

**THE PRIMROSE PATH.**

—

**VOL. II.**

"A violet in the youth of primy nature,  
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,  
The perfume and suppliance of a minute;  
No more."

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— "the primrose path of dalliance"

*HAMLET, Act I, Scene III.*

# THE PRIMROSE PATH.

A CHAPTER

IN THE

ANNALS OF THE KINGDOM OF FIFE.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF

“The Chronicles of Carlingford,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



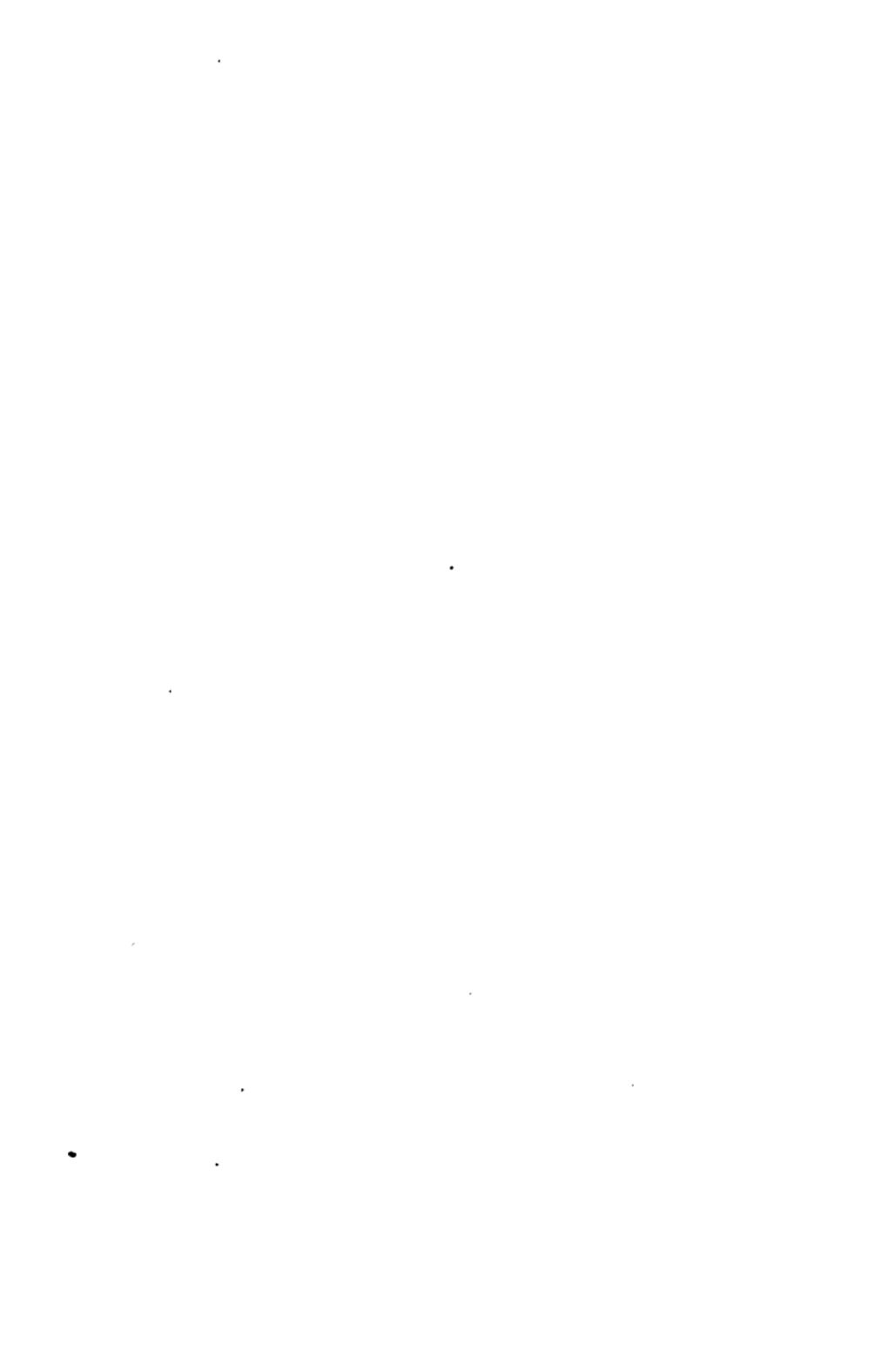
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# THE PRIMROSE PATH.

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## CHAPTER I.

SIR LUDOVIC was "none the worse" of his stumble, and next day all things went on as before. Rob Glen was one of the first who came to inquire, and he was asked to go upstairs, and was thanked for his aid with all ceremony yet kindness, Margaret standing by, beaming upon him, beaming with pleasure and gratitude. Rob, she felt, was her friend much more than her father's, and she was grateful to him for his succour of her father, and grateful to Sir Ludovic for accepting the service. She stood by and smiled upon the young man. "I am very thankful too," she said, "Mr. Glen," and the look in Rob's eyes

made her blush. She had always been given to blushing, but Margaret blushed more than ever now, in the vague excitement of thought and feeling which these last weeks had revived in her. They had been spent almost in Rob's constant companionship so long had the sketching lasted; and the two had been for hours together, alone, in close proximity, with unlimited opportunities of conversation. He had told her a great deal about himself, and she had revealed to him all the corners of her innocent memory. They had become again as closely united as when little Margaret sat by the big boy, with her little feet dabbling in the water, spoiling his fishing, but filling him with vague delight. He had indulged in various other loves since then; but, after all, when you came to look back upon it, was not little Margaret his first love? He got her to go with him one day to the burn which they had haunted as children, and told her he meant to make a picture of it. This was just the spot, he said. It was nothing but a bit of grassy bank, a ragged willow dipping into the brook, a great old hawthorn bush upon

the slope. "You used to be so fond of the white hawthorn" ("And so I am still," Margaret said), "and here was where you sat with the clear water running over your little feet. I think I can see them now." Margaret grew crimson, but that was an effect so easily produced; and she too, thought she could remember sitting on these summer afternoons, with the soft ripple, like warm silk, playing over her feet, and the scent of the hawthorn (we do not call it May in Fife) filling the air, and flies and little fishes dimpling the surface of the pool. "I will paint a picture of it," said Rob; and the idea pleased her. Thus the days went on; they were shorter than any days had ever been before to Margaret, full of interest, full of pleasure. An atmosphere of soft flattery, praise, too delicate to be put into words, a kind of unspoken worship, surrounded her. She was amused, she was occupied, she was made happy. And it did not occur to her to ask herself the reason of this vague but delightful exhilaration. She felt it like an atmosphere all round her, but did not ask herself, and did not know what it was.

And perhaps with this round of pleasant occupation going on outside, she was not quite so much with her father, or so ready to note his ways as she had been. On the Monday evening, Rob, by special invitation, dined with them, and exerted himself to his utmost to amuse Sir Ludovic; and after this beginning he came often. He did amuse Sir Ludovic, sometimes by his knowledge, sometimes by his ignorance; by the clever things he would say, and the foolish things he would say, the one as much as the other.

“Let your friend come to dinner,” the old man would say with a smile. “John, you will put a plate for Mr. Glen.” And so it came about that for a whole week Rob shared their meal every evening. When Sir Ludovic got drowsy (as it is so natural to do after dinner, for everyone, not only for old men), the two young people would steal away into the West Chamber and watch the sun setting, which also was a dangerous amusement. Thus it will be seen poor little unprotected Margaret was in a bad way.

During all this time, the old servants

of the house watched their master very closely. Even Bell had to give up the consideration of Margaret and devote herself to Sir Ludovic. And they saw many signs and tokens that they did not like, and had many consultations whether Mr. Leslie or "the ladies" should be sent for. The ladies seemed the most natural, for the young master was known to have his business to attend to, and his family; but Bell "could not bide" calling for the ladies before their time. And Sir Ludovic was just in his ordinar; there was nothing more to be said; failing, but that was natural: nothing that anybody could take notice of. It was well to have Rob Glen at night, for that amused him; and when the minister called, bringing his son to be re-presented to his old friend, they were glad, for Sir Ludovic was interested. When Dr. Burnside went away he stopped at the door expressly to tell Bell how glad he was to see the old gentleman look so well.

"He's taking out a new lease," said the Doctor.

"Eh, me," Bell said, looking after him,

“how little sense it takes to make a minister!” But this was an utterance of hasty temper, for she had in reality an exalted respect for Dr. Burnside, both as minister and as man.

But it fell upon the house like a bomb-shell, when suddenly one morning, after being unusually well the night before, Sir Ludovic declined to get out of bed. No, he said, he was not ill, he was quite comfortable; but he did not feel disposed to get up. Old John, upon whose imagination this had an effect quite out of proportion to its apparent importance as an incident; begged and entreated almost with tears, and finding his own remonstrances ineffectual, went to get Bell.

“I canna stand it,” the old man said. “Get you him out of his bed, Bell. Pit it to me ony other way, and I’ll bear it; but to see him lie yonder smiling, and think of a’ that’s to come!”

Bell put on a clean apron and went upstairs.

“Sir Ludovic,” she said, “you’re no going to bide there as if you were ill, and frighten my auld man out of his wits. Ye

ken John; he's a dour body on the outside, but within there's no a baby has a softer heart; and he canna bide to see you in your bed—nor me either!" cried the old woman suddenly, putting up her hands to her face.

Sir Ludovic lay quite placid, with his white head upon the white pillows, his fine dark eyes full of light and smiling. It was enough, Bell thought, to break the heart of a stone.

"And why should I get up when I am comfortable here?" said Sir Ludovic, "my good Bell. You've ruled over me so long that you think I am never to have a will of my own; and, indeed, if I do not show a spark of resolution now, when am I to show it?" he said, with a soft laugh. "There is but little time."

On this John made an inarticulate outburst, something between a sob and a groan—a roar of grief and impatience such as an animal in extremity might have uttered. He had stolen up behind his wife, not able to keep away from his old master. Bell had long been her husband's interpreter when words failed him. She

dried her eyes with her apron, and turned again to the bedside.

“Sir Ludovic,” she said solemnly, “he says you’ll break his heart.” -

“My good friends,” said the old man, with a humorous twitch about his mouth, “Let us be honest. It must come some time, why shouldn’t it come now? I’ve been trying, like the rest of you, to push it off, and pretend I did not know. Come, you are not so young yourselves to be frightened. It must come, sooner or later. What is the use of being uncomfortable, trying to keep it at arm’s length? I’m very well here. I am quite at my ease. Let us go through with it,” said Sir Ludovic, with a sparkle in his eye.

“You’re speaking Hebrew Greek to me, Sir Ludovic. I canna tell no more than the babe unborn what you’re going through with,” cried Bell; and when she had said this she threw her apron over her head and sobbed aloud.

“Well, this is a cheerful beginning,” said Sir Ludovic. “Call ye this backing of your friends? Go away, you two old fools, and send me my little Peggy; and

none of your wailing to her, Bell. Leave the little thing at peace as long as that may be."

"I hope I ken my duty to Miss Margret," said Bell, with an air of offence, which was the easiest to put on in the circumstances. She hurried out of the room with hasty steps, keeping up this little fiction, and met Margaret coming downstairs, fresh as the morning, in her light dress, with her shining hair. "You're to go to your papa, Miss Margret," said Bell, "in his ain room: where you'll find him in his bed—"

"He's not ill, Bell?" cried Margaret, with quick anxiety.

"Ill! he's just as obstinate and as ill-willy as the mule in the Scriptures," cried Bell, darting down the winding stair. She could not bear it any more than John. Margaret, standing on the spiral steps, an apparition of brightness, everything about her

"Drawn

From morning and the cheerful dawn;"

her countenance all smiling, her eyes as

soft and as happy as the morning light—Bell could not see her for tears. She seemed to see the crape and blackness which so soon would envelop them all, and the deeper darkness of the world, in which this young creature would soon have no natural home. “No another moment to think upon it,” Bell said to herself; “no a moment. The ladies maun come now.”

Margaret, surprised, went through the long room in which, by this hour, her father’s chair was always occupied, but felt no superstitious presentiment at seeing it desolate. Sir Ludovic’s rooms—there were two of them, a larger and a smaller—opened off from the long room. He had taken, quite lately, as his bed-chamber, the smaller room of the two, an octagon-shaped and panelled room, as being the warmest and most bright; and there he was lying, smiling as when Bell saw him first, with the morning light upon his face.

“You sent for me, papa,” said Margaret. “Are you ill that you are in bed? I have never seen you in bed before.”

“Remember that, then, my Peggy, as a proof of the comfortable life I have had,

though I am so old. No, not ill, but very comfortable. Why should I get up and give myself a great deal of trouble, when I am so comfortable here?"

"Indeed, if you are so very comfortable—" said Margaret a little bewildered, "it must be only laziness, papa;" and she laughed, but stopped in the middle of her laugh, and grew serious, she could not tell why. "But it is very lazy of you," she said, "I never heard of any one, who was quite well, staying in bed because it was comfortable."

"No? but then there are things in heaven and earth, my Peggy—and I want you to do something for me. I want you to write a letter for me. Bring your writing things here, and I will tell you what to say."

She met John in the long room, coming in with various articles, as if to provision a place which was about to be besieged. He had some wood under his arm to light a fire, and a tray with cups and glasses, and a hot-water bottle (called in Scotland a "pig"); and there was an air of excitement about him, sup-

pressed and sombre, which struck Margaret with vague alarm. "Why are you taking in all these things?" she said, "he did not say he was cold."

"If he doesn't want them the day, he may want them the morn," said John.

"The morn! he is not going to lie in bed always because it is comfortable—that would be too absurd," said Margaret. "What is it? there is not going to be—anything done to papa?—any—operation? What is it? You look as if there was—something coming—"

"I have my work to do," said John, hastily turning away. "I've nae time to say aye and no to little misses—that canna understand."

"Oh, John, what an old bear you are!" said Margaret. He made her uneasy. It seemed as if something must have happened during the night. Was her father perhaps going to have a leg off, or an arm? She knew this was nonsense; but John's paraphernalia and his face both looked so. She went to the West Chamber, where all her special possessions were, and got her little writing case, which one

of her sisters had given her. Last night before she went to bed she had set up a little drawing she had done, and which she thought was more successful than any hitherto attempted. She had set it up so that she might see it the first thing in the morning to judge how it bore the light of day. And on the table was Rob's block with the sketch he had made of Sir Ludovic in his chair. He was to come again that very day, with her father's consent, to go on with it. All this looked somehow, she could not tell how, a long way off to Margaret, as if something had happened to set these simple plans aside. She felt in the jargon of her new art, as if the foreground had suddenly grown into such importance that all that was behind it was thrown miles back. It was very strange; and yet nothing had happened, only her father was lazy and had not got out of bed.

"Who is it for? and am I to write from myself, papa, or am I to write for you?" she said sitting down at the bedside and opening her writing-case. He paused and looked at her for a moment before he spoke.

“It is to your sisters, to Jean and Grace, my little Peggy.”

“To Jean and Grace!”

“To ask them, if it is quite convenient, to come here now, instead of waiting till September according to their general custom—”

“Oh, papa!” cried Margaret, suddenly realizing the change that was coming in her life; the sketches and the drawing lessons, and the talks, and the confidences, and Rob Glen himself—What would Jean and Grace say to Rob? She felt as if in a moment all her little structure of amusement and pleasure was falling to pieces. She closed her writing-case again with a gesture of despair. “Oh, papa, is not September soon enough? I don’t want them here now. In—the summer,” said Margaret hastily, blushing for herself at the little subtle subterfuge to which she was resorting to conceal her real terror—“in the summer there is always something—I mean so many things to do.”

“Yes,” her father said with a smile, “and for some of us, my little girl, things we shall never do again.”

She did not realize the meaning of this, and perhaps Margaret may be pardoned if not knowing the sadder circumstances involved, her mind was for the moment absorbed in her own disappointment and confusion; the sudden sense of arrest and stoppage in all her pleasant ways which overwhelmed her. "Why do you want them, papa?" she went on, "am I not enough? You used to say you liked me best. You used to say, just you and me, you and me, got on best in the old house."

"And so I would say still," said the old man, "my little Peggy, my bonnie Peggy! Yes, it is enough to have you and me. (I forgive you the grammar). But however selfish I might be were there only myself to think of, I must think now of you, my little girl."

"And what is about me?" cried Margaret, "if you think I want Jean and Grace, papa! what will they do but find fault. They are never satisfied with anything we do. They find fault with everybody: they say John is stupid—"

"And so he is, a doited old body—and,

my Peggy, sometimes very far from civil to you."

"Old John, papa! To me! he is as fond of me as if I were his own. When he scolds, I don't pay any attention, any more than when *you* scold."

Sir Ludovic laughed.

"That is a pretty way of telling me how little authority I have," he said.

"Papa!" cried Margaret impatiently, "you know very well that is not what I mean. I would not vex you, not for the world—never you—and not even John. I cannot bear him to be called names, and everything found fault with. There's not this and there's not that, no drawing-room, and the bed-rooms are not big enough, and me not well enough dressed."

"Perhaps they are right there, my Peggy. I fear you are dressed anyhow, though I see nobody that looks so well."

"Then why must they come before September?" said Margaret. "Let them come, papa, at their own time."

He laughed a little, lying there upon the white pillow, with a delicate hue of life in his old cheek, and all the vigour

of twenty in his dark eyes. He did not look as if there was anything the matter with him. He only looked comfortable, luxuriously comfortable, that was all. She laughed too as she looked at him. "How lazy you are, papa!" she said, "do you think it is right? What would Bell say to me if I did not get up? You look so comfortable—and so happy."

"Yes, very comfortable;" he said, but the laugh went off his face. "My Peggy," he went on with sudden gravity, "don't ask any questions, but write to your sisters. Say I wish them to come, and to come now. No more, my dear, no more. I am not joking. Say I will look for them as soon as they can get here."

She opened her writing book again, and got her paper, and began to write. When he took this tone there was nothing to be done but to obey. But when she had written a few lines, Margaret stopped suddenly with a little start, as if all at once overtaken by a sense of the meaning of what she was doing. "Papa!" she cried, the colour leaving her face, two big tears starting into her eyes, "you are

hiding something from me—you are ill!"

"No, no," he said, "no, I am not at all ill; but, my Peggy, one never knows what may be going to happen, and I want to have your sisters here."

"Oh," cried Margaret, throwing away her book, "let them stay away, let them stay away! I want you all to myself. I can take care of you better than they can. Papa, I know you are ill, though you will not own it."

"No, no," he said more feebly. "Run away and play, my little girl. I am—tired, just a trifle tired: and come back in half an hour, in half an hour, before post-time."

"Here's a cordial to ye, Sir Ludovic," said John, and he made an imperative sign to his young mistress. "Let him be, let him be! he's no weel enough to be teased about anything," he whispered in her ear.

Margaret stood gazing at her father for a moment thunderstruck. Then she snatched up the letter she had begun, and rushed rapidly, yet on noiseless feet, out of the room. Oh, old John was cruel!

would she do anything to tease her father? And, oh! *he* was cruel not to tell her—to wish for Jean and Grace, and to hide it from her. She went downstairs like the wind, her feet scarcely touching the steps, making a brightness in the dim light of the stair, and a movement in the stillness, to go to Bell, her referee in everything, and to ask what it meant. “Oh, Bell, what does it mean?” was on her lips; when suddenly, through the open door, Margaret saw two figures approaching, and stopped short. They were young men both, both pleasant to behold, but even at that agitated moment, and in the suddenness of the apparition, the girl observed the difference between them without knowing that she observed it. The difference was to the disadvantage of Rob, on whose behalf all her prepossessions were engaged; and this gave her a faint pang, the cause of which she was at the moment quite unconscious of. “Oh!” she cried, not able to restrain her little outcry of trouble, as she met their surprised and questioning looks. “Oh, papa is ill, I think he is very ill; and I don’t know what to do.”

The second of the visitors was Randal Burnside who had met Rob Glen at the door: and it was he who answered first, eagerly. "I passed Dr. Hume's carriage on the road at a cottage door. Shall I go back and tell him to come here?"

"Oh, will you?" cried Margaret, two big tears trembling out with a great plash like big raindrops from her anxious eyes. "Oh, will you? That is what I want most."

He did not stop to tell his errand, or to receive any greeting or acknowledgment; but turned with his hat in his hand and sped away. Rob had said nothing; he only stood gazing at her wistfully, and took her hand when the other was gone. "I see what is the matter," he said tenderly, "is there anything new, is there any cause for fear?"

In her excitement, Margaret was not like herself. The touch and the tone of tenderness seemed to go through her with a strange almost guilty sense of consolation; and yet she was angry that it was not he who had gone to serve her practically. She drew her hand away, frigh-

tened, angry, yet not displeased, "Why did you let him go?" she cried with a reproach that said more than confession.

Rob's face brightened and glowed all over. "I wanted to stay with you and comfort you," he said, "I can think of no one else when you are in trouble. Come in and rest, and tell me what it is. You must not overdo yourself. *You* must not suffer. I want to take care of *you*."

"Oh, what is about me?" said Margaret; but she suffered herself to be persuaded, and went with him up to the West Chamber to tell him how it all was.

## CHAPTER II.

MRS. BELLINGHAM and Miss Leslie arrived as soon as convenient trains could bring them. The summons which Margaret wrote later that day, taking down her father's message from his lips, was not instant, though as decided as he could make it without too much alarming the girl, whose nerves were shaken, and who sat and gazed at him with a wistful countenance, large-eyed and dismal, watching every look. When he spoke to her, her eyes filled, and she did not seem able to keep that anxious gaze from his face. But the doctor, when he came, was more consoling than alarming. There was nothing to be frightened about, he said, scolding Margaret, paternally. And by degrees the household calmed down and accepted the new state of affairs, and began to think it natural that Sir Lu-

dovic should have taken to his bed. His son came and paid him a visit from Edinburgh, staying a single night, and sitting for a solemn hour or two by his father's bedside, though he did not say much. "Is there anything I can do for you, Sir?" he asked, and begged that he might be written to daily with news of his father's state, though he could find so little to say to him. But the visit of Mr. Leslie was not nearly so important as that of "the ladies," to which everybody looked forward with excitement. They arrived in the afternoon, having slept in Edinburgh the previous night. Just at the right moment they arrived, at the hour which is most proper for the arrival of a visitor at a country house, leaving just time enough to dress for dinner. And they came in with a rustle of silk into Sir Ludovic's octagon room, where there was scarcely room for them, and gave him each a delicate kiss, filling the place with delicate odours.

"I hope you are a little better, dear papa," Grace said; and Mrs. Jean, who was large and round, and scarcely could pass between

the bed and the wall, cried out cheerily that it was a relief to her mind to see him looking so well.

“I never should have found out he was ill at all, if I had not been told,” Mrs. Bellingham said, whose voice was pitched higher than that of the others. Sir Ludovic greeted them kindly, and allowed them to put their faces against his for a moment without disturbing himself.

“Yes, I told you—I am very comfortable;” he said to Margaret, who stood behind, very eager to see what impression her father’s appearance would make on her sisters. She was very happy, poor child, to hear those cheerful words from Mrs. Bellingham’s high-pitched voice.

“Well, papa, now we have seen you, and I feel quite happy about you, we will go and make ourselves comfortable too;” said Mrs. Bellingham. “I hope you have a cup of tea for us, Margaret, after our journey; and you must come and pour it out, for I want to look at you? Papa will spare you a little. John is waiting in the next room, I see.”

“John will do very well,” said Sir

Ludovic, "don't derange yourselves, my dears, from your usual habits for me."

"I assure you, dear papa," said Grace, "I do not care at all for being put out of my usual habits. I will stay with you. What is there in comparison with a dear father's wishes? You go, dearest Jean, I am sure you want some tea, and I will stay with dear papa. I can see in his eyes," she added, in an audible undertone, pushing her sister gently towards the door. "that he wishes me to stay."

"My dear," said Sir Ludovic, "you must not begin your self-sacrifices as soon as you enter the house. I am looking quite well, as you both say. There is no reason why you shouldn't have your tea in peace. My eyes are very deceitful if they say anything about it except what I have said. Go, and make yourselves quite comfortable."

"Come, come," said Mrs. Bellingham. "This is just your usual nonsense; of course papa likes his old John, whom he can order about as he pleases, better than you in that old silk that makes such a noise. We shall come and sit with papa

after dinner; good-bye for the moment," she said, kissing the tips of her fingers. Sir Ludovic laughed to himself softly as they disappeared. They came back every year with all their little peculiarities unchanged, all their little vanities and *minauderies*, Grace self-sacrificing, Jean sensible. They were so little like his children that he could laugh at their foibles without any harshness, but without any pain. The constant re-appearance of these two ladies, always falling into their little genteel comedy as they entered the room, exactly at the point where on the previous year they left it off, made the interval of time appear as if it had never been. John, who was coming in with one of the many additional adjuncts to comfort which he was always bringing, caught the sound of the laugh. John did not know if he approved of a laugh from a dying man, but he could not help joining in with a faint chuckle.

"The ladies, Sir Ludovic, are aye just the same, a' their little ways," he said.

Meanwhile Margaret followed them in a little flutter of excitement. She had not

wanted them to come, but now that they were here, the novelty was always agreeable, and she had been grateful to them for thinking so well of Sir Ludovic's looks, which by dint of anxiety and watching she had ceased to be satisfied with. Bell, who knew the ways and the wants of the ladies, had sent up tea to the West Chamber, whither they went, giving a sensation of company and fulness to the quiet old house. The other voices in Earl's-hall had a different sound, they were lower, softer, with a little of the chant and modulation which belongs to Fife, and did not make the air tingle as Mrs. Bellingham did. Even downstairs the women-servants could trace the movements of the newcomers by the flow of what was chiefly a monologue, on the part of the elder lady. Miss Leslie had no objection to take her share, but Mrs. Bellingham had most boldness and most perseverance, and left little room for anyone else. "Hear to her lang tongue," Bell said, "high English—and as sharp as the clipping of a pair of sheers." It ran on from Sir Ludovic's dressing-room, through the long

room, which was so vacant, and which Margaret could scarcely go through without tears.

