no connection with the circumstances about her. “Mother, it is Anne—Mother, Anne’s here, Anne’s come to see ye—Mother, have ye not a word for Anne?” “Anne, is that her name? No, my bonny dear, but Alison after my mother. She’s the biggest of the three, and look at her gold hair like Jeanie’s.” The white face was illuminated with the most beautiful smile—the half-opened eyes had a dazzled look of happiness. She opened them faintly with the one recognition that remained in them. “Eh, Kirsteen, but it’s bonny, bonny!” “Mother,” cried Kirsteen with her arm under the pillow gently moving and changing the position of the sufferer, as she turned from one side to another. “Mother! one word for poor Anne!” Her mother only turned once more those dazzled faint eyes with the last spark of mortal consciousness in them to Kirsteen and smiled. She had gone out into the green pastures and by the quiet waters, and recognized earthly calls no more.

“Oh, Kirsteen, never mind, oh, never mind. Now that I’ve seen her I’ll just creep away.”

“Come here,” said Kirsteen full of pity, “and ye can give her a kiss before ye go.”

Anne dragged herself up, trembling and tottering. She would rather have dared the dark road than touch that white face. But what her sister ordained she had to do. She bent over the bedside with terror to give the required kiss.

Something had roused Drumcarro at that moment from his disturbed slumbers. He had thrown himself on his bed half dressed, being after all human and not without some feeling in respect to the poor companion of so many long years. Perhaps he had heard something of the progress of Anne and her supporters up the stairs. He came out now with a swing of his door, pushing open that of the sick room. The first thing he saw was the distracted face of Anne put forward reluctantly towards her mother, against the dark moreen curtains of the bed. She saw him at the same moment, and with the shriek of a wild creature at the touch of the slayer sank out of sight, prone upon the floor, keeping a despairing hold upon the folds of Kirsteen’s dress. Scorn of the coward no doubt was in Drumcarro’s mind as well as rage at the intruder. He made a stride across the room, and caught her by the shoulder forcing her to her feet. The unusual sounds roused the dying mother. She struggled up,

looking wildly round, "What was that, what was that? Oh, dinna make a noise, bairns, and anger your father." Then her dim faculties returned to their previous impression. "Neil, Neil—you're the priest—Say it once more—The Lord bless them a' and all belonging to them, for Jesus Christ's sake, Amen—for ever and ever, Amen!"

She put her wasted hands upon her breast and fell back on her pillows. The end had come—and everything had now to give way to the presence of death. Drumcarro thrust his trembling daughter violently from him with a muttered oath, and all except Anne gathered round the bed. The solitary candle flickered with a faint light upon the group, Kirsteen on one side with her arm under the pillow to ease the faint movements of the dying, the father's dark and weather-beaten countenance lowering over the bed, Marg'ret behind, and Jeanie more like an angel than ever in her white nightdress, startled by the sensation that had gone through the house, appearing in the doorway. A last gleam of light in the mother's fading eyes rested upon this white angelic figure. No doubt the departing soul took it for the guide that was to lead her to the skies.

Mr. Douglas put his hand, not without reverence, over the closing eyes. He took out his watch to note the time. To kiss the dead face, or make any demonstration of love or sorrow would have been impossible, and a contradiction of all his habits and tenets: but the man was subdued, and there was something in this presence which obliterated for the moment all violent impulses. He said aloud but softly, "Twenty minutes past three in the morning," and closing his big watch with a sharp sound which jarred upon the silence turned away. He even laid his hand almost tenderly for an instant upon the golden head of Jeanie as he passed her, and closed his own door with little noise. It was his only tribute to the dead, and yet it was a real tribute. No harsh sound nor violence could intrude there. Perhaps he was ashamed to have startled her, and thankful even in his arbitrary soul that she had not known what it was.

Some moments of absolute silence passed during which Anne did not know what to do. She had time to steal away, but was afraid to do so—not sure that her father might not be lurking, lying in wait for her outside of the door. The grip of his fingers on her shoulder seemed still to burn her, and yet she had not received any harm. And this was not all—for awe and superstitious fear and some natural feeling also kept her still. She might see some white image of her mother more terrible still than the wrath of the other parent if she ventured out of the shelter of human society even in the death-chamber. Tears were hot behind her eyes, waiting to burst. She did not dare to approach, to look again at the face out of which life had just departed. The only movement of which she

was capable was to put forth a hand and grasp Kirsteen's dress, as at last, after that long moment of silence and homage to the departed life, the watchers began to move again.

How soon that has to be! A few inevitable tears, a sense of utter quiet and relief after the struggle, instinctive little cares which Marg'ret could not postpone, to close the eyes, to straighten the dead arms, to smooth the sheets in the decorum of death. Marg'ret's eyes were full of tears, but she knew well all that had to be done. "You must go and lie down, my dear, and leave the rest to me," she whispered. "All's done that you can do," and it was only then that Anne recurred to their minds, an anxiety the more, and that Kirsteen felt as she moved her sister's hold upon her dress.

Four o'clock in the morning, the darkest moment of the winter night! The little troubled feminine party withdrew to the warm kitchen, the only place in the house where there was warmth and light, to consult what they should do. It had been Kirsteen's intention to leave her father's house at once as she had come, her duty being over. But Jeanie's anxious entreaty bursting forth among the tears in which her simple sorrow found relief, and a sense of the charge she had seemed to take from her mother's hand like some office and trust conferred, changed the mood of Kirsteen. Her father had endured her presence, her young sister needed her; Anne was her chief hindrance in these circumstances. But even for Anne the bitterness of death was past. It was all over, and she had sustained little harm; all that any one could ask of her now was to get away as quietly as possible; the worst was over; Anne was capable of enjoying the cup of tea which Marg'ret made haste to prepare. She even was persuaded to "try an egg" with it, as she had "a journey before her." It is true that for a moment she was thrown into fresh despair by the suggestion that Kirsteen was not to accompany her home.

"Oh, what will I do?" cried Anne. "Walk that awful way in the dark, and take up the chaise at the end, and all alone, with nobody with me? Oh, Kirsteen, if I had known, you would never have got me to leave my family, me that never goes a step without my man!"

"It's a great pity," said Marg'ret, "that you put Mrs. Doctor Dewar to all that trouble, Kirsteen."

"And so it is," said Anne. "I told her so; I said I was not fit for it, to be trailed away to the Highlands at a moment's notice. And my poor mother that was too far gone to mind, or to ask about my family. And what good could I do? But you might as well speak to the rocks as to Kirsteen when she has taken a thing into her head. And now what is to become of me?"

## CHAPTER VIII.

The question how to dispose of Anne was finally settled by the evident necessity of sending Duncan, the man from the farm, into the town for various necessary things, and to call at the merchant's and other indispensable errands. Marg'ret decided that he should take the cart, and convey Mrs. Doctor Dewar to the place where the postchaise had been left, an arrangement to which Anne did not object, for Anne was one of the women who have not much confidence in other women, and she was very willing to exchange Kirsteen's protection and care for that of a man, even though he was only Duncan. She made her preparations for departure more cheerfully than could have been supposed, and even set out in the dark with Kirsteen and the lantern to walk a part of the way so that the sound of the cart might not be heard by Drumcarro, with resignation. They were interrupted however as they stole out of the house, by a sudden rush upon them of Jeanie who had been sent back to bed, but lying weeping there had heard the little stir of the departure, carefully as they had subdued every sound. Jeanie thought it was Kirsteen who was abandoning her, and rose and rushed to the door still in her nightdress to implore her sister to stay. "Oh! if ye will not stay, take me with you, oh, take me with you, Kirsteen!" she cried, flinging herself upon her sister's shoulder.

"Oh, Jeanie, whisht, whisht! you will make a noise and wake my father. I am not going away."

"Oh, take me with you, Kirsteen!" cried the girl too much excited to understand what was said. "Oh! dinna leave me here." She clung to Kirsteen's arm embracing it in both her own. "You would not leave me if you knew! Oh! you would take me with you if you knew. Kirsteen! Kirsteen!"

It was Anne who interfered with words of wisdom. "Are you out of your senses, Jeanie?" she said. "Take ye away from your home, and your father's house? Kirsteen may be foolish enough but she is not so mad as that."

"Oh! Kirsteen," continued Jeanie imploringly, putting her wet cheek against her sister's, rubbing herself against her like a child, "hear nobody but me! Bide with me, Kirsteen, or take me with you. I will just die—or worse—if I am left here."

It was not until Marg'ret had come alarmed from her kitchen to bid them, "Oh, whisht, bairns, or ye'll waken your father," that Jeanie could be persuaded to silence, and to believe in her sister's promise to return. The sounds though so subdued still made a whispering through the hall, and an alarming movement that shook the house overhead as if Drumcarro himself

had been roused to see what was going on. This precipitated the departure of Anne, who, frightened as she was for the dark road and the chill of the morning, was still more alarmed at the idea of her father's appearance, and hastened out from the one danger to dare the other, almost with alertness pulling Kirsteen with her, with a clutch of her other arm. Anne's spirit was roused by the episode which had just passed. She was aware that she was not herself strong or able to move about unprotected, or take any separate step on her own responsibility, but she had a great confidence in her own judgment respecting others. She almost forgot to think of the terrors of the dark in her desire to make Kirsteen see her duty in respect to Jeanie, and to set everything right. She panted a little as she spoke walking on in the darkness, with the lantern throwing a faint light upon the ground at her feet, but though it affected her breath, it did not affect her certainty of being able to give good advice.

"Kirsteen—ye will be very wrong—if ye yield to that bairn. She is little more—than a bairn. She is maybe nervish with a person dead in the house. You will say it is weak—but I'm nervish myself. Kirsteen!"—Anne had made a longer pause to take breath,—“ye had ay a great confidence in yourself. But you see you make a mistake whiles. Like bringing me here. David—was just silly as well as you. He thought, if I came, it might mend—matters—and be good for the bairns. But I—was right ye see. When a person's dying—they've no time to think—about other folk.”

“All that my mother thought was about other folk—if you call her children other folk.”

“Ay, in a kind of a general way. But she never said ‘Where's Anne? How many bairns has she?—and is the doctor doing well?’—Which is what I would have expected. No that I did—expect it,” said Anne panting. “Oh, Kirsteen, we'll be in—the burn—if ye do not take care! She never—asked for me, at all,” Mrs. Dewar continued. “I might have been safe—in my bed—at home. A long day in a postchaise—and now another long day—and I'll get back perished with hunger and cold—and if I havena an illness, as Marg'ret says—and just for nothing,” said Anne—“nothing! for all you said—David and you.”

Kirsteen said nothing in reply, but instinctively quickened her pace a little. She heard the rumble of the cart in the darkness round a corner which was to deliver her from Anne's wisdom and helplessness, the first of which was worse than the last. And after a while the gleam of another lantern, the horse's hoofs and jog of the cart guided them to the spot where Duncan stood, his ruddy face grave with sympathy. He made a little remark about the waeiful occasion, and the need of supporting God's will, raising his bonnet reverently; and then Mrs. Dewar was helped into the cart, and went rumbling away into the darkness,

still relieved for a time by the gleams growing fainter and fainter thrown by Duncan's lantern from side to side.

The wind had fallen and the burn ran more softly, as Kirsteen walked home. She was very tired, in that state of exaltation which extreme exhaustion and sorrow sometimes bring, as if lifted out of herself altogether into a clear, still atmosphere of utter sadness, yet relief. The active suffering was over, she was incapable of further pain, but unutterably sad and sorrowful, hushed out of all complaining. The darkness enveloped her and soothed her, hiding her from all the world so that she could go on, weeping all to herself with no one to ask why or how.

“True loves I may get many an ane,  
But minnie ne'er anither.”

These words kept wandering through her mind involuntarily while the tears fell down, and her mouth quivered with something like a smile. The futile contrast now, to her who could have no true love but one, and no second mother. She went on very softly in the dark, as in a dream, feeling in her face the freshness of the mountain air and the turn of the night towards morning—silently weeping as she walked. The greater of her losses was altogether secret, a thing to be known of none. Neither of her sorrows was for the public eye. Her life, which was so far from this and so different, awaited her with labours and cares unknown to this solitude, and she had much to do with which no loss or sorrow could interfere. She was to be the stand-by of the family, she who had fled from it to find a shelter among strangers. She must not even sit down to weep for her mother. Only thus could she allow herself the indulgence of tears. The darkness was sweet to her, wrapping her round, keeping all her secrets. The heavens did not open to show her any beatitude, the landscape which she loved was all hidden away as if it did not exist. Nor were there any ecstatic thoughts in her heart of reunion or heavenly rapture. There was a long, long weary road stretching before her, years that seemed endless going on and on, through which she must walk, weeping only in the dark, smiling and busy through the day. Kirsteen made up her mind to all that was before her in that solitary walk, going towards her desolate home. In a day or two she would have left it, probably for ever, and gone back to a manifold and many-coloured life. The stand-by of the family! She had always intended this, and now there was consecration on her head.

The lights in Drumcarro shone blurred through the dark, a window here and there with rays of reflection round it hanging suspended in the night, no walls visible, a faint illumination for the dead. Duncan's wife had come in to help, and a silent, solemn bustle was going on, sad, yet not without an

enjoyment in it. Merran went and came up and down stairs with an occasional sniff and sob, and the importance of a great event was in the hushed house. Save for a birth or a marriage there had never been so much suppressed excitement in Drumcarro—even Marg’ret was swept by it, and moved about, observing many punctilios, with a tremor of emotion which was not altogether painful. She had put the best sheets upon the bed, and covered the looking-glass with white, and put away everything that belonged to the usages of life. Kirsteen paused for a moment to look at the white, serene face upon the pillows, with all the white, cold surroundings of the death chamber—and then went noiselessly into the room which had been her own, where Jeanie lay fast asleep, exhausted with sorrow and trouble, upon one of the beds. She undressed for the first time since she had left London, and lay down on the other. But she was too tired and overworn to sleep. She lay with wide-open eyes in the dark, thinking over and over all the circumstances through which she found herself again an inmate of her father’s house. It seemed an endless time before the first greyness of dawn crept into the room, carrying with it a whole world of the past, beginning, as it seemed to Kirsteen, a new life of which she but dimly realized the burdens and anxieties. There was her father to think of, how he would receive her now that the protection of her mother’s dying presence was withdrawn. Whether he would allow her to stay—and what she could answer to Jeanie’s cry of distress, “Oh, take me with you!” Anne was a fool and yet she had spoken wisely. The daughter who had herself escaped from home was the last who could take another away. Perhaps the bonds of nature seemed all the stronger now to Kirsteen because she had herself broken them, because even now she shuddered at the thought of being again bound by them. Even when it is but an interval of a few years which has made the change, a woman who has gone out into the world and encountered life is slow to believe that a girl’s troubles can be so heavy as to warrant such a step. They were in her own case she may allow—but how to believe that there is anything in a father’s power tragic enough to make life unbearable for another, or how in Jeanie’s childlike existence such a necessity should arise, made Kirsteen smile with half shame of herself who had set the example, half amazement at her little sister’s exaggerated feelings. It could be nothing surely but fear of her father’s jibes and frowns. Neither of these things alarmed Kirsteen now. And who could be harsh to Jeanie?—not even her father, though she was but a girl!

While the elder sister thought thus, the younger stirred a little and turned towards her. The daylight was still grey but clear enough to make the sweet little countenance visible. Jeanie’s yellow hair was all decently smoothed under her nightcap according to the decorous fashion of the time. And the little

frilled cap surrounding her face made her look something between an infant and a nun, unspeakably childlike, innocent and pure to her sister's admiring eyes. But Jeanie's face grew agitated and unquiet as the faint light stole over it and the moment of waking approached. She put out her hands and seemed to clutch at something in the air—"I will not go—I will not go—I will go with none but Kirsteen," she cried in her sleep. Then, her voice growing thick and hurried, "No—no—I'll not do it—I'll never go—no, no, no." Jeanie struggled in her dream as if she were being dragged away struggling with something stronger than herself. Suddenly she woke, and sat up in her bed with a dazed look round her, and trouble in every line of her puckered eyelids. "What is it, Jeanie?" She turned round and saw Kirsteen, with a sudden lightening of her countenance, as if the sun had risen, "Oh, Kirsteen, if you're there! nobody will meddle with me if you're there!" "What is it—what is it, Jeanie?" Jeanie looked round again as if still unassured. "I was only dreaming," she said.

And there was little time for further inquiries since Marg'ret just then came into the room. She was very tender to Jeanie but anxious to get her roused and dressed and sent down stairs, "to give the laddies, poor things, their breakfast." Marg'ret had restrained herself with a great effort that neither might be disturbed before the time after such a broken night. She herself had not been in bed at all, and felt it quite natural that it should be so, her fatigue going off with the coming of the morning, and a still excitement filling all her veins. The loss of the mistress was perhaps more to Marg'ret than to any one in the house; but Kirsteen too was more to her than any other. She would have a long time to indulge her grief, but not long to hear the story and enter into all the feelings of her child. She had restrained with what was a true self-sacrifice her eagerness and loving curiosity. When she sat down now by Kirsteen's bedside it was with a sigh of satisfaction and relief. "And now, my own bairn, the pride of my heart!" Marg'ret said.

