

MRS.
BARRY

BY
FREDERICK NIVEN



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FIRST EDITION

DEDICATED
TO THE MEMORY OF
JOHN GALT
AND TO THOSE WHO REMEMBER HIM

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Mrs. Barry

CHAPTER I

OCTOBER MORNING

We see Mrs. Barry first on a grey October morning blowing up the fire with a bellows. The blind was raised so that when morning was more than a name its light would be in the room, but the gas was lit to help her. That was a very serviceable gas-bracket over the mantelpiece, with no less than three joints so that one could fold it close to the wall when it was not in use or draw it out straight, or bend it downward to see if the kettle boiled.

She was on a knee before the fire, the brass nozzle of the bellows resting on the base of the grate between its two central bars. Her hands were somewhat shrivelled, well-shapen but worn. When the flames leapt up they spasmodically lit a face beautified with an elderly tranquillity, showed silver in her brown hair, showed that her eyes were blue and that her skin was of a fine texture.

The kettle began to purr. Steam came from the spout. She put the porridge-pot on the stove and stirred meal into the salted, boiling water. *Plop-plop* went the fumaroles in it. Mr. Stewart (one of her lodgers), who occupied the back bedroom, liked his porridge “knotty” a little; Mr. Amara (the other lodger), who occupied the front bedroom, liked it without knots, but she would leave a few for Mr. Stewart.

And now for the boots and shoes, she considered. She passed into the dark entrance hall. There she had a thrill, the thrill of going back to the night that was past. The only radiance, and it was but trifling at that hour, was from the fanlight over the front door which gave upon the stair-landing. Last night lurked in the hall, dark in the corners. There was a certain piquancy—almost an excitement—in fumbling back to last night, fumbling for Mr. Stewart’s boots and Mr. Amara’s shoes.

Mr. Amara had forgotten to put his shoes out. With Mr. Stewart’s boots in hand she stole back to the morning that was oozing into the kitchen and dimming the gaslight. She must get Mr. Amara’s shoes. He was her steady lodger. The Siamese consul had arranged for him to come to her. His name in full was Mr. Luang Amara Chakranandhu, and he had come all the way from Bangkok, Siam, to learn about boilers and marine engines with the

Fairglen Shipbuilding Company, preparatory to being engineer on a Siamese steamship. The ordinary period of apprenticeship to become a marine engineer was five years; but at the end of the five years there would probably be two more in the drafting office. He had been lodging with her over six months.

Yes, she must get his shoes. Would there be enough light in his room, if she opened the door, for her to see where he had dropped them? He would still be asleep. Neither her alarm-clock, nor the bell of the parish church (which began to ring at half-past five every morning) ever awoke him. He never stirred till she knocked upon his door. But the little dark foreign man, behind his very grand manner, his puffing chest, his back-canted head, his frowning brows and compressed lips, was excessively timid and required, to fall asleep, a revolver under his pillow. He had forgotten to remove it one morning; making the bed, Mrs. Barry had found it.

Yet he must have his shoes shined. He was her *steady*. The Siamese consul kept an eye on him, in the manner of a guardian, and if Mr. Amara did not like his lodgings, did not find them satisfactory on all points, he would say so to the consul and remove. She must not lose him, for to have a permanent lodger meant much.

She crept back across the hall and stealthily turned his door-handle a fraction of an inch at a time. The odour of eau-de-Cologne came out to her. He always scented himself when he went out in the evenings. She heard his heavy breathing. Down on hands and knees she peered into the room. Yes, there were his shoes: she caught a faint gleam of them beside a chair on which garments hung ghostly. Just as she was reaching for them he turned in his bed and she held her breath. The pusillanimous little man might whip the revolver from under his pillow and with a quick whirl—he was very pliant; he could bend his fingers till they almost touched the back of his hand—shoot down at her only to discover later that he had killed not a burglar but the landlady with his natty shoes in her hand. She paused. She lifted the shoes. On all fours she backed from the room.

Safely outside again she stood up and in doing so felt a jab in her back. Mrs. Murdoch, one of her neighbours, had told her that lumbago was the cause of that jab. However, she had retrieved the shoes. She smiled. As cautiously as she had opened the door she closed it. She had a girlish sense of adventure; but in the kitchen again it gave place to one of ignominy.

A pretty pass this was that she had come to, down on her knees crawling on a floor to cull the shoes of a Siamese lodger and polish them. Briefly she

had an emotion of self-pity. She had a vision of a great farm in Ayrshire. She saw the rolling acres and the woods of it, the farm-hands coming and going and her father, in his fawn leggings and his high felt hat, ordering one *Go* and he went, and another *Come* and he came. She saw her husband (one of the “sugar-kings” of Glasgow) alighting from the hansom that brought him home from the office every evening. She heard the jingling bells of that cab.

She fell to work brushing Mr. Stewart’s boots and Mr. Amara’s shoes. The characters of the men were in their footwear. What a small foot had Mr. Amara! How small, even for so small a man! With one of these midget shoes on her left hand like a glove, she polished, smiling over it, smiling over him. A conceited little fop! Perhaps in Siam it was a great affair to go abroad to learn engineering. To scull a sampan was the wont there, no doubt. These shoes he would have to change when he got to the shipyards—put them in a locker there. Mr. Stewart was also an engineer, but not at one of the yards. He was a fully qualified marine engineer ashore for but a few weeks while his steamer was being overhauled in dry dock. Soon he would be off, to Australia. He had come to her on the understanding that he might go without long notice.

She regained a sense of not having come down in the world but merely of having had a little misfortune as she thought of him while polishing his boots. He asked for what he wanted; he did not order. He congratulated her upon the meals she served: he did not look at them as though he supposed they were the best he could expect. She would be very sorry when he had to go. The great, big man had a face at once stern and kind. He never said to her: “I know it is an accident that you have to live here in Heather Street and take in lodgers,” but he conveyed his awareness of that by his manner to her. By the very fact that she never stood in the doorway explaining that she had come down, or informing him that her father had been a great landowner (a gentleman farmer), and her husband, when young, a wealthy merchant of the city, he knew.

She never told anyone that she had been this or that; she never explained that the competition of the French beet-sugar with her husband’s cane-sugar from the West Indies had been a hard blow and, atop of that, the failure of the City Bank a knock-out blow.

The bell of the parish church began to ring, and her eyes that had been slightly tired eyes brightened as she raised her head and listened, a smile on her lips. She took happiness where she could in those days; and when the bell of the parish church rang a pane of the kitchen window, in which was a tiny crack, gave a *ting* of response. It pleased her—don’t ask me why. It

pleased her; she liked to hear it; it made her smile. There are people in Glasgow who, in October, could not be happy, wakened in their bedrooms by a servant bringing matutinal tea or chocolate on a tray, unless aware that on the morrow they would be off to the Canaries or Biarritz, or on a tour of the world. Mrs. Barry, however, had pleasure in that gentle response of the cracked pane to the harsh clang of the bell.

Not to worship but to work did that bell call the citizens. It called them at five-thirty a.m., so that they might be building ships by six o'clock, when work began in the yards. At nine, work stopped for three-quarters of an hour to allow of the men having breakfast. At a quarter-to-ten they began again and worked till one o'clock. They had three-quarters of an hour for lunch, getting back to work at a quarter-to-two and continuing till five. A long day. On Saturdays the hours were six to nine and nine-thirty to one. That made a fifty-four hour week, as everybody in Heather Street knew. The Siamese consul had suggested that Mrs. Barry might give Mr. Amara an early breakfast before he went out in the morning, not just a cup of coffee as sole sustenance for his exotic body in the snell climate of Glasgow till the nine o'clock breakfast at the yards.

She tried to be a good lodging-house keeper. Somehow in her the girl survived, so that she was happy when the crack in the pane answered *ting* to the clash of the bell in the parish church over the way, and when she had such little experiences as passing out of a room with morning percolating into it and finding night lurking still in the hallway. She had an extraordinarily beautiful smile, as of one practised in patience and with a sustaining secret, but the blue of her eyes was slightly pallid, as though the colour had been washed out by tears.

Night was only in the corners of the hall when she went back with Mr. Amara's shoes, Mr. Stewart's boots. The drifting entrance of morning she was aware of in a part of her that was not thinking: "There's the shoe-shining done, and now I'll take Mr. Stewart his hot water and put Mr. Amara's in the bathroom." She felt that there was another life all round the life of taking in lodgers for a living. In a way her thoughts were upon shoe-shining, hot water jugs, pushing the porridge-pot back on the stove preparatory to cooking the bacon and eggs, but only in a way.

She lit the gas in the bathroom. The little window high up in its wall let in only a drizzle of light from the staircase. At night Mr. Amara had his bath, only a brief wash and a shave in the bathroom in the morning. Mr. Stewart had a bath only on Saturdays but lots of hot water in his room each night when he came home. Everything was going well that morning since the

exciting hitch of having to dare a bullet in her back while getting Mr. Amara's shoes. She carried hot water to the bathroom. She set another jug at Mr. Stewart's door and knocked.

"All right. Thank you, ma'am!" came his voice.

She knocked at Mr. Amara's door. He made noises, as usual, that reminded her of the sound her little boy's sucker made when he pulled it free from a stone.

"The hot water is in the bathroom," she said.

"Oh! All right."

When she went back to the kitchen the morning was putting out the gas. She turned it down to a peep and raised the bracket so that her movements at the stove would not bring her head in contact with it. She heard Mr. Amara go into the bathroom and tapped an egg on the edge of the frying-pan. Bacon and eggs for him; for Mr. Stewart an omelet. "Ah, ma'am, you make heavenly omelets," he said to her once. Her neighbour, Mrs. Murdoch, had told her that if an omelet did not turn out well one could always whip it up with a fork and change it into scrambled eggs. But her omelets were not like that. Mrs. Murdoch was rough and ready. Mrs. Murdoch's lodgers—they were both working at the shipyards—usually had to drink their coffee as they pattered downstairs, carrying their cups with them, taking a gulp on each landing, almost always just a little late. And they had only toast to eat before setting out in the morning. They left the cups in the entry and Mrs. Murdoch had to go down later and retrieve them.

When Mr. Amara left the bathroom and passed back to his room, Mrs. Barry had but to lift his tray and follow him. Because he could not have delay over his meal, and she did not like to think of him bolting his food, she carried in the porridge, coffee, bacon and eggs and toast all at the same time on a large brass tray, that Mr. Amara, by the way, greatly admired. It had been among the few things saved from the wreck when, after the slump in Jamaica sugar, the City Bank failed.

"Good-morning, Mr. Amara."

"Good-morning, Mrs. Barry. Did I leave my shoes out last night?"

"No."

"Then—er—how you obtain them?"

"I opened your door and just slipped in for them."

“But I might shoot you for burglar!”

She joined in his laughter and passed out. The hallway was normal. Its strangeness, as of another world pried into by early risers, had gone. It was just the somewhat murky hall of a three-room and kitchen flat in a tenement block of a shipbuilding parish of Glasgow. The odour of porridge and of bacon was in it, the strangeness gone. The principalities and powers that at times muster their unseen array even in such places had withdrawn.

She tapped at Mr. Stewart’s door.

“Yes, ma’am?”

“Are you ready?”

“All ready, thank you.”

After all he was not indentured to Time as was Mr. Amara. He had only to go to the dry-dock, and to oversee. It did not matter if he did not arrive with the tinkering mechanics—in fact to come a little later was all to the good, let them know that he was a critic, who might not be criticised, rather than a worker. But if Mr. Amara did not get to the yards at six he would find the gate shut and have to kick his heels till six-fifteen when the gate was opened to admit the laggards and then closed again. That quarter of an hour would be written down against him. If ever he were to arrive as late as six-twenty he would have to wait till after breakfast-time to get to work, and three hours to work off would be marked down against his name. But that was unthinkable. Apprentices there were who, so often late, at end of what should have been their time had to work several weeks more to wipe out the debt of many lazy mornings. But never once had he been late. One minute to six was the nearest he had ever come to seeing the gate shut.

She carried in Mr. Stewart’s porridge. As soon as she entered he stood.

“Good-morning, Mrs. Barry,” he said.

“Good-morning, Mr. Stewart.”

He looked out of the window.

“Those mists and the wall of that storage warehouse there make me think of a cliff near Cape Horn,” he remarked.

She looked beyond the back-greens at the grey vapours that streamed slowly across the dark stone and the blank unlit rear windows of the warehouse that stood there, and nodded. She had a feeling of kinship with this man. He too, perhaps, was one with a secret against the sorriness of life,

that could transmute it. He too, perhaps, if pressed in an ethical debate upon the living of a double life, might find it hard to say which was the real and which the unreal. Or at least he too, she surmised, knew life as a queer blend of gloom and glory, whatever the end. He would have understood how she felt on finding night lurking in the hall. He would have understood even her pleasure in hearing the cracked pane sing a gentle, silvery *ting* in response to the harsh clang of the iron bell.

“It gives a strange look,” she agreed.

“Strange. Yes, strange.”

She moved over to the door and as she passed out he sat down. Then back she went in a few minutes with his omelet, some thin-cut bread and butter and tea. Sometimes she thought to beg him not always to stand when she entered but was diffident about doing so, for they were on such perfect terms. Actually she was helped by his constant courtesy. She never stood, door in hand, talking to him. That exchange of talk about the mist in a grey web among the chimney-pots was typical of the longest talks they had.

“Ah, one of your heavenly omelets, Mrs. Barry.”

“I’m glad you like them.”

As she came out Mr. Amara plunged from his room, glanced sidelong at her but did not speak, opened the front door, dashed out with nervous steps, and slammed it behind him. She returned to the kitchen and smiled to herself. Was she, she wondered, in his eyes kin with some serving woman in a little short kirtle of grass coming into a great thatched barn of a house bearing a dish of cassava? Cassava—what was cassava? Why yes, of course, cassava was the West Indian name for manioc. Well, bearing a dish of whatever they ate in Siam! She wondered if at home he lived in a pagoda, and considered that it must be very tiring to live in a pagoda, for there would be no lift. Such a lot of stairs to mount up. Still, coming down would be easy!

The clashes of the bell in the church tower came slower. Something sad about the last strokes of a bell, always. Every morning she felt it so. She believed that when she died she would go straight to a spirit-land where Mr. Barry would meet her at once, but she would leave their little boy, in the natural order of events, and even if one was going to a Better Land, going was sad when one had to leave a loved one behind in a precarious world. She thrust that melancholy thought away. As she did so another intruded:

Was life so good that one should grieve to leave it even with no life to follow? There! The last stroke of the bell!

She entered Mr. Amara's room to clear away the breakfast things. Having done so she made herself a cup of tea. She drank it standing by the window, looking over the back-greens at the rear of tenements beyond, thinking, at first, of Mr. Stewart's reference to Cape Horn, and how dismally grand it must be in mists, and then of much else. As she sipped the tea, saucer in left hand, her mind, like a veering swallow, dipped and flew back along thirty years. She was a girl again. She swung on the gate of the big meadow at Wester Kyle; she watched the men at shearing; she saw rooks and gulls together streaming behind a ploughman on the acres of her old home; she lay in the bracken on Kyle Law with her lover. Over the shires the larks were singing and out of the blue of distance toward Galloway a cuckoo called. Across the years the singing of the larks and the cuckoo's call were at one and the same time a sweetness and a laceration. Och aye, och aye!

"I'm just away, Mrs. Barry."

At the voice in the hall she came back from the knob of Kyle Law with a gasp and hurried to the door.

"You'll be back to lunch as usual, I suppose, Mr. Stewart?"

"Yes."

She moved on to open the front door for him but he was before her, opened it, and passed out.

She thought of him as she cleared away his dishes, made his bed, swept his floor. Somehow he helped her. After the City Bank failure, when her husband had to do just what he could get to do, he had once said: "One does not need to go down. Circumstances are to a great extent what we make of them. You remember the old saying, 'You can mak' a kirk or a mill of it.'" But in the change of circumstances he had to suffer affronts not dreamt of earlier. Before his death he was working as a commercial traveller, going from yard to yard, from engine-shop to engine-shop, factory to factory, colliery to colliery, with specimens of asbestos—asbestos packing, asbestos plates. He had come home one day with a depression he could not hide from her. "Oh, nothing, nothing," he had said in response to her inquiries, but in the end he had told her: Some people spoke to commercial-travellers as they would not speak to people to whom they had something to sell—coal or steel, boilers, pumps, or ships. That day he had shown a piece of sheet-asbestos to a man in a machine-shop, and the man had taken it from him like

that, as if he was smelling it, then said “Pah!” and with a jerk of his wrist sent it sailing out of the window into the yard. He had not deserved that sort of treatment. He had always been civil even to the most insignificant member of his staff. He had never been one of those who had different manners for different people.

Mr. Stewart’s room was spick and span, and so was Mr. Amara’s. Their dishes were all washed and dried. It was a quarter-to-eight. Time to waken the boy.

Little Neil always wakened very happy. He had reason to be happy, for he owned six pigeons—a pair of black fantails, a pair of brown tumblers, and a pair of blue-bars. They lived in pigeon-houses or dovecots (pronounced locally *doocot* but snappily, thus, *dooc't*) at the kitchen window, a two-storey house to one side, a two-storey house to the other. That left one of the apartments unoccupied. The hole into it was closed by a piece of upright wood, for he had been told by an older boy (Roy MacIntosh) who put them in place for him that if he did not bar the entrance to the pigeons he had they would look upon it as their property in common, with the result that when it was given over to another pair some day that pair would have to fight with all the others for right of occupancy.

His first thought on awakening was generally of the pigeons. Other reasons for happiness he had: He often had bronchitis in winter, severe enough to prevent his going to school. All little gentlemen, it has been said, should sing the praise of their school right or wrong, but he did not know that. He only knew it was pleasant not to have to go to school sometimes. Even the odour of linseed poultices was not enough to make him wish to be free of occasional bronchitis. Even the tearing of his chest with it was easier to bear than *pawmies*, these thrashings with a leathern strap, supposedly on the palm of the hand but often on the wrist as well, causing pain that was slow to go, and sometimes leaving, for hours, a swelling as large as an egg on the blue-veined wrist. In his first year at school there had been no *pawmies*, the tender age of those in Standard One exempting them, but in the second (being eight years old this was his second) there were many.

Yet even if he had to go to school he woke happy. He slept in a box-bed in the dining-and sitting-room. When the bed was not in use its door was closed. The uninitiated might imagine a cupboard there or another room. Its ceiling was high and there was a little slot in the wall for ventilation into a mysterious narrow shaft that presumably led somewhere into the open air, though even the curious mind of that boy did not inquire where. He slept of course with the door of the box-bed wide open.

“Time to get——”

“Hullo, mummy, I’m awake!”

He bounced out of bed into the room that was furnished, or overcrowded, with a residue of the furniture of the days of plenty—the mahogany sideboard, the mahogany dining suite, the great easy chairs, a tall Chinese vase to one side of the fireplace, to the other a large glossy sphere that one could spin gently round on idle evenings, lessons learnt, letting the gaslight run like dawn over the polished surface of Europe, across the lustrous blue of the Atlantic, across glowing America, to gleam anon on Japan and bring another day to Asia. He never got pawmies for errors in geography. Already he could spell Hawaii and Caribbean. He knew where Tidore was and where Timbuctoo.

“Are the pigeons tapping for breakfast yet, mummy?” he asked flapping into the bathroom.

“They’re all sitting on the landing-board.”

“Oh, so they are. I can hear them ruck-a-ta-cooing.”

He made haste in his tubbing and dressing to go to his pets.

His mother the while was laying the breakfast in the room off which he slept. Most of the tenement dwellers of Heather Street ate in their kitchens. Most of them, to save the washing of dishes, filled their plates from the pots upon the stove, and delved into jam-pots, instead of jam-dishes, set on the table. But Mrs. Barry had an instinctive dislike for such practices. While Neil was feeding the pigeons at the opened kitchen window she was carrying in the breakfast, very happy, holding a conversation with the son and heir as she came and went.

“I don’t think I’d like to have pouter-pigeons,” he said. “You need a high cot for them for they should not crouch. They should stand erect—oh, very. And they sometimes gorge too much and burst their crops. Then you have to put them in a lady’s stocking to hold them tight, and hang them up till they get over the gorge. It is disgusting to gorge.”

“Yes. It’s disgusting to go in for any excess,” agreed his mother.

“Yes, no doubt. But one can be sick without excessing. Do you remember when we went to Belfast and on the way back it was oh, a very high sea?”

“Yes.”

“A mountaineous sea.”

“Mountainous.”

“Well, all right—that, then.”

“Mountainous.”

“Yes, that kind of sea. And the man in the white coat—the steward—brought me a dish to put my sick in. Oh, mummy, it was no laughing matter!”

“No, it was not, son. Are you ready to come to breakfast?”

“Yes. There’s Nelly MacNaughton down in the back-green emptying the baikie in the midden.”

“Ash-pit.”

“Ash-pit midden.”

“No, *ash-pit* is enough.”

He closed the kitchen window leaving the pigeons in a cluster to their quick pecking of the Indian corn, and followed his mother to the dining-room. He sat down at his place and folded his hands while she said grace.

“Amen,” he said. “Nelly MacNaughton told me yesterday that Tommy Nairn had put his hand up her clothes.”

Mrs. Barry was handing his porridge-plate to him and for a moment remained rigid.

“Oh,” she said.

“Yes. What did he do that for?” he inquired.

“It was an odd thing to do,” said she.

“Oh, very! Why would he do it?”

“I can’t imagine. Certainly no nice boy would do such a thing. I don’t think, if I were you, Neil, that I’d have any more to do——”

He liked Tommy Nairn and was at once crestfallen at what he believed she was about to say.

“—— with Nelly MacNaughton,” she ended.

He was clearly astonished. His spoon remained poised over his porridge as he stared at her in surprise across the table. He thought she had made a mistake, had meant to say Tommy Nairn. But no.

“You don’t often see her, do you?” she asked.

“No. That’s almost the first time we’ve talked. She usually looks at me like this,” and he showed his mother a sidelong sneer, “when we meet in the close. That’s the only real conversation we’ve had.”

“Conversation.”

“Yes, well, that—con—what you said.”

“Conversation.”

“Convasation.”

“How did you come to talk about what Tommy had done?”

He furrowed his brows, recalling.

“We didn’t come to it, mummy. He was going upstairs ahead of me. She was down in the doorway to the cellars, getting a pail full of coal, and saw him, and looked up and made a face at his back and said that—what I told you.”

“Well, I don’t think if I were you I’d stop and talk to her again,” said Mrs. Barry.

It was very puzzling. What Tommy had done should not be done by any little boy, that was evident; but there seemed to be something wrong in a girl telling a boy that another had done it. Perhaps it was telling tales—*clyping*—that his mother objected to.

“And she may not have been telling the truth,” said Mrs. Barry. “I should not think a nice boy would have done such a thing.”

“I’ll ask him if he did.”

“Oh, no, no, I wouldn’t do that. Don’t bother any more about it. It’s not worth that. Finished? Well, you can take away these plates now and bring in the eggs.”

She looked after his small figure as it disappeared across the hall. Oh, dear, how soon these sex-troubles and sex-inquiries began! It would be very difficult, without a father. He came back slowly with the eggs and with the information that the pigeons were up for a morning flight and the tumblers tumbling.

“It doesn’t hurt them to tumble,” he explained earnestly. “It doesn’t bother them. Funny thing—Roy MacIntosh told me that the best tumblers don’t tumble often. If a tumbler tumbles a lot it’s not a prize bird. I can’t understand that. Can you?”

“No. It seems strange.”

But breakfast was over. Time was flying. He must be off to school.

As he put his books into his bag she gazed absently past him, her mind upon a theme to the title of *Ignorance and Innocence*. His luncheon sandwiches were ready for him to put into their tin, and he had his penny for a glass of milk—and then the morning kiss, and he was off. She went to the window, her mind still occupied upon thoughts that had arisen over his gossip of Tommy Nairn and Nelly MacNaughton. Funny little fellow! She was always doubtful about his playing out in the street or in the back-green with the neighbouring children, yet she did not want to make a little snob of him. But she hoped that his future would be in other spheres.

School did not seem to teach these children in Heather Street how to speak. *I seen him. You hadn't ought to 'a' done it. A cup a tea. Mind yer ain bluidy business.* Such phrases danced through her mind. That was how the children spoke, despite schooling, in their neighbourhood. Perhaps it was just that they unlearnt at home—most of them—what they learnt in school. Not to allow him ever to go out and play with them when his home-lessons were done seemed a cruelty, a form of starvation for him. She kept him from them as much as she could, and he did seem able to play lonely games by the hour often. He'd be a coalman with the sofa for lorry and old brown-paper bags for sacks and suddenly draw up the reins tied to the chair set at the sofa's end and deliver coal on his back across the room. When he heavily, and with much puffing, marked time doing so, he was going upstairs. He'd be a queer boy in Heather Street who never was a coalman on the sofa of his home.

Sometimes he would take books out of the shelves—the remaining books—and either dismiss them after struggles with a baffling page or two or be utterly lost in them as though not there. She smiled, waiting for him to appear in the street, recalling a visit of certain distant relatives of her husband, who had no near ones, relatives of the sort known as forty-second cousins, who came to see her with increasing infrequency. Last time they came and stayed after dinner she had made up a bed for him on the sofa in the kitchen. He had said good-night very properly but added, as he passed to the door, “I must now retire to the incestuous pleasures of my bed.” That had come from dipping into the four great folios of Shakespeare. How solemn they had all been at that parting remark! How they chuckled when he had gone and closed the door! But that was different from this gossip, over the breakfast-table, of Tommy Nairn and Nelly MacNaughton.

There he was. Or there was the top of his cap and the hump of the satchel on his back as he passed out of the entry. He went across the street at once, at a tangent, and looked up at the window. She waved and he waved back, then marched away. There was something in his walk that gave her the impression of great valiance there. Boys at school he liked, one or two of the masters he neither hated nor dreaded, but he was not wildly excited about school. She had sent him to the best she could afford; in fact she could not afford it, yet had sent him.

She stood to one side of the window-recess that she might see him all the way to the corner. He halted there. He turned to look back. She waved again. He waved in response, and then turned the corner. She had had to raise the window and lean out that he might see her thus far and as she stooped back into the room again to stand erect——

“Ugh!” she said.

That stab of pain again! She must not grow old! She felt that very strongly that morning. She must remain young a long time to look after him and be companionable to him.

There was a drizzle of rain and the odour in her nostrils as she came erect again in the room was of down-beaten soot, coal-smoke. All Glasgow smelt of that—except perhaps in favoured patches of its west end. In some quarters it smelt not only of coal-smoke but of chemicals. She closed the window, wondering as she did so why sooty rain should make her think of hawthorn. Always on such mornings as this, waving Neil off to school, the smell of coal-smoke suggested hawthorn-scent.

She stared before her, seeking explanation. Perhaps it was the waving good-bye that was responsible. It was like waving him off into the world, for life—not only to school for the day. And she remembered the day she left Wester Kyle, waved away by all her friends there. At Wester Kyle there had been odour of hawthorn in the air, very rich, very poignant, that morning.

A great quiet filled the flat, took possession. She was alone not only with it but—odd thought!—with the mute furniture. The sideboard might have had a strange life of its own, seemingly inanimate though it was, nominally but a piece of furniture. The sphere to one side of the fireplace had come to her when her father followed her mother out of the world, and was part of her childhood, an old friend. The dragons ramping round the tall Chinese vase she had danced with, round the vase, in years so far off that they were as of a former life. These heirlooms were like old friends. She had known them in rooms out of the windows of which one did not look only on dank

stone across the way, wet dark stone and windows blurred now and then by eddies of down-blown smoke, known them in rooms the windows of which framed sloping lawns, bright privet hedges, and lazy rolls of hills serrated with the orderly scars of ploughs, or showing the waves of wind passing in their growing grain, or dotted with great haystacks, or with silver stubble under low autumn skies. They had come with her, these things, the last of them, to bear her company, to assure her that she was the same person who had known those old scenes and was not only one who had heard her life-story, the story of Jean Munro of Wester Kyle who had married John Barry (the son of old John Barry of Carrick who had gone in for business in Glasgow instead of farming), and had had a son by him two years after marriage and lost the lad when he was seven years of age, and another son (Neil) seven years later—when perhaps, considering what they had come to, they should not have had him.

After her mother's death her father had lost much of his interest in the farm. After her marriage he had lost all it would appear, for when he died the furniture and the family portraits, the glass and silver things, had come to her, but the farm had gone to a mortgagee. While he lived she had no impression from his manner, on her visits to the old home, that he had any financial worry. Perhaps he had not, she being, by the evidence then (before the dual crash), well provided for and the only issue.

An urgent knock at the front door interrupted her reverie.

CHAPTER III

FORENOON

Mrs. Murdoch, greatly excited, was on the landing. Her plumply loose body quaked and she could not keep still; her plump brownish face was creased and dimpled with delight.

“Good-morning, good-morning,” she carolled. “Would you do me a favour? It’s my day to wash the stairs but I’ve just had a letter from Edinburgh to ask me through for the day. I’ve never been so far in my life—Paisley is the fardest. If you were so kind as to take my turn to wash the stairs I’ll pay ye back washing them some day when it’s your turn.”

“Why, surely,” said Mrs. Barry.

“You are a kindly lady! I kent you would, but I couldna run off and no’ a word to ye. Never been that far before in my life. It’s my sister’s birthday and her husband has been daeing well. He has a grand job there—he gets one pound a day wages! Did ye ever hear the like? One pound a day! And I’ve to go and see the sights. Thank ye, thank ye. I had to ask ye first. Now I maun run.”

She danced across the landing, waving her hand behind her and laughing over her shoulder.

Mrs. Barry returned to the sweeping of the sitting-room, ashamed at herself that ever she bemoaned her lot. The farthest her naif and jolly neighbour had ever been was to Paisley, and to-day she was going to Edinburgh! Mrs. Barry had been to Florence, to Lake Como, to Madrid, and several times to Paris and London, long ago, as well as to Ballater and Oban, the Isle of Skye and the Isle of Arran, and . . .

She heard, as she swept, Mrs. Murdoch’s cough of nervous excitement going down the stairs. Only when excited did Mrs. Murdoch cough. Funny thing, a nervous cough! She went to the window. Yes, Mrs. Murdoch. There she went bobbing down the street as if inflated, like a balloon being prepared for an ascent. If she bobbed much more in her walk she might soar several yards instead of bounce along them. Now she was running, the old dear! She must have heard a tram-car coming along Clydeside Road. She would have to cross the street to stop it. Mrs. Barry could not see her neighbour crossing, but a moment or two later the car stopped at the corner.

Then it went on. God bless her—she was off for a great day, she who had in all her life never been farther than Paisley.

Mrs. Barry went on with her sweeping and took the dust away in the scoop, shaking it into the baikie (or small dust-bin) under the kitchen sink. When she came back there was singing outside in Heather Street, lugubrious singing. There was not but one voice; there were several. She looked out and at the mere flutter of the curtain four pairs of eyes stared up at her window.

Two big rawboned men in navvies' clothes, straps round their calves, shepherd-tartan mufflers knotted at their necks, were singing, accompanied by two squat women, one wearing a bonnet, the other a shawl over her head and shoulders. These were no ordinary street-singers but clearly victims of the depression. And they had seen her. The whites of their eyes glinted at her, pathetic, hopeful, imploring, as soon as she peeped. It must be dreadful to be as poor as that, she considered.

She went to the kitchen and from her purse that lay on the dresser took two pennies, and each she wrapped in a scrap of newspaper. To throw them without wrapping was not good. A coin tossed down into the street often ricocheted and rolled; and to run about in pursuit of a divagating copper must add to the ignominy of having to resort to street-singing. She opened the window and there was nothing else in the world but the whites of the eyes of these four miserable suppliants. They did not stop; they sang on lustily, sadly, drearily. She threw out the two wisps of paper and one of the men, stooping, picked them up, opened them and saluted her.

“May God bless ye, ma’am, and all the saints in glory,” he called up.

Irish people. Perhaps they'd be what were called potato howkers. But one could not *howk* potatoes all the time; besides, this had been a bad year for potatoes as for much else.

She nodded back and smiled—and clutched her back where the stab came when she rose suddenly from bending. Smythe's Embrocation was what Mrs. Murdoch prescribed. If these stabs continued she must get a bottle from Mr. Gilmour, the chemist, at the corner opposite the church. Or she could ask him if he would advise it. He was almost as good as a doctor some people said. He was also a dentist; at least he had a chair in a partitioned-off room where he extracted teeth. He did not make false sets or fill a cavity but he could draw a decayed tooth that was beyond relief from putting a piece of cotton-wool in the hole soaked in Toothache Ease.

Yes, she must ask him if he would advise Smythe's Embrocation. Doctors cost money. Mr. Gilmour would not charge for advice, just look round his stock and select something suitable. After all he must make up lots of prescriptions and that would give him an insight into cures. He always, she knew, when a prescription was novel to him, asked the person who presented it what the trouble might precisely be, and when the bottle was taken back to be refilled he'd say, "And how do you find this treatment assisting you? Better? You find it giving satisfaction?"

There came another knock at the door. Opening it she saw it was Mrs. Brand, from upstairs, with the morning paper. They took week about in buying it—Mrs. Murdoch, Mrs. Brand, and she—and this was Mrs. Brand's week.

"I have my gentleman coming home to lunch to-day," said Mrs. Brand. "I can't stop a minute. I must just hand ye the paper. Did ye see those four people singing? Of course ye did—I believe ye threw them something. It's dreadful this depression. They look the real thing—working people, genuine labourers, not professional beggars. Well, I have my gentleman coming home for lunch. I must run. I just came with the paper. What a lot of calamities there are in it. You know I always say when one reads the paper that one can't be too thankful for having a bed to sleep in. When I go to bed at night I say, 'Thank God for a bed.' I just stretch out and say, 'Well, thank God for a bed.' It is so nice to get one's clothes off and stretch out. I always wash my face and hands and my feet too every night. I canna abide dirty feet. It makes me feel fresh all over to wash them. But one doesn't need to read only about all the troubles. It's nice to read about other things too. I got great pleasure this morning reading about the Queen opening the bazaar at Perth. She smiled that sweetly on all the children, and there was one she chucked under the chin, the paper says. She would just be the life and soul of that bazaar I was thinking. But I must run. Here's somebody coming up the stairs and it looks bad talking on the landings instead of doing one's work. I just came to give you the paper."

Mrs. Barry went with it to the kitchen where, without sitting down, she glanced at the front page, and the first item of news to catch her eye was a report of a terrible accident to a little boy. Sometimes these accidents that the paper narrated were not in her country at all. You would see *Fire in Shipyard, Five Killed*, and it was a shipyard in France; or you would see *River Rises, Threatens Shore-Side Homes*, and it would be the Yang-tsze-kiang. But this accident to a little boy was in Glasgow. He had gone for a bath and his father, wondering why he was so quiet and did not come out,

went to the door and called, "Are you all right?" There was no answer, so he entered the room to find that a terrible thing had happened. Evidently the boy had slipped and come down with his neck on top of a tumbler kept in a holder at the bath's end. It had broken and gone right into his throat. He lay dead in the bath.

Mrs. Barry shuddered as she read. The paper trembled as she read. She had to sit down to compose herself. When she felt better she went straight to the bathroom and removed the tumbler from the rack at the end of the bath. The shelf above the basin was for Mr. Amara. There stood his toothpaste and private tumbler and shaving effects. In future the glass with Neil's brush in it could stand in the kitchen cupboard. She carried it away and made a place for it on the bottom shelf where he could easily reach it.

Time was flying. Mr. Amara's room was in order. Mr. Stewart's room was neat and clean to welcome him back for lunch. She had to make Neil's bed now, and it was not easy to do because of being in the enclosed space. She had to get up on it and clamber about on it on her knees.

She had just finished when an extraordinary sound broke out in the street below. Did someone call for help? Was someone taken suddenly with a fit? No—the voice was chanting. It was not, "Any knives or scissors to grind?" It was not singing in the British sense.

She stepped again to the window and there below was a bear—a bear, rampant. It was spinning slowly on its hind feet, revolving and revolving, and just when it seemed it must become dizzy it revolved the other way as though unwinding its dizziness. Beside it stood a foreign-looking man in a striped cotton coat—a striped cotton coat in October!—and he it was who chanted. There was a thin rope from a ring in the bear's nose to his hand. She had the impression that his chanting would seem less strange to Mr. Amara than it did to her, music nearer to that of Siam than of Scotland; for sometimes she heard Mr. Amara singing in his room, a thin falsetto, as though he imitated a woman.

"Oh, the poor thing," she said aloud when the bear stopped pirouetting and the brown man in the striped coat twitched the rope again.

He prodded the beast with a tall pole that he carried and it lay down in the wet street and rolled six times, over and over. He gave a shout in the middle of his chant and it rolled back again.