“I wish papa would have been advised about this room, it might have been made so much more comfortable; a partition where that screen is would have given a real dining-room and library instead of this ridiculous long wilderness. Oh! Margaret, why do you leave that huge old chair standing out there, to break one’s legs against? It should be put back out of the way,” said Mrs. Bellingham, advancing her hand to put aside the chair.

“Oh stop, stop! It is papa’s chair; it must not be moved!”

“Ah, to be sure, it is papa’s chair,” said Mrs. Bellingham. She stood and looked at it for a moment, with her head on one side. “Well, do you know it is touching, this? Poor papa! I remember he always sat here. It is affecting, like a soldier’s sword and his horse. But, my dear little Margaret, my poor child, you cannot leave it always here, blocking up the way.”

“Dear papa’s chair!” said Miss Grace, putting her hand caressingly upon it; and

then she touched the back with her cheek, as she had touched Sir Ludovic's face. "Poor dear old chair! never again to be what it has been, never again——"

"Yes, poor old thing, I should not like to see it sent away to a lumber-room," said Mrs. Bellingham. "But there will be so many changes, that it is sad to contemplate! Now, Margaret, tell me all about it; how was he seized? You did not say anything about a fit, and he does not look as if there had been any fit. No sugar for me, dear; were you with him when it happened? or how did it come on? We must know all this, you know, before we see the doctor. I shall make it a point of going fully over the case with the doctor. One knows then what we have to expect, and how long a course it is likely to run."

"Jean!" cried Margaret, aghast with grief and horror. "I thought you thought he was looking well? you said you would not have known there was anything the matter; you said——"

"My dear child! did you expect me to tell *him* that I saw death in his face? Is

that the sort of thing, do you think, to let the patient know? Do you expect me to say to him—— Good gracious, child! what is the matter? What are you going to do?"

"You must pour out your tea for yourselves," said Margaret, "I am going to papa. Oh! if you think he is so ill, how can you sit and take your tea, how can you sit down and talk, and tell him you will come after dinner, as if it was nothing? You cannot mean it," said the poor girl, "you cannot mean it! Oh! how can *you* tell, that have seen him only once? The doctor thinks he will soon be well again, and Ludovic, Ludovic is as old as you are, he never said a word to me."

"Ludovic thought you were too young to be told, he thought it was best for us to come first; and there are some doctors that will never tell you the truth. I don't hold with that. I would not blurt it out to the patient to affect his spirits, but I would tell the family always. Now, Margaret, you must not go to papa with that crying face; sit down and compose yourself. He is very well, he has got old John;

you don't suppose that I am looking for anything immediate——”

“Take this, it will do you good,” said Miss Leslie, forcing upon Margaret her own cup of tea. “I will pour out another for myself.”

Margaret put it away from her with out-stretched hands. She turned from them with an anguish of disgust and impatience which Jean and Grace had done nothing to deserve, feeling only the justice of that one advice not to go to her father with her countenance convulsed with weeping. But where could she go? She had been frightened and had recovered from her fright; had taken comfort from what the doctor said, and joyful consolation from the comments of her sisters on the old man's appearance; but where was she to seek any comfort now? With her heart sick, and fluttering, tingling, with the stroke she had received so unexpectedly, the girl turned to the window, where at least she could conceal her “crying face,” and stood there gazing out, seeing nothing, stunned with sudden misery, and not knowing what to do. But the in-

tolerable pain into which she had been plunged all at once did not deaden her faculties. Though her mind was in such commotion, she could not help bearing all that went on behind her. Jean and Grace were quite free from any bewilderment of pain. They were glad to have their tea after their journey, and they discussed everything with a little excitement and expectation, just touched by solemnity. To be thus summoned to their father's death-bed, to be placed in the foremost places at this tragic act which was about to be accomplished, themselves sharing in the importance of it, and with a claim upon the sympathy and respect of the world in consequence, gave Jean and Grace a sense of solemn dignity. When the heart is not deeply affected, and when, indeed, your connection with the dying is, as it were, an official one, it is difficult not to feel thus advanced in moral importance by attendance on a death-bed. It was Miss Leslie who felt this most.

“How sad to think of poor dearest papa, on that bed from which he will never rise,” she said, shaking her head; “and

when one remembers how active he used to be! But we have nothing to murmur at. He has been spared to us for so many years—”

“What are you thinking of, Grace?” said Mrs. Bellingham. “I am older than you are, but I never can remember a time when papa was active; and, to be sure, he is an old man, but not half so old as grandpapa, whom I recollect quite distinctly. *He* was active, if you like.”

“At such a time, dearest Jean, why should we dispute about words? Of course, you are right; I am always making mistakes,” said Miss Grace; “but all the same, we have no right to complain. Many, many years we have had him longer than numbers of people I could mention. Indeed, to have a father living is rare at our time of life.”

“That’s true, at least,” said Mrs. Bellingham. “I hope you are not going to keep on that dress. I told you in Edinburgh that a silk gown with a train was preposterous to travel in, and it is quite impossible for a sick room. I shall put on a soft merino, that does not make any

noise. Merino is never too warm, even in the height of summer, at Earl's-hall."

"I have nothing but black, and I could not put on black to hurt poor papa's feelings," said Grace; "he would think we were getting our mourning already. Indeed, when you think how long we will have to wear it without putting it on a day too soon—"

"As if he would remark what you are wearing! But I must go and see that Steward has unpacked. It is true there will be black enough before we are done with it, and once in mourning, I always say you never can tell when you may take it off," said Mrs. Bellingham; "but I will not let you come into the sick room in that rustling dress. He was always fidgetty at the best of times. He would not put up with it. There's your muslins, if you are not afraid of taking cold; but I won't have silk," said the elder sister, peremptory and decided.

Miss Leslie came to Margaret, and put an arm round her where she stood at the window, as the other went away.

"Dearest child, you must not cry so,"

she said. "He is not suffering, you know. What a blessing that there is no pain, that he is comfortable, as he says. Dear Jean seems to be a little hard, but she means it very well; and now that we are here, you will be able to rest, you will not have so much responsibility."

"Oh, do you think I want to rest—am I thinking of myself? It is because you are all wrong, you are mistaken. The doctor did not say so. It is not true!"

Miss Leslie shook her head, and gave a little moan.

"Dearest child!" she said, putting her cheek against Margaret's wet and tear-stained cheek. "But I must go and see about my things too," she said. "Steward never thinks of me till she has done everything for Jean. I am very glad of that, of course, it is just what I like; but it gives me a little more to do. Come with me, dear, and tell me what to put on. It will amuse you a little to see my things, though I haven't got anything new—not a thing all this year. You see, dear Ludie told us of dearest papa's uncertain state of health, and what was the good? There is nothing

more provoking than having got a supply of coloured things just before a long mourning. Alas! it is bad enough without that," said Grace with a deep sigh.

After they had made their toilette, the ladies dined, and not without appetite, while Margaret sat unable to swallow a morsel, unable to escape to her father's room for the tears which she could not suppress. In the meantime it was Bell that had taken the place of watcher. Bell's heart was heavy too; but she exerted herself to amuse her patient, to tell him all the circumstances of his daughters' arrival.

"They've but a box apiece," said Bell, "and that's wonderful for our ladies. But they've minded this time that it's not that easy to get trunks up our stairs. They've minded and they've no minded, Sir Ludovic: for Mrs. Bellin'am's is that big that no mortal, let alone John, could get it up the stair. Her woman has had a' the things to carry up in armfu's. And oh, the heap o' things a leddy wants when she gangs about! It's just a bondage—gowns for the mornin' and gowns for the evenin', and gowns to put on when she's dressing

hersel', and as mony fykes of laces and collars, and caps for her head—if they ca' thae vanities caps."

Sir Ludovic laughed.

"Poor Jean and poor Grace!" he said. "I hope they think mourning is becoming to them, Bell, for they will not stint me of a ribbon; I know my daughters too well for that. They will give me everything that is due to me, to the very last scrap of crape."

"They'll do that, Sir Ludovic," said Bell, divided between her desire to humour him and her wish to keep off painful subjects; "the ladies have never shown any want o' respect. But Miss Grace was aye fond of bright colours. They're no so young as I mind them, but they're weell-fa'ured women still. The Leslies were aye a handsome family. They take it from yourself, Sir Ludovic, if I may make so bold."

"Not entirely from me," said Sir Ludovic with a smile. He did not dislike the allusion to his good looks even though he was dying. "Their mother, whom you scarcely remember, was a handsome

woman. We were not a bad looking couple people said. Ah! that's a long time ago, Bell."

"Deed and it's a long time, Sir Ludovic," but Bell did not know what to say on this subject, for the interpolation of a third Lady Leslie no doubt made the matter somewhat more difficult. Probably this struck Sir Ludovic too, and he was in the condition when human nature is glad to seek a little help from another, or sympathy at least, no help being possible. This time he sighed, which was a thing much more befitting than laughter on a dying bed.

"That's a strange subject altogether," he said, "any meeting after so long a time would be strange: if she had been at one end of the world and I at the other, there would be many changes even then. Would we understand each other?" Sir Ludovic had ceased to speak to Bell. He was musing alone, talking with himself. "And the difference must be greater than any mortal separation. Know each other? of course we must know each other,

she and I; but the question is will we understand each other?"

"Eh, Sir Ludovic," said Bell, "it was God's will that parted you, not your ain. There would be fault on one side or the other if my lady had been in—say America a' this time, and you at hame; but she's been in—heaven; that makes a' the difference."

"Does it?" he said, "that's just what I want to be sure of, Bell. Time has made great changes on me; if I find her just where she was when she left me, I have gone long beyond that; and if she has gone on too—where is she? and how shall we meet, each with our new experiences which the other does not know?"

Bell was very much perplexed by this inquiry. It had not occurred to her own mind. "Eh, Sir Ludovic," she said, "I am no the one, the like o' me, to clear up sic mysteries. But what new things can the lady meet with in heaven, but just the praise o' God and the love o' God? and that doesna distract the mind."

"Ah, Bell! but I've met with a great many more things since I parted with

her; and then," he said with a gleam in his eyes which might have been half comic in its embarrassment had the circumstances been different; "there is—my little Peggy's mother, poor thing."

Bell sat down in her confusion and bewilderment by the bedside, and pondered. "I'm thinking," she said, "that my late leddy, Miss Margret's mother, will be the one that will maist cling to ye when a's done."

"Poor little thing," he said softly, with a smile on his face, "poor little thing! she should have seen me safe out of the world, and then had a life of her own. That would have made a balance; but how are we to know what my wife thinks? You see we know nothing, we know nothing. And it is very hard to tell when people have been parted so long, and things have happened—how they are to get on when they meet again."

(Sir Ludovic, perhaps, was a little confused in his mind, as to which of the Ladies Leslie he meant, when he said "my wife;" but at all events it was not the last one, the "poor little thing,"

Margaret's mother, who was to him as a child.)

"Sir Ludovic, there's neither marrying nor giving in marriage there," said Bell solemnly. It had never occurred to herself certainly that old John would not form part of her paradise; but then there was no complication in their relations. "And you maunna think of things like that," she added reverently, "eh, Sir Ludovic, there's One we should a' think of; and if He's pleased what does it matter for anything else in the wide world?"

"Ay, Bell; that's very true, Bell," he said acquiescing, though scarcely remarking what she said; but the dying will rarely see things with the solemnity which the living feel to be appropriate to their circumstances, neither does the approach of death concentrate our thoughts on our most important concerns, as we all fondly hope it may, without difficulty or struggle. "I would like to know—what my wife thinks," he said.

"What are you talking so much about," said Mrs. Bellingham, coming in. "I heard your tongues going all the time of

dinner. Is that you, Bell? How are you, Bell? I was wondering not to have seen you before; but I don't think you should let papa talk so much when he is so weak. Indeed, I don't think you should talk, papa. It is always exhausting your strength. Just lie quiet and keep quite still till you get your strength back."

Sir Ludovic turned round and looked at Bell with a glimmer of fun, about which this time there could be no mistake, in his eyes. Bell did not know what it meant. She did not see any fun in Mrs. Bellingham's orders, nor in the way in which she herself was speedily, noiselessly displaced from the position she had taken. But so it was. Bell was put out of the way very innocently and naturally, and with a soft flood of unrustling merino about her, Mrs. Bellingham took possession. She made no sound; she was quite fresh in dress, in looks, in spirits.

"I have made Margaret tell me all about how it came on, and cheered her up, the silly little thing. She has never seen any illness, she is like to cry if you only

look at her. But we must make her more practical," said the elder sister. Grace was in a blue gown with rose-coloured ribbons. She came in, stealing with noiseless feet, a much slimmer shadow than her sister, and bent over the bed, and put her cheek to Sir Ludovic's again, and kissed his hand and murmured "dearest papa!" If he had been in the article of death Sir Ludovic must have laughed.

But Margaret did not appear. She could not present herself with her swollen eyes and pale cheeks. Oh! if Jean and Grace had but stayed away—had they but left him to herself, to Bell, and John, who loved him! But she could not creep into her corner in her father's room while the ladies were there, filling it up, taking possession of him. Her heart was as heavy as lead in her bosom, it lay there like a stone. People will sometimes speak of the heart as if it were a figure of speech. Margaret felt hers lying, broken, bleeding, heavy, a weight that bent her to the ground.

## CHAPTER III.

MARGARET roamed about the house, unable to take any comfort or find any. Jeanie found her crying in the long room when she went to remove the remains of the dinner; for John had a hundred things to do and showed his excitement by an inability to keep to his ordinary work.

“Oh, Miss Margret, dinna be so cast down!” Jeanie said, with tender sympathy, brushing the tears from her own eyes.

“What can I be but cast down;” she cried, “when papa is— Oh, Jeanie, what does Bell say? Does Bell think he is—” Dying, the girl meant to say, but to pronounce the word was impossible to her.

“Oh, Miss Margret,” said Jeanie; “what does it matter what Bell says; how can she ken? and the doctor he says quite different—”

This was a betrayal of all that Margaret had feared; Bell, too, was then of the same opinion. The poor girl stole to the door of her father's room, and stood there for a moment listening to the easy flow of Mrs. Bellingham's dogmas, and Grace's sigh of "Dearest papa!" and she heard him laugh, and say something in his own natural tone. Would he laugh if he were—dying?

"Come in, Miss Margret;" said John, coming through the dressing-room, this time with some extra pillows (for he might want to have his head higher, John thought).

"Oh, I cannot; I cannot bear it!" cried Margaret, turning away. He put his large old hand softly upon her arm.

"My bonnie leddy!" he said. He would not have said it, Margaret felt, if there had been any hope. Then she went out in her despair, restless, not knowing where to seek relief from the pain in her heart, which was so sore, and which could not be shaken off. She said to herself that she could not bear it. It was her first experience of the intolerable. The fine

weather had broken which had so favoured the drawing, and the wind was moaning about the old house, prophesying rain. With another pang in her heart—not that she was thinking of Rob, but only of the contrast between that lightheartedness and her present despair, she stumbled through the potatoe furrows, past the place where she had spent so many pleasant hours thinking no evil—though the evil she remembered must have been in existence all the same—and made her way into the wood. There was shelter there, and no one would see her. The trees were all vocal with those sighings of melancholy cadence that are never long absent from the Scotch fir-woods. The wind came sweeping over them, with one great sigh after another, like the waves of the sea: and she sighed too in heaviness. Oh, if she could but sigh deep enough, like the wind, to get that burden off her breast! Margaret sat down on a damp knoll with all the firs rising up round her like a congregation of shadows, and the wind sweeping with long complaint, sadder and sadder over their melancholy branches: and gazed at the grey old

house through her tears. How different it had looked in the morning sunshine, with her father sitting among his books, and no evil near! All the colour and light had gone out of it now; it was grey as death, pale, solemn—the old tower and gables rising against a sky scarcely less grey than they were, the trees swaying wildly about, the clouds rolling together in masses across the colourless sky.

It was not a time or a place to cheer any one. All the severity of aspect which melts so completely out of a Scotch landscape with the shining of the sun, had come out in fullest force. The trees looked darker in their leafage, the house paler in its greyness than houses and trees are anywhere else. But Margaret did not make any comparisons. She knew no landscape half so well. She was not disposed to find fault with it or wish it more lovely. And for this moment she was not thinking of the landscape, but of what was going on in that room, where she could see a little glimmer of firelight at the window. Both John and Bell thought it natural and seemly when there was illness in the house that

there should be a fire. Dying! oh the chill and mysterious terror of the word; lying there smiling, but soon, perhaps at any moment, Margaret thought in her inexperience, to be gone out of reach, out of sight! he who had always been at hand to be appealed to in every difficulty, to be greeted morning and evening, he who was always smiling at her, "making a fool of her," as she had so often complained. Perhaps there is no desolation so complete as the shrinking and gasp of the young soul when it first comes thus within sight, within realisation of death. If it had been she who had to die, Margaret would not have found it so hard. She would have been ineffably, childishly, consoled by the thought of the flowers with which she would be covered, and the weeping of "all the house," and the broken hearts of those whom she would leave behind; but nothing of this comforted her now. For the first time in her life misery took hold upon her, a thing that would not be shaken off, could not be staved aside. She sat at the foot of the big fir-tree, gazing with wide eyes at the grey old house which

was like her father, who was dying. The tears gathered and fell, minute by minute, from her eyes, blinding her, then showing clearer than ever as they fell, the old pale outline, the ruddy glimmer in that window where he was lying. Why did she not rush to him, to be with him every moment that remained? but she could not bear it. She could not go and watch for *that* coming. To have it over, to get through the unimaginable anguish anyhow, at any cost, seemed the best thing, the only thing that remained for her. She had not heard anyone coming, being too much rapt in her own thoughts to pay attention to what was going on around her; and indeed the moaning of the trees and the sweep of the wind were enough to silence all other sounds.

Thus Margaret was taken entirely by surprise when a well known voice over her head suddenly addressed her.

“Miss Margaret!” Rob Glen said. He was greatly surprised and very glad, having heard of the arrival, which he feared would put a stop to the possibility of his visits. But then he added in anxious

tones, "What is the matter? you are crying. What has happened?" He thought, so miserable were her looks, that Sir Ludovic was dead, and it was with a natural impulse of tenderness and pity that the young man suddenly knelt down beside her and took her hand quietly between his own.

"Oh no," said Margaret, with a sob; "not that, not yet! but they tell me—they tell me—" She could not go any further for tears.

Rob did not say anything, but he put his lips to her hand, and looked anxiously in her face. Margaret could not look at him again—could not speak. She was blind and inarticulate with tears. She only knew that he wept too, and that seemed to make them one.

"Did *you* hear *that*," she said, "is that what everybody says? I think it will kill me too!"

Rob Glen had no premeditated plan. His heart ached for her, so desolate, so young, under the moaning firs. He put his arm round her unconsciously, holding her fast.

“Oh, my poor darling!” he said, “my love! I would die to keep any trouble from *you!*”

Margaret was entirely overpowered with the sorrow and the sympathy. She leaned her head upon him unawares, she felt his arm support her, and that there was a vague comfort in it. She cried and sobbed without any attempt to restrain herself. No criticism was here, no formal consolations, nothing to make her remember that now she was a woman and must not abandon herself like a child to her misery. He only wept with her, and after a while began to kiss her hair and her pale cheeks, murmuring over her, “My Margaret, my poor darling!” She did not hear or heed what he said. She was conscious of nothing but anguish, with a vague faint relief in it, a lessening of the burden, a giving way of the iron band that had seemed to be about her heart.

When this passion of weeping was spent, the evening had fallen into dusk. The house had become greyer, paler than ever; the glimmer of the window more red; the trees about were like ghosts, looming in-

distinctly through the gloom; and Rob was kneeling by her with his arms round her, her head pillowed against him, his face close to hers. There did not seem anything strange in it to poor Margaret. He was very, very kind; he had wept, too, breaking his heart like her; it seemed all so natural, so simple. And she was a little relieved, a little consoled.

“Darling,” he was saying, “I don’t think it can be quite true. The doctor would not deceive me, and he did not say so. Who should know best, they who have just come, or we who have been here all the time? Oh, my sweet, don’t break your dear heart!—that would break mine too. I don’t think it can be so bad as they say.”

“Oh, do you think so? do you think there is any hope?” said Margaret.

This gave her strength to stir a little, to move from the warm shelter in which she found herself. But he kept her close to him with a gentle pressure of his arm.

“Yes; let us hope,” he said; “he is not so old; and he is not very ill; you told me he was not suffering—”

“No—he ought to know better than they do; he said he was not ill. Oh, I do not think it can be so bad,” said Margaret, raising herself up, “and you—don’t think so, Mr. Glen?”

“Do you call me Mr. Glen *still*?” he said, with his lips close to her ear. “Oh, my darling, don’t tempt me to wish harm to Sir Ludovic. If I may only comfort you when you are in trouble—if I am to be nothing to you when you are happy—”

“Oh!” said Margaret, with a deep sigh, “do you think I am happy yet? I am not quite so wretched, perhaps; but I shall never be happy till papa is out of danger, till he is well again, sitting in his chair with his books. Oh, you do not say anything now! You think that will never be—”

“And I working at my drawing,” he said. He did not want to deceive her, and his voice was husky—but he could not do other than humour her, whatever shape her fancy might take. “I finishing my drawing, and making it more like him: and my sweet Margaret sitting by

me, not trying to escape from me : and her kind father giving us his blessing—”

“Oh,” Margaret cried, starting away from him, “it is quite dark, it is quite late, Mr. Glen.”

“Yes, darling,” he said, rising reluctantly, “I must take you in now ; it is too cold and too late for you, though it has been better than the brightest day to me.”

“I thought you were sorry for me,” said Margaret. “I thought you were unhappy too. Oh, were you only glad because I was in trouble, Mr. Glen?”

There was a poignant tone of pain in the question which encouraged Rob. He caught her hand in his, and drew it through his arm and held her fast.

“You don’t know,” he said, “because you are so young, and love is new to you. You don’t know that a man can be happy in his worst misery if it brings him close, close to the girl he loves.”

Margaret did not say a word. She did not understand : but yet did not she feel, too, a vague bliss that overwhelmed her in the midst of her sorrow ? The relief that had stolen over her, was it real hope, or

only a vague sense that all must be well because something had come into her life which made her happy? She was willing to go with Rob when he led her, the long way round, through the wood, and by the other side of the house. He did not want to be circumscribed in his good night by the possible inspection of old John or Bell. "This is the best way for you," he said, leading her very tenderly along the margin of the wood. All the way he talked to her in a whisper, saying, Margaret could not tell what, caressing words that were sweet, though she did not realise the meaning of them; nor did she in the least resist his "kindness." She suffered him to hold her hand and kiss it, and call her all the tender names he could think of. It seemed all quite natural. She was half stunned by her sorrow, half intoxicated by this strange sweet opiate of tender re-assurances and impassioned love. It did not occur to her to make any response, but neither did she repulse him. She trembled with the strangeness and the naturalness, the consolation, the tremor; but her mind was so much confused between pain and

relief that she could not even think, could not realise what this new thing was.

They had come round to the door in the courtyard wall, which was the chief entrance to the house, and here Rob reluctantly parted with her, saying a hundred good-byes, and venturing again, ere he let her go, to kiss her cheek. Margaret was much more startled now than she had been before, and made haste to draw her hands from his. Then she heard him utter a little sharp short exclamation, and he tried to hold her back. But she was not thinking of spectators. She stepped on through the doorway, which was open, and came straight upon some one who was coming out. It did not occur to her to think that he had seen this parting, or what he had seen. She did not look at the stranger at all, but went on hurriedly into the courtyard. Rob had dropped her hand as if it had been a stone. This surprised her a little, but nothing else. Any necessity for concealment, any fear of being seen, had not entered into Margaret's confused and troubled mind, troubled with more than grief now, with a kind of bewil-

derment, caused by this something new which had come upon her unawares, and which she did not understand.

The two young men stood together outside. There was no possibility of mistake, or chance that they might be unable to recognise each other. There had been a moment's intense suspense, and then Randal Burnside, coming out from his evening inquiries after Sir Ludovic, had discovered, in spite of himself, the discomfited and abashed lover. Randal's surprise was mingled with a momentary pang of disappointment and pain to think so young a creature as Margaret, and so sweet a creature, should have thus been found returning from a walk with, evidently, her lover, and capable of dalliance at such a moment, when her father was dying. It hurt his ideal sense of what was fit. He had scarcely renewed his childish acquaintance with her, and had no right to be disappointed. What did it matter to him whom she walked with or what was the fashion of her wooing? But it wounded him to class this delicate Margaret with the village lasses and their

“ lads.” He tried not to look at the fellow, not to surprise her secret. Heaven knows, he had no desire to surprise anybody’s secret, much less such a vulgar one as this. But his eyes were quicker than his will, and he had seen Rob Glen before he was aware. This gave him a greater shock still; he stared with a kind of consternation, then gave his old acquaintance a hasty nod, and went on much disturbed, though why he should be disturbed he could not tell. She was nothing to him—why should he mind? Poor girl, she had been neglected; there had been no one to train her, to tell what a lady should do. But Randal felt vexed as if she had been his sister, that Margaret had not known by instinct how a lady should behave. He went on more quickly than usual, to drive it out of his mind.