The conversation lasted a long time. Their letters had been frequent for the habit of the time, once every quarter of a year at the least they had exchanged their good wishes and such information to each other about the other as could be conveyed by "hand o' write"; but neither of them had any habit of letter-writing, and there was much to be added, to fill in the framework of fact which Kirsteen had communicated from time to time. Everything indeed had to be told from the time of her arrival in London until the present moment. Marg'ret sat crying softly, holding her hands, keeping up a low murmur of commentary. "Eh, but I'm glad my sister Jean had it in her power." "Eh, but she's a fortunate woman to have ye!" "Eh, if I had but been there!" she exclaimed at intervals, pride and satisfaction mingled with an envy of her sister which Marg'ret's better feeling could scarcely overcome. "I am just an ill woman,



full of envy and all uncharitableness. I would fain, fain have been the one. I would have held ye up in my arms, and let no harm come near ye! I couldna have seen your bonny fingers spoilt with sewing," she cried with outbursts of tears. But when Kirsteen came to the story of the last year, Marg'ret listened upon her knees, her head bent down upon the hands which she held clasped in her own, a few sobs bursting from her breast, her lips pressed in a passion of sympathy which had no words upon Kirsteen's hands. The story was told very briefly in a few words. And then that chapter was closed, and no more was said.

"What is it that ails Jeanie?" asked Kirsteen, after she had come to the end of her tale, and Marg'ret had resumed her seat by the bed. "Tell me what has happened to her; there is something on her mind."

"Hoots," said Marg'ret drying her eyes, "there is little on it, but what is on most lassies' minds—most likely a braw marriage so far as I can see. There is a gentleman that is up in yon lodge on the hill above Glendyer. It's said to be for the fishing—but first it was said to be for the shooting—and my opinion is it's neither for the one nor the other, but for our bit bonny Jeanie. It is just what I always said, even to the Laird himself. She is the bonniest creature in all this country from Clyde to the sea."

"But she would not start in her sleep like that, nor cry and pray to me to take her with me, if that was all. And who is the man?"

"Not like Glendochart, though he's a clever gentleman and a real good man to her that has the wit to guide him. A young lad, long and straight and with a bonny black e'e—and a clever tongue, but leein', for he says very ceevil things to me. He's ceevil to every one about the place, and great friends with the Laird—and I canna tell what ails her at him, if there's anything ails her at him. She was just real pleased to see him till twa three weeks ago; and then she took an ill turn—but wherefore I canna say. Wha can say what whimsies come into a lassie's mind?—and I've been muckle taken up," said Marg'ret. She paused a moment, and if she had been a Roman Catholic would have crossed herself; the impulse was the same, though nothing would have more horrified a Scotch Protestant than to be told so. She paused, and in a low voice said, "Muckle taken up—with her that needs nae mortal's service mair—"

And there was silence between them for a moment, and thought, that travels so fast, stopped remorseful with a sense of compunction, feeling how recent was the event, and how swift was the current of life which had already begun to flow.

"You have not told me who he is?" said Kirsteen presently in a subdued

tone.

“Well,” said Marg’ret rousing herself with a smile of pride and pleasure, “his is a kind of what they ca’ incognity at the lodge; but I’m thinking, though I’m not quite sure, that it’s just one of the Duke’s sons.”

“One of the Duke’s sons,” cried Kirsteen aghast.

“Well, my bonny dear! And wherefore no?—the Douglasses are as good blood as any in Scotland, if it were the Queen herself—”

“Oh, Marg’ret,” cried Kirsteen, “my poor little Jeanie! Do ye think she cares for this man?”

“I make nae doubt ye are used to grander persons than that; but it’s no just ceevil to call the young lord ‘this man.’ ”

“Ye don’t understand.—Oh! ye don’t understand,” cried Kirsteen, wringing her hands. “The blood of the Douglasses may be a very fine thing, but it will not make her a match for the Duke’s son—Marg’ret, you that have so much sense! And what does my father say?”

“I mind the time,” said Marg’ret, “when ye wouldna have said I didna understand. Maybe my sister Jean—Oh, my bonny dear, forgive me, I’m just a jealous fool, and I didna mean it. But there’s naething in it that’s hard to understand; a bonny lad that’s young and ganging his ain gait—and he sees a bonny lass, that is just like a flower, the pride of the place. Is he to wait and reckon, will my father be pleased, and will my leddy mother be pleased? Set them up! Not to be owerproud of a Douglas in their house, and a beauty like Jeanie. The pride used to be on our side once,” said Marg’ret, tossing her head, “if a’ tales be true.”

“It must have been a long time ago,” said Kirsteen; “and my father, what does he say?”

“I never saw the laird so father-like—no since the day when I put your brother Alexander into his arms, that’s now the Cornel and a great man among the blacks in India. I mind the gleam in his face when he got his son, and thought upon all the grand things that would come with the lad-bairn. Ye ken yoursel’ he never heeded a lass he had. But when he sees my lord coming like a little colley doguie after our Jeanie, following her wherever she goes, there’s the same look upon his face. I was the first to tell him,” said Marg’ret with pride, “that it wasna just a bonny lass that bairn would be, but a beauty to be kent about the world. And now he sees it himsel’. What your father says?—He just says naething for pleasure and pride.”

“Oh, Marg’re—I fear, I fear, that this will be the worst of all.”

“And what is there that’s ill among ye, that ye speak of the worst of a’. There’s Mrs. Doctor Dewar just a very comfortable-like person, that’s done weel enough for hersel’. She’s a poor creature with little heart, wrapt up in her common man and her little vulgar bairns. But that is just a’ she would have been fit for whether or no. And there’s Leddy Glendochart that is a real credit to the family, and has travelled, and can knap English with the best—far better than you. And there’s yourself, Kirsteen, that makes all the grand London leddies stand about. And where is the ill among ye, that our bonny little Jeanie should be the worst of a’?”

Marg’re raised her voice unconsciously as she gave forth this flourish, with her head in the air and all her banners waving. But the sound of her own utterance brought her back with a shock to the reality of things. She gave a low cry. “Eh, to think I should forget myself and brag and boast—with her, just an angel of God lying ben the house.”

And once more Marg’re paid a little hasty hot tribute of tears to the presence, now so solemn, but which till now had counted for so little amid the agitations of the family. During those days of mourning, at least the mistress could not be altogether forgotten.

Mary and her husband arrived from Glendochart in the afternoon of that day. She was very full of explanations as to how it was impossible to come sooner, and how the illness had gone on so long, she had no belief in its speedy ending. She went up dutifully to the death-chamber, and shed a natural tear or two and came down again with her handkerchief to her eyes. “I thought my mother would have seen us all out, I never mind of her anything but ill,” she remarked, her ideas still being Scottish though her voice, since her visit to London, had taken on what she considered an English accent. “We had got to think, Glendochart and me, that she would go on as long as any of us. It was a great shock. If I had thought there was danger, I would have been here.”

Then there was a little natural family conversation and a few more natural tears. And Kirsteen gave her sister an account of the last hours which she had witnessed, which Mary listened to with due gravity and a little feeling, saying at intervals, “My poor mother!” “She had always a very feeling heart!” “She was always so proud of her family!” as occasion required. “And what did my father say when he saw you, Kirsteen? I did not think you would dare to come, but Glendochart thought ye would dare anything, and it appears he knew better than me.”

Kirsteen repressed the spark of resentment which this speech called forth.

“My father said little to me. He made no objection, but he was not kind to Anne.”

“To Anne!” Mary cried with horror, looking round lest any one should hear.

“I brought her, that she might see her mother before she died. But I am not unwilling to allow,” said Kirsteen, “that it was a mistake. My mother took no notice of her, and my father—I did it for the best, but she came against her will—and it was a mistake.”

“Little doubt of that,” said Mary; “but I’m very glad ye see it, Kirsteen, for it’s not often ye’ll yield to say ye have made a mistake. And it will be a lesson to you another time.”

“Let us hope so,” said Kirsteen. “There is one thing I would fain have ye do, and that will save me maybe from making another. Mary, our little Jeanie is not happy, I cannot tell why.”

“It would be very unnatural if she were happy, when her mother died this morning.”

“It is not that. Grief is one thing and trouble is another. She has something on her mind. Will ye take her back with ye to Glendochart, and take care of her, when I go away?”

“Take her back? And who would be left with my father, to keep him company? And the two callants, that have nobody to look after them?”

“Marg’ret would look after them. And my father wants no company. Jeanie will miss my mother more than any of us.”

“You will not miss her,” said Mary; “I well believe that. But me that came to see her every six months.”

“Still that is different from Jeanie that has been always here. The little thing will be very solitary. There may be people about that are not company for the like of her. I could not take her, it would not be allowed.”

“I hope, Kirsteen, you will put nothing like that into Jeanie’s head. You to take her! There are many things ye must have forgotten to propose that.”

“I do not propose it. On the contrary I ask you to take her. I am not easy about her. I would not like to have her left here.”

“Do you think because you could not put up with your home that nobody can put up with it?” said Mary. “Ye are just far mistaken, Kirsteen. Jeanie is a contented creature, of a quiet mind, and she’ll do very well and keep very

happy doing her duty to her father. None of us want to be hard upon you, but perhaps if my mother had not had all the charge left upon her, poor body, she might have had a longer and a more peaceful life; when the daughters of the house just take their own way—”

“You did not stay long after me,” said Kirsteen, out of patience.

“I was very different,” said Mary, holding up her head. “I had my duty to my husband to think of; a married woman cannot please herself. You,—it was just your own fancy, but I had to think of Glendochart, for the Scripture says ye are to leave your parents and your father’s house.”

Kirsteen was silent and said no more.

## CHAPTER IX.

The funeral, according to the dreary custom of the time, did not take place for nearly a week, and in the meantime there was a great subdued bustle in the house of mourning. It was rather the house of what they all called *mournings*, or *murninse*, in the plural, than of grief. The mistress lay still and white in her coffin, locked up and shut away, more drearily separated from all living thoughts and ways than had she been in the grave; but the black gowns and bonnets that were intended to “show respect” to her were being manufactured everywhere, in almost every room but hers. Miss Macnab was throned in the parlour as at the time when she came to make the ball dresses, and not less absorbed in the perfection of her art and the fit of every garment, while Kirsteen looked on with something of the suppressed amusement with which a great scholar contemplates the village pedagogue who taught him his first Latin, or an artist the house-painter who first showed him the uses of the brush. How far already had all their thoughts drifted from the dead mother who was the cause of this subdued commotion, and of so much more stir and life than for a long time had been in the house! But yet there were many things that were intimately connected with that poor lady. All her little secrets were disclosed. Mary began almost immediately to clear out the drawers and wardrobes in which her mother’s old dresses and old stores of every kind had accumulated. She turned out the old pockets of which Mrs. Douglas had many, some made in silk to wear outside her gown, some of strong linen to wear below, and which were emptied out with all their countless stores, pathetically insignificant, not without many a critical remark. “There was never anybody like my mother for rubbish in her pockets. It’s just like a clatter of old iron to hear the keys jingling. And what did she ever do with keys?—with everything in Marg’ret’s hand. I cannot tell what to do with these old gowns, unless we give them to the old bodies in the clachan, for they’re past fashion and past wearing, and just rubbitch like all the rest.”

“Could you not let them be? Such as they are, they are part of my mother—at least to me,” said Kirsteen.

“Why would I let them be? Just to gather dust and cumber the earth, and fill presses that there may be need of for living folk. I am not a wasteful person, as maybe in London and among all your heaps of claes you may be tempted to be. They are little more than old rags, and what my mother could mean by keeping them, I cannot divine, but still they might be of use to the old bodies in the clachan. Just bring them all down into the parlour in your arms, Merran, and I’ll sort them there. And ye can clear out the big hanging press; it

might be wanted for Miss Jeanie, or when I come over myself on a visit, for there's very little room for hanging up a good gown in this house."

Kirsteen left her sister to this congenial occupation, feeling the sight of the old, well-remembered gowns, upon which she had hung in her childhood, a sight too pitiful to be endured. But Mary divided them into bundles, and tied them up in napkins, apportioning to the "poor bodies" about, each her share. "If they will not do for themselves, they'll make frocks out of them for their grandchildren," Mary said. She was very thoughtful and considerate of the poor bodies; and she gave Jeanie many lectures upon her duties, now that she was the only one left at home. "I hope you'll not allow yourself to be led away by anything Kirsteen can say to you. Of course we will be aye glad to see you at Glendochart, but in the meantime your duty is at home. What would my father do without a woman in the house? And what would come of the callants? It may be a little dull for you at first, but you must just never mind that. But don't let yourself be led away by Kirsteen, who is just wilfulness itself," said Mary. Jeanie sat very still, and listened, looking wistfully at her mother's old gowns, but she had nothing to say in reply.

Miss Eelen came over to Drumcarro for the funeral, but not with the intention of following the mournful procession to the grave. This was a thing which was contrary to all Scotch customs—a thing unheard of. The men attired in their "blacks," with deep white "weepers" on their cuffs, and great hatbands with flowing ends of crape, formed a long line marching two and two, with pauses now and then to change the bearers along the mournful wintry road. The women sat within, keeping together in one room, and firing off little minute guns in the way of mournful remarks, as they sat solemnly doing nothing, not even looking out to see the object of this lugubrious ceremony carried away to her last rest. Miss Eelen bore the part of a kind of mistress of the ceremonies on this sad occasion. She sat in her weepers and her crape, which was not new like the others' but kept for such occasions, in the high chair which had been Mrs. Douglas's, with a white handkerchief in her hand, and said at intervals, "Poor Christina—she was a fine creature. Your mother, my dears, was a real, right-thinking woman. She was from the south, and ignorant of some of our ways, but her meaning was always good. She was very fond of her family, poor body. All those laddies—and not one of them to help to lay her head in the grave, except the two little ones, poor things."

Kirsteen stood leaning against the window watching through the shutters the mournful black line as it moved away, while Jeanie at her feet, holding by her dress, followed vicariously through her sister's eyes the progress of the procession. They heard the tramp, recognisable among the others, of the

bearers, as they straightened themselves under their burden, and then the sound of the slow, irregular march. "Can ye see it, Kirsteen? Is it away? Is that it passing? Oh, my mother, my mother!" cried Jeanie. She held fast by Kirsteen's dress, as if there was strength and support in it; and Kirsteen stooped and raised her up when the sound of the measured tramp had died away. "Now," she said, "all is gone—the very last. And the time is come when we must begin our common lives again."

"She was indeed a fine creature," said Miss Eelen with a little flourish of her handkerchief. "I mind when she came first here, a delicate bit thing, that never looked as if she would live."

"She was always delicate," said Mary taking up the response.

"And to think of all the bairns she had—a fine stirring family."

"Fourteen of us," said Mary.

"Eleven living, and all a credit—that is to say—but I name no names," said Miss Eelen.

"It is perhaps better not," said Mary.

Kirsteen whispered in her little sister's ear that she could bear this no longer, and taking Jeanie's hand rose to leave the room. She was stopped by Mary's reproving voice—"Where are ye taking Jeanie, Kirsteen? Ye are not going out on the day of my mother's funeral?"

"At least leave the innocent bairn," said Miss Eelen in a voice of solemn command. "A day like this should be like a Lord's day in a house."

"Or worse," Mary added with tremendous seriousness—"for the Sabbath comes once in a week, but your mother's funeral but once in a lifetime."

The words came surging back into Kirsteen's mind again—

"True loves I may get many an ane,  
But minnie ne'er anither."

Her heart felt as if it must burst, and yet it was something like a laugh that broke from her, as she was thus reproached for levity. "I am not likely to forget that," she said. Jeanie clung to her as she left the others to their antiphone. The sound of the familiar linn seemed to have come back to dominate all sounds as before, when she stole out at the back of the house, Jeanie always following. It was a grey mild wintry day, a day such as is consolatory to the overwrought spirit. The two sisters seated themselves on the fallen trunk of a tree on the bank near the head of the linn. The softened rush of the water with no storm



and but little wind in the air filled the atmosphere with a soothing hush of sound. Jeanie laid her head upon her sister's knee, hiding her face, and sobbing softly like a child in its mother's lap when the storm of woe is overpast; Kirsteen who had no tears at her command save those that welled quietly into her eyes from time to time without observation, smoothed tenderly with one hand the girl's soft and beautiful hair.

"Just sob out all your heart," she said, "my little Jeanie—it will do you good."

"Oh, Kirsteen, it is not all for her, but for me too that am so forlorn."

"Jeanie, my dear, it's a hard thing to say, but soon ye will not be so forlorn. We will all go back to our common work, and your heart will maybe not be light again for many a long day; but the sun will begin to shine again."

"Kirsteen," said Jeanie raising her head, "you are my sister next to me, and I am a woman grown. There is not such a long, long way between us; but you speak as if it was a hundred years."

"It is more I think," said Kirsteen; "for you will have all that life can give, and I will have nothing, except maybe you, and being a stand-by for the family as my mother said."

"Why should you not too have all that life can give?"

Kirsteen smiled and shook her head. "It is too long a story; and I would rather speak about you, Jeanie. To-morrow I am going away."

Jeanie seized Kirsteen's hands and held them fast. "I will be no trouble," she said. "I will do whatever you please, but take me with you, Kirsteen."

"I cannot, Jeanie. It would be to steal you away; I dare not do it. If I have been right or wrong in what I did for myself I cannot always tell; but for you, I dare not take it upon me. You heard what Anne said—and it was true."

"Kirsteen," said Jeanie raising her face to her sister. "I have more cause than you. Oh, listen to me, Kirsteen; would you like to see shame at Drumcarro? Would you like to see the name you all think so much of rolled in the dust? Oh, hear what I'm saying, Kirsteen! I have more cause than you."