Yes, she knew what that man was: he was of the same race as the onion-sellers who, when Spanish ships were in dock, came to the doors with sticks

over their shoulders from which strings of onions depended. They sold them very cheaply, far cheaper than the shops. Probably it was only pocket-money they were making. Mrs. Murdoch told her that they slept on them, that the bunks in their fo'c'sles were full of them, but of course, she had added, one boils them or fries them so it should be all right. "And they are rale good ingins," said Mrs. Murdoch. Yes, that was a man of the same race as the onion-selling sailors. It would be a bear from the Pyrenees, she presumed. What a shame! The poor thing should be up in its own mountains. She pictured the map of Europe, the line of the Pyrenees between Spain and France, and it suddenly changed from a map to views she had seen in books—views of roads winding up from cultivated valleys to austere ranges, and always there was a string of donkeys on the road, with panniers on them, and a priest in a long cassock swinging along.

At that time of day there were no children in the street to cluster round, half-timid, half-brave. Only those young people who were at home, ailing, might, from the windows, see the bear. Had Neil been there she would have called him to look out, but with the feeling that it was not right to take captive the animal and carry him to dance shufflingly and pirouette in this northern city and roll in the grime of its streets for the dubious delectation of young or old. It should be prohibited; it was cruel. The bear should be in a deep dark forest, such as those shown in these pictures of northern Spain, that covered the mid-slopes of tall mountains out of the upper rocky saddles of which the strings of panniered donkeys fumbled. At any rate, she had given twopence to the out of work Irish navvies (or potato howkers) and their wives, and could not afford another penny unless for a clearly very necessitous case. She turned away from the window and went back to the kitchen to begin the preparation of Mr. Stewart's lunch.

There were days (and this was one of them) on which Mrs. Barry simply could not take any interest in cooking, alone, a lunch she had to eat alone. Mr. Stewart having come and gone, she had some bread and butter, a little cheese, and a cup of tea, and then went out to the grocer's, finding herself there without being aware of the steps that had carried her thither, her mind occupied upon a diversity of subjects from the dawning innocent curiosity regarding sex of young people to the pity of being forced by bitter circumstances to sing in the street for pence.

It was the stillness under foot when she entered the shop and trod on the deep-strewn sawdust that awoke her to the realisation that she was there, and the sound of the coffee-mill and the sudden pleasant wash all round her of the odour of the new-ground coffee-beans impregnating the air. That fragrance was more delightful to her olfactory senses than a cup of coffee to the palate.

She had not seen the grocer, so far, that week. He had of late taken to attending the same church as she—"on trial," he explained, and he had been hoping for her to come in so that he might relieve his mind of something to her. He was relieving his mind of it to all members of St. Clyde's Parish Church.

He came smartly from amid the dark gloss of Dutch cheeses and the bright lustre of Ayrshires at the rear of the shop to give her good-day, attend to her wants, and lead the talk, as swiftly as possible without seeming to be lying in wait for her to do so, to the subject of St. Clyde's.

The Rev. Dr. Porteous was no doubt an unusual preacher, he remarked, but "niminy, niminy." As for his assistant, the Rev. Algernon Aberlady——

"That man is a *nyaff*. That's what he is—a *nyaff*. I thought it not seemly that there should be applause in church last Sunday," he went on. "They began to clap at the end of Dr. Porteous' harangue."

"Yes," she said. "I knew some people would object to that. It was quickly stilled, of course."

"True, but it shows the secular spirit. It was politics he was preaching, Mrs. Barry. No. I am not entirely satisfied with the reverend doctor—and his assistant is just a *nyaff*, a hee-haw, lah-di-dah *nyaff*."

But Mrs. Barry was not of those who would fain coerce others of diverse views to their own. She accepted her grocer's view as his view, though feeling slightly surprised by a certain look in his eyes as of challenge to her, contempt for her. Yet, outside again, she smiled. There was generally something to smile over in life. "*Nyaff*," she said to herself, "*nyaff*." It was new to her, and expressive. It did also, incidentally, convey "the Rev. Algy." Yes, he was a *nyaff* no doubt.

The melancholy that was afternoon was drifting and deepening in close-entrances. That suggestion of a cerement of mist over the city was less depressing at night than by day. And in the afternoon, or as afternoon wore on, it had an inference of *coothie*. That old Scots word somehow described how she felt it, better it seemed than the English substitute of *friendly* or *kindly*. Lights were beginning to prank the shop windows and their reflected radiance lay on the pavements like gold on gun-metal. Distant lamps were haloed with the haze. It enfolded one's spirit as it enfolded the lights. It wrapped one away with a sense of protection, easy aloofness. One moved about in one's own sanctuary.

When she reached home again the flat was a place of quiet. It had a peace in it like that of the Duke of Hamilton's mausoleum which she had once visited and never forgotten. The man in attendance there put his head close to the wall and gave a little whistle—a whisper of a whistle—and the group of visitors had listened while it went up and up, round and round the walls as though it were running in a groove. All of them raised their heads and looked in the direction towards which they listened, as though they might see the whistle moving round in soaring spirals. And, up in the dome at last, it seemed never to end but to join a faint whisper, the residue of all the other tenuous whistles that had gone corkscrewing to that zenith. The flat was as quiet as that. Its quiet made her remember the Duke's mausoleum and the eternal peace in it.

Behind the bars of the kitchen grate was a red glow. She fumbled for a paper-spill on the mantelpiece and lit the gas there. Then the hall gas she lit and turned low.

A fusillade of happy knocks smote on the door and she opened to Neil—as loquacious as he had been in the morning, effervescent with chatter. He was late. Had he been kept in? No, no, he had not been kept in: he had stopped on the way home to see a Punch and Judy show. He had to tell her all about it. He had not spent his penny on milk at lunch-time, he explained, so he had given it to the Punch and Judy man. Was that right? Yes, that was right.

There came another knock.

“Run and see who that is,” he was told.

The light on the stairs was lit and there stood a girl hardly older than Neil. She wore but a tattered coat and an old skirt (or it may have been an old petticoat for skirt) and her feet were bare. She grinned at him gaily.

“Hullo!” she said. “Ast her does she want the baikie emptied?”

“It’s Maisie, mummy, to see if you want the baikie emptied.”

“Yes. Come in, Maisie, and get it.”

“Aw, ma feet are a’ glaur. Wait or I dicht them on the mat.”

Neil watched her curiously as she brushed her feet to and fro on the mat.

“Don’t the bristles hurt you?” he asked.

“Naw! Ah’m used tae’t.”

The fee for emptying the baikie, or small dust-bin, down in the enclosed ash-pit in the back-green (which was really back mud these days, no bleaching-green at all) was one penny. Many people emptied their buckets for themselves, but some did not.

“And you can sweep down the stairs and wash them for me if you like, Maisie,” said Mrs. Barry.

Fourpence for that! That was fivepence in sight. So Maisie’s eyes danced and her smile broadened. While she was washing the stairs they sat down to tea, and suddenly in the midst of it Neil recollected that he had something for his mother.

“I’ve got a book they gave me to-day,” he said. “All about the school. We were to give it to our parents—or guardians,” he added, and leaping up he ran to his satchel for it.

“I’ll look at it this evening,” said his mother, taking it from him. “I think that’s Maisie. I’ll go. I have to pay her.”

How like a wild Persian kitten was Maisie, she thought, full of vigour, full of life. Five pence. That was not much.

“Would you like a cup of cocoa and an egg, Maisie?” she asked.

“Ah wud, indeed.”

“Come in,” and Mrs. Barry led her to the kitchen.

How the girl ate! With what vigour—and sound! A pretty little creature she was and bodily well-developed for her years. She looked like some gipsy of the moors caught by the city but not tamed.

Mrs. Barry went to the door with the wild young thing after having fed her—and there came Mr. Stewart upward. He was ascending just as one would expect of him. Observing that the stairs had been newly washed and pipe-clayed he was clearing four steps in a stride, and carefully putting only his toes on the edges so as not to mark them before they dried.

“Good-evening, Mrs. Barry,” he said. “The stairs look fresh and clean. You the young lady who did them?” he asked of Maisie who was tiptoeing down past him.

“Yes, sir.”

“Made a good job of them, eh?”

Maisie grinned and went leaping onward downstairs, her hand clenched round her fivepence and in ecstasy over a sumptuous repast of boiled egg, bread and butter, and cocoa. Her every skip was of joy in life and its happy chances.

It was a happy flat that night. In the sitting-room, thumbs in his ears, palms over his forehead, Neil memorised his homework, valiantly exorcising, that he might be sooner done, visions of a Punch and Judy show between him and the page. The back bedroom lodger, Mr. Stewart, had dined excellently on a strengthening soup made out of stock (old bones boiled) with shreds of onion *intilt*, and leeks *intilt*, a few peas *intilt*, and a little flick of some condiment *intilt*; and on kidneys on toast, and a bread and butter pudding with currants in it served in an individual dish. The odour of his cheroot trickled into the hallway. He slouched in a cane chair before his fire, his feet in brown morocco slippers, reading, contented, happy.

Mr. Amara had had his bath and his dinner, its menu the same as the engineer's, and had donned silk socks and patent slippers. He had just bought, for Sundays, a gold-headed Malacca cane and was making essay of various ways of carrying it before his mirror, studying the effect with a bowler hat on, with a cap, with his silk hat, advancing toward the glass with little dancing steps, bowing to himself, raising his hat, backing away from the mirror and advancing again, trying it another way, whipping the cane smartly under an arm, the gold knob protruding behind, and observing that effect, and now and then breaking into some little stave of falsetto song: Mr. Luang Amara Chakranandhu of Bangkok, Siam, very happy.

In the kitchen, till Neil would have finished his lessons, Mrs. Barry sat by the fire, the jointed bracket pulled down close to her head, reading the book for Parents and Guardians that her boy had brought home. *Curriculum, Sports . . .* but what was this? *The Arnot Grant for Sons of Decayed Burgesses*. She began to read:

“Under the terms of the Arnot Bequest . . .”

She read on, engrossed, that those who had served their city, in a manner that gave employment to not less than a specified number of their fellows, were entitled, if in straitened circumstances, to apply for free education for their sons. She read the whole page relative to that matter twice; and beyond doubt the little boy Neil, whether one relished the sound of it or not, was the son of a decayed burgess. A pity she had not known of this grant earlier. What an enormous help it would be! Even if, after Mr. Stewart’s steamer was out of dry-dock, and steaming away to the other side of the world, the back bedroom remained untenanted, she would not have to worry about school-fees.

She put the book down on her lap and looked round the kitchen. It was as though her eyes had been refreshed, as if she had cleaned her spectacles, or as though the things she looked upon had been newly washed and scoured and polished while she read, the plates rarely twinkling in their racks, the dish-covers hanging on the wall like silver helmets, the blue stripe of the coverlet of her bed, in the recess, brighter. She did not have to go to the sitting-room for ink and paper. There they were at the back of the dresser. No time like the present, she thought and, conning the page regarding the Arnot Bequest to ascertain precisely how to make application, she sat down to write to the Trustees of the Fund. The letter sealed and stamped, she peeped into the sitting-room to discover how Neil progressed. He was hunched over a school-book upon the table.

“I’m just going to the pillar-box with a letter, son,” she said.

“Want me to go? I’ll go.”

“No, no. I’ll be back soon.”

When the necessitous widow of the decayed burgess returned, her son had just finished his lessons and was extracting a book that was not a school-book from the shelves.

“Read aloud to me,” she asked him, sitting down by the fire.

He plunged into a story, the protagonists of which, according to his pronunciation, were “Little Harry and his sister Lucky.” Yes, he read very

well, she thought, for his years. But when he stepped across to her that she might see an illustration to the story, she noticed that the caption beneath it read, "Harry and Lucy in the Wood."

She told him of his error—and the wide-eyed gaze that was his way when accepting instruction came back into her mind hours later as she lay in bed, the flat all quiet save for a board that snapped here and there, cooling in the night, a cinder falling from the grate.

It had been a happy day; and as she lay there she had a sense of the immensity of the night outside with all its stars, shrouded or revealed, and of the comfort and seclusion of the flat. Things might be worse. The Arnot Brothers who had left their fortune to assist in the education of the sons of decayed burgesses must have been fine men, she considered, and wondered what they were like as men, as boys. She remembered Mrs. Brand telling her how she stretched out and thanked God for her bed, and then wondered if Mrs. Murdoch was home from her extraordinary and far travel to Edin-burry—thought again of the Arnot Bequest and, thinking of it, fell asleep.

CHAPTER V

INTERLUDE

Before Mr. Amara's coming, finances had been very worrying to Mrs. Barry, with no lodger for some time in any room. If only, when money was not coming in, one could do without food and fuel, poise, remain in equilibrium! The financial stringency she read of in the papers she had known all about by personal experience. Not superstitious by nature, she had had spasms, at that time, of superstition, seeking for legitimate reason why she should be so sorely pressed, and not satisfied with what she found, according to what her heart, and her mind too, conceived as legitimate. One day, having spilt some salt, she took a pinch in her hand and threw it over her left shoulder. Yes, hardship was telling on her.

Yet rather would she become superstitious than bitter. She did not want to become bitter. And she felt so toward her great-aunt, Rachel. She recalled Aunt Rachel's visit after the bankruptcy. Aunt Rachel was a highly-strung woman, ageless it seemed, unageing, an active mummy. As long as could be remembered she had been old, ever so old—and active, voluble, with fiery vivacious eyes. She had told them, Mr. and Mrs. Barry, that if it was any comfort for them to know it, they were not the only ones affected by the West Indies sugar crises.

“All the eggs in one basket is no good. I've invested widely because of that. Of course we all thought sugar was a surety. Glad I did not have my all in it, though.”

On being told that their aim was to pay up all their creditors she had snorted: “Never! Rubbish! Got to look out for yourselves. Ideals are very well for talk but it's a hard world. Must harden your heart. Mark my words! If you live up to ideals of honesty you may become impoverished. You can't *af-ford*,” and her voice had gone up into a scream, “to be honest.”

Had they been fools to set that as an aim? Was Aunt Rachel right? Were ideals only for talk but not for practice? God, it seemed, did not look after those who suffered by being true to ideals. In her memory was still Aunt Rachel's shrill voice screaming, after the City Bank Failure, “What did I *tell* you? What did I *tell* you?” And why had she not written to her great-aunt for help? Because of pride? It was years since they had met.

“We're awfully sorry for you, of course, dear,” Aunt Rachel had said. “First the bottom knocked out of the business, and then the bank. It's

dreadful, dreadful, but what can *we* do? Blood's thicker than water, I know, and one would like to help one's kith and kin, but we have to think of ourselves. I had some of my money in the City Bank too, you know. Only some! Oh, I'm not to be caught napping! But we just don't know which way to turn."

"Oh, Aunt Rachel, I'm sorry. I had no idea you were hit too."

"Hit? No idea? Why, we have to limit ourselves just to cook and housemaid now. Dread-ful! The gardener may have to go next and Wilfred do it all, perhaps with a little occasional help from some labourer. There is a very deserving man in the village we could give odd jobs like that to. Like to help the poor, you know."

"Yes, like to help, by gad, but don't know which way to turn," Wilfred, her son, who accompanied her that day, had agreed. Partly a gentle filial piety, partly the dread of being cut off in her will, moved him to a constant compliance with his energetic mother.

No, she could not write to Aunt Rachel for help, for Aunt Rachel had dropped her since John Barry died. Wilfred came to the funeral—and that was the last of them, apart from occasional letters. They had to think of themselves. Aunt Rachel could not stand the rigours of the Scots climate in winter. They had to go to the south of France every year for four or five months; and every letter, before letters ceased to come entirely—sometimes from Paris, sometimes from London (where she had a small flat in Knightsbridge), sometimes from Cannes, sometimes from her home in Galloway where she and bachelor Wilfred kept close house—bemoaned the dreadfully hard times in which one had to look after oneself, and was so *woefully skimped*. No, she could not write to Aunt Rachel for financial aid.

It had been extremely painful to have to acknowledge her poverty to anyone. The man who read the gas-meter had come one day not only to read it but to inform her that unless the bill was paid it would have to be cut off.

She bit her lip. Her eyes were as if looking through him.

"I have no money," she said.

His matter-of-fact expression changed.

"Now that's too bad, too bad. There's an awfu' lot of hardship. Could ye no' borrow it?"

She had an inspiration.

"Yes. In fact—er—I expect some money this afternoon and——"

“Well, well. I tell ye what I’ll dae,” said the man. “I’ll come back again. I’ll make ye my last call afore I knock off. That’ll gie ye a chance.”

A troubling day! She had walked miles away from her home (carrying two old silver candlesticks in a brown-paper parcel) though pawnshops were almost as plentiful as public-houses in her vicinity. She had stolen into a distant one as though committing a sin. The pawnbroker had been entirely matter-of-fact, however. He did not look at her as though he thought it demeaning for anyone to enter his premises! More than that: she had discovered that a pawnshop was mitigatingly arranged. On entering it she found a row of doors to one side, swing-doors, and beyond each of these a narrow space between high partitions. On his side of the counter the attendant could see all his customers, but nobody on the customers’ side could see another. It was just in the popping in and popping out that one might be observed. Anyone entering the shop could tell if a narrow booth was occupied for, on pushing its swing door (which opened only inwards), it would bump against the back of the unseen person within. Her interest in the experience, in learning how excellently the place was arranged, had some part in easing the chagrin, the vexation she felt over the need for this visit. Her head, so to speak, was bloody but unbowed, so *vexation, chagrin* are strong enough. She would not allow the emotion in her during these proceedings to mount (or descend) to misery or anguish.

She had not had the money to retrieve her possessions on the date stamped upon her ticket, and for some days was desperately worried in her innocence, her ingenuousness regarding such transactions, lest the pawnbroker might think she was a fraud for not having come back. He had said, “You are going to take them out again?” and, “Oh, yes,” she had assured him, and then had added, “I hope so.” But she consoled herself later with the consideration that, even so, he must have allowed himself a fair margin for profit lest she did not call to retrieve. Perhaps, she considered, if he remembered her, he would think she had died and that that was why she had not been back to take away those silver candlesticks.

She must trust in God and keep her powder dry. That was the idea. And God helps those who help themselves. Aphorisms—wise saws: they trooped through her troubled mind. On the hint of the second of these quoted she had spent part of the money the candlesticks gave her (how hopeful the feeling of it in her hand made her!) upon an advertisement in the morning paper. The card in the window of the sitting-room—*Lodgings to Let*—seemed to have been rendered useless, by her spilling of salt perhaps, or perhaps not; at

any rate, useless. An advertisement in the paper might, incidentally, get her a better type of lodger than the window-card.

A gentle inspiration, that came to her then, millionaires might think morbid, but to her, poverty-stricken, it was exquisite, an ecstasy: In her loneliness she had the sudden belief that she was being prepared for the final loneliness between the leaving of the sound of earthly voices and arriving where one hungered no more, thirsted no more, and money was not in use, and her husband awaited her. To accept the sense of being forsaken in the present would be to have the power to accept the final loneliness. An ethereal happiness filled her, thinking so—accepting loneliness. Accepted, it became beautiful. She hummed as she came and went at the work of sweeping and polishing, that the flat might be bright and attractive. She sang to herself, and some social-welfare workers, hearing her, might have thought, “How lightly, after all, these people take their troubles, how heedless, how careless they are.” But in the midst of her singing the sense of being forgotten, discarded, swept upon her again, and she had to go back over the argument in favour of being neglected—and again she sang.

The butcher had told her (unhappily, for he knew she was not of those who take the things out of pawn every Saturday—pay-day—and after the week-end debauch put them in again every Monday) that he was sorry he could not give further credit. What was she to do? Have faith! Faith, faith, faith! Oh, but she must not be hysterical. She must keep calm. Many a night sleep never came to her. It seemed of no use to say, “I will not worry.” With bills mounting up and the knowledge that at the week’s end with some creditors, at the month’s end with others, credit would cease, it was a hard task to empty her mind of anxiety. She would believe she had done so. She would, or so it seemed, successfully empty her mind; her eyelids, heavy with weariness, would droop; and at the lulling of slumber worry would awaken her again.

Slumber and worry played with her night-long and neither won. Her bed was as a rack. She would rise and fumble across the kitchen and look out of the window at the dark bulk of the houses across the back-green, the cliff of the storage warehouse, and two or three faint stars, then drink a glass of water, yawn with exhaustion, her eyelids drooping. And she would kneel and pray again, though she had prayed on going to bed, and the close of her prayer was not, “for Jesus’ sake, amen,” as in her girlhood’s prayers but, “for Neil’s sake.”

Their supper was of pease-brose—pea-meal, that is, with a little salt in it, boiling water poured on it and stirred in—on the night when Mr. Luang

Amara Chakranandhu came to her (in an answer to prayer she thought perhaps as well as to her advertisement) all the way from Bangkok, Siam, the Siamese consul who was to look after him having seen that advertisement in the paper. And the butcher was very kind to her when she explained, standing in an oddly stately way on his sawdust and talking in an odd monotone, that she had got a lodger who would be paying weekly but must get food for him for the week. Yes, certainly he would trust her—and what did she want? The candlesticks had not gone very far. What was left from them she used to mollify the grocer, to whom she owed more than to the butcher. There was lee-way to make up after this long drifting. She had to bail the boat but it was not filling up more quickly than she could bail. That was past. Mr. Amara had come to the rescue.

“My name in full is Mr. Luang Amara Chakranandhu,” he told her, “but you will call me Mr. Amara. My friend the consul is of the opinion that it will be more convenient.”

“Certainly, Mr. Amara.”

What a quaint little answer to prayer! He was a diminutive man with dark baffling eyes that considered her with what seemed to be a sort of disdainful blankness, then glittered suddenly and just as she thought the glitter was of a steely hate, or at least antipathy to her race, a smile came to his face, glowed on it, suffused it, as though he realised that she thought he was hating and wished to assure her he was not. When she returned the smile his went out—abrupt as an extinguished candle-flame.

One day shortly after his arrival she was considering that dark enigma who had come to her when there was a buoyant but not violent knocking at the front door.

“Good-morning, madam. I see you have a card in the window, *Lodgings to Let.*”

“Will you please come in.”

Mr. Stewart had come. And it was not pease-brose that night for mother and son but a boiled egg with bread and jam to follow.

CHAPTER VI

A DESERVING CASE

As for the morning after she had posted the letter to the Trustees of the Arnot Bequest:

It was five o'clock. There were districts where the *chapper-up* would be going his rounds chapping—knocking—on doors or windows for a small weekly sum paid by those whose doors and windows he chapped upon. A policeman or two, here and there, for a weekly private honorarium, would be doing the same thing. But the professional *chapper-up* was soon to be out of work with alarm-clocks becoming cheaper. A few—those who lived close to the yards—were content to be wakened by the parish church bell (a sort of *chapper-up de luxe*) at five-thirty. They leapt from bed and cringed into their clothes at its first clashes. By the time it stopped they had eaten some sandwiches, prepared the night before, gulped a cup of tea or coffee, and were off. But these were the hardy fittest. Some, hardier still, did not trouble with anything to eat or drink, merely rose and dressed and lit a pipe against the chill. Such as Mr. Amara, who had an early breakfast, were to them sybarites.

Mrs. Barry's alarm-clock warned with its metallic cough in the quiet kitchen and then rang. The moment it did so, by use and wont, she reached out and throttled it. Her first thought was to the tune of *decayed burgess*. Her letter would be on its way, well on its way. *Next collection 12 p.m.* she had seen on the pillar-box. First delivery in the city would probably be early, as soon as offices were opened.

Only the quality of the air ratified the alarm's announcement that it was morning. In the empty darkness without there was a wind among the chimney-pots, rising and falling and making sorties. She drew on a dressing-gown to fend her from the chill till she had lit the fire, very happy with the thought that her letter would at any rate be at the general post-office in the hands of the sorters, and with that happiness blent the physical comfort of the dressing-gown.

At the back of her mind all that day—getting Mr. Amara off to his yard, Mr. Stewart to his dry-dock, Neil to school, sweeping, dusting, polishing, shopping—was thought of the blessed bequest. And the answer to her letter came much more speedily than she had hoped.

She had lunched on bread and butter (and two sardines that Mr. Amara had left over from breakfast); she had told a man who wanted to sell a sewing machine that she had one, and in reply to his inquiry if it worked satisfactorily, and if he might look over it, that it was in perfect condition; she had given two slices of bread and cheese to a beggar; she had given twopence to another and, going to the window to see if he only wanted it for drink, had observed him go into the *pub* at the corner round which Neil, having waved a good-morning, had strutted off to school. Another man, with a guitar, had come into the back-green and strummed awhile and sung two or three pert songs.

When she was expecting Neil to arrive home from school there had come a gay knock at the door slightly different from his and, on opening, there was Mrs. Murdoch—a rap different from her usual one had to be given that day—beaming.

“Good-day, good-day, Mrs. Barry. Here I am! I’d have been sooner to tell you all about it but——”

“Come in.”

“No, I’ll no’ come in. I’m expecting the laddie from the butcher’s and I have to pay him at the door. I’d have been sooner to tell ye all about it and thank ye for seeing to the stair-washing out of your turn, but I have sic a lot to dae. Aw, it was grand! I feel real traivelled now. I have never been in sic a speedy train. You couldna see but a blur on either side; you couldna see the sleepers atween the rails. And what a grand train! Oh, but yon’s a bonny toon. I couldna believe it at first. The streets are that clean. But here’s the wonderful thing: do ye ken what I had at ma sister’s to my supper last nicht?”

“No. What did you have?”

“Fish—withoot—banes!” announced Mrs. Murdoch. She raised a hand and dabbed the air between herself and Mrs. Barry to accentuate the marvel. “Fish withoot banes. That’s what I had for my supper.”

So she had had filleted plaice, thought Mrs. Barry, and it was evidently a meal outside her ken for herself or her lodgers.

“Well!” ejaculated Mrs. Barry as one impressed—and heard steps come slowly into the entrance and begin to ascend.

“Oh, I was rale taken with it. It was a thing I couldna have believed. Of course with her husband being that wealthy, earning a pound a day, she kens dishes that I’ve never heard of. Aye, oh, it was wonderful. I was reading a

piece in the paper the other day about traivel and how it broadens ye. I understand now. Ye ken I feel real traivelled now.”

The ascending steps did not stop at the flat below. A gloved hand showed upon the baluster-rail—and there were two men pausing at the mid-landing at the window that overlooked the back-greens.

“I’m glad you had such a happy time,” said Mrs. Barry. “It was kind of you to come and tell me.”

Mrs. Murdoch wheeled and looked down at the strangers.

“Oh, I thought it was the butcher’s lad!” she exclaimed, clapped her hand to her mouth over a gurgling giggle and skipped away to her door with her habitual backward wave.

Mrs. Barry moved into the hall. As she did so the two men, mounting, paused at her door, with a glance at the brass name-plate, and raised their hats.

“Mrs. Barry?” said one.

“Yes,” she replied.

“We have just called in response to your letter regarding the Arnot Grant.”

“Will you come in?” she said.

“Thank you.”

She had the feeling that, without blatantly examining the room into which she conducted them, they had, on the instant, its significance. The pieces of furniture, her old friends, spoke for her, she felt, in their mute fashion. The old sideboard, the old Chinese vase, the gleaming sphere, the portrait of her grandfather in a white stock, of her grandmother holding a letter in her hand: she felt that, without staring at these like auctioneers upon an appraising visit, they had observed them.

“Let me take your hats,” she said. “Won’t you remove your coats?”

They would just loosen them. They would not trouble her about their hats. They put them under their chairs, then smiled on her for preliminary. The one who seemed to be the elder explained that they had just called for a chat, that her letter was being considered by the board, that if all was in order—and they had no doubt it was—there would be no difficulty about securing the grant for her son.

They looked at their toes then, not because they were embarrassed in any way but because of the way she suddenly fell in upon herself where she sat before them. Relief! That was what they saw in the motion of her body. She slumped, then suddenly drew erect again, aware of what she had done.

A very deserving case was what they were thinking. And she was wishing that they had not found her standing upon the landing in converse with a neighbour. They'd take her for a gossip! They would look upon her as one of these women who are immersed but in their little local tittle-tattle at doorways and on stair-landings. But, at any rate, she considered, if they thought her a gossip they'd not think her a slattern. She had on a nice dress, if threadbare. She had on her cameo-brooch and her gold chain and locket.

Her eyes, they observed, were those of one always contending with circumstances, patiently. She was—to the life, and well they knew it, saw it—a widow of a decayed burgess.

“You wrote quite fully,” the younger man remarked. “It was very kind of you. You told us all about your late husband's business and his—er—his bad luck. Too bad! One thing on top of another. We have really hardly any further questions to ask, but it is part of our duty to call and interview applicants.”

The other one—he who had spoken first—rose, adjusted his pince-nez and stooping over the sphere spun it slowly round.

“It's a lovely old one,” he said. “I see that Tasmania is Van Diemen's Land on it.”

“Yes, there are several old names. I had to tell Neil—that's my little boy—all about that.”

“Well, Mrs. Barry, this is just a friendly—or a formally friendly call—to see you. We'll make a report of our visit and advise action to have your boy Neil enrolled as a recipient of the Arnot——”

The rat-a-tat that announced Neil was at the front door.

“I think this is he now,” she said. “You might like to see him.”

She left them, to open the door, and when she returned, thrusting Neil before her, they were standing together talking and looking at a sewed sampler that hung framed upon the wall, talking quietly together apparently about it—though actually about her. They wheeled as she entered.

“This is my boy, Neil,” she said.

He made a little bow.

“These two gentlemen have just come to have a chat about getting you to school for nothing,” she explained.

“Yes,” said the elder, a very big man—Neil, looking up at him, thought he must be seven feet tall—“it is not such a bad old world in some ways. It is hard, but it’s good too. Hard *and* good. Your dad did a lot for his city, you see, and there were two brothers who lived in the seventeenth century and had a lot of money and wondered how best to lay it out, and they decided that the interest on its investment should be used for helping to educate the sons of people who had done something for Glasgow.”

Neil looked puzzled.

“You are one of these. So there is nothing to be ashamed of in having free education. There is just something—not to be proud of, perhaps, but to live up to, live up to your father’s name and be a credit to the school, and the school will get credit from you, eh? Too deep for you, sonny?”

Neil was tongue-tied. That young man, generally so loquacious, was apparently not going to make any bright remark. If only he would say something that would show him as delightful if not clever! That would suffice. His mother could not say, before him, “He’s really a bright little boy.”

“Would you like,” she suggested, “to ask him any questions, just to see what he knows for his age?”

“No, but he might read to us. I’m always interested in hearing them read. One gets an impression of——” his voice tailed off as though he did not want to explain what the impression was that he sought. As he spoke he took a book from the shelves and flipped the pages open.

“Read a little of this to us,” he said, and they both sat down.

Sometimes there would be tableaux made that impinged on Mrs. Barry’s mind, went into some place behind the retina as on to a sensitive plate, indelibly. She knew here was one of these: the two men sitting down again with coats open and their hats under their chairs, Neil, book in hand, looking over its top at them as for a sign when to begin. Even herself she seemed to see in the picture, hands folded on her lap with the end of the gold chain between her fingers, pinching the locket.

The page had been opened for him at the story of Little Harry and Lucy in the Wood. As soon as he began to read she felt that there was a divine

plan in life, that it was not a jig-saw puzzle with lost parts. He would not call Lucy *Lucky* this time. She felt so deeply grateful to the Power behind our days that a benignity came upon her face. She was looking at the boy and was unaware that the two men were looking as much at her as at him while he read. One sat with his head thrown back, eyelids lowered, and the gaze of his eyes roved from mother to son. The other sat hunched forward, arms folded, under his brows looking from one to the other.

“Very good. That will do,” said the one who had seemed director of the proceedings—he who had suggested the reading—at a paragraph’s end. “I just wanted to hear you read.” He rose once more. “You don’t know yet what you want to be?” he asked.

The boy had an idea on that head but was doubtful about divulging it. It was a new idea. He realised that he had had various aims, had not arrived at a decision.

“Or to do?” the other added.

That made it easier. He blurted it out.

“I would like to be able to play a big drum on my back,” he said, “and—eh—cymbals on top of it, and a triangle below it, and a flute with my mouth, all at the same time!”

The two men raised their heads and laughed, remembering their boyhood. They seemed bigger than ever to Neil then. They were immense in the room, dwarfing it, like statues well beyond life size.

“Oh, we saw him,” said one. “We saw him at a corner as we were coming along. It is very clever.”

“Very clever indeed—oh, very,” agreed the boy, and looked ever so little to the men, staring up at them.

“How does he do it?” asked one and, “Did you examine the contraption?” asked the other.

“Yes, sir. I watched him. He has the drum on his back and the drum-sticks are strapped to his elbows. He does like this,” and he showed them.

“Put it in words. Don’t tell us by gestures,” said the elder of the two.

Neil stared. He thought he had done wrong.

“Well,” he said, “he brings his arms in and that makes the drum-sticks hit the drum. *That’s the drum.*”

“Yes, that’s the drum accounted for. Well?”

“And then he has little things like spurs on the heels of his boots, but not really spurs. They are——” he held up a hand with thumb and finger forming a circle, then remembered he was not, for some reason, to inform by gestures and so dropped his hand. “They have little circles in them, and there’s a chain from the cymbals to one and from the triangle to the other. He just kicks out a foot and that makes the cymbals play—or the triangle. It depends on the foot he kicks out. When he wants to walk away he loosens the chains from the things like spurs. And all the time he is playing the flute with his mouth and both hands. It must require a great deal of perseverance,” he added, solemnly.

At that the man who seemed to be the chief gave a little chesty laugh, put a hand on Neil’s head, said, “Well!” and stepped past him to the door, the other following. There they turned.

“Good-bye, young man,” they said together.

“Good-bye, sir. Good-bye, sir.”

Mrs. Barry showed them out. They turned on the landing to bow to her graciously, she giving them a gracious bow in return, and as she closed the door she was so happy that she had to press her eyelids close to stanch a rush of tears that came. To be moved to tears by happiness seems perfectly absurd, she told herself.

CHAPTER VII

NEW OLD CLOTHES

Not before time had this befallen: free education for Neil at that school to which she had been sending him (though she could not afford to) because it offered more than the free schools.

So far—since Mr. Amara had come to her and Mr. Stewart upon his heels—she had not been able to save anything because of the earlier barren period when money had to go out though none came in, in the inexorable way of existence. Help came, but somewhat tardy. She had still to bail the boat. And Neil should have new boots. Her shoes had holes in the soles. One day as she stepped into Mr. Stewart's room—there was a space of polished boards there, round the carpet—a long splinter slipping through the hole in one had tethered her to the floor for a moment and almost thrown her. The ignominy of it! It was as a shouting of poverty before a stranger. It had been necessary to drag her foot back to get free. Later she had polished over the place where the splinter had come out. Yes, Neil required new boots. Neil required new underclothing to be warm. She skimped herself of food often so as to give him sustaining meals. He was a growing boy.

When Mr. Amara and Mr. Stewart both announced that they would not be in for the evening meal—Mr. Amara going out to dinner and a dance, Mr. Stewart “to have a crack” with an old shipmate he had run across when strolling home by the docks—she determined to take advantage of the free evening. She would go and call on the Kinnairds. She was not going to beg of them. She was just going to call on them—these old friends who knew her connection with Ayrshire. Blood had not proved thicker than water: Aunt Rachel had dropped her. But a sentiment for place might move the Kinnairds to help. In course of talk she could, perhaps, drop a hint of her condition. In the Kinnaird household there were three boys, but they were rich, these people, and did not have to pass on clothing, hats, shoes, from the eldest to the youngest, as is the way in Heather Street.

If only she could take Neil with her! He was an engaging boy—or she thought he was—and seeing him might be sufficient hint to them. She decided, however, to go alone. The visit would be difficult. She must not comport herself in such a way as to make them think she would be offended if they offered her cast-off raiment—old hats, old boots. How boots did bother one! Yet for her pride's sake she must not directly ask. Both for her pride's sake and to save them from feeling too much depressed over her lot

(she gave them credit for the possession of compassion) she must not ask directly. After all, she had been to a pawnshop. She had faced that. She could face this.

If she went in the afternoon, arriving about tea-time, she would see the women alone. It had better be afternoon, then, instead of evening. So Neil was given the key of the flat in the morning. That made him feel wonderfully important and grown-up. His mother stepped out with him on to the landing and closed the door so that he might rehearse the opening of it. The key had to be put in just a certain length and no more. Ever so little more or less and it did not act properly. She would leave his supper on the sitting-room table, a cold meal with a glass of milk, and he was not to worry if she was late, for she might be detained.

All arranged! The opening of the door was rehearsed three times, the key was in Neil's pocket, a sense of importance in his small head—and he was off to school. Mr. Stewart came home as usual to lunch and as soon as he was gone and she had washed the dishes she set off.