But Rob had the consciousness of guilt in him, and could not take it so lightly. He thought Randal would betray him; no doubt Randal had it in his power to betray him; and on the whole it might be better to guard the discovered secret by a confidence. He went hastily after the

other, making his way among the trees; but he had called him two or three times before Randal could be got to stop. When at last he did so, he turned round with a half angry "Well!" Randal did not want the confidence; he did not care to play the part of convenient friend to such a hero; he was angry to find himself in circumstances which obliged him to listen to an explanation. Rob came panting after him through the gathering dark.

"Mr. Burnside," he said breathless, "I must speak to you. I am sure you could not help seeing who it was that went in as you came out, or what was between her and me." Rob could not help a movement of pride, a little dilation and expansion of his breast.

"I had no wish to notice anything, or anyone," Randal said, "pray believe me that I never pry into things which are no business of mine."

"I am sure you are the soul of honour," said Rob, "but it is better you should know the circumstances. Don't think she had come out to meet me. She had been driven out by despair about her father,

and I was in the wood by chance—I declare to you by chance. I might have gone there to see the light in her window, that was all. But she did not come with any idea of meeting me.”

“This is quite unnecessary,” said Randal, “I expressed no opinion and have no right to form one. I didn’t want to see, and I don’t want to know—”

“I perceive, however,” said Rob, “that you do not approve of me, and won’t approve of me; that you think I had no right to do what I have done, to speak to Mar—”

“Hold your tongue,” said Randal savagely, “what do you mean by bringing in a lady’s name?”

Rob blushed to his very shoes; that he should have done a thing which evidently some private rule in that troublesome unwritten code of a gentleman, which it was so difficult to master in all its details, forbade—was worse to him than a crime. The annoyance with which he felt this took away his resentment at Randal’s tone.

“Of course you are right,” he said,

“I made a mistake; but, Mr. Burnside, you must not judge us too harshly. We have been thrown in each other’s way all day long and almost every day. They have allowed us to be together so much, that we were encouraged to go a little further. And she was very unhappy,” he added with a little tremor in his voice, “not to console her was beyond the strength of man.”

How Randal would have liked to pitch him over the hedgerow into a flourishing bed of nettles which he knew to be thereabout! But he restrained himself and made a stiff bow instead.

“This is very interesting,” he said, “no doubt; but I fail to see what I have to do with it. It was not my fault that my coming was at so indiscreet a moment.”

“Then I may ask you not to betray us,” said Rob, “the circumstances are peculiar, as you will easily perceive. I should not wish—”

“Really this is doubly unnecessary,” said Randal angrily, “I am not a gossip,

nor would it occur to me to betray any one—is not this enough?”

“I should have liked to take you into my confidence,” said Rob, “to ask your advice—”

“My advice? it could not be of much use.” But why should he be angry? Other love affairs had been confided to him, and he had not rejected the confidence; but this fellow was not his friend, and it was a dastardly thing to take advantage of a poor little girl in her trouble. “I am no more a judge than I am a gossip,” he said, “take my assurance that what I saw shall be precisely as if I had not seen it. Good night,” he added abruptly, turning on his heel. Rob found himself alone in the middle of the road, feeling somehow shrunken and small, he could not tell why. But presently there burst upon him the recollection, the realisation of all that had happened, and Randal Burnside’s implied contempt (if it was not rather envy) ceased to affect him. He turned down the path across the fields where he had first met Margaret in a kind of half delirious triumph. He was “in love” too,

and had that delight quite honestly, if also superficially, to fill up the measure of his happiness. To be in love with the girl who can make your fortune, who can set you above all slights and scorns, and give you all the good things the world contains—is not that the most astounding piece of good fortune to a poor man? A mercenary courtship is always despicable; but to woo the girl whom you love, notwithstanding that she has the advantage of you in worldly goods, is permissible, nay laudable, since it shows you to have a mind far above prejudice. Rob felt too that he had got this crowning gift of fortune in the most innocent and disinterested way. Had it been Jeanie whom he had met in trouble, Jeanie, who was but a poor servant lass, and no heiress, and with whom he had been once in love, as he was now in love with Margaret, his tenderness would all have come back to him, and he would have exerted himself to console her in the self-same way. He would have done it by instinct, by nature, out of pure pity and affectionateness, and warm desire to make

her happy, if he had not done so out of love. The weeping girl would have been irresistible to him. "And thus I won my Genevieve," he said to himself, as he turned homewards in an intoxication of happiness. His success went to his head like wine. He could have danced, he could have sung as he went along the darkling path through the fields. He had won his Margaret, the prettiest, the sweetest of all his loves. His heart was all aglow with the thought of her, and melting with tenderness over her tears and her grief. His beautiful little lady, Margaret! The others had been but essays in love. He did not forget them; not one of them but Rob had a kind thought for, and would have been kind to had occasion served, Jeanie among the rest. He did not suppose for a moment that it had ever occurred to him to marry Jeanie. She would have been as unsuitable a wife for a minister as for a prince. He had not meant very much one way or other; but he had been very fond of Jeanie, and she of him. He was very fond of her still, and if he had seen

her cry would have been as ready to comfort her as if Margaret did not exist. But Margaret! Margaret was the queen of all. That white soft lady's hand! never any like it had lingered in Rob's before. He was as happy as kings very seldom are, if all tales be true, and was no more ashamed of himself than if he had been a young monarch giving a throne to his chosen—as soon as he had got clear of Randal Burnside.

## CHAPTER IV.

RANDAL returned to the Manse pre-occupied and abstracted, his mother could not tell why. He brought her word that Sir Ludovic was in the same condition as before, neither better nor worse, and that the ladies had arrived; but he told no more.

“Did you see nobody?” Mrs. Burnside asked. Perhaps in her heart she had hoped that her son might occupy some such post of comforter as Rob Glen had assumed—if not quite in the same way.

“I saw old John,” said Randal, “the ladies were with their father; and John was so gruff that I fear things must be looking badly. He grumbled behind his hand, ‘what change could they expect in a day?’ as if your inquiries irritated him. I don’t wonder if they do. I think I

should be worried too by constant questions, if anyone was ill who belonged to me."

"Oh, don't say that, Randal," said Mrs. Burnside, "we must always pay proper respect. You may depend upon it, Jean and Grace are capable of saying that we paid no attention at all, if we did not send twice a day. One must be upon one's p's and q's with such people. And Margaret—you saw nothing of poor little Margaret? it is for her my heart bleeds. It is more a ploy than anything else for Jean and Grace."

The same remark had been made by Bell in the vaulted kitchen the very same night. "It's just a ploy for the ladies," Bell said, "I heard them say they were going to look out all the old things in the high room. You'll see they'll have a' out, and make their regulations, wha's to have this, and wha's to have that—but I say it should all go to Miss Margret. She'll have little enough else on the Leslie side of the house. I'll speak to Mr. Leslie about it. He has not muckle to say, but he's a just man."

"A when auld duds and rubbitsh,"

said John, who was busy preparing still another trayful of provisions for his beleaguered city upstairs.

“Ay; but leddies think muckle o’ them,” said Bell. They had not surmounted their sorrow, but already it had ceased to affect them as a novelty, and all the inevitable arrangements had been brought nearer by the arrival of the visitors. These arrangements, are they not the saving of humanity, which without them must have suffered so much more from the perpetual falling out, of one after another, familiar figure on the way? Even now it occupied Bell a little, and the ladies a great deal, to think of these stores, which must be arranged and disposed of somehow, in the high room. Margaret’s wild grief and terror were not within the range of any such consolation; but those who felt less keenly, found in them a great relief. The day after their arrival, Mrs. Bellingham and her sister went upstairs with much solemnity of aspect, but great internal satisfaction, to do their duty. Sir Ludovic was still “very comfortable,” he said; but dozed a great deal, and even

when he was not dozing kept his eyes shut, while they were with him. They had remained by his bedside all the previous evening, with the most conscientious discharge of duty, and Jean had done everything a woman could do to keep up his spirits, assuring him that he would soon feel himself again, and planning a hundred things which were to be done "as soon as you are about." To say that this never deceived Sir Ludovic is little. He listened to it all with a smile, knowing that she was as little deceived as he was. If he had not been in bed and so feeble, he would have shrugged his shoulders and said it was Jean's way. Miss Grace had not the opportunity to talk had she wished it; but she did not take the same line in any case. She stood by him on the other side, and from time to time put down her face to touch him, and said "Dearest papa." When he wanted anything, she was so anxious to be of use that she would almost choke him by putting his drink to his lips as if he had been a baby. Poor Sir Ludovic was very patient; they amused him as

if they had been a scene in a comedy; but he was very tired when night came, and this was one of the reasons why he kept his eyes closed next morning. He woke up however when Margaret stole in, a pale little ghost, large-eyed and trembling. She looked at him so piteously, scarcely able to speak, that the old man was moved to the very heart, notwithstanding the all-absorbing languor of his condition. "Are you better to-day, papa?" she said, in a scarcely audible whisper. When he put out his hand to her, she took it in both hers, and laid down her pretty head upon it, and cried silently, her shoulders heaving with suppressed sobs—though she tried her best, poor child, not to betray them.

"My little Peggy!" said her father, "why is this? have I not told you I am very comfortable? and by and by I shall be more than comfortable—happy; so everybody says: and so I believe, too, though it troubles me not to know a little better. And you will be—like all of us who have lost our parents. It is a loss that must come, my little girl."

“Oh no, no, papa!” her voice was muffled and hoarse with crying. She could not consent to her own desolation.

“Ah yes, my little girl, it must come; and so we go on to have children of our own, and then to leave them *à la grace de Dieu*. My Peggy, listen! If you were old like Jean and Grace you would not care; and then think this wonder to yourself: I am glad that my little girl is so young and breaks her heart. Glad! think of that, my little Peggy. It is good to see that your little heart is broken. It will mend, but it warms my old one.”

“Oh, papa!” she cried, kissing his pale hand, “oh, papa!” but could not lift her head or look him in the face.

“So now, my little girl,” he said, “we will not make believe, you and I, but acknowledge that we are going to part for a long, long time, my Peggy. I hope for a very long time; but probably,” he said, with a smile, “if all is true that we fancy and believe, it will not be so long for me as for you. I shall have the best of it. You would like your old father to have the best of it, my little girl?”

At this she lifted her face and gave him a look which said Yes, yes, a hundred times ! but could not speak.

“ I knew you would,” he said. “ I, you see, will find myself among old friends ; and we will have our talks about what’s come and gone since we parted, and there will be a great many people to make acquaintance with that I have known only—in the spirit, as the Bible says ;—and there will be the One, you know, that you say your prayers to, my Peggy. When you say your prayers you can fancy (the best of life is fancy,” said Sir Ludovic, with a faint smile,) “ that I’m there somewhere, about what the Bible calls His footstool, and that He, perhaps, being so tender-hearted, may call to me and say, ‘ Ludovic ! here is your little girl.’ ”

“ Oh, papa ! will you say something more, something more ? ”

“ I would if I could, my Peggy ; but I am tired again. I’ll have a little doze now ; but sit still and stay by me, my own little girl.”

And there Margaret sat almost all the day. Excessive weeping brought its own

cure, and she could not weep any more, but sat like a snow statue, except that her eyes were swollen; and by and by fell into a kind of torpor, a doze of the spirit, sitting in the warm stillness, with no sound but the soft stir of the fire, and sometimes the appearance of old John, who would open the door stealthily, and look in with his long, grave, serious face to see if anything was wanted. Margaret sat holding her father's hand, stilled by exhaustion and warmth, and quiet and grief: and Sir Ludovic dozed, opening his eyes now and then, smiling, dozing again. So the long still morning went by.

A very different scene was going on in the high room, which was over the long room, and as long and large, running the whole width of the house. It had a vaulted roof, curiously painted with old coats of arms, and was hung with old tapestry, gradually falling to pieces by process of time. Several of the windows, which had originally lighted it, had been built up in the days of the window tax, and, stretching across the place where two of them had been, was a great oak

“aumory” or press, full of those riches which John called “old rubbish,” but which were prized by ladies, Bell knew. There were old clothes enough to have set up several theatres, costumes of all kinds, saques, and pelisses, brocade and velvets, feathers and lace. Mrs. Bellingham remembered specially that there was a drawer full of lace; but Sir Ludovic had never permitted these treasures to be ransacked when his elder daughters were at Earl’s-hall. He would not tolerate any commotion over his head, and accordingly they had been shut out from these delightful hoards. It was with corresponding excitement now that they opened the doors, their fingers trembling with eagerness. Mrs. Bellingham had interpreted something he said into a desire that they should make this investigation, and had immediately declared that his wish was a law to her.

“Certainly, Grace,” she had said, “we will do it at whatever cost, since papa wishes it.”

“Oh, yes, if dearest papa wishes it,” said Grace. And Sir Ludovic smiled, as

usual, seeing the whole, with an amused toleration of their weakness. Jean got out the drawer of lace with nervous anxiety. "It may be nothing, it may be nothing," she said, meaning to save herself from disappointment. She took out the drawer altogether, and carried it to the window where there was a good light, with her heart beating.

"Don't be excited, Grace," she said, "perhaps it is only modern, most likely mere babies caps, Valenciennes and common stuff." Then she made a little pause, gave one hurried glance, and produced the one word "Point!" with an almost shriek.

"Point?" said Miss Grace, pressing forward with the point of her nose; she was shortsighted, and only thus could she inspect the treasure. Mrs. Bellingham held her off with one hand, while with the other she dived among the delicate yellow rags; the excitement grew to a height when she brought out her hand garlanded with wreaths as of a fairy web. There was a moment of silent adoration while the two ladies gazed at it. Some sea-

fairy with curious knowledge of all the starry fishes and twisted shells, and filmy fronds of weed at the bottom of the ocean must have woven this. "Venice! and I never saw finer; and not a thread broken," cried the finder, almost faint with delight.

"And enough to trim you from top to toe," said Grace, solemnly. Bell coming in jealously on some pretence, saw them, with their hands uplifted and eyes gleaming, and approached to see what the cause of so much emotion might be.

"Eh!" said Bell, "the heap o' things that us poor folk miss for want o' kennin! Is that something awfu' grand now, leddies, that makes you look so fain?"

"It is a most lovely piece of lace," cried Mrs. Jean. "Venice point; though I fear, Bell, you will not know what that means. Every little bit done by the needle—you will understand that. Look at all those little sprays."

"Eh, leddies," said Bell. "Ye ken what the fishwife says in ane o' Sir Walter's novells, 'It's no fish you're buyin', it's men's lives.' Eh, what heaps o' poor women's e'en must be workit into that

auld rag! But it was my late lady's a' the same. I've seen her wear it, and many a time she's told me the same story: so it will be Miss Margret's: part o' her fortune," said the old housekeeper, with malicious demureness. This discouraged the investigators considerably.

"I never saw it before," said Mrs. Bellingham; "but then I knew but little of the late Lady Leslie; of course if it was her mother's, it must be Margaret's. Fold it up and put it aside, Grace. Was this Lady Leslie's, too?"

"Na, I canna say; I never saw that before," said Bell, overwhelmed. "Eh, that was never made by woman's fingers. It must be shaped out o' the gossamer in the autumn mornings, or the foam of the sea."

But Bell's presence disturbed the inquiry; it was not until she was called away to see to Sir Ludovic's beef-tea that they fully rallied to their work.

"I don't believe a word of what that old woman says—Lady Leslie indeed—Lady Leslie was not five-and-twenty when she died, poor thing. Stand out of the

way, Grace, don't come so close; you may be sure you shall see it all—and no girl understands lace. It might be her mother's? Dear me, what a memory you have got, Grace! she had no mother. She would never have married poor papa if there had been a mother to look after her. Thank Providence, Margaret will be better off. This affliction," said Mrs. Bellingham, with solemnity, "which is so sad for all of us, will not be without its good side for poor little neglected Margaret. Though whether it is not too late to make any change in her—"

"She is very nice-looking," said Miss Grace, "and being pretty covers a great deal—at least as long as you are young."

"Pretty! none of the Leslies were ever ugly," said her sister; "but it breaks my heart to look at her. Neither education nor manners. She might be a country lass at the meanest farm, she might be a fisher girl mending nets—Grace, I wish you would sometimes let me get in a word! It's melancholy to see her running about in those cotton frocks, and think that she is my father's daughter. We will have our

hands full with that girl. Now this is old Flanders—there is not very much of it; I remember it as well as if I had seen it yesterday, on old Aunt Jean.”

“Then that should be yours, for you were her name-daughter—”

“Grace, how can you be so Scotch! Say godchild, you can always say godchild—it sounds a great deal better!”

“But we were not English Church people when we were born, and there’s no godmo—”

“I think there never was such a clatter in this world,” cried Mrs. Bellingham. “Talk, talk, one cannot get in a word! I know papa’s old-fashioned ways as well as you do, but why should we publish them? What would anybody think at the Court if it was known that we were Presbyterians—not that I ever was a Presbyterian after I was old enough to think for myself.”

“It was being at school,” said Grace; “and a great trouble it was to have to drive all the way to Fifetown on Sundays instead of going to Dr. Burnside. You were married, it didn’t matter for you;

but— do you mean to have Aubrey down, Jean, after all ?”

“Of course I mean to have Aubrey,” said Mrs. Bellingham. She had been carefully measuring on her finger and marking the lengths of the lace, which was the reason Miss Leslie had been allowed to deliver herself of so long a speech. “He will, perhaps, join us somewhere after this sad time is over. It is not to be supposed that we will be able for much company at first,” she said, with a sigh. “There are three yards of the Flanders, too much for a bodice and too little for anything else, and it would be wicked to cut it. After all we have gone through, of course there will be a time when we will have no spirits for company; but Aubrey is not like a stranger; being my nephew, he will be a kind of cousin to Margaret. Dear me, I wish I could think there was a good chance that he would be something more; for the responsibility on you and me of a young girl— !”

“Oh, he will be very willing to be something more,” cried Miss Grace, with

alacrity; "a pretty young creature like Margaret, and a good income."

"Her income is but a small one to tempt a Bellingham; but I suppose because he is my nephew you must have a fling at him. I have often noticed that inclination in you, Grace. I am sure my family, by marriage, have never but shown you the greatest attention, and Aubrey never makes any difference between us. He calls you Aunt Grace, though you are no more his Aunt Grace— Here is a very nice piece, I don't know what it is. It is English, or perhaps it might be Argentan, or one of the less known kinds. Would you like to have it? it is very pretty. So here are three pieces to commence with: the Venice point for Margaret, if it really was her mother's—but I don't believe it—and the Flanders for me."

Grace lifted the piece allotted to her now, with but scant satisfaction. It was Jean who had always the lion's share; it was she who took the management of everything, and put herself forward. Though Miss Leslie was very willing to sacrifice herself when occasion offered,

she did not like to be sacrificed calmly by others, without deriving any glory from it. But she said nothing. There was a great deal more still to be looked over; and Jean could not always have so good an excuse for appropriating the best, as she had when she secured Aunt Jean's old piece of Flanders lace.

While these very different scenes were going on within the walls of Earl's-hall, the old grey house in which so soon the last act of a life was to be accomplished, was the centre of many thoughts and discussions outside. At the breakfast-table at the Manse, Mrs. Burnside read aloud a letter from Mrs. Ludovic in Edinburgh, asking whether the Minister's wife could receive her husband, who was uneasy about his father, and anxious "to be on the spot," whatever happened.

"I thought of sending my Effie with Ludovic, if you would take her in," Mrs. Leslie wrote. "Of course, Earl's-hall, so little bedroom accommodation as they have, is quite full with Jean and Grace and their maid. It is very provoking that

it should be such a fine old house, and one that we would be very unwilling to let go out of the family, and yet so little use. Ludovic has always such confidence in your kindness, dear Mrs. Burnside, that I thought I might ask you. Of course, you will say no, *at once*, if it is not convenient. Effie is not very strong, and I would like her to have a change; and we thought it might be something for poor little Margaret, if anything happens, to have some one near her of her own age. She is the one to be pitied; and yet she has been sadly neglected, poor child—and I don't doubt but in this, as in other matters, all things will work together for good."

"That's a sorely misused text," said the Minister, shaking his head.

"Is this better?" said Randal:—"Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.' They seem all rushing upon their prey."

"No, no, you must not say that. Their own father—who should come to his death-bed but his children? I'll write and say certainly, let Ludovic come; and if

you can do without that green room for your old portmanteaux, Randal, I'll find a place for them among the other boxes; and we might take little Effie too. I am always glad to give a town-child the advantage of good country air."

"She cannot be such a child if she is the same age as Margaret—"

"And what is Margaret but a child? Poor thing, poor thing! Yes, she has been neglected, she has not had the upbringing a lady of her family should have; but, dear me," said Mrs. Burnside, who was of the old school, "I've seen such things before, and what harm did it do them? She cannot play the piano, or speak French, or draw, or even dance, so far as I can tell; but she cannot but be a lady, it was born with her—and the questions she asks are just extraordinary. I would not make a stipulation for the piano myself everywhere; but still there's no doubt she has been neglected. Jean and Grace are far from being ill women, but I don't think I would like to change old Sir Ludovic, that never said a harsh word to her, for the like of them."

“Yes, mother, Margaret can draw. The young fellow who put Sir Ludovic into his carriage last Sunday, whom you were so impatient of—”

“Me impatient! Randal, you take the very strangest ideas. Why should I be disturbed, one way or other, by Rob Glen? What about Rob Glen?”

“Not much, except that he is giving her—lessons. It seems he is an artist—”

“An artist—Rob Glen! But oh, did I not say Mrs. Ludovic was right? She has been sorely neglected, sorely neglected! Not that old Sir Ludovic meant any harm. He was an old man and she a child, and he forgot she was growing up, and that a girl is not a child so long as a boy. After all, perhaps, she will be better in the hands of Grace and Jean.”

“And so the text is not misused, after all,” said the Minister, once more shaking his head.

## CHAPTER V.

LUDOVIC came accordingly, with his little daughter Effie, a sentimental little maiden, with a likeness to her aunt Grace, and very anxious to be "of use" to Margaret, who, though only six months older than herself, was her aunt also. Ludovic himself was a serious, silent man, not like the Leslies, everybody said, taking after his mother, who had been a Montgomery, and of a more steady-going race. While Mrs. Bellingham sat by her father's side and talked to him about what was to be done when he was better, saying: "Oh, yes, you are mending—slowly, making a little progress every day, though you will not believe it;" and Grace stood, eager, too, to "be of use," touching his cheek—most generally, poor lady, with her nose, which was cold, and not agreeable to the patient—and saying, "Dearest

papa!" Ludovic, for his part, would come and sit at the foot of the bed for an hour at a time, not saying anything, but keeping his serious eyes upon the old man, who was more glad than ever to doze, and keep his eyes shut, now that so many affectionate watchers were round him. Now and then, Sir Ludovic would rouse up when they were all taking a rest from their anxious duties, as Grace expressed it, and "was just his ain man again," Bell would say.

"Oh, if my children would but neglect me!" he said, when one of these blessed intervals came.

"There is nobody but me here now, papa," said Margaret, like a little shadow in the corner, with her red eyes.

"And that is just as it ought to be, my little Peggy; but who," he said, with that faint little laugh, which scarcely sounded now at all, but abode in his eyes with all its old humour, "who will look after your pronouns when I am away, my little girl?" But sometimes he moaned a little, and complained that it was long. "Could you not give me a jog, John?" he would say, "I'm keeping everybody waiting. Jean and

Grace will lose their usual holiday, and Ludovic has his business to think of."

"They're paying you every respect, Sir Ludovic," said John, not feeling that his master was fully alive to the domestic virtue exhibited by his children. Perhaps John, too, felt that to keep up all the forms of anxious solicitude was hard for such a lengthened period, which made the "respect" of the group around Sir Ludovic's deathbed more striking still. Sir Ludovic smiled, and repeated the sentiment with which he began the conversation, "I wish my children would but neglect me." But he was always patient and grateful and polite. He never said anything to Grace about her cold nose; he did not tell Ludovic that his steady stare fretted him beyond measure; he let Jean prattle on as she would, though he knew that what she said was all a fiction. Sir Ludovic was never a more high-bred gentleman than in this last chapter of his life. He was bored beyond measure, but he never showed it. Only when he was alone with his little daughter, with the old servants who loved him, who always under-

stood him more or less, and always amused him, which was, perhaps as important, he would rouse up by moments and be his old self.

As for Margaret, she led the strangest double life, a life which no one suspected, which she did not herself realise. They made her go to bed every night, though she came and went, a white apparition, all the night through, to her father's door to listen, lest anything should happen while she was away from him; and in the evenings after dinner, when the family were all about Sir Ludovic's bed, she would steal out, half reluctant, half eager, half guilty, half happy; guilty because of the strange flutter of sick and troubled happiness that would come upon her.

"Yes, my bonnie lamb, ye'll get a moment to yoursel'; gang your ways and get a breath of air," Bell would say, all unwitting that something else was waiting for Margaret besides the fresh air and soft soothing of the night.

"I will be in the wood, Bell, where you can cry upon me. You will be sure to cry upon me if there's any need."

“My bonnie doo! I’ll cry soon enough; but there will be no need,” said the old woman, patting her shoulder as she dismissed her.