"Jeanie, my dear! my dear!"

"Kirsteen, there is one that is here, and they all think much of him, and he follows me wherever I go. Kirsteen, are ye listening?" The girl grasped her hands fiercely as if her own had been made of steel. "Kirsteen! It's not to marry me he is seeking me. Do ye hear what I am saying? It is not—for

anything that's good."

And Jeanie who had been very pale, hid her face which was blazing with sudden red in Kirsteen's lap, and sobbed as if her heart would burst.

Kirsteen caught her in her arms, held her to her breast, murmured over her every tender word, but profoundly as Jeanie was in earnest, gave no faith to what she said. "What has put that dreadful thought in your mind? Oh, my darling, if there was such a villain in the world it's not here he would dare to come—with everybody round you to defend you—to our father's house."

"Who have I to defend me?" cried Jeanie raising her head. "Jock is away and Jamie is so young; how should he understand? And my father that notices nothing, that thinks it will be a grand marriage and a credit to the family. Even Marg'ret!"—cried the girl with sudden exasperation, "they will none of them understand!"

Kirsteen took her young sister's face between her hands—"An ill man could have no power but what he got from you. Jeanie, Jeanie, has he got your heart?"

"Oh, how can you tell, you that have never been tried?" cried the girl drawing herself out of her sister's hold. Little Jeanie had her experience too. "No, he has not got my heart; but he gives me no rest night nor day, he sends me letters—I might put them in the fire. But there's little to keep you living at Drumcarro—and I read them, I canna help it. And then he's waiting for me about the door whenever I stir. And his tongue would wile the bird off the tree. And he's not like the rough men you see, young Glenbowie or the like of that, he's a fine grand gentleman. And oh, Kirsteen, take me with you! take me away! For my father's one that will not understand, and Jamie is but a laddie, and even Marg'ret!—And how am I to fight and stand all alone by myself?"

The girl's eyes were full of tears and her face of trouble. She held fast by Kirsteen's hand as if by an anchor of salvation. "He has not got my heart," she said, "but oh, I canna trust my head. He wiles me away. And there's nobody in the world, nobody else, that is heeding what becomes of me, or where I go, unless it's maybe you, Kirsteen. Oh, take me with you, Kirsteen! for I cannot trust myself and live here."

"Jeanie, Jeanie, ye love this man."

"No," cried the girl rising to her feet. "No! no! If it was my last word, No! but I'm lone, lone in the house, and nobody to speak a word, and him with his flattering tongue. And oh, Kirsteen, if you will do anything for Jeanie, take her away."

“There is nothing I would not do for Jeanie,” said the elder sister, drawing her again to her arms. “My dear, there was one I saw in London before I came away.”

“One you saw in London?”

“That had his heart set upon my little sister, one I could serve with my life.”

Jeanie’s agitated face was again covered with a burning blush. She withdrew herself from Kirsteen’s arm. “How can I tell who ye might see in London. It’s far, far from here.”

“And maybe you never thought upon him, though his heart is set on you.”

Jeanie turned from red to pale. She trembled, drawing herself from within her sister’s arm. “How can I tell who it is!” she said with an indignation which made her breathless, “when you never tell me? And there has never been any person—oh, never any person!” Her eyes were unquiet, seeking Kirsteen’s face, then withdrawn hurriedly not to meet her look; her hands were nervously clasping and unclasping in her lap. “Men,” she cried, “never care! I’ve read it in books and I know it’s true. They look at you and they speak and speak, and follow you about, and then when their time is come they go away, and you hear of them no more.”

“Where have you learned all this, my poor little Jeanie,” said Kirsteen tenderly, “for ye seem to have knowledge of things that are beyond me?”

“We learn the things that come our way,” said the girl. Her lips quivered, she was too much agitated to keep still. “Who would that be that you saw in London?” she asked with a forced, almost mocking smile.

“He has been in India since then, and wherever there was fighting. His name is Major Gordon.”

Kirsteen was conscious once more of the grudge in her heart at Gordon’s life and promotion, and the title she had given him; but she had no time for thought. For Jeanie rose up from her side in a passion of mingled feeling, anger and indignation and wistfulness and pain.

“How dared he speak?” she cried. “How dared he name my name? Him! that came when I was but a bairn, and then rode away!”

“Jeanie!”

“Oh! I thought you understood,” cried Jeanie in a kind of frenzy. “I thought you would know, but you’ve aye had peace in your heart though ye think

you're so wise. There has nobody ever come and gone and made ye feel ye were a fool and unwomanly, and all that Marg'ret says. You have never known what it was to have your heart burnt like hot irons on it, and to scorn yourself, and feel that ye were the poorest thing on earth! To let a man think that, and then to see him ride away!"

Scorching tears poured from Jeanie's eyes. Tears like a fiery torrent, very different from those which had been wept for her mother. She sat down again on the log but turned her back to Kirsteen, covering her face with her hands. "It is just for that," she said to herself, "just for that that I'm tempted most—just for that!"

"I would have thought," said Kirsteen, with intense and sorrowful indignation to think that where there was life and love there should be this perversity. "I would have thought that a touch of true love in the heart would save ye for ever and ever from all temptations of the kind."

"You would have thought!" cried Jeanie scornful in her passion, turning her soft angelic countenance, in which there were so many things unintelligible to her elder sister, all flushed and wild to Kirsteen. "And me that thought you would understand!" she cried.

There was a pause, and Kirsteen's heart ached with feelings inexpressible. She had never been accused of not understanding before, and it is a reproach which is hard to bear. She sat silent, painfully wondering into what strange places these young feet had wandered where she could not follow. She had expressed the only conviction that was possible to her one-ideaed soul. The touch of true love had been to herself the one and only touch, never to be obliterated by baser contact. She sat gazing wistfully into the dim air, perplexed and troubled, her eyes filling with tears, her heart with heaviness. To be tempted was the one thing which in her austere and spotless womanhood, a widowed maiden, Kirsteen could not understand.

Jeanie had been sobbing passionately by her side for a minute or more, when suddenly she turned and flung herself again upon her sister, once more hiding her face in Kirsteen's lap. "Oh!" she cried, "take me with you, Kirsteen! Do you not see now that I cannot be left? You're holy like a saint, but me, I want more, I want something more. Is it not natural to be happy when you're young—to get what you like, and see what's bonny and bright, and get out into the world? I'm not one that can be patient and bide at home. Oh, Kirsteen! I cannot just sew my seam, and read my book like good girls—even with my mother here—and now that she's gone—Kirsteen, Kirsteen! he will wile me away to my shame if you will not save me, you that are the only one."

She said all this half intelligibly, clasping her arms round her sister, now raising her head with an imploring look, now burying it again on Kirsteen's shoulder or in her lap. Such an impassioned creature was unlike anything that Kirsteen had ever known before. She soothed her with soft words, saying, "My dear, my darlin', my bonny Jeanie!" the tears falling from her eyes as she caressed and stilled the excitement of the other. What could she do? How could she take her? How leave her? She who was herself on sufferance allowed to be here by reason of her mother's death, but bound to go away tomorrow, and with so little likelihood that any one would pay attention to what she said. She dared not steal her little sister away. She dared scarcely plead for her, for more care, for closer guardianship! Alas, was this all that was to come of the post she had undertaken, she who was to be the stand-by of the family? She who from the beginning had thought of Jeanie as the one for whom everything was to be made bright?

## CHAPTER X.

Kirsteen, up to this time, had kept as much as possible out of her father's way, and he had taken no notice of her presence in the house. When she came within his range of vision he turned his back upon her but said nothing. It appeared to her now, however, that it was necessary to change her procedure. If she were to do anything for Jeanie she must take a more decided part. Accordingly, on the evening of her mother's funeral, Kirsteen appeared at the family table among the others. Her father perceived her as he took his place, and gave her a somewhat fixed look from under his eyebrows, along with a muttered exclamation; but he said nothing, and suffered her presence without any demonstration of displeasure. The evening was like and yet unlike one of the former ceremonials of the house on the eve of the departure of sons. It was a celebration like that, but the hero of the occasion was not there, and the party at table after a week of composed, quiet, subdued voices, and melancholy subjects, showed a certain relief in the fact that all was over, and nothing further required to show their respect. The black ribbons in Miss Eelen's cap nodded as she moved her head, and Mary was very careful of the crisp new crape which ornamented her dress, while Mr. Pyper, the minister, would make an occasional remark in conformity with what were supposed to be the feelings of the bereaved family. But these were almost the only signs of mourning. Jeanie, after all the agitation of the morning, presented a changeful aspect, and her eyes were heavy and a little red with tears; and Jamie, the last of the boys, had an open-eyed, wistful, almost startled look, feeling very solitary, poor boy, and wishing to be away like the rest. There was no one who had felt the mother's death, or perhaps it would be almost more just to say the presence of death in the house, as this boy, more imaginative than the rest, to whom the week's interval had been a terrible one. He was pale under his freckles, with a dismal look in his wide eyes, the impression of the funeral still too strong upon him for any other feeling. But the others were relieved; it is impossible to use another word.

"The country will be very quiet this year with nobody at the castle," said Mary in subdued tones.

"It will make little difference to ainy of you," replied Miss Eelen, her black bows nodding in her cap, "for if there had been fifty balls, ye could not in decency have gone to ainy one o' them."

"There are more folk in the country than us," said Mary, with a little sharpness. "But I hear Lady Chatty's far from happy, poor thing. For my part I never had any confidence in the man."

“The man was well enough; there’s nothing to be said against the man; they’re just both spenders, and no siller to spend.”

“That is what I am saying,” said Mary. “The Duke’s daughter, and her beauty, and her fashion, and all that—and at the last to take up with a poor man.”

“What do you think, Drumcarro, of this Catholic Emancipation that is making such a noise?” said Glendochart, as the ladies continued to argue over the subject of Lady Chatty.

“I just think that we’ll have all the wild Irish and the wild North on our hands before we know where we are—and Jesuits going to and fro over the face of the earth like Sawtan in the Scriptures—if the Government doesn’t stand firm.”

“I cannot but think, however,” said Glendochart, “that there’s something to be said on the other side. A large number of our country folk just put out of the question altogether.”

“There’s nothing to be said on the other side of the question,” cried Drumcarro, with his fierce look. “Fellow subjects! just thae deevils of Irish and a whean idle Crofters that will neither fish the seas nor delve the land—and a horde of priests at the head of them. Them that think the Pope of Rome should have a hand in governing this country will get little backing from me.”

“I allow,” said Mr. Pyper, “that it’s a difficult question with modern notions of toleration, and all that—but violent evils must have violent remedies—and when ye think, Glendochart, what this country has suffered from Papal rule—”

“I would just have no dealings with the pooers of darkness,” said Mr. Douglas, bringing down his hand upon the table with a force which made everything tremble.

“Bless me,” cried Miss Eelen, “what’s wrong with ye, Drumcarro? Ye’ll break all the glasses. Eh, but the pooers o’ darkness are no so easy to make or meddle with. The minister will tell ye that they are just in our hearts and at our doors.”

“Ye may say that, Miss Eelen,” said Mr. Pyper, shaking his head professionally; “but it was in the sphere of politics our friend was meaning. It would be a fine thing if, with all our progress, we were to find ourselves back again in the hands of the Inquiseetion and yon wild Irishman O’Connell.”

“I would learn them a lesson,” cried Drumcarro, “there’s none o’ them to

be trusted. I would let them know there woud be no trafficking with treason. We've had enough in Scotland of the thumbscrew and the boot—no but what judeeciously employed," he added a moment after, "with the ignorant, when ye cannot get at them in any other way—"

"I hope ye don't advocate torture, Drumcarro; that would be a curious way of opposing Catholic Emancipation," said Glendochart.

"I'm not saying, sir, that I advocate torture; but I've seen cases—when deevilish obstinacy had to be dealt with," said the old slave-driver, with a gleam of fire from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"Well, well," said the minister softly, raising a large hand in deprecation of the argument, "that's perhaps departing from the immediate question. I hear there's like to be trouble in your parish, Glendochart, about the new presentee. The Duke has been maybe a little hasty—an old tutor, that had to be provided for."

"If he manages the parish as ill as he managed some of the young lords," said Glendochart, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"I will not have a word said against the young lords," cried Mary. "They're just very pleasant—and as ceevil young men as ye could meet anywhere—there's Lord John that we know best."

Miss Eelen shook her head till the black bows fluttered as if in a strong wind. "You're all just infatuate about Lord John. I would not trust him, not a step out o' my sight. I have no faith in your Lord Johns. Begging your pardon, Glendochart, they're not a true race, and Lord John he is the worst of a'."

"I think you might know better, Aunt Eelen, than to bring up accusations against the head of my husband's name."

"Your husband quotha!" cried Miss Eelen. "It was said of them for hundreds of years before your husband was born or thought of."

The minister again intervened to smooth matters down with instances of the power and value of the race thus called in question. Jeanie was seated at the other end of the table out of reach of the principal personages who kept up the conversation, but she started at the name of Lord John, and her pale face with the faint redness round the eyes, which appealed so powerfully to Kirsteen's sympathies, grew suddenly crimson. She cast a terrified look at her sister who sat silently by her, and caught Kirsteen's hand under the table with a clutch as of despair. Lord John! Kirsteen had made no attempt to identify Jeanie's wooer whom the girl held in such strange terror. Her own heart gave a bound of alarm yet disdain. She asked with her eyes, "Is that the man?" and received from



Jeanie an answering look of confusion and trouble. There were no words exchanged between them. Kirsteen shook her head with a gesture which to Jeanie's eyes expressed not only disapproval but surprise and scorn, and Jeanie let go her hold of her sister's hand with an impulse of impatience much like that with which she had cried, "I thought you would understand!" This little conversation by pantomime made the heart of the elder sister ache. "Lord John," she said to herself, "Lord John!" with mingled fear and astonishment. That Jeanie should be in danger from him—that he should dare! that her little sister with that angelic face, who had once been touched as Kirsteen said by true love should feel a temptation in the flattering words of the man from whom she yet desired to escape, conscious that he was not a true man! Kirsteen's experiences had been of a simple kind hitherto. She was acquainted with no such problems. It cost her a painful effort to bring herself even to the threshold of Jeanie's confused mind. She could not comprehend the conflict that was going on there. And yet she could not forsake her little sister even though the circumstances were such as she did not understand.

"Glendochart," said Mary when the ladies had retired to the parlour leaving the gentlemen to consume their toddy, "has had a letter from Major Gordon that we first met in London, Kirsteen. I cannot call to mind where my husband met him, if it was at the Duke's or where. But we had him down for the shooting, and two or three times he just went and came—and admired Jeanie—but that's no wonder, for there's nobody but what admires Jeanie. He's wanting to come again if we'll ask him. But I doubt if I'll do it—for Jeanie—where is she? I hope she cannot hear me—is on the way to something far grander or I'm much mistaken—and I'm not one that makes mistakes in that way."

"If ye paid any attention to me," said Miss Eelen, "I would say ye were making the greatest mistake ye ever made in your life."

"That's because it's not one of your Douglas allies—and you're full of auld world freats and proverbs about names, but I would like to hear in our family who had anything to say against my husband's name."

"If you mean Lord John—do you know he has not a good reputation? Very ill things are said of him."

"In London," said the Lady of Glendochart with a superior smile. "My experience is that there's just nothing but scandal in London. But in his own country he's the Duke's son and one of the first of his name."

"There are some things that one learns in London," said Kirsteen with a little of that quick growing identification of one's self with one's habitation

which changes the point of view; “and Mary, if you will let me say it, this is one. The Duke’s son does not match with a country laird’s daughter however bonny she may be, unless he may be one of the romanticks that will make a sacrifice—but Lord John, he is not one.”

“I would hope not,” cried Mary. “The romanticks you are meaning are just fools and fantastic persons like—” she was about to have said like yourself, but forebore.

“He would need to be fantastic that went to the Duke his father, and said I am going to be married to Jeanie Douglas of Drumcarro.”

“Ye go a little too far, Kirsteen,” said Miss Eelen. “The Douglasses might match with princes so far as blood goes. But I’m not saying (for I know their ways) that there is not reason in it. He will just get up a talk about the lassie and then he will go away.”

“Ye are two ravens,” said Mary; “he will do nothing of the kind.”

“I wish you would take her to Glendochart, Mary. She is not happy. If it is Lord John or something else I cannot tell. She says she would like to come with me—but what would my father say?”

“Say! just what we all would say—that we would not permit it. A mantua-maker’s house in London for Jeanie Douglas. Oh, you need not blaze up, Kirsteen; ye have made your bed and ye must lie on it—but Jeanie!”

Kirsteen did not blaze up. Her eyes flashed, her colour rose; but she restrained herself with a great effort—for what would be the use? “The more reason,” she said, “that you should step in—you that are no mantua-maker but a lady in your own house. Take Jeanie with you, and keep her safe—and if you will take my advice ask Major Gordon. He is not rich but he has a very good name.”

“I mind now,” said Mary, “that these Gordons were friends of yours—and you want to keep Jeanie down, just in a mean position when she might take her place among the highest. I would not have thought ye were so little, Kirsteen. But I have nothing of that. I’ve always been proud of Jeanie and I’m not minding if she’s put over my head. I’ll bring no man here to distract her mind—and I’ll put no spoke in her wheel, my bonny little sister. She shall be the first and grandest of us all, if I can do it. And then her ladyship,” cried Mary, “will know who was her best friend.”