That was a long journey across Glasgow. It took as much time as Mrs. Murdoch's far travel to Edinburgh—more in fact. At the outset she had occasion to realise that *things might be worse*, that she had *much to be thankful for*, that *every cloud has its silver lining*. For at the outset she passed turnings to tenement blocks where people did not live, as where she lived, one in a room and, at most, two in a bed. She passed mephitic and noisy side-streets where whole families existed in one room and unthinkably increased and multiplied in one room, conceiving and bearing there. Perhaps they also said, *things might be worse*. The outlook from their broken windows was, as often as not, a high brick wall or the blank back of warehouses with doors high up in place of windows and derricks depending before these for the loading and unloading of trucks. She passed streets at the blind end of which rows of hawkers' barrows were left, the barrows of sellers of whelks, of dulse, of oranges and bananas in their season. Yes, she decided, she had much to be thankful for. And she had managed to tack up the more dubious sole so that it would not flap loose on the way.

Only part of the distance would she go by tram-car. Hardly was it likely that money would be given to her at her journey's end, and she might be so tired later that she would have to come home all the way by tram-car. There is a certain strain in going to pawnshops or to visit old friends in the hope that one's clothes will make them offer an old coat or hat or pair of shoes.

Oh, but there was much to be thankful for! It might, for instance, have been raining. It was not; it was almost a sunny day. There was at least enough sunlight to see motes dancing in air, in pale yellow shafts that were propped from high window to dusky floor in the barn-like interiors of old-iron shops or grain-stores that she glanced into, without slackening her steps, upon her way. The lingering girl in her liked these interiors. They gave her, inexplicably, a frail but exquisite happiness.

On she went and passed from the region where at every corner was a public-house and the grocers and butchers strewed sawdust on their floors and women walked bare-footed, shawls drawn over their heads like Spanish mantillas. She came to the bridges, high and low, across the creeping grey river, to the city's centre, the clangour of traffic, the plate-glass fronts that gleamed, the doors that had no ostentation, chastely simple, with commissionaires in blue, medals on their breasts, to decorate them—the region of jewels and rich furs inviting in windows. She saw a massive man, wearing a red uniform with tassels of gold, hurry across the pavement to open a carriage-door. He carried an enormous umbrella as a sign of office. With large fussiness he closed the carriage-door and opened the umbrella and walked beside a shopping lady, exquisite beyond words, sheltering her from the first drops of a shower. Yes, it was going to rain after all.

She must not arrive wet. Servants sometimes look askance on people who arrive dripping wet. So, sometimes, do their masters and mistresses. So she got into a west-bound car at Charing Cross. But as the rain came on it seemed, oddly, that the city brightened. How was that? she asked herself. It was only that she had come to another quarter of Glasgow. Where she lived the houses were built of a drab stone that no treatment could ever make other than drab. She had come to the areas where the houses were built of stone that glittered in the rain. Even rain in West-end Grove is different in effect from rain in Heather Street. In Heather Street it smears the soot on; in West-end Grove it washes off what soot may have fallen on a roughness of the surface.

But this feeling of being out of place here that came to her—it was painful. She should not feel so. She should not feel intimidated by rhododendron bushes and gilt-topped iron palings. She should not feel disconcerted by ruffling nurse-maids with starched falls at their throats, and twinkling shoes, hurrying home from the park with their charges before the rain came down in earnest. She should not feel as an intruder when turning into a crescent just because the lamp at the corner was of beauty as well as service and had a great crystal bowl over it different from the containing

glass atop the lamp-posts in the region of her declension. This district had once been her home. Such were the houses, when she was a girl in Ayrshire, at which she visited when coming up to the city for a few days. In such a house had she lived before beet-sugar warred with cane-sugar and when no one thought it a mistake to bank in the City Bank and no other. *All street cries prohibited*. It was in white lettering on a blue plate. Street cries! The cries of her home-parish seemed to be still in her ears so that the silence here was terrifying by comparison.

The door was opened to her by a lean pallid liveried young man of no expression, and as he opened a great burst of bird-song came out to her. He held the door wide and she advanced into blue and gold, a blue carpet soft as turf and the gold of picture frames. A cloud of pictures was in that hall. Copper bowls glinted and a copper gong winked at her. The gold tremblings of the singing canaries in big bright cages she noted. “Hullo. Ast her does she want the baikie emptied?”—“Could ye spare the price of a cup of coffee to an auld sojer?”—“Good-morning, madam, I have called representing the Western Sewing Machine Company . . .” All that was of another world. She was in trepidation walking through that hall lest the sole of her shoe should become loose again and flap.

“Mrs. Barry,” announced the footman, opening a door.

There was Mrs. Kinnaird, and Mrs. Barry had to look deliberately at her face so as not to look at the lovely clothes she wore.

“My dear!” exclaimed Mrs. Kinnaird. “What a pleasant surprise!” but with her words there was a look of inquiry as though she asked, “What have you come for?”—not challengingly, no, not that, but as if she were telepathically aware that her old friend had come for something more than for the sake of *auld lang syne* and their connection with the same portion of the world’s soil.

“How do you do, Emma?” said Mrs. Barry.

“You are just in time for tea, Jean,” said Mrs. Kinnaird. “Do sit down here—that’s a comfortable chair—and give me your news.”

Mrs. Barry sat down and so soft and enormous was the cushion that she subsided with unexpectedness. The shock she had, sitting down, made her feel that the world of such cushions had become foreign to her.

“I’m all alone to-day,” said Mrs. Kinnaird. “The girls are out. We can have a *rale guid crack*.”

It was as if she hinted that—if blood was not thicker than water—there was such a thing as sentiment for place.

Mrs. Barry did not plunge into the true statement of how she was getting along. She talked airily of how well she was—apart from a little pain, “age, I suppose,” and she laughed, and Mrs. Kinnaird remarked that “the lumbar region, as doctors call it, is a nuisance.” Mrs. Barry told of how Neil was at school and then how she had discovered the existence of the Arnot Bequest. Mrs. Kinnaird’s eyes, at that, had a little cloud across them.

“How are you supporting yourself, Jean?” she asked.

Oh, coward, coward! So Mrs. Barry called herself. She was leaving it all to Emma to lead the way.

“I’m getting along,” she said, “getting along. I have—er—” no, she would not say a *paying guest*—“I have a lodger, a Siamese. That is a great help. He is learning engineering, apprenticed to the Fairglen Shipbuilding Yards. The Siamese consul arranged for him to come to me. And I have another lodger in the back bedroom, such a nice man, very genuine. But he’ll be leaving me soon. He is a marine engineer and his boat is undergoing repairs. As soon as they are over he will be gone.”

“But you’ll get somebody else, no doubt.”

“Yes, no doubt.”

A servant came in, carried a folding table to them and opened it, while they talked about the canary in the cage in the big window-recess. The subject of canaries seemed to have been thrashed out to the last feather by the time that tea was set upon the table and they were alone again.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Kinnaird and suddenly laid a hand on her old friend’s arm, “I have an idea.” It had come to her while they were talking of canaries and how they were the only birds she would have in a cage—born in captivity, accustomed to captivity—and how this and that about canaries. “I wonder if you will be annoyed——”

Mrs. Barry waited.

“You know how the boys do shoot up. New clothes all the time. I hope you won’t be annoyed at what came into my head. I was just looking over their things this very morning, wondering what to do with them, and if—if little Neil would like them—you know they’ve just got to have new things at school.”

“I’d be very grateful,” said Mrs. Barry, and then, “You’re a dear,” she added.

Mrs. Kinnaird knew that she meant, “You’re a dear for being so very tactful in the way you put it.”

As they walked up the stairs together, tea finished, to look at the things in question, Mrs. Barry felt no envy at all, no jealousy of her hostess walking there on quiet carpets among the clouds of pictures on the wall and porcelain loveliness in niches—and singing canaries. No, for herself, she would not have even a canary in a cage, though they were born in captivity. But she looked up pleasantly enough on the way at one hanging in a staircase window when Emma stopped to put a finger between the bars of its cage and make little kissing sounds at it. They stood there a moment beaming at the little yellow bird and then went on.

In a cupboard of what had been the nursery the things were stored and as they examined them together Mrs. Barry felt a great sense of relief. What here was cast-off was, in her parish, dandiacal. Up in that long bright room they both seemed removed from all troubles. They might have been at the top of some silver tower of dreams; and this woman who lifted blazers and jackets from hooks, and held them this way and that, was of her own part of the land. As Mrs. Kinnaird’s arm brushed her once, holding out a garment for inspection, a strange thrill passed through her, and she thought, “We both come from the same shire.” In her mind was a rich corner of the land, unexpectedly lush and fruitful to those who expected a stony North. Orchards were in her mind, with sunlight on the ruddy apples that dropped now and then with a blunt bump; and great cart-horses plugged past in the lanes; in the holes their hoofs made, when the water trickled in, were splinters of sky. She heard the wind roar in the trees that flounced the base of Kyle Law. She could have suddenly bowed her head, kneeling there before that cupboard with Mrs. Kinnaird beside her, and putting her face in her hands have burst into tears, but whether tears of grief or happiness she did not know.

There are emotions that some might mock at . . . Let that be. See her instead carrying a great parcel that Emma Kinnaird (who used to be Emma Barclay in those old days of sky in the cart-tracks and leafy thunder round Kyle Law) had tied up for her. It was a big parcel and Mrs. Kinnaird suggested having it sent to her by post, but Mrs. Barry was sure she could carry it to the tram-car. She would have to change cars only once on the way, at the city’s centre. See her homing again at a quarter-to-seven, getting into a tram at the terminus in Great Western Road with her bundle. Two people

sitting opposite looked at it, examined her from hat to shoe-tip, gazed at the bundle as though they would fain see the contents. She knew they were examining it and essaying conclusions regarding the meaning of her and it. They were not pleasant people. They were noting her own attire and contrasting it with her facial fineness, considering her bearing as too fine for her clothes and disliking her thereby. They were accounting for her connection with the parcel and accounting pitilessly, nay, sadistically. They looked one to another and smiled. But she gazed past them, between their heads, looking through a faint reflection of herself there at the curving lamp-rows of crescents and the stately terraces in which lights were lit.

At home Neil waited for her, perturbed, apprehensive, terror-stricken. His lessons learnt, he had become engrossed in a ghost-story in the sitting-room. There was an illustration to it showing a youth walking in a dark wood and behind him a stalking giant with blazing eyes, and horns. Underneath were quoted the classic lines which served as a text for the story:

“Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And, having once turned round, walks on
And turns no more his head,
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.”

The picture, the verse beneath it, and the story created a condition of high tension in the child. And when, at a call of nature, he went to the room-door and opened it, at once he shut it and leant against it. He had not lit the hall gas. The only room in which was a light was the one in which he sat. The frightful fiend, he felt sure, was in the hallway. He dare not cross it to the bathroom.

He went back to his seat, looking aslant at the door, expecting it to open at any moment and to see one of the fiend's horns come round it, then one eye. He shuddered. Then suddenly out in the street was a wail, a high keening lamentation, “*Caller Ooo!*” It was some distance away. It rose again, nearer. It came closer. Why do those who sell fresh oysters in those parts where street cries are not prohibited cry so dismally, so eerily? Philologists may know why *caller oysters*—that is to say fresh oysters—become *caller ooo*. But that is a subject apart from the shudderings of that little boy when the voice below wailed into the vasty night the drawn-out cry of *Caller Ooo!* Nearer and nearer it came.

No, not if his life depended upon it, as they say, could he budge from that room. Terror stalked in the street and the Frightful Fiend lurked in the hall. And yet the necessity to leave the room was urgent, increasingly urgent by reason of his trepidation. Then his gaze rested on the Chinese vase. He could not go into the hall, the dark hall; so he stepped over to the vase and made use of it as never it had been used before.

“Ca-a-aller ooo!”

The voice of desolation was just below the window. He drew a deep breath and set down the vase. The melancholy cry came again, but it was receding. And now, he thought, all was well. The Fiend in the hall would not come in to him, would not come into the lit room. There he would remain till his mother’s arrival. He listened for the sound of her key in the outer door and suddenly recalled that he had the key. He would have to cross the hall, after all, to open to her. Well, he would throw the sitting-room door wide open so as to let the light flood out and dash across to let her in. The Frightful Fiend would not have time to catch him. His mother’s knock would make it prepare, instead, for flight.

The knock came at last and he did as he planned.

“Oh, Neil,” she said, “you have the place in darkness. You did not do as I——”

“I couldn’t, mummy.”

“You could have got up on a chair to light the hall gas.”

“Oh, but I was reading a story—a ghost-story—and I—I forgot. I became so interested.”

She passed into the kitchen, set down her bundle there and, lighting the gas, removed her hat.

At that he left her, went stealthily back to the sitting-room, took up the vase and crept to the bathroom. And there she was, coming out of the kitchen, staring at him inquiringly.

“What *are* you doing, Neil?”

“I’m going to empty this,” he explained.

“Empty it!”

“Yes,” and he marched into the bathroom.

She awaited his return.

“But what——” she began.

“Oh, mummy, if you please I was afraid to leave the room. You see it was dark out here and I was afraid of the Frightful Fiend.”

“The Frightful Fiend?”

“It’s in a book I was reading,” he said, vase balanced in his arms.

“Yes, I remember. But, Neil, you should try to be a brave little boy.”

He felt that he was in disgrace. He was very subdued. But he was greatly relieved that she was home again, even if displeased with him.

Her displeasure, however, did not last long. Soon he was in the kitchen trying on shoes she had brought with her, and sweaters and jackets.

“A present,” she told him, “from our old friends the Kinnairds. You remember them coming to see us?”

“Yes.”

Within the big parcel was another. Mrs. Kinnaird had left her alone a few minutes, going to another room to wrap up the things, and now, unfastening this inner parcel she found there was something for her also—a new old hat, a new old coat, a pair of slippers. The discarded clothing of the West End was indeed fine raiment here.

Well aware she was of an intruding sense of ignominy in this, that she had perforce to be recipient of cast-off apparel; but she refused to consider that. She thrust it from her mind. In bed, wakeful—waukrife—she lay picturing the things, the two pairs of boots, the pair of shoes, the two sweaters with no more than an unripped shred of wool on the right cuff of each, the Norfolk jacket that perfectly fitted Neil, the tweed jacket and vest that had outlasted their knickerbockers and so, though showing hardly a sign of being worn in the Heather Street sense of the word, were of no further use in West-end Grove; the two woollen vests that had but tiny holes in the elbows.

From the parish steeple came the announcement of an hour with leisurely chime. She waited to count the strokes of the clock. Two o’clock! And still she lay awake, trying to evade the persistent sense of ignominy and to think only of how Neil’s feet would be dry and his body warm. Also she was haunted by memory of how she had felt as an alien at her journey’s end. She was hurt, she was disappointed in herself, that she had come to be intimidated by rhododendron bushes and gilt-topped railings, by an expressionless man-servant, deep carpets—and too many canaries! Tears

abruptly filled her eyes, not to be stemmed, and burying her face in the pillow she cried and cried, alone, she who never wept before others.

Then, angry at herself, she called herself a fool and wiped the tears from her cheeks with a corner of the pillow-case. Next moment she thought of Neil in the sitting-room, in terror of the Frightful Fiend and unable to dare the hallway, making service of the old Chinese vase as surely never had it been used before—and she laughed and laughed, relaxed, and fell asleep.

CHAPTER VIII

A CRIMINOUS CLERK

Late October darkened into November, the short days of December came, and Mr. Stewart announced that he did not suppose he would be leaving her till after Christmas because of delays in dry-dock causing his steamer to have to lie in mooring-dock awaiting cargo. No crew had yet been signed on. Only a watchman was aboard, and the officers roomed ashore or were away on visits to friends or relatives.

It was the approach of Christmas that was given as a reason for a call upon her made by an elderly clergyman who, when she opened to his gentle summons, whispered to her as though he suffered from speaker's throat:

“Good-day, madam. *Might* I have a little speech with you on a matter of public interest?”

His physiognomy, and something in his eyes (or the lack of something in them), grey eyes almost white, gave her an instant dread of the man. But because of his reassuring garb she answered, “Will you step in?”

As she stood back, holding the door wide open for his entrance, Neil's leaping steps were on the stairs, he arriving early, or punctually, that day, delayed by no Punch and Judy show, no genius at a corner playing a band all by himself. The clergyman, as she recalled later, looked round with a sudden odd stooping of his shoulders as she waited to close the door. He listened to these leaping steps as with apprehension.

“Well, Neil,” she said.

“Hullo, mummy!”

“Ah, your little boy! Your son?” asked the visitor.

“Yes.”

“A fine little chap.”

There was something about him, hard to define, that made her glad Neil had arrived at that moment. It was not that he looked slightly bibulous. Many clergymen look bibulous. Even the Rev. Dr. Porteous none could mistake for a total abstainer. It was not that his manner was smug. She felt, somehow, slightly afraid of him.

She closed the door and indicating the sitting-room ushered him thither, curving an arm round Neil's shoulders to take him in with her as if for company. Her feeling of doubt in this caller cannot have been satisfactorily quenched by his ecclesiastical collar and his braid claithe. Her thought was not that Neil—that smoot of manhood—could protect her from this oddly sinister cleric in an emergency, but that he could scamper for help if it was needed. Odd thoughts to be turning over while welcoming a parson! Dear, oh, dear, she must be getting highly strung with all her worries.

“What can I do for you? What is the matter of public interest you wanted to speak to me about?” she inquired when he was seated and she also seated, Neil leaning against her knee staring at the stranger.

“I'm collecting clothes,” he began, “for the necessitous poor. We wish to give them a little comfort at this season approaching. Of course we try to ease as much as possible the ignominy of their position. You understand, my dear lady.”

“Yes. Quite,” said Mrs. Barry.

“Well, I'm glad. Clothes,” he said, and added lightly, “and money if you care. But clothes especially. This is a hard winter and there are many people who never have dry feet. Never—have—dry—feet, my dear lady. Boots and shoes, so long as they are not too old or patched, we are glad to get. I have some necessitous cases in my mind's eye who have their footwear lined with brown paper. Now if you have any old clothes I will get a collector to call for them.”

“You have my sympathy,” she told him. “I understand. Yes, I might spare a pair of shoes. There is a pair of my son's that pinch a little. I find they are really too small. They might do for a younger boy. And I have a coat—an old one—of my own. It is rather shabby, I'm afraid, but I recently got a new one.”

“All is welcome,” he declared, “and the spirit of the giving counts. I'll take a note of your name and address and have our official collector call. I don't try to carry any bundles myself. I am getting quite a lot, I'm glad to say. Christmas drawing near opens the hearts of the charitable. Anyone who would rather give money for us to buy clothes—of course I can take that.”

She hesitated.

“Well, I couldn't give much,” she said. “Perhaps the shoes and the coat _____”

“The widow’s mite!” he wheezed. “All is acceptable. I’ve even had young people give. One dear little boy at a home I visited went to his little bank—you know, a savings-bank in the shape of a castle—and contributed a threepenny bit.”

“I could spare perhaps threepence now,” said she. “I didn’t like to offer so little. And I’ll have the coat and the shoes in a parcel ready for your collector.”

“You’re very, very kind indeed,” he assured her, and produced a notebook and pencil from a waistcoat pocket.

She sent Neil to the kitchen for her purse, and as he ran off turned to the cleric to give him her name and address. As he pocketed the small donation to his cause the equivocal look passed from his eyes and a little smile spread on his grey face. She felt that she had been very foolish to be nervous with him. Perhaps her custom of saving on tea by pouring fresh boiling water on the leaves left in Mr. Amara’s or Mr. Stewart’s tea-pot was not good for her nerves. That thought flickered through her mind as the parson rose to depart. Out upon the landing he wheeled and bowed, once, twice, thrice, as if for each penny, and repeated, in an unctuous voice, that the collector of clothes would call next day. He turned downstairs. Mrs. Barry wondered why he did not go on upstairs.

As she prepared Neil’s tea she remarked: “It would be bad for you to try to wear the smallest of these shoes that Mrs. Kinnaird sent you. They pinch you dreadfully.”

“They do,” he said. “It’s very painful to have tight shoes. If you kick a ball it hurts the toes badly.”

They had just finished their evening meal when there came another knock at the door, an odd, double knock, smart, peremptory.

“I’ll go, mummy,” said Neil.

“Good-afternoon, laddie. Is the good lady your mother at home?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Neil looking up at the man on the mat—a man tall and spare, of loose carriage, dressed in rough tweeds, and wearing a bowler hat. Hanging from his curved left arm by its crook-handle was a furred umbrella, and the thumb of his left hand was in his waistcoat pocket.

“Just ask her to come to the door,” he said.

“Yes, sir.”

He raised a finger to his hat in a half-salute as Mrs. Barry came in response.

“City police, madam,” he said. “May I come in and have a word with you?”

City police!

He stepped into the hall without removing his hat, suddenly recollected that he was not here with a search-warrant or to make an arrest and took it off.

“Have you recently been visited by a clergyman collecting old clothes for the poor?” he asked, standing in the hall.

“Yes,” she said. “Won’t you come into the sitting-room?”

“This is all right. Did you give him anything?”

“I gave him threepence and he said he would send a collector for an old coat of mine and an old pair of shoes.”

“H’m-h’m! You could recognise him again?”

“Oh, yes. But why?”

He ignored the question.

“You could describe him?” he asked.

“Yes. He’s a stoutish, heavily-built man about seventy I should say, with watery grey eyes and a wheezy voice.”

“Very good. And wore brown shoes?”

Mrs. Barry thought.

“No,” she said. “No. He did not wear brown shoes. He had on black boots.”

“That’s right,” said the detective. “He wore black boots. Well, madam, the collector may call—or he may not. We’ll have someone posted to see about him should he call.”

“But what is wrong?”

“Just that the man who called on you collecting is a rogue and trickster.”

“He is!” she exclaimed. “He looked really like a clergyman, and yet—there was something——”

“He was a clergyman too. And he is seventy. He was discharged forty years ago from his church for appropriation of funds, and of that forty years he has spent, all sentences added together, thirty-one in prison.”

Mrs. Barry bit her lip.

“How dreadful!” she said. “But—I think I would rather not, if you catch him, give evidence. Seventy years old!”

“You think, then, madam, that such a man, because of his years, should be allowed to go on robbing the poor—robbing widows even, children?”

She recalled the words, “The widow’s mite!” She recalled his voice as he had told them about the little boy who had taken threepence from his savings bank.

“You’re quite right,” she replied. “I’m being sentimental about him.”

“Did the little boy see him?” asked the detective.

“Yes, I saw him,” said Neil, who was lurking just inside the kitchen and came back into view then.

“You would recognise him, eh?”

“Yes!”

“Good. Well, you should be very careful, madam, about letting people unbeknown to you into your house. That old man is really a dangerous character. Just to warn you I must tell you that there was a lady not far from you who had been feeding a man two or three times a week for quite some time while he was *out of work*, and suddenly he stopped calling on her. After three years he came back and told her he had been employed by a blind gentleman in Aberdeenshire to read to him. Actually he had been in the Peterhead Prison in Aberdeenshire for three years. We found that he was calling on the lady in question and went to see her. A queer case that man was. He might have murdered her for a matter of a few pounds had he taken the notion but I believe he went to her not so much even for the food as for herself—her belief in him, her trust in him. They are sentimental at times, you know. She was terribly upset when she heard what sort of man he truly was. He committed a bad crime soon after and is in Peterhead again. Well, I’m only telling that as a warning to you against taking strangers into your place when you are alone. If the collector calls to-morrow just let him have the things and if this laddie is in he might slip along to the police office as soon as the man comes to tell us he’s here. Thank you, madam, thank you.”

He was no sooner gone than Neil was hopping from one foot to the other in great excitement.

“A detective!” he chanted. “A detective!”

He had seen a real detective! They had had a detective in their house—and a real criminal but shortly before him. That was a wonderful day.

The next day, the day before Christmas, holidays began. How well things fitted in! If he opened the door to a man collecting the pair of shoes and the coat he would just call to his mother, “Here’s the collector for the things for the poor,” and then go running downstairs as if he was going out to play, and rush along to the police station. He would be an assistant detective. He would be *Neil Barry, the Boy Sleuth of the Shipping-Parish*.

CHAPTER IX

THE PLAIN-CLOTHES MAN

The day before this Christmas, for Neil, was extraordinarily exciting, with the additional piquancy of expecting the arrival, at any moment, of the collector, the accomplice of the fraudulent cleric. For Mrs. Barry there was no piquancy in that expectation. The tragedy of that old man depressed her.

The last day of the year would have its own flutter; but from the 24th to the 31st of December, for the boy, there was a real elevation from the ordinary, and for the mother a period of make-believe.

He went to and fro in the house with her. He saw her place a vase with a great bunch of holly in it on Mr. Stewart's mantelpiece and, with delight, watched her write on the overmantel-mirror, with the corner of a bar of soap dipped in water, "A Merry Christmas." He helped her, steadying a chair by holding its back while she stood up on it to twist paper-streamers round the chandelier in the centre of Mr. Amara's room. He held the chair for her while she hung up, in the hall, from the chandelier there, a little witch-ball. When the four doors were open it was wonderful to look up at that small silver sphere, walk round it, and observe how the kitchen and Mr. Stewart's room, on one side, and the sitting-room and Mr. Amara's room on the other, were reflected in it, ever so small and quaintly curved.

And all the time there was that additional excitement of expecting the collector of clothes for the necessitous poor to call.

A great day—whatever the symbolism of all this decoration in the minds of adults! He answered every knock at the door with eagerness: Maisie said, "Hullo, merry Christmas the morn. I'll no' be coming the morn. Ast her does she want the baikie empied?" The milkman gave him a small pot of cream along with the day's milk, saying, "There's her Christmas tae her." But the collector of clothes for the necessitous poor did not arrive.

The day was ecstatic enough without that. When, after lunch, he looked out of the kitchen window, watching his pigeons wheel and veer and loop in flight overhead, the occasional glints of light under their wings seemed different from those of ordinary days.

During the afternoon Mrs. Barry discovered she was almost out of salt and sent him down to the grocer's.

"But if the collector comes, mummy," he said.

“Oh, I don’t think I’d be so anxious for him to come,” she replied.

And lo, what had been going on indoors had been going on outdoors also: there were streamers of paper in the shop-windows. And a shaven pig, hanging by the heels in a butcher’s doorway, had a sprig of holly in its mouth.

This little glimpse of the outer world atoned for the possibility of failing in his duty as assistant to the impressive detective should the collector call while he was out. On the way back he eyed cunningly everyone he met in the street, wondering, “Is that a man who is on watch for the collector?” But so many of them looked like detectives to him, with roving and oblique glances, that he gave it up.

There were more decorations to look at when he got home—the surprise, for his return, of paper-streamers on the dining-room chandelier and a tinsel butterfly pinned to each of the curtains.

The odours of cooking were trickling through the small flat when there came to the door an odd knock, a double knock—the second rap so emphatic that the sound might be described as a slur and a knock. Somehow it made mother and son look one to the other.

“I’ll go,” she said.

Was it the clothes collector? If so he rapped much like the detective, and as one having authority.

Neil would have peeped round the kitchen door to see, had he not been told by his mother that he must not do so when she went to the door. In most houses of these parts a knock or ring brings not only the lady of the house to the door but all her brood hanging to her skirts and Mrs. Barry had a natural aversion to that sort of thing. Neil might not even peep.

“Good-day, madam,” he heard—and it was the detective’s voice.

“Please come in,” said Mrs. Barrie.

“I just thought I would look up, ma’am,” said the detective, “to relieve your mind, in case that it was hanging over your head that you might be involved in that affair of the clergyman—and to tell the little boy about it. I thought he might like to hear.”

His mother’s voice, with a note as of relief, a little laugh in it, replied, “Oh, that was very kind!” And then she called, “Neil!” He hurried into the sitting-room where the detective, less formal on this visit than on the first, had already taken a chair.

“Well, little man?”

“How do you do, sir?”

But it was to Mrs. Barry the man addressed himself, though thinking the little boy would be interested.

“We’ve got him,” he said, “and the collector also. I think we have plenty of witnesses. I don’t think we’ll need you. Besides, he has owned up. In fact he has owned up so quickly we are rather suspicious there are other cases he knows of against him and doesn’t want us to discover before his trial. I was out this morning on quite different business, and I was just cutting across Maybole Street on my way back to the office when I saw a square-set man in clergyman’s clothes looking up at the windows of the flats there. I saw him take mental note of a flower-box outside a window one story up, and I saw him observing specially clean curtains at the windows of a flat above. They generally go to the people with flower-boxes—and the ones with clean curtains. I gave him time to get well into the close and up the stairs. He just went up the first flight. I can’t understand a man with his intelligence not beginning at the top.”

This was all extraordinarily interesting to Neil, who listened with staring eyes—this technique of crime and detection.

“You see, if they begin at the top,” the detective explained, “and work down, nobody who suspects them and is shadowing them can get evidence on the ground floor or the first floor while they are upstairs, and cut off the possibility of escape.”

“He went straight down after he left here,” remarked Mrs. Barry.

“He may have come only to you and to no one else on these stairs, because of your curtains,” said the plain-clothes man. “Anyhow, I think that flower-box I was telling you about put him off. He started at the flat where the flower-box was, one storey up. Standing in the close, I could just hear him talking to somebody and then the door shut. I wondered if he had been asked in and then I heard him go on up. Aye, he went on up. Then I slipped up quietly to the first landing and gave the bell a little ring. It was a servant-lassie opened. They have servants in some of the flats in Maybole Street, you know. I told her who I was and asked her what the old gentleman had said. He was collecting, says she, for the poor, for Christmas Good Cheer, but she had told him there was nobody at home and she could do nothing. That was good enough, so I just nipped down to the street again and waited there by the close. Down he came slowly, wheezing away to himself, and

out. I just stepped up to him and says I, ‘The Rev. Mr.— ’ and I got no further; he gave me a look over and says he, ‘My God, I’ve been expecting this,’ says he, just like that; ‘take me where I can get some brandy before you take me to the station.’ ”

“Dear, dear!” said Mrs. Barry, shaking her head; but little Neil was listening with his eyes near to popping out. No longer did he desire to be a whole band, drum and cymbals, triangle and flute, but a detective, thinking things out, shrewd and calm and masterful.

“Oh, well, I just thought seeing I was passing I would tell you, so that it would not be hanging over the head of a lady like you. And the laddie might like to hear.”

Rising, he smiled down at Neil, put a hand on top of his head for a moment, much the way that one of the gentlemen who had come regarding the Arnot Bequest had done. Had he asked, “And what do you intend to be?” Neil would have answered, instanter, “A detective, sir.”

The plain-clothes man passed out into the hall with lithe and leisurely stride, that looseness of limb, opened the door for himself before Mrs. Barry could make up on him, smacked his bowler down on his head so that the hard edge of it made quite a loud sound hitting upon some bone, and pulled the door shut after him in a most masterful and extraordinary exit.

Oh, a wonderful day, an exceptional day, full of unusual things—and it was not finished.

Surely it was a splendid inspiration of grown-ups to set apart one day in the year for which to prepare with witch-balls and paper-streamers and good wishes written with soap on mirrors. Perhaps it was because of the season and the general spirit of goodwill in the air that the plain-clothes man had unbent as he had done. But now that Neil was no longer tethered to the flat by a hope of being the detective's boy assistant, he was eager to go out.

He had a surmise amounting almost to certainty that his mother had bought a Christmas present for him. There had been a big envelope (an unusual envelope, vivid blue, with a radiating sun on it—like the Japanese flag) on the dresser, unopened, beside the boxes from which she took the coloured streamers, that made him curious. What was in it? he had asked, and, "A secret," he was told. Later, coming into the kitchen again, he noticed that it had been removed. And he had a present in mind for her. He had seen it in a shop-window down by the Campbeltown Docks.

"What do you want to go out for?" she said when he asked permission.

"I want to buy a present for somebody."

"Do you think you can afford to buy presents?"

"It's just one present, not presents."

She thought he looked pinched, drawn, from the over-excitement of the day.

"It's not to cost much, is it, now?" she asked. "You may need some of your pennies later on. New Year's day is coming and you might want a few pennies then."

"I'll have quite a lot left," he assured her. "It costs sixpence."

"But you have only one shilling and sixpence in your box, I think."

"Yes. Three sixpences is one and sixpence. Oh, it's an expensive present, I know; but," and he quoted, "'Christmas comes but once a year.'"

"Well, you'd better have tea first. The shops are not shutting early these days."

Tea over he set out. The radiance of the main artery of their part of the city (Clydeside Road) was bright at the end of Heather Street. Points of

moisture in the atmosphere glittered as the points of tinsel glittered in the Christmas stockings of canvas in the sweetie-shops. There was a feeling of excitement in the long illuminated gorge of Clydeside Road. All the shops were lit as though it were a Saturday night. The houses soaring on either side, when he looked up, seemed higher than usual above the suffused glow of the lights. And even as he looked small flakes of snow came down out of the upper darkness, a multitude of twinkling spots that turned to mere moisture as they alighted on the pavements. It was snowing and yet there was no whiteness where the snow fell. The flakes melted like sugar.

At the first corner, the corner of Broomieknowe Street, there was a sudden excitement. The public-house doors there abruptly opened, a thick voice bawled, "Take your hands off me, I tell you!" Another yelled, "Get out!" and a man was shot half-way across the pavement on his back. He leapt up at once and wheeled, charging at his ejector who was a fiery-faced man wearing a white-bibbed apron, in shirt-sleeves, the sleeves rolled up.

"Get out!" snarled the barman stepping back inside the public-house and letting the swing-doors close behind him with the result that the other's fist, instead of smiting the barman's jaw, smote the glass.

The crisp shattering sound attracted the attention of people who had been blasé about the shouting, and the little knot of persons who had been halted on the pavement merely by the interruption of the ejection was augmented by an excited scurry of others, even from across the street, in quest of diversion or anxious to take sides in troubles.

"Oho, you'll pay for that!" said the man in the apron, stepping outside again and calling to anyone and everyone, "Where's the policeman?"

"Take that while he's coming!" shouted the man he had thrown out and smote at him again, delivering his blow, this time, on the potman's chin.

Immediately there was a return punch that crashed him to the pavement. He slid along it. His head struck the corner lamp-post with a dull impact. He did not rise.

"That will learn ye!" said the potman.

Slowly the fallen man came to his senses, lurched to a knee, tried to rise, thickly cursing his enemy, indomitable, one of those who would welcome a gory bed or victory, drunk or sober. The potman was very pallid but he held his ground and prepared, with a glance left and right for his longed-for policeman, to knock the celebrating rivetter down before he was fairly up again.

“Aw, let him alone!” shouted a looker-on. “Ye canna hit a man when he’s doon.”

“He’s not doon.”

“Well, he’s no’ up.”

“It’s none of your business.”

“Maybe it’s not, but you fill a felly up as full as an egg and then, when you’ve got all his money, you chuck him out.”

“Are you insinuating that he got his liquor here?” demanded the potman.

“Insinyate? What ye mean insinyate? I know what ye do. Let the man get up. If it’s a fight I’ll see it’s a fair fight.”

“You be careful you don’t find yourself locked up too.”

Up rose the ejected drunken one and balanced, peering for his assailant, blood running from his knuckles.

“Aw, here’s the polis! Here’s the polis!”

A policeman elbowed his way into the crowd. The potman merely pointed at the drunken man and then at the pane of glass.

“Come along,” said the constable, and made a swift movement into the front of his tunic, then down to the dazed man’s wrist—and *click!*

“So Ah’m arrested, am Ah? And what’s the chairge?”

“He used very abusive language because I wouldn’t serve him,” said the potman to the policeman, “and he refused to go quietly. And he tried to hit me and broke that pane of glass with his fist.”

“Aye. Drunk and disorderly, eh?” And then to the crowd, “Pass along, please, pass along!”

A booing broke out.

“Tak’ a man’s money and then throw him out!” shouted a voice.

The potman said “Chut!” and passed into the bar. The half-door with the words *Wines and* on its frosted glass panel swung against one on the glass of which all that remained of *Spirits* was the capital *S*. Through the hole Neil saw only tobacco-smoke, a blue haze, and heard the clamour of thick and terrifying voices. Despite all the bright lights, the canvas stockings full of chocolates and sweeties and with tinsel on them, the holly in pigs’ mouths,

and the paper-streamers round chandeliers, there was something alarming and dangerous in the air.

He dodged round the crowd and with a glance east and west to make sure no tram-car or lorry was rushing along the street, crossed it and (perhaps in a youthful desire to escape from reality) passed into the comparative dusk and peace of Broomieknowe Street.

It was a street of tenements, and of warehouses, and in the arched entry of one, its closed gate being not flush with the pavement but set in a little way, two women stood, one on either side. They were wrapped in shawls. One looked up the street, one down. Neil slowed in his walk, curious as to what they were doing. It was as if they were playing some very serious form of *I-spy*. He dallied, watching them, and then he saw, behind one of them, another, taller, better dressed, and a man standing close to her peering into her face which she held up rigidly.

Neil turned, staring at the odd tableau, and walked on backwards.

“Get to hell out of here,” said one of the women so seriously playing *I-spy*.