And Margaret would flit along the broken ground where the potatoes had been, where her feet had made a path, and disappear into the sighing of the firs, which swept round and hid her amid the perplexing crowd of their straight columns. There was one tree, beneath the sweeping branches of which some one was always waiting for her. It was a silver fir, with great angular limbs, the biggest in the wood, and the little mossy knoll between its great roots was soft and green as velvet. There Rob Glen was always waiting, looking out anxiously through the clear evenings, and with a great grey plaid ready to wrap her in when it was cold or wet. They did not feel the rain under the great horizontal branches of the firs, and the soft pattering it made was more soothing than the wild sweep of the wind coming strong from the sea. There the two would sit sheltered, and look out upon the grey mass of Earl’s-hall, with

that one ruddy lighted window. Margaret leant upon her lover, whom in her trouble she did not think of as her lover, and cried and was comforted. He was the only one, she felt, except, perhaps, Bell, who was really good to her, who understood her, and did not want her to be composed and calm. He never said she should not cry, but kissed her hands and her cheek, and said soft caressing words, "My darling! my Margaret!" His heart was beating much more loudly than she could understand; but Rob, if he was not all good, had a certain tenderness of nature in him and poetry of feeling which kept him from anything which could shock or startle her. At these moments, as the long summer day darkened and the soft gloaming spread over them, he was as nearly her true and innocent and generous lover, as a man could be who was not always generous and true. He was betraying her, but to what—only to accept his love, the best thing a man had to give; a gift, if you come to that, to give to a queen. He was not feigning nor deceiving, but loved her, as warmly as if he had never

loved any one before, nor meant to love any other again. And then he would go towards the house with her, not so far as he went that first night in over-boldness, when they were caught—an accident he always remembered with shame and self-reproach, yet a certain pride, as having proved to Randal Burnside, once for all, his own inferiority, and that he, Rob Glen, had hopelessly distanced all competitors, however they might build upon being gentlemen. He led her along the edge of the wood always under cover, and stole with her under shadow of the garden wall to the corner, beyond which he did not venture. Then he would take her into his arms unresisted, and they would linger for a moment, while he lavished upon Margaret every tender name he could think of—

“Remember that I am always thinking of you, always longing to be by you, to support you, to comfort you, my darling.”

“Yes, I will remember,” Margaret said meekly, and there fluttered a little forlorn warmth and sweetness about her heart; and then he would release her, and, more like a shadow than ever, would stand and

watch while she flitted along the wall to the great door.

And what thoughts were in Rob's mind when she was gone! That almost innocence, and nobleness and truth, which had existed in the emotion of their meeting, disappeared with Margaret, leaving him in a tumult of other and less noble thoughts. He knew very well that he had beguiled her, though he meant nothing but love and devotion to her. He had betrayed her in the moment of her sorrow into a tacit acceptance of him, and committal of herself from which there was no escape. Rob knew very well, no one better—that there were girls who took such love passages lightly enough; but to a delicate little maiden, "a lady," like Margaret, he knew there could be but one meaning in this. Though she had scarcely responded at all, she had accepted his tenderness, and committed herself for ever. And he knew he had betrayed her into this, and was glad with a bounding sense of delight and triumph, such as made him almost spurn the earth. This occurrence gave him, not only Margaret, whom he was

in love with, and whose society was for the time sweeter to him than anything in the world, but with her such a dazzling flood of advantages as might well have turned any young man's head : a position, such as he might toil all his life for, and never be able to reach : money, such as would make him admired and looked up to by everybody he knew : a life of intoxicating happiness and advancement, with no need to do anything he did not care to do, or take any further trouble about his living, one way or another. Rob's organization was not so fine as to make him unwilling to accept all these advantages from his wife ; in practical life there are indeed very few men who are thus delicately organized ; neither were his principles so high or so honourable as to give him very much trouble about the manner in which he had won all this, by surprise. He just felt it, just had a sense that there was something here to be slurred over as much as possible—but it did not spoil his pleasure. It was, however, terribly difficult to know what it would be best to do in the circumstances, what step he should next take : whether he

should boldly face the family, on the chance that Sir Ludovic would be glad before he died to see his daughter with a protector and companion of her own—or whether it was wise to keep in the background, and watch the progress of events, keeping that sure hold upon Margaret herself, which he felt he could now trust to. He had done her good, he had been more to her than anyone else, and had helped her to bear her burden; and he had thus woven himself in with every association of her life, at its, as yet, most important period, and made himself inseparable from her. He had no fear of losing his hold of Margaret. But from the family, the brother and sisters who were like uncle and aunts to the young creature, Rob knew very well he should find little mercy. They would all want to make their own out of her he felt sure; for it is hard, even when escaping from all sensation of vulgarity in one's person, to get rid of that deeply-rooted principle of vulgarity which shows itself in attributing mean motives to other people. This birth-stain of the meaner sort, not always confined to the



lower classes, was strong in him. He did not feel that it was her fortune and her importance which made Margaret valuable in his own eyes (for was he not in love?) but he had no hesitation in deciding that her family and all about her must look at her in this mercenary light.

• They certainly would not let her fortune slip through their fingers if they could help it. There might be some hope of a legitimate sanction from Sir Ludovic, who was beyond the reach of any advantage from his daughter's money, and might like to feel that she was "settled" and safe; but there could be no hope from the others. They would have plans of their own for her. The Leslies were known not to be rich, and an heiress was not a thing to be lightly parted with. They would keep her to themselves, of that he was sure. And at such a moment as this, what chance was there of reaching Sir Ludovic's bedside, and gaining his consent? It would be impossible to do so without running the gauntlet of all the family—it would make a scene, and probably hurt the old man or kill him. Thus

he was musing, as after an interval he followed Margaret's course under the shadow of the garden-wall, meaning to make his way out by what was called the avenue, though it was merely a path opened through the belt of wood, which was thin on that side, to the gate in the high road. But this spot was evidently unlucky to Rob. When he was about to pass the door of Earl's-hall, he met Mr. Leslie coming out. Mr. Leslie was one of the men who are always more or less suspicious, and he had just seen Margaret with her hat in her hand and the fresh night air still about her, going up the winding stair. Ludovic looked at the man walking along under the wall with instinctive mistrust,

"Did you want anything?" he asked, hastily. "This path is private, I think."

"I think not," said Rob; "at least everybody has been free to pass as long as I can remember; but I was on my way," he added, thinking it good to try any means of conciliation, "to ask for Sir Ludovic."

"There is no change," said Mr. Leslie,

stiffly. He was himself, to tell the truth, very weary of this invariable answer, but there was nothing else to be said; and he tried to see who the inquirer was, but was unable to make him out in the late dusk. He had never seen him before, for one thing. "You are from—?"

"I am from nowhere," said Rob. "I don't suppose you know me at all, Mr. Leslie, or even my name. I am Robert Glen; but Sir Ludovic has been very kind to me. He has allowed me to come and sketch the house, and latterly I have seen a great deal of him. His illness has grieved me as much—as if I had a right to be grieved. He was very kind. Latterly I saw a great deal of him."

"Ah!" said Mr. Leslie. He had heard the people at the Manse talking of Rob Glen, and he had seen Margaret's return a minute before. What connection there might be between these two things he did not very clearly perceive, but there seemed to be something, and he was suspicious, as indeed he had a right to be.

"Is he too ill—to ask to see him?" said Rob, with a sense that a refusal would

take all the responsibility off his shoulders. If he could see Sir Ludovic it might be honourable to explain everything—but if not—

“ See him !” said Mr. Leslie, “ I don’t know what your acquaintance may be with my father, Mr. Glen, but he is much too ill to see anybody—scarcely even his own children. I am leaving early, as you perceive, because I feel that it is too much for him to have, even, all of ourselves there.”

“ I am very sorry to hear it,” said Rob, with the proper expression in his voice; but in reality he was relieved; no need now to say anything to the family. He had Margaret only to deal with, and in her he could fully trust, he thought. “ I began a sketch of Sir Ludovic,” he said, “ for which he had promised me a second sitting; will you kindly ask Miss Margaret Leslie to send it back to me, that I may finish it for her as well as I can? Poor though my drawing was, it will have its value now.”

“ I will tell my sister,” said Mr. Leslie, and he swung open the gate and waited till Rob passed through. “ Good night,” said the young man. It was better in any

case to be courteous and friendly, if they would permit it, with "the family." But Mr. Leslie only made an indistinct murmur in the darkness. He gave no articulate response; there was no cordiality on his side; and why indeed should he be cordial to the farmer's son? Rob went quickly homeward, forcing a smile of contempt, though there was nobody to see. This haughty and distant personage would yet learn to respond to any salutation his sister's husband might make, he would have to be civil if nothing more, Rob said within himself. What was he that he should be so high and mighty? An Edinburgh advocate working for his living, a poor laird at the best, with a ramshackle old house for all his inheritance. Thus the vulgar came uppermost again in Rob's heart; he scorned for his poverty the man with whom he was indignant for scorning him, because he was unknown and poor. He hurried home with this little fillip of additional energy given to all his schemes. His mother was standing at the door as he approached, looking out for him, or perhaps only looking to see

the last of the cows looming through the dusk coming in from the fields. He was absent every night, and Mrs. Glen wanted to know where he went. She was getting impatient on all points, and had determined to wait no longer for any information he might have to give.

“Where have you been?” she asked as he came in sight.

“To Earl’s-hall.”

“To Earl’s-hall! and what have you been doing at Earl’s-hall? no drawing and fiddling while the poor auld man lies dying? Ye’re ill enough, but surely you have not the heart for that?”

“I have neither been drawing nor fiddling—indeed I did not know that I could fiddle; but all the same I have come from Earl’s-hall,” he said. “Let me in, mother; I’ve been sitting in the wood and the night has got cold.”

“What have you been doing, sitting in the wood? There’s no light to take your views—tell me,” said Mrs. Glen with determination, “what have you been doing once for all.”

“I may as well tell you,” he said, “I

have been sitting in the wood with Margaret."

"With—Margaret? you're no blate to speak o' a young lady like that. Rob, my bonnie man, I aye thought you were to be the lucky bairn of my family. Have ye naething mair to tell me about—Margaret? I would like weel, real weel to hear."

"Can you keep a secret, mother?" he said. "I will tell you something if you will swear to me never to repeat it, never to hint at it, never to brag of what is coming, or to give the slightest ground for suspicion: if you will promise me this—"

"I was never a tale-pyete," said Mrs. Glen, offended, "nobody ever laid tittle-tattle or bragging of any kind to my door. But if you canna trust your mother without promises, I see not why you should trust her at all."

"It is not that I doubt you, mother; but you know how difficult it is not to mention a thing that is much in your mind. Margaret Leslie is my own; it is all settled and fixed between us. She

came out to me in her trouble when she found her father was dying, and what could I do but comfort her, and support her, and show my feeling—”

“Oh, ay, Rob,” his mother interpolated, “you were aye grand at that!”

“What could a man do else? a sweet young creature like Margaret Leslie crying by his side! I told her, what I suppose she knew very well before, for I never hide my feelings, mother, as you say. And the issue is, she’s mine. However it was done, you will not say but what it was well done. I have been fond of her since ever I can remember.”

“And of twa-three mair,” said Mrs. Glen, “but no a word o’ that, Rob my man. Eh, but I’m weel pleased! that’s what I’ve been thinking of since the very week you came hame. ‘Now if Rob, with all his cleverness, could get that bonnie Miss Margret,’ I said to mysel’. The Lord bless ye, my man! I aye thought you were born to be the lucky one of my family. Is it a’ in her ain disposition, or have the family ony power over it, Rob? Eh, my bonnie man, what a down-sitting!

and the bonniest leddy in Fife of her years. You're a lucky lad, if ever there was one."

"Let me in, mother; I don't want to tell this to any ears but yours."

"Ay, ay, my man, I'll let you' in," said his mother, standing aside from the door. "Come in and welcome, my lucky lad. Is there anything you would like for your supper? naething in a' the house is ower good for such good news; we'll take a bottle o' wine out of the press, or maybe ye would like a drap toddy just as well, which is mair wholesome. Come in, come in, my bonnie man. A bonnie lass, and plenty wi' her! and a real auld family, an honour to anybody to be connected with. My word, Rob Glen, you're a lucky lad! Wha will look down upon you now? Wha will say a word about your opinions? I've never upbraided you mysel'; I saw your talents and felt ye could bide your time. Eh," cried Mrs. Glen exultant, "wha will say now but that marriages are made in heaven? And Rob, my bonnie man, when is it to be?"

"We are not so far as that, mother,"

he said, "do you think she has the heart to think of marrying, and poor old Sir Ludovic lying on his deathbed? We must wait for all that. I'm too happy in the meantime to think of more; she's mine—and that is more than I could have hoped."

"That's very true, my man: but still something settled would have been a grand standby," said Mrs. Glen, slightly disappointed, "I would have thought now it would have been a great comfort to Sir Ludovic to see his daughter married and settled before he slips away. But the gentry's ways are not as our ways. I'm doubting you'll have some trouble with the family, if nothing's settled afore the auld gentleman dies."

"I doubt I will, mother," said Rob, "but whatever trouble I may have, Margaret's mine; and she will never go back from her word."

## CHAPTER VI.

AT last the time came when old Sir Ludovic's dozing and drowsiness, his speculations, and the gleam of humour with which they were all accompanied, and which most of those around him thought so inappropriate to his circumstances, came to an end. All his affairs were in order, his will made, though he had not much to leave, and Dr. Burnside (which was a great satisfaction to the family) paid him a daily visit for the last week of his life; so that everything was done decently and in order. Dr. Burnside had not so very much to say to the old man. He had no answer to give to his questions. He bade Sir Ludovic believe. "And so I do," he said; he could not be got to be frightened; and now that he had got over the shock of it, and into that dreamy slumbrous

valley of the shadow, he did not even wish to avoid what was coming. "It is not so bad as one thinks," he said to old John, his faithful servant, and to the good Minister who was approaching old age too, though not so near as either of these old men. Dr. Burnside was a little disturbed by the smile on his patient's face, and hoped it did not show any inclination towards levity; but he was glad to hear, having that journey in view, that it was not so bad as one thought. "He is a man of a very steady faith," the Minister said, and he himself was wise enough to let Sir Ludovic glide away out of the world with that smile upon his face. As for Jean and Grace, they did their best to disturb their father and to unsettle him, and insinuated that Dr. Burnside's instructions were of an unsatisfactory kind. Even Bell held it unorthodox that, except in cases of religious triumph and ecstasy, which no doubt were on record, a human creature should leave this earth smiling, to appear in the presence of his Maker, as she said. Mrs. Bellingham did all she could to question her father on

the subject, but was not successful. "Leave him in peace," his son said; but neither was Mr. Leslie satisfied. It was very strange to them all. The old man did not even seem to feel that anxiety for Margaret's future which they expected, and never made that solemn appeal to them to take care of her, to which both the sisters were prepared to respond, and which even Ludovic expected, though he felt that, with such a large family of his own, nothing much could be looked for from him. But Sir Ludovic made no appeal. He said "my little Peggy," when all other words had failed him, and on the very last day of his life a gleam as of laughter crossed his face, and he shook his head faintly at her when she said "me" instead of "I." And thus faded quite gently and pleasantly away.

There was silence in Earl's-hall that night, silence and quiet, scarcely a whisper even between the sisters, who generally had a meeting in Mrs. Bellingham's room for a last discussion of everything that had passed, notwithstanding that they were all the day together. But

on this evening nobody talked. Ludovic went away with the Minister and ate a solemn late meal, having, as everybody said, eaten nothing all day (but that was a mistake, for he had not been called to the last ceremonial till after luncheon). And in Earl's-hall everybody went to bed. They had been keeping irregular hours, had sometimes sat late, and sometimes been called early, and John and Bell in particular had not for a week past kept any count which was night and which was day. A few broken phrases about "*him* yonder," a groan from John, a few tears rubbed off till her eyes were red by Bell's apron, and the sound of "greeting" from Jeanie's little turret room, was almost all that could be heard in the silent house. Margaret, for her part, could not "greet" as Jeanie did. She was stunned, and did not know what had happened to her. For the moment it was over—the worst had come, and a blank of utter exhaustion came over the girl. She allowed herself to be put to bed, and did nothing but sigh, long sighs which went to Bell's heart, sighs

which seemed almost a physical necessity to the young bosom oppressed with such an unknown burden. Mrs. Bellingham (though she was not quite satisfied in her mind) said a few words to her maid, that it was a most peaceful end, that it was beautiful to see him lying there at rest just as if he were asleep; and Miss Leslie cried copiously and said, "dearest papa!" They were all in bed by ten o'clock, and the old grey house shut up and silent. A dark night, the wind sweeping through the firs, everything silent and hushed in earth and heaven, and all dark except the one window in which a faint watch-light burned palely, but no longer the warm inconstant glimmer of any cheerful fire.

But with the morning, what a flood of pent-up energy and activity was let loose. They were all anxious to keep quiet in Margaret's part of the house, that she might sleep as long as possible and be kept out of everyone's way. The arrangements into which everybody else plunged were not for her. The first thing to be thought of, of course, Mrs. Bellingham said, was the mourning, and there was

not a moment's time to lose. Telegraphs were not universally prevalent in those days, and one of the men from the farm had to be sent on horseback to Fifeton to send a message to Edinburgh about the bombazine and the crape. As Sir Ludovic had anticipated, his daughter Jean did not stint him of a single fold, she meant to show "every respect." Fortunately Steward, their maid, was quite equal to the occasion, both the ladies congratulated themselves. "Of course, we shall want no evening-dresses, nothing beyond the mere necessary here," Mrs. Bellingham said. "One for the morning and another to go out with, a little more trimmed, that will be all." But even for this little outfit a good deal of trouble had to be taken. That very evening a man arrived from Edinburgh, with mountains of crape, and boxes full of hem-stitched cambric for the collars and cuffs. There was crape all over the house—even Bell and Jeanie had their share—no stint. When a man has been so much thought of as Sir Ludovic, and has a respectable family whose credit is involved in showing him every respect,

a good deal of quiet bustle becomes inevitable; the house was full of whispers, of consultations, of measurements, and a great hurry and pressure to get done in time for the funeral; though the funeral was delayed long, according to use and wont in the country. Mr. Leslie, on his part, went over all the house, and walked diligently about the farm and inspected everything, though being a silent man he said little about it. It was too early to say anything. When his sisters put questions to him about what he was going to do, he said he had not made up his mind, and it was only when the funeral was over, and the shutters opened, and old Sir Ludovic's chair put against the wall, that he at all opened his mind. Nearly a week passed in this melancholy interval; he had become Sir Ludovic himself, but nobody in Earl's-hall could give him the familiar title; old John ground his teeth together (though he had not many left) and tried to get it out, but the conclusion was a hurried exclamation, "I canna do it! Pit me away, Sir. Bell and me, we're ready to gang whenever

ye please ; but I canna ca' ye your right name."

The new Sir Ludovic, though he said little, had a kind heart. He said, "Never mind, John ; tell Bell never to mind ;" but Mrs. Bellingham had no such feeling. She said it was ridiculous in servants, when the family themselves had to do it. "I hope I know what is due to the living as well as to the dead," she cried ; "and if I can say it, why should not John?"

But at first, no doubt, it was difficult enough. After the funeral, however, the new Sir Ludovic went "home" to Earl's-hall, where his wife came and joined him. The eldest boy too arrived for the ceremony itself, and walked with his father to the churchyard as one of the chief mourners. The house was filled to over-flowing with the family, as soon as the last act of old Sir Ludovic's earthly history was accomplished. Beds were put in the high room to accommodate the boys. It was all novelty to them, who had not known very much of their grandfather, and their mother liked being my lady. It was

natural. She had not known much of the old man any more than her children had, and he was only her father-in-law, not a very tender relationship. Thus the new tide rose at once and new life came in. Had there been only the elders in the house, no doubt they would have kept up a drowsy appearance of gravity, but that was not to be done with young people in the house.

As for Margaret, this period passed over her like a dream. While the house was shut up, and everything went on in a pale twilight, she wandered about like a ghost, not knowing what to do or say, unable to take up any of her occupations. It seemed years to her, centuries since the careless time when she went and came so lightly, fearing no evil, trying to draw straight lines with an ineffectual pencil, flitting out and in of her father's room, getting out books for him, searching for something she might read herself, taking up for half-an-hour Lady Jean's old work, knitting a bit of Bell's stocking, roaming everywhere about as light as the wind. All that, Margaret thought, was over for ever; but she did not "break her

heart" altogether, as she supposed she would. Sometimes indeed an aching sense of loss, a horrible void about her, would make her heart sick and her whole being giddy with pain, but in the intervals life went on, and she found that it was possible to sit at table, to talk to the others, to have her dresses fitted on. And when the children came, there were moments when she felt inclined to smile at their curious little ways, even (was that possible?) to laugh at little Loodie, who was the youngest of the boys, and never, heaven forbid! would be Sir Ludovic. Bell, too, found little Loodie "a real diverting bairn." "Eh, if his grandpapaw had but been here to see him!" she said, with tears and smiles. But Margaret, naturally, was more unwilling to be "diverted" than Bell was. When she was beguiled into a smile at little Loodie, it was very unwillingly, and she would recover herself with a sense of guilt; for it was a terrible revelation to Margaret, a most painful discovery to feel that a smile was possible even within a week of her father's death, and that her heart

was not altogether broken. She wept for her own heartlessness as well as for her dear father, of whom she had thought beforehand that all she wished for would be to be buried in his grave.

But she went out of the house only once between the death and the funeral. Rob, for his part, roamed round about it, and stayed for hours in the wood, looking for her; but it seemed to Margaret that for the moment she shrank from Rob. Oh, how could she have thought of Rob or anyone while he lay dying? how could she have gone out and spent those hours in the wood with him, which might have been spent with Sir Ludovic? What would she give now, she said to herself, to be able to steal upstairs to him, to sit by his bedside, to hold his hand, to hear him say "My little Peggy" again; now that this was no longer possible, she felt a kind of resentment against Rob, who had occupied her at times when it was still possible. And the state of his mind, during this interval, was not pleasant to contemplate; when he had asked once or twice for the ladies he had no further excuse for returning openly,

and he was afraid to be seen lest he should again meet some one, perhaps the new Sir Ludovic himself, who had not been delighted by his previous appearance, or some jealous spectator like Randal Burnside. Rob stood for hours behind the big fir-tree looking towards the house in which there were more lights now, but no glimmer in that window which had been his beacon for so long; and more voices audible, never Margaret's soft notes, like a bird. He was very fond of Margaret. Those dreary evenings when she was kept from him, or kept herself from him, Rob was wild with love, and fear, and disappointment. Could *they* have found it out, could *they* be keeping her away? He stood under the fir-tree scarcely daring to move, and watched with his heart beating in his ears. Sometimes John would loom heavily across the vacant space, coming out again, according to his old habit, to "take a look at the potatoes." Sometimes Bell would appear at the opening of the little courtyard to "cry upon" her husband when something was wanted. "There's aye something

wanting now," John would say, as he turned back. Or Rob would see some one at the wall, drawing water, under the shade of the thorn-tree, without knowing who it was, or that there were any thoughts of himself, except those which might be in Margaret's bosom, within the grey shadow of those old walls. How breathlessly he watched John's lumbering steps about the potatoes, and the whiteness of Bell's aprons, and the clang of the water-pails! But no one came. Had she accepted his consolations only because there was no one else to comfort her, without caring for him who breathed them in her ear? were all his lofty hopes to end in nothing, and his love to be rejected? Terror and anxiety thrilled through Rob as he stood and watched, tantalized by all those sounds and half-seen sights. Once only she came, and then she would say little or nothing to him: she had never said much; but she shrank from his outstretched arms now, crying, "Don't, don't!" in tones half of terror. That one meeting was a greater disappointment than when she did not come at all. Had she but

been taking advantage of him, as great people, Rob knew, were so ready to take advantage of small people? and now that she needed him no longer was she about to cast him off? In that case all his fine anticipations, all his triumph, would be like Alnascher's hopes in the story. His very heart quailed in terror. The disappointment, the downfall, the decay of hopes and prospects would be more than he could bear.

The truth was that Margaret, left all alone suddenly in the midst of what, to her, was a crowd of people, all more or less strangers, seemed to have lost the power of doing so much for herself as to go anywhere. Though they amused her sometimes in spite of herself, they kept her in a kind of subjugation which was very confusing and very novel.

"Where are you going, Margaret?" Mrs. Bellingham would say if she went across the room.

"Darling Margaret, don't leave us," Grace would add, next time she moved. Even Effie, who was so anxious to be "of use," would interfere, throwing her arms

about her youthful aunt, whispering, "You are not to go to your own room and cry. Oh, come with me to the tower, and look at the sunset."

"Yes, my dear Margaret, go with Effie; it will take off your thoughts a little," said the new Lady Leslie.

Thus Margaret had weights of kindness hung round her on every side, and was changed in every particular of her life from the light-hearted creature who flitted about like the wind, in and out a hundred times a day. Even Bell approved of this thralldom.

"Ah, my bonnie dear, keep wi' Miss Effie. She's your ain flesh and blood. What would you do out your lane when you have sic company?"

"I always went out alone before," Margaret said, mechanically turning up-stairs again.

"Yes, my bonnie doo; but you hadna a bonnie young Miss, a cousin of your ain (for niece is but a jest) to keep ye company."

Thus Margaret was held fast. And by and by her habit of wandering out would

probably have been broken, and she might have been carried away by her sisters safe out of all contact or reach of her lover. For the lover, as will be seen, was not violently in Margaret's mind. If she missed him, there were so many other things that she missed more! He was but part of the general privation, impoverishment of her life. She had lost everything she thought, her father, her careless sweetness of living, her light heart, the sunshine of her morning. All these other happinesses being gone, how could Margaret make an effort for Rob only? She was not strong enough to do this. She was not even unwilling to let him go with all the rest. Perhaps there was ingratitude in the feeling. He had been very "kind" to her, had given her a little comfort of sweet sympathy in her trouble. It was ungrateful to forget that now; and she did not forget it, but was too languid, too weary, and had lost too much already to be able to make any effort for this. Meanwhile, while she sat in a kind of lethargy within, and followed the directions of all about her, and let him

drop from her, Rob roamed about outside, gnashing his teeth, sometimes almost cursing her, sometimes almost praying for her, watching every door and window, holding the post of a most impatient sentinel under the great fir-tree.