“Perhaps I think less of ladyships being more used to them,” cried Kirsteen, irritated beyond her self-control. “If ye bring her to shame instead of grandeur who will she thank then?”

“To shame!” cried Mary. “Let them say that word that dare.”

“But I dare! And I know them all, and what they think of him in his own family. And that he’s not safe for a girl like Jeanie to know. Aunt Eelen, you know them as well, and you know if what I say is true.”

“Young weemen,” said Miss Eelen, “if ye think that words of strife are seemly in a house where the mother’s buried that day, it’s not my opinion. Kirsteen goes too far, though I would not say but there was reason in it,” she added after a moment. “Whisht, both of you—here is the poor bairn herself.”

The next morning Kirsteen, in her despair, took a still bolder step. She went to the door of the room in which Drumcarro was, and knocked for admittance. He stared at her as she came in with a lowering brow, and *humph!* of ungracious surprise, and stopped in his reading of the paper, but said nothing.

“Father,” said Kirsteen, “I am going away to-day.”

He gave her another lowering and stormy glance. “It is the best thing you can do,” he said. “You were never wanted here.”

Kirsteen, wounded, could not refrain from saying, “My mother wanted me,” which was met solely by that impatient indifference which we render badly by the word *humph!*

“But I did not come to speak of myself. I know,” she said, “father, that you like where you can to add on a little of the old Douglas lands to what you have already.”

He gave her a more direct look, astonished, not knowing what she meant; then, “What o’ that?” he said.

“No more than this—that money’s sometimes wanting, and I thought if the opportunity arose—I have done very well—I have some siller—at your command.”

Drumcarro was very much startled; he dropped the newspaper which he had been holding before him, as an intimation that her visit was an interruption, and turning round stared at her for a moment with genuine surprise. Then he said, “Your mantua-making must have thriven. I would like to know one thing about ye, have you put my name intill your miserable trade?”

“No,” she said; “so far as any name is in it, it is Miss Kirsteen.”

He gave a sigh of relief. “I’m glad at least that ye have not brought

disgrace upon the name of Douglas.”

“The name of Douglas will never get disgrace from me,” cried Kirsteen proudly, with an answering glance of fire. “There is no one that bears it that has more care of it than me. If you kept it in as great honour at home——”

He laughed grimly. “My lass, you may trust me for that.”

“I hope so, father; I hope there will be no speaking got up about the bonniest of us all—the youngest and the sweetest.”

His fiery eyes gave forth a gleam of mingled exultation and anger. “I see,” he said, “you’re jealous, like all your kind. A woman can never stand another being mounted o’er her head. Trust you me, my woman, to take care of Jeanie; it’s my place.”

“Yes,” she said, “it’s your place.” Then hesitating, Kirsteen continued: “She would have liked—to go to London with me.”

“To London with you!”

“It is excusable,” said Kirsteen; “it is natural that a young thing should desire to see a little of the world.”

Mr. Douglas expressed his feelings in a harsh and angry laugh. “Out of a mantua-maker’s windows,” he cried; then added with solemnity, “and her mother dead just a week to-day.”

“It’s not for want of heart,” said Kirsteen. She paused again, and then speaking quickly with all the courage she could summon up: “Oh, father, yon Lord John—there’s no truth in him; there’s no trust to be put in him! She’s frightened for him, father.”

“Hold your peace!” he cried. “I’ll have none of your slandering here.”

“Father, mind—you’ll have to be both father and mother to Jeanie. If it should come to pass that every old wife in the clachan had a hold of her bonny name!”

Perhaps it was not unnatural that Drumcarro should resent this speech. “If ye will mind your own concerns,” he said grimly, “I will take care of mine. The sooner you go your own gait the better; there will be more peace left behind.”

“I have delivered my soul,” said Kirsteen; “the wyte will be upon your own head if you close your eyes. Farewell, father, if we should never meet again.”

She stood for a moment waiting his reply; then made him a curtsy as she had done when she was a little girl. Something perhaps in this salutation

touched Drumcarro. He broke out into a laugh, not so harsh as before. “Fare ye well,” he said, “you were always upsetting, and wiser than other folk. But I’ll mind what you said about the siller, which was not without reason. And I’ve little doubt but I’ll see ye again. You’re too fond o’ meddling not to come back now ye’ve got your hand in.”

This was all the leave-taking between father and daughter, but Kirsteen’s heart was touched as she went away. It was at once a sign of amity and a permission—a condoning of her past sins and almost an invitation to return.

## CHAPTER XI.

"Then you are going, Kirsteen?"

"I must go, Jeanie. There is no place, and no wish for me here."

"And I am to bide—alone. Oh, there are plenty of folk in the house. My father to gloom at me, and Marg'ret to make me scones, and take care that I do not wet my feet—as if that was all the danger in the world!—and Jamie to sit at his books and never say a word. And on the other side—oh, the deevil, just the deevil himself aye whispering in my ear."

"Jeanie, Jeanie! ye must not say such words."

"It's like swearing," said the girl with a scornful laugh, "but it's true."

"Jeanie," said Kirsteen anxiously, "you will say again that I do not understand. But, my dear, I cannot think but you're terrifying yourself in vain; when true love has once come in, how can the false move ye? It will be no temptation. Oh, no, no. There can be but one; there cannot be two."

"Where is your one?" said Jeanie. "I know nothing about your one." She shook her head with a sudden flush of burning and indignant colour, too painful to be called a blush, as if to shake all recollection away. "I have none to take my part," she said, "but him that says 'Come.' And I know that it's the ill way, and not the good, he's leading to. But if you leave me here, and leave me alone, that's the way I'll go."

"Oh, Jeanie, my darling, what can I do? I cannot bide—and I cannot steal you away."

"I will ask no more," said Jeanie. "You will may be be sorry after—but then it will be too late."

Kirsteen put her arms round her young sister, who turned her shoulder towards her, holding off as far away as was possible, with a reluctance and resistance that were almost sullen. "Jeanie," she said, "if I send you Lewis Gordon instead?"

Jeanie wrenched herself indignantly out of her sister's arms. "I will never speak nor look at ye again! A man that never said a word to me. What would Lewis Gordon do here? The shooting's near over, and the fishing's bad this year. Men that come to the Highlands for sport had better stay at home."

"Jeanie! if he never spoke it was for poverty and not for want of love; and you were so young."

“Oh, yes, I was very young—too young to be shamed and made a fool of by him or any man. And if you send him here, Kirsteen, out of pity to save Jeanie—Oh!” the girl cried dashing her clenched hands in the air, “I will—I will—just go headlong and be lost in the darkness, and never be seen more!”

It was true that Kirsteen did not understand. She could only look wistfully at her little sister, in whose young bosom there were tumults unknown to herself. What could she do but soothe and try to subdue her, endeavouring all the time to represent to herself that it was but the impatience of Jeanie’s nature, the hasty temper of a spoilt child, sharpened by offence and misunderstanding of the man whom she really loved. After a time Jeanie yielded to Kirsteen’s caresses and consolations with a sudden recovery of her self-control which was almost more wonderful and alarming than the previous abandon. “It’s no matter,” she said, and recovered her calm with almost an indignant effort. What did it mean? Both the despair and the recovery were mysteries to the more steadfast spirit which knew no such impulses and was ignorant both of the strength and weakness of a passionate superficial nature eager to live and to enjoy, unable to support the tedium and languor of life.

Kirsteen had little more success with Marg’ret to whom she appealed next. “You will look after my poor little Jeanie. Oh, Marg’ret, don’t let her out of your sight, keep her like the apple of your eye.”

“And do you think, Kirsteen, you that are full of sense, that I could keep any grip of her if I did that? Never let her out of my sight! I canna keep her in my sight for an hour.”

“Marg’ret, my heart’s just sick with fear and trouble.”

“Hoot,” said Marg’ret, “there is nae occasion. What should possess the bairn to terrify ye as she seems to do, I canna tell. There’s nae reason for it. A man is none the worse that I can see for bein’ a young lord—maybe he’s none the better; I’m putting forward nae opinion—but to come to Drumcarro with an ill-meaning if he were the greatest of his name—no, no, I’ll never believe that.”

“It is hard to believe, but it’s harder still to think of the Duke’s son coming here for his wife.”

“If it was a king’s son, and the bride was our Jeanie,” Marg’ret cast her head high, “they’re no blate that think themselves above the Douglasses, whatever their titles or their honours may be!”

Kirsteen shook her head, but in her heart too that superstition was strong. Insult the Douglasses in their own house! She thought again that perhaps all her

sophisticated thoughts might be wrong. In London there was a difference unspeakable between the great Duke and the little Highland laird whom nobody had ever heard of—but at home Drumcarro was as good blood as the Duke, and of an older race—and to intend insult to the house of as good a gentleman as himself was surely more than the wildest profligate would dare. She tried to persuade herself of this as she made her preparations for going away, which were very small. While she was doing this Jamie, the only boy now left at home, the one of the family who was studious, and for whom not the usual commission but a writership in India had been obtained, came to her shyly; for to him his sister Kirsteen was little more than a name.

“There was a book,” he said, and then hung his head, unable to get out any more.

“There was a book? Is it something you want, Jamie?”

Jamie explained with many contortions that it was—a book which he wanted much, and which there was no chance of getting nearer than Glasgow, but which Mr. Pyper thought might be found in London if any one would take the trouble. Kirsteen promised eagerly to take that trouble. She laid her hand upon the big boy’s shoulder. He was only eighteen, but already much taller than herself, a large, loosely made, immature man.

“And will ye do something for me?” she said. Jamie, very awkward and shame-faced, pledged himself at once—whatever she wanted.

“I want you to take care of Jeanie,” said Kirsteen; “will ye go with her when she takes a walk, and stand by her whatever happens, and not let her out of your sight?”

“Not let her out of my sight!” cried Jamie, astonished as Marg’ret had been. “But she would soon send me out of the way. She would never be bothered with me.”

“I meant not long out of your sight, Jamie. Oh! just keep a watch. She will be lonely and want kind company. Ye must keep your eye upon her for kindness, and not let her be alone.”

“If you mean I’m to spy upon her, I couldn’t do that, Kirsteen, not for all the books in the world.”

“That is not what I mean,” Kirsteen cried. “Can you not understand, Jamie? I want you to stand by her, to be with her when you can, not to leave her by herself. She’s very lonely—She’s—not happy—She’s—”

Jamie gave an abashed laugh. “She’s sometimes happy enough,” he said,



then recollected himself and became grave all at once. "I was meaning, before —" Presently he recovered again from this momentary cloud, and added, "She's no wanting me; there are other folk she likes better."

"Jamie—it is just the other folk that frighten me."

Jamie made a great effort to consider the matter with the seriousness which he saw to be expected from him. But the effort was vain. He burst into a great laugh, and with heaving shoulders and a face crimson with the struggle swung himself away.

In the meantime, Mary, not without a great deal of satisfaction in the removal of the restraint which Kirsteen's presence enforced, was preparing officiously for her sister's journey. The gig which Kirsteen could herself drive, and in which Miss Macnab could be conveyed back to her home, was ordered in time for the further journey to Glasgow which Kirsteen was to make by postchaise. The ease with which she made these arrangements, her indifference to the cost of her journey, her practical contempt of the difficulties which to the country people who had to scheme and plan for a long time before they decided upon any extra expense, had a half sinful appearance, and was very trying to Mary's sense of innate superiority. "She does not heed what money she spends. It's come light, gang light," said the Lady of Glendochart. "I have heard that was the way with persons in business, but I never thought to see it in a sister of mine. I do not doubt," she added, "that Kirsteen would just order an expensive dinner at an inn if it took her fancy; but I'm saving her the need of that at least, for I'm putting her a chicken in her basket, and some of Marg'ret's scones and cakes (oat-cakes were meant) to keep her going." "I am sure, mem, you are very considerate," said Miss Macnab, to whom this explanation was given. "But I get very little credit for it from Kirsteen," Mary answered with a sigh.

These preparations to get rid of her, and the disappearance of Jeanie, who had shut herself up in her room and would see nobody, had a great effect upon Kirsteen. She had taken up, with a heroic sense of having something henceforward to live for, her mother's half-charge, half-statement that she would be the stand-by of the family. All brighter hopes being gone that was enough to keep her heart from sinking, and it was not always she knew that the stand-by of a family received much acknowledgment, thanks or praise. But to find herself forsaken and avoided by her young sister, hurried away by the elder, with a scarcely veiled pleasure in her departure, were painful things to meet with in the beginning of that mission. She went out of the house in the weary hours of waiting before the gig was ready, to lighten if possible the aching of her heart by the soothing influence of the fresh air and natural

sounds. The linn was making less than its usual tumult in the benumbing of the frost, the wind was hushed in the trees, the clouds hung low and grey with that look of oppressed and lowering heaviness which precedes snow. The house too—the home which now indeed she felt herself to be leaving for ever, seemed bound in bands of frost and silence. The poor mother so complaining in her life-time, so peaceful in her death, who had wanted for so little while she was there, seemed to have left a blank behind her, quite out of correspondence with the insignificance of her life. There was no one now to call Kirsteen, to have the right of weakness to her service and succour. With a sharp pang Kirsteen recollected that Jeanie had called and she had refused. What could she do but refuse? Yet to have done so troubled her beyond anything else that could have happened. It came upon her now with a sense of failure which was very bitter. Not her mother, but her mother's child, the little beautiful sister who from her birth had been Kirsteen's joy,—she had called, and Kirsteen had refused. She went up the hill behind the house and sat down upon a rock, and gazed at the familiar scene. And then this remorse came upon her and seized her. She had failed to Jeanie's call. She had allowed other notions to come in, thoughts of other people, hesitations, pride, reluctance to be thought to interfere. Was she right to have done so? Was she wrong? Should she have yielded to Jeanie's instinct instead of what seemed like duty? It was rare to Kirsteen to be in this dilemma. It added to the pang with which she felt herself entirely deserted, with nobody to regret her or to say a kind word. If misfortune should come to Jeanie, if anything should happen, as people say, how deeply, how bitterly would she blame herself who might have helped but refused. And yet again what but this could she do?

The sound of some one coming down the hill, wading among the great bushes of the ling, and over the withered bracken scarcely aroused her; for what did it matter to Kirsteen who came that way? She was still sitting on the rock when a man appeared round the turning of the path; she paid no attention to him till he was quite near. Then her heart suddenly leapt up to her throat; she started, rising from her seat. He on his side recognized her too. He stopped with a low whistle of dismay, then took off his Highland bonnet, less with an air of courtesy than with that of not daring to omit the forms of respect.

"So it is you, Miss Kirsteen," he said.

"It is me—at my father's door. It's more wonderful to see that it's you, my Lord John."

"Not so very wonderful either," he said, "for I may say I am at my father's door too."

"You are on the lands of Drumcarro—the Douglas lands, that never

belonged to one of your name.”

“You don’t expect me to enter into old feuds,” he said with a laugh; “would you like to have me seized by your men-at-arms, Miss Kirsteen, and plunged into the dungeon below the castle moat?” He paused and looked down at the grey, penurious house standing bare in the wilds. “Unhappily there is neither moat nor castle,” he said again with a laugh.

“There’s more,” said Kirsteen proudly, “for there’s honour and peace, and he that disturbs either will not pass without his reward. Lord John, I would like to know what you are wanting here?”

“You have always treated me in a very lordly way, Miss Kirsteen,” he said. “What if I were to doubt your right to make any such inquiry. I am wanting, as you say, to pay my respects to my kinswoman of Glendochart, and ask for the family, who I hear have been in trouble.”

Kirsteen paused with a look at him to which he answered with a smile and bow. What could she say? To let him know that he was a danger to Jeanie was but to stimulate him in his pursuit, and she could not herself believe it even now.

“Lord John,” she said, “I met you once upon another hillside; you had done me a great service but you did not know who I was—a gentlewoman as good as yourself. But when I bid you as a gentleman to stand by and let me pass, ye did so. You could not stand against me when I said that. I ask you now again, but I ask more. As ye are a gentleman, Lord John, go away from here.”

He shook his head. “The argument served its turn once,” he said; “you must not scorn my intellect so much as to try it again.”

“Go,” she said, putting herself in his way, “those that are dwelling down there are too high for one thing and not high enough for another. Go away, Lord John, if you’re what a gentleman should be. If ye do not, I’ll promise you this that you will repent it all your days.”

He stepped past her amid the heather bushes and short brushwood. “Not even an angel with a flaming sword could bar the road,” he said waving his hand, “on a hillside like this. Farewell, Miss Kirsteen, I’m going about my own affairs and doing no harm to you.”

In a moment he had passed, finding another path for himself among the windings of the heather and bracken. He took off his bonnet again with a mocking salutation as he disappeared down the hill. And Kirsteen felt herself left behind with a sense of mortification and helplessness intolerable to her high and proud spirit. How could she have hoped to stop him? What power had

she? But this did not make her feel her failure less. "You will repent it all your days," she called after him, raising her voice in the vexation of her soul. He turned and lifted his bonnet again with a mocking salutation. That was all. She might have known, she said to herself with angry tears of humiliation in her eyes.