His eyes opened wide, his eyebrows arched at that uncouth order. But he hurried on. Curiosity, however, halted him again half-way to the corner and turning about once more he again walked backward slowly, wondering what it was all about—and so bumped into someone. Turning, he looked up and saw a big policeman.

“Can’t you walk face first?” asked the policeman. “What do you walk that way for?”

“I was looking—looking at those people.”

“What people?”

“In the arch there.”

“Arch?” and the policeman stood close to the wall so that he could look along it against the light of the main street. “Um!” he muttered. “What are they like?”

“Two women looking two ways and a man and a woman behind them. I think he is frightening the lady.”

“Oh, ye do, do ye?” and the policeman strolled up the street.

Neil stood still. The policeman paced casually along and then suddenly the two women came from the shadow. The tall one followed and the man

also. The policeman strolled on. They were—all five figures—in silhouette for the boy. Then the two in shawls moved off in a scurrying walk. By the way they departed it seemed that they feared that at any moment they might be called back by the policeman. But no. He walked on beyond the man and the woman, then again halted. There he remained stationary but Neil could see his head turn, watching them. And they too arrived at some decision and walking rapidly at a tangent across the street turned the corner, the policeman strolling on to the end of the pavement on his side and there pausing again, gigantic in the yellow haze of lights in the Clydeside Road, to look after them.

At that Neil fled on, suddenly realising that time was passing while he observed the sights of his part of the city—sights both explicable and mysterious.

He was now in the street parallel with Clydeside Road. Along it he sped for a block. That brought him to Robert Bruce Street. After one leaves the ironically titled Heather and Broomieknowe Streets one comes to thoroughfares named not for what once flourished in these parts but for national heroes. He passed down Robert Bruce Street, towards the river, and was then in Campbeltown Dock Street which had its own radiance, not as bright by any means as that of Clydeside Road, but less shadowy than the tributary streets. He could see, across it, steps down to one of the ferries—see the river, or at least what he knew was the river, a darkness in which gold flakes of reflected light wriggled creepily.

Over the way at the wharf-end he saw yet another policeman. Perhaps, after all, it was as well there were policeman. They might sometimes take the wrong side and arrest a rivetter instead of the potman who had rough-handled him, but no doubt not as a regular procedure! He stood there like a tall pillar with helmet atop. There was a faint gleam of light on his waterproof cape. On the wall behind him, to be read in a spray of gaslight, was a big printed notice: “Commit No Nuisance.” Only the affair of the potman and that accident of bumping backwards into the second policeman in Broomieknowe Street made Neil observe, more than casually, this other one by the wharf-end.

A shed gable, a dim lamp illuminating a civic warning, a gurgling blackness with reflections drowning and coming to the surface in it, a policeman rigid as in a wax-works with a gleam of light from a street lamp on his heavy waterproof cape, a flickering in air of tiny snow-flakes that sometimes seemed to be white, as snow should be, and sometimes almost black like soot as they came down out of the upper darkness to the tricks of

the street-lights on them, and as soon as they touched the black pavement ceased to be: the picture went into his mind, into his consciousness and sank away, no doubt, into the subconscious as he dashed on to buy his Christmas present for his mother.

He passed a knot of sailors in blue jerseys standing by the first lamp-post over their deep reflections on the wet paving-stones. They were talking Gaelic and smoking little clay pipes. He passed on to where, across the pavement, there lay a slab of wan gold from the window in which he had seen his gift.

Yes, there it was still. It had not been sold. On either side, within the window, were long-stemmed clay pipes with varnished mouthpieces. Little trays of shag were there and coils of thick and of thin black-twist, boxes of cigars with pictures of Spanish women on them or views of Havana, and tobacco-jars with handles to their lids of little sailors dancing hornpipes. Back of that display, and serving as a screen to the shop, were several rows of books affixed by metal clips (well he knew that window) to wires stretched from side to side—paper-bound books, some penny ones, some twopenny ones, some threepenny ones, and some sixpenny ones.

It was a book he was going to buy for his mother, for Christmas, one that he thought she would yearn to read the moment she saw the cover. On it was presented a white-cloaked decapitated horseman riding at a gallop straight out of the picture holding the reins in one hand and his head in the other. *The Headless Horseman of the Pampas*. The name was splashed in bright scarlet across the night-sky behind the rider.

So much did he like what his mother liked that, to judge by the fascination over him of that book, she would be utterly enthralled by it.

A very pleasant though somewhat frowsy man was in the shop. He was smoking one of the long clay pipes, his arm holding it out-thrust full length, fingers curved to the bowl. On a divan facing the counter two sailors (blue jerseys showing under their jackets) sat talking, and smoking normal pipes.

“Well, young man, what can I do for you?” asked the pleasant but unkempt shopkeeper.

“If you please I want *The Headless Horseman of the Pampas*.”

“Oh, yes. Which is it from which end?”

Neil did not have to go out to count. He had but to visualise. Often, passing, had he looked at it fascinated—as he knew his mother would be on opening the packet and seeing it.

“It’s in the bottom row and fifth from that end,” he said.

The man of the church-warden pipe took it from its place on the wire and laid it on the counter.

“There you are, sonny. That will be sixpence to you.”

“Yes, that’s it,” said Neil, but did not lift it, just looked from it up into the man’s face. He laid down his sixpence, but still stood at gaze.

“You want me to wrap it up for you, do ye, eh? Put it in an envelope, eh?”

“Yes, please, sir. It’s for a Christmas present.”

“For your big brother?”

“No, sir. I have no big brother.”

“For your dad, then. Well, we’ll put a piece of gold twine round it—Christmas and New Year twine.”

“Thank you, sir. It’s for my mother.”

At that the tousled shopkeeper grinned broadly and the two on the divan chuckled.

Neil wondered why they were amused.

CHAPTER XI

A MERRY CHRISTMAS

Mrs. Barrie put down at Mr. Stewart's door his polished boots and his jug of hot water, and as she did so she heard him yawning, *Ho-hi-ho*. Then she knocked.

"Thank you. Merry Christmas," he called.

"Thank you. The same to you."

She knocked at Mr. Amara's door.

"A merry Christmas to you, Mrs. Barry," he called.

"The same to you, Mr. Amara—and many of them," she responded. And thought she, "He must be studying the customs of the land very keenly. He said that just like a little boy repeating a memorised lesson."

As for her boy—when it was time to waken him and she entered the sitting-room, he called from the box-bed, "Merry Christmas, mummy!" and when she went laughing to the door of the recess, there he lay wide awake, and—"Got you first! Got you first!" he chanted.

"Yes, you got ahead of me."

"I've been awake a long time waiting to get you first," he told her. "When do we open the Christmas presents?"

"As soon as you are up," she said. "And in the evening we'll pull two crackers I've got and see what's in them. It will be a wonderful day—all day!"

A very big parcel had arrived on Christmas eve, not delivered by post but by a vanman with the name of one of the big and opulent shops—the vans of which were seldom seen in these parts of the city—in brass-letters on his cap; and that parcel was addressed to "Master Neil Barry." By the last post there had come a parcel for Mrs. Barry, on it the tasteful label of another flourishing city shop—a scented emporium in which easily might one buy what he (or she) had no need of because of its design or its colour-scheme or its lustre. The postman did not often see its labels on parcels he delivered in Heather Street. Mrs. Barry thought that Emma Kinnaird must be the sender.

As soon as breakfast was over these parcels were opened. The big one contained a locomotive, two goods-trucks, two passenger coaches, and sections of railway lines that jointed together; and pasted on the underside of the lid of the box were full directions. On a card inside was written, "From George Stewart to wish Neil a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year." When the intense excitement occasioned by that gift had simmered down in Neil——

"Now open yours," he said.

"The one you bought for me?"

"Oh, no. Keep it till last. Open that other parcel."

The wrapping-paper removed, there was disclosed a cardboard box of such happy blending of colours and shades that it might, of itself, have been the present. Inside was a sealskin purse-bag with a card hanging from its clasp, "Mrs. Barry, to wish her a Happy Christmas, from George Stewart." She opened it and there was an envelope on which was written, "First prize for making heavenly omelets," and in the envelope she found a pound-note.

"My turn now!" chanted Neil.

He opened a big envelope, the one he had seen on the kitchen dresser—and then not seen—on which was just his name, printed, *Neil*. It contained two pictures, views on the Clyde, and under each was the advice, "Hold to the fire and see the sun set."

"That's my little gift to you," said Mrs. Barry. "We'll keep them till evening, shall we, and hold to the fire then?"

"Yes, that will be fun. We'll see the sun set then. But how can the sun set by holding them to the fire?"

"Well, we'll see."

"Now your turn, mummy."

She undid the gold twine. She opened the envelope. She took out the book and gazed at the cloaked and galloping rider with his severed head in one hand and the reins in the other. She read, *The Headless Horseman of the Pampas*, and then her gaze lifted and met Neil's. For a moment, at the expression in hers, his look of expectancy, as he waited for evidence of her intense enthralment, turned to one of disappointment. Didn't she like it? Then she smiled.

"Neil, that's very sweet of you," she said.

“I knew you’d like it! You didn’t expect anything like that, did you?”

“No, nothing like it!” she declared. “I’m sure it will be fascinating.”

“Oh, very! I’m sure it will,” he agreed, “by the picture on the lid.”

“Cover.”

“Yes, cover.”

But great though the happiness over the Christmas parcels at morning, and over fitting together the railway lines into a great circle on the sitting-room floor, and winding up the clockwork engine—and discovering two semaphores under clips at the side of the box—it was at night that the full happiness came.

Mr. Amara was out to dinner; Mr. Stewart, who had been gratefully thanked for his gifts, was also out. They had the house to themselves. Dinner was being kept secret from Neil. No high-tea that night; no boiled eggs with jam to follow that night; no bowl of pease-brose. He was not to come into the kitchen but to wait in the dining-room till the surprise was all ready. That period of waiting was not arduous for him with the clockwork locomotive and the rails for it to run on—and *The Headless Horseman of the Pampas*. The book being his gift to his mother it was for her to read first but, seeing she had left it on the table, he dipped into it and was soon far from Heather Street among bolas-throwing gauchos and jaguars. When she came in to lay the table he returned to Heather Street with a start.

“I’m sure you’ll be delighted with this present I’ve given you,” he said, and put it on the sideboard and returned to his goods-train which he had left on a siding that he had discovered, reading the Full Directions, he could make with the railway-track.

There was for Christmas dinner—late dinner—cock-a-leekie; and after that there was a small shoulder of mutton with onion-sauce and potatoes cooked and served in an unusual way, all creamy. Then came the big surprise: A little plum-pudding—with a sprig of holly in it. Yes, thought Neil, it was a wonderful time, with holly in the mouths of pigs suspended in butchers’ doorways and holly stuck in the pudding!

Then they pulled the two crackers, with joy in the loud reports of them. In the first was a wooden whistle and a paper cap, in the next a “motto” and a paper cap. The motto read, “You have a nature that makes you find happiness everywhere.” They exchanged caps to decide who should wear which; but even then the rare felicity of Christmas Day was not over. Along with the two crackers Mrs. Barry had bought something else. She turned the

gas low, and produced four little pieces of wire with thick ends. At the peep of gas she lit one of these. It smouldered; it blazed; it gave off a shower of small silver stars.

“Take one and light it from mine, son,” she told him. And, “Oh-ho-ho!” he cried out in joy; and Mrs. Barry ejaculated, “Isn’t it wonderful, Neil?” and he was not enough of a student of expression to see that she feigned delight, to realise that she was marvelling how anyone had joy in buying these little things and seeing the sparks fly—and also that it was a waste of money, and inane, and that she was old!

“Light another before it burns out!” she said gaily.

“Oh, yes. We must be quick. This one is nearly out!”

He lit another and held it to her that she might ignite the last from his.

“The sparks don’t hurt,” she remarked. “You can hold them close to your hand. Try.”

He tried.

“Oho!” he pealed. “Just a little sort of a nip they give when they touch, that’s all. Oh, it’s going out.”

She rose and turned up the gas again. The odour of magnesium seeped away.

“I think they are just grand,” he said, his eyes bright, thinking of these sparks that turned to little stars.

Even then all was not over. There were the two views to be held to the fire so as to see the sun set upon them.

“After the sun has set will we be able to make it day again?” he asked. “If we put them away from the fire will they turn to day-pictures again?”

“I hardly think so,” said Mrs. Barry. “That is too much to hope for.”

“Well, let’s try one anyhow,” said Neil, and he went down on a knee before the fire, holding the picture out to toast.

Looking up at his mother to make sure that she was sharing his pleasant anxiety and the sense of experimenting—yes, almost of adventurousness—in it all, he found that she was not watching. Indeed no, she was not. She was watching other Christmasses away over his head, away through the wall, away across the years, and having also a moment’s reprieve from the

urging of the note of gaiety. But with the turning up of his head she looked down.

“How does it go?” she asked. “Look at it.”

He took it from before the fire.

“Look, look,” she said, “the sky has all turned red with sunset!”

“So it has, so it has! It’s evening. It’s evening now, mummy, in the picture. I’ll hold it a little longer and see if it goes to night. It doesn’t say on it that if one holds it a long time the stars will come out.”

“No, you can only make sunset, I think.”

“Let’s see if we can make it night,” he said, and he held it close to the fire again. “Wow! It’s hot!” He had to clutch first with one hand, then with the other. “Wow!” He took up the tongs and with them held the picture, standing to one side of the hearth. He held it before the glow too long. Suddenly it gave forth a slight smoke as of toast about to burn. He drew it back to examine it and in doing so knocked it against the fender. It had become brittle, charred, and by that impact was shattered.

“Never mind, there’s the other one,” said his mother.

He had an inspiration.

“I know!” he exclaimed.

“Yes?”

“Let’s keep it to do when we’re seeing the New Year in.”

“Splendid! And now I think it must be about time for a little boy I know to go to bed.”

“We sit up till midnight, don’t we?” he asked.

“No, no, dear. We only do that on Hogmanay, the last night of the year, to see the New Year in, but not on Christmas night.”

“Oh, yes! I remember.” And then, raising his head, he listened. “How quiet it is,” he said.

“It is quiet,” said Mrs. Barry.

Then they heard, in that quiet, a gentle ruffling sound at the window, heard it simultaneously, and crossing the room drew the curtains aside.

The street outside was all white. The footsteps of those who passed by were muffled. Flakes flickered at the window like moths. They stood there a

little while, watching.

He pressed his nose against the pane till his breath made a blur there, happy in the snowfall of that night; and his mother stood beside him, remembering, if not the first snowfall she had seen, the one farthest back in her memory and her young delight in how the flakes lightened and darkened, and how on the lawn at first it was like hoar-frost and then, deep, when the sun came out, like starch with blue in its whiteness.

“Well, I think it is time for you to go to bed,” she said—and Neil agreed.

He was just dozing off when singing awoke him, beautiful singing such as he had never heard before in his life. It was outside. It was in Heather Street. It was drawing nearer, creating ecstasy, as the cry of *Caller Ooo* had drawn nearer, inflicting terror.

Then he heard his mother at the door, and her voice, “Are you awake, son?”

“Yes, mummy. Do you hear the singing and music?”

“Yes. I came to see if you heard it.”

“What is it? May I get up and look out?”

“Yes. Let’s go to the window. Can you see your way?”

“Yes. Here I am.”

They groped to the window and looked out.

A group of shrouded figures, heavily coated, and powdered with the snow, passed slowly down the street, passed strangely too as though not belonging to this world, with one man in advance as though leading them—leading not their voices but their steps. The instruments that accompanied the singing were played very softly that the voices might not be drowned out; and the voices harmonised magically. They were not at all like those of the poor people who dismally sang *Where is my wandering boy to-night?* and *Loch Lomond*, showing the whites of their eyes as they watched the windows. Exquisitely these voices rose, and with clear enunciation:

“O come, all ye faithful,
Joyfully triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem . . .”

Slowly they passed and yet too quickly. Beautifully the voices ebbed away:

“O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him . . .”

“Well, they’ve gone. You’d better go back to bed,” said Mrs. Barry, and left him.

That music they had heard was the waking thought of both in the morning.

“Wasn’t that awful’ nice last night, mummy, that singing?” said Neil.

“Yes, it was, dear.”

“What was it? Who were they? They did not look up for us to throw money down. If we had they might not have got it—in the snow.”

“They were the waits,” she said.

“What are the waits?”

“It’s another name for carol-singers,” she said. “A carol is a song, or a hymn, about Christ. Yesterday was the anniversary of His birth, or held as the anniversary, you see. That’s why they were singing.”

“Oh, yes, quite,” he said, but with a baffled look in his eyes as though he did not grasp the explanation. There were times when he asked a question and it seemed enough that she answered, enough that there was an answer to give. That there was an explanation sufficed even if it was beyond his comprehension. His mind strayed.

“Perhaps they will call for some money to-day,” he suggested.

But no. When Mrs. Barry looked through the morning paper she had the explanation. They were the choir of an Asylum for the Blind. They were carol-singing not even for contributions to the Asylum but just in evidence of appreciation of the kindness of these charitable people who during the year had given donations to their home.

All that day the memory of the waits, these muffled figures passing almost ghostly, as from another world, in the snow that muted all foot-falls, was in Mrs. Barry’s mind—and in Neil’s too. The flute-notes were still in their ears. It seemed that, holding breath, could still be heard the harmonising voices lingering on the air:

"O come, let us a—dore Him, Christ the Lord"

This musical score is written for a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (bass clef). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are: "O come, let us a—dore Him, Christ the Lord". The melody features a mix of quarter, eighth, and half notes, with a long note on "a—dore" and a half note on "Him". The piano accompaniment consists of chords and moving lines in the left hand.

CHAPTER XII

AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

Although in these parts it is the ending of the old year, the dawn of the new, that is celebrated rather than the anniversary of the Nativity, it seemed that anything that might follow during the Christmas holidays would be in the nature of anti-climax.

Not but what there were sights to see. Out on an errand for his mother, Neil saw, for example, a very old and grey woman clawing the face of a policeman who was trying hard to conduct her to the cells without hurting her. Another hurried to his aid. The woman, thought Neil, must have been bitten by a mad dog. She swore and screamed and tore. The faces of the constables were lacerated by her claws. The boy backed away, horrified. No great crowd gathered, many who passed just glancing and hurrying on instead of stopping. This was a different matter from a fight between a potman and a "drouth."

Suddenly a third policeman came smartly along the street, pushing before him a barrow over which was a tarpaulin hood. He halted beside these two, and the screeching old lady was adroitly tackled, thrust on to the barrow under the hoops that upheld the hood, and strapped down. The cover was then drawn down where, in the scrimmage, it had been thrust up, to hide her shame; and away went the policeman who had come with the ambulance, one of those who had been wrestling with the beldame quick-stepping beside him. From under the discreet tarpaulin came a yell: "I'll tear the eyes out of yez yet!"

"Is she mad?" Neil asked of a boy standing nearby, whose glance he encountered after they had watched that departure to the lock-up.

"Mad? Oh-ho! Yes, mad drunk. That's old Granny Malone drunk again."

Little Neil turned away.

On the way back he met Tommy Nairn who asked him to come for a walk down Clydeside Road next day, Hogmanay, "to see the drunks getting chucked out." And on reporting to his mother this kind invitation she said:

"Wouldn't you rather spend Hogmanay at home? There's that other picture, you know, that you were keeping to see the sun set on it."

"Oh, yes, so there is. And I've often seen gentlemen being chucked out. It's nothing new to me."

“Quite,” she replied, gently.

Neil was very happy at home with the locomotive, the goods train, the passenger train, the rails—and the *Headless Horseman*. There are ecstasies of the recluse that those who would have him come out to join the communal relief from their tedium wot not of. They may even have their headless horsemen, and their clockwork train, yet not find in either half as much fun as in watching an ejected “drunk” hit the pavement, and so be amazed at his preference.

Neil was far in the Gran Chaco when Mrs. Barry answered a knock at the door, a knock so demure, that it could not reach to Argentina. It was Nellie MacNaughton who came, bearer of an invitation.

“If you please, mother says would you let Neil come to my Hogmanay party?”

Mrs. Barry looked at the oddly old-young face and recalling a certain revelation of Neil regarding the girl and her reason for disliking Tommy Nairn, she said:

“Will you thank your mother and say I think it very kind of her, but unfortunately we’ve got our Hogmanay all planned already.”

“All planned already!”

“Yes.”

“I’ll tell her that. I’m awfu’ sorry. It’s a pity we didn’t think sooner of having a Hogmanay party.”

“Yes. Too bad. I hope you have a very happy time. You’ll thank your mother and explain, won’t you?”

“Yes,” and the little old-young face was lit with a smile.

Mrs. Barry did not mention the invitation to Neil. And perhaps, she thought afterwards, she was making a mistake; perhaps she was coddling him; perhaps she should have accepted, and let him go. It was difficult to decide just how to bring up the young.

Next afternoon, as she had vetoed the party, she let him go out, the moment he asked permission, to join a group of the young of Heather Street who were snowballing there, boys and girls together. There was a lot of pelting of party against party till one of the boys, becoming angry, found a stone and putting it in the midst of two handfuls of snow crushed a tight ball and let fly with it at another, taking him full centre on the forehead. The one

who was struck lurched dizzily into a close opposite, followed by a perturbed group, and the other ran helter-skelter home.

Mrs. Barry, who had come to the window and saw all that, thought it was time to call Neil indoors. But no, she would wait. The group, Neil among them, that had followed the hurt boy into the close came out again and he after them, rubbing the last of the pain from his forehead, it seemed. They were evidently going to play again. They clustered together, animated, with a criss-crossing of suggestions. “Oh, let’s play Release.”—“Oh, let’s ha’e slides.”

And then came Tommy Nairn with a handful of snow, tiptoed behind Nellie MacNaughton, and suddenly grabbing hold of her thrust it down the back of her dress. She screamed and wheeled and, “Aw, ye mean thing!” she shouted, then gave a roll of her old-young eyes and turned about before him. Evidently he had to remove the snow for her. He did so, brushing a hand over her neck, reaching down inside her dress and drying her with his handkerchief, the other young people looking this way and that like pups wondering where an old shoe or a sock might be found. “A slide! A slide!” one called out. “A slide! A slide!” the others chorused. And soon they were all sliding on the pavement across the way. Two slides they made, almost parallel. They charged wildly at one and away they went, balancing along it, danced off it, wheeled and rushed over to the other.

“Here’s the polis—the polis!”

A policeman came slowly up the street, paused beside the slides, put a hand in pocket and drawing out a bag strewed salt on them, the children, in doubtful groups, watching him at safe distance. It was the last day of the year so he did not say anything to them. He but strewed his salt, gloomed professionally at them, strolled slowly on and at the corner looked back to be sure that they were not brushing the salt off before it could take effect. But the icy glitter of the slides quickly changed to a dark smear of mere dampness.

Disjaskit, forfoughten, these are the Scots words to describe how the children looked then. They had been playing long, and there had been a discord amidst their play, and now their slides were spoiled and the late afternoon was *snell*. Neil glanced up at the window. His mother nodded and beckoned and he ran across the street. Soon it would be supper-time.

“Did you enjoy yourself?” she asked.

“Immensely! You know, there’s quite a trick in sliding. You’ve to keep yourself from turning round on the slide, or you can learn how to turn round like a top and yet keep on going. Sometimes when you go off the slide you nearly fall and you have to keep on running a long way—oh, quite a long way—before you can stop.” And then came a word heard from elders. “It has been most ex-exhil-arating.”

He had indeed been most exhilarated. Mrs. Barry noticed that the ruddiness of play was beginning to give place to the pallor of tiredness and had the private opinion that with all his open-air diversion of that afternoon he would be sleepy soon after the evening meal and ready for bed rather than to see the New Year in.

But after a wash he was all agog for that. At dinner—once again, as on Christmas eve, the evening meal was no mere high tea—there were mince-pies in place of plum-pudding with holly in it. And after dinner there was the remaining magic picture to hold to the fire.

“Let’s make it a slow sunset,” he suggested, and so it was toasted for a few moments at a time, and when the redness of the sky began at last to turn to darkness, warned by his earlier experience, he decided to desist.

“I think we’d better keep it like that,” he said, “just the sunset the way it is now—for always. You see, if we went on there wouldn’t be any stars. We know that now. We have had our lesson. And there wouldn’t even be a night picture. There would just be nothing.”

He looked round the room for a place to put the view, toasted from day to sunset.

“Well, we’ll put it up on the mantelpiece like that,” said he, and then, “If you are not going to read your present to yourself, mummy, would you like me to read a bit of it aloud for you for Hogmanay?”

“Just read to yourself for a spell,” said she, “while I wash the dishes.”

When she came back he was fast asleep in the big chair to one side of the fire, the *Headless Horseman* on his knee. It was snowing again, wet snow. Against the window it patted softly and the voices of people in the street were muted, their steps hushed. A burst of song came, with a sudden impact, from a group of young men parading in Clydeside Road and crossing the end of Heather Street—

“. . . be forgot
And never brought to mind,
Should auld acquaint . . .”

She subsided quietly in the other easy-chair and sat there, gazing in the fire, resting. Her hands in her lap anon relaxed, turned palm upwards and opened, empty hands as if waiting to be filled. Her head fell backwards and sideways.

It was singing in their own street that woke her with a start. She came erect, and—

“Oh!” she gasped.

She must have been taking that nap in a twisted position. What a stab that was in her side! But the singing did not waken Neil, and it was assuredly not the sort of singing that she would arouse him to hear. It was not the blind waits again, with music as of the choir invisible, who were in Heather Street. There arose a wailing, very flat, melancholy drawlings. That kind of singing, if singing it could be called, gave her a *grue*. It gave her also a horror of crowds, of mass movement, mass emotion. It gave her also thankfulness for a home with a closed door and drawn curtains.

There came a sound in the hall. It was of Mr. Stewart's door opening. Did he want something? No. After a pause she heard the bathroom door close gently. He was evidently getting ready for bed. To see the new year in—to sit up till after twelve that night—perhaps meant nothing special to him, had lost its charm. The bathroom door clicked again; a pause, and then his door-handle clicked. A quiet man. Mr. Amara was at the Siamese consul's to a Hogmanay dinner and dance. He would not be home till early morning and had his duplicate key with which to let himself in.

She looked up at the clock. Eleven! She stooped to the coal-scuttle and put on more coals, stealthily—that Neil might sleep on—a lump at a time; and again, rising from that, she had the stab in her back. She must really get a bottle of Smythe's Embrocation. That would take but a little out of Mr. Stewart's pound-note. Two shillings for a large bottle, she thought it was—for sprains, chaps, chilblains, stiff joints, rheumatic pains, pain in the lumbar region, sore throats (either applied externally or used diluted as a gargle), and can be taken internally in small doses for coughs and colds: she knew the bottle well. Sometimes the chemist's window at the corner was full of nothing else—apart from his tall carboys with coloured liquids in them, green and red, a gas-flare behind each. There was a *double strength*, in a very large bottle, *for veterinary purposes*.

There, she was in a comfortable position again, and the warmth of the fire was delightfully over her. Out in the street were inexplicable shufflings

and grunts, and then, “Come on, come on!” In reply to that there was a thick laugh and a protestation:

“I’m all right. There’s nothing the matter with me.”

“Come on!”

“I canna come on.”

“Ye said ye were all right.”

“Well, I am but I canna come on.”

There was a sudden outburst of sobbing, not the sobbing of a child—a man’s sobbing. She rose and went to the window and shielding her eyes from the light within peered down. One man sat on the kerb-edge, his head in his hands, weeping, his shoulders heaving, and over him lurched two others. They discussed him together in high voices.

“He’s—he’s——” a fit of coughing interrupted. “They cigars get my throat. I’m no’ accustomed to cigars. I swallowed the smoke the wrong way. He’s the worse of liquor!”

The other laughed at that.

“Yes. He’s intosticated. Good word, that.”

They bobbed against each other, laughing over the good word. They were having a very merry time.

“Get up and come on!” shouted one of them again.

“I canna. I’m that sad,” and the man on the kerb again burst into tears.

“I know what he is—he’s greetin’ fou. Was you ever greetin’ fou?” and the man who spoke bumped against his balancing friend and for a moment they were as two swaying skittles, their fate, a return to the perpendicular or a fall, uncertain. But each solicitously upheld the other.

“No, no. I dinna greet, and I dinna fecht. I sing. Let us shing. Perhaps it would cheer him up. He says he is sad.”

They began to wail charitably in forlorn voices. The one on the kerb rose, lurching to his feet. The songsters bobbed apart and, by some beautiful accident of their divagations, as they drew together again found the melancholy one between them. One took his left and one his right arm and away they went with wavering legs under the lamp. The singing and the weeping passed up the street.

The boy slept on, tranquil, through it all, and the clock on the mantelpiece told a quarter to twelve. Mrs. Barry lay back in her chair again.

So another year was drawing to a close. She looked at her hands. She turned her wedding-ring about and about on its finger. Still turning it round she let her mind go where it would—in and out of rooms of other houses, along roads, through woods and over moors, along sea-shores. She was in the swing at Wester Kyle, swinging high for a glimpse of the sea, dipping down again, the ribbons of flowerbeds rushing past, and up again—when the bell of the parish church began to ring.

Neil stirred and woke.

“Oh!” he said and grinned at her affably. “I’ve been asleep.”

Soon the bell was ringing vigorously. Another one boomed in. They were not using just the one—they were sounding a carillon.

Yo-ho, ho-ho,
Yo-ho, ho-ho!

went the bells; and beyond them they could hear others, joining in with their Yo-ho, ho-ho! Mrs. Barry wondered why she was suddenly on the point of crying. She was getting to be easily affected by this and that that used not to affect her so. Things that once made her happy now made her pensive.

The jubilation of the bells increased in volume. There came a time when it seemed one heard not bells but a whirling roar of solemn sound. The clappers were striking in definite beats but the wash of the sound-waves swept round and round the belfry. All the other bells of the city were ringing and the sound whirled, to her imagination, round the edges of the night.

Neil listened entranced to that concatenated uproar of iron. His mother rose and opened the window a little way and the din invaded the room. Neil leapt to his feet in an ecstasy. But the damp air rushed in so she closed the window. The clamour no longer possessed the room, making the air quake. Among the yo-hoing of the bells came another sound. Locomotive whistles were blowing. All up and down Clyde steamer sirens were blowing. There were shrill ones; there were some that rose from a melancholy low tone to a ponderous austere zoom and faded away in melancholy as they began. There were others that were screams of steam. They ceased. Then one or two began again, giving five notes only.

“A—hap-py—New—Year,” Mrs. Barry counted and spoke.

“A happy new year, mummy! Oh, isn’t it grand!”

Out in the street silence had fallen, a comfortable silence. The final feeble taps of the bells ceased. Far off in Clydeside Road was the last of huzzaing and snatches of, “Should auld acquaintance be forgot . . .” It had been wonderful, wonderful seeing the new year in.

Mr. Stewart’s voice came to them: “You are sitting up, are you?”

She hurried to the sitting-room door.

“Yes. Is there anything you want?” she asked.

“No, no. Just to wish you a happy new year,” he said. “I’m your first foot so I’m not empty-handed.”

He entered the room, one arm behind his back. He shook hands with her; he shook hands with Neil (“The same to you, and many of them!”); and then he brought the hidden hand to the front.

“Just not to be empty-handed,” he said, and set upon the table a winter cherry-tree in a pot. “Good-night! Good-night and good-morning.”

CHAPTER XIII

THE MONKEY-WRENCH

There was great excitement on the staircase landing in the morning, Mrs. Murdoch and Mrs. Brand standing there together, in a condition of strange blend of elation and misery, to wish her a happy new year and give her the morning paper.

“See this in the paper,” said Mrs. Murdoch. “there has been a train-accident, and a young man was killed. He was going home from Glasgow to Beattock to spend Hogmanay wi’ his folks and there was a train-accident due to the heavy fall of snow that the paper says sheeted up the Borders frae Tinto tae Tweedside. Aye, that’s what it says—sheeted up the Borders. It was a collusion. His name is Elliott, John Elliott, the poor young man. He was going hame to see the new year in wi’ his folks. But do ye mind the gentleman that was with Mrs. Brand syne?”

Mrs. Brand took up the tale.

“It wasn’t the gentleman that was with me that was called John Elliott,” she said. “My gentleman was a young man called Mr. Napier. But the point is that there used to be a young man called John Elliott used to come in whiles and have tea with my young man on a Sunday. The paper says that this John Elliott was in the soft-goods business and so was my gentleman, Mr. Napier.”

“She’s written to find out for certain if the young man that used to call and have tea whiles wi’ her Mr. Napier was the one killed in the accident,” said Mrs. Murdoch, shaking her head. “Would ye let wee Neil run oot with the letter and it will get an early post and we’ll ken for certain a’ the sooner?”

“Neil!” called Mrs. Barry.

“Yes, mummy?”

“Put on your cap and coat like a good boy and run down to the pillar-box with this letter, please.”

As he went skipping downstairs—

“Ah, weel,” said Mrs. Murdoch to Mrs. Brand, “that’s that. The letter’s awa and ye’ll ken for certain by the morn’s morning maybe. He’ll have it to-night at his new ludgings and he maybe will post it when he’s oot for his

stroll before going to bed. I mind he used to tak' a dander before going to bed when he was with you."

Mrs. Brand passed lugubriously upstairs, like a corpse that has *walked* returning to its sepulchre; and Mrs. Murdoch, with a buoyant motion, bobbed into the dimness of her own hallway.

That was the morning's to-do. This was the evening's:

Just after lights had been lit Mrs. Barry heard a long, low whistle from Mr. Amara's room that made her raise her head. It came again. What could it mean? Had something happened to him to prevent him from ringing his bell? Was there some queer accident in her flat?

She went to his door and knocked. Only the long, low whistle replied. She knocked again and entered. The room was in darkness and Mr. Amara was standing over by the window, dimly revealed in the glow from the street-lights, but hiding himself from the street with the curtain. The window was open. He was in a condition of giggling private glee.

"Oh, Mrs. Barry, I was not whistling for you. It is some fun I am having."

Mrs. Barry looked astonished.

"I have made discovery. In a house across the street, down there on the ground floor, there is a young lady whose father objects to her beau. I have watched the affair often for fun. It was the whistle that made me be curious. They have Venetian blinds. When the girl's father is out at night, and the young man comes and whistles—so, as I whistle now," and he whistled again, "the young lady lifts one slat of the blind in that room for a sign to him that her papa is out, and he goes in. When her papa is in she raises a slat of the blind in that other room. Ah, there! She has raised the slat in the window nearest the entry. See, Mrs. Barry. Papa is out. But no young man comes! She will think perhaps her sweetheart thinks of her and sends a whistle by psychic method. You know. You have read of telepathy, Mrs. Barry?"

"Have you ever whistled like that before?"

"Yes. More than one time. Frequently I have played the fool on them. I should not be at all amazed if they change the code and he makes a new whistle. I think they must by now have smelt a rat. Poor girl, oh, poor girl, did I pretend your lover had come? Well, that is enough amusement for just now. I shall close my window."

Mrs. Barry left him—with his light turned up again, giggling in his chair—and went back to the kitchen.

Rat-a-tat came at the front door. It was Mr. Stewart. He walked in slowly, opened his door, and there stood still a moment. Then—

“I have news for you,” he said. “I don’t like to give it. The old tub will be sailing by the end of next week. Yes, two weeks come Saturday we’ll be dropping Pladda. No more of your blessed omelets, Mrs. Barry.”

He walked into his room as he spoke and turned up the gas. For once did Mrs. Barry stand in his doorway, her fingers fumbling the handle; for once did she stand and talk.

“I’m sorry,” she said. Her gaze fell on his wash-hand stand. “I’m awfully sorry. We shall miss you.”

“I shall miss the house, the flat, the stairs—coming upstairs. But it’s the life. That’s the way of it.”

“One thing I regret is——” and she stopped.

“What, Mrs. Barry?”

“That I’ve not been able to get you a bigger wash-stand.”

“God bless me! That one is all right. I’ve had many a time at sea to make my ablutions in a saucer!”

“But I did want to get a really big one for you, because of the difficulty of arranging about the bathroom with two people getting up at the same time. I’ve seen one that would have been just the thing, in a furniture shop in Clydeside Road, and looked at it for weeks.”

“Well, I’m glad you did not get it—spending your substance on my riotous washing. Ab-surd! Absurd, my dear lady. You can’t blow the profits that way.”

Suddenly she realised that she stood in the doorway, fidgiting with the handle, the very picture of the loquacious landlady who bores the lodger.

“Well, I’m very sorry you have to go,” she said, and left him.

Mrs. Brand’s letter to her ex-lodger had reply, not by the first but by the last post next day. Her anxious question was answered. The young man called John Elliott who had been killed in the train-accident was the same John Elliott who had frequently been up and down these stairs to visit her young man. There was the letter to read and reread:

“I’m very sorry to tell you that the Mr. Elliott you ask about was my old friend. Writing at this season I hope you will accept the enclosed” (the enclosed was a postal-order for ten shillings) “to buy something for yourself for a new year gift. You will know better than I what to get with it.”