It happened to Margaret, however, one evening to find herself alone. Mrs. Bellingham had a headache, a thing which was not generally regarded as a great calamity in places where Mrs. Bellingham paid visits. It confined her to her room, and it was, on the whole, not a disagreeable change for her friends. Her sister, who in weal and woe was inseparable from her, though she would have been glad enough to escape too, was, under Jean's orders, writing letters for her in her room. And the new proprietors of Earl's-hall were glad enough for once to be by themselves. They took a conjugal walk about the place, examining into everything—the ruined part, to see if anything could be done to it; the stables, which had been made out of part of the ruin; even the pigstye, which was John's favourite spot in the demesne. The subject

of consideration in the mind of the pair was whether the old place, with all its associations, should be sold, or whether anything could be done with it, cheaply, to adapt it for the country residence of the family. In its present state certainly it did not take much to "keep up;" but on the other hand, the rental of the little scraps of estate which old Sir Ludovic had left, scarcely justified the new Sir Ludovic, with his large family, in "keeping up" any country place at all. To decide upon this subject was the reason of Lady Leslie's presence here.

And Effie, whose mourning was less deep, and her mind less affected by "the family loss" than Margaret, had gone to visit Mrs. Burnside. Even little Loodie was being put to bed. Margaret, for the first time since her father's death, was alone. She had found that day, among a collection of papers into which it had been shuffled heedlessly amid the confusion of the moment, the drawing of her father which Rob Glen had begun on his first appearance at Earl's-hall: and this had plunged her back into all that fresh agita-

tion of loss and loneliness which is, in its way, a kind of pleasure to the mind, instead of the dull stupor of habitual grief which follows upon the immediate passion of an event. She had wept till her eyes and her strength were exhausted, but her heart relieved a little; and then that heart yearned momentarily for some one to comfort her. Where was *he*? She had not thought of him in this aspect before — perhaps looking for her, perhaps waiting for her, he who had been so “kind.” She put on her hat with the heavy gauze veil which Jean had thought necessary. She was all hung and garlanded with crape, the hat itself wrapt in a cloud of it, her dress covered with it, so that Margaret’s very movements were hampered. The grass always damp, more or less, the mossy underground beneath the firs, the moist brown earth of the potato ground, were all alike unsuitable for this heavy and elaborate robe of mourning. Margaret gathered it about her and put on her hat, with its thick black gauze veil—she did not know herself in all this panoply of woe—and went out.

There was nobody about. John was showing the new Baronet his pigstye, and Bell, more comforted and cheerful than she had yet felt, stood in the door of the byre and talked to Lady Leslie about her favourite, her bonny brown cow. The old people were amused and pleased; they were more near "getting over it" than they had felt yet; and even John began to feel that it might be possible, after a while, to say Sir Ludovic again.

Margaret went out, hearing their voices though she did not see them. She had no feeling of bitterness towards her brother, though he was assuming possession of her old home. He had not much to say, but he was kind, and good Lady Leslie was a good mother, and could not but speak softly and think gently of everybody. They were perhaps a humdrum and somewhat careworn couple, but no unkindness was in them. It gave Margaret no pang to hear them talking about Bell's beloved Brownie or what they were to do with the stables; neither did it occur to her to take any pains not to be seen by them. It was still light, but the evening was

waning, the sky glowing in the west, the shadows gathering under the fir-trees in the woods which lay to eastward of the house. She made her way to her usual haunt, her feet making no sound on the soft path. Would he be there, waiting for her as in that dreadful time? or would he have gone away? Margaret had not enough animation left to feel that she would be disappointed if he were not there, but yet her heart was a little lighter, for the first time relieved from the dull burden of sorrow which is so intolerable to youth. And who can say with what transport Rob Glen saw this slim black-clad figure detach itself from the shadow of the house? He had come here, as he said to himself, half indignantly, half sullenly, for the last time, to wait for her: the last time he would come and wait—but not on that account would he give up the pursuit of her. She was his, that he would maintain with all his force. He would write to her next day, and ask why she did not come. He would let her feel that he had a claim upon her, that she could not cast him off when she

pleased. But in his very vehemence there was a tremor of fear, and it is impossible to describe with what feelings of anxiety he had come, putting his fortune to the touch, meaning that this vigil should be final before he proceeded to "other steps." And how had fortune, nay, providence rewarded him! Not John this time, not Bell smoothing down her apron, not Jeanie with her pitcher at the well; but slim and fair as a lily in her envelope of gloom, pale with grief and exhaustion, with wet eyes and a pitiful lip, that quivered as she tried to smile at him, at last Margaret was here.

## CHAPTER VII.

“**A**T last!” He came out from the shadow of the firs and took her hands, and drew her towards him. “At last! my Margaret, my own Margaret! such a weary time it has been, waiting, but this repays all; say that it is not your doing, darling. You have been kept back, you have not forgotten me, or that I was waiting here?”

“No,” she said; “but I did not know you were waiting here. I did not know, even, if I would find you to-night.”

“It would have been strange, indeed, if you had not found me. Every evening, as sure as the gloaming came, I have been here waiting for you, Margaret. I did not think you would have kept me so long. But it is not as it used to be between us, when I thought, perhaps, you might cast me off at any moment. I,

a poor farmer's son, you the young lady of Earl's-hall; but that could not be now: for you are mine and I am yours."

"It would not have been at any time—for that reason," said Margaret. She was uneasy about the very close proximity he wished for, and avoided his arm. In her great trouble she had not thought of this, but now it troubled and partially shocked her, though she could scarcely tell why. She was roused however by the idea that she could have slighted him for any ignoble reason. "It is you that have always been kind to me," she said. "I, who am only a country-girl and know nothing at all."

"You are a princess," said Rob, "you are a queen to me. *My* queen and my Margaret; but you will not keep me so long hungering and thirsting out here, far from the light of your sweet countenance? you will not leave me so long again?"

"Oh, Mr. Glen!" said Margaret, "I ought to let you know at once, we are going away."

"Do not, for Heaven's sake, call me

Mr. Glen! Do you want to make me very unhappy, to take away all pleasures from me? Surely the time is over in which you should call me Mr. Glen. You cannot want to play with me and make me wretched, Margaret?"

"No," she said, with a tremor in her voice, "I will call you by your name, as I used to do when I was little. But it is quite true that I said, we are going away."

"Going away? where are you going, and who are *we*? Oh, yes, I knew it was not likely they would stay here," cried Rob, with mingled irritation and despair. "Where are they going to take you, my Margaret? nowhere that I cannot come and see you, nowhere that I will not follow you, my darling. I would go after you to the world's end."

"I am going with my sisters, Jean and Grace. They are my guardians now; I am to live with them till—for three years at least, till I am twenty-one; then they say I can do what I like. What does it matter now about doing what I like? I do not think I care what becomes of me, now that I have no one, no one that has a

right to me! and they will not even let me cry.”

She began to weep and he did not stop her, though his mind was full of impatience. He drew her to him close, and this time she did not resist him.

“Cry there,” he said, “Margaret, my Margaret! I will never try to keep you from crying. Oh! he deserved it well. He loved you better than all the earth. You were the light of his eyes, as you are of mine. They! what does it matter to them? they will bother you, they will make you do what they like, they will not worship you as he did, and as I do. But, Margaret, there is still one that has a right to you. Had he known, had I but had the courage to go and tell him everything, he would have given you to me; I am certain he would. He would have thought, like you, that it was better, far better for you, to have some one of your very own. The others, what are you to them? but to him you were everything, and to me you, are everything. Margaret! say this, darling! Say, Rob, I am yours; I will always be yours, as you are mine!”

Margaret looked in his face with her wet eyes. But she did not say the words he dictated to her. Her heart was full of emotion of another kind. She was thankful to Rob for his kindness, and he was not like—anyone else; he had a special standing ground of his own with her. To nobody else could she talk as she was talking, on nobody else would she lean; but still it did not occur to her to obey him, to say what he asked her to say.

“I found that picture you made,” she said, “only to-day. It is him, just himself. I took it away to my own room that nobody might see it. It must have been some angel that put it into your mind to do that.”

“Yes,” he said, “Margaret, it was an angel, for it was you. And it was not I that did it, but love that did it; but if you will give it to me, I will make it still more like him. I will never forget how he looked: and how you looked—and my heart all full, and running over with love, which I dared not say.”

Alas, there was this peculiarity in the conversation, that while Rob was eager to

speak of himself and his love, Margaret, in the most innocent and unwitting way, made it apparent that this was not the subject that interested her most. She was too polite not to listen to him, too grateful and sensitively affected by the curious link between them to show any opposition; but when she could she turned aside from this subject, which to him was the most interesting subject in heaven or earth; and it is impossible to say how this fact moved Rob, who had never met with anything of the kind before. It piqued him, and it made him more eager. He watched her with an anxiety and impatience which he could scarcely keep in check, while she, with downcast eyes full of tears, pursued that part of the subject which interested her most.

“I should not like it touched,” she said, “I would not give it for all the pictures in the world. If I gave it to you, it would be only that it might be put into some case that would preserve it. I have folded it in paper, but that is not enough. I would not give it for all the pictures in the world.”

“Thank you, my darling,” he said. “It is something to have done a thing that so pleases you. If you will bring it to me, I will get it put in a case for you. Indeed it was an angel that put that scene before me; for now when you look at that, and think of *him*, you will think of me too.”

“Oh no, Mr. Glen,” said Margaret; then she stopped, confused: “I mean, Rob—I am very very thankful to you. But when I look at that, all the world goes away and there is only papa leaning back, sleeping. I am glad he was sleeping. He slept a great deal, do you know, before he died. But it was better to see him in his chair, as he used always to be, than in his bed. I don’t want anyone to see it but myself—other people do not understand it; they would hand it about from one to another, and say, ‘Is it not like?’ and talk. I could not bear that; I prefer to keep it to myself.”

“But you don’t mind me seeing it?” he said. “I should not be so unfeeling. Many a time when we are together—when we are married, darling, we will look at

it together ; and I will make a picture from it, a real picture, with you at my elbow, and it shall be hung in the best place in our house."

At this Margaret winced slightly, but made no remark. She had not the courage to contradict him, to say anything against this strange view ; but it disturbed her all the same. Probably it would have to be some time. There seemed a necessity for it, though she could not quite tell why ; but as it could not be now, nor for a long time, why should it be spoken of, or brought in to disturb everything ? She said, not knowing how to put aside this subject gently, yet to say something all the same : "Jean and Grace are going to take me to the Grange—to my house."

"To *your* house !" Rob felt the blood flush to his face, with the excitement of this thought. "I did not know you had a house of your own, Margaret."

"Oh yes, it was my mother's. It is away in England, where I never was. I have seen a picture of it. They say it is very English, with creepers hanging about

the walls, roses and honey-suckle, and beautiful great trees. Jean thinks everything in England is better than anything in Scotland. However pretty it may be, it will never, never be like old gray Earl's-hall."

Rob dropped his arm from her, and hung his head. "What am I thinking of?" he said, "you a great lady, with beautiful houses and lands, and I a poor man with nothing. I must be mad to think that you could care for me, that you would even think of me at all."

"Mr.—Rob! oh, what must you think of me that you say so; do I care for money or for a house? Are you going away? Are you going to—leave me? oh!" cried Margaret, penitent, clasping her hands, "did you not know I had a fortune? But what does that matter? You have been kind, very kind to me, thinking I was poor—Rob! are you going to cry, you!—no don't, don't, you will break my heart. I am calling you by your name now," she said, anxiously, with one hand upon his arm, and with the other pulling down the hand which covered his face.

She put her own face close to his in her generous, foolish earnestness. "I am calling you by your name now, Rob; don't hide your face from me, don't go away and leave me. If I am rich, is it not all the better? There will plenty for us both."

"It makes a difference," he said; and indeed he was able to play his part very well, for never before in his life had Rob been so entirely ashamed of himself. Her very earnestness, she who had been so cool and calm before, her generous trouble and importunity humbled him to the very depths. A man may do a great many things that will not bear examination before he finds himself out; but to act such a falsehood as this—to pretend that he did not know what he knew so much more definitely than she did—to pretend to resist her generous anxiety—to avert his face, and let her woo him, she who had taken his hot wooing with such shy coldness! This made Rob feel himself the most wretched creature, the most despicable, miserable, mercenary wretch. He could not endure himself. Well might he

hide his face, for a poor swindler and cheat, worse, far worse than he had ever known himself before! To breathe deceitful vows, to say more than he meant, to promise more than he intended to perform, all this was not a thousandth part so bad; for indeed he had always been "in love," when he made love, and a promise more or less what is that? the common coin of young deceivers. Hitherto Rob had not been bad, only fickle and false. But what was he now, a cheat, a liar, a traitor, unfit to breathe where such innocent creatures were? Thus he played his part very well; his misery was not dissembled; and when he allowed himself to yield to her entreaties, to be moved by the eager eloquence of that soft lip which was so ready to quiver, what vows he made in his heart to be to Margaret something more than ever man had been before!

After this their intercourse was more easy, and by and by Rob came to feel that perhaps the momentary fear of losing him (which was how, in his native vulgarity and self importance, he put it after a while to himself) had been a good thing.

More than ever now she had committed herself. They wandered about among the trees and talked. They talked of her departure, and of how he could write to her—which Margaret was half shy again to think of, yet half happy too, a novelty as it was. But she could not tell him how this was to be managed, or how he could come to see her; all was strange, and Jean and Grace were very different from anything she had known in all her previous life.

“They tell me to sit down when I am standing, and to stand up when I am sitting down; they will always have me doing something different,” she avowed, though gently, and with a faint sense of humour. But this made it very evident that the life before her would be quite unlike the past. And it did not occur to Margaret that Jean and Grace ought perhaps to be informed of Rob, and the understanding between him and herself. Rob naturally said nothing about this, and to Margaret the thought did not occur. She had no idea of concealment, but simply did not think of her sisters in connection with this “secret,” which was something

too strange and confusing to herself to be capable of explanation to others, who could not know how it had come about.

“Will you come up to the tower?” said Effie Leslie to Randal Burnside, who had walked home with her from the Manse. Randal had been much about Earl’s-hall since Sir Ludovic’s death. He had been ready to do anything for the family, and the family had been very willing to employ him. It was a kindness to give him something to do, his mother said, who was glad to throw him in Margaret’s way; and the decorousness of the grief which made Mrs. Bellingham and Miss Leslie quite unable to see anybody, was put aside on his behalf as well as on his father’s. And Margaret and he had grown friends, though she was almost the only one in the house who never gave him any commissions in that moment of bustle. She had never ceased to be grateful to him for calling the doctor when her father’s illness began, but she was too independent to have any personal wants to which he could minister, and too shy to have asked his aid if she had. Effie was much more

disposed to make use of the young man. She was not unhappy, why should she be, having seen so little of grandpapa? She was a little elated indeed, to think that mamma was now my lady, and she herself entitled to precedence as a baronet's daughter, and she was very glad to have some one to speak to, who did not melt into tears in the middle of the conversation, or say "Hush, child, remember that this is a house of mourning." The Manse was not a house of mourning, and she liked to go there, and she liked Randal to walk home with her, and talk. Lady Leslie was still looking at the brown cow, and John's pigstye, and Mrs. Bellingham, as has been said, had a headache. Effie peeped into the West Chamber and the long room, and saw nobody. And then she said, "Have you ever been on the tower, Mr. Burnside. Oh, do come up to the tower."

Randal had climbed the tower a hundred times in former days; he went up the winding stair very willingly, thinking he would have all the better chance of seeing "the others," when the falling night drove

them in from their walks. Perhaps the others meant only the new Sir Ludovic, perhaps it had another significance. He was interested about Margaret, he allowed to himself, more interested than he dared let any one know: for had he not almost seen a lover's parting between her and Rob Glen?—a secret knowledge which made him very uneasy. Randal felt that he could not betray them; it would be a base thing in their contemporary, or so, at least, he thought; but he was uneasy. Many thoughts had gone through his mind on this subject. He did not know what to do. The only thing that seemed to him possible was to speak to Rob Glen himself, to represent to him that it was not manly or honourable to engage a girl in Margaret's position, without the knowledge and consent of her friends. But to make such a statement to a young man of your own age, with whom you have not the warrant of friendship for your interference, nor even the warrant of equality, is a difficult thing to do. If Rob, resenting it, could have called him out, there would have been less harm; but that was

ridiculous, and what could be done to expiate such an affront? There was nothing to be done, unless he permitted Rob to knock him down, and he did not feel that his forbearance was equal to that. So that Randal remained very uneasy on this subject, and did not know what to do. To let Margaret fall into the hands of a— of Rob Glen, seemed desolation and sacrilege; but what could Randal, who had known them both from his cradle, what could he do between them. Was it his part to *tell*, most despicable of all offices in the opinion of youth? This train of uneasy thought was brought back when Effie looked into the little white-panelled sitting-room, the West Chamber, where Margaret, he knew, spent most of her time. She liked it better than the long room, every nook of which was so full of her father's memory: and the ladies humoured her, and, small as it was, made the West Chamber their centre. Where was she, if she was not there? Possibly out-of-doors in the soft evening, confiding all her griefs to Rob Glen. Possibly it was the thought that Randal himself would

have liked to have those griefs confided to him, and to act the part of comforter, that made his blood burn at this imagination. So soon after her father's death! He felt disposed to despise Margaret too.

“Go softly just here,” said Effie, whispering; “for there is Aunt Jean's room, and we must not do anything to disturb her headache. It is a very good thing, you know, that she has a headache sometimes: even Aunt Grace says so—for otherwise she would wear herself out. Perhaps it is a little too late for the view, but the sky was still full of glow when we came in. Ah! it is very dark up here; but now there is only another flight. Oh, no, it is not too late for the view,” Effie cried, her young voice coming out soft yet ringing as they emerged into the open air. “Nobody can hear us here,” she said, with a laugh; for at seventeen it is not easy to be serious all day, especially when it is only a grandfather, nothing more, who is dead.

It was not too late for the view, and the view was not a view to be despised. There does not seem much beauty to spare

in the east of Fife. Low hills, great breadths of level fields: the sea a great expanse of blue or leaden grey, fringed with low reefs of dark rocks, like the teeth of some hungry monster, dangerous and grim without being picturesque, without a ship to break its monotony. But yet with those limitless breadths of sky and cloud, the wistful clearness and golden after-glow, and all the varying blueness of the hills, it would have been difficult to surpass the effect, of the great amphitheatre of sea and land of which this solitary grey old house formed the centre. The hill, behind which the sun had set, is scarcely considerable enough to have a name: but it threw up its outline against the wonderful greenness, blueness, goldenness of the sky with a grandeur which would not have misbecome an Alp. Underneath its shelter, grey and sweet, lay the soft levels of Stratheden in all their varying hues of colour, green corn, and brown earth, and red fields of clover, and dark belts of wood. Behind were the two papss of the Lomonds, rising green against the clear serene: and on the other side entwining lines of hills, with gleams of

golden light breaking through the mists, clearing here and there as far as the mysterious Grampians, far off under Highland skies. This was one side of the circle; and the other was the sea, a sea still blue under the faint evening skies, in which the young moon was rising; the yellow sands of Forfarshire on one hand, stretching downwards from the mouth of the Tay—the low brown cliffs and green headlands bending away on the other towards Fifeness—and the great bow of water reaching to the horizon between. Nearer the eye, showing half against the slope of the coast, and half against the water, rose St. Andrews on its cliff, the fine dark tower of the College Church poised over the little city, the jagged ruins of the Castle marking the outline, the Cathedral rising majestic in naked pathos; and old St. Rule, homely and weatherbeaten, oldest venerable pilgrim of all, standing strong and steady, at watch upon the younger centuries, This was the view at that time from Earl's-hall. It is a little less noble now, because of the fine, vulgar, comfortable grey stone houses which have got themselves built

everywhere since, and spoiled one part of the picture ; but all the rest will remain for ever, Heaven be praised. The little wood of Earl's-hall, pinched and ragged with the wind, lay immediately below, and the flat Eden, with its homely green lines of bank on either side, lighted up by here and there a sandbank ; but the tide was out, and the Eden meandered in a desert of wet brown sand, and was not lovely. The two young people did not speak for a moment. They were moved, in spite of themselves, by all this perfect vault of sky, and perfect round of earth and sea. It is not often that you can see the great world in little, field and mountain, sunset and moonrise, land and sea at one glance. They were silenced for sixty seconds ; and then Effie Leslie drew a long breath and began to chatter again.

“ Well ! ” she said, with as much expression as the simple word was capable of bearing, “ I don't think I should like to sell this old house where the family has been so long, if I were papa ! ”

“ I would not sell it, if it were mine, for anything that could be offered me, ”

cried Randal, in the enthusiasm of the moment. Effie shook her head.

“Perhaps not, Mr. Burnside; but then you would not have ten children—or nine at least, for now Gracie is married she does not count. But oh! I wish we could keep Earl’s-hall. It must be very pleasant to live where everybody knows you, and knows exactly what you are—that is, if you are anybody. Poor Margaret will not like leaving, but then she is a lucky girl, she is an heiress, she has a house of her own, and I daresay she will get very fond of that when she knows it. Do you think I ought to call her *Aunt Margaret*, Mr. Burnside?”

Effie’s laugh rang out so merrily as she said this, that she checked herself with a little alarm.

“Suppose Aunt Jean should hear me!” she said; and then after a pause, “Oh! look straight down, straight down under the fir-trees, Mr. Burnside. Oh! this is more interesting than the view. A pair of—”

“Do you think it is quite honourable to look at them?” said Randal. He had a presentiment who it must be.

“Oh, it can't be anybody we know,” said lighthearted Effie.

Far down in the wood, under the firs, no doubt the lovers felt themselves perfectly safe; but there were treacherous groups of trees, whose branches had been swept in one direction by the wind, laying bare the two who stood beneath. They were standing close together, holding each other's hands.

“The girl is crying, I think,” said Effie, “and leaning against the man. What can be the matter, can they have quarrelled? and she is all in black, with a thick veil——”

“Come to this side,” said Randal, hastily, “there is a break in the mist. I think I can show you Schehallion.”

“I like this better than Schehallion,” said Effie; and then she started and cried, “O-oh!” with a long breath; and suddenly blushing all over, looked Randal in the face.

“I think Schehallion is much the most interesting to look at,” he said; and touching her elbow with his hand, endeavoured to lead her away. But Effie was

too much startled to conceal her wonder and alarm.

“Oh, Mr. Burnside ! you are not thinking of Schehallion, you only want to get me away. I believe you know who *he* is.”

“I don’t know who either is and I don’t want to know” cried Randal ; “and I think, Miss Leslie, I must bid you good night.”

That was easy enough ; but Effie did not budge, though Randal went away.

## CHAPTER VIII.

EFFIE was not a tell-tale, and she was fond of her young aunt; but still this was such a revelation as made the blood stand still in her veins. She was deeply, profoundly interested, and strained her eyes to make out "the gentleman." Who could he be? Effie felt almost certain Mr. Burnside knew, and almost certain Mr. Burnside had seen them before, and was their confidante, or he would not have been so anxious to call her attention to Schehallion. Schehallion! nothing but a hill—whereas this was a romance! She leaned over the parapet of the tower, till the night grew so dark that she took fright and felt disposed to cry for help, never thinking, unaccustomed to it as she was, that she could grope her way in safety down the spiral stair. But she did manage it, partly fortified by a

generous determination not to make any noise near Aunt Jean's room, which might end in a betrayal of the lovers. Effie would have gone to the stake rather than betray the lovers to Aunt Jean. But her mother was a different matter. She knew she could not go to bed with a secret from her mother; and perhaps it was not right—was it quite right of Margaret? Effie reflected, however, as she stumbled down in the dark to the West Chamber, where John had just placed candles (the inspection of the pigstye being over), that perhaps grandpapa had known all about it; most likely Margaret had told him—and she had no need to tell anyone else. But to meet a—gentleman, in the wood! It was the most strange, and most exciting, and most wonderful thing in real life which Effie had ever seen with her own eyes. She crept in to the West Chamber, where Miss Leslie had just come, relieved of her attendance on her sister.

“Your dear Aunt Jean is a little better,” she said, “dear Effie; and where is dearest Margaret, and your dear papa

and mamma? Dear Jean has gone to bed, she will not come down to-night; and had you a pleasant walk, my love? and how is dear Mrs. Burnside?"

All these dears put Effie out of breath; and she had been out of breath before, with the shock she had got and with her progress downstairs: for a very narrow spiral stair which you are not familiar with, is rather alarming, when it is quite dark. Effie, however, made what breathless answer she could, and sat down in a corner, getting some work to conceal her burning cheeks from Aunt Grace's gaze, and forgetting altogether that Aunt Grace was shortsighted and saw nothing when she had not her spectacles on, which she did not wear when she was knitting. Miss Leslie, however, very glad to have a listener, and to have *la parole* in the absence of her sister, talked, without requiring any answer, straight on, flowing in a gentle stream, and gave Effie no trouble; and the girl sat turning her back to the light, and watching very keenly who should come in next. The first was her mother, placid and fresh from the

cool air, saying it was very pleasant out of doors after having been in the house all day; and then after an interval Margaret followed, very pale, with her eyes red, and her hat with its heavy veil in her hand.

“Have you been out too, my dear?” said Lady Leslie. “I wonder we did not see you; your brother and I have been taking a walk.”

“Yes,” said Margaret, “I saw you; I was in the wood. I always go to the wood.”

“I don’t think it is at all a good place,” said Aunt Grace, “a damp place; and no doubt you will have been standing about or even sitting down upon the moss and grass. Your dear Aunt Jean—no, I forgot, she is not your dear aunt, darling Margaret, but your dear sister—it is so strange to have a dear sister so young—She is better, but she has gone to bed, that is why you see me here alone. Dear Effie has been a good child; she has been sitting, talking to me, while you have been out, dear Mary, with dearest Ludovic, and while dear Margaret has been out.