But when Kirsteen came down the hill there was no trace of Lord John. Mary and Jeanie were in the parlour waiting for her to say good-bye. And there was an air of agitation about her younger sister, which Kirsteen in her troubled mind set down to the visit for which no doubt Jeanie had been called from her room. But nothing was said. They accompanied her to the door where the gig was now standing with Miss Macnab already mounted into her seat. There was no time or opportunity for further leave-taking; Jeanie gave her cheek to be kissed with averted eyes; and not even with Marg'ret could Kirsteen speak another word in private. In a few minutes more she had turned her back upon Drumcarro; was it for ever? To her wounded and impatient heart, impatient above all of the sense of utter futility and failure, this seemed the thing most probable. Why should she ever come again, the stand-by of the family? Perhaps if they should want money, and she should have it—but in no other way.

She was roused by the mild voice of the country artist at her elbow. "You will find a great change in everything, Miss Kirsteen, coming back from London?" she said.

Kirsteen did not immediately reply. "I find more change in myself than in anything else," she said at last, bringing herself back with difficulty from more urgent thoughts.

"That was partly what I was meaning. Ye'll find a great interest in life in yon muckle London, where there must always be the bonniest new things to see."

"When your heart's away," said Kirsteen, yielding in spite of herself to the natural desire of unburdening her mind a little, "it does not matter much what bonny things there may be to see."

"That's true too," said the dressmaker; "but my experience has aye been, that where we canna have what we want, and eh, how few of us have that advantage! it's just a great thing to please your e'e, and fill your mind with what e'e can see, and the best ye can see. There's even pleasure in a new fashion book when ye have little else. And with all the bonny leddies and their court dresses, and just to dress them like a picture."

Kirsteen looked at this humble artist with a sigh. "Perhaps you were not

always so resigned,” she said.

“I’m not saying that I’m resigned. I would just like to see the Queen’s court, and the princesses in their plumes and trains, before everything in the world, but it’s a comfort,” said the mild philosopher, “when ye can make it up to yourself with a bonny person like Miss Jeanie, just to make the line of her gown perfitt, if ainything can ever be called perfitt,” she added piously, “in this imperfitt world.”

## CHAPTER XII.

There came a great sense of desolation and misery into the heart of Jeanie after she had witnessed, with eyes averted and without a sign of affection, wrapped up in offence and estrangement, the departure of her sister. She was angry with Kirsteen and deeply disappointed, and incapable of comprehending that it must be so, and that she, Jeanie, was to be crossed at last and after all, her plaint disregarded, her prayer refused. It had been her lot hitherto to get all her little requirements in the end, however her mother or Marg'ret might at first stand out. And the boys had been much ruled by Jeanie's will, and had yielded to her as big brothers often fail to do. She had never been crossed, in the end. Opposition had been made to her, difficulties insisted upon, but in the end they had always given way. Only once before had Jeanie come face to face with a disappointment, which could not by anything she could do be changed into happiness and content. It was the central incident in her life, but it had been up to this moment the exception, the one adverse event she had ever known. And it had been so great, so startling and astonishing that the girl's pride and all her strength had been roused to conceal and surmount it, so that no one should ever suspect that to her, Jeanie, any slight had ever come. To nobody but to Kirsteen, and to her only when taken utterly by surprise, had this secret ever been betrayed. Young Gordon had visited Glendochart from time to time during the last years. He had come in the intervals of his service while Jeanie grew and blossomed into womanhood. While she was still half child, half woman, he had awakened in her heart that first delicious and strange sense of power which is so great a revelation to a girl. His eyes had said a thousand indistinct sweetnesses to her, which his lips had not ventured to confess. He had been reverent of her extreme youth. He had been kept back by his own uncertain prospects, by his want of money and unsettled life, a soldier seeking advancement wherever it was to be found. But none of these honourable reasons had been taken into account by the girl who, convinced as she had been of his love, had seen him go away with an amazement and shock of feeling scarcely comprehensible out of the first absolutism and certainty of youth. He had gone away, saying never a word. That he was overwhelmed with agitation and distress when the summons to join his regiment (for which he professed to be looking eagerly) came; that he had spoken of returning, of hopes that were involved in his return, with allusions and suggestions that the poor fellow thought plain enough, had all been invisible to Jeanie, or disdained by her, as so many evidences of falsehood. Her little imperious soul had been shaken as by a tempest. She to be forsaken, wooed and abandoned, she before whom every one bowed, the flower of the Highlands, as they called her!

And now Kirsteen had done the same. Once again, till the last moment Jeanie had believed that her sister would yield, and she would have her way. Just as she had expected that word which never came from Lewis Gordon, she had expected from Kirsteen if it were but a word, a whisper of consent at the last. Even while she held her cheek to be kissed, turning away her eyes which were sullen with anger yet expectation, the girl expected that Kirsteen might still whisper—"Come." She had contrived all in her own mind ready for that last moment—Kirsteen would say, "Come, I'll wait for you at the clachan,"—and all unsuspected, the stranger having visibly departed, Jeanie would steal out, nobody taking any notice, and fly along the road, and spring up light as a feather beside Miss Macnab. What would it matter to her that there was no room? She had planned it all. At the very last, as her mother used to do, as Marg'ret did, compunction at the sight of Jeanie's averted face would seize upon Kirsteen. None of them could bear to see her vexed—and at the last that feeling would be stronger than prudence or any wise sentiment. Jeanie within herself had been sure of this; but she had been deceived. And after she had watched with incredulous angry eyes full of a mist of bitterness—for tears she would not shed to acknowledge herself defeated—the actual going away without a word of her sister, she had fled to her room and flung herself upon her bed, even now not without an ear intent on any sound that might indicate Kirsteen's return, to say yet the tardy "Come," to her little sister. But the wintry afternoon closed down, the light faded away, and stillness fell upon the house. There was nothing to be heard but the echo of the linn which always mingled with everything, and Merran's heavy footstep and Marg'ret's distant voice in the kitchen. Kirsteen was gone. It was impossible to believe it, but it was true. She was gone like *him*—him for whom she had spoken, who was her friend, for like draws to like, Jeanie cried furiously to herself, in the silence. They had gone away—both of them!—the man who loved her, and the sister who was evidently born for no such important end as to save and succour Jeanie—both! They had gone away, and she was left alone—to meet her fate.

Jeanie was not of the simple fibre of her family. Perhaps her condition of spoiled child had done something towards the development of a different character, but that character was there in the first place to be developed. Her impatient determination to have what she wanted, to be happy, to get such amusements, privileges, and advantages as were comprehensible to her, without consideration as to whether they were possible or not, or what the result of her satisfaction would be—was very different both from the steadfastness of Kirsteen, and the calm self-seeking of Mary. Jeanie had a passion in her which would not be gainsaid. She did not understand obstacles except as things to be eluded, pushed aside, thrust out of the way, arbitrarily,

imperiously, whether they were just or even necessary or not. She could not understand that she had been born for anything but to be paramount, to be loved and admired, and happy. Her lover and heaven itself had wronged her by holding back that happiness that was her due. And when there seemed a prospect that it was to come back to her, Jeanie's heart rushed at the hope with a fervour which was largely made up of fury and indignation. The thought of a future more brilliant than any she could have had with Gordon filled her with fierce delight, principally from the hope that he would hear of it, perhaps see it and recognize her superior bliss and his loss. This, more than a girl's natural vanity in being followed by one so much above her in rank, and far more than any feeling for Lord John, had made his attentions delightful to her. Jeanie had been taken like her sisters before her to the ball at the Castle; but hers were not merely the good looks of Kirsteen or the comeliness of Mary. It had not been possible to keep the little beauty in the background. Even the noble party of visitors and relations who were usually so little interested by the lairds and their belongings were moved by Jeanie. She was introduced among them, danced with, talked to, while the others of her class looked on grim or smiling as their case might be. That Jeanie had been excited and delighted by her triumph it is needless to say; what was much more extraordinary was that her father, though he said nothing, felt for the first time the true sensation of that superiority which he had believed in and asserted all his life. The beauty and brightness which dazzled everybody were but the natural emanation of her blood, to Drumcarro. "Oh, ay, she's of the real auld Douglas kind," he said with proud carelessness when compliments were paid him. That the Douglasses should gain a triumph through a lassie was a thing that he had scarcely been able to bring himself to believe; but when this triumph was accomplished for him, his pride accepted it as a thing to be looked for. Was not she a Douglas? That explained all.

And when Lord John appeared "incognito" as Marg'ret said, in the little shooting lodge on the hill, both father and daughter had responded after their kind. Drumcarro had felt the suggestion of an alliance with the other noble house which had outstripped his in honours, but never to his consciousness excelled or even equalled it in antiquity and nobility, to be a gratifying circumstance and high testimonial to his superiority to everything around, but he had not contemplated it with any surprise. To get a Douglas as his wife was honour enough for any duke's son; but the thought of being so closely allied to the Duke gave him on his side a proud satisfaction. It was a great thing for a daughter to do who was only a daughter, and of no account whatever. Jeanie too felt a subtle elation in her veins, a sense of high promotion, but not in so simple a way. When *he* heard of it what would he think? was the burden of her



thoughts. He would see that Jeanie Douglas was not one to be deserted, left or taken up again at his pleasure. She pictured to herself meeting him in some vague grandeur of a party in London, and a hundred times in her heart rehearsed the bow she would give him, the sweeping curtsey, the fine progress past him which she would make on her husband's arm. The husband himself had a very secondary place—but that did not occur to Jeanie. He was understood as the occasion of all that grandeur, the sharer of it no doubt; but the exquisite revenge of such an encounter was what in her first vague sense of triumph, Jeanie chiefly pictured to herself.

The girl was not, however, herself enlightened by this curious evidence of the state of her mind. She had not begun to think about her thoughts; all was straightforward and simple with her, as with a young savage. On the other side Lord John did not leave her in any doubt as to his feelings. His declaration of love was not delayed by any scruples—but neither was it followed by any of those practical steps which even in Jeanie's limited experience were usual in the circumstances. It is true that Jeanie herself was coy, and held off from the warm love-making of her suitor, keeping him at arm's length; but no reference to her father, none of the suggestions and arrangements into which happy lovers rush ever came from Lord John's lips. He spoke indeed of the time when they should be always together, but said not a word as to when or how that should be. It was less difficult to Jeanie to keep such a secret than it would have been for most girls. Her mother was ill, her father, as she supposed, utterly indifferent, no sister near to whom her heart could be opened. And to be secret in love was one of the traditions of the time and country. But still after a time she began to feel that there was something, she could not tell what, unexpected, undesirable, in her lover. When he spoke of marriage it was with a scoff and jeer. Even, however, when the moment came in which he told her that marriage in the ordinary way, with all the publicity usually surrounding that event, was impossible to him, Jeanie was not suspicious enough to be defiant. "You'll have to steal out some night, and trust yourself to me and let me carry you away," he said, "that's what we'll have to do. My bonny Jeanie will trust herself to me."

"That is what Anne did," cried Jeanie, startled. "My father would not give his consent; and he has never seen her again. We dare not say her name. But maybe," she added after a pause, "it would be different with you."

"I think it would be different with me," he said, with a laugh that somehow offended Jeanie, she could not tell how. But then he began to lavish sweet words and praises upon her, so that the girl's vanity was soothed and her imagination excited. He told her where he would take her—to London, and

then abroad, which was a word of no tangible import to her ignorance, but meant only everything that was brilliant and splendid—and of all the beautiful places she should see, and the beautiful things she should have.

“I suppose,” said Jeanie, “we would go to see the king?”

“There is no king, in that way,” he said, with a laugh.

“But there is a court, for we see it in the paper,” said Jeanie. “If it is the prince, it would just be the same.”

“We’ll not go to the court this time,” he said, with another of those laughs which wounded Jeanie, she could not tell how.

“I thought it was the right way,” said Jeanie, thoughtfully. What she was thinking was, that in that case she would not meet *him*, and that the heart of her triumph would be lost.

“In some cases,” he said, still laughing, “but not in ours, my lovely dear. We will never think of the world, we’ll think only of love. Whatever’s pleasantest my Jeanie shall see, but nothing so bonny as herself.”

“There will be many things in London besides the court—there is my sister Kirsteen,” said Jeanie, still musing. “Oh, I will be glad to see Kirsteen.”

“It’s clear I am not enough for my Jeanie, though my Jeanie is enough for me!”

“Oh, it is not that,” said Jeanie, vaguely. In her heart, however, there was no doubt a sensation that to dazzle *him* with her grandeur, and to make her sister a spectator of her new and exalted life, were the things to which she looked forward most.

“I’ll not promise to take you to Kirsteen, any more than to take you to court,” he said. “I’ll promise nothing that takes your mind off me. To think of having you all to myself is enough for me. I mean to carry you off to some Italian bower, where there will be nothing to do but love, and love, and—”

“Till you are tired of love, as you call it, and me too,” said Jeanie, with a little disdain.

He gave her a curious look, wondering if at last the little simplicity had fathomed what he really meant. But Jeanie’s eyes were all untroubled, and her brow serene. She was disappointed and dissatisfied with his way; but only because it was not her way, and contrary to her expectations, not that she had divined the shame that was in his heart.

But one day a gleam of strange light burst upon the girl. He had been

telling her of one of his friends, who had gone to those Italian bowers, and of the life he led; the lake, the moonlight, the myrtles and roses in the middle of winter, till Jeanie's eyes grew bright. "We will get him to look for a place for us, on the water's edge," Lord John said. No thought of suspicion, or of finding her lover out, was in Jeanie's mind. She asked, as a girl does, eager to hear of others in the same circumstances as herself, "And is he married, too?"

For the moment she could not comprehend the hurried demonstration, the embarrassment of Lord John among his caresses, the laugh, always so distasteful to her. "They don't think of that out there," he said, "they don't put you in chains out there, they trust everything to love—as my Jeanie is going to do."

What did it mean? She was always shy of these vehement caresses—she freed herself, with a strange chill upon her, and said that she must go. They had been wandering by the side of the linn, under the bare, overarching trees; and Jeanie would not listen to the explanations which he was anxious to make, and which she understood no more than the offence. She was sure of nothing but that she must get away.

## CHAPTER XIII.

Jeanie fled to her own room, and all that had been said went vaguely rolling and sweeping through her mind like clouds blowing up for a storm. A hundred things he had said came drifting up—singly they had no meaning, and without something in her own soul to interpret them they would have conveyed no enlightenment to the uninstructed Highland girl. Even now, though aroused and frightened, it was very hard for Jeanie to put in shape or to explain to herself, what were the suspicions and the uneasiness she felt,—“they don’t think of that out there, they don’t put you in chains out there,”—what did it mean? Jeanie knew that there was a kind of *persiflage*—though she did not know the word nor yet what it meant—in which marriage was spoken of as bondage, and it was said of a man that he was going up for execution on his marriage day. That was said “in fun” she knew. Was Lord John in fun? Was it a jest, and no more? But there was something uncertain, something dissatisfied in Jeanie’s heart which would not be calmed down by any such explanation. What, oh, what did he mean? She was not to be taken to court, nor even to see Kirsteen. She was to go to that Italian bower where all was trusted to love. An Italian bower sounded like Paradise to Jeanie. She had not the most remote idea what it was. She was prepared to believe anything, to allow of any difference between the conditions of life there and those she knew. That might be quite right in an Italian bower which was not right in a Highland glen. She was bewildered in her innocence and simplicity; and yet that very simplicity gave her the sensation that all was not well.

After this there was a long interval in her intercourse with Lord John. He wandered about the glen and the hillside, but she took care never to fall in his way, the excitement of eluding him making a kind of counterpoise for the absence of the excitement there used to be in meeting him. And then he began to make frequent calls, to endure interviews with Drumcarro and inquire into Mrs. Douglas’s ailments in order to see Jeanie, to whom he directed the most appealing looks. And the impression and suspicion gradually died away from her mind. When she met him by accident after this interval out of doors, and he was free to demand explanations, Jeanie hung her head and said nothing. How could she explain? She had nothing to explain. And once more, though with self-reproach, the daily walks and talks were resumed. In her dull life it was the only relief. Her mother was growing more and more helpless and wanted more and more attention. And when Jeanie stole out from her long nursing for a breath of air no doubt it pleased and exhilarated her to see him waiting, to receive his welcome and all the tender words he could think of. Drumcarro himself saw them together, and made no remark. Marg’ret saw them together

and was glad and proud to see the favourite of the house courted by the Duke's son. Thus no one helped Jeanie, but everything persuaded her against her own perception that all was not well.

That perception, however, grew stronger and stronger, but with it a longing of Jeanie's forlorn youth for the only pleasure that remained in her life. He flattered her so, he conveyed to her in every word and look such evidence of her own delightfulness, of her power over him, and his devotion to her! And all the rest of life was so overcast to Jeanie, so dull and grey, so destitute of pleasure. It was like a momentary escape into that Italian bower of which he spoke, to go out to him, to see his eyes glowing with admiration, to hear of all the delightful things which were waiting for her. Day by day it became more clear to Jeanie that Lord John's love was not like that of those downright wooers at whom she had once scoffed, who would have her answer yes or no, and left nothing vague in respect to their wishes. It occurred to her too, though she would not permit it to put itself into words, even in her mind, that his love was not like that which she had been so sure of in Lewis Gordon's eyes, but which had never been spoken. Lord John was bold, there was no timidity nor reverence in his look, he was confident, excited, sure that he had her in his toils. All these the girl saw with the perspicacity of despair—yet could not free herself or break away. With him she divined there might be shame lying in wait for her, but with him, too, was all that was brilliant and fair in life. A time of splendour, of pleasure, of joy, if after that despair—while within her own possibilities there was nothing but the given routine, the dull existence in which nothing ever stirred, in which no pleasure was. Oh, if only something would come, she cared not what. Death or a saviour—what did it matter?—to carry Jeanie away.