She brought the letter for Mrs. Murdoch to read and for Mrs. Barry to read, and——

“I’ll really have to write some day and thank him,” she said, “but I’m an awful poor correspondent. Ah, weel, anyway—that was the young man who was killed in the train-accident, going home to see his people. And to think he’s been up and doon these stairs and in my hoose!”

But what, after all, had the friend (killed in a railway-accident) of the one-time lodger of Mrs. Brand to do with Mrs. Barry? To herself she had to confess it—nothing. She read the letter of ratification of her neighbour’s surmise and said, “Well, well,” but she had no recollection of the ex-lodger or the ex-lodger’s friend. It meant more to her that she had not been able to afford that wash-hand stand for Mr. Stewart, double the size of the one he had and with an enormous pail inside it and a stopper in the basin that he could just pull out to let the water run through as though he had a water-system laid on in the room.

Two weeks were to pass before he had to go, but she could not bring herself to put the card *Lodgings To Let* in the sitting-room window. She may not have been able to take sad pleasure in the thought of having seen a young man who was to be killed in a train-accident, and have looked upon that emotion as worse than mock-sentiment, but to put the card in the window instanter would have seemed like speeding the parting guest. Mr. Stewart’s wish had been to give her as long notice as possible, so that perhaps the day after he went another would come into his vacant room. And “stuff and nonsense!” he’d have told her had she informed him of her dislike of putting the card in the window thus precipitately. Not till just a week before his sailing-day could she bring herself to put the card in the window.

On the eve of his departure, when he carried his roped box into the hall and left it standing there, saying, “Two of the boys from the boat will be coming up for this,” she felt sad indeed.

“Very good, Mr. Stewart,” she replied, in the driest of voices.

They came for the box about eight at night, two rollicking sailors. Down in the street they had a hand-truck that they had borrowed at the docks. The hall looked utterly empty when the roped trunk had gone. The clasp on it, the odd knots of the rope, lingered in her mind as she went about her morning's work. It was as well that some of his belongings had to go before him. If he had just come out of his room with all his things and departed—baggage and man together—the sudden emptiness would have been dreadful. She was aware of a little sick feeling under the left breast, a queasiness. It was as if she were going away, going to leave her familiar things, step for the last time out of the door and go down the stairs leaving the mahogany sideboard and chairs, the glittering sphere and the old Chinese vase (with its quaint private history) and the portraits of her grandfather and grandmother for others to look at. Her heart was sick with the knowledge of change, instability, a future unknown. "Here we have no continuing city but we seek one to come," entered her head, and "Change and decay in all around we see."

On the appointed Saturday, shortly after breakfast, his voice was in the hall: "Are you there, Mrs. Barry?"

There he was with his suit-case at his feet.

"So you are off," she said.

"Yes, sorry to say." He held out his hand. "Well," he said, and then, "Where's little Neil?"

At her call Neil appeared.

"Good-bye, little man," said Mr. Stewart.

"Good-bye, sir."

"You've got everything?" she asked.

"Yes, everything, I think."

He was on the landing; he was going downstairs, Neil and she following him and standing on the mat. At the turn, beside the window that showed the back-green and the rear of the tenements and warehouse beyond, he looked up, halted a moment, took off his hat and said:

"I'll never forget the blessed omelets! Good-bye."

His footsteps echoed with a hollow sound as he got down to the entry, and then the sound was gone.

They ran to the front room, the sitting-room, and Mrs. Barry raised the window. They both looked out. He was striding down the street, suit-case in hand—striding away to Australia. He did not look back. They watched him to the corner at the chemist's, saw him turn there and pass into the ribbon of traffic.

For a moment she had a feeling near kin with fear, passing back into the hall. It was as if she was somewhat of a helpless person and had again been left alone in the world. Mr. Amara—her *steady*—somehow did not give the sense of security that Mr. Stewart, though transient, one she had known from the first was but a transient, had given her. She would really have to make a cup of tea, though it was but ten of the morning.

“Would you like a glass of milk, Neil?” she asked, passing into the kitchen.

“Yes, please. I'm sorry he's gone. I think, all things considered, I'd like to be an engineer.”

A pigeon in one of the cotes outside the window began to voice the coo that, continuing, suggests that the bird has fallen into a trance: *Ooo-oh, ooo-oh, ooo-oh*, on and on.

Well, one must work. One cannot just sip tea. She took up her plate-basket and fell to work polishing the spoons and Neil, with a piece of cork and powdered bath-brick, polished the knives, she sitting at the table, he standing at the sink with the emery-board laid across it where he could have sight of his pigeons bowing out of their doors, waddling on the landing-board, preening themselves, shaking themselves, taking a sip of water, or but sitting with humped shoulders like men cowering into coats with upturned collars, their heads pressed close into their puffed iridescent breasts.

It was not till after lunch that Mrs. Barry went into Mr. Stewart's room and when she did so, looking round, she observed a monkey-wrench leaning against the fender in the grate beside the poker.

“Oh, Neil, Mr. Stewart has left something—he has left a wrench. You'll have to run down to the dock with it. You know the Sydney Dock?”

“Yes, I know.”

He was happy that Mr. Stewart had left something behind. It gave him an errand much to his heart. Were a policeman to challenge his right to intrude along the wharf, or a watchman ask him what he wanted, he had a passport in the wrench.

Banners were fluttering in the air over Glasgow that day, banners of smoke. The snow was gone from the streets, and the black residual slush had been washed away by rain. There was humidity to be sure in the air. Going downstairs Neil laid a forefinger on the wall and kept it there as he descended. It made a wavering line where its pressure removed the moisture, a line of young gaiety. Out in the street an eddying wind buffeted him and he liked it. At the corner of Clydeside Road the wind snatched a man's hat from his head, and Neil grinned with delight over the way in which it jinked from its pursuing owner.

Between trams and drays he charged safely across and ran on to Waterfront Street. There was a different sort of din there, the din only of trucks. He crossed to the side where the wharf-walls showed that there was some sunlight getting through between the great continents of clouds overhead. The tarnished gold smouldered and faded as the clouds scurried across. At all the great doors opening into the wharfs he had to look quickly lest a dray was coming out. At each he had glimpses of men in shirt-sleeves, some wearing leather-aprons, pushing trucks, hauling trucks, dumping bales or boxes into great nets of rope, or gathering the corners of these nets over the dumped merchandise to affix in them the hook from a pendant derrick and raise a hand in a signal. Donkey-engines coughed, iron gangways resounded to the drubbing of tackety-boots and iron wheels.

On he ran, at every opening the hulls of steamers gleaming with heedless port-holes. The ships did not care. They lay there inert, being laden or unladen.

There were new chalk scribblings on one of the walls since he had passed that way, but he did not pause to discover what the word was that followed "Johnny MacPherson is a dirty——" He did not know Johnny MacPherson. Here and there were not charges chalked up against any boy or girl of the vicinity, but just, perhaps, one obscene word. Underneath one of these someone had written, "Do you think this is funny?" He read that in passing at a trot.

At West Ferry Street he turned down toward the river. Trains came to the back of the Sydney Dock from between tenements, and under streets. He saw, beyond a distant shed-roof, the coils of steam that announced the dock. A man stepped forward, out of a little house that was something like a big pillar-box, to intercept him.

"Hey, young fellow, my lad!" he said.

Neil stopped in his run.

“Where did ye get the wrench?” asked the man.

“It belongs to Mr. Stewart. I’m taking it to him.”

“Stewart?”

“Yes. He’s the chief engineer of the *Torres*. He left it behind.”

“Oh, I see. Weel, keep on running. I saw the tug slip in for her.”

He hurried. Two gamins rushed from behind a tower of hay-bales to clutch him, or the wrench, but the man who had been curious about him must have been looking after him, for a short sharp whistle sounded. Neil glanced round. The man, whistle in hand, was making a sign. It was of warning to those two boys not to interfere with him; and they rushed away.

As he reached Sydney Dock a policeman stepped out on to the causeway and held up his hand. But that was a sign not to Neil. Drays alongside of him stopped, their drivers raising their hands in turn to pass back the signal for a halt to those behind them. On Neil ran.

“Hey!”

The policeman grabbed him just at the moment that, ahead, a big steel arm descended from vertical to horizontal. He was panting like a coursing greyhound after a race.

“Where do you think you’re going?” demanded the policeman.

“I have a monkey-wrench belonging to Mr. Stewart, chief engineer of the *Torres*.”

“Oh, ye have. Well—there she goes!”

Neil stood beside the policeman looking down at the water as the swing-bridge moved away. An apple or two, a potato or two, bobbed on the fuliginous and oily water that had stains as of verdigris upon it in drifting patches. A little tug was churning into the space left by the swinging of the bridge, and behind it was a great bulk of bluntnosed iron with Roman numerals painted on it. IV. was the same as four—one from five; and V. was for five. But his pride in knowing that did not keep his eyes from what was above, the one word, in gold, *Torres*. The black wharfs and the slips and the steamers and the gulls were of a world apart and he had business in that world to-day. He was too late to deliver the wrench, but he was here, seeing her go out.

A sea-gull was sitting on the top of each mast, and one on the fore-crosstrees. They raised their heads, sitting there, and opening their beaks

wide screamed vociferously. Nobody seemed to see them. Everybody was looking at the hawser from the tug to the *Torres*. Up on the bridge a man in a blue coat with brass buttons stepped to one side, craning over, looked towards the stern, towards the bow, suddenly clapped hands to mouth and shouted. Men at the fo’c’sle of the *Torres* looked up at him and then at each other, at him again. He yelled, “For the love of——” They understood, that time, what he meant, and two rushed together to a rope’s end, drew it in and made it fast with a belaying-pin.

The tug went fussily past, showing its broad stubby deck to Neil as the birds see ships’ decks, flying over. The *Torres* was gliding near, nearer. Oh, where was Mr. Stewart? Neil peered at a man who stood beside some obvious machinery in the bows. Was that he? Why, no; Mr. Stewart would be down below, in the engine-room. He measured the distance from wharf to ship. He even made passes in air with his hand that held the wrench. Could he throw it on the deck? Perhaps he could, and then yell, “Give it to Mr. Stewart.”

“What are you doing, laddie? Dinna throw it. You might brain one of the sailors, or break one of the companion-way windys.”

Neil nodded sadly.

“I know,” he said.

So there he stood, watching the *Torres* pass. The tug, out in the river, slowed, stopped. There was shouting between the low bridge of the tug and the high bridge of the steamer. The *Torres*, gliding on, lay across the river while the tug turned downstream. As he watched her he was aware of the drays beside him beginning to move again. The bridge had swung back in place. The iron arm had gone up like a big semaphore. The *Torres* was dismissed. But not by him. He dodged over to the pedestrians’ strip of the bridge upon the river-side and in between its great iron lace-work and criss-crossing of rivetted beams, peered down and out at her. Her propeller was gently turning. Ahead, the tug was fussing the water with its paddles. He stood there a long time craning out, watching her go down river. *Torres—Greenock*, he read over her stern. Oh, well!

He did not go back by the docks. He crossed the bridge and went straight up to Clydeside Road, greatly depressed that he had been too late. His mother would be sorry that he had not managed to deliver the wrench. One had no right to keep things that belonged to others, he considered. He slowed down. Should he go back and throw it into the Sydney Dock and tell her he had been just in time? No, that would please her—to think he had

been in time—but, well, lies were usually found out somehow. She would want details regarding the delivery and he might make a mess of his invention concerning that.

With all his rushing to the wharf, all his excitement, he was pinched and pale-looking when he climbed the stairs and knocked.

Mrs. Barry saw the wrench in his hand at once.

“Too late,” she said.

“Yes. It was just going out into the river. I couldn’t throw it down on the deck.”

“Oh, no. It might have hit someone!”

She took it from him. The boy was interested to observe that she seemed not greatly downcast. She put it up on the kitchen mantelpiece as if it was a decoration. Perhaps it was to her a souvenir.

“I think, Neil,” she said, “you’d better give the pigeons fresh water. Perhaps it would stop that one from making that noise all the time.”

Ooo-oh, ooo-oh, ooo-oh, went the crooning moan in the pigeon-house, on and on.

CHAPTER XIV

ROUNDABOUTS AND SWINGS

One night, shortly after Mr. Stewart's departure, when Mr. Amara was out at a smoking concert of the Fairglen apprentices, Mrs. Barry stood with a pair of the boy's shoes in hand and——

Boots, she mused, wear out, especially boots that have been pre-worn by somebody else, even though the original owner did not ever have recourse to re-soleing or re-heeling or patching.

"I think they might be worth mending," she said. "We'll go and see."

They set off along Clydeside Road, round Gilmour's corner and past a little tobacconist's, a watch-repairing shop with collar-studs and wedding-rings in its window, and a close between two shops with the words *Alex. Craig, Surgeon*, stencilled with white paint on the varnished brown dado, past a pawnbroker's and corner public-houses, and drew near to Clydeside Road West.

Where the two roads join there was a vacant plot of mire surrounded by advertisement hoardings, but upon that night they found a great section of the hoarding had been removed and in the space behind was a blaze of lights and a blare of mechanical music.

"Oh, look!" exclaimed Neil, the glow of excitement and of the naphtha flares together on his face.

There was a circle of painted wooden horses, a great circle of them, two abreast under a roof like a huge gilt umbrella. Suddenly they began to revolve, brown horses, dappled greys, black glossy ones, while wild music broke out from the great umbrella's central pillar which was surrounded with pipes like those of the church organ but garishly coloured. There were roped enclosures backed by pendant nets against canvas walls, close to which were pieces of wood shaped like bottles. These cast their shadows on the canvas waveringly, because of the fluttering of the naphtha-flares that illuminated the place. And there were——

"Come along, Neil. If we stop the shop will be shut."

"Can we stop and look on the way back?"

"Yes, yes. We'll do that."

So they held on along Clydeside Road West, Neil looking over his shoulder at a row of caravans to rear of the blaze, caravans red and blue, dogs (of whose species he did not know the name, just dogs) lying under them.

As in Clydeside Road it was sticky underfoot in Clydeside Road West, stickier in fact it seemed, though no rain was falling. Pyramids of eggs and great cheeses shone under the rows of gas-jets that fanned from polished battens across the shop-windows. And there were dim-lit little shops that displayed writing-pads, pencils, and pipes in the windows; and very dim shops that had the word *Fruiterer* as well as *Greengrocer* over their lintels but seemed to sell only vegetables—and the selection of these limited to potatoes, carrots, turnips and onions. The usual crowds dawdled on the pavement, and women engaged in apparent rueful mental arithmetic puckered their lips before the display of foodstuffs.

They arrived at their destination—a shop on either side of the door of which boots and shoes hung as onions hung in the doorways of greengrocers. By the way they were tilted one could see the great thick soles studded with gleaming tackets. As soon as they entered the noise of the street dwindled slightly though the door was open, hooked back. Or the noise did not seem to matter so much. It went past. It did not come in. Only a backwash came in.

Mrs. Grant, who owned the business with her husband (in another part of the city they had a larger shop, which Mr. Grant looked after), a little thin fair-haired woman wearing large spectacles, was behind the counter in a black sateen apron and with sateen cuffs on her wrists. But Neil was more interested in a man who sat in a room to rear, framed in the doorway against the bracket-light under which he worked, the same sort of gas-bracket as in the kitchen at home. He sat on a stool with a leather apron on, in his shirt-sleeves, and the tapping of his hammer as he drove nails into the soles of a boot that he held between his knees came out louder than the sound of the traffic.

“Good-evening, Mrs. Barry.”

“Good-evening, Mrs. Grant.”

Neil, looking at the man in the rear room, observed that he did not just hold the boot on which he worked between his knees but had it on a piece of iron shaped like a foot and set into a heavy block of wood in front of him. The nails he took from between his lips, every now and then groping a handful of them from a box on the table and tossing them into his mouth as

though they were currants, doing so as adroitly as he picked them out one at a time to slam into the boot-sole.

“And the little boy—little Neil—how do you do?”

“Very well, thank you, Mrs. Grant.”

“That’s the boy! Oh, yes, Neil is always the little lad, eh?”

An incomprehensible remark, that.

“I was wondering,” said Mrs. Barry, taking the package from Neil and unwrapping it, “if these uppers would stand re-soling and heeling.”

“Well, I’ll ask George. I see there’s a little crack here at the toe-cap and he could maybe stitch that, so that it would need a ferret’s eyes to see it. It might not need a patch.” She moved away to the lit door in the rear and began, “George, Mrs. Barry wants to know if——” and her voice ended as she passed into the cobbling-room.

The man at work there looked up, bent his head, raised the bracket a little and peered under the glare of its big gas-jet and nodded and smiled, as though on chance that they were looking at him. Then he examined the boots and spoke to Mrs. Grant. He lifted his hand and elevated the gas-bracket further so that he might stretch forward and put the boots on a shelf, then pulled it down again and once more hunched over his last. They were evidently worth repairing.

Mrs. Grant came back to the shop.

“Yes, he’ll sole and heel them,” she said, “and he can stitch that crack so’s it will hardly show, and at the back there’s a crack on each of them. He’ll mend that and reinforce them.”

The cobbler was at the door then, standing up, the job he had been employed upon completed. Neil walked slowly toward him.

“I’ll mak’ a guid job o’ them for ye. Comin’ in tae see the snab at work, laddie?”

Neil stepped inside and watched him for a little while, watched him draw a thread over a piece of wax, pressing it into the wax with a deft thumb; noted that his face looked as if it had wax on it though it was with the back of his hand or with a knuckle that he scratched his head or his jaw or the tip of his nose from time to time.

“When yer hands are full ye aye have an itch or a tickle somewhere that ye want to scratch,” the cobbler remarked, and stretched to his table for a

small knife.

He cut a pattern of leather from a sheet of it which leant against his stool, then held up the knife for Neil to look at. Its blade shone like silver, an oft-sharpened knife by the look of it.

“Ye hae just got tae touch it wi’ yer finger and yer finger is cut,” said George. He tapped the blade in the table before him and there it stood up, sticking in the wood. “Now, what have I tae do next? Oh, aye!”

It was all very engrossing to Neil.

George dodged under his gas-flare and went over to a high sewing machine that he worked while standing, one foot upon its treadle. That treadle reminded Neil of the Scissors-and-Knives-to-Grind man, so there was reason for his seemingly inconsequent question:

“Do you think that it is true that the little bottle the scissors and knives man has with him is a bottle of vitriol and that he’d throw some at you if you bothered him and that it would burn you?”

“Eh? Oh, I don’t know. I shouldn’t think so.”

George was willing to entertain the boy but his thoughts were elsewhere and with this answer Neil seemed at least partially satisfied.

He wondered if perhaps he might be a cobbler when he grew up, but thought he would find other things to do, not but what it was interesting to see a cobbler at work. Then suddenly George was greatly interested in him, it seemed, asked him how old he was, what he was learning at school, if he liked going to school, and was not surprised to hear that for some things he liked it and for others did not. When George had asked all the stock questions and there was a lull, Neil told him of the circle of horses he had seen in the vacant plot at the end of Clydeside Road West.

“Oh, aye! Hobby-horses,” said George.

“Is that what they’re called?”

“Yes, that’s what they cry them—hobby-horses.”

“And what are those big things like swings and boats?”

“Like flat-bottomed boats hanging down, d’ye mean?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that’s what they are, laddie. They are swings. Was naebody swinging when ye cam’ along?”

“No.”

George, back on his stool again, glanced at his watch that hung on a nail on the wall, put up a hand and moved the gas-bracket, muttering, “I can see naething but the shine on the glass,” and then, “Oh, they’ll be swinging when ye go back. The nicht was but young when ye cam’ bye. Aye, they’ll be on the swings. In the hardest times there’s aye those who can afford money for the swings.”

That made Neil think he’d like to be going. He looked out at the shop. His mother seemed to be half-waiting for him, half-listening to Mrs. Grant talking.

“I’d better go, perhaps,” he said.

“All richt. I’ll have the boots ready for ye twa nichts frae noo. Good-nicht tae ye, laddie.”

“Good-night, sir.”

“That’s the little lad.”

He went back to the shop and stood beside his mother. Mrs. Grant was looking away into distance, as though at the street, but talking, he gathered, about George.

“Oh, yes,” she was saying, “he is a good worker. The best snob in the Clydeside Road I have with me, but he has a fault.”

“Oh.”

“Aye. He crooks his elbow.”

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

Crooks his elbow! Now what was there to be regretful over and sigh that way about in George being able to crook his elbow? Obviously, to hammer nails into shoes he would have to crook his elbow. Neil raised an arm, gazing at his elbow as he did so as though, by close scrutiny, he could perceive something wrong in the action.

“Your young lady assistant isn’t with you now?” asked Mrs. Barry.

“Oh, dear, oh, dear, that lassie!”

Mrs. Grant shook her head, making a clucking sound in her throat. She bent forward over the counter and whispered to Mrs. Barry.

“What a pity!” said Mrs. Barry.

Mrs. Grant leant back, tucking in her chin and shutting her eyes tight for a moment, pursing her lips close. Then she opened her eyes and, “No doubt about it,” she said; “just six months.”

Mrs. Barrie glanced at Neil.

“We must be going,” said she.

“I’ll just ask George when the boots will be ready,” and Mrs. Grant turned away.

“The night after to-morrow,” said Neil promptly.

“He told you that? That’s fine,” and Mrs. Grant turned back to them. “Well, good-night, good-night.”

Out in the street Neil forgot to ask about the crooking of George’s elbow, wondering what had befallen Mrs. Grant’s assistant. He had liked her.

“Where did she say that Miss Lennox had gone?” he asked.

“Fancy you remembering her name,” said Mrs. Barry. “She’s got married.”

“Then she won’t be serving in the shop at any time, reliving Mrs. Grant.”

“*Relieving.*”

“What was it about six months that bothered her?”

“Six months?” said Mrs. Barry. “Oh, that was just that the girl was married six months ago.”

“Has she any family?”

“Oh, Neil, how funny you are! Where did you hear that phrase?”

“I’ve heard people say that. I liked Miss Lennox—oh, very.”

Mrs. Barry glanced down at her son. She hoped that when he grew older he would have a liking for lassies less wild; for herself she had not been astonished to hear the news about the assistant. The last declaration of liking for one of the other sex he had made was for Maisie, and Mrs. Barry had the opinion, from every toss and flip and gay twinkle of wild Maisie, that in whatever back-court she dwelt there was not much she did not know of cause and effect on the subject of families, and accept with zest as all in order.

But here was the vacant plot at the end of Clydeside Road West, before they passed into Clydeside Road.

“Let’s stop and look!” he begged. “Oh, see, there are people on the horses, and they don’t just go round level. They jump!”

“Yes, dear.”

“Could I have a ride?”

“Not to-night, son.”

Beside the hanging boats, the swings, a big rough man was standing. He was holding one steady while a youth and a girl climbed in. As soon as they were seated he began to push the swing to set it in motion. Up and up it went. The two occupants had each hold of a tasselled rope that came down from the top which was dim in the night above the haze of the flares. Up and up! They rose a little from the seats as they hauled and then popped back on them again. Up and up! The youth’s coat-tails were flying in air: Neil could see the gleam of the cotton back of his waistcoat. The girl’s dress rose like an umbrella being opened in the draught they made, and he saw that she wore little white trousers. Up and up! A woman going by paused to look on also.

“It’s dangerous!” she said.

Dangerous! It was splendid! They swept down into the blaze of the flares, their faces glowing. They swept up into the golden haze that hung above the fair-ground. They were swinging out almost level with the beam from which the swing-boat depended. Such height had they achieved that at each drop the rope did not remain taut but slacked a moment and they dropped with a jar.

“I dinna like they swings with the ropes,” the doubtful lady in front of them said. “They should have the ones with the iron bars from the top to the swing.”

“Wouldn’t you like to go home?” asked Mrs. Barry.

“Must we, mummy?”

“Oh, well.”

The young couple in the big boat-swing were coming down, down, down.

Neil moved on, his mother beside him to humour him, not urging a departure, thinking there were no great adventures or fun in his life. A man

stood at a tent-door with two pairs of boxing-gloves dangling round his neck. Beside him stood another, shouting:

“Sparring MacTavish! Champeen middle-weight o’ the world! Wha will tak’ him on? Step in, ladies and gents. Money returned if no one accepts his challenge.”

Somebody swung out of the crowd and strode smartly to the tent-door.

“I’ll take him on,” said he.

“Ah-ha! Step in, ladies and gents. Sparring MacTavish has been challenged by an unknown stranger.”

One could not see inside the tent. There was a canvas dodger immediately in front of the entrance. Those who went in gave their pennies to a girl with fuzzy hair sitting there and then turned sharply to the right where she pointed.

“*Unknown* be damned!” came a voice, and another, “Sssh!”

“Let’s move on, Neil,” said Mrs. Barry.

“Och, aye. They have their cronies planted to lead the way. Not but what I’ve kent of a stranger taking up the challenge. Ye mind Jock . . .”

Neil, moving on with his mother, had a feeling that there were secrets in the world not revealed to him. Something funny about that sparring business, evidently, or open to suspicion! Life had a dubious streak in it, he thought.

But his mind soon had something else to consider. A wonderful lady was at the door of another tent, looking—just looking, and pacing a few steps this way, a few steps that way. She had on a vivid shawl over one shoulder and drawn under her armpit on the other side. None of the women he had seen wearing shawls wore them that way. Ear-rings were in her ears, like little half-moons of silver. He met her eyes and she smiled at him. They were lovely eyes, what colour he did not know, but the look in them was wonderful.

“Gaze in the crystal for ye, lady? Spey your fortune from the palm? Your past is there—a’ on the loof of your hand—and your future also.” She paused and then went on as though lightly to give a hint of her occult powers: “The little boy is an only son. Not but what there was another, but he was taken from you. Am I right, lady?”

Mrs. Barry looked frightened for a moment and then, still the same Mrs. Barry who could not slam the door on a beggar or a canvasser, she smiled sweetly and,

“Yes,” she said. “You are quite right; but no, thank you, not to-night.”

“Thank you, lady. But you need not worry about the boy. He’ll be cared for.”

Almost did Mrs. Barry turn back and go into the tent. She had a sixpence in her purse and on the card that hung on the soothsayer’s tent was the legend: “Consult Marie. Sixpence only.” But these people, even when they were remarkable and inexplicable with their gift, made mistakes, slips, as though they saw “through a glass darkly.” Or so said Mrs. Barrie to herself, moving on.

She recalled how once in Irvine, long ago, visiting friends there, she had consulted a sibyl. It was fair-time, and according to the custom of the place merry-go-rounds and coco-nut shies were set up in the broad part of the High Street for a week. The strolling players’ booths she remembered, and one announcing *Pepper’s Ghost*, and there was the fortune-teller’s tent into which she had gone.

“You are on a visit to friends in Irvine. You do not live here—you live in a big farm-place. Your mother has passed away but your father is alive. Shut your hand and open it.”

She had shut her hand and opened it.

“I see on your hand the initials J.S.B. Do you know them?”

Did she know them! John Stuart Barry!

“Will I tell ye of your future?”

But she had felt faint and suddenly considered it was better not to know the future, so accurate had that swift series of revelations of her past been.

“I think that’s enough,” she had said.

The sibyl had understood that she thought it better not to know.

“Very well,” she had replied, “as you please. But I can tell you that you will never feel the pinch of poverty for I hear a grand bell call ye to your breakfast.”

They made slips. They could not be fully relied on, not even the ones who had a genuine and strange gift, not understanding their own uncanny

gift themselves.

“Hadn’t we better go home, Neil?”

“Yes, perhaps so, unless you would like to see the Man-Faced Gorilla.”

He had just espied the representation of it on a placard outside a booth.

“I don’t think I would.”

“I’m not sure that I would either,” said Neil, “not when I’ve got to go to bed soon.”

So they went home.

The card was in the window but no one came to make inquiry. Time passed and Mr. Amara's weekly payment for board and lodging was all the cash that Mrs. Barry had coming in. She was forced to think as much about money as though she were mercenary. She had to lay aside what she could against rent-day. The words Rent, Rates, Taxes were as names of three lurking ogres. There had been arrears to wipe out. The boat was bailed, and that was all that could be said. One lodger does not bring opulence.

She felt somewhat guilty when, pondering the question of ways and means, Margaret Bryden came into her mind. Margaret's father had been for some years on the Wester Kyle farm as foreman and later had left to be steward, or factor, to Sir Robert Kyle. In those old days Margaret and Jean (Mrs. Barry to be) had been good friends. In the days of affluence Mrs. Barry kept in touch with her by letters, and on those occasions when Meg came to Glasgow the Barry house had been as her town-house.

When she came to Glasgow to learn nursing the Barrys had seen much of her. Then there had been the years when she, having gone in for private nursing, was here, there and everywhere except Scotland—Bournemouth, Droitwich, Aix-les-Bains—but letters and New Year cards kept them in touch. When the crash came Meg had just returned to Glasgow as nurse-companion to Lady Shaw, the invalid wife of Sir Thornton Shaw—of the Shaw-Ruglen Chemical Works and various civic activities and donations—but she had come almost as frequently to see them in their lowly home as she had in their opulent one. When Mr. Barry died she got leave of absence from her duties at Shaw Park and was to Mrs. Barry as a sister, though no blood-kin, in those days of emptiness in life. And thereafter they had seen each other about twice a year, Mrs. Barry making an annual visit to Margaret and having tea with her in her private sitting-room, Margaret making an annual visit to Mrs. Barry in Heather Street, trying to hide her depression over the contrast between Mrs. Barry's life past and present, and Mrs. Barry wondering why Meg had never married.

Why Mrs. Barry felt guilty, thinking of Margaret Bryden now, was that she realised she had for long forgotten her—or at least seemed, perhaps, to have forgotten her. She had, she told herself, been as callous toward Meg as to her were those old friends who had ceased to send her even a Christmas or New Year card, those friends who by their silence trained her to accept

loneliness. Yet hardly was she fair to herself here, for she had not let Margaret go out of her mind because the Brydens had *gone down*. Meg had not gone down and had not, in fact, been completely out of her mind.

It was her own poverty that had kept her from paying her usual visit to Shaw Place—the visit she owed. She had become self-conscious of her patches and darns, seeing them as more certain evidence of carking penury than rags. She had thought that perhaps it would not do any good to her friend to have threadbare people calling on her, that the respect of the servants to her might suffer diminution if they saw her visited by shabby tidiness.

But why did she think of Meg so constantly now? Because once, when on a visit to Shaw Place, Lady Shaw, meeting her in the hall, had demanded, after a few words following the introduction, that they all have tea together, and—here's the rub, here's the point—after tea had carried Neil off to see some rabbits that, through the window, he had observed cavorting on the rear lawn, and given him five shillings for himself.

So, after cogitating this and that, one Saturday morning she sent the boy off to Shaw Place. He was to ask for Miss Bryden, take his cap off when he entered and let the servant hang it up, and when he was ushered into the sitting-room he was to say: "Mother wanted me to have an outing to-day and as she hadn't heard of you for so long, and hadn't been able to come and see you, she told me to come and ask how you are—so that you would know she is thinking of you."

His earlier visit, when he had seen the rabbits, he had not forgotten by any means. He remembered Lady Shaw vaguely and the rabbits very well, and the lawn over which they made little leaps and suddenly sat down and leapt again. The way to Shaw Place he did not recall as clearly, but his mother gave him full directions. She put a broad Eton-collar on him and a natty little tie, and he wore the shoes of one of the Kinnaird boys, which were still presentable when polished.

There was a different quality about this mission from that rushing one to get to the *Torres* and deliver the monkey-wrench.

It was a long way he had to go. All along Clydeside Road he trudged, past the corner public-houses, and bakers' doors with hot rushes of air coming up from under their windows, and grocers' doors before which sawdust lay on either side, carried out by feet of shoppers making exit, and tobacconists with their cigar-boxes. He liked cigar-boxes both for the texture of their wood and for the pictures on their lids. One that he stopped a

moment to look at was, he knew, of Sir Walter Raleigh talking to the aborigines of Virginia.

He passed on to Clydeside Road East, crossing a clanging lateral highway where he saw pastry-cooks' windows more resplendent than the bakers' of Clydeside Road, and a grocer's shop without sawdust on the floor, and "Robert Grant, Boots and Shoes" in big gilt letters over a door and two windows, instead of just being painted there.

The crossing safely made he was as one adventuring into foreign country. There it was that his Eton-collar began to attract more markedly the attention of boys of his own age who clustered at close-mouths. He did not like the way they looked at it. They were not friendly toward it; they hated it.

One or two landmarks on the way he recalled from earlier pilgrimages. A public bath-house was familiar. All up its walls were little spaces between the facing-stones, and he thought as he passed it, as he had thought before, that one could clamber up it by inserting fingers and toes in these.

Then there was a great dark archway to right, leading into mystery, and out of it came the reek of smoked herrings—or of herrings being smoked. He remembered having seen before that dark arch, and having whiffed there that odour of a thousand bloaters.

A little further on, three boys who were coming toward him, after a quick exchange of words together, pounced upon him and jostled him from one to the other. As he made no sign of fight, gave evidence only of trying to run the gauntlet, one of them seized his collar as though to tear it off. He grabbed that grabbing hand vigorously; but another, at that, slapped his face.

Neil hit back. He tried to wriggle free—one thought dominant in his mind—to get to Shaw Place with a clean collar. One hit him on the shoulder.

"Cowardly! Cowardly!" they all shouted.

The injustice of that charge, when they were three to one, made him feel sick at the stomach with rage. They called him *cowardly* because he tried to wriggle free! All right, he'd fight! He did so, hitting the biggest boy in proof that he was no coward and followed up the blow with a swift tattoo of lesser ones. The two others, who were nearer to his size, seemed to have had enough in seeing their big comrade thus tackled, but a fourth boy appeared as from nowhere.

"Grab him and tak' off his toff's collar!" he whooped.

That must not be! Perhaps already the collar was thumb-marked from the first attack on it. He hit out valiantly. He hit left and right at the four. Then suddenly a man pushed into the little eddy of savage youth.

“Here, here, what’s all this?” he demanded. “Leave the laddie alone. Four to one! Fine laddies you are! You go on, my son, and you four boys just you bide here with me or I’ll knock all your heads thegither.”

“Thank you. Thank you, sir,” gasped Neil, tucking his chin into his neck in an attempt to see if his collar was spoiled for the visit.

“Go on, then, go on your way,” said the man in a tone that suggested that if Neil did not go at once he would leave him to his fate, and with a glance at the collar that hinted he had little liking for it however much for fair-play.

Neil went on.

He felt relief when the character of his surroundings changed. In cities, as in the rural world, there are, of course, district changes in locality, local characteristics. He came to where tenements and cottages alternated, and where there was a house, occasionally, set back from the road behind old iron railings, a greenhouse perhaps leaning against one side of it. Behind he could see tall smoke-stacks, immensely tall, each of them sending out a dun-blue smudge against the grey cope of that part of the world, across which now and then a solitary bird would hurry, or a flock of birds make an eddy and subside.

Then there came fields, dark fields, each with a plough or a harrow rusting in a corner. They seemed to be sad fields. Instead of hedges between some of them there would be a row of trees in single file, or two deep, or occasionally forming fours. Where they did that the ruts of little paths led into them through a gap in the roadside hedge. One could play at Trails through the Great Forests there, he thought. But he was on a mission and passed on.

From the door of a row of cottages a dog rose and came snakily towards him. He said, “Good dog,” to it but it did not wag its tail when he spoke so he walked on, hoping it would leave him. The way it looked reminded him of how those boys had looked at him—those boys who tried to tear off his Eton-collar. It seemed rather to be following him with dislike than a sudden affection. It was a scrubby-looking animal and when it suddenly stopped and sat down to scratch he did not glance round to see whether it followed him or not, lest looking round might encourage it to do so.

Here there were no pavements but in place of a pavement a narrow cinder-path. It had a kerbstone to one side and to the other were sometimes cottages, sometimes the wall of one of those houses with a greenhouse propped against it and a rustic seat under a bare winter tree in front, sometimes hedges, leafless at that season, a tangle of twigs that the thin wind whistled through with a sound as shrill as a bat's cry, sometimes a wall holding up the butt-end of a heap of slag. In the desert beyond it he could see eerie towers of pitheads with great wheels slowly turning in them. Fields there were also on to which these slag-heaps were evidently encroaching. At their bases the rubble that had been shot down spread a long way, making them look dismal, dilapidated. Now and then he had a glimpse, through the smoky foreground, of distant flames flapping in air—iron-works.

Came then only fields on both sides of the road and the smell of rotting cabbages blent with the omnipresent odour of chemicals. Great gaunt buildings with smoke-stacks (*stalks* they call them in these parts) stood up in middle-distance like a darkening or thickening of the dun atmosphere pouring forth stinks.