But about the wood, darling Margaret; you must go and change your shoes directly. Dear Jean would never forgive me if I did not make you go and change your shoes."

"They are not wet," cried Margaret, going to the other corner, opposite to Effie, who gazed at her with the eagerest curiosity; but Effie was much more like the heroine of a love-story than Margaret, and the little girl's heart was sore for her young aunt. She had no mother to go to and tell, and how could she tell Aunt Jean? As for Aunt Grace, that might be possible perhaps, but then Aunt Jean would be told directly and there would be no fun. These were Effie's thoughts, sitting with her back to the light, so that nobody might see the excitement in her scarlet cheeks; but Margaret did not seem excited at all. She was quite quiet and still, though she was obstinate about changing her shoes. Oh, Effie thought, if I could only lend her mamma! but then you cannot lend a mother. There was nothing to be done but to pity the poor girl, who had nobody to breathe the secret

of her heart to, except Aunt Jean and Aunt Grace.

That night, however, after all the ladies had gone upstairs, Lady Leslie appeared again in her dressing-gown in the long room, where her husband was sitting at his father's table. The room was dark, except in the small space lighted by his lamp, and if the good man, though he had not much imagination, was startled by the sight of the white figure coming towards him through the dimness, he may be forgiven, so soon after a death in the family. When he saw who it was, he recovered his calm, and drew a chair for her to the table.

“Is it you, my dear?” he said, “you gave me a fright for the moment.” He thought she had some new light on the subject of the house, and as it was a matter of great thought to him, and they had not been able to come to any decision on the subject, he was very glad to see her. “I hope you have thought of some other expedient,” he said, “I can make neither head nor tail of it.” How was it likely he could think of anything but this very

troublesome and knotty problem of their own ?

“No indeed, Ludovic,” said Lady Leslie, “I have no new light ; and what I came to speak about is a new fash for you. No, nothing about the children, they are all right, thank God ! But when I went to say good night to Effie, I found her with red cheeks and such bright eyes, that I felt sure something was the matter.”

“Not fever ?” he said. “It was all quite right in a sanitary point of view—far better than most old houses, the surveyor told me.”

“No, no, not fever : when I told you it was nothing about the children ! But I don’t know what to do about it, Ludovic. It is poor little Margaret. Effie told me—the monkey to know anything about such things ! that standing by accident on the tower, looking down upon the wood, she saw—”

“You and me, my dear, taking our walk ; that was simple enough.”

“No, not you and me ; but two people under the big silver fir—Margaret and

—a gentleman; there is no use mincing the matter. By what Effie saw, a lover, Ludovic. Well! you need not get up in a passion, it may be no harm. It may be somebody your father knew of. We are all strangers to her, poor little thing. There may be nothing to blame in it. Only I don't know what gentleman it can be near this, for it was not Randal Burnside."

"How do you know it was not Randal Burnside?" said Sir Ludovic, rising and pacing about the room, in much fuss and fret, as his wife had feared. "No, but it could not be. He is too honourable a fellow."

"Mind, Ludovic, we don't know it is not as honourable as anything can be—your father might have sanctioned it. I would lay my life upon Margaret that she is a good girl. It cannot be more than imprudent at the worst—if it is that."

"She should be whipt," said her brother; "a little lightheaded thing! not a fortnight since my father died."

Sir Ludovic, though his blood was as good as any king's, was a homely Scots-

man, and the dialect of his childhood returned to him when his mind was disturbed, as happens sometimes even in this cosmopolitan age.

“Whisht, whist, Loodie!” said his wife. “She is a poor little motherless girl, and my heart bleeds for her—and I cannot bear to say anything to Jean. Jean would interfere with a strong hand, and make everything worse. If we only knew who it was! for I can think of no gentleman of these parts, unless it was one of the young men that are always staying with Sir Claude.”

At this her husband started and gave a long whew—w! of suspicion and consternation. “I know who it is,” he said, “I know who it is!” and began to walk about the room more than ever. Then he told his wife of his encounter with Rob Glen, and the circumstances seemed to fit so exactly that Lady Leslie could but hold up her hands in pain and horror.

“No doubt my father was foolish about it,” said Sir Ludovic. “It is true that he used to have him here to dinner; it is true that he made a sketch of the house—spend-

ing days upon it. John says he always disapproved, but my father had taken a fancy to the young man. Rob Glen—I know all about him—the widow’s son that has the little farm at Earl’s-lee : a stickit minister, John says, an artist, a forward confident fellow, as I saw from the way he addressed me ; and, by the way, I met Margaret coming in just before I met him. That makes it certain. It is just Rob Glen, and no gentleman of these parts : not even an artist of the better sort from Sir Claude’s—a clodpole, a lout, a common lad—”

“Oh, Ludovic!” Lady Leslie shivered, and covered her face with her hands ; “but if your father took him up and had him about the house, Margaret was not to blame. If he is, as you say, ‘a stickit minister,’ he must have some education ; and if he could draw your poor father, he must be clever. And probably he has the air of a gentleman—”

“I took him for a pushing forward fellow.”

“And how was the child to know? Good-looking very likely, and plenty of confidence, as you say ; and she a poor little

innocent girl knowing nothing, with nobody to look after her! Oh, Ludovic, you will not deserve to have so many sweet daughters of your own, if you are not very tender to poor Margaret; and if you can, oh, say nothing to Jean!"

"It is Jean's business," said Ludovic; but he was pleased that his wife should think him more capable than his sister. "Jean thinks she can do everything better than anybody else," he said; "but what is to be done? I will speak to *him*. I will tell him he has taken a most unfair advantage of an ignorant girl. I will tell him it's a most dishonourable action—"

"Oh, Ludovic, listen to me a little! How do you know that it is dishonourable? I incline to think your father sanctioned it. But speak to Margaret first. You are her brother, though you might be her father; and remember, poor thing, she has never had a mother. Speak to her gently, you have too kind a heart to be harsh. Tell her how unsuitable it is, and how young she is, not able to judge for herself. But don't abuse him, or she will take his part. Tell her—"

“I wish you would tell her yourself, Mary. You could manage that part of the matter much better than I.”

“But she is not my flesh and blood,” said Lady Leslie. “She might not think I had any right to interfere.”

And the decision they came to, after a lengthened consultation, was that Sir Ludovic should have a conversation with Margaret next morning, and ascertain how far things had gone; and persuade her to give up so unsuitable a connection; but that if she were obdurate, he should try his powers upon Rob, who might, perhaps, be brought to see that the transaction was not to his credit; and in any case the affair was to be kept, if possible, from the knowledge of the aunts, who henceforward would have the charge of Margaret. Sir Ludovic’s calculations were all put out, however, by this troublesome piece of business, and Lady Leslie shook her head as she went away through the long room and up the dark stair, a white figure, with her candle in her hand.

“Papa will speak to Margaret to-morrow,” she said, going into her daughter’s

room as she passed, "and we hope she will see what is right. But you must take great care never to breathe a word of this, Effie, for I am most anxious to keep it all from Aunt Jean."

"But, oh, mamma, what will happen if she will not give him up? and who can it be?" said Effie. Lady Leslie did not think it necessary to make any further revelations to her daughter. She said, "Go to sleep, dear," and gave her a kiss, and took away the light. And shortly after, Ludovic, disturbed in all his thoughts (though they were much more important, he could not but feel, than any nonsense about a lassie and her sweetheart), tramped heavily upstairs, also with his candle, shedding glimmers of light through all the window-slits as he passed; and silence and darkness fell once more over the house.

But Sir Ludovic had a face of care when he made his appearance next day. The sense of what he had got to do hung heavy on his soul. Though his wife had entreated him not to be harsh, it was not of cruelty, but of weak indulgence, that the good man felt himself most capable. He

almost hoped the girl would be saucy and impertinent, to put him on his mettle; but one glance at Margaret's pale, subdued child's face, which had been so happy and bright a little while ago, made this appear impossible. If only his wife could have done it! But he supposed Mary was right, and that it was "his place" to do it. How many disagreeable things, he reflected, it is a man's "place" to do when he is the head of a family! He did not feel that the dignity of the place made up for its troubles. If Mary would only do it herself! And Mrs. Bellingham had emerged as fresh as ever after the little retirement of yesterday. Her headache was quite gone, she was glad to say. It was so much better just to give in at once, and go to bed, and then you were as right as possible next day. She was able for anything now, Jean said. Sir Ludovic gave his wife an appealing glance across the table. Jean would enjoy doing this, she would do it a great deal better than he should; but Lady Leslie paid no attention to these covert appeals. Mrs. Bellingham was in better spirits, she allowed, than she had

been since papa's death. "Indeed, it would be wicked for us to grieve over that very bitterly, though great allowance must be made for Margaret; for he was an old man, and life had ceased to be any pleasure to him."

"Dearest papa!" said Miss Leslie, putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

"But here is a letter from my nephew, Aubrey Bellingham," said Jean. "I think you have met him, Ludovic; a very fine young fellow and one I put the greatest trust in. He is to be at Edinburgh to-day, and to-morrow he is coming on here. I am sure good Mrs. Burnside will not mind giving him a bed. He has come to take us home, or to go anywhere with us, if we prefer that. It is such a comfort on a long troublesome journey, with a languid party, to have a gentleman."

"I should have thought you were very well used to the journey," said Lady Leslie.

"So I am, and it is nothing with only Grace and myself; but three ladies, and one a very inexperienced traveller—I am too glad to have Aubrey's help. My

spirits might not be equal to it, and my strength is not what it once was—”

“No, indeed, dear Jean,” said Miss Grace, “those who knew you a few years ago, would scarcely recog——”

“And Aubrey is invaluable about travelling. I never saw a man so good; for one thing I have very much trained him myself, he has gone about with me since he was quite a little fellow. I used to make him take the tickets, and then he got advanced to looking after the luggage. To be sure he once made us a present of his beautiful new umbrella, letting the guard put it into our carriage—but that was a trifle. I think, as he has come, we must settle to go in a day or two, Mary. This just gives me the courage to go. I should have lingered on, not able to make up my mind to tear ourselves away from a spot——”

“Where we have been so unhappy.” Miss Leslie took advantage of the moment when Mrs. Bellingham took up her cup of coffee. A mouthful of anything, especially when it is hot, is an interruption perforce of the most eloquent speech.

“It will be better for us all, and better for Margaret not to linger here,” said Jean. “Poor child, she will never do any good till we get her away. Yes, you will suffer, Margaret, but believe me, it is real consideration for your good, real anxiety for you. Ask Mary, she will tell you the same thing. Earl’s-hall will never be the same to you again. You must begin your new life some time or other, and the sooner the better, Margaret. Would you like to go to the Highlands and see a little of the country? or shall we go straight to the Grange at once? Now that Aubrey is to be with us, it is quite the same for my comfort—and we will do, my love, what you like best.”

“Oh, I do not care about anything,” said Margaret, “whatever, whatever you please.”

“That is very natural, my dear,” said Lady Leslie, “and Jean is right, though perhaps it sounds hard. Effie and I will miss you dreadfully, Margaret, but the change is the best thing for you. If you go to the Highlands, would you like Effie to go too, for company?” said the

kind woman. But Margaret could not speak for crying, and Jean and Grace did not seem delighted with the suggestion.

“It will be best for her to make the break at once,” said Mrs. Bellingham. “Effie can come after, we shall be most happy to see her when we are settled at the Grange.”

“I daresay you are right,” said Effie’s mother; but this rejection of the offer, which she knew to be so kind on her own part, of her daughter’s company, made her heart colder to poor Margaret than all the story about Rob Glen.

Ludovic put his hand on his little sister’s shoulder as she was leaving the breakfast-table.

“Will you come out with me, and take a little walk about the place, Margaret? I want to say something to you,” he said.

“What is that?” said Mrs. Bellingham. “I suppose, Ludovic, you would like me to come too? I will get on my hat in a moment; indeed, Margaret can fetch it when she brings her own. A turn in the morning is always pleasant. Run away,

my dear, and bring our hats, the air will do us both good."

"But I wanted your advice," said Lady Leslie, "yours and Grace's; there are still some things to settle. These laces, for instance, which we were to look over."

"That is true," said Mrs. Bellingham; "but I am afraid it will be a disappointment to Ludovic; and then, of course, it is necessary I should be there if he has really something to say to Margaret."

"Let me go, dear Jean," said Grace; "I will not mind, indeed I will not mind *much*, being away, and the lace could never be settled without you. I am not so clever about knowing the kinds, and I am sure you will not forget that I am fond of it *too*."

"Does Margaret want a chaperon when she goes out with me?" said Ludovic. "It is only to put a little colour in her cheeks." But he was not clever at these little social artifices, and looked once more at his wife.

"Leave him alone with his girls," said Lady Leslie, "a man is always fond of a

walk with girls. Get your hat, Margaret, my dear, and you too, Effie, and take a run with him. He will like that a great deal better than you and me, Jean. We are very well in our way, but he likes the young things, and who will blame him? and we will settle about the lace before they come in."

"There is no accounting for tastes," Mrs. Bellingham said, "but if there is anything particular, it will be better to wait till I can be with you, Ludovic; and, Margaret, put on your goloshes, for it rained last night."

"You can take mine, dear," whispered Grace, who knew that Margaret did not possess these necessary articles. And thus, at last, the party got under weigh. Effie, warned by her mother, deserted them as soon as her aunts were safe in the high room, and Margaret, without any foreboding of evil, went out with her brother peacefully into the morning. It was very damp after the rain, as Mrs. Bellingham had divined, and cost her some trouble to keep her crape unsoiled. But except for that care, and that there

was some excitement in her mind to hear of the speedy departure from Earl's-hall, Margaret went out with Ludovic with great confidence in his kindness and without any fear.

## CHAPTER IX.

“ I SAID to Jean it was nothing, for I did not care to mix her up with it; but I have something very serious to say to you, Margaret,” said Sir Ludovic.

She looked up at him with eyes wistful, yet candid, fearing nothing still. The character of Margaret’s face seemed to have changed within the last month. What she was in June was not like what she was in July. The trouble she had gone through had not seemed to develope, but to subdue her. She had been full of variety, animation and energy before. Now the life seemed to have sunk to so low an ebb in her paled being, exhausted with tears, that there was little remaining but simple consciousness and intelligence. She did not seem able to originate anything on her own side, not even a question. A half smile, the reflection of a smile, came to

her face, and she looked up, without any alarm, for what her brother had to say.

“Margaret,” he said (how hard it was! harder even than he thought. He cleared his throat, and a rush of uncomfortable colour came to his middle-aged countenance, though she took it so calmly, and did not blush at all). “Margaret, I have found out something, my dear, that gives me a great deal of pain—something about you.”

But even this solemn preamble seemed to convey no thrill of conscious guilt to Margaret’s mind. She only looked at him again a little more earnestly. “Have I lost my—money?” she said.

“No, it is not that. What made you think of losing your money?”

“It often happens, does it not?” she said. “I am sure I should not care.”

“Oh yes, you would care—we should all care; but your money is safe enough. I wish you yourself were as safe. Margaret, my dear, give me your full attention; you were seen last night in the wood.”

“Yes!” she said, a little alarmed.

“With a—gentleman: or at least, let us hope it was a gentleman,” said Ludovic. “You know that it is not—usual, nor perhaps—right. I want you to tell me all about it: and first of all, who was the man?”

Margaret was taken entirely by surprise. It had not occurred to her to think of Rob Glen as one about whom she could be questioned. He had grown so familiar while her father lived, and he had been so kind. There was no sort of novelty about it—nothing to be thus solemnly questioned about. But she looked up at her brother with startled eyes.

“Oh, Ludovic, the gentleman—”

“Yes; don’t be frightened for me, my poor little sister, I will not be unkind; but tell me truly, everything. You must not keep back anything, Margaret.”

“I don’t know, perhaps, if—you would call him a gentleman,” said Margaret, the colour beginning to rise in her pale face. Keep back nothing! would she have to tell them all he had said? Her heart began to beat faster. “It is Rob Glen, Ludovic; perhaps you remember him long

ago, when he was a boy. I used to go fishing with him, he was very kind to me. Bell always says—”

“Yes—yes, it does not matter about children; but you are not a child now, Margaret. Have you always kept on such—intimate terms with Rob Glen?”

Margaret winced, and her face began to burn. He seemed to himself to be speaking brutally to her; but what else could he say?

“I did not see him at all for a long time,” she said; “and then he came back. He always said he was not—as good as we were. But do you think it all depends upon where you are born? You can’t help where you are born.”

“No—but you must be content with it, and keep to your own place,” said Ludovic, an argument which did not make much impression on his own mind.

“But he is very clever, he can draw most beautifully,” said Margaret. “The first time he came—It was—papa that said he might come.”

The name brought with it, as was natural, a sob, and Ludovic, horribly

compunctious, patted his little sister on the shoulder, with a kind and lingering hand.

“He made a picture of *him*,” cried Margaret, half inarticulate, struggling with the “climbing sorrow.” “Oh, Loodie! I found it just yesterday, it is *him*, his very self.”

“My poor little Margaret! don’t think me cruel,” said the good man, with a break in his voice. “I *must* hear.”

“Yes, Ludovic. He used to come often, and sometimes would cheer him up and make him laugh. And he grew—a great friend. Then when *he* was ill, when I went out to cry—I could not cry when everybody was there.”

“My poor child!”

“That was the first time I met him in the wood. He was very, very kind. I—could do nothing but cry.”

Ludovic took her hand into his, and held it between his own. He was beginning to understand.

“I see how it was,” he said, his voice not so steady as at first. “I see exactly how it was; and I don’t blame you,

my dear. But, Margaret, has he taken advantage of this? Has he got you to promise—to marry him? Is that what he talks to you about? Forget I am an old man, old to the like of you—or rather think that I am your father, Margaret.”

“No, no,” she said, “you are not that, no one will ever be that again; but you are very kind. My father—would have been pleased to see how kind you are.”

“God knows—and my poor father too if he knows anything of what he’s left behind him—that I want to be kind to you, as kind as he could have been, my poor little Margaret. Tell me then, dear, has this young man spoken of marriage to you, and love?”

“Of love, oh yes!” said Margaret, drooping her head. “I am not sure about the other. He was for going away yesterday, when I told him I had a fortune; and I had to tell him myself that was no reason for going away, that there would be plenty for us both.”

“Does that mean that you promised to marry him, Margaret?”

“I do not know,” she said, slowly;

“I did not think of that. I suppose when you come to think of it—” the colour had all gone out of her face, and she was quite pale again, and letting the words fall more and more slowly—“when you come to think of it, though I never did stop to think—that is what it would mean.”

There was a touch of regret in her tone, a weary acknowledgment of necessity, but no blushing pride or fervour. It had not occurred to her before, but being put to her, it must, no doubt, mean that. She did not look at her brother, but at the ground; but not to hide any happy flush of consciousness. Ludovic was half bewildered, half irritated by her calm.

“But, Margaret,” he cried, “you cannot think what you are saying; this must be put a stop to, it must be brought to an end, it is monstrous—it is impossible! My dear, you cannot really have the least idea what you are doing. Giving yourself up to the first fortune-hunter that appears, a vulgar fellow without a penny, without even the position of a gentleman. He has taken a base advantage of your youth and your

trouble. It must be put a stop to," he said. He had dropped her hand, and withdrawn from her side, and was crushing the damp grass under his feet with all those frettings and fidgetings of embarrassment and irritation of which his wife was afraid.

Margaret had looked up at him again. She was quite quiet, but as steady as a statue.

"How can it be put a stop to?" she said. "He is not what you say, Ludovic; he is very kind."

"Margaret! are you in love with him?" cried her brother, "is that what you mean?"

A slight colour wavered over Margaret's face.

"It is he that is—*that*," she said softly.

This gave Ludovic, ignorant man, courage.

"Heaven be praised if it is only he! I would make short work with him; the only difficulty would be to make you unhappy. My dear, I will see him this very day, and you shall never be troubled with him any more."

"He has not been a trouble at all,

Ludovic. I cannot tell you how kind he was ; and yesterday again he was very kind. He would have gone away if I had let him, but I would not let him."

"Now that you see how serious it is, my dear," said Ludovic, "you will let him now? I will go and see him at once. I will lose no time. Go you back to the house and don't say anything to Jean. Speak to Mary if you like, but not to Jean ; and don't give yourself any more trouble about it, my dear ; I will manage it all."

But Margaret did not move ; she stood very steadily, all the trembling gone away from her, the tears dried from her cheeks, and her eyes shining. These eyes were still fixed on the ground, and her head was drooping, but she showed no other signs of emotion.

"Ludovic," she said slowly, "it is a mistake you are making, it cannot be settled so easily. Indeed, it would be better just to let it alone," she added, after a pause.

"Let it alone!" cried Sir Ludovic ;

“that is just the thing that cannot be done.”

Margaret put out her hand and touched his arm. She raised her head with a slight proud elevation, unlike anything that had been seen in it before.

“You must not meddle with me,” she said, with a wistful look, half warning, half entreating.

“But I must meddle with you, my dear. You must not go to your ruin; you cannot be allowed to go.”

“Don’t meddle with me, Ludovic! I have never been meddled with. You need not think I will do—anything wrong.”

“I must act according to my judgment, Margaret. You are too young to know what you are doing. I must save you from this adventurer. You do not even care about him. I know how a girl looks when she is in love—not as you do, Margaret, thank God for it; and that is the one thing of any importance. I must interfere.”

“I do not want to be disobedient,” she said, “but, Ludovic, you know there must be some things that are my own; you

cannot judge for me always, nor Jean either. And whatever you may say about this, I will not do it; anything else! but about this I will not do it. It is very, very difficult to say so, when you are so kind; but I cannot, and do not bid me, Ludovic; oh do not bid me! for I will not!" she said.

"But if I tell you you must!" He was entirely out of patience. What fantastic piece of folly was this that had made her set herself against him like a rock? He was beyond his own control with impatience and irritation. "I hope you will not drive me to say something I will be sorry for," he said. "You, Margaret, who have always been a good girl! and you don't even care for this young man."

"*He* cares," said Margaret, under her breath.

"Is that why you resist me?" cried her brother. "*He* cares! yes, for your money, you foolish girl, for what you have got; because he will be able to live and think himself a gentleman!"

"Ludovic!" she cried, her face grow-

ing crimson; "but you are only angry, you don't mean to be so unkind."

And then he stopped short, touched in the midst of his anger by the simplicity of her confidence.

"Do you mean to tell me—that you are really going to marry—Rob Glen, Margaret?"

"Oh! but not for such a long, long time!" she said.

What was he to say to her? a girl so simple, so almost childish, so unyielding. If Mary had only done it herself! probably she would have had some means of insight into this strange, subtle girl's mechanism which was out of his way. What was reason, argument, common sense, to a creature like this, who refused to abandon her lover, and yet drew a long breath of relief at the thought that it must be "a long, long time" before he could claim her? Sir Ludovic was at his wit's end. They had been walking up and down in front of the house, where, out of reach of all the windows, their conversation was quite safe. The grassy path was damp, but it was noiseless, affording

no interruption to their talk. On the ruined gable the tall wall-flowers were nodding, and the ivy threw a little shower of raindrops over them whenever the wind blew. Looking up at that ruined gable reminded him of all his own cares, so much more important than this love nonsense. Should he ever be able to re-build it? but in the meantime, he must not think of this question at all, but address himself to the still more difficult subject of Rob Glen.

When the conversation, however, had come to this pass, beyond which it seemed so difficult to carry it, an interruption occurred. A lumbering old hackney-carriage, well known in the country, which carried everybody to and from the station, of the few who wanted any other means of conveyance but their own legs or their own carriage—and there were not many people of this intermediate class in Stratheden—suddenly swung in heavily at the gate, and sinking deep in the rut, which it went to Ludovic's heart to see, disfiguring the muddy road through the scanty trees, which called itself the

avenue—came labouring towards them. There was a portmanteau on the outside of this vehicle, and somebody within, who thrust out his head as he approached, reconnoitering the curious old grey house. When he saw the two figures advancing from the other side, he called to the driver and leapt out. It was a young man, fair and fashionable, and spotless in apparel, with a beardless but not boyish face, an eye-glass in his eye and a great-coat on his arm.

“Excuse me,” he said, “I am sure that I am speaking to——”

While at the same time Ludovic Leslie, leaving Margaret, upon whom the stranger had already fixed a very decided gaze, went forward saying,

“Aubrey Bellingham—How do you do? My sister told us she expected you to-day.”

“Yes,” said the young man, “here I am. I came up as soon as I got her summons. It is a fine thing to have nothing to do, for then one is always at the call of one’s friends. May I be presented to—Miss Leslie? whom I have heard of

so often. As I am about to enter her service, don't you think I should know her at once when good fortune throws me in her way?"

“Only Miss Margaret Leslie, Bellingham. You understand, Margaret, that this is Jean's nephew, whom she was speaking of this morning. I don't know what he means by entering your service, but perhaps he can explain that himself.”

The stranger gave Margaret a very keen look of examination, not the chance glance of an ordinary meeting, nor yet the complimentary surprise of sudden admiration of a pretty face. The look meant a great deal more than this, and might have confused Margaret if she had not been far beyond noticing anything of the kind. He seemed to look, try, judge all in a moment, and the keen sudden inspection struck Sir Ludovic, though he was not very swift to mark such undercurrents of meaning. It seemed to take a long time, so searching and thorough was it; and yet almost before Ludovic's voice had ceased to vibrate, Bellingham replied,

“I believe I am to be the courier of the

party, which is the same as entering Miss Leslie's service. My aunts are used to me. Miss Leslie, it is a very quaint relationship this of yours to my aunts. I call both your sisters by that endearing title."

"I hope you don't mean to make my little sister into Aunt Margaret," said Sir Ludovic. "Perhaps, my dear, you had better go and tell Jean of Mr. Bellingham's arrival. I don't know what you will think," he added, escaping with some relief, as Margaret hurried away, into the more habitual current of his thoughts, "of my tumbledown old house."