And now Kirsteen had come and gone. Kirsteen who was her natural saviour, the only one who could have done it. Kirsteen who knew *him*, and said that he was true. The wail, "Take me with you!" had come from Jeanie's very heart. But Kirsteen had gone away, and every hope had failed. And as for the party at home they were all elated by the visits of Lord John, all expectant of a grand marriage, which would bring back something of the old *prestige* to Drumcarro. "When ye are so near the head, Jeanie, I hope you'll be mindful of the branches," said Mary. "It's not just an invitation to the ball which everybody is asked to that will satisfy me then." No thought of possible wrong was in the innocent fancies of all these people. They ought to have known, but they did not. They ought to have taken fright, but no alarm came to them. The man who would try to wrong a Douglas, Mary thought, could never be born.

There had been again a pause during the time when the atmosphere of

death had surrounded the house. Jeanie had seen him pass from a window. She had heard his voice at the door inquiring for the family. He had sent some flowers, an unusual and unexpected compliment, to decorate the death-chamber, for to put flowers on a coffin or a grave was not then the habit in England and still less in Scotland. All these attentions had added to the elation and pleasure of the others, but had not silenced the terror in Jeanie's heart. And now all was over, the pause for her mother's death, the visit of Kirsteen, the hope she had of something or of some one, who would interfere to save her. Even to hear of Lewis Gordon had added to the fire in Jeanie's veins. She would not have him come to find her at his disposal, to know how she had suffered in the thought of his desertion. No! he should find that there was some one else who did not hold back, some one who would not let her go, some one—oh, hapless Jeanie!—whom she could no longer escape, towards whom she was drifting without any power to stop herself though it should be towards tears and shame. Better even that, Jeanie said to herself, than to wait upon the leisure of a man who thought he could let her drop and take her up again at his pleasure. Her mind was disturbed beyond description, confused and miserable. She was afloat upon a dreadful current which carried her away, from which some one outside could save her, but not herself, against which she seemed now to have no force to struggle more.

Jeanie made still another stand, lashing herself, as it were, against the violence of that tide to the companions whom for the moment she had in the house with her, even to Mary by whom she could hold, a little in want of other help. Mary was not a very enlivening companion for the girl—all she could talk about was her children, and the vicissitudes of her household, and the wit and wisdom of little Colin. But Mary was not exigent as to her listeners. So long as she was allowed to go on in her monologue her companion was called upon for no reply. And thus Jeanie's thoughts had full scope, and increased instead of softened the tension of being in which she was; she seemed unable to escape that current which drew her unwilling feet.

She met him again on the last day of the Glendocharts' stay. Though Mary gave her so little help, Jeanie regarded with terror the time of her sister's departure. She felt as if then her last hope would fail her. There would be no longer anything to which to cling, any counterpoise to the influence which was hurrying her to her destruction. She had gone out in the afternoon with a bad headache, and a still worse tremor and throbbing in her heart, feeling that need for the fresh air and the stillness outside, and a moment's exemption from the voices and the questions within, which people in agitation and trouble so often feel. She had not thought of Lord John at all, or of meeting him. She felt only that she must breathe the outer air and be alone for a moment, or else die.

She sat down upon the same fallen tree on which she had sat with Kirsteen. The voice of the linn was softer than ever, stilled by the frost into a soothing murmur. The bare trees stirred their many branches over her head, as if to shield her from any penetrating look, whether from earth or sky. "Oh, what am I to do?" she said to herself. How often these words are said by people in mortal perplexity, in difficulty and trouble. What to do, when you have no alternative but one, no temptation but one? But everything was against Jeanie, and all, who ought to have protected her, fought against her, and made it more and more difficult to resist. She bent down her face into her hands, and repeated to herself that question, "What am I to do?—What am I to do?" Jeanie did not know how long she had been there, or how much time had elapsed before with a start, and a sense of horror, her heart struggling to her throat, she felt a pair of arms encircle her, and a voice in her ear: "Crying, Jeanie! Why should you cry—you who should never have a care? You would never have a care if you would trust yourself, as I am imploring you to do, to me."

Poor Jeanie's heart was sick with conflicting emotions, with the temptation and the strong recoil from it. She could make no reply, could not lift her head, or escape from his arms, or control the sudden access of sobbing that had come upon her. Her sobbing became audible in the stillness of the wintry scene, through the sound of the linn and the faint rustling of the trees. "Oh, go away and leave me! Oh, let me be!" Jeanie said among her sobs. Perhaps she did not altogether mean it, neither the one thing nor the other—neither that he should go nor stay.

He stayed, however, and talked more earnestly than he had ever done before. Not of the Italian bower, but of the two living together, sharing everything, never apart. He had the house all ready to which he would take her, he said; a house fit for her, waiting for its mistress—everything was ready but Jeanie. And why should she hold back? Did she not know he loved her? Had she any doubt? She could not have any doubt; all his study would be to make her happy. She knew that he had no other thought. "Jeanie, Jeanie, only say yes; only yield that pride of yours; you know you have yielded in your heart."

"No," cried Jeanie, sitting upright, drawing herself from him. "No, I have not yielded. There is but one way. Go and ask my father, and then I will go with you. I will go with you," she repeated, one belated sob coming in breaking her voice, "wherever you want me to go."

"Speak to your father? But you know that is what I cannot do. I have told you already I would have to speak to my father, too. And he—would put me into a madhouse or a prison. You know, my sweet love, for I have told you—

but must we be parted by two old fathers with no feeling left in them? Jeanie, if you will be ready by ten o'clock, or any hour you please, I will have a postchaise waiting. Oh, Jeanie, come! Just a little boldness, just one bold step, and then nothing can harm us more; for we'll be together—for ever!" said the young man in his fervour. She had risen up, putting him away from her, but he pressed to her side again. "You have gone too far to go back now," he said. "Jeanie, I'll take no denial. To-night, to-night, my lovely dear."

"No," she said, her heart throbbing as if it would break, putting one hand against his shoulder to push him away from her. "Oh, no, no!" but her eyes met the glowing gaze of his, and the current was seizing her feet.

"That means yes, yes—for two no's make a consent," cried Lord John, seizing her again in his arms.

Drumcarro had scoffed at Kirsteen and her warning, but like many another suspicious man, he had remembered the warning he scorned. He had kept an eye upon all Jeanie's movements since that day. On this afternoon he had seen her steal out, and had cautiously followed her. It was not difficult on the soft grass, doubly soft with the penetrating moisture like a bank of green mossy sponge, to steal along without making any noise; and the trees were thick enough to permit a wayfarer to steal from trunk to trunk undiscovered, especially when those who were watched were so altogether unafraid. Thus Drumcarro, his tall shadow mingled with the trees, had come close to the log on which they sat, and had heard everything. No scruple about listening moved his mind. With his hand grasping a young birch, as if it were a staff, he stood grim and fierce, and heard the lovers talk. His eyes gave forth a gleam that might have set the wood on fire when he heard of the postchaise, and the young tree shivered in his hand. Jeanie was at the end of her powers. She put up her hand to her face to cover it from the storm of her lover's kisses. His passion carried her away. She murmured, *No, no!* still, but it was in gasps, with her failing breath.

"You'll come, you're coming—to-night—and hurrah for love and freedom," cried Lord John.

At this moment he was seized from behind by the collar of his coat—a furious hand full of force and passion caught him with sudden, wild, overpowering strength—Lord John was young but not strong, his slim form writhed in the sudden grasp. There was a moment's struggle, yet scarcely a struggle, as Drumcarro assumed his choking hold. And then something dashed through the air with the speed and the force of a thunderbolt—flung by sheer force of passion. A gasping cry, and an answering roar of the linn as if to swallow down in its caves the object tossed and spinning down—a flash far



below. And in another moment all was still.

What was it that had been done? Jeanie looking up to see her father's transformed and impassioned face, and finding herself free, had fled in the first impulse of terror. And on the log where the lovers had been seated, the old man sat down quivering with the strain he had made, wiping the drops of moisture from his forehead. He was old, but not beyond the strength of his prime; the unaccustomed effort had brought out the muscles on his hands, the veins upon his forehead. The blood was purple in his face. His capacious chest and shoulders heaved; he put his hand, the hand that had done it, to his mouth, to blow upon it, to relieve the strain. He sat down to recover his breath.

How still everything was!—as it is after a rock has fallen, after a tree has been torn up, the silence arching over the void before any whispering voice gets up to say where is it. The waters and the sighing branches both seemed still—with horror. And Drumcarro blew upon his hand which he had strained, and wiped the perspiration from his face.

After a while he rose, still panting a little, his feet sinking into the spongy grass, and went homeward. He met nobody on the way, but seeing Duncan in the yard where he was attending to the cattle, beckoned to him with his hand. Duncan came at the master's call, but not too quickly. "Ye were wanting me, sir," he said. "No—I was not wanting you." "Ye cried upon me, maister." "No, I did not cry upon you—is it me that knows best or you? Go back to your beasts." Drumcarro stood for a moment and watched the man turn back reluctantly, then he raised his voice: "Hey, Duncan—go down yonder," pointing his thumb over his shoulder—"and see if anything's happened. I'm thinking there's a man—tummult over the linn." Having said this the master went quietly to his own room and shut himself up there.

## CHAPTER XIV.

Duncan gave a great start at this strange intimation—"Tummult over the linn!" That was not an accident to be spoken of in such an easy way. He put down the noisy pail he had been carrying in his hand. "Lord!" he said to himself; but he was a man slow to move. Nevertheless after two or three goings back upon himself, and thoughts that "the maister must have gone gyte," Duncan set himself slowly in motion. "A man tumult o'er the linn—that's a very sarious thing," he said to himself. It was a great ease to his mind to see Glendochart coming down the path from the hill, and he stopped until they met. "Sir," said Duncan, "have ye noticed anything strange about the maister?" "Strange about Drumcarro? I have noticed nothing beyond the ordinary," was the reply. "What has he been doing, Duncan?" "He has been doing naething, Glendochart. But he just came upon me when I was doing my wark in the yaird. And I says, 'Are ye wanting me, maister?' And he says, 'Me wanting ye? No, I'm no wanting ye.' But afore I can get back to my wark I hear him again, 'Duncan!' 'What is it, maister?' says I. And says he, 'I think there's a man tumult over the linn. Ye can go and see.' "

"Tumbled over the linn!" cried Glendochart. "Good Lord! and did ye go and see?"

"I'm on the road now," said Duncan; "a man cannot do everything at once."

"The man may be drowned," cried Glendochart, turning round quickly. "Run on, Duncan, for the Lord's sake. I'm not so surefooted as the like of you, but I'll follow ye by the road, as fast as I can. A man over the linn! Dear me, but that may be a very serious matter."

"I was just saying that," said Duncan plunging down upon the spongy grass. He slid and stumbled, tearing long strips of moss off the roots of the trees with which he came in heavy contact, striding over the fallen trunk which had played so great a part in the drama of that afternoon. There were signs of footsteps there, and Duncan slid on the slippery and trampled soil and came down on his back, but got up again at once and took no notice. This accident perhaps delayed him for a moment, and the need of precaution as he descended after such a warning. At all events Glendochart coming quickly by the roundabout of the road arrived only a moment after, and found Duncan dragging out upon the bank an inanimate figure which had apparently been lying half in half out of the stream. Duncan's ruddy face had grown suddenly pale. "Lord keep us! Do ye think he's dead, sir?"

"I hope not, Duncan," said Glendochart, kneeling down by the body; but after a few minutes, both men scared and horror-stricken bending over the figure on the grass, "God preserve us," he said, "I fear it is so. Do you know who it is?"—then a hoarse exclamation burst from them both, "It's the young lord from the lodge on the hill—It's Lord John! God preserve us!" cried Glendochart again. "What can this mean? But a man that's drowned may be brought to life again," he added. "How are we to get him home?"

Duncan, roused by the wonderful event which had thus come in a moment into the tranquil ordinary of his life, rushed along the road calling with a roar for help, which it was not easy to find in that lonely place. However there proved to be one or two people within call—the gamekeeper who lived at the lodge inhabited by Lord John, and the blacksmith from the clachan, who had been carrying some implement home to a distant mountain farm. They managed to tie some branches roughly together to make a sort of litter and thus carried the dead man to Drumcarro, which was the nearest house. The sound of the men's feet and Glendochart's call at the door, brought out every member of the household except the laird, who remained in his room with the door closed and took no notice. Glendochart and the gamekeeper had both some rude notion of what to do, and they acted upon their knowledge, roughly it is true, but with all the care they were capable of. Duncan on horseback, and less apt to spare his horse's legs than his own, thundered off for a doctor. But the doctor was not easily found, and long before his arrival the rough methods of restoring animation had all been given up. Lord John lay on the mistress's unoccupied bed to which he had been carried, like a marble image, with all the lines that a careless life had made showing still upon the whiteness of death, the darkness under the eyes, the curves about the mouth. His wet clothes, which had been cut from the limbs to which they clung, lay in a muddy heap smoking before the now blazing fire. They had piled blankets over him and done everything they knew to restore the vital heat—but without avail.

"How did it happen?" the doctor said—but this no man could tell. They gathered together in an excited yet awestricken group to consult together, to put their different guesses together, to collect what indications might be found. Duncan thought that the collar of the coat was torn as if some one had grasped the poor young man "by the scruff of the neck." There was a bruise on his throat which might have come from the hand thus inserted—but his face had several bruises upon it from contact with the rocks, and his clothes had been so torn and cut up that they afforded little assistance in solving the problem. To send for some member of his family, and to make the sheriff aware of all the circumstances was evidently the only thing to do.

Jeanie had fled without a word, without a look behind her, when her lover's arm loosened from her waist, and her father's hoarse and angry voice broke in upon the scene. No thought of any tragedy to follow was in Jeanie's mind. She had never seen her father take any violent action; his voice, his frowns, had always been enough, there had been no need for more. She thought of an angry altercation, a command to come near the house no more, so far as she thought at all. But she scarcely did think at all. She fled, afraid of her lover, afraid of her father, not sure, to tell the truth, which she feared most—glad that the situation was over, that she could escape by any means. She sped up the wooded bank, out of the shadow of the bare trees about the linn, like a frightened bird—flying, never looking behind. Pausing a moment to take breath before she ran round to the house door, she was thankful to hear no voices in anger, but all fallen into quiet again, nothing but the sound of the linn, louder she thought for the cessation of other sounds; and concluding rapidly in her mind that her father had reserved his anger for her, and let Lord John go—not a just, but according even to Jeanie's small experience, a sufficiently usual turn of affairs—she went on more quietly to the house, that no hasty rush on her part, or self-disclosure of agitation, might call forth Mary's remarks or the questions of Marg'ret. But the agitation of the moment was not over for Jeanie. She saw some one approaching the door from the road as she came within sight. It was too late to escape, and she instinctively put up her hand to smooth her hair, and drew a few long breaths to overcome altogether the panting of her heart, that the stranger, whoever he might be, might not perceive how disturbed she was. But when Jeanie had taken a step or two further, her heart suddenly made a leap again, which swept all her precautions away. "Oh!" she cried, with almost a shriek of agitated recognition, "now of all moments in the world——That he should come now!"

"I am afraid," he said, "I cannot think that cry means any pleasure to see me, though I am so glad to be here."

Oh, to think he should be able to speak, to use common words, as if they had parted yesterday—as if nothing had happened since then!

"Oh, Captain Gordon," she said, breathless; then added, not knowing what she said, "You've been long away."

"Not with my will. I've nothing but my profession, and I was forced to do all I could in that. If it had been my will——"

"Oh," said Jeanie, "I cannot talk; my sister is here, you will want to see her—but for me, I cannot talk. I am—not well. I am in—grief and trouble. Don't stop me now, but let me go."

He stood aside, without a word, his hat in his hand, looking at her wistfully. His look dwelt in her mind as she hurried up stairs. It was not like the look of Lord John—the look that terrified, yet excited her. He had come for her, for her and no one else; but he would not stop her, nor trouble her. It was of her he thought, not of himself. Jeanie's heart came back like an unbent bow. This was the man that she loved. She fled from him, not daring to meet his eyes—but she felt as if some chain had been broken, some bond cut. Lord John! What was Lord John? She was afraid of him no more.