The road took a bend and there it was—Shaw Place. He remembered it well. The moment he saw it ahead he knew the relief of arrival. Columbus sighting land after sighting the carved stick wallowing by, Chancellor coming safely to Muscovy, must have felt so.

There were two little houses just inside the gates, one on either side, oddly like the big house that stood at the top of a broad avenue strewn with little stones (chuckies), like the big house in miniature, as though it had had pups and they had come down to look at the road. To the side of the carriage-gates was a smaller gate, ajar. He swung it open and closed it carefully behind him lest the dog was following. He could not see it, looking back along the road, but it might be just round the bend. Up the drive he walked and saw behind the big house the besom-like tops of elms and in them a great number of restless rooks and heard their cawing. He remembered the rooks.

Going up the steps to the porch he had to lift his feet only half as high as when climbing to the flat in Heather Street, but as well as being much shallower than the steps at home they were a great deal broader. If he did not take long strides from one to the other, planting his feet in the centre of each, he'd have to take two paces across each. At the top was a very broad step. It made him think of the landing-board for his pigeons. There was a hole at the base of the wall, horseshoe shaped, with a piece of iron across it, what for he did not know. He made a hazard that it was to scrape one's shoes on if they

had got mud on the soles, but not being sure he rubbed his feet back and forth on a mat that lay on the landing-board. It had a monogram worked in it and was so clean that he felt troubled over the amount of dirt his rubbing left.

Now he was all ready to make an entrance. But he stood uncertain what to do. What had his mother done when he came here with her? There was a handle to one side of the porch, a handle of iron like lace, and there was a little white spot of a bell-pull also in the wooden framework of the door. He essayed the bell-pull instead of the bell-push. It was stiff. He pulled it down, down. Nothing happened. He let it go and it sprang up with a jump, and at once he heard, far off in the interior, the wild clatter of a bell. By the sound it seemed to ring in a corridor all of stone. Then he waited. When the door opened there stood a tall young woman wearing a white apron and a white cap, and when she saw him she laughed.

“Is Miss Bryden at home?” he asked.

“Yes. Step in.”

He stepped in and she closed the door. He had his cap in his hand.

“Come this way,” said the maid, and preceded him with a starchy rustling. She did not offer to take his cap from him so he folded it carefully as he followed her and thrust it into a pocket.

There were rugs lying here and there over a tiled floor. The heels of the servant went *tip-tap* on the tiles, then passed quiet over the rugs, then *tip-tapped* again. And the *click-clack* of his heels between the rugs rang loud after her, for he had tackets on his heels towards the lengthening of their service.

She drew back a curtain that hung down from an upper dusk in a side passage. He heard the brass rattle of the rings overhead. Then she turned and looking down at him asked, “What is the name?”

“Miss Bryden.”

“No, your name, you funny little fellow.”

“Oh. My name is Neil Barry.”

She opened a door.

“Master Neil Barrie,” she said.

He stood still, looking into the room, but the maid put her hand to his shoulder and thrust him before her, then shut the door. There was Miss

Bryden lying back on a settee that was placed between two tall windows. Out of the windows he could see the elm-trees right down to their bases, and the sweep of wintry grass that had been green when he once watched the rabbits cavorting there.

“Well, my dear Neil!” and Miss Bryden rose. “I was just having my siesta—before lunch—after getting things a-going, though I suppose *siesta* should be after lunch. Sit down, dear, sit down. Isn’t your mother well?”

“Yes, thank you. If you please, mother says she wanted me to have an outing to-day, and as she hasn’t heard of you for so long, or been able to come to see you, she told me to come and ask how you were—so that you would know she was thinking of you.”

“That’s very good and thoughtful of her. Will you tell her I have been thinking of her often recently?”

“Yes, I will.”

She moved to the hearth-rug. Over the mantel was a big oval mirror, lengthwise, framed in polished wood. His gaze followed her. She arranged her hair. Having done so she peered into the glass, peering at the reflection of her eyes, searchingly. Beside the settee on which she had been lying was a fragile-looking table, highly polished, of golden-brown wood with lines running through it like the markings on marble, balanced atop a single centre pole that rose out of three great wooden claws; and on the table was a bottle of a sort that he had never seen before (the Barry decanters and cut glass had been sold long ago), with a base shaped something like a turnip and with a very long neck.

“Just having my pre-lunch sherry,” she said, as to herself, going back.

She filled the wineglass with a yellowish fluid, drank it down at a gulp, making a little grimace afterwards, then carried away both glass and decanter which she put into a cupboard.

“Well,” she said, patting her hair again and sitting down on the settee, “so your mother is quite well. Hasn’t had any of her little pains again?”

“Pains? Oh, no, she never has pains.”

“Huh! You wouldn’t know, I suppose, even if she had. Men all over! Men all over!”

He could not be sure what she meant by that and was still puzzling for explanation in his mind when she went on.

“You’ll give her my love and thank her for sending you along to see me. You look tired. Would you like a glass of milk?”

“No, thank you.”

“No, thank you! You mean Yes, please.”

She was a very puzzling lady. He was uncertain whether she was annoyed with him or not.

“Yes, please,” he said.

“I knew it! No, thank you, Yes, please!”

She rose and passing back to the fireside—for it was a very old-fashioned house—pressed down a bell-handle on the wall and let it spring back, then leant against the mantelpiece, more like a man than a woman in her pose, considering him.

“Yes, you are like your grandfather,” she said, “on your mother’s side, I mean. Plenty of milk, plenty of good food, fresh air, and you’ll be a credit to the Munroes. But you look kind of *shilpit*. Did you walk all the way?”

“Yes.”

“That would account for it. It’s a miserable enough drive. As a walk it is ——” she did not say what it was as a walk.

The door opened.

“This little man will have a glass of milk,” said she.

“Just the milk or a biscuit with it?” asked the servant.

“A biscuit with it, Neil?” inquired Miss Bryden.

“No, thank you.”

“Yes, bring a biscuit or two,” said Miss Bryden, and after the maid had gone she asked, “How many lodgers has your mother got just now?”

“Only Mr. Amara.”

“That’s the Hottentot.”

“Siamese,” he corrected her.

“Siamese, is it? Uh-hu!”

“We had an engineer with us for a little while.”

“Oh? What was he? Another Siamese?”

“No. He was a Scots gentleman.”

“Amara’s an engineer too, isn’t he?”

“He’s learning engineering, but Mr. Stewart is an engineer—on the *Torres*. He left his monkey-wrench with us.”

“Well, that was an extraordinary thing to do. What did he do that for?”

But just then the milk and biscuits arrived, and a message also: “If you please, miss, the mistress says she would like to see you.”

“All right. Just you sip that milk and eat the biscuits, Neil, till I come back.”

Alone in the room the height of it interested Neil, and the embossed patterns in the four corners of the ceiling, and the great central marvel, a pendant cluster of lozenges of glass—fat lozenges—that, if he moved his head this way and that looking up at them showed glints coming and going as if they reflected rainbows. Just one of them he would be happy to own, to carry in his pocket, to show to the boys at school. The curtains at the windows came down in long folds out of uncertain upper shadows; and now that he was alone he heard that the rooks were calling outside all the time—*Caw, caw, caw*. That there were no rabbits in sight was neither here nor there to him. He was not greatly interested in them. The rooks, up in their tree-top villages, made him forget their absence. As for pets—he infinitely preferred pigeons to rabbits. When he put down his tumbler after a drink, though he set it down gingerly, a little hushed by the quiet of the old house, it made quite a loud sound of impact on the plate.

He sipped the milk slowly, as he had been told, and ate the biscuits slowly, but still was left alone. He noticed that he had dropped some crumbs at his feet and stooped to pick them up. They had fallen not on the carpet but on a rug of some beast’s pelt. As he tried to pick them up they slithered further in among the jungle of that rug. He wondered if it was a guanaco skin. The guanaco, or huanaca, he had read, that scours the illimitable pampas, is of a reddish brown.

By the time he had got the crumbs out and put them in a pocket, and sat down again, he decided he had been forgotten, such a long time had it seemed to take him to get them out, with the dread (for some reason) of being discovered doing so by Miss Bryden. Just the quiet, the long, peaceful curtains, the prisms, the leisurely cawing of the rooks: that was all.

But he had not been forgotten.

“Well, young man, did you think I’d forgotten you?” asked Miss Bryden, entering.

“Oh, no, not at all,” he replied.

“Oh, yes!” she said. “I told Lady Shaw you were here and she wants you to stay to lunch. We’ll be having it very soon now. Come along with me and I’ll show you where you can wash your hands first.”

It was on the whole—in fact for many reasons—a happy visit despite certain difficulty with a mat, with the plug in the bathroom basin, and with a piece of chicken, or rather a piece of chicken-bone, at lunch. It was happy because of such things as the panel of coloured glass on either side of the tall window on the staircase that showed him, as he ascended to the bathroom, elm-trees, near lawn, and sky yellow and blue and green.

Miss Bryden had told him, “The door straight in front of you when you get to the top of the stairs,” and the celerity with which he came to that door on reaching the upper storey was disconcerting. For he trod on a small mat there and away he glissaded as on a skate over the absurdly polished floor, and brought up against the entrance to the bathroom with a crash. It was the suddenest transit imaginable and he had but two thoughts at the moment—one that Miss Bryden would call from below, “What are you doing up there?” and the other that he had balanced on the mat very skilfully. But Miss Bryden neither called nor ascended to inquire into the cause of the racket.

Neil decided to put the mat in place after washing, so passed into the bathroom. Much in that house was antique but the plumbing was of the latest model. There were three levers, instead of handles that turned, behind the broad porcelain basin, one labelled *Hot*, one labelled *Cold* and, between these, a diminutive lever devoid of any designation. In the bottom of the basin was a little metal mushroom projecting out of what was obviously the hole through which the waste water ran away. He made attempt to push it down into place with a thumb, but it would not move to that pressure. He wondered if it screwed down, and made trial to discover, trying to turn it both left and right, but in neither direction would it budge. And time was passing. So—the quotation that necessity is the mother of invention is inevitable—he took out his handkerchief and twisting it round the metal mushroom tamped it well home with a finger.

He examined then, carefully, the levers. Tentatively he thrust down the one labelled *Hot*. At once there was a volley of musketry as it seemed behind the wall and the floor shook below his feet. So he let it spring back and tried again, giving a very vigorous instead of a canny downward thrust to it, and at once water dashed into the basin, swirled round it, splashed his jacket. He let the lever go and made an attempt upon the cold water one to

see how it behaved. It was much better behaved, neither noisy nor violent in action; and he managed to wash his hands before the water had percolated through his stopper of handkerchief, then wrung it out, rubbed the front of his jacket with it where he had been splashed, and dried his hands—not on one of the several unused towels hanging on the rail but on one that had already been used.

Well, he had got through all that, but time was passing. Miss Bryden would wonder what detained him. Outside again, gingerly though he stepped on the rug that had carried him across the landing, it shot away from under him. His fingers were still on the handle of the door, closing it, and with a dull thump he sat down, his heels taken from him by that treacherous rug on that treacherous floor. There he sat, listening again, expecting to hear Miss Bryden hail, “What on earth are you doing up there?” Her voice did not come up, however, only the sound of a gong being struck, its tone much less over-awing than that of the great gong at school.

He felt that in his ignorance of modern plumbing he had lost much time. What he had to do up there he must do quickly. Soon he would become flustered if not careful, and he did not want to become flustered, wherefore he remained solemnly seated upon the floor so preposterously polished and paddled his way to the head of the stairs, picking up the mat en route, and setting it in place only when he found himself on the top step where, to his great content, the carpet was anchored.

He rose then and descended with dignity. Consolation for difficulties with rug, polished floor, and novel plumbing he had on the way down in another glimpse of a wood of yellow and blue and green through the coloured border of the staircase window. As he came to the hall, there was the lady who had taken him out on to the rear lawn, on his first visit here, to look at the rabbits and shown him how to lift them by the ears with one hand while supporting them by the rump with the other. She was leaning upon Miss Bryden’s arm and asked him how he was, and he told her very well. Being educated in the lesson of Ladies First he stood to one side of the dining-room door while they entered, and continued to stand there, expecting that the next to enter would be the servant who, having rung the gong, had posed (like a sentry at the barrack-gates) just beside him. She did not move. Nor did he, gazing up at her. Suddenly realising his idea she laughed, and taking him by the shoulders thrust him into the room.

That was but a minor hitch compared with the hitch of the mat-toboggan and the extraordinary basin-plug. At table he assured Lady Shaw, in answer to her inquiry, that he remembered her well—as indeed he had the moment

he saw her, and then sat silent while she and Miss Bryden became engaged in talk of their own about people whose names he did not know, and affairs beyond his ken, beyond his curiosity, about “bulbs” and “potting.” He supped the soup, he ate the fish set before him. After these came chicken and potatoes and peas and something else new to him like (or so he described it to his mother later) a small leek but of a greeny-golden hue with an end resembling a flower, and all buttery.

“I wouldn’t try to cut that, sonny,” said Lady Shaw. “Just take it up by the stalk and eat it with your fingers—like this,” and she showed him.

“Oh, thank you,” he said; “at home we have only cabbage or carrots.”

But why, on finding that he had inadvertently put a small bone into his mouth along with a piece of the fowl, he lost his aplomb, why he did not do just as he would have done at home—that is to say neatly remove it and put it on the edge of his plate—the Lord knows. He managed to wriggle it to one side of his cheek and then went on uncomfortably eating.

“Why, bless me, my dear child,” exclaimed Lady Shaw, “you have a gum-boil beginning! I didn’t notice it before.”

“No, thank you,” he muttered. “I don’t think I have.”

“But your face is quite puffed or swollen. Don’t you think so, Miss Bryden?”

As Miss Bryden looked at him he quickly slipped the bone into the centre of his mouth.

“I can’t see it,” she said.

“You can’t? Perhaps it is my mistake. The light is poor to-day. There, that side. Turn your head, little boy, and let her see. Why, no. It must have been a trick of the light.”

That he might continue to eat the very delicious fowl he then shifted the bone from the centre of his mouth to the other side.

“Well, how odd!” said Lady Shaw. “It seems to be the other side of your face that is swollen!”

She turned to Miss Bryden with a look of puzzlement and Neil took the opportunity to slip the splinter of bone swiftly from between his lips and set it on the side of his plate. Behind Lady Shaw the pleasant girl who attended to them drew a deep breath and looked up at the ceiling, her cheeks dimpling, her eyes rotating.

“What are you laughing at, Slimmon?” the old lady demanded. “I can see you laughing in the mirror.”

“Perhaps,” said Miss Bryden, “she was amused at Neil’s gum-boil. Huh! Couldn’t you just take the bone out of your mouth in the first place and put it on your plate?”

“So that was it!” ejaculated Lady Shaw, and laughed. And as she laughed her face, that was wrinkly, became as the face of a young girl, the wrinkles seemingly but of mirth, not of age. He would remember her like that, no doubt, years after, laughing gaily at him with the face of a girl, and wonder what possessed him to secrete the bone in his cheek.

Again he was left to himself, Lady Shaw and Miss Bryden talking their own talk, much over his head, till coffee was served in the tiniest cups imaginable. He could hardly get his forefinger inside the handle of his cup. In fact it was so small that he had to hold it between thumb and finger. There was no milk in it, and the sugar given him to put into it was soft and brown.

“When I was a little girl,” said Lady Shaw, smiling at him, “I used to love to play with brown sugar. I was always being checked for doing that. If the bowl was in front of me I’d play with it. It used to fascinate me to heap it up and watch how the grains slithered slowly together instead of running together quickly like soft white sugar. It is funny the things that one isn’t allowed to do, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it is,” agreed Neil. “My mother will never let me have my feet bare in the summer, even when almost all the boys and girls in Heather Street go without shoes.”

She put her head on one side and smiled at him again.

“I think your mother is very wise,” she said. “In our climate we never know how long the pavements will be warm and dry. And with all our smoky activities, from Tennant’s Stalk to Dixon’s Blazes, they are always dirty. You will remember me to your mother. I took a great liking to her.”

“I like her too,” said Neil.

“Well, that’s most satisfactory,” replied Lady Shaw.

She rose, and at once the parlour-maid drew back her chair and Miss Bryden stepped to her, crooking an arm for her to hold.

“Just a moment,” said the old lady, “just a moment, now. Where is my purse? Yes, in my chatelaine.”

Neil saw that she had a big bag something like a sporran hanging from her waist, and she opened it. Fumbling inside she educed two half-crowns.

“Come here, Neil,” she said.

He walked up to her as if here were school and this prize-giving day.

“There’s half-a-crown for you,” said she. “Perhaps you have something in mind you might like to buy for yourself. And perhaps there is something you might like to buy for your mother—so there is another one.”

“No, thank you,” said Neil.

“Oh, but yes!”

“No, thank you, Lady Shaw.”

“Tut!” exclaimed Miss Bryden.

“Nonsense!” said Lady Shaw.

She pressed the two silver coins into his hand and taking his fingers closed them over the money, then clapped them. They moved to the door, he following, wondering what to do next. In the hallway Miss Bryden turned to him.

“You’ll give your mother my love,” she said, “and tell her it was sweet of her to send you along to see me.”

“I will.” He looked at Lady Shaw again. “And thank you very much for the two half-crowns,” he said.

The girl in the starched cap and apron, smiling at him, walked to the front door with him (and *click-clack* went his tackety heels on tiles and then quiet on the rugs, and *click-clack* again), and opened it for him.

“Thank you very much,” he said.

He was outside on the landing-board getting his cap out of his pocket and smoothing the creases out of it; and as he put it on he took from his breast-pocket the wet handkerchief with which he had plugged the basin, because the dampness was penetrating to his chest and making him feel cold.

The day had clouded over. The rain came on long before he had got to the end of the cinder-path through that outland of odours of chemicals. In the darkening of the skies the flames of the great blast-furnaces behind the chemical-works and the colliery flapped more brightly. The only birds he saw were some starlings that eddied away from a tree as he drew near. He

had been told by Roy Macintosh that a flock of starlings would sometimes catch a solitary pigeon and peck it to death. Nasty-looking birds, he thought, with their sharp pointed beaks.

The starlings made him think of the boys who had set upon him on his outward journey. He considered the advisability of going back through their district by a different route, but the back streets were unknown territory to him. Besides, if they caught him going home in a back street they'd think he was afraid. The rain was coming down torrentially by the time he came to the street where he had had to run the gauntlet. Those who were out were all adults and in a hurry, not boys at play or idly waiting for occasion to be mischievous. He raised the smell of bloaters and dropped it behind. He came to the public-baths, a big ceiling-lamp lit in their wide porch as though night had already come.

On he trudged, drawing nearer to the precincts of his own parish. The polished upper flat of Shaw Place came to his mind, the rugs on that gleaming floor, the reflections of the white doors in it. Far away seemed Shaw Place. He crossed that loud street where the traffic goes north and south ceaselessly. A policeman at the corner was regulating it, but he did not watch him, uncertain of what his gestures meant. He stood, instead, close to some grown-ups who were waiting to cross, and when they suddenly moved off the pavement he jumped along beside them and so got safely from Clydeside Road East to Clydeside Road.

Suddenly he stopped and stared. A new dairy had been opened. He had not noticed it when on the outward way, perhaps because what was now in its window to catch his gaze had not been there then.

There was a cow in the window—a cow about a foot long, with horns, and red and white spots, and big eyes. It was a wonderful thing. Never might he get a rocking-horse—rocking-horses too expensive, hopelessly. But a cow! It could not be sat upon, of course, even if one did sit on cows as on horses; but it could be put on the dining-room table or on the mantelpiece to look at. It was of himself only he thought then. The idea did not enter his mind that his mother would love to have the cow on the mantelpiece (as he had been sure that *The Headless Horseman* would fascinate her), only that he would. And he had five shillings in his pocket, half of it to spend upon something he wanted.

He stepped into the dairy.

“What can I do for you, my dear?” asked a buxom, golden-haired and freckled wench behind the counter.

“What is the price of the cow?” he said.

“The what?”

“The price of the cow?”

“What cow?”

“The cow in the window.”

“Oh!” She laughed. “Do you want to buy it?”

“Yes, please.”

“Well, it’s not for sale, sonny.”

“Not for sale! But it’s in the window!”

“That’s just a sign to show this is a dairy.”

“Oh, I see! But wouldn’t you sell it?”

“I’m afraid not. We want it for ourselves.”

“Oh, you want it for yourselves.”

“Yes.”

“I see. Thank you.” He turned away. Then he turned back. “Could you get me one like it?” he asked.

“You don’t really want one.”

“Yes, I’d like to have one.”

“But what would you do with it?”

He had no reply. Then—

“Would it cost more than two shillings and sixpence?” he inquired.

“Yes, I think so.”

“Oh,” said he, and then again, “Thank you.”

Out in the rain again he felt very weary. Disappointment, perhaps, made him aware of physical tiredness. He came to the corner of Heather Street, saw the carboys in Mr. Gilmour’s window glowing with the lights behind them, and shambled up the street. He went upstairs two steps to a stride but as in protest against his weariness, with the aid of vigorous pulls upon the balusters. The lower part of the wall, the polished part below the whitewash, was glistening with moisture and here and there drops formed on it like

liquid beads and trickled down it. He gave his knock at the front door and his mother opened.

“Ah, there you are, son,” she said. “Why, you look tired!”

“No, I’m not tired. Not very.”

“Well, you are soaked. There’s lots of hot water. You can have a bath, and change your things, before tea.”

He was clutching the two half-crowns close together in a pocket, ready to flash upon her, but she prevented that with her question, “How was Miss Bryden?”

He delivered the message.

“You did not see Lady Shaw, I suppose,” she remarked.

“Oh, yes. She gave me lunch. We had a very sustaining lunch indeed.”

Mrs. Barry’s eyes were on him with a wistful expression.

“And—oh, mummy—when I was coming away she gave me”—he drew a deep breath—“five shillings!”

That was what she had sent him to Miss Bryden hoping for—not for five shillings necessarily, but for something, recalling how Lady Shaw, on a former occasion, had given him some money. Only that morning, after his departure, she had been reading in the paper about Quantock’s Orphan Homes, and how Mr. Quantock had no collectors going round but how he prayed, prayed for what was needed. And, in Neil’s absence, she had prayed—for, if it were possible, five shillings.

“Five shillings!” she ejaculated. “What did she say?”

“She said, ‘Here’s half-a-crown for you. Perhaps you have something in mind you might like to buy with it. And perhaps there’s something you’d like to buy for your mother—so there is another one.’ I can’t think of anything to buy for you so I’ll give you the half-crown and you can get something for yourself. I went into a shop on the way back to buy what I wanted.”

“What?”

“A cow.”

“A what?”

“A cow.”

“A cow, Neil?”

“Yes. About that size,” and he held his hands apart, one of them clenched over the two half-crowns, “and all complete. It’s lovely. Different colours on it, just like a real cow, and horns, and eyes just like a real cow, and the big bag under it like a real cow, and the tail as if it was swishing its back. But”—he heaved a sigh—“it wasn’t for sale.”

She too heaved a sigh.

“I’m glad you got that money, Neil,” she said. “We need it badly.”

“Are we very poor?”

“Yes. You see, since Mr. Stewart went away we have had only Mr. Amara’s money, and there is so much one needs in the winter. We burn more coals.”

“Well,” said Neil, “I tell you what I could do. I could lend you my half-crown as well as giving you the other one. Any time would do for you to pay it back—any time at all when it was convenient.”

Rat-a-tat came a knock at the door. Always knocks at the door in these parts!

CHAPTER XVII

OUT-PATIENTS

After Neil was asleep in bed she had suddenly a bout of pain beyond any that she had so far known, pain that doubled her up in the extremity of it, pain that made the sweat cold upon her. When it was over she had that extraordinary gratitude for relief, weak, weary, but beatified by the mere absence of torture.

She looked at the clock. Mr. Gilmour would not yet have put up his shutters. She would slip down to the corner and ask him what he could advise—ask him if he thought that Smythe's Embrocation (as Mrs. Murdoch believed) would help her. Or he might suggest something else.

In a space between tiers of cardboard cartons and ranks of bottles he looked at her over the top of his spectacles, listening to the account of her recurrent, and increasing, pain, slowly wringing his beard with a dark hand. He reminded her of a picture she had seen of an alchemist among crucibles and dried lizards that hung from cob-webbed rafters.

“Why don't you see a doctor?” he asked.

She did not reply; and not having immediate reply he continued:

“What *I* would advise is that you go to one of the best men in town on such ailments.”

“The best men!”

“Yes. And you don't need to pay. He is at the West End Road Hospital every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from nine-thirty till four. You can go by tram-car with only one change all the way. Or you could go across the river on the ferry and walk up to it.”

“What do you think the pain means?”

“I wouldn't like to say.”

“Do you think it is serious?”

“Well, from what you tell me it is a bad pain, whether it is serious or not. It might be gall-stones.”

“Oh, gall-stones! I never thought of that.”

“No, I suppose you didn’t. You perhaps thought of the very worst you could.”

She had indeed thought of the very worst she could and her gaze left his for a moment, ashamed that she had done so.

He gave a relieving little laugh.

“Ye’ll never dee the daith ye dread,” he told her, for encouragement. (She doubted if that was an infallible maxim.) “There’s nothing to feel menial about in going to Doctor Ian MacPherson at the public consultation rooms in West End Road. You’ll find him thorough. Why throw your money away on guesswork? Why not get a reliable diagnosis? He is one of the best diagnosticians in the city, and as for operations——”

“Do you think there might be an operation?”

“Now, my good lady! You are in a run-down state. Maybe all he’ll advise for you is a diet and a tonic. Don’t worry. Worry never helped anyone. No, I’ll not advise anything for you either to be taken internally or for outward application; but if he does not give you a prescription to be filled in the dispensing-room of the hospital but outside you can bring it to me. Let it go at that. You go and see him—you go and see him. At least it will set your mind at rest.”

“Thank you very much.”

“For nothing, ma’am. Glad to advise.”

She went out into the street. It was still raining and there was a wind. The pavements were being washed by rain. The light of the gas-lamps, reflected in the blackness of the wet paving-stones flickered like flames. They seemed on the point of being blown off the wetness and clinging to it. The wildness of the night symbolised for her all the buffetings of life. She was glad when she got into the close, was blown into the entry.

Thus it was that on the following Monday she sat in a hall, the odour of which was of humanity and disinfectants. The windows were high up and only upon one side. There were about eighty wooden forms, forty or so to one side, forty or so to the other of a central aisle and—she surmised that the waiting-room was sometimes used as a lecture-hall—facing the aisle was a reading-desk, an empty chair behind it.

None of the forms upon the side of the hall beneath the windows were occupied, but the first four rows of those upon the other side were packed when she and Neil arrived. She had taken Neil with her because of a

chapped lip—a nasty little gash that did not heal. Always when he laughed (and he laughed often), it opened and bled. Going to see the doctor at West End Road Hospital regarding herself, she would see if he could advise some way of healing that lip. Neil was happy about it, what with being away from school for a day and having another outing, another experience.

An usher, who chanted, “Names and addresses, please,” when they entered, pencil in hand and with a sheaf of cards on a table beside him, had shown them to their seats in a preoccupied and casual manner. Soon they were not alone on the fifth form, other people all the while being ushered in after them.

There was seldom need for the usher in attendance to give advice on the movement away from the seats of those who had come to consult the doctor. A door in the wall opened, a woman leaning heavily upon a stick came out (giving a view only of a curtain beyond, hanging from a semi-circular rod), a piece of paper in her hand, and passed into another doorway, one labelled *Dispensary*. Then a bell set in the wall clanged once and a man with a bandage round his face rose from the end of the form and entered the consulting-room.

“Has that gentleman got mumps?” asked Neil.

“Hush!” said his mother; and they all moved up one.

Poverty does indeed make strange bedfellows. Furtively Mrs. Barry glanced at those who waited patiently on the forms. It was very depressing to be sitting there, but she tried to look upon the bright side. Life might be hard, very hard, very difficult, and sometimes even apparently cruel, but evidently there were those who would ameliorate the lot of others with whom life and chance dealt hardly. Here could free medical examination be had; here could prescriptions be made up free.

The man with the bandaged head came out, a new bandage upon it.

“Oh, it’s going to jump!” said Neil, his eyes upon the hammer of the bell above the door.

He had observed that it trembled a little and leapt back before smacking forward. *Clang!* A woman rose and taking by the hand a crippled child led her into that room of kindness in a bitter world; and they all moved up two.

There was not much conversation among the waiting invalids. Here and there some curious person would interrogate a neighbour regarding what ailed him or her. Here and there two people might get their heads together, taking it in turns to tell of the operations performed on them; or, if they

could not cap a story of operation out of their own personal experience, to recall and recount the operation performed on an aunt or an uncle, with all its wealth of detail. Fragments of these narrations came to Mrs. Barry's ears, as to her nostrils, at entry of another bandaged case, the odour of iodoform.

Next to her, ahead of her, sat a young woman of the kind called respectable who glanced sidewise at her several times and eventually made an inquiry.

“Are you here for yourself or for the little boy?” she asked.

“I want them to look at his lip,” replied Mrs. Barry. “It is always cracking and chapping in the winter.”

“Oh,” said the young lady. “I’m awfully worried about myself.” She had been wanting to talk, for relief. “I can’t sit still, I’m so worried. I’ve such a funny mark just there, under my hip, and I’ve been putting it off and putting it off because I hate to let a man look at it.”

“I wouldn’t let that trouble you,” advised Mrs. Barry.

The bell clanged, and in moving up again the bashful young woman left their form for the one in front.

Mrs. Barry looked at the clock. *Tick-tock, tick-tock* it went loudly. She was aware of it all the time, and of the smell of people and of disinfectants. Nine-thirty to four, as Mr. Gilmour had told her, were the hours of consultation here; but the doctors, she mused, must surely go to lunch sometime—from twelve to one, perhaps; and what would happen, she wondered, if four o’clock came and there were still people to be seen? Well, they would just have to go home and come another day, she supposed, and it is really dreadful to be poor, she thought; being poor brings one thing on top of another, like the house that Jack built. Some people might not be able to get off from their work two days in succession. If they stayed off longer without a “doctor’s line” they might be discharged, whereas a rich person could make an appointment for a certain hour with a specialist, just leave his lucrative work shortly before the hour of it and be back again shortly after—unless he was told to go to bed, or unless he had to undergo an urgent operation.

Operation: well, she could not be operated upon—that was one thing that must be understood—because Mr. Amara must be attended to; he was her sole source of income. No, she would not talk to the doctor about herself at all to-day, would not mention her pain; she would just ask what she should do for Neil’s lip. For the doctor, on examining her, might say she must be

operated upon and she could not afford that with Mr. Amara to . . . Her mind was like a wheel.

Someone passed out of the room of verdicts. The bell clanged, and another passed in. There was that sound of shuffling as all moved and she rose and passed to the seat in front. The clock struck twelve. The bell over the door clanged twice. Now what did that mean? The usher came to them.

“Will you all just keep a note of where you’re sitting now,” he said, “and take the same places again at one o’clock? Be sure to take the same places, now.”

Looks of worry, of consternation, showed on some of the faces. He bent down to a woman who had spoken to him.

“Eh, what did ye say?” She repeated her remark. “Oh, no, no,” he said. “You dinna need to go out. Ye can stop in your seat if you like. There’s nae compulsion.” He addressed them all, jogged by that inquiry: “Ye can sit still if ye like, but if ye want a refreshment ye can gang out and come back to your same place, ye see. There’s a bit shop round the corner where ye can get a cup of tea and a bun for twopence, or ye can gang up the first turn on the right,” he began to smile, “and then the second on the left, and syne ye’ll see a big edifice with the words *Royal Scotia Hotel* over the door, and ye can get a grand lunch there for ten shillings.”

At that, laughter broke out, thin and splendid. These were the die-hards, these were the descendants of Wallace and his kind, after all.

The usher departed and when he had gone they were still chuckling over his remark, remembering it.

“That was a guid one!”

“Aye, that was a guid one, that was.”

Here and there among these halt and maimed and ailing one rose, and saying, “Excuse me,” walked or limped away, or departed with an accompanying squeak and muffled thud of crutches.

“I’m juist going up tae that hotel he was telling us of,” a man turned back to announce to nobody in particular.

“Would you like to go out for a little walk, Neil?” Mrs. Barry asked.

“I don’t mind,” he said.

It was typical of her that when so many seemed under the necessity of denying themselves luncheon she hesitated to rise and go out with those few.

That was why she had asked Neil only if he would like to have a little walk; but as he had not jumped at the proposal—

“I think a glass of milk and a sandwich would be welcome,” she suggested.

“Yes, it would,” he agreed.

So Neil had his glass of milk and several sandwiches and she had a cup of tea and a slice of toast, and they were back in place again by a quarter-to-one.

It was after half-past three before the modest young woman with the worrying mark on her hip, who had been biting her lip in anxiety, answered the bell. She returned after so short an absence, and with an aspect so greatly altered, that Mrs. Barry had to nod and smile to her.

“Everything satisfactory?” she asked.

“Oh, yes. It is nothing at all. I am so glad.”

The bell clanged and as the widow of John Stuart Barry, one-time “sugar-king,” rose to lead his son into the room she heard behind her the shuffle of those left, moving up two places.

At the opening of the door a sound of great hilarity greeted her. The curtains they had glimpsed hung upon a half-moon of iron bar, and when she parted them what she saw was a horseshoe of chairs in three tiers. In the centre of the horseshoe, and below the level of the lowest tier, sat a fairly stout man with a skin that looked polished. On the three tiers of chairs sat young men. The doctor was half-turned in his easy-chair, looking up at them.

This was a shock to Mrs. Barry. She had not expected publicity. The room seemed less kind than her fancy of it when waiting her turn. She had expected to see the doctor alone. That these were medical students she at once realised; but of course—and that also at once she realised—if one had free advice it had to be balanced somehow, and medical students have to learn from more than books and skeletons.

As for the hilarity, how was she to know its source? The coy lady who had preceded her was the cause of it. Stealing herself at last to call upon the doctor she had devised a way not to expose her person to the masculine eye. She had cut a little flap in her skirt over the worrying mark below her hip, and affixed a fastening for it of hook and eye. There was a similar little peep-hole in her bloomers and another in her vest. The intense gravity of Dr.

MacPherson and the students when she raised these flaps one after the other, on being asked what her trouble might be, was being compensated for after her departure.

“Order, please!” said the doctor. “Will you sit down here, and the little boy here. What is the name?”

“Barry—Mrs. Barry.”

He looked at some cards that lay on the desk beside him, filled in for him no doubt by the usher outside.

“Mrs. Barry and Neil Barry,” he read from one. “And which is the patient?”

No, Mrs. Barry could not, before all these young men, begin her story.

“Perhaps it is trifling, doctor,” she said, “but my little boy gets such a sore lip every winter.”

“Come along, young man,” said the doctor, and Neil walked up to him. He put an arm round the boy’s shoulder. “Tut-tut-tut!” he said. “Yes, I know. And just when you think it’s going to heal you laugh at something funny and crack it goes again, and bleeds.”

“Yes, sir.”

The doctor opened a box on his desk and taking out what looked like a pencil drew Neil closer to him.

“Now this may hurt you just a bit,” he said, “and after it has hurt you it will do you all the good in the world.” He rubbed the point of the pencil in the crack, and as he did so he went on: “And then you will get a little pot of nice salve to put on it.” He rubbed deeper and water welled out of Neil’s eyes. “There! That’s all. And he didn’t cry!”

“No, sir. That was just my eyes ran. I wasn’t crying.”

“I know. Splendid!”

Dr. MacPherson drew a pad across the desk and wrote upon it.

“You can get that either on your way out,” he said, tearing off a sheet, “or at your own chemist’s—just as your mother pleases. I’ve written the directions for use. Better get it here. And before they seal it up for you just dab a little on your lip to keep you comfy going home.” He glanced at the card again. “You live in the shipping parish, I see. Quite a little way to go. And now, what about mother?”

He sat back in his chair, lacing his fingers on his chest, and gazed at her.

She met his eyes doubtfully. After all, she considered, she had been practically unaware of the young men while Neil was having his lip treated. They had sat quiet, looking down, till all was over, and then one of them had grinned at Neil, another had pulled a face for his delectation, and two had clapped their hands gently without making a sound, in silent applause at his bravery. That was all. They were the nicest looking lot of young men she had ever seen gathered together! Wild, buoyant, by the evidence of their faces, their eyes, their attire, most of them seemed, but there was nothing unpleasant about them.

As she sat there, diffident, the doctor elevated his brows and made a gesture, opening a hand and spreading the palm of it toward the chair close beside him which Neil had vacated to return to the one by hers. It really was almost as if he were a mesmerist. She recanted. She stepped towards him and sat down, and then she heard herself saying (that was how it was: she heard herself saying), "I've had a recurrent pain for a long time, just here. Sometimes it is only a stab. Sometimes it has all the force of a stab but lasts a long time."