"It is a most curious old house," said the stranger, "I can see that already. I have been studying it all the time; fifteenth century, do you suppose? Domestic architecture is always a little bewildering. I know there are people who can read it like a church, but I don't pretend to be clever about it. It always puzzles me."

"No doubt it is puzzling, when you know only a little about it," said Ludovic, who knew nothing at all.

"That is just my case," said the other,

cheerfully. "I have been taught just a little of most things. It is very unsatisfactory. Indeed, to have the reputation of a handy man in a large family party is ruin to everything. You can neither work nor study: and when you are cursed in addition with a little good-nature——"

"A large share of that," Sir Ludovic said, chiefly because it seemed to him the only thing to say; and it was very good-natured, indeed, for a young man, a man so entirely *comme il faut*, and looking more like Pall Mall than Earl's-hall, to come when his aunt called him so readily. Ludovic knew he himself would not have done it, for any number of old ladies, but then he had always had his profession to think of; and how many things he had at this moment to think of! Thank heaven, at least, he had got rid of Margaret's affairs for the moment. Let Mary put her own brains to work and see what she could make of it. For himself, there was a certain relief in the sight of a new face. In the meantime, while Sir Ludovic's mind was thus condoling with itself, the new arrival had paid his cab, and seen

his portmanteau handed over to John, who had made his appearance at the sound of the wheels.

“For some things, Sir,” said young Bellingham, peering at John through his eyeglass, “this is a delightful country. Fancy your old butler, who looks an archbishop at least, meekly carrying off my portmanteau! If he had been on the other side of the Tweed, he would have looked at it helplessly, and requested to know what he was supposed to have to do with such an article”

“John is not used to much grandeur,” said Sir Ludovic, not knowing whether this was compliment or depreciation; “a man-of-all-work about a homely Scotch country-house, is not like one of your pampered menials in the South. Did you have a good crossing at the Ferry?”

There are times when the Ferry at Burntisland is not much more agreeable than the worse ferry at Dover, and it was always a civil question—though privately he thought that a little tossing, or even a little sea-sickness, would not have done any harm to this spruce gentleman.

Ludovic felt plainer, rustier, in his old black coat, which had seen much service at his office, since this carefully dressed young hero had dawned upon the horizon. He felt instinctively that he did not like him; though nothing could be more cheerful or friendly than Mr. Aubrey Bellingham. He was good enough to explain the house to its master as they went in, and told him why the screen wall between the two blocks of building existed, and all about it. Ludovic was so startled that he found nothing to reply; he had even a little heraldic lecture upon his own coat of arms over the door.

## CHAPTER X.

THERE was quite a cheerful flutter of talk at the luncheon-table in the long room. Sir Ludovic had never much to say, and his wife was very anxious to know the result of his interview with Margaret, and Effie was shy, and Margaret herself perfectly silent. But the rapid interchange of question and answer between Mrs. Bellingham and her nephew made the most lively commotion, and stirred all the echoes in the quiet place, where nobody as yet had ventured upon a laugh. It was not to be supposed that Aubrey Bellingham, who was a stranger and had never seen the old Sir Ludovic, could be much subdued in his tone by "what had happened"—and Jean had already begun to feel that there was really no reason to regret such a happy release.

"I am just beginning to be able to look

people in the face again," she said. "I need not tell you, Aubrey, it has been a dreadful time. My sister and I have had a great deal to do, and naturally, though it may not tell at the time, one feels it afterwards. I did not leave my room yesterday at all. Grace will tell you I had one of my bad headaches. But what with seeing you to-day, and being obliged to bestir myself in the morning about some business, a piece of work quite after your own heart, Aubrey, arranging some lace."

"If it is fine, I quite understand the improvement in your health," he said. "What kind? and who is the happy possessor. I hope some of it has fallen to your share."

"Oh, a little," said Mrs. Bellingham; and Grace echoed "a little" with some dolefulness.

This division of the stores of the house into three portions had not been so successful as was hoped: and when it was again gone over, some scraps naturally fell to Lady Leslie and her daughters. It was Miss Leslie upon whom the loss chiefly

fell, and there was accordingly in her tone a tinge of melancholy. She was not sorry that dear Mary and the dear girls should have it, but still it was notorious that she was generally the sufferer, when anyone had to suffer.

“Margaret is the most fortunate; Margaret has a piece of point de Venise. I never saw such a lovely piece. It will go to your very heart. After lunch you shall see it all, and I know you will think Margaret a lucky girl; too lucky! She will not appreciate it for a dozen years, and by that time she will have grown familiar with it, and it will not impress her,” said Mrs. Bellingham, regretfully. “You don’t think half so much of things you have had since you were a girl. But tell me, Aubrey, how is everybody? had you heard from the Court before you left? What were they all doing? I declare it seems about a year since we came here in such a hurry. I daresay you have heard all about us, and the sad way in which we have been spending our time? I have had a great deal of flying neuralgia, and yesterday it quite settled in my head.

Scotland does not suit me, I always say. It does very well for Grace, who is as strong as a pony, though she does not look it—”

“Dearest Jean!” said Miss Leslie, touched to the quick, and this time insisting upon a hearing. “I strong? Dear Aubrey knows better than to believe——”

“Oh, yes, we all know, my dear, you are strong at bottom, though you have your little ailments; and with me it is just the other way. I am kept up by my spirit. Now, Aubrey, you have not given us one single piece of news. Tell us something about the Court.”

“I appeal to your candour, Aunt Jean; what can I tell you about the Court when I am fresh from town? unless you mean the other kind of a court, the royal one: or the Club; you shall hear, if you please, about the Club. You know about that trial that was so much talked of? it is to be all hushed up, I believe. *She* is to be condoned, and *he* is to have his debts paid, and they are all to live happy ever after. You should hear Mountfort on the subject. He says it will not be six months

before it is all on again, and the detectives at work."

"Is it possible?" cried Mrs. Bellingham. "I thought Lady Arabella had really taken the last step and run off, you know, in the yacht; and that Lord Fred—"

"No names, my dear aunt, I entreat. Of course, everybody knows who is meant, but it is better not to bandy names about. Oh no; my lady would have done it, I don't doubt for a moment, but Fred is a fellow who knows very well how far the world will permit you to go, and he wouldn't hear of it; so it is all hushed up. There is something very piquant, however, going on in another quarter, where you would never suspect it. It sounds just like a romance. A couple that have always been one of the most devoted couples, and a friend who has been the most devoted friend, husband's school-fellow, you know, and saved his life in India, or something—and there they are, the three of them; everybody sees it except the silly fellow himself. It's as good as a play to watch them; you know whom I mean. They have a place not a hundred

miles from us, wife the most innocent, smiling creature—”

“ Ah !” cried Miss Leslie, holding up her hands, “ I can see who you me——”

“ Of course, anybody can see,” said Mrs. Bellingham. “ The A.’s, of course, of A. C. Do you really mean it, Aubrey? and the man? Goodness gracious! why of course it must be!—no—not that, don’t say so—Algy—? I never heard of such a complication in all my life.”

“ Exactly,” said the newcomer, “ that is what everybody says. Algy, of all men in the world, with a character to lose! but in this sort of affair you never can trust any one; and still waters run deep, you know. It is the woman that puzzles me, smiling and looking so innocent. Happily Sir Cresswell Cresswell does not want a jury, for no jury would ever go against such an innocent-looking little woman.”

Effie had been taking all this mysterious talk in with the most rapt attention. She did not understand a word of it, but still a lively discussion of other people, even when you don’t know who they are, and don’t

know what they are accused of, has a certain interest. But Sir Cresswell Cresswell's well-known name roused Lady Leslie, who had been longing to interfere before, and woke up even Ludovic, who had been eating his luncheon steadily and thinking how the avenue could be put in order at the least expense. What did he care for their chatter? But this name woke the good man up.

"You will think me very stupid," said Lady Leslie, "but we are only plain Scots people, you know, and very seldom go to England, and don't know about your friends. I daresay Mr. Aubrey would be so kind as to tell us something about the Court, as he said—not Bellingham Court, but the Queen's Court. Effie would like to hear about the Princes and Princesses, and so would Margaret. They say we are going to have one of them up here."

"Oh, surely," said Aubrey, "there is always plenty of talk on that subject. Most of them are going a frightful pace. I am not posted up in the very last scandals, for, you know, I have never been a favourite. But there is a very pretty

story current about a pretty Galician or Wallachian, or some of those savage tribes. The lady, of course, was quite civilized enough to know all about the proprieties—or perhaps it would be better to say the improprieties—of our princely society, and she thought, I suppose, that an English Royalty—”

“Oh!” said Lady Leslie, “but I feel sure half these stories are nonsense, or worse than nonsense. I know you gentlemen are fond of a little gossip at your club, and I suppose you don’t mean the half of what you say. Were the pictures fine this year, Mr. Bellingham? That is one thing I regret never going to London for; one sees so few pictures.”

“I think everybody who has seen them will agree with me in saying the fewer the better,” said Bellingham, ready for all subjects. “The dinner this year was as great bosh as usual. But there is a very good story about an R.A. who asked a great lady he happened to meet with, how she liked the portrait of her husband? It was her Grace of X., or Y., or Z., never mind who, I daresay you will all guess.

She stared at him, as you may suppose. But he insisted. 'Oh, yes, he had finished it a month before; and he always understood it was the Duchess herself who had suggested that pose which was so successful!' Fancy the unfortunate fellow's feelings when he saw what he had done! And I hope her Grace gave it hot and hot to the Duke."

"There, Aubrey, that will do; that is enough of your funny stories. They are not pretty stories at all, though sometimes they make one laugh when one oughtn't," said Mrs. Bellingham. "Those clubs of yours are not at all nice places, as my sister-in-law says; and talk of women's gossip! But now and then it is like a sniff of salts, you know, or a vinaigrette, which is not nice in itself, but wakes one up. Now we must be going to-morrow or the day after to-morrow; and I think, as you are here, Aubrey, we might as well go to Perth, and then make a little round through the Highlands. I daresay you are going somewhere shooting as soon as the moors are open. We cannot do much mountain work, because of the sad cir-

cumstances and our crape; but we might stay for a week in one place and a week in another, and so make our way to the Grange about the end of August. That would be a very good time. The very hot weather will be over, and it will be best not to try Margaret too much with the heat of an English summer. I wish you would not always interrupt me, Grace. There is never any heat in Scotland. It is rather fine now, and warmish, and quite pleasant; but as for a scorching sun, and that sort of thing— You are very quiet, Margaret. Has Ludovic been scolding you? You ought to leave that to me, Ludovic; a man has always a heavier hand. I always said, if I had been blessed with children, I never should have let their father correct them. Men mean very well, but they have a heavy hand.”

“But not dearest Loodie!” cried Miss Leslie; “he always was the kindest! and dear Jean knows as well as any of us—”

“Yes, I know that a man’s hand is always heavier than he thinks, whether it is a simple scolding or something more

serious. Margaret looks like a little mouse with all the spirits out of her. If she comes in like that after walks with you, Ludovic, I don't think I will trust her with you again."

"Margaret has not been very lively lately," said kind Lady Leslie. "She has not been keeping us all in amusement, like Mrs. Bellingham. I think I will take the two girls away with me this afternoon, if you have no objections, Jean. I am going to the Manse to see Mrs. Burnside, and the walk will do Margaret good."

"Will you speak to Mrs. Burnside, please, about giving Aubrey a bed?" Mrs. Bellingham said; and Lady Leslie, who was anxious about her husband's interview with his sister, and not at all anxious to cultivate Aubrey's acquaintance, hurried them away. She had a hasty interview with Ludovic before she went out, who was very anxious she should take the business into her own hands. What was to be done? Would it be better to say nothing at all about it, but trust to the "long long time," and the distance, and the development of the girl's mind?

“But it would be better for her to marry Rob Glen than Aubrey Bellingham, with all his nasty stories,” Lady Leslie said indignantly.

“What was the fellow talking about?” asked Ludovic. He had not paid any attention, save for one moment, at the sound of that too remarkable name; but it had not come to anything except “havers,” and he had resumed his own thoughts. Lady Leslie, however, did not let her victim off so easily. She insisted that he should see Rob Glen, and warn him of the disapproval of the family; and this at last, with many sighs and groans, the unfortunate head of the family consented to do.

“I have been watching her all the time,” said the stranger, when he had been taken by the two ladies to the West Chamber, “and I approve. She is not very lively, and I daresay she will never be amusing (begging your pardons, my dear aunts, for so plain a speech); but she is very pretty, and what you call interesting; and a little money, though it is not much, is always acceptable.

I have not come off hitherto, notwithstanding my merits. You put me up at too high a price, you ladies; and I have gone through a good many seasons without ever fetching that fancy price; so if you think I have any chance, really I don't mind. I will go in for Miss Margaret seriously, and I will not tell her naughty stories, but bring her up in the way she should go."

"No; you must be more careful how you talk before young ladies," said Mrs. Bellingham. "People here are not used to it. My sister-in-law is a very good little body, but quite untrained, as you would see. Yes, Aubrey, it would make me happy to see dear Margaret in your hands. I am sure you would always be kind to her. And it is a very nice little property, and could be improved; and she would make you a very nice little wife. It would just be the kind of thing to make me feel I had all I wished for, if I could provide for my little sister and for you, Aubrey, my husband's godchild, at the same time."

"Oh, we can't have you take the Nunc

Dimittis view," he said, "that is out of the question; but I am quite willing, if *she* is; and if she isn't, after a while, with all my opportunities, I shall be a precious fool, Aunt Jean. By the way, it is a little odd if you come to think of it, marrying into a previous generation, as I should be doing if she'd have me—marrying my aunt, isn't it? I think it's within the forbidden degrees."

"Margaret your aunt, dear Aubrey? Darling Margaret is not quite eighteen; so how could that be?" said Miss Leslie; "and do you mean that *this* is what you were thinking of? Oh, I wondered what dear Jean, with her own clever head, wanted Aubrey for—Jean, who can manage everything. But how can you tell whether you will love her, dear Aubrey? You cannot always love where you wish to, and I never would give my consent, never for a moment, to a match which was not—"

"What nonsense is she talking?" said Mrs. Bellingham. She had gone to get Margaret's lace to exhibit, and this was why Grace had found the occasion to

address Aubrey at such length, "a match which was not—something or other; I am sure, Aubrey, you will fall in love, as everybody does before they marry. I suppose you don't want to shut up little Margaret in a prison with you and me, Grace, and keep her money, that her husband might not get the use of it? That would be just like you old maids. But I mean Margaret to have a good husband, and live a happy life."

"Dearest Jean!" said Miss Grace, with tears. "I keep dear Margaret unmarried, or want her money! She shall have all I have when I die, and as for being an old maid—"

This was a very unkind cut indeed, and Miss Leslie was unable to resist the impulse to cry. Her tears were not so interesting as Margaret's, for her nose became red, and her shortsighted eyes muddy. "I am sure I have not done anything to deserve this," she said, and sobbed; while Jean told her not to be so silly, and without paying any more attention, held up the point de Venise, which had belonged to

Margaret's mother, in her plump hands.

"Look at that, Aubrey. If all goes well you may have a wife with *that* upon her wedding dress. Dear me, I think I would almost marry myself to have it. Is it not lovely? But Margaret will not care a bit, no one does at her age. She would think a bit of common Valenciennes from a shop just as pretty, or perhaps, Lord knows, imitation would please her. I had a piece myself in my trousseau, not half so good as that, nor half so much of it, but still *lace*, you know, real lace; and I let it lie about, and wore net ruffs and things. Even I! so you may fancy what Margaret will do; but if it was her mother's (and Bell swears it was), she has a right to it," Mrs. Bellingham said, with integrity beyond praise.

"It is very nice, Aunt Jean," said Aubrey, holding it to the light; "but I think you are a little too enthusiastic. If it is point de Venise it is very late work, not the best. I should be disposed to say it was point de France, very pretty all the same, and valuable in its way. Now look at that stitch—I don't think you would find

that in real old Venetian. I think that is a French stitch. But it is very nice," he added, looking at it, critically, "very nice: on a dark velvet or brocade, it would look very well. As for putting it over white satin, I never should consent to such a thing. Light point de Flandres, or modern Brussels, or Malines, I shouldn't mind; but Venetian point, no. You ladies have your own ideas; but I wouldn't allow it, not if my opinion was asked."

"You see! you allow it is Venetian after all."

"Or point de France. It is very much the same thing; sometimes you can scarcely tell that it has travelled over the Alps; but I think I have an eye for lace. Any china?" said Aubrey, walking to a door in the panelling, and opening it coolly. "Ay, I thought it was a cupboard. But here's only common stuff."

"The best tea-things!" said Miss Grace, with a little shriek, "that have always been kept there ever since I was a child."

"In that case perhaps they are better than they appear," said Aubrey, calmly; and after a closer inspection, he decided

that this was the case. They were Chelsea, "but not much." From this it will be seen that young Mr. Bellingham was a young man of extended and various information. He went upstairs to the high room with them, and was really excited by the old clothes. The house, though he appreciated its curiousness, did not otherwise attract the young man. "If one could spend a few thousands on old oak and tapestry, it might be made very nice," he acknowledged; but there were some old cups and saucers here and there in the various rooms which pleased him. And as he accompanied the ladies up and down, and examined everything, he gave an occasional thought to Margaret, which ought to have made her proud, had she been aware of the distinction. She would do very well. She was not at all the kind of person whom, in such circumstances, it would have been natural to see. A red-haired young woman with high cheek-bones—was not that the recognized type of a Scotch heiress? Aubrey knew that the conventional type does not always hold; but he had thought of Miss Leslie's nose and her

short-sight, and he had also thought of his aunt's plumpness, and that peculiarity of tone which many Scotchwomen in England attain, with the proud consciousness of having lost all their native accent. There are few things so disagreeably provincial as this tone, which is not Scotch, which is the very triumph and proclaimed conviction of having shaken off Scotch, and acquired the finest of Southern speech. Aubrey had been afraid of all these things; but Margaret had not come up to the conventional requirements of her position. Her soft native Fife, even with its modulations, did not alarm him like Aunt Jean's high English, and her nose would never be like that of Aunt Grace. Altogether she was an unexceptionable heiress, sweet and sorrowful, and "interesting." It was a commonplace sort of word, but yet even a superfine young man is sometimes obliged to use such ordinary mediums of expression. For a man who, previously set up at much too high a figure (to quote his own metaphor) and commanding no offers, was ready to accept a moderate fortune

even under disadvantageous conditions; the thought of a nice little property weighted only by Margaret, was very consolatory indeed.

## CHAPTER XI.

NEXT day was Sunday, the last day that Margaret was to spend at home, not like the brilliant Sunday on which old Sir Ludovic, for the last time, attended "a diet of worship" in the parish church, and was reminded of his latter end by good Dr. Burnside; but grey, and dull, and cloudy, with no light on the horizon, and the whole landscape, hill, and valley, and sea, all expressed in different tones of a flat lead colour, the change of all others which most affects the landscape. In Fife, as has been candidly allowed, the features of the country have no splendour or native nobleness—and accordingly there is no power in them to resist this invasion of greyness. Mr. Aubrey Bellingham, though he did not pretend to "go in" for the beauties of nature, intimated very plainly his discontent with the scene before him.

"Anything poorer, in the way of land-

scape, I don't know that I ever saw," he said, and sighed, when he was made to take his place in the old carriage to be driven to Fifeton, to the "English chapel." It was six miles off, whereas the parish church, with the Norman chancel, was scarcely one? But as Mrs. Bellingham said, if you do not hold by your church, what is to become of you.

"Only the common people go there," she said, "the farmers and so forth. The gentry are *all* Episcopalian. My brother, Sir Ludovic, may go now and then for the sake of example, and because Dr. Burnside is an old family friend; but Sir Claude, and everybody of importance, you will find at our church. All the *élite* go there. I can't think what the gentry were thinking of to allow the Presbyterians to seize the endowments. It is quite the other way in England, where it is the common people who are dissenters, and *we* have a church which is really fit for ladies and gentlemen to go to. But things are all very queer in Scotland, Aubrey; that is one thing, I suppose, that gives the common people such very independent ways."

“ Well, Aunt Jean, let us be thankful we were not born to set it right ;” said Aubrey, reconciled to see that his six-miles-drive was to be in company with Margaret. But she, in her deep mourning, did not afford much good diversion during the drive. The fact that it was the last day—the last day ! had at length penetrated her mind, and a vague horror of what might happen, of something hanging over her which she did not understand, of leave-takings and engagements to be entered into, and promises to be made, had come over Margaret like a cloud. She had passively obeyed her sisters’ orders, and followed them into the carriage—though not without an acute recollection of her last drive in that carriage by her father’s side, at a time when she was not passive at all, but liked her own way and had it, and was not aware how happy she was. Margaret took all the other changes as secondary to the one great change, and did not feel them as an old man’s darling, a somewhat spoiled child, accustomed to unlimited indulgence for all her fancies, might have been expected to do. But her individuality

came back to her, and with it a sense of unknown troubles to be encountered, as she leaned back in her corner, saying nothing. She drew herself as far as possible away from Aubrey Bellingham, and she let her veil drop with its heavy burden of crape, and took refuge within herself. She had to part with her home, and Bell and John, the attendants of her life, but more alarming still and strange, she had to part with Rob Glen. Ludovic's interposition had increased tenfold the importance of everything about Rob Glen, the circumstances of which she had thought so little when the first step had been taken. How could she have thought of the young man's position, or of any consequences that might follow, at the moment when her father lay dying? Rob had been very kind, his tenderness, his caresses, had gone to her heart. There were indeed moments, after the first, when they no longer impressed her with such a sense of kindness, when she would have been glad enough to avoid the close contact, and when the touch of his arm round her, gave Margaret a sense of shy shrinking, rather than of the utter confi-

dence and soothing which she had felt at first—and when she had not liked to vex him by resistance, but had edged and shrunk away, and made herself as small as possible to avoid the embarrassing pressure. But all this vague shyness and shrinking had changed at their last interview, when Margaret, in generous impetuosity, and terror lest he should think she considered herself raised above him by her fortune had taken the matter into her own hands and made all the vague ties definite. What an extraordinary sensation it was to feel that she belonged to him, she, Margaret Leslie, to him, Rob Glen! She could not realize or understand it, but felt with a sense of giddiness through her whole being that something existed which bound her to him for ever. Yes, no doubt, when you came to think of it, that was what it meant. She had not been aware of it at first, but this no doubt was how it was. And Ludovic's questioning had made it all so much more real; after what her brother had said there was no avoiding the certainty. Between Rob Glen and herself was an invisible link, woven so closely

that nothing could undo it. How changed all the world was! Once it lay free and bright and open before her, with but one restriction, and that her natural obedience to her father and loyalty to her home. Now with a giddiness and dazzling in her eyes she felt how different it all was. She had no longer any home, and the world was closed up to her by that figure of Rob Glen. She did not know that she objected to him or disliked his presence; but it made everything different. And chiefly it made her giddy, so that she herself and the whole universe seemed to be going round and round—Rob Glen. She was not sure even—but all was confusion in her mind—that she thought of him now just as she had thought of him in those old old times, when he had sat among the potatoes and made his picture, when he had seemed so clever, such a genius, such a poet, making a common bit of paper into a landscape, in which the sun would shine and the wind blow for ever. That side of the subject was dim to her now. Rob was no longer an artist doing wonders before her eyes, but a man whose touch made her

shrink, yet held her fast; one whom she was more shy of, yet more bound to, than to anybody else in the world, from whom she would like to steal a little further off, if she could do it unnoticed, yet move a step nearer to, should he find her out. This strange jumble of feeling seemed to be brought to a climax by the thought that she was going away to-morrow. To-night—there was no avoiding the necessity—she must go again and meet him, and explain everything to him, and part with him. What might he say, or make her do and say? She could not wound his feelings by refusing, by letting him see that she shrank from him. She felt that she must yield to him, not to hurt his feelings. A mingled sense of sympathy and gratitude, and (though the word is so inadequate) politeness, made it seem terrible to Margaret to withdraw from her lover. To betray to a person who loves you that his gaze, his touch, his close vicinity is distasteful, what a dreadful thing to do—what a wound to his feelings and his pride, and his fondness! If he would not do it, if he would keep a little further off, and

keep his arms by his side, like other people, how much more pleasant; but to be so unsympathetic, so unfeeling, as to show him that you did not like what he meant in such great kindness! This was more than Margaret could do. As she sat back in the carriage and was carried along through the grey landscape with a whiff of Mrs. Bellingham's *mille-fleurs* pervading the atmosphere, and a sea of crape all about her, and the voices of the others flowing on, Margaret, whom they thought so impassive, was turning over this question with flushes of strange confusion and trouble. What would he say? what would he ask of her? what promises would she have to make, and pledges to give? To give him up was a thing that did not enter into her mind; she could not have done anything so cruel; but she looked forward to the next meeting with an alarm which was very vivid—while at the same time she was aware that it was quite inevitable, that she must see him, and that in all likelihood she would do what he wanted her to do.

This pervading consciousness confused

Margaret much in respect to the morning's service, and the people who came up to her and pressed her hand, and said things they meant to be kind. It was a little chapel, very like, as Mrs. Bellingham said indignantly, the chapels which the dissenters had in England; and to see all the common folk going to the big church with the steeple, to which they were called by all the discordancy of loudly clanging bells, while the carriages drew up before that little non-conforming tabernacle, was very offensive to all right-minded people.

“Things must have been dreadfully mismanaged, Aubrey, at the time when all was settled,” Mrs. Bellingham said, very seriously; “for you see for yourself all the best people were there. One advantage is that it is much pleasanter sitting among a congregation that is *all* ladies and gentlemen; but surely, surely, taking the most liberal view of it, it is more suitable that *we* should have the churches, and the common people be dissenters, as they are in England? I would not prevent them—I would let them have their way; but naturally it is not we that should

give place to them, but they to us.”