Major Gordon did not know what to do. He lingered a little, unable with the excitement in his veins of having seen his love again, to knock presently at the door and ask for the lady of Glendochart. After a time the sound of a heavy step caught his ear, and the loud interchange of words between Duncan and his master. Then the heavy steps came on towards the door. It must be Drumcarro himself who was coming. Major Gordon drew aside to await the coming of Jeanie's father. Mr. Douglas came round the side of the house, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets and his shoulders up to his ears. He was staring before him with a fierce intensity, the kind of look which sees nothing. Gordon made a step forward, and said some common words of greeting, at which Drumcarro lifted his puckered eyelids for a moment, said "Eh?" with a sort of hasty interrogation, and then turning his back went in and closed the door behind him, leaving the stranger astonished. What did it mean? Gordon thought at first a studied slight to him, but farther thought showed him that this was absurd, and with some surprise he set it down to its true cause—some secret trouble in Drumcarro's mind, some thought which absorbed him. After a moment's astonished pause he turned back upon the road, concluding that whatever this excitement was, by and by it would die away. He walked, perhaps a mile, occupied by his own thoughts, by Jeanie, who was more lovely, he thought, than ever, and by eager speculations what she would say to him; whether perhaps after all she might not be glad to see him when she had got over the first surprise; whether it was merely haste and that great surprise that made her turn away. Gordon had occupation enough for his thoughts had he walked on the whole afternoon; but presently he turned back, remembering what Jeanie had said, that her sister was at Drumcarro, and glad to think of so reasonable a way of getting admittance. He had just come up to the house again, and was approaching the door, when he was met by the group of men coming down from their hopeless attempts to resuscitate the dead. He was much surprised to see this party come to the door, and stepped out of the way with vexation and annoyance, feeling himself and his urgent affairs thrust as it were into a secondary place by this evidence of something going on at Drumcarro. The men, of whom at first he recognized none, were exchanging

grave observations, shaking their heads, with puzzled and troubled looks. At the sight of him there was a visible stir among them. One of them stepped forward hastily, and caught him by the arm, "Who are you? And what are you doing here?"

"Glendochart, you seem to have forgotten me. I am Lewis Gordon, whom you were once very kind to."

"Captain Gordon!"

"Major, at your service; I got my step in India."

"Gordon!" repeated Glendochart. It was natural enough that every new idea should chime in with the terrible one that now possessed his mind. He remembered in a moment who the young man was, and all that had been said and thought of him. He had been Jeanie's lover. It seemed to throw a sudden gleam of illumination on the mystery. "Step in, step in here, and come you with me," he said, laying his hand on the doctor's arm. With a slight summons at the door, but without waiting for any reply he led them into his father-in-law's room. Drumcarro was sitting at his usual table with his head leant upon his hands. He turned half round but did not otherwise change his attitude, as these new comers entered, darkening the little room.

"I beg your pardon, Drumcarro," said Glendochart, "but it's urgent. I must ask this gentleman a few questions in the presence of some responsible person—Captain Gordon, or Major if ye are Major, answer me for the love of God. Ye may do a hasty act, but you're not one that will shrink from the consequence, or I'm far mistaken in you. When did you come here?"

"This is a strange way of receiving a friend," said Gordon with surprise. "I came here about half an hour ago."

"But you did not come in?"

"No—I saw—one of the family."

"And then? Still you did not come in?"

"No, I walked back a mile or so to wait—and then hearing that you were here, and Mrs. Campbell—I returned."

"Why did you not come in?"

"I really cannot tell you the reason," said Gordon, a little irritated. "There was no particular reason."

Said the doctor, perceiving where Glendochart's questions were tending: "It will be far better for you to tell the truth. It might be an accident, but denial

will do no good.”

“Am I accused of anything?” said the stranger in great surprise.

“A stranger about the place at such a time is very suspicious,” said the doctor, shaking his head. “The best thing you could do, Glendochart, would be to detain him till the sheriff comes.”

Drumcarro raised his head from his supporting hands. His habitual redness had changed to grey. He spoke with some difficulty moistening his lips. He said, “Whatever ye may be thinking of, this lad’s tale’s true. I saw him come, and I saw him go. If there’s any man to blame it’s not him.”

They all turned round to where Mr. Douglas sat; the afternoon light was by this time waning, and they had difficulty in seeing each other’s faces. Drumcarro after a moment resumed again. The want of light and the deep sound of his voice, and the scene from which they had just come, made a strange horror of impression upon the men. He asked, “Is he dead?”

“Yes, he is dead. And that minds me it was you that gave the alarm. What did you see, Drumcarro?”

“I heard a rumbling as if the linn rose up to meet him, like hell in the Scriptures to meet that king—and a thud here and there upon the rocks—that’s all I heard.”

Nobody made any reply. No suspicion of the truth had occurred to any mind, but something in the voice, and the language not familiar to the man gave a vague sensation of solemnity and horror. The darkness seemed to deepen round them, while this pause lasted. And Drumcarro said no more, but leant his head upon his hands again. The silence was broken by the doctor who said in a subdued tone: “We’ll better leave Mr. Douglas quiet. It is a time of trouble—and the shock of this accident on the top of all the rest—”

Drumcarro did not move, but he said between the two hands that supported his head, “That man has nothing to do with it. I saw him come. And now ye can let him go his way.”

They filed out of the room in silence with a vague dread upon them all. Something strange was in the air. The dark figure by the table never moved, his head on his hands, his big frame looking colossal in the quivering twilight. The fire in the grate behind burned up suddenly and threw a little flickering flame into the gloom relieving still more that motionless shadow. “It has been too much for the old gentleman,” the doctor said in a whisper, as he closed the door.

"He's none so old," said Glendochart with a little irritation, mindful of the fact that he was not himself much younger, and feeling the thrill of nervous discomfort and alarm.

"I doubt if he'll live to be much older. I do not like the looks of him," the doctor said.

It seemed to have become almost night when they came out into the hall. The blacksmith and the gamekeeper and Duncan were standing in a group about the door, the sky full of a twilight clearness behind them, and one star in it, like a messenger sent out to see what dreadful thing had happened. The air blew cold through the house from the open door, and Mary crying and nervous stood at the door of the parlour behind. The mother's death which she had taken with such calm propriety was in the course of nature, but the dreadful suddenness of this, the mystery about it affected even her calm nerves. A second death in the house, and the Duke's son! It comforted Mary when Gordon left the group of men whose meaning he did not even yet comprehend and joined her, to hear the whole story, and yet not all.

The other men still stood consulting when the Glendochart carriage arrived at the door; everybody had forgotten that the departure of the visitors had been settled for that afternoon, Glendochart seized the opportunity at once. "I will send the ladies away; this is no place for them with all these new troubles," he said, "and the express to the Duke can travel so far with them." It had occurred to Glendochart that the less that could be made of Lord John's intercourse with the family at Drumcarro the better. He had not discouraged it himself; had it come to a marriage which would have allied himself and his children so much more nearly with the ducal family, it would have been no bad thing; but now that there could be no marriage it was clear that it was neither for Jeanie's advantage, nor indeed for his own, to give any more publicity than was necessary to the cause of Lord John's presence here. And thus it was that Jeanie without knowing why, yet willing enough to be carried off at such a crisis even to Glendochart, found herself within half an hour seated by her sister's side driving off, with the darkness of night behind her, and the clearness in the west reflected in her startled eyes. Jeanie neither knew nor suspected that anything dreadful had happened; but to escape her father's eye and his questions after the discovery he had made was relief enough to make her forget the bustle and haste with which she was carried away. They were to give Major Gordon "a lift as far as the town," but Jeanie did not know this until he followed her into the carriage, and then her heart so jumped up and choked her with its beating that she thought no more of Drumcarro's wrath, nor of the deliverance from Lord John which she knew her father's



interposition would make final.

And so Drumcarro House was once more, but with a deepened mystery and terror, left with its dead. Mr. Douglas did not leave his room all the evening. The call to supper made first by Marg'ret, then by Glendochart knocking cautiously at his door, produced only the response of a growl from within. No light was visible from under the door. No sound was heard in the room. To all appearance he remained without moving or even lighting his candle, until late at night his heavy step was heard going upstairs to bed. Without a light, that was the strangest thing of all to the keen but silent observers. There could be nothing on the master's mind or he could never have sat all the evening through knowing what it was that lay in his wife's room up stairs, without a light. They could not imagine indeed how in any circumstances Drumcarro, an old man, could have had anything to do with the death of Lord John, a young one, nor what reason there could be for seeking his death, yet an uneasy fear was in the air, and there was no one else who could be thought of. But that circumstance cleared him. Without a light no man could sit who had been instrumental in causing a man's death, while that man lay dead in the same house. Glendochart, whose mind was disturbed by many miserable surmises, was comforted by this thought, though almost unconsciously to himself.

And nobody knew what thoughts were going on in the dark in that closed room. They were not thoughts specially about Lord John. They were the bewildering circling of a mind suddenly driven into tragic self-consciousness, about the entire chapter of his life now perhaps about to be brought to an end. The sudden pang of the moment, his clutch upon his victim (his hand hurt him still from the strain, and still now and then he raised it to his mouth, to blow his hot breath upon it), the whirl of that figure through the air, came back at intervals like a picture placed before his eyes. But between those intervals there surged up all manner of things. Old scenes far off and gone, incidents that had taken place in the jungle and swamp, cries and sounds of the lash, and pistol shots all long over and forgotten. One face, not white like Lord John's, but grey in its blackness, like ashes, came and wavered in the darkness before him more distinct than the others. No ghost, he had no faith in ghosts, nothing outside of him. Something within from which even if they should hang him he knew he would not get free. Lord John,—he thought very little of Lord John! And yet his hand hurt him, the picture would come back, and the scene re-enact itself before his eyes. Sometimes he dozed with his head in his hands. The chief thing was that he should not be disturbed, that no one should come in to question him, to interfere with his liberty, that night at least. That he should be quiet that night if nevermore.

## CHAPTER XV.

The Duke arrived with his eldest son as soon as post-horses could bring him. He had been in the north, not very far away, so that the interval, though it represented much more difficult travelling than the journey from one end to the other of Great Britain nowadays, was not very long. Lord John had been a trouble to his family all his life. He had followed none of the traditions of prudence and good sense which had made his race what they were. The scrapes in which he had been were innumerable, and all his family were aware that nothing but embarrassment and trouble was likely to come to them from his hand. Sometimes this state of affairs may exist without any breach of the bonds of natural affection; but perhaps when a man is a duke and accustomed to have many things bow to his will, the things and persons that cannot be made to do so become more obnoxious to him than to a common man. No doubt a shock of natural distress convulsed the father's mind at the first news of what had happened, but after a while there came, horrible as it seems to say it, a certain relief into the august mind of the Duke. At least here was an end of it; there could be no more to follow, no new disgraces or inconveniences to be encountered. Scarcely a year had come or gone for many years past without some fresh development of John's powers of mischief. Now, poor fellow! all was over; he could do no more harm, make no more demands on a revenue which was not able to bear such claims, endanger no more a name which indeed had borne a great deal in its day without much permanent disadvantage. On the whole there was thus something to set against the terrible shock of a son's sudden death by accident. A few questions thrown into the air as it were, a general demand upon somebody for information burst from the Duke during that long drive. "Where is this linn, do you know? What could he have wanted there? On the land of that old ruffian, Drumcarro? And what did he want there?" But to the last question at least no one could make any reply. Even to speak of Drumcarro's lovely daughter as an inducement would have been a jarring note when the poor fellow was so recently dead. And the Duke could answer his own question well enough; any petty intrigue would be reason enough for John, the worse the better. His only fear was that some dark story of seduction and revenge might unfold itself when he got there.

It was Glendochart who received his chief when he reached his journey's end, and told him the little there was to tell. It was supposed that Lord John had somehow missed his footing when at the head of the linn. Some one had heard the sound of a fall, and the body had been found below at the foot of the waterfall. This was all that could be discovered at the end of two or three days which had elapsed. The Duke saw, with a natural pang, his dead son laid out

upon the mistress's bed, and then he visited the scene of the tragedy. He inspected everything with a clouded countenance, asking brief, sharp questions from time to time. To Glendochart he seemed suspicious of violence and foul play, a suspicion which was lurking in Glendochart's own mind, with strange surmises which he could not put into words, but which his mind was on the alert to find some clue to. This, however, was scarcely the Duke's frame of mind. After he had visited the spot where the body had been found, and looked up the foaming fall of the linn, and heard everything that could be told him, he put a sudden question which dismayed Glendochart. "Have you any suspicions?" he said. "Has there been any suggestion—of violence?"

"The idea has no doubt been suggested," Mr. Campbell replied, "but I can find nothing to give it any countenance. There were signs as of stamping of feet at one place near the fallen tree, but the man who found the body accounted for that as having slipped and fallen there."

"It has been suggested then?" said the Duke, with another cloud coming over his face. "Glendochart, I may speak freely to you that would bring no discredit on the name. Was there any story, any reason for his staying here?"

Glendochart felt his countenance redden, though it was of that well-worn colour which shows little. He suddenly realised, with a sense of relief unspeakable, what it would have been had Lord John lived and thriven, to have intimated to the chief that his son had married Drumcarro's daughter. Glendochart had himself been flattered by the idea. He saw the reverse of the medal now.

"I know of none," he said, "my Lord Duke. He was more at this house than at any other house round about."

"And there was no story—no lass, disappointed perhaps—or angry father? You know what I mean, Glendochart. One of my own name, and not so far from me in blood, I know that I can trust you. You know, too—what my poor boy was."

"I understand what your Grace means," said Glendochart. "I have heard of nothing of the kind."

"And who was it that heard the fall?"

"It was my father-in-law, Drumcarro himself. He was taking his usual walk. I don't imagine he ever thought it was so serious. He called to the man in the byre to see to it, that he thought he had heard a fall."

"I will see Drumcarro. I suppose——"

"If it will satisfy your Grace better—but he is an old man, and much shaken with his wife's death which took place only a fortnight ago."

The Duke gave his clansman what looked like a suspicious glance. But he only said, "It will be better not to disturb him. I would have thought," he added, "that old Drumcarro was tough enough to stand the loss of his wife or anything else."

"We sometimes do men injustice," said Glendochart, a little stiffly; "and the shock of having another death, so to speak, in the house, has had a great effect upon his mind—or I should perhaps say his nerves."

"Well, well, I will not disturb him," said the Duke. He said no more until they reached again the head of the linn. Then he stood for a few minutes amid the spray, looking down as he had looked up the boiling foam of waters. The cloud had gone off his face. He turned to his son, by his side, who had said little all this time. "I think we may satisfy ourselves that it was pure accident," he said.

"I think so," said the taintless heir, with a solemn nod of his head.

The Duke stood there for a moment more, and then he took off his hat and said, "Thank God." With all his heart, Glendochart echoed the surprising words. He thought that he indeed had cause for thankfulness—that he should never have had the occasion to approach his chief with news of an alliance that would have been so little to his mind; that Jeanie's name should have been kept out of the matter altogether, and no questions put to the old man whose nerves had been so strangely shaken. He had indeed cause for thankfulness; but the Duke, why? Glendochart came to understand later why the Duke should have been glad that no new scandal was to be associated with the end of his son's life.

And so Lord John was carried in great state to the burial place of his fathers, and was rehabilitated with his family, and mourned by his mother and sisters, like other men. And whatever the tragedy was that attended his last hours it was buried with him, and never told to man. There is no coroner in Scotland; and in those remote regions, and at that period, the Duke's satisfaction that his son's death was caused by accident was enough for all.

Drumcarro scarcely left his room while that solemn visitor was in the house. He appeared after, a singularly changed and broken man, and fell into something like the habits of his old life. There had been no secret in his strange retirement, but there was no doubt left in the mind of any who surrounded him, that something had happened which was not in the peaceful routine of existence. They formed their own impressions at their leisure; it was nothing to

the laird what they thought. He had deceived no man, neither had he confided in any man. When Glendochart left the house, taking charge of the mournful conveyance which carried Lord John home, life at Drumcarro would, in any circumstances, have been a wonderfully changed and shrunken life. It was the first time that the diminished family had been left alone since the death of the mistress. At the family table, once so well surrounded, Drumcarro sat down with his one remaining son, and the vast expanse of the wide tablecloth vacant save in that corner. It did not occur to any one to substitute a smaller table for the long-stretching board where there had been room for all. Jamie, who was never seen without a book, compensated himself for the silence and anxiety of this *tête-à-tête* by reading furtively, while his father sat with his shoulders up to his ears, and his eyes, almost lost in his shaggy eyebrows, glaring out now and then with a glance of gloomy fire. It was rarely that he addressed the boy, and the boy escaped from him into his book. The mother was gone, Jeanie was gone, every one who could make that empty board a little brighter. The father and son swallowed their meal side by side, but did not prolong it any more than was possible. The sight of them affected Merran's nerves when she served them, though that ruddy lass might well have been supposed to have no such things in her possession. "There's the laird just glowering frae him as if he saw something no canny, and Jamie with his book. And me that minds all that fine family!" cried Merran. "Ye must just go ben yourself, Marg'ret, for I canna do it." And there is no doubt that it was a piteous sight.

Jeanie, on the other hand, recovered her spirit and her ease of mind with singular rapidity under the sheltering roof of Glendochart. She was not told of Lord John's death for some time, and never of the rapidity with which it followed her interrupted interview. She was very much moved and excited when she heard of his death, wondering with natural self-importance whether her resistance of his suit had anything to do with the breaking down of his health. It half relieved, half disappointed Jeanie to discover after that his death was caused by an accident and not by love. But indeed she had then only a limited space to give in her thoughts to that lover of the past. He of the present had the command of the situation. Determined as she had been not to understand Gordon, the effect of a few days in the same house with him had been marvellous, and when the fairy regions of youthful experience began once more to open before Jeanie, she forgot that she had cause of grievance against the companion who opened to her that magic gate. All tragic possibilities disappeared from the path of the girl who had no longer any distracting struggle, but whose desires and inclinations all went with her fate. Her father made no objection to her marriage. "Let him take her if he wants her. I have no need of her here," Drumcarro said. Jeanie indeed, instead of

brightening the house and soothing the fever in him, excited and disturbed her father: "I want no lass about the house, now her mother that keepled her a little in order is gone." She was married eventually at Glendochart, the Laird making no appearance even. He was said to be ill, and his illness had taken the curious form, a form not unprecedented, but much against nature, of strong dislike to certain persons. He could not abide the sight of Jeanie: "Let her do what she will, but let her no more come near me. Let him take her if he likes, I'm well pleased to be quit of her." When Jeanie came attended by her lover to bid her father good-bye, the Laird almost drove her away. He got up from his chair supporting himself upon its arms, his eyes burning like coals of fire, his now gaunt and worn figure trembling with passion. "Go away to the parlour," he said, "and get your tea, or whatever you've come for. I want none of you here."