He was looking at her eyes, her skin over the cheek-bones, the backs of her hands, all in a seemingly casual, superficially casual way, while he nodded his head, listening to her. Then he leant over to her in a way that suggested that here was a confidential chat, nursing and clapping one polished hand with the other, and in a low voice asked her a question or two. His whole manner suggested, "This is just a little matter between ourselves. These young men won't hear." Dr. Ian MacPherson had a quietly compelling way. He and she, by his manner, were moated apart in that big room.

"Would you stand a minute?" he said quietly. "Turn your back to me. Oh, your coat—let me take it."

He removed it for her and laid it over the arm of his chair. She became slightly flustered, though he assured her, "Nothing to worry about in this examination. Can you just loosen here a little," he murmured, feeling her waist-band, "so that I can get my hand in—just loosen a little, please. That's it. That's it."

Her back was to him and to the students. Before her, across the table, were Neil's staring eyes, at which she smiled reassuringly. Suddenly she had an extraordinary confidence in this doctor and was glad he had had his way, for he did with her what only one with the most experienced hands, she thought, could do. It was like a piece of legerdemain. It was like some

extraordinary trick. Still standing behind her he put his arms round her, pressed her in front, removed one of his hands to her back and just for a moment she felt as if the fingers met in her body.

“I’m going to do that again,” he said, looking down over her shoulder, and even as he spoke it was done. His hands stayed a little longer that time.

“There,” he said. “Thank you.”

She was slipping a hook into an eye, another hook into an eye, and he was holding her coat for her to put her arms into the sleeves. Then he was handing her a glass of water and pointing to the chair, for her to sit down again. The pressure of his hands, skilled though it was, had been painful. She drank, glancing up at the horseshoe of students; but they did not seem to be paying any attention. They sat in poses very similar, most of them humped forward, legs apart, elbows on knees, hands locked, or with head in hand, staring at the floor before them. One of them, even as she watched, with thumb and forefinger flicked the lobe of an ear of a young man in the row before him. They successfully conveyed the impression that they were not interested in this patient.

The doctor sat forward in his chair.

“I would like,” he said, “to give you a thorough examination—thorough.”

That remark carrying to Neil, he gave voice.

“You hurt my mother,” he said. “Please don’t hurt her more!”

The doctor smiled at him.

“Well, I hurt you a little bit,” he pointed out, “and you are feeling better already. And when you get that salve on—my word!”

“I think you hurt her,” said Neil.

“No, no,” said his mother.

The doctor changed his pose, sat in the same sort of attitude as most of the students behind him, legs apart, elbows on knees, hands clasped.

“Come some day without the little boy,” he murmured. “As a matter of fact I would like to have Alexander Craig here, Dr. Craig, I mean, for a consultation.”

“You think it is something serious?” she asked.

“Well——” he hesitated. “I should like to have a thorough examination. Thorough.”

She glanced up at the students again. Two doctors examining her she would not object to—but all these young men! A thorough examination would interest them. She was trying to bring herself to the point of asking (though with the thought in her mind that beggars cannot be choosers) if they would be looking on, when Dr. MacPherson picked up the card and reread her address.

“You must know Dr. Craig,” he said. “He’s in your parish. Why, they call him——” on the word he stopped. He was about to say *the poor man’s doctor* but altered it and gave him not the title of the people but the title of his fellow-practitioners, or those of them who were exempt from jealousy, “—— the finest surgeon in Glasgow,” he ended.

Surgeon! So her malady was like that. She associated the word surgeon with knives. The word also recalled something else to her: An entry, a close in Clydeside Road, and on the wall of it the words *Alex. Craig, Surgeon*. She had somehow thought, noticing it, that Alex. Craig must be only a half-doctor, the equivalent in therapeutics of a stickit minister in divinity. She may be excused. Only the discerning would imagine behind that exterior of Dr. Craig (not that she was aware of having seen him)—and with that home address and, instead of brass-plate, an inscription painted on a wall—a genius, a genius who did not bother about what he called “tails to your name,” a man whose profession was as a consecration. And flash into her mind came again Mrs. Murdoch saying once, when she had been putting mustard leaves on Neil’s chest for bronchitis, “Ye should hae Dr. Alex. up to see him. Ye ken—Dr. Craig—the poor man’s doctor.”

“I believe I’ve heard of him,” she said. “They call him the poor man’s doctor, I think.”

Dr. MacPherson looked at the floor between his feet.

“Yes,” he said. “If you have any recurrence of that extreme pain before,” he dropped his voice, “you come to see me again without the little stalwart protector, call in Dr. Craig. But I’d like you to think this over—a thorough examination. Think it over and write to me and I’ll try to arrange for Dr. Craig to be here and give you an appointment.”

“That’s very kind of you. I’ll——” she glanced up at the students. “I’ll come without my boy some day.”

“Shall we fix a day,” he asked. “Would you like me to write to Dr. Craig now and see when he could come?”

She felt very cold round her lips and her heart fluttered.

“I tell you what,” said the doctor, “if you have another bout of that pain call in Dr. Craig at once and mention what I’ve said.”

“Yes, I’ll do that,” she replied.

Suddenly she thought of all the people waiting outside. The clock said ten minutes to four. She rose.

“Thank you very much,” she said. “Thank the doctor, Neil.”

“Thank you, sir,” said Neil.

They turned and passed out and as they went in at the door marked *Dispensary*, clang went the bell over the door behind them.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE POOR MAN'S DOCTOR

But it was to prescribe for Neil, not for herself, that she had, a day or two later, to call in Dr. Alexander Craig. The boy breathed with a warning crackle in his chest; he had a tearing cough.

She went down the Clydeside Road, just before lunch, leaving him in the box-bed, and mounted the stairs at the end of the entry that bore the legend of *Alex. Craig, Surgeon*. On the first landing was a brass plate with just the name *Craig* on it. A stout woman she presumed to be his housekeeper opened to her ring. She explained that she had not come to consult the doctor but to leave her name and address for him to call to examine her little boy.

About one o'clock he arrived. He seemed as some one out of an earlier generation. He wore a tall hat of the kind called stove-pipe, one without any flare, and a surcoat that had once been black but was dark green with age. He carried a gleaming walking stick, unadorned save by that lustre of age. He wore an old-fashioned black stock—not one of the modern sort occasionally affected by the young. The sight of him took Mrs. Barry's thoughts beyond Gladstone to Palmerston. His eyes were unusual, and were at once kindly, keen, piercing. She did not think he was the medical equivalent of a stickit minister then, seeing his eyes, seeing his head.

He just looked at her and stepped in with a murmur that sounded like, "Aye!" She knew—she did not have to ask, "Are you Dr. Craig?"—she knew this was Dr. Craig.

"Where's the sick laddie?" he inquired.

She conducted him to the sitting-room and to the enclosed bed.

"Are you awake, Neil?" she asked. "Here's a doctor come to have a look at you and help your cough."

Dr. Craig peered at the child in the bed and then smiled, and Neil liked him at once. Mrs. Barry drew a chair close to the bed for him to sit down, but hardly had he done so, on the chair's edge, than he bent forward and turning back the blankets produced a wooden stethoscope and listened to the patient's breathing.

"Ugh!" he muttered, and thrusting the stethoscope back in his pocket, as with contempt for it, bent again and, ear to Neil's chest, listened. "Coaf!" he

said.

Neil obliged.

“Coaf again!” and again Neil coughed.

“Aye,” said Dr. Craig, and then put the bedclothes in place. “Let’s see your hause, laddie.”

Neil was puzzled.

“Let’s see your throat.”

Neil opened his mouth.

“Now say *Ha* at me.”

“Ha!”

“Aye. That’ll dae.” He sat back on the chair. “Now juist haud this in below your tongue for a minute,” and slipping a clinical thermometer from its case he put it in place.

He frowned into the recess for a spell and then took the thermometer from Neil’s mouth and glanced at it.

“Ye’ll get him oot of that enclosed bed,” he said. “Ye’ll put a bed up for him in the room. Or have ye a spare room?”

“Yes, I have. It’s not occupied just now.”

“Not occupied. How do ye mak’ a living?”

“I take in lodgers.”

“Aye. It’s a three-room and kitchen house, eh?”

“Yes.”

“And ye have only the one lodger?”

“Yes.”

“Ye could do with another?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I can send ye one. You’ll put up a cot in this room for the laddie and get him oot o’ that enclosed space. This man I’ll send ye is a respectable man. His family has scarlet fever. I turned him oot so that he could go on with his work. The house is quarantined. He’s stopping with relatives, and stopping wi’ relatives is a kittle business whiles. He’s looking for a room to

bide in till I give him leave tae get back. I'll send him to you till I lift the quarantine from his hoose. He's all right. He's got nothing smittle on him. He'll be wi' ye—let's see—oh, about four or five weeks yet. Rathie's the name."

"Thank you very much."

"Thank you—thank you. That's him got a lodging. And now bring me two tumblers filled tae about an inch frae the top wi' water."

She brought them and set them on the table. He moved over to it and took from his breast-pocket a long box like a jewel-case, snapped it open. It contained rows of small phials lying in plush grooves. He selected one, asked for a teaspoon, and measured into it the desired amount of medicine, then stirred that into one of the tumblers, sipped a little from the spoon, and licked his lips. He took another phial and measured some of its contents into the other glass, stirred and tasted and smacked his lips.

"Give me a couple of cards," he said.

"Cards? What kind?"

"Clean," he replied. "Oh, post-cards, envelopes would do. Something to put on top of these tumblers."

"Oh, I see."

He produced a pencil and wrote on one card, *Take two teaspoonsful every two hours* and on the other, *Take two teaspoonsful after each meal*, then laid them atop the tumblers.

"Are his bowels open?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Aye. Did he ever have rheumatic fever?"

"No."

"Did he ever have growing-pains?"

"He's had pains in his legs and—yes—we thought it was growing-pains."

"Aye. Gi'e him slops for a day or two. Gi'e him bread and milk and soup. Put some bones on the stove and get the strength out of them and make him a soup wi' that. You can give him a simple pudding for one meal; you can give him a switched egg in a glass of milk if he seems no' satisfied wi' the slops. I'll come in and see him again the morn's nicht onyhow,

maybe in the afternoon. I'm going past that man's place of business after I leave here and I'll step in and tell him I've found him a lodging. Aye."

He had put his hat on the table, his gloves in the crown, and his stick lay beside them. He picked all up and walked out ahead of her.

"Where's your kitchen?" he asked. "In here? Aye. They are all in the same place."

He walked over to the sink, washed the thermometer and dropped it into its case, then took a piece of soap and washed his hands.

"I'll get you toilet-soap and a basin," she said.

"This is fine."

She hurried away for a clean towel, and had that in time. He dried his hands, looking out at the pigeons.

"I see he keeps doos," he remarked. "They're a fine diversion for a laddie. That's a tumbler sitting there."

"Yes, that's a tumbler."

"Aye. I used to keep doos when I was a boy." He took up his hat, his gloves and stick from the dresser where he had set them down.

"That'll be a shilling if ye have it," he said. "If ye haven't, it can lie over."

"Oh, yes, I have it," and she took one from her purse and handed it to him.

"Aye," he said again, and marched away. He was at the door before she could reach it and opened it for himself.

The postman, stepping to the landing as the doctor made exit, raised his sheaf of letters in a salute and Craig saluted in return with his stick. The postman passed on upstairs (no letters for her) and the doctor passed downward with no backward glance. She closed the door and went to do his bidding regarding the removal of Neil from the concealed bed in the sitting-room.

Fortunately she had a bedstead in the hall-cupboard. She dragged out the ends and the frame and set it up, and then dragged out its mattress to air before the fire, Neil watching what he could see of these preparations from the box-bed with but a listless interest, his eyes too bright, his cheeks too red.

When she had him in the bed in the open—

“I like having bronchitis,” he told her.

“You like it?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“I don’t have to go to school!” He began to wiggle his legs under the coverings.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“I’m making the Mediterranean,” he explained.

“You are doing what?”

“Making the Mediterranean, mummy. This is Europe. This is Africa. I crook my leg under the clothes for Italy. This is Algiers, and the pirates are coming out in their lanteen-sailed craft to harry the merchant ships, and the French, their patience at last exhausted, sweep down here upon the wild sea-rovers to their very nest.”

Up and down in his chest as he spoke there was that crackling.

“If you’re going to do that you’ll need to have your back and shoulders covered,” she said. “Don’t you think you could lie down and have a sleep instead?”

He considered that.

“I believe I could,” he said.

He slept till supper-time and then had bread and milk and the medicine to be taken after meals. While he lay back, wondering whether to play at going round the Cape of Good Hope or round Cape Horn to Australia, and patting up Africa and South America, and patting down the South Atlantic on the coverlet, he had another coughing-fit and when it was over yawned, lost interest both in the Horn and the Cape, and fell asleep.

It would be about seven o’clock when a man knocked at the door, who, on Mrs. Barry opening, raised his cap slightly and said:

“Dr. Craig told me you have a bedroom you would let for a matter of a month or five weeks. My name is Rathie.”

“Please come in.”

The room and the price were both satisfactory. He worked at a saddlery and leather shop, his specialty, he explained, the making of trusses. Dr. Craig had known him for a long time, it appeared. And really, thought Mrs. Barry again, it is wonderful how things dovetail after all. Dr. Ian MacPherson had mentioned Alexander Craig to her. She had imagined he was some local practitioner of no great account, and lo, he was the best surgeon in Glasgow. And he had sent her a lodger, temporary only, to be sure, but sufficient for the day are the anxieties. If that dreadful pain returned she would assuredly consult him, what with Dr. MacPherson's praise of him and the feeling of belief that sight of him had given her.

He called next afternoon and was very much pleased with the improvement of the boy.

"Turn out the remains of that glass and I'll gie him something else intilt," he said.

Again, before leaving, he marched into the kitchen but Mrs. Barry had a basin set in the sink ready for him, a clean towel beside it and a new cake of toilet-soap. He dried his hands slowly, looking at her.

"How are ye feeling yoursel'?" he asked.

"Very well," she replied.

"Very well, eh?" He peered at her and she smiled back. "Och, aye, it's fine to be well. That'll be a shilling if ye have it. If ye haven't, it can lie."

She had the shilling ready and gave it to him.

"Feeling fine yoursel'?" he asked again.

"Yes, thank you. You see, I have to keep up and not bother about my aches with the boy to look after."

"Aye, aye." He moved away and, over his shoulder, as though not to disturb her with persistent inquiries, he added: "You're looking no' so bad—no' too bad."

After all, there are the conventions, even for Dr. Craig. He could not, as it were, snatch a patient. But he'd be coming back to see the boy and so could have his eye on her. He didn't like her looks—"No, not at all, not at all," he said to himself going downstairs.

CHAPTER XIX

THE LITTLE ANGEL

“Good-day, ma’am. I see you have a card in the window—*Lodgings to Let.*”

Mrs. Barry did not know she had, was under the impression she had removed it. Certainly she had intended to after Mr. Rathie’s arrival. That was her first thought and the next was that in a few weeks Mr. Rathie would be gone, the quarantine on his family removed, and perhaps this man of ruddy countenance—not as of alcohol but as of open air—to whose summons she had opened did not want a room at once.

“Please come in,” she said.

She led him to the dining-room that, with the bed for Neil set up in it, was transformed into what in the letting-world is called a bed-sitting-room. It was Neil’s first day up and he was in the kitchen, watching his pigeons after absence from them.

“The very thing I want,” said the man, “a bed-sitting-room. I’ll be away for about six weeks——”

“Six weeks,” she considered. “Mr. Rathie will be gone by then. I’ll show him the back room.”

“I’m a mate on the Two Stars Line. We usually sail out of Liverpool,” the man explained, “but we’re sailing out of Glasgow this trip. My wife is up here with me and we thought she might stay till I got back.”

Oh, it was not for himself, it was for his wife he wanted a room, and not six weeks later—but now. Well, it would mean a little money to lay up lest after the rainy days came deluge. She could make up another bed for Neil in the kitchen, on the couch.

“We’re sailing in three days. I’d like to get fixed up for the wife quickly.” The mate moved to and fro in the room and saw the box-bed. “Splendid!” he said. “The little girl usually sleeps with her mother but sometimes she’s restless. It is good to have the extra bed.”

“A little girl!” ejaculated Mrs. Barry.

“She’s a little angel, a little angel,” chanted the mate. “No trouble at all. Quiet as a mouse.”

Mrs. Barry swithered. As she swithered the sailor-man was asking what she would charge for room and board for his wife and the little girl. She was engaged on a dual consideration: she was hoping that the child really was a little angel, not noisy (for a noisy child would annoy Mr. Amara, her *steady*), reflecting that a six week's lodger might drive away one who otherwise would be with her for years. Also she was wondering what to charge.

When she told Mrs. Murdoch, later, that she was going to have a lady and a little girl with her for six weeks, Mrs. Murdoch's gaze rolled heavenwards.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" she said.

Men, give her men every time. They were less trouble. They did not criticise. If anything went wrong they mentioned it and it was over; it wasn't *harped* on. She told Mrs. Brand what Mrs. Barry had *let herself in for* and Mrs. Brand, when Mrs. Barry took her the paper, plunged into the subject.

"Mrs. Murdoch tells me you have a woman coming to you—and a child! Oh, you should never have a woman. Men every time!"

It was a gospel that sounded odd from one whose deep-seated belief was that a woman, simply by being a woman, was superior to a man. And Mrs. Barry, knowing how ardent a feminist Mrs. Brand was, felt perturbed. Mrs. Murdoch's horror—so she had thought—might be only due to the fact that women were more particular about the removal of dust from the corners and from under beds.

"A married woman might have a baby," Mrs. Brand continued. "It mightn't show till too late, when it would look bad to tell her to go and have it in the hospital. You might have her on your hands suddenly in labour. And a single woman, unless you have made inquiries, is risky too. A young man brings just young men home, and you can say to him, 'No women guests allowed—no *cousins* even. We know these cousins! A sister, maybe, sometimes. You can tell by the face if she's a sister.' And he'll just laugh and say, 'All right.' But if you tell a woman she can't have a man calling on her she's insulted and there's an undercurrent all the time of unpleasant feeling. Oh, no, I'm sorry for you. A woman and a child is dreadful—dreadful."

It was dreadful, as it turned out. Mrs. Perkins, the mate's wife, was a great lolloping woman, heavy of eyelids, a somnolent creature, thickly powdered, more partial in fact to powder than water, and with excess of frill-fralls about her attire that gave her a slatternly appearance. As for the child,

she was a “little angel,” and “quiet as a mouse” while her father was still in port and might come in at any moment; but after Alice and her mother had waved the ship away——

She ran to and fro in the house. She bumped the kitchen door open and rushed to the sink, screamed, ran back through the flat into the sitting-room, over to the window, and screamed again there. Mrs. Barry asked her, in the seemingly fit gentle accents for a first reproof to a child, not to come dashing into the kitchen. Little Alice put out her tongue, stamped her foot, yelled, rushed to the front room where her mother lay on the bed—and yelled there.

Fortunately Mr. Amara and Mr. Rathie were out then. Neil sat by the kitchen table, pale after his bout of bronchitis, staring at Alice during these sudden entrances as though he wondered what ailed her. And each time that she brought up against the sink, raising her shrill voice in a yell, she pulled a face at Neil. He did not find her attractive. Clearly he was contented that she did not wish to make overtures to him.

Mrs. Barry did not complain to the mother at once. The child, she hoped, would quiet down anon. But it irked her that every time a knock sounded at the door Alice must come running to see who was there. At last, on the third day of their occupancy, Mrs. Barry decided to ask a favour, and went to Mrs. Perkins’ room. Alice was asleep in the bed, Mrs. Perkins was rubbing some ointment into her face before the sideboard that had been temporarily transformed for her into a dressing-table.

“I wonder,” said Mrs. Barry, talking quietly to let the sleeping child lie, “if you would mind telling your little girl not to run out to see who is at the door every time anyone calls.”

“What harm does it do?” asked Mrs. Perkins, and then, “All right, I’ll tell her. Your boy is so sickly that I suppose he never makes any noise and you expect all children to be as quiet as mice. But all right, I’ll tell her.”

“Thank you,” said Mrs. Barry, and retired.

Mrs. Perkins may or may not have spoken about the matter to her little girl. At any rate, Alice continued in her prying, though the dashing in and out of the kitchen stopped. As the week wore on there came an evening on which Mrs. Barry was startled to hear a scream in Mrs. Perkins’ voice, “Don’t do that, I tell you!”

“I will!” the little angel shrieked in reply.

“Come here, you brat!”

“I won’t!”

Loud yells followed and the unmistakable sound of the application of a slipper and louder yells from Alice.

“Stop screaming!”

“I won’t!”

More slippings, and then, “Yes, I’ll stop. I’ll be good.”

Followed silence for a few minutes, then into the hall dashed Alice and raising her head screamed there. The mother darted after her, dragged her back to their room, and once more there came the sounds of chastisement, of screams and counter-screams.

“Stop screaming!”

“I won’t!”

“You will!”

“Oh, yes, I will. I will be good.”

Neil, his temperature normal, and with only an occasional residual cough, was back at school again, waved away from Mr. Amara’s window, the other room facing up the street occupied by Mrs. Perkins and Alice. Actually they occupied more than one room. Mrs. Barry had further evidence why Mrs. Murdoch had rolled her eyes heavenward on hearing of the new lodgers and Mrs. Brand had prophesied that they would be *dreadful*. For Mrs. Perkins, going down to the local shops, would come home with “a tasty bit” of this or that for lunch and decide to have it instead of what Mrs. Barry had already prepared. Not only that but she would come into the kitchen and say: “I’ll cook it and save you the trouble. I just love cooking sometimes.” Then she would sit down and tell Mrs. Barry of the men who had adored her, forgetting that she had come to cook.

Came later that *dreadful* day for Mr. Amara: Alice, hearing the sound of a key in the door, ran out to discover who came and butted him fairly in the midriff with her curly head. In a pensive voice he told Mrs. Barry of the experience when she carried in his evening meal. She assured him she was very sorry.

“That is a very noisy child,” he went on sadly. “The arrival of that child has changed my life for me.”

Mr. Rathie had no complaint. But he seemed, Mrs. Barry thought, quiet though he was, to have become even more quiet, glum and quiet. He had no

key and one day when she opened to him out popped Alice.

“I’ve seen you before,” she said.

He paid no heed, walking on to his door.

“What’s your name?” she demanded.

He entered his room and, without looking round, said he, “My name is Norval. On the Grampian Hills my father feeds his flock,” and slammed his door.

“You’re a liar!” shouted Alice. “You’re a liar!” and she kicked his door several times.

“Don’t do that!” said Mrs. Barry sharply.

“I will,” and the little angel kicked again.

That brought Mrs. Perkins sleepily into the hall. She caught her daughter’s hand and dragged her to their room. She closed the door and there was a repetition of the yells to which the flat was becoming accustomed.

Suddenly Mr. Amara’s door opened. He ran across the hall and fled from the place. Mr. Rathie, less sensitive, remained quiescent in his room. Mrs. Barry stood in the kitchen, staring at the fire. Neil with head raised over his lesson-books, listened as one spellbound.

“Yes, I’ll have to ask her to leave,” said Mrs. Barry. “I’ll lose Mr. Amara otherwise.”

As she was so considering she heard Mrs. Perkins’ voice in the hall.

“Yes, my pet and precious. Mother is going to buy her little girlie a nice doll now and her little girl will be good till daddie comes home.”

“Oh, yes, I’ll be good.”

“There’s a precious. If you’re not, God help you!”

The outer door slammed and they were gone.

These were wearing days. The doll was not a mascot. Next day was the worst of all. This must come to an end! Mr. Amara clinched Mrs. Barry’s decision.

“How long,” he asked, as she cleared away his dinner dishes, “is that child to be here?”

“A little over a month,” replied Mrs. Barry. “I’m very sorry about it. I had no idea she was such a child. Her father told me she was a little angel.”

Mr. Amara’s smooth face cracked in a great number of wrinkles and his eyes were but slits in a vast smile. Suddenly the smile was extinguished, giving place to a veneer of placidity, his face as a mask. Then it changed again. It became as that of the executioner on an oriental print.

“I wonder it has not been killed,” he said. He put his head to one side and gazed ruefully before him. “I do not want to leave you, Mrs. Barry. As I have told my friend the consul, I am comfortable here. But I fear that I shall be violent to that child some day. It runs to look at me when I come in always. I do not know why, but that annoys me. When it looks at me I wish to end its life. That looking at me is as much annoyance to me as when it hit me like a goat in my stomach one day with its head. I like your home and I like your little boy. I do not find him offensive. When we do happen to meet I can say to him, ‘Hullo, little boy,’ and he replies nicely. But I cannot speak to that little girl. Your boy is polite. That little girl pushes up its nose at me and—squints, is it? Squints?”

He squinted at Mrs. Barry for elucidation.

“Oh—squints.”

“Thank you. Yes, it squints at me, looking both inward toward its nose and the other way, outward.” He laughed. “Oh, it makes me murderous.”

He put a hand to his forehead and pressed his eyes.

“I wonder,” he said, “it does not hurt its eyes by squinting at me as it does. I feel as if it has been here in this place screaming for all my life.”

“I know how you feel,” said Mrs. Barry. “I am going to ask the mother to find other lodgings.”

“Dear me! I do not want to be the cause of you having to expel a lodger—with pecuniary loss. But you do not look very well yourself since,” and he smiled beautifully, “the little angel come here, and I think it is wearing you out.”

So Mrs. Barry went to Mrs. Perkins and gave her ultimatum.

“I am very sorry,” she said, “but I must ask you to go. I have a lodger who may be with me for years and he is talking of leaving because of the noise.”

“Perhaps I won’t be able to find lodgings. What then?” and Mrs. Perkins swayed to the mirror and powdered her nose, while little Alice charged at the sphere, embraced it, kicked her legs in air, and whirled back and forth on it, spinning it upon its axis.

“Then you will have to go to a hotel,” replied Mrs. Barry.

Mrs. Perkins turned slowly, with a look of astonishment. She had not heard that accent before from her landlady. Next morning she went out early with Alice and, returning, packed her boxes. Then she called Mrs. Barry.

“I’m only going to pay you to date,” she said, “seeing you asked me to go. I’m not going to pay till the end of the week.”

“That will be quite satisfactory,” said Mrs. Barry.

When Mrs. Perkins had gone (with voluble entreaties all the way downstairs of, “Careful, cabby! Careful!”—“Cabby, go easy! I’ve just thrown the stuff in the box and not packed it proper!” and Alice shouting, “Careful, cabby! Go easy, cabby!”) a sense of peace descended on the flat and Mrs. Barry, very tired, sat down to savour it.

A pigeon on the landing-board crouched close to one of the cotes and cooed that constant low croon, *Ooo-oh, ooo-oh, ooo-oh*, but instead of finding it melancholy she found it was a sound of reprieve, of infinite ease. Mrs. Perkins and her little angel, the smell of powder and unguents, were gone.

Her mind went back to the green dusk of a high wood in Kyle. Her husband was with her. Remote, and inexplicably exquisite and precious to hear was the crooning of wood-pigeons over their heads beyond the shafts of sun and shade. That’s where the slow, persistent cooing outside the window in Heather Street took her so that the very air of that past day and of that place was in her nostrils. It gave her a catch at the heart to come back to the present. It was as though, thinking of the past deeply, she was drifting away from the present for ever.

During that period it was chiefly by aid of brave maxims, phrases of valour, and recorded examples of courage, that she *kept going*. She read an article one day, in the church magazine, by a missionary to the Orient in which he told of how his Japanese servant seemed always “to have a smile for the world,” but how, chancing to see him when he thought himself unobserved, that face of good cheer was drawn as in pain and stamped with grief. The writer had discovered, on inquiry, that his servant was both physically ill and mentally harassed.

Mrs. Barry added that story to others of a like sort and to the brave maxims, phrases of valour in her mental vade-mecum. The pain that had driven her to Mr. Gilmour and Dr. MacPherson for advice was now constant, but bearable, with no sudden flaring spasms; and she tried to treat it as, when a girl, she had tried to treat toothache, upon some theory that what one thinks of becomes more marked. But there were times when, instead of saying, “I’m all right,” or “This pain is nothing,” she found herself saying, “I must not be ill—I can’t be ill—I have to look after Neil.” There were times also when in place of making speeches to herself she took consolation in the words of the soothsayer at the tent-door who had told her: “You need not worry about the boy. He’ll be cared for.”

Constant pain wearied her. Perhaps the attempt to make mind triumph over body wearied also. If she fell ill and died, what would become of Neil? She thought of Aunt Rachel. No, Aunt Rachel might—might—take Neil under her wing but never could Aunt Rachel give him anything but a vinegary charity. The Kinnairds? No, she could not ask them to look after him. She had not heard from them since the day she had carried from their home a bundle of new old clothes. She had written to Emma at Christmas, but had no card even from them. Wouldn’t it be splendid if Lady Shaw played fairy-godmother? Fairy-godmothers, alack, she thought, are but for fairy-tales.

Lying awake at night, such often were her thoughts. Back they would go to Aunt Rachel because of their relationship. No, no, no, useless! To think of her only brought bitterness. In her mind’s eye she saw Aunt Rachel, ageless, withered, and vigorous (looking always round about sixty-five) and heard her, in memory, chattering in her quick voice: “Terrible! Things are terrible! One just has to *harden* one’s heart. Got to! Just got to think of oneself.” And

her son and heir, the “confirmed bachelor” who had also that ageless appearance, seeming always—even to those who might see him but once in a lustre—anything from thirty-five to forty, would pipe up in that manner of his suggesting either filial piety or the sycophantish, or a blend of both, “Oh, yes, by gad! Got to—got to harden one’s heart—think of oneself, by gad!”

There came into her head frequently a recollection of the article she had read in the daily paper on William Quantock, founder of the Caledonia Orphan Homes. The article had mentioned that he had no door-to-door collectors, that the secret of his great work was, in a word, Faith, that he believed in the efficacy of prayer. Sceptics would snort at that, no doubt, but he was not a myth. Lying awake worrying over Neil’s future, she would draft a letter, in her mind, to the Orphan Homes, a letter explaining her position, her dread—if “anything happened” to her—of leaving her son uncared for, and asking if, in the event of her death, arrangements could be made for him to be looked after at the Homes. Even in the ordinary course of events she would likely go before him, some day. He would be left alone.

A little bitter thought would enter then, and it troubled her that bitter thoughts came. She would remember Mrs. Brand saying to her that no woman should be content with only marriage-lines, that every woman should demand also of the man who married her an insurance company’s certificate to show that her husband’s life was insured to an amount that, should he die, would leave her comfortable. She believed that her neighbour had been “pumping her” to discover if her sole support was in the lodgers’ payments; and she did not think that Mrs. Brand’s curiosity was of the kindly sort. She suspected—and hated herself for suspecting—that Mrs. Brand, with her annuity, only wanted to find out if she was dependant upon the lodgers so as to feel a squalid sort of superiority.

How could she tell Mrs. Brand that they never thought of insurance in the days of wealth, that the days of poverty came suddenly, that then her husband had taken out an insurance policy (with no urging from her, in fact with a feeling of misery, for her, as though she were made to bank on his postulated death before her), had hard work to pay the instalments, and that when he died but a little later, all that she received had gone to bury him? She had just voiced agreement without feeling it, “Yes, that’s so,” rebelling inwardly against something in Mrs. Brand’s attitude to men, a predatory quality it seemed to her. Mrs. Brand had once told her of Mr. Brand’s fatal illness, and ended, “It was a happy release when he went.” And Mrs. Barry had said, “He suffered a lot?” to which Mrs. Brand had replied, “Oh, no, but he was bedridden, and an awfu’ tie.”

“But I mustn’t lie here imputing meanness to people,” she’d murmur to herself, and dismiss such thoughts from her mind, as she dismissed memories of Aunt Rachel, because they were not broadening but constricting.

A sense of spiritual desolation came upon her at that period. She felt as though, as she walked, on either side was a shadow. A darkness of the spirit accompanied her. There was a wall, or a moat, between her and whatever it was that had hitherto sustained her. It occurred to her that it was some time since she had been to church, she had so much to do, was so tired; but perhaps if she attended a service she might feel less deserted. If only as in thanksgiving for Neil’s recovery from sickness she should go to church.

The bells began to clang. She had lots of time for it was only a step or two to the church. Neil was happy to go with her. He did not understand church but to go was an outing. The bell was still making its terrific din in the steeple as they walked decorously up the steps and past the two sentries in frock coats (as Neil saw them) who stood at the door. He was wondering if the pigeons that lived in the belfry, the strays—the “strags” as Roy Macintosh called them—sat still during the din up there, accustomed to it, or flew about till it stopped. Mrs. Barry, mounting the steps, by the mere association of the movement, the clangour of the bell, and the smell of dank stone that pervaded the portico, was gathering in her heart as it were the quintessence of all her enterings into churches during her life.

They passed to their pew and as soon as she had come to her place she slipped forward and kneeling upon the hassock, with her hands folded before her she bowed her head and prayed. The touch of that hassock on her knees was healing. The smell of the varnish was consolatory. Memories—memories—she could not begin her private prayer for the rush of memories. She was in the church at Wester Kyle and when she raised her head she would see, through the windows, the wavering branches of trees. No, that was but a moment’s delusion. But to retain the emotion of it she kept her head bowed, her eyes closed. She had no specific prayer then; she did not know for what it would be best to pray; she just bowed her head before the Spirit with which she had lost touch.

Neil, beside her, had imitated her motions and bent forward, but with his head slewed to one side that he might watch her for guidance as to when to sit up again. She remained bowed so long that he peeped backward at other bowed heads, wondering what it was all about. Then his mother sat back in her pew.

It was the assistant, the young clergyman spoken of by the grocer in Clydeside Road as “that young *nyaff*,” who conducted the preliminaries. Neil watched with interest his languid forward motion, the drooping of his hands before him as he sibilantly sighed to the congregation, “Le’—’s—spray!” A sigh of movement answered his sigh as the worshippers bent knees to hassocks.

Neil looked round carefully. Here and there a man sat erect; here and there were those who but bowed forward, did not kneel in the House. He saw one or two men who were twisting their moustaches, or scratching their heads, or smoothing their hair; others were running a finger between collar and throat, or twirling their watch-chains round a finger. It was never necessary to tell him to be quiet in church. When all the elders were hushed, to be quiet was understood; but what they were being quiet about was beyond his understanding.

Once he had gone for a period to Sunday School. The children, one Sunday, had been told a sort of fairy tale and, after having heard of angels, had been given sheets of paper and told to draw angels. He had not got the idea rightly it seemed. Never having seen one, having only had the description from a lady in whose utterance, whose delivery, he had been spellbound rather than in what she had to say, he was stumped. He drew one that was rather like Mr. Amara, shaded darkly, and wearing his silk hat and carrying his cane, and clapped wings on to him elevated like pigeons’ wings as he had often watched them when the pigeons ceased to flap and just glided. The lady who had set them to drawing angels was annoyed and told him that at day-school he would be punished for drawing such a picture. He referred the matter to his mother on return, and though she had that deep sense of a Something not ourselves in the world to aid us, she thought it was stuff and nonsense to set children drawing angels, of the opinion that there were no such creatures. So Sunday School had ended for him with Mr. Amara, winged, careening in space.

However, we are now in church:

Now the lily-white hands of the Rev. Algernon Aberlady took his attention. They were immobile and an overhead light was on them. They were clasped like the stone hands in an effigy to one side of the choir-stalls. The voice fascinated him—and slightly amused him too, for being young he had not learnt that the strange is not necessarily the whimsical.

“We have done those ah things—which we ought to have done ah—and we have left undone ah those things which we ought not—er——”

Something had gone wrong. The hands fluttered slightly, turned flesh again from stone. Neil saw one of the men who sat erect smile to himself.

“—— have left undone ah those things which we *ought* to have done ——”

Beside him his mother heaved a little sigh. He looked at her. Her eyes were tight shut; her gloved finger-tips were close together, an expression of tensity was on her face. Neil wondered why she looked like that. Strange world, strange place this, with its pillars, its duskiness, and all these people before something invisible, something that had to do, perhaps, with the gleam of light on the pews, the splinters of grey twilight among the acanthus fronds, high up, and the quiet that was broken so markedly by a cough now and then.

He looked up the fluted lines of the pillars to where they fanned under the gallery. He saw a little girl whose head was on the board at the front of the gallery beside all the other bowed heads there. She was gazing down at the church's lower and central part with roving eyes.

The prayer ended and his mother and all the others sat back again. The choir rose; the congregation rose; but the congregation did not sing as a body. Only here and there someone occasionally sang, very low, a bar or two. It was a paid choir and they were singers indeed. A woman's voice went up like a wind-plucked kite and the rumble of a man's pursued it as if a drum had been thrown in air. Now and then others joined in, and there was a part in which all sang together (bass and tenor, soprano and contralto) as if were a different melody and yet each fitted with the rest in the most stirring fashion.