"Father, I just came to bid you good-bye," said Jeanie.

"Go 'way to the parlour. I suffer nobody to disturb me here. Go 'way to Marg'ret. Ye'll get what ye want from her, and plenty of petting, no doubt. Go 'way to the parlour. Marg'ret! Get them what they want and let them go."

"Oh, father," cried Jeanie weeping, "it's not for anything we've come, but just for kindness—to say good-bye."

He was a strange figure standing up between his chair and table, supporting himself by his hands, stooping forward, grown old all at once, his hair and beard long and ragged in aspect, a nervous tremor in his limbs. Could that be the hale and vigorous man who scarcely seemed beyond middle age? Jeanie assayed to say something more, but the words were checked on her lips by his threatening looks.

"Good-bye," he said. "Consider it's done and all your duty paid, and begone from my sight, for I cannot bide to see you." He added a moment after with a painful effort over himself, "I'm an old man, and not well in my health. Marg'ret! Ye mind me of many a thing I would fain forget. Good-bye, and for the love of God go away, and let me see you no more."

"Is he always like that?" Jeanie asked, clinging to Marg'ret in the parlour, where that faithful adherent prepared tea for the visitors.

"Like what?" asked Marg'ret with a determination to keep up appearances in the presence of the strange gentleman with whom she had no associations. "The maister's not very well. He has never been in his richt health since your mother died. That made an awfu' change in the house, as might have been expected. Such a quiet woman as she was, never making any steer; it's just by ordinar' how she's missed."

“Is it that? Is that all?” cried Jeanie.

“And what else would it be?” asked Marg’ret with a look that could not be gainsaid.

Marg’ret did not know any more than the rest what had happened. Lord John had died of an accident, he had fallen over the linn, and from the Duke himself to the last of the name all were satisfied that it was so. And in Drumcarro House there was not a word said to alter this view. But many heavy thoughts had arisen there of which nothing was said.

Drumcarro did what is also not uncommon in such circumstances: he justified those who explained his strange conduct by illness, and fell ill. The doctor said it was a malady of long standing which had thus developed itself as it was certain to have done sooner or later. He recommended that a doctor should be sent for from Glasgow, who had become very famous for his practice in this particular malady. It is doubtful whether Glendochart, who had the conduct of the business, knew anything about Dr. Dewar. At all events, if he did, it did not prevent him from sending for that special practitioner. The result was a curious scene in the chamber of the patient, who raised himself from his bed to stare at the new comer, and after contemplating him for some time in doubtful silence between wrath and astonishment, suddenly burst out into a great guffaw of laughter. “This was all that was wanted,” he said. But he allowed Anne’s husband to come in, to examine him, to prescribe, and with a grim humour saw him wave away the offered fee. “Na, it’s all in the family,” said the grim patient with a sudden sense of the grotesque illumining the darkness of his sick room. He was not insensible to this irony of circumstance, and he made no resistance. It was the only thing that produced a gleam of amusement in these latter days.

## CHAPTER XVI.

In his newly developed condition as an invalid Mr. Douglas had gone on for more than a year. During this time he had taken no active steps of any kind. Jamie had been left to read as he pleased every book he could lay his hands upon, from Mr. Pyper's old-fashioned theology to D'Urfey's *Pills to Purge Melancholy*, a curious if not very extensive range. Only these two, the dreary boy with his books, and his possible writer-ship hung suspended so to speak, no one taking any steps to put him forth like his brothers into active life, and the grim invalid, who rarely left his room or indeed his bed, remained in Drumcarro. Such an emptiness occurs not unfrequently in the story of a house once full and echoing with the superabundant energies of a large family; but the father and son afforded a deeper emblem of dulness and desolation than almost any mother and daughter could have done. They were more separated from life. The Laird cared nothing for his neighbours, rich or poor, whether they prospered or were in want. Marg'ret, who had the control of everything, kept indeed a liberal hand, and preserved the reputation of Drumcarro as a house from which no poor body was ever sent away without a handful of meal at least, if not more substantial charity.

But her master took no interest in the vicissitudes of the clachan or to hear of either prosperity or need. She still attempted to carry him the news of the district for the relief of her own mind if not for the advantage of his, for to arrange his room in silence or bring his meals without a word was an effort quite beyond Marg'ret's powers.

"The Rossraig Carmichaels have come to the end of their tether," she told him one morning, "there's a muckle roup proclaimed for next month of a' the farm things. I might maybe send Duncan to see what's going, if there's anything very cheap, and folk say the farm itself."

"What's that you're saying, woman?"

"I'm just telling you, Laird. The Rossraig family is clean ruined—no much wonder if ye think of a' the on-goings they've had. There's to be a roup, and the estate itsel' by private contract, or if nae offer comes—"

"Get out of my room, woman," cried Drumcarro. "Bring me my clothes. You steek everything away as if a gentleman was to be bound for ever in his bed. I'm going to get up."

"Sir!" cried Marg'ret in dismay. "It's as much as your life is worth."

"My life!" he said with a snarl of angry impatience, but as he struggled up



in his bed Drumcarro caught sight of himself, a weird figure, lean as an old eagle, with long hair and ragged beard, and no doubt the spring of sudden energy with which he raised himself was felt through all his rusty joints so long unaccustomed to movement. He kept up, sitting erect, but he uttered a groan of impatience as he did so. "I'm not my own master," he said—"a woman's enough to daunt me that once never knew what difficulty was. Stop your infernal dusting and cleaning, and listen to me. Where's that lass in London living now? Or is she aye there? Or has she taken up with some man to waste her siller like the rest of her kind?"

"Sir, are ye meaning your daughter Kirsteen?" said Marg'ret, with dignity.

"Who should I be meaning? Ye can write her a letter and send it by the post. Tell her there's need of her. Her father's wanting her, and at once. Do ye hear? There's no time to trouble about a frank. Just send it by the post."

"If ye were not in such an awfu' hurry," said Marg'ret, "there might maybe be an occasion."

"I can wait for none of your occasions—there's little feeling in her if she cannot pay for one letter—from her father. Tell her I'm wanting her, and just as fast as horses' legs can carry her, she's to come."

"Maister," cried Marg'ret with great seriousness drawing close to the bed, "if ye're feeling the end sa near and wanting your bairns about ye, will I no send for the minister? It's right he should be here."

Drumcarro sat taller and taller in his bed, and let forth a string of epithets enough to make a woman's blood run cold. "Ye old bletherin' doited witch!" he said, "ye old——" His eloquence had not failed him, and Marg'ret, though a brave woman, who had taken these objurgations composedly enough on previous occasions, was altogether overwhelmed by the torrent of fiery words, and the red ferocious light in the eyes of the skeleton form in the bed. She put up her hands to her ears and fled. "I'll do your will—I'll do your will," she cried. A letter was not a very easy piece of work to Marg'ret, but so great was the impression made upon her mind that she fulfilled the Laird's commission at once. She wrote as follows in the perturbation of her mind—

"Your fader has either taken leave of his senses, or he's fey, or thinks his later end is nigh. But any way I'm bid to summons you, Kirsteen, just this moment without delay. I'm to tell ye there's need of you—that your fader's wanting ye. Ye will just exerceese your own judgment, for he's in his ordinar' neither better nor warse. But he's took a passion of wanting ye and will not bide for an occasion

nor a private hand as may be whiles heard of—nor yet a frank that could be got with a little trouble. So ye will have this letter to pay for, and ye'll come no doubt if ye think it's reasonable, but I cannot say that I do for my part.

“P.S. The Carmichaels of Rossraig are just ruined with feasting and wasting, and their place is to be sold and everything roupit—a sair downcome for their name.”

Kirsteen obeyed this letter with a speed beyond anything which was thought possible in the north. She drove to the door, no longer finding it necessary to conceal her coming. Marg'ret's postscript, written from the mere instinct of telling what news there was to tell, had already thrown some light to her upon this hasty summons. Drumcarro lay propped up by pillows waiting for her, with something of the old deep red upon his worn face. He was wonderfully changed, but the red light in his eyes and the passion which had always blazed or smouldered in the man, ready to burst out at any touch, even when covered with the inevitable repressions of modern life, was more apparent than ever. His greetings were few. “Eh, so that's you?” he said. “Ye've come fast.”

“I was told that you wanted me, father.”

“And maybe thought I was dying and there was no time to lose.” He noticed that Kirsteen held in her hand a newspaper, at which he glanced with something like contempt. A London newspaper was no small prize to people so far off from all sources of information. But such things were at present contemptible to Drumcarro in presence of the overwhelming pre-occupation in his own mind.

“I see,” he said, “ye've brought a paper to the old man; but I have other things in my head. When ye were here before ye made an offer. It was none of my seeking. It was little likely I should think of a lass like you having siller at her command—which is just another sign that everything in this country is turned upside down.”

Kirsteen made no reply, but waited for the further revelation of his news.

“Well,” he said with a slight appearance of embarrassment and a wave of his hand, “here's just an opportunity. I have not the means of my own self. I would just have to sit and grin in this corner where a severe Providence has thrown me and see it go—to another of those damned Campbells, little doubt of that.”

“What is it?” she said. Kirsteen had lifted her head too, like a horse

scenting the battle from afar. She had not her father's hatred of his hereditary foes, but there was a fine strain of tradition in Kirsteen's veins.

"It's just Rossraig—our own land, that's been in the Douglas name for hundreds of years, and out of it since the attainder. I would be ready to depart in peace if I had it back."

Kirsteen's eyes flashed in response. "If it's possible—but they will want a great sum for Rossraig."

"Possible!" he cried with furious impatience. "How dare ye beguile me with your offer, if it's only to think of what's possible? I can do that myself. Does one of your name condescend to a dirty trade, and serve women that are not fit to tie a Douglas's shoe, and then come to me and talk of what's possible? If that's all, give up your mantua-making and your trading that's a disgrace to your family, and come back and look after the house which will set you better. Possible!" he cried, the fire flying from his eyes and the foam from his mouth. "For what do you demean yourself—and me to permit it—if it's no possible?" He came to the end on a high note, with the sharpness of indignant passion in his voice.

Kirsteen had followed every word with a kindling countenance, with responsive flame in her eyes. "Ye speak justly," she said, with a little heaving of her breast. "For them to whom it's natural a little may suffice. But I that do it against nature am bound to a different end." She paused a little, thinking; then raised her head. "It shall be possible," she said.

He held out his thin and trembling fingers, which were like eagle's claws.

"Your hand upon it," he cried. The hot clutch made Kirsteen start and shiver. He dropped her hand with an excited laugh. "That's the first bargain," he said, "was ever made between father and child to the father's advantage—at least, in this house. And a lass,—and all my fine lads that I sent out for honour and for gain!" He leant back on his pillows with feeble sobs of sound, the penalty of his excitement. "Not for me," he said, "not for me, though I would be the first—but for the auld name, that was once so great."

Kirsteen unfolded the paper tremulously, with tears lingering on her eyelashes. "Father, if ye will look here——"

"Go away with your news and your follies," he said roughly. "You think much of your London town and your great world, as ye call it, but I think more of my forbears' name and the lands they had, and to bring to confusion a false race. Kirsteen," he put out his hand again, and drew her close to the bedside, clutching her arm. "I'll tell you a thing I've told nobody. It was me that did it. I

just took and threw him down the linn. Me an old man, him a young one, and as false as hell. He was like the serpent at that bairn's lug; and I just took him by the scruff of the neck. My hand's never got the better of it," he added, thrusting her away suddenly, and looking at his right hand, blowing upon it as if to remove the stiffness of the strain.

"Father!" Kirsteen cried, with subdued horror. "What was it you did?"

He chuckled with sounds of laughter that seemed to dislocate his throat. "I took him by the scruff of the neck—I never thought I could have had the strength. It was just pawson. The Douglasses have that in them; they're wild when they're roused. I took him—by the scruff of the neck. He never made a struggle. I know nothing more about it, if he was living or dead."

"Ye killed him!" cried Kirsteen with horror. "Oh, it's no possible!"

"There ye are with your possibles again. It's just very possible when a man's blood's up. He's not the first," he said, in a low tone, turning his face to the wall. He lay muttering there for some time words of which Kirsteen could only hear, "the scruff of the neck," "no struggle," "it's hurt my hand, though," till in the recoil from his excitement Drumcarro fell fast asleep and remembered no more.

He had, however, it appeared, to pay for this excitement and the tremendous tension in which he had been held from the time he summoned Kirsteen to the moment of her arrival. His frame, already, so weakened, had not been able to bear it. He was seized during the night by a paralytic attack, from which he never rallied, though he lived for a week or more as in a living tomb. All that had been so important to Drumcarro died off from him, and left him struggling in that dumb insensibility, living yet dead. Kirsteen was never able to let him know that, herself as eager for the elevation of the family as he could be, she had at once opened negotiations for the purchase of Rossraig, though on terms that would cripple her for years. Sometimes his eyes would glare upon her wildly out of the half dead face asking questions to which his deadened senses could understand no answer. She at last withdrew from the room altogether, finding that he was more calm in her absence. And all the time there lay on the table beside his bed, rejected first in his excitement, all-impotent to reach him now, the copy of the *Gazette* brought by Kirsteen from London, in which appeared the announcement that Colonel Alexander Douglas, of the 100th Native Regiment, for distinguished valour and long services, had received the honours of a K.C.B. Had it come but a day sooner, the exultation of Drumcarro might have killed him (which would have been so good a thing), but at least would have given him such sensations of glory and gratified pride as would have crowned his life. But he never had this supreme

delight.

When Sir Alexander Douglas, K.C.B., came home, he found his patrimony largely increased, but both father and mother and all his belongings swept away. The one whom he found it hardest to approve was Kirsteen. Anne with her well-to-do doctor had nothing now to forgive that her brother could see; Mary had fulfilled every duty of woman. Young Jeanie with her young soldier had all the prestige of beauty and youth, and the fact that her husband was a rising man and sure of promotion to make her acceptable to her family. But a London mantua-maker, "sewing," so he put it to himself, "for her bread!" It startled him a little to find that he owed Rossraig to that mantua-maker, but he never got over the shock of hearing what and where she was. "Any sort of a man, if he had been a chimney-sweep, would have been better," Sir Alexander said. And Kirsteen was a rare and not very welcome visitor in the house she had redeemed. They all deplored the miserable way of life she had chosen, and that she had no man. For the credit of human nature, it must be said that the young Gordons, succoured and established by Kirsteen's bounty, were on her side, and stood by her loyally; but even Jeanie wavered in her convictions in respect to the mantua-making. She too would have been thankful to drown the recollection of the establishment in Chapel Street in the name of a man. "If she had but a good man of her own!" But Major Gordon, soon Colonel and eventually General, as fortunate a man as in piping times of peace a soldier could hope to be, put down this suggestion with a vehemence which nobody could understand. He was the only one to whom Kirsteen's secret had ever been revealed.

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In the times which are not ancient history, which some of us still remember, which were our high days of youth, as far down as in the fifties of this present century, there lived in one of the most imposing houses in one of the princeliest squares of Edinburgh, a lady, who was an old lady, yet still as may be said in the prime of life. Her eye was not dim nor her natural force abated; her beautiful head of hair was still red, her eyes still full of fire. She drove the finest horses in the town, and gave dinners in which judges delighted and where the best talkers were glad to come. Her hospitality was almost boundless, her large house running over with hordes of nephews and nieces, her advice, which meant her help, continually demanded from one side or other of a large and widely extended family. No one could be more cheerful, more full of interest in all that went on. Her figure had expanded a little like her fortune, but she was the best dressed woman in Edinburgh, always clothed in rich dark-coloured silks and satins, with lace which a queen might have envied. Upon the table by her bed-head there stood a silver casket, without

which she never moved; but the story of which the records were there enshrined, sometimes appeared to this lady like a beautiful dream of the past, of which she was not always sure that it had ever been.

She was of the Drumcarro family in Argyllshire, who it is well known are the elder branch of all; and she was well known not only as the stand-by of her family, but as the friend of the poor and struggling everywhere. It was a common question in many circles where she was known as to how it was that she had never gotten a man—a question more than usually mysterious, seeing how well off she was, and that she must have been very good-looking in her time. She was Miss Douglas of Moray Place, sister to a number of distinguished Indian officers, and to one bookworm and antiquary well known to a certain class of learned readers, but whom Edinburgh lightly jeered at as blind Jimmy Douglas or the Moudiewart—not that he was blind indeed but only abstracted in much learning. Miss Douglas was the elder sister also of the beautiful Lady Gordon whose husband was in command at Edinburgh Castle. There was no one better thought of. And so far as anybody ever knew, most people had entirely forgotten that in past times, not to disgrace her family, her name had appeared on a neat plate in conjunction with the name of Miss Jean Brown, Court Dressmaker and Mantua-Maker, as

MISS KIRSTEEN.

THE END.

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## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *Kirsteen, Volume 3* by Margaret Oliphant]