The Rev. Algernon Aberlady gave place to Dr. Porteous who, when he stood up, deepened the hush. He wore a little bib at his throat, very white, and had a gown that shimmered like dark water when he moved. He stood before them, saying nothing. He made silence profound in the place, but whether God was in that silence or not, hard to say.

“My text to-day——” he began and raised his head in a pause of effect.

Mrs. Barry took up a Bible and then looked toward him and waited. When he gave out the text she turned up the place, though Neil noticed that there were those (notably among them the man who did not kneel and who had smiled once in the middle of a prayer) who did not seem to think it necessary to look up the text seeing that Dr. Porteous was going to read it to them anyhow.

What it was all about Neil did not know. His mother, however, was enthralled. Every now and then the same question was repeated by the preacher. He'd pause and put up both hands and hold his gown on each side as some men hold the lapels of their coats, and then he would raise his head, and ask, "Canst thou by seeking find out God?"

Nobody answered.

Then he went on again, gliding into one of those little personal essays that it was his wont to toss into a sermon, "When I was a boy in Kyle we used to go to a certain wood in the time when the bluebells were out under the beeches——"

Mrs. Barry did not know he had been a boy in Kyle, did not know he had any connection with Kyle, and as she listened, entranced, she thought, in a heart-leap, that she must find some opportunity to tell him of the intensified pleasure he was giving her. As he went on she was glad she had followed her impulse, tired though she was, to come to church that day, for it was an oasis, it was a sanctuary. Here the three ogres—Rent, Rates, and Taxes—were ousted. There was at least reprieve.

He ended with a quotation "from a new young poet," something about how he, the young poet in question, had found God

“. . . where this virgin brooklet silvers past,
And yellowing either bank the king-cups blow."

Neil glanced at his mother. She was rapt, lost, her eyes blind and bright. The king-cups were blowing for her. There was another world besides the world of physical pain and of financial stringency and of anxieties. It seemed, deep in her heart, that God was with her again. She was intensely happy.

That night she had so violent an attack of pain, after a fairly long period of comparative ease, that the beads of sweat stood on her face and she clenched and unclenched her hands in agony, unable to hide her trouble from Neil. His anxiety was like that of a dog, when its master is injured, only able to paw and whimper. His rush to her and his embrace she fended off.

“Oh, don’t touch me,” she moaned. “I can’t stand it! Neil, I think you must go for Mrs. Murdoch.”

Mrs. Murdoch, though one usually early to bed, was fortunately still up and in response to Neil’s excited and wildly anxious summons came bouncing into the kitchen.

“See, see! Where’s the pain?” she said.

“There. Don’t touch it.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Murdoch, “you’d better run for the doctor. No, I’ll go.”

“Perhaps I could hold out till morning and not bother him now—so late,” whimpered Mrs. Barry.

“You know yourself. How would it be if I filled a bottle with hot water? Ye have a stone jar, have ye, or a rubber bed-bag?”

Mrs. Barry lay back in her chair and drew a long breath.

“It’s easier,” she said.

Mrs. Murdoch stared at her, saw her an ashen colour and wet with the sweat of her agony.

“There’s a rubber bag hanging in the bathroom,” said Neil. “I’ll get it.”

When Mrs. Murdoch had filled it—

“Where just is the place that ye have the pain?” she asked, and being shown put the bag on it. “I’ll be back in a meenit. I left the door ajar. I’ll go and get my key and shut it and sit wi’ ye a whiley lest it comes on again.”

She came quietly back again and stood for a moment looking at Mrs. Barry, then sat down, biting her lip on and on, her big brown eyes full of commiseration and anxiety.

“Neil, you had better get off to bed,” said Mrs. Barry, for Neil leant against the table, staring at her also.

After he had gone her eyelids began to droop. Mrs. Murdoch sat very quiet, and without taking any special note of what it rested on her gaze roved round the kitchen. Then again she would look at Mrs. Barry.

“I think ye are going to sleep,” she murmured at last, and rose. “Ye are going to sleep, are ye?” she asked in a low voice, bending over the sick woman.

Mrs. Barry drew a long breath and opened her eyes.

“My prayer has been answered,” she said. “I fell asleep.”

“I thoct so. How’s the pain now?”

“Easier. It feels just the way the place where an aching tooth has been feels”—she drew another long breath—“when the tooth has been pulled.”

“Ah understand. You’re fair exhausted wi’ the spasm. Now, would ye like me to go for the doctor or will ye go to bed and sleep again?”

“I’ll go to bed and to sleep.”

“I’ll wait till ye are in your bed, and mind ye—if it starts again in the nicht ye are no’ to hesitate to send Neil to waken me.”

“You are very kind, Mrs. Murdoch.”

“Havers!”

So Mrs. Barry undressed and climbed into the bed-recess in the kitchen.

“How is it?”

“All right. Please don’t stop, Mrs. Murdoch, I’ll drop off to sleep, I think. I’m sorry I was so silly about it and frightened Neil and bothered you.”

“Now, see here, I’ll leave the matches on the corner of the table. Or maybe I’ll leave a peep of gas. It will no’ blow out if I dinna leave it ower low. Good-nicht.”

Only a heavy breathing replied. She bent over Mrs. Barry and gazed at her, biting her under lip in distress, and then she stole away. She crept into the sitting-room.

“Are you wauken, laddie?” she whispered.

Neil leapt up in his bed.

“Yes.”

“If she takes bad again,” she whispered, “ye’ll come for me no matter what the time. No, no, laddie, dinna rise. I can let mysel’ out and draw the door after me so easy it’ll no’ waken her.”

Mrs. Barry slept without moving till the alarm-clock woke her in the morning, rose and prepared breakfast for Mr. Amara, heard him patter off, sat down in the chair before the fire and dozed till it was time to attend to Mr. Rathie who had not to be at work till eight-thirty, got him off her hands and then Neil, with the assurance that she was quite well again, away to school, waving to him from the window gaily. Then she hurried off to Dr. Alexander Craig.

The housekeeper opened the doctor’s front door.

“Good-morning. Is Dr. Craig in.”

“Yes, come in. Oh, it’s you again. Is it for the laddie ill?”

“No. It’s about myself.”

“Oh, well, come in the waiting-room. He has somebody wi’ him the noo.”

She was led into a room with double windows looking down on the Clydeside Road. The windows were not only shut but held tight with little wedges, to prevent them from rattling to the passing traffic, no doubt, and keep out its din. The doctor who had got Neil out of close air into open air evidently gave up the attempt when noise was too great. Yet the room was very fresh.

“We aye leave this door open to keep the room aired,” said the buxom lady, who reminded her somewhat of Mrs. Murdoch. “What was the name again?”

“Mrs. Barry.”

“All right.”

Mrs. Barry sat down, in an easy-chair. It was good to be there. Yes, it was good to be there, close to a doctor should the pain return. The freedom from it was good too, a luxury. The freedom from it was ecstasy. Perhaps this sense of being almost disembodied, after having been desperately aware of the body, was partly what people meant who spoke of the value of pain. She leant back in the chair and rested. There were a lot of books in the room. On either side of the fireplace, which was at the end away from the door,

were books in open cases; along the inner walls, books in glass cases, atop of one a vase with a great flaunt of honesty-seeds in it. There was a faint, but pleasant odour in the room that came perhaps, thought Mrs. Barry, from a bowl something like those for gold-fish which hung from a small hook in the ceiling over the central table. It contained a liquid almost colourless like water. If that clean odour she was aware of was of a disinfectant it was not as pungent as the disinfectants used in the waiting-room for out-patients at the West End Road Hospital. The two windows were reflected in it in tiny curves of light, as in a witch-ball. Feeling "half here and half away" she noted all this—window-wedges and books, faint clean scent and hanging bowl with twinkles of reflected windows in it.

She heard a sound in the hall—the scuff of a loose slipper—and Dr. Craig appeared at the door in a dressing-gown, the cords pendant.

"Aye," he said. "Come this way."

She followed him and he halted, pointed a finger at another room and she passed in before him. It seemed, at first, utterly bare—no pictures on the wall, just a table laden with bottles, to one side of it a big wooden chair with arms, to the other an ordinary chair, to one side of the room a long, low, ordinary couch, to the other a high, extraordinary one, an operating table, perhaps.

He pointed to the patients' chair, and she sat down. Subsiding slowly into his own he stared out of the window as if lost in thought, then felt his chin, scratched his head. Not to remain watching him, she looked at the table. Rank after rank of bottles filled almost all its space. They were full, or nearly full, of powders of various colours, bottles of plain glass mostly. But there were some green ones in a little cluster apart, like officers over the others, and there was a phalanx of tall blue ones, thick of neck, with large corks in them, corks put in place with tufts of cotton-wool projecting round them. A little way apart from the rest were a few of red glass.

The doctor turned to her.

"I was just thinking of that patient I've been seeing to," he said.

He did not ask her if she had come about the laddie again. He said, "Where is the pain?" and arranged the leaves of a blotter before him, for which the thronging bottles allowed a little space, took up a paper-cutter that lay beside it, and tapped the palm of his left hand.

She gave him a slightly astonished look.

“Just here,” she said. “I had such a spasm last night that I nearly sent for you.”

“Why didn’t ye?”

“It was late. I didn’t like to bother you if I could wait till morning.”

He laughed quietly.

“I have been gotten out o’ my bed at three a.m.,” he said, “to gang three miles to see a wumman who had the wind. ’Twas the wind and nothing more. Aye. Not but what it can be severe—wind. How long did the pain last?”

“I don’t know. It seemed——”

“Ages, eh? How long have ye been having it?”

She considered that.

“Now I come to think of it,” she said, “I believe I’ve had it over a year.”

“Aye. Weel, just tak’ off your claes doon tae yer shift.”

He rose and drew a little further open one wing of a folding screen—its panels of a coarse yellow canvas—that stood in a corner, and, as though tolerantly to humour modesty lest she had it in excess, passed to the window and lowered the blind. The screen hid a chair and a large basin affixed to the wall with taps over it. *Hot, Cold* she read as she removed her upper clothes and hung them on the chair.

“How’s the boy?” came the doctor’s voice.

“He’s wonderfully well.”

“Nae wheeze in his chest, eh?”

“No.”

“That’s fine. Aw, it’s an awful climate whiles. It’s the soot we breathe too. Have ye been a town woman all your life?”

“No. I was born in Ayrshire.”

“What part?”

“Wester Kyle,” said she, and came from behind the screen.

“Aye, aye. I’m a border man mysel’. Galasheils. ‘The lads o’ Gala water—Braw, braw lads.’ Ye’ll ken that.”

“Oh, yes.”

Odd, she thought, to be standing there like that, chatting about where they had been born and the doctor looking as though he did not realise she was ready for his examination.

“Aye.”

He stepped to her, laid a hand on her, smacked it with the edge of the other, here, there, in quick succession, then back again the hand passed to one spot tried before and on to another. Then he went behind her and drew her to him with one hand pressed to her in front, the other against her back. She knew that grip. She knew what would follow. That was what Dr. Ian MacPherson had done. Dr. Craig’s hands seemed to meet within her. A picture flashed in her mind—along with a stab of pain—of an old woman she had once seen washing tripe and rubbing it over a washing-board.

“Aye,” he said.

“Do I dress again?” she asked.

“Yes.”

She walked behind the screen, and as she dressed she spoke to the room.

“I went to the West End Road Hospital one day,” she said, “and I saw Dr. MacPherson. He said he would like to have a consultation and asked me to write to him if I decided to so that he could try to get you.”

“Get me?” came Craig’s voice.

“Yes.”

“I don’t think Ian needed me,” he said. “But look, if that’s how he feels I’ll write to him.” She came from behind the screen. “I’ll get him here and we’ll have a”—he wagged his head—“thorough examination.”

He took the blind-cord in hand, twitched it, and let the blind run up slowly on its roller, passed to his chair and sat down, fluttered a long knuckly hand over the phalanx of the bottles and carefully selected one of the red ones, then flipped in front of him twelve little squares of white paper from a pile of these. He put his forefinger on the lever of a small pair of scales before him, dropped a diminutive weight upon one of its trays and shook grains of powder on to the other. Slowly he continued until on each square of paper he had a small mound of powder. The paper-knife was for aid in neatly folding these papers. He put them in an envelope and wrote on it, speaking the words as he did so, “Take one in a little water every three hours,” and leaning across the table handed it to her.

“That will hold ye till I can arrange for Dr. MacPherson,” he said. “It will be pleasanter for ye here than in yon place. He might want the students to be in on’t. I’ll get him here and send ye word when tae slip roond.”

“I don’t know how to thank you——”

“Aye, that’ll be a shilling. So ye were born in Wester Kyle. Well, it’s a bonny spot. How old are ye?”

“Forty-seven.”

“Oh, I have ye beat, but we maun all shuffle off some day,” and he rose. “I’ll get Dr. MacPherson as soon as possible and send ye word at once.”

If Dr. Craig had been another sort of man she might have asked him directly for his opinion, a verdict; but he seemed at one and the same time humanly close to her, sympathetic, and yet remote as in some impalpable wrapping woven out of his mind. Besides, he would probably only have told her to await the consultation with Dr. MacPherson.

Three days later she was again in that entry with the unassuming *Alex. Craig, Surgeon*, stencilled in white on the brown wall. The remark he had made about being older than she, and how all must “shuffle off some day,” gave her a thought, passing that sign, that was not, as a rule, much in her vein. A surmise of what the verdict upon her would be was probably the cause of it. That sign would be painted over one day; only one peering close would be able to trace where it had been; and what a pity that so fine a man should be forgotten, smudged away from remembrance by the brush of the years. She would like to have a chat with him on—well, religion she supposed, would like to hear his views on the soul as well as the body.

She would have been astonished had she known that his gospel of life was, “Expect nothing good from anybody, but do your best for them,” with another for addendum to it, “When any do show goodness it is all the more pleasant by not being hoped for.” She would have had a spell of quiet pondering on it had she been told that his aloof gentleness was born out of a creed as of disappointment in men, lack of faith in them flowering into pity instead of turning to cynicism.

Craig: there it was; that was all that was on the name-plate on his door. She felt slightly faint as she rang the bell.

“You are punctual,” said the buxom dame who reminded her of Mrs. Murdoch, opening to her ring. “So are they. You have just to go into the consulting-room,” and she went to the door and opened it.

The two men were standing in the window-recess talking. Together they turned.

“Aye, there ye are,” said Dr. Craig.

“Well, here we are, Mrs. Barry,” said Dr. MacPherson.

“I think ye might lie up here,” said Craig. “Just slip off your bodice and—och aye, doon tae yer shift.”

As she passed behind the screen she heard Dr. MacPherson say: “I like the way you have your bottles arranged. You could play chess with them if you had the table done in squares!”

“Aye.”

“Do all your own dispensing? Still take a taste of everything?”

“Usually. It’s a habit I’ve gotten into.”

“Habits are hard to drop.”

“Wi’ some folks. I was saying that to a man just yesterday. His wife called me in to see him and I looked at him a while and says I, ‘Ye ken what’s wrang wi’ ye,’ and he tried to look perplexed as if he didna understand what I meant. I lookit at him and said, ‘Ye ken yersel’.’ Aye, some of them canna give up the drink. ‘Habits are hard tae drop for some of ye,’ I said to him. Are ye ready, Mrs. Barry?”

“Yes, thank you,” she said.

He swung the screen round in front of the window, drawing the blind but half-way for light.

Thankfulness to them, gratefulness to them: that was the emotion that carried her through. It was a “thorough examination” and her chief thought—which declared itself to them in her manner—was to give no trouble to these two who were being so good to her.

At last it was all over and she knew. She knew by the way Dr. MacPherson sighed. She knew by the way Dr. Craig said, “Aye, aye.”

As she dressed again, the screen swung back to its corner, they stepped over to the window. Dr. Craig gave the end of the blind a tug and let it slide up, let the cord run slowly through his fingers. They stood there looking out on the street, talking quietly together, so quietly that she caught but odd words.

“You tell her,” came, however, fairly clearly to her.

She stepped back from behind the screen. Dr. Craig went over to his place, motioning her to the patients' chair, and Dr. MacPherson sat down on the low couch.

"I'm sorry to have to tell you," began Dr. Craig, "that it is too far advanced for—any hope."

"Oh." A pause, and then, "Will I have any more attacks of pain such as I had the other night?" she asked.

"Other night?" said Craig sharply. "You didna have an attack since the one you came to me about?"

"No, that's the one I mean. Tell me, please—will I have many such attacks as that again?" and she looked to Dr. MacPherson because Dr. Craig was staring out of the window.

MacPherson avoided the direct answer.

"Alexander here—Dr. Craig—will be able to give you opiates to prevent that," he said. "But it is quite a good plan not to take them until it is really bad."

"I thought so," said she.

Then the question came into her eyes that they knew would come. They waited for her to ask.

"How long will I live?" she asked.

"That's what I was asking Dr. MacPherson while you were dressing," said Dr. Craig, his gaze coming back from the window. "I think, maybe—not long."

"A month?"

"Oh, maybe that. Maybe longer."

She thought over that. She was weighing this and that. If she was weakened much more by pain she would not be able to attend even to Mr. Amara. A month would give her time to arrange about Neil's future after she had gone—and then she might as well go as be laid up and have to pay for help and so leave less even of the little for him.

Suddenly she realised that she was sitting there planning and considering when all she had to do was to get up and go off to the putting of her house in order toward the leaving of it. This was the doctor's consulting-room and the verdict had been passed. It was not a place for her to meditate in.

She rose.

“You have both been very kind,” she said. “How much do I owe you for the examination?”

Dr. MacPherson had risen with her and at that inquiry he passed behind the screen, turned on a tap, and began to wash his hands.

“Oh, that’ll be a shilling—if ye want to pay,” replied Dr. Craig.

“But—but——” she glanced toward the screen. “Dr. MacPherson——”

“I’ll settle wi’ him. He comes and helps me whiles and I go and help him.”

Dr. MacPherson came back, drying his hands carefully, and smiled at her. She tendered her shilling to Dr. Craig and he thrust it into a trouser-pocket.

“I’ll drop in and see ye whiles,” he said, and stepped to the door.

“Good-bye, Dr. MacPherson,” said Mrs. Barry.

He took her hand, bowed over it.

“Good-bye, Mrs. Barry,” he said.

When he raised himself erect the look on his face gave her courage. It was of respect for her. Respect for her! She had to live up to that. It would be an aid to her.

Dr. Craig walked across the hall at her side, opened wide the outer door, stepped out on to the landing with her.

“Send word any time ye want me,” he said. “I’ll pop up anyhow and see ye. If ye should happen to have an attack of the pain—bad, ye ken—tak’ a dose of the medicine I’m going to send roond tae ye after I’ve had a chat with Dr. MacPherson.”

“I could take it with me.”

“I just want a crack with him first. But ye’ll promise me ye’ll send for me no matter what the time may be gin ye have another bout like yon?”

“Yes, I promise. And thank you, doctor, ever so much——”

He nodded and turned away and passed indoors.

It was over. It had not been as bad as she had feared. It had not been as bad as she had feared—to have sentence passed.

Down in the street it seemed to her that the tram-cars and the lorries, the people going and coming, were not real. The clamour of Clydeside Road had, then, a quality as of the sea heard from an inland valley. People thought that the dead were ghosts, unless they thought that at death all ended. But, after that verdict, she had the oddest feeling that those going by—and she with them—were as ghosts compared with something else that they, that she, might be. A half-life—only a half-life—was this life here, as lived by men and women, with rumour of some other life.

As if treading on air, with a feeling in her feet as though the paving-stones were resilient under her, she went home to write her letter to William Quantock.

She considered that it would be easier for her to write in full what she had to communicate than to speak it when someone called from the Homes to see her, as no doubt someone would. Calmly she wrote of her circumstances, of the doctors' verdict, of her anxiety to make preparations for the care of the boy. A reply, signed *Mary Quantock*, came by return post, inviting her to go to the Homes, if convenient for her, upon the first Saturday, to discuss the matter of her letter.

But how could she do that with Mr. Rathie to feed and Mr. Amara to look after? As she was so considering, Mr. Rathie came in to tell her that the quarantine on his house was raised, and having paid her up to date he quietly departed. When he had gone down the stairs it was as though he had never been there. Very different was he from Mr. Stewart. She needed neither his winter cherry-tree nor the wrench he had left behind to remember him by. Mr. Rathie's main object in life seemed to be to get through it unobserved. He was always secluded behind a paper when she went in to lay his table. He eyed the progress of the preparation without moving his head, just his eyes, in sidelong furtive quick glances. Then he more swallowed than uttered a "Thank you." On going he did, after having turned away, bethink of revealing himself. He pivoted round and said, "I have to say that I have been rale comfortable." She replied, "I'm very glad," and he was gone—like an illusion.

However—the point about his going was that then there was only Mr. Amara to consider. She wondered whether she could ask him if he would be agreeable, for once, to having a cold lunch left for him on Saturday, all ready on his table—as Mrs. Murdoch had done with her lodgers when she adventured on her famous far travel to Edinburgh. Going into his room to clear away the dinner-things she was turning over in her mind a form of words with which to broach the subject. He was standing before the overmantel-mirror, arranging some new photographs of himself there.

"Oh, by the way, while I remember," he said to her reflection in the glass, "I have been invited by a friend of mine, whose acquaintance I have made at the engine-shops, to go with him to visit his family-home for the celebration of his birthday anniversary. When I go off on Saturday morning you will not see me till Sunday morning, when you shall once more see me like the bad sixpence. I shall not be back on Saturday night till the *wee sma'*

hours, when I shall let myself in quietly with my key,” and he grinned, very pleased with his linguistic skill.

Absurd to say, thought Mrs. Barry, that there is no plan in life! Faithless to imagine, she upbraided herself, that God had withdrawn and left her alone in a world like a jig-saw puzzle of which half the parts have been thrown into the baikie by accident.

Sometimes she felt so tired that a part of her would not have been sorry to be at the end save that, dying, she would leave Neil alone. Indeed sometimes she had the feeling that she'd be glad—apart from that, or if there were no Neil—to be gone, gone away from sharing the daily paper, discussing accidents and operations when waylaid on the stairs by neighbours, winding the alarm at night, wakening to it in the morning, feeling always that smouldering pain and trying not to think of it lest thinking of it might make it flare up. But as the train that carried them to Bridge of Caulder on the Saturday ran out from under the city's smoke-pall to where sunlight was not obliterated, not suffused or sifted through grey, but shone, truly shone, and when she saw an elaborate cloud of white and gold beyond a silver-grey hill of stubble, and harrowed fields in distance a deep purple, tears came to her eyes. Soon she would be leaving beauty—and had but glimpses of it.

Neil did not see these tears. He was watching the optical illusion of the telegraph-wires rushing upward only to be grabbed for and caught and pulled down by the poles, one after the other. The train slowed down.

“Brig o' Caulder! Brig o' Caulder!”

Well, here she was. It was the only way, things being as they were. No use of wondering if she did wisely. There was nothing else to do.

Beyond the gate where the ticket-checker stood a man in livery, with a cockade in his hat, a travelling rug over his arm, was craning his head to look for someone—but not for her. A young lad in rough tweeds regarded her speculatively from under the scoop of his cap, glanced at Neil, at her again, and inquiringly stepped towards them. She saw behind him a portion of a legend along the side of a waiting vehicle, just, “Caledonia Orphan —” and the rest hidden by an intervening cart.

“Excuse me, are you Mrs. Barry?”

“Yes.”

“Would you get in this bus, please,” he said.

She had made a resolve of bravery. She had made a resolve to be, indeed, matter of fact. All die some day. In the consulting-room she had made it when it occurred to her that she detained the two doctors from other patients, other work, their work with her done—and perhaps embarrassed them—and that therefore it was time for her to be gone. But, meeting Mary Quantock (when the bus, turning in at the gate of that village of villas and children, brought her to her journey's end), bravery was not needed.

Mary Quantock was one of those who seem to have an invisible and splendid companion with them. Her small body was richly inhabited. Mrs. Barry could speak to her perfectly—well—matter of fact when Neil had been carried off by a young man who was obviously brought in for no other purpose than that. Wouldn't he like to go and talk to the Newfoundland dog that strolled past the window, and perhaps go on to the river and see the fish in it, and perhaps have a ride on a donkey?

Alone, the two women discussed Neil's temperament. Mary Quantock explained legalities in the matter of his ultimate adoption by the Homes and gave Mrs. Barry a crisp document to carry away with her, read at her leisure, and sign. And it was not in Mrs. Barry's eyes that a tear suddenly showed glittering when all that matter-of-fact discussion was over, but in Mary Quantock's. Clearing her throat she then leapt up and suggested that her visitor might like a wash after the journey, and then they could have a walk round the grounds, and visit one of the homes.

Mrs. Barry did not need to have it explained to her that they were going to visit the villa in which Neil would live. The "father" and "mother" there she met, and they talked of anything but the core of the business that brought her. Then they turned back. Only twice did she have a dread that she was not going to be able to prevent a breakdown, but on each occasion her determination not to give in triumphed.

The first was on the way back with Miss Quantock from visiting the home where Neil would live later. She saw an unexpected shop, or store, and in its window jars of sweets—French tablet, butter-scotch, bull's eyes. The thought leapt on her that he would have a penny to spend now and then and come here to examine these jars to decide what he would buy. For a moment she could not speak.

The second occasion was on the way back to the station. Mary Quantock had come out to the bus with her and kissed her and (it was the first remark of the sort, though she had expected there would be many such), putting a hand on her arm had said, "My dear, remember, 'the Eternal God is our

refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms,'” the bus had climbed the hill beyond the river. Neil sat close to her.

“I’ve had a great day,” he said. “The dog went with us, and we saw fish in the water in a little pool, and then we went and looked at a big pool that’s shallow at one end and deep at the other, with spring-boards there. I’d like to come back in summer and learn to swim. There’s an instructor teaches swimming there in summer, but it’s too cold this time of year. And oh, the ride on the donkey! We got it in a field and it had no saddle, so I rode it bare-back. I’d no idea a donkey’s back-bone was so hard and broad. It must be as broad as that,” and he held his hands apart before him, “and the edges of it are very sharp. Oh, very. But it was great fun. I was just thinking it was time to be coming back to you when the gentleman said he thought so. I’ve had such a happy day here. You know, mummy, I think I’d like to be an orphan.”

The March winds whistled among the chimney-pots, plucking the smoke away and scattering it. Below, on the pavements, blown dry, girls played with skipping-ropes and boys played with marbles and with tops, spinning-tops and whip-tops, till darkness sent them home. Hobbledehoyes, who, a little older, would sit in the pubs, double-shuffled in the close-mouths. Others were out at extension classes, evening classes, or at the swimming-baths, or trudging down Clydeside Road, Clydeside Road West, and back again, to ogle at girls or to pick them up. On Saturday night the public-house doors swung and clients grown fighting-drunk were heaved into the street where they were arrested for being intoxicated and, if they had hit back on being thrown out, for assault. On Monday morning women trooped into the doorways over which the three balls of pawnbrokers hung. All week long the clang of rivetting sounded not far off, and the intermittent rattles of winches and donkey-engines loading and unloading ships. Dr. Craig, topped with his tall old-fashioned stove-pipe hat, went his rounds, bringing children into the world and easing the pains of the living and dying. ("That'll be a shilling if ye have it. If ye haven't, it can bide over.")

After her return from Bridge of Caulder, Mrs. Barry called on him and then on the Rev. Dr. Porteous to request their signatures in witness of hers on the documents Miss Quantock had given her relating to Neil's future. Her calm through these proceedings left Dr. Porteous, when he was able to grasp that she had not just come for a clergyman's signature to some ordinary document, stunned, and Dr. Craig, who had seen much of life, with something like reverence for the fortitude of such women.

Then, with all in order, and the document posted to Miss Quantock, something snapped within her. On her visit to Dr. Craig he had told her that bed was the place for her. Taking the opportunity of that call upon him to sound her heart he had an unspoken hope for her that, weakened as it was by the strain on it due to her refusal to give in, she would not, forced to give in at last, linger in her passing. That was a tired heart, he considered. No, she would hardly lie for months; weeks, likely. How she had borne up so long was beyond his comprehension unless there was a soul within the body that could keep it going when by all the physical signs it should collapse.

She did, in fact, collapse that day climbing the stairs to her flat. Mrs. Murdoch, on the landing, dancing the dust out of a mat that she had turned

upside down for that purpose, bouncing upon it with a *thump-thump-thump*, halted and stared at her. Mrs. Barry clung to the baluster-rail.

“If ever I saw daith,” said Mrs. Murdoch to Mrs. Brand, later, “it was in that woman’s eyes. Daith was in her, right in her, looking oot o’ her eyes.”

She was horrified. There was an ashen hue on that face that—whatever it meant, whatever sort of malady—meant one that would carry her off. The bone framework of the cheeks was mercilessly shown under the tightened skin, and that skin had a gleam through its pallor. There were beads of sweat on it like spots of froth.

“Oh, my good woman, what ails ye?” cried out Mrs. Murdoch.

Mrs. Barry, still holding the baluster-rail, told her all in an even voice.

“God sakes, woman, ye maun go to bed then.”

“Who’s to attend to things? I must keep up.”

“Why, I will! I have lost my last gentleman this very day, and I’m no’ likely to get anither immediately. He’s gone to Australia and the other to South Africa. It’s awfu’ the way they emigrate. But I’m free to come in your house and see to your gentleman, and to the callant too, get him off to the school wi’ a breakfast in him and his lunch sangwidges cut, and——”

“If you do that, Mrs. Murdoch, you’ll just have to take Mr. Amara’s money in payment.”

“Havers!”

“Oh, yes, that would be only fair,” and Mrs. Barry looked urgently into her friend’s face. “Don’t you see—it is as if there is a plan after all with us both? You have no lodger and I can’t attend to mine——”

With that Dr. Craig, who had followed her home, came up the stairs. They put her to bed in that back bedroom, the room Mr. Stewart had occupied. The doctor had brought his hypodermic syringe with him lest it were needed; and it was.

Neil was distressed over his mother’s illness. She had no cough; she had no crackle up and down in her chest, but she was none the less ill. She had to stay in bed. Why? It was a pain she had. Was it a pain as bad as he had when his fingers were crushed by a door that slammed shut on them in a draught? Yes, dear, perhaps something like that. Then it must be very painful.

She smiled at him and he left her and she lay back in bed, the world of what is called reality ebbing away partly because she could do no more and partly because of the effect of the opiate, which made it seem that her blood was thickened and that her head was hollow and stuffed with cotton-wool. *Woozy* it made her feel, she said, but it killed the pain.

Mr. Amara was greatly perturbed when he heard from Mrs. Murdoch that his landlady was in bed ill.

“What is wrong?” he asked, stepping back in trepidation lest she had some contagious malady which might be conveyed to him by Mrs. Murdoch.

“Oh, she’s been ailing for some time. She’s no’ very well. I’ll look after you, sir, till she—is better.”

“I hope she will be better soon. Is it anything infectious?”

“Anything—eh? Oh, smittle. Oh, no, nothing smittle.”

Perhaps he was ashamed of himself for having first thought of that, and wished to atone. Whatever the prompting, as soon as he had had dinner (and Mrs. Murdoch was a good cook though not a clean housekeeper) he hurried out and leaping on a tram-car got to the city’s centre in quest of a florist’s still open. He found one on the point of closing and returned to Heather Street with a great bunch of daffodils, people in the car wondering if it was a white girl or one of his own shade on whom he was going to call. He inserted his key so quietly in the lock that the stealthy sound of it brought Mrs. Murdoch into the hall thinking that a burglar was making attempt to enter.

“Oh, Mrs. Murdoch,” he said, “I would be obliged to you if you would put these flowers in water and give them to Mrs. Barry in her lying-in room, and tell her they are from me and I hope she will soon be herself again.”

“Well, that’s rale good o’ ye,” said Mrs. Murdoch, taking the flowers as in awe of them; and to herself she mused, laying the great bunch on the dresser to go in search of a vase to put them in, “I wonder how much this cost him!”

She put them in the Chinese vase and stealthily, lest her patient was asleep, carried the glory of yellow blooms into the back bedroom. As she set the vase on a small table at the window, Mrs. Barry opened her eyes and Mrs. Murdoch, glancing round, gave a little bob at her.

“Frae Mr. Amara tae ye,” she said.

Surprised by the daffodils, not prepared for them, Mrs. Barry's eyes filled and—

“How silly of me!” she said. “Forgive me, Mrs. Murdoch. I seem to do a lot of this now when I am alone. I shouldn't do it when——” she drew a deep breath. “But they are so lovely and it was kind of him. Please thank him.”

It was not till she had lain there a month, the doctor coming morning and night, Mrs. Murdoch carrying on with a wonderful ease, it appeared, that she suddenly perceived a flaw in her plan for Neil, some premonition of Death advancing, the brush of His wing as it were, causing her to reconsider all, once more, to be sure that all was in wise order. Dr. Craig was to see to what Mrs. Murdoch called the “unction sale”; Mrs. Murdoch was to take Neil down to Bridge of Caulder. It had seemed very simple; but suddenly, at that cold breath, she tried to visualise what would be after she died and was in the midst of the attempt when Dr. Craig came in.

“Oh, doctor,” she said, “I have been thinking. My plan has a flaw in it. We should get Neil away on some pretext before I go. He should not be here after. It terrorises children—they can't understand, and to console him will be very difficult. If I could invent a scheme to get him to Bridge of Caulder before I go—ah, dear me!—those good people there would manage to explain to him, console him, somehow, easier.”

“Aye, I see your point,” he agreed. “Well, now, I'll think over that. Two heads are better than one, ye ken. And we'll discuss it in the morning. I will just mak' ye comfortable for the night now.”

He knew that odd, that inexplicable feeling in the room. It was one thing that made him believe in the possibility of another life than this. For not the patient's appearance, not anything physical, anything that he knew of the patient's condition, had to do with that—with what? He had known it several times: there was the feeling that something that had nothing to do with the life of getting up at the sound of a bell, going off to work, attending to lodgers, was there. It was something in touch rather with that wind shrilling in the chimney-pots and patting on the window. He sat with her, conscious of that other presence, till she drew a long deep trembling breath and her head rested easily and as in content on the pillows.

Aye, the cheek-bones were marked below the drawn skin. That was the face of one worn with pain and with anxiety, yet as she relaxed the dominant effect was of a spiritual beauty. It was lit with it. Her practised patience, her studied tranquillity, were stamped there. Circumstances, thought Dr. Craig,

might have striven to mak' a mill o' her life, but by her courage she had made a kirk o't, so to speak. He had seen enough of her to apprehend that. Had he known her more deeply he would have conjectured that it was by more than her courage. Perhaps, indeed, he did surmise, from what he had seen of her, that it was also by her consciousness of life as dual—by the belief that the one wontedly (because of its nagging insistence) granted the title of Real may be less real than the other. Aye, there was a spiritual beauty on that haggard face.

He put his fingers under her wrist and felt the pulse, then, withdrawing his hand, rose quietly and with a backward look at her lying there took up his hat with his gloves in it, and his stick, and left her. He had a case awaiting him in the next street. The monthly nurse was with her to be sure, but he had better be going.

Mrs. Murdoch went in and looked at her at half-past eleven that night. The wind had dropped and rain had come, torrential. It was hissing outside; it was running so much in spate in the rones along the tenement-roof that it overflowed. The splash of that overflow sounded below, a slapping of water, in the back-green. In that room the sound but added to the sense of its peace.

Mrs. Murdoch stole away and went to bed in the kitchen, leaving both doors open. A little bell was close to Mrs. Barry's hand on a table by the bed. When Mrs. Murdoch woke she had a feeling that she had been sleeping some hours. She had a night-light by her bedside so that if Mrs. Barry should call her she could get up at once and go to her with no fumbling in the dark for matches. It stood just in front of the clock. Five-past-five. All was quiet in the sick-room, but if Mrs. Murdoch turned over to sleep again, to catch forty winks, she might sleep through many sounds, might not even hear the alarm. She had had experience of that; if she indulged in a second nap before getting up she slept like a log.

So she rose and lit the fire and dressed. Then she slipped out into the hall for Mr. Amara's shoes, and listened at Mrs. Barry's door as she tiptoed back with them. There was no sound. A good night! A very good night!

When the bell of the parish kirk rang out at half-past five, so that the builders of ships might be at their work at six, and the silvery *ting* answered from the pane that was slightly cracked, she went back again. Dr. Craig often spoke of that clangour with annoyance. It woke those ailing folk who had not been able to sleep all night, and had fallen asleep only with the dawn.

“Aw, that bell!” exclaimed Mrs. Murdoch. “It aye wakens her.”

When alone her round, dark face was none too gay. But she put a smile upon it and, sure that Mrs. Barry would be awakened by the bell, went so, smiling, into the back bedroom.

“Good-morning,” she lilted. “Good-morning.”

But Mrs. Barry had found rest. She did not hear the bell.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

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[The end of *Mrs Barry* by Frederick John Niven]