“But, dearest Jean, we were all once—”

“And when you think—Grace, I wish you would let me get in a word—that we really cannot get a very good set of clergy because there is no money to give them, while the Presbyterians have got it all, though it comes out of our pockets! I have never studied history as I ought to have done, for really education was not so much attended to in our days; but I am sure the Scots gentry must have been very badly treated. For that John Knox, you know, sprang of the common people himself, and they were all he cared about, and no pains was taken, none at all, to suit the Church to the better classes. But Margaret has been more seen to-day, and we have had more condolences and sympathy from our own kind of people at this one service than we would have had at the parish church in twenty years.”

These shakings of hands, however, and the words of sympathy were too much for Margaret, who was not perhaps in the best condition for being inspected and condoled with, after all the secret agita-

tion of this long silent drive, and who had to be sent home finally alone, while her sisters and their attendant stopped half way to take luncheon with Sir Claude.

“You will send back the carriage for us, Margaret, since you don’t feel equal to staying? of course, it is a very different thing to her, who never was away from him, to what it is to us, who had not been with him for years,” Mrs. Bellingham said, while Miss Leslie lingered at the carriage-door and could not make up her mind to leave her dearest Margaret.

“I think I ought to go with her, dear child. Don’t you think so, dear Aubrey? But then Sir Claude and Lady Jane are so kind; and then it will be such a trouble sending back the carriage. Darling Margaret, are you sure, are you quite sure you don’t mind going alone? for I will come with you in a minute. I don’t really care to stay at all, but for Jean, who always likes a change; and dear Sir Claude is so kind; and it will be a change, you know, for dear Aubrey—the chief people in Fife!” she added, anxiously putting her nose into the carriage, “if you are quite

sure, dearest Margaret, that you don't mind."

Free of the crape and of that sense of a multitude which belongs to a closely packed carriage, Margaret went home very much more tranquilly in her corner, and cried and was relieved as the heavy old vehicle rolled along between the well known hedgerows, and passed the well known church upon its mound where her old father lay sleeping the sleep of the weary and the just. She gazed out wistfully through her tears at the path round the old apse of the church where she had walked with him so lately, and close to which he was now laid. In these days no idea of floral decorations had visited Scotch graveyards, and the great grey stone-work of the Leslie tomb, rearing its seventeenth century skulls and crossbones against the old twisted Norman arches, was not favourable to any loving deposit of this kind. But a rose-bush that grew by the side door had thrown a long tendril round the grey wall, which was drooping with a single half-opened rose upon it, straight across those melancholy emblems, pointing, as it seemed to Margaret, to the

very spot where old Sir Ludovic lay. This went to her heart, poor child. They were taking her away, but the rose would remain and shed its leaves over the place, and make it sweet; and kind eyes would look at it, and kind people would talk of old Sir Ludovic, and be sorry for his poor little Peggy, whose life was so changed. There is something in the pang of self-pity in a young mind, which is more poignant and yet more sweet than any other sorrow. There is nothing so ready to bring the tears that give relief. They would talk about her, all the kind poor people;—not the ladies and the gentlemen, perhaps, who went to the English chapel, and of whom Jean was so fond—but a great many people in the high town and the laigh toun whom Margaret knew intimately, and the family in the Manse, Dr. Burnside and his wife and Randal. Randal had been kind too. How he had run for the doctor that day, though it was of no use! and how many things he had done after, not stopping, Margaret thought, to talk to her, but always doing what was most wanted. Ah!—this thought brought her to the other end of the circle

again with a spring. It was always herself, Margaret remembered, that Rob had thought of, always her first. She began to go over all the course of events as the carriage rolled on, too quickly now, to Earl's-hall. Had she forgotten, she asked herself, that time when he came to her father's aid on the churchyard path? how careful he had been of the old man? and how much trouble he had taken to please him afterwards? thinking of her own troubles, she had forgotten half that Rob had done. How kind he had been! and Sir Ludovic had liked him, he had got to be fond of him; surely he had been fond of him? He had allowed her to be with Rob, drawing, talking, as much as she pleased. He had never said "You must give up Rob Glen." Perhaps, indeed, *that* was what her father meant. What did it matter about being what people called a gentleman? Sir Claude was all that, but except when he sent a servant to ask how Sir Ludovic was, what had he ever done? though Grace said he was so kind. The great people had all been the same. They had sent a servant, they had sent their

carriages to the funeral. But Rob had held up her father when he stumbled, and had come to talk to him and amuse him, and had made a picture of him which was more to Margaret than all the National Gallery. Oh! that was what it was to be kind! The carriage heaving horribly as it turned into the rut inside the gate, stopped Margaret in the full current of these thoughts. But they were a great support to her in the prospect that lay before her, the farewell scene that she knew she would have to go through, when he would be so sorry and she—would not know what to say.

The Leslies, like so many kind people, dined earlier than usual on Sundays. They dined at five, to the great discomfort of the party who had lunched with Sir Claude, and who arrived just in time for this second meal. Mr. Aubrey Bellingham thought it was done in deference to the national desire to be uncomfortable on Sunday, and submitted with a shrug of his shoulders; but Mrs. Bellingham, having more right to express an

opinion, did so frankly, and with much indignation. She said :

“ I know it’s Mary’s way in Edinburgh—and there may be excuses where there is a young family, and servants have to be considered. Of course, they are not rich, and servants insist on being considered when they know they have you in their power ; but at Earl’s-hall, and when *we* are here ! I think it is very unnecessary. Last Sunday we were not thinking of dinner, and I am sure I cannot tell you when we had it ; but just when people are recovering their spirits, and when a cheerful meal is your best restorative ! It may be very good of Mary to consider her servants, but I must say she might just as well, for once in a way, have considered you and me.”

“ But, dearest Jean ! dear Mary is the most unselfish ! She does not mind any inconvenience—”

“ Oh, inconvenience ! don’t speak to me—she *likes* it !” cried Mrs. Jean, indignant. “ She is just the kind of woman that relishes a tea-dinner, and all that sort of thing ; and if she can make out that

she saves sixpence, what a thing that is! And Ludovic just lets her do what she likes. She is getting him into all her hugger-mugger ways. If a woman has not more self-respect, she ought, at least, to have some respect for her husband. But everything is made to give in to the children and the servants in that house. I could have put up with it, not that I ever like it, in Edinburgh—for there one knows what one has to expect. But here, where Bell and John were so used to my father—and when *we* are in the house, and without even asking my opinion, and the excellent luncheon we have just had! she might have thought of Aubrey, who is not accustomed to any nonsense of consideration for servants; but I always said, though she is a good enough wife to Ludovic, that she was a woman of no perception," Mrs. Bellingham said.

After this little storm, the untimely dinner was marred by some sulkiness on Jean's part, as was, perhaps natural. And though Aubrey made himself very agreeable, with the most noble and Christian forgiveness of injuries, devoting himself

to little Effie, whom he regaled with historiettes of a less piquant description than those of his *début*; yet there was a general irritability about the simple meal which, it must be allowed, often attends that well-meant expedient for the keeping of Sunday. The company dispersed early, flocking off to their rooms, where Mrs. Bellingham, with her feet up, instructed her maid as to her packing, and once more turned over the packet of lace which had fallen to her share. Margaret, when she had seen the rest of the party go away, fled too, to escape another interview with her brother, who looked, she thought, as if meditating a renewal of his remonstrances, and having watched her opportunity, stole softly downstairs. Even Bell was still busy after the dinner. Her chair stood in the court outside the door, but she had not yet come out to enjoy her favourite seat. And Bell's heart was so heavy that her work went but slowly. She had no thought of anything but Miss Margret, who to-morrow was to be taken away.

Margaret stole out like one who had learnt that she was guilty. Never before had she emerged so stealthily from the shadow of the old house. She did not go the usual way, to run the risk of being seen, but crept round by the garden-wall, as she had done sometimes when returning, when Rob was with her. There was a feeble attempt at a sunset, though the sun had not shown all day, and consequently had no right to his usual pomps—but in the west there was a redness breaking through the grey, which brightened the face of the country, and changed the character of the landscape. Under the trees it fell like lamps of rich gold, escaping here and there through broken openings in the clouds, and warming the wood with gleams of colour which had looked so dark and wind-scathed in the morning. Margaret went softly, threading through the colonnades of the great fir trunks, and sat down on the little mossy knoll under the silver fir. She placed herself so that she could not be seen from the house, but yet could spy through the branches the approach of

any danger from that side. It was the first time she had been first at the place of meeting, and her heart beat as she sat and waited. She, who had shrunk from the prospect of this meeting, she became alarmed now lest he should not come, and longed for him with a kind of sick anxiety. Oh that he would come, that she might get it over! She did not know what it was to be, but instinctively felt that there must be something painful in this last meeting. The last! She would not be sorry to have met, perhaps, when she was away and had no longer any chance of seeing him: she would understand better what he meant and what she herself meant; and there is something which subdues the pride in thus waiting for one who does not come. She did not seem so sure that it was he who cared, that it was he only who would break his heart, as she sat there alone; and she had almost lost herself in fancies more bitter than any she had yet known—in dreamy realization of her loneliness and a sense that no one perhaps would care much when she went away. Who

did care? not Ludovic, who wished her to do well, but would not have suffered much had Margaret died with her father; nor his wife, who was very kind, but had so many girls of her own; nor Effie, though she would cry and think she was sorry. Nobody would care; and Jean and Grace would often find her a trouble; and nobody in the world belonged to Margaret, cared for her above everything else, was happy when she was happy, and grieved when she was sorry;—nobody—except, perhaps, him alone.

“Margaret!” a low eager voice that seemed the very essence of subdued delight, trembling with satisfaction and happiness, and he suddenly made a spring to her side from under the trees, through which he had been threading his way to the place of meeting. He threw himself on his knees by her, and seized and kissed her hands a hundred times. “You here before me! waiting for *me!* to think I should have lost a moment of the little time I may have you! I shall never forgive myself; but I thought it was too early for you even now.”

“Oh, I have not been waiting long,” she said. “It was because we dined so early; and then they were all—tired.”

“Except my Margaret. God bless my Margaret, that came out and took the trouble to wait for me! How often I have sat here and watched for the sweep of your dress at the corner of the house, for the least sign of you! And to think that *you* should have been first to-night and waiting——”

“Why should not I wait,” she said, “as well as you? And to-morrow I am going away.”

“To-morrow!” he cried, in a voice of despair, “how am I to endure it? how am I to go on without you? I am afraid to think of it, my darling. Margaret! Margaret! what are you going to say to me to give me strength to get through to-morrow, and all the days after it, till we meet again?”

Now it has come, said Margaret to herself; and she felt with astonishment that the emergency seemed to give her possession of her faculties.

“I do not know,” she said steadily,

“ what you want me to do or say. I shall be very sorry to go away and to—part from you. But what can I do? my sisters have the right to do what they think proper with me; and I think I ought, too, to go and see my own house. I would like to take Bell or somebody, but they will not let me; and now that Ludovic is here and his family, it is natural that I should go away.”

“ Yes; but first say something to comfort me, Margaret. I did not suppose you could stay here for ever: but tell me you love me and will be faithful to me—tell me when I may come after you?”

“ Come after me?” she exclaimed, with a certain dismay.

“ Did you not think I would come after you? Did you think I could stay in one country while you were in another? I, who have had the happiness of seeing you every day? But it is better this should end, though it is like to break my heart, for we should have lost time and been content just with seeing each other—and now, Margaret, my darling, we must settle something. Tell me what I may do? To

wait till you are of age is a lifetime. If I come to England after you in about three months, when you are in your own house, will you receive me and tell your sisters what I am to you? Margaret! you are not frightened, darling? You did not think I would let my love go away and carry my heart with her without settling something? You could not have been so cruel."

"I do not want to be cruel," she said, "but oh! wouldn't it do to wait—to wait a little? It is only three years; I am very near eighteen. I shall be eighteen in November; and three years go so quickly. Why do you look at me like that? I am not unkind. It is only that I think—it is only that—oh! I am sure that would be the best!"

"Three years!" he said, "you might as well bid me wait thirty years; how can I be sure you will not forget *me* long before three years are out? What! live without knowing anything of you—without seeing you, for three centuries—it would be all the same. Tell me to go out into St. Andrew's bay in a storm, and be

cast away on the rocks—tell me to drown myself in Eden—as you please, Margaret! I think it is in me to do it if you bid me; but wait for three years and never see you—never know what you are thinking, never hear the sound of your voice. I had rather go and hang myself at once!” cried Rob. He was walking up and down under the shadow of the trees. He was very much excited. After coming so far, after holding her in his hand, as he thought, was he going to lose her at the last?

“I did not mean—that,” she stood leaning against the fir, very much troubled, “what can I do? Oh, what am I to do?”

“You must not ask me to be content without you,” he said, “for I cannot—I cannot. It is not possible for me to give you up, and live without you now. If you had sent me away at the very first, perhaps— but after all that has passed, Margaret, after feeling that you were mine, to ask me to go away and give you up—now!”

“I did not say, give me up, I said—”

“You said three years, darling—three lifetimes; you could not mean anything so dreadful! You would not kill me, would you? it is like taking my heart out of my breast. What good would there be in the world for me, what could I do? what would I be fit for. Margaret, Margaret! you could not have the heart to treat me so.”

“What can I do?” she said, trembling. “Ludovic has found out about you, and he asked me to give you up. I did not mean to tell you; but I cannot help it. He says they will never, never consent. And what am *I* to do? how can I fight with them? I said I would not give you up. I said—it would break your heart.”

“And so it would, my darling!” he cried, coming to her side, putting his arm round her, “and, oh, my Margaret, yours too?”

Margaret made no reply to this. She withdrew the least little step—but how could she hurt his feelings?

“That was why I said three years,” she said, “three years is not so very long. Poor Jeanie in the house, did you ever

see Jeanie? She is—very fond of some one; and she has not heard of him at all or seen him, for two years. It would pass—very fast. You would become a great painter—and then; but Jeanie does not know if she will ever see him again; and his name is Rob too, like you.”

“What has—Jeanie to do with it?” he cried, with a look of dismay. Then he caught her arm and drew her away. “There is some one coming from the house, let us not wait here—but come down the other side of the wood, I must not be interrupted now. I have a great deal more to say to you, Margaret, my Margaret, this last night before we part.”

## CHAPTER XII.

ROB had a great deal to say; but it was chiefly repetition of what he had said before. He drew her arm within his, and they wandered down by the edge of the wood and into the fields. That last little accidental outbreak of sunshine was over, and all once more was greyness and monotones. There was nobody about, the evening was not tempting enough to bring out walkers. In the kirktown, people were out "about the doors," sitting on the kirk steps, keeping up a confused little hum of conversation, quieter than usual as suited the Sabbath night; and the people who had gardens strolled about them in domestic stillness, and commented upon the coming apples; but it was not the fashion in Stratheden to take walks on Sunday evening. The fields were very silent and still, and so

absorbed were the two in their conversation that they wandered far out of the woods of Earl's-hall, and were skirting the fields about the farm before they were aware. Rob's plan was to go to London, to make what progress he could with his drawing, to study and work, and achieve success, the last went without saying. Margaret was as certain of it as that the sun would rise to-morrow. But she was not equally certain of the other part of the programme, which was that he should go to the Grange—her house where she was to live: and be produced there as her betrothed husband, and introduced to her sisters. This prospect alarmed her more than she could say. She did not want him to come to the Grange. She did not know what to say about writing to him. The idea brought a hot blush to her face. Margaret was not quite sure that she could write a letter that she would like Rob Glen to see—he was very clever, and she did not think she could write a very pretty letter. In short, she was unpractical and unmanageable to the last degree, and Rob had some excuse for being impa-

tient. She had no idea what could be done, except that she might perhaps come to Earl's-hall and see him there, and that three years was not so very long. He lost himself in arguments, in eloquent appeals to her; and she had nothing very eloquent to say in return. After a while she was silenced, and made very little answer at all; but walked along by his side demurely, with her thick gauze veil drooping over her face, and heard all he had to say, saying yes now and then, and sometimes no. Her position was very simple, and though he proved to her that it was untenable by a hundred arguments, and showed her that some other plan was necessary, he did not drive Margaret out of it. What could she do? she asked, wringing her hands. Ludovic was against them, and Jean would be much more against them. She dared not let Jean know. Even her brother himself had said that Jean must not know. And to tell the truth, Rob himself was of the opinion that it would be better to keep this secret from Mrs. Bellingham; but yet he thought he might at least be allowed to visit at the Grange,

as an old friend, if nothing more. They got through a series of byways into the field path, where their first meeting had been, and Rob was trying, for the hundredth time, to obtain some promise of intercourse from Margaret, when suddenly some one coming behind them laid a hand upon a shoulder of each. Rob gave a violent start, and turned round, while Margaret, with a little cry, shrank back into the shadow of the hedgerow.

“My certy!” said the intruder, “this is a fine occupation, Rob, my man, for a Sabbath night.” And then she, too, gave a cry of surprise, more pretended than real, but in which there was a little genuine fright. “Eh, bless me, it’s Miss Margaret, and so far from hame!” she cried.

“Mother! what are *you* doing here?” cried Rob. But as for Margaret she was relieved. She had thought nothing less for the moment than that Jean was upon her, or at the very least, Bell coming out to seek and bring her back. Mrs. Glen was not a person of whom she stood in any fear, and she would not tell or inter-

ferred to let Jean know, for Rob's sake. So that Margaret turned round from the hedgerow with a relieved soul, and said,

“Oh, is it you, Mrs. Glen?” with a new sense of ease in her tone.

“Deed and it is just me, my bonnie young lady. I hear you are going away, Miss Margret, and many a sore heart you will leave in the countryside. You're so near the farm, you must come in and I will make you a cup of tea in a moment. It's real grey and dull, and there's a feel in the air like rain. Come your ways to the farm, Miss Margret, my bonny dear; and after that Rob will take you home.”

Margaret made no resistance to this proposal. She had been walking for some time and she was tired, and even the idea of the tea was welcome. She went in after Mrs. Glen, with some misgivings as to the length of her absence, but a sense of relief on that point too, for it had always been a good excuse to Bell, and even to her father, that she had accepted the civility of one of their humbler neighbours. “It pleases them; and so long as they are decent folk they will never but be awfu’

keen to take care of Miss Margret : and she knows none but decent folk," Bell had said. The cup of tea in the farm-parlour would be as good a reason for Margret's absence as Sir Claude's luncheon-table was for her sisters'. To be sure in former days there had been no son at Mrs. Glen's to make such visits dangerous. She went in with a sense of unexpected relief, and sat down, very glad to find herself at rest in the parlour, where a little fire was burning. To be sure Rob would walk home with her and renew his entreaties ; but he could not, she thought, continue them in his mother's presence, and the relief was great.

"Mony a time have you come in here to get your tea, Miss Margret. I've seen Rob come ben carrying ye in his arms. I mind one time you were greeting for tiredness, a poor wee missie, and your shoe lost in the burn ; that lad was aye your slave, Miss Margret, from the time you were no bigger than the table."

"Oh, I remember," said Margret ; "I thought Bell would scold me, and I did not know how I was to go home without my shoe."

“ You went home in that lad’s arms, my bonnie dear, for all he stands there so blate, looking at ye as if you were an angel ; he wasna aye sae blate. You went home in his arms and gave him a good kiss and thought no shame. But you were only six then, and now you’re eighteen. Oh ay, my dear, I can tell your age to a day. You were born the same week as my youngest that died, a cauld November, and that sent your bonnie young mother to her grave. It was an awfu’ draughty house, and no a place for a delicate young woman, that auld house at Earl’s-hall. Fine I mind—and Rob there he’s five years older. From the time you could toddle he aye thought you the chief wonder o’ the world.”

“ Mother, you that know so much you had better know all,” said Rob. “ I think her the chief wonder of the world still.”

“ You need not tell me that, my bonnie man, as if I could not see it in your een.” Margaret stirred uneasily while this conversation went on over her head. She had never thought of having this engagement told to anybody, of being talked about to

anybody. She got up with a little gasp, feeling as if there was not air enough to breathe. If they would not surround her so, close her up, all these people; oh, if they would only let her alone! She tried to turn away to escape before Rob should have said any more—but before she clearly understood what was passing found herself suddenly in the arms of Mrs. Glen.

“Oh, my pretty Miss! my bonnie young lady! is this all true that I hear?” Rob’s mother cried, with effusive, surprise and delight. “Did I ever think when I rose out of my bed this morning that I was to hear such wonderful news afore the night? Eh, Miss Margret, my dear, I wish ye much joy, and I think ye’ll have it, for he’s a good lad; and you, ye smiling loon, I need not wish you joy, for you’re just leaping out of yourself with happiness and content.”

“And I think I have good reason,” cried Rob, coming up in his turn and receiving her out of his mother’s embrace. Oh, how horribly out of place Margaret felt between them! Never in her life had she felt the dignity of being Margaret

Leslie, old Sir Ludovic's daughter, as she did at that moment. Her cheeks burned crimson, she shrank into herself to escape from the embracing arms. What had she to do here? how had she strayed so far from home? It was all she could do not to break forth into passionate tears of disgust and repugnance. Oh, Margaret thought, if she could but get away, if she could but run home all the way and never stop! if she could but beg Jean to leave Earl's-hall instantly, that very night! But she could not do any of these things. She had to stand still, with eyes cast down and crimson cheeks, hearing them talk of her. It was to them she seemed to belong now; and how could she get away?

"Now give us your advice, mother," said Rob, "we cannot tell what to do. The Leslies are prejudiced, as may easily be supposed, especially the old ladies, (oh that Jean and Grace had but heard themselves called old ladies!) and Margaret wants me to wait the three years till she comes of age. She wants me to trust to chances of seeing her and hearing of her, not even to have any regular correspond-

ence. I would cut off my right hand to please her, but how am I to live without seeing her, mother? We had been talking and consulting, and wandering on, a little further and a little further, till we did not know where we were going. But now that we are here, give us your advice. Will you be for me, I wonder, or on Margaret's side?"

He had called her Margaret often before and she was quite used to it; why did it suddenly become so offensive and insupportable now?

"You see," said Mrs. Glen, "there is a great deal to be said on both sides." Mrs. Glen was very much excited, her eyes gleaming, her heart beating. It seemed to her that she had the fate of these two young people in her hands, and might now clinch the matter and establish her son's good fortune if Providence would but inspire her with the right thing to say. "There is this for our bonnie Miss Margret, that she would be all her lane to bear the opposition o' thae ladies, and hard it would be for a delicate young thing no used to struggle for herself; and there's

that for you, Rob, that nae doubt it would be a terrible trial to worship the ground she treads on as you do, and never to see her for three lang years. Now let me think a moment, bairns, while this dear lassie takes her cup of tea."

Margaret could not refuse the cup of tea. How could she assert herself and withdraw from them, and let them know that she was not to be taken possession of and called a dear lassie by Mrs. Glen? Her heart was in revolt; but she was far too shy, far too polite to make a visible resistance. She drew back into the room as far as she could out of the fitful gleams of the firelight, and she shrank from Rob's arm, which was on the back of her chair; but still she took the tea and sat still, bearing with all they said and did. It was the last time, but oh, what trouble she had got into without meaning it! Suddenly it had come to be salvation and deliverance to Margaret that she was going away.

"Now, bairns," said Mrs. Glen, "listen to me. I think I have found what you want. The grand thing is that you should

be faithful to each other, and mind upon each other. It's no being parted that does harm. Three years will flee away like three days, and you will be young, young, ower young to be married at the end; and you would do more than that, Rob Glen, for your bonnie Margaret, weel I ken that. So here is just what you must do. You must give each other a bit writing, saying that ye'll marry at the end of three years—you to her, Rob, and her to you. And then you will be out of all doubt, and troth-pledge, the one to the other before God and man."

"Mother!" cried Rob, starting up from where he had been bending over Margaret, with a wild glow of mingled rage, terror, and hope in his eyes. The suggestion gave him a shock. He did not know anything about the law on that point, nor whether there was more validity in such a promise than in any other love pledge; but he was struck with sudden alarm at the idea of doing something which might afterwards be brought against him, and a certain generosity and honour not extinguished in his mind made

him realise Margaret's helpless condition between his mother and himself, and her ignorance and her youth—while at the same time to secure her, to make certain of her, gave him a tug of temptation, a wild sensation of delight. “No, no,” he cried hoarsely, “I could not make her do it,” then paused and looked at her with the eager wildness of passion in his eyes.

But Margaret was perfectly calm. No passion was woke in her, scarcely any understanding of what this meant. A bit writing? Oh, yes, what would that matter? so long as she could get away.

“It is getting dark,” she said, “they will not know where I am, they will be wondering. Will I do it now, whatever you want me to do, and go home?”

“Margaret, my love!” he cried, “I thought you were frightened, I thought you were shrinking from me—and here is your sweet consent more ready than even mine!”

“Oh, it is not that,” she said, a little alarmed by the praise and by the demonstrations that accompanied it. “But it is

getting dark, and it is late, and oh, I am so anxious to get home."

Rob wrung his hands. "She doesn't understand what we mean, mother; I can't take advantage of her. She thinks of nothing but to get home."

"You gomerel!" said his mother between her teeth: and then she turned a smiling face upon Margaret. "Just that, my bonnie miss," she said, "a woman's heart's aye ready to save sorrow to them that's fond of her. It's time you were home, my sweet lady. Just you write it down to make him easy in his mind—and then he will take you back to Earl's-hall."

"Must I write it myself?" Margaret said, and it came across her with a wave of blushing, that she did not write at all nicely, not so well as she ought. "And what am I to say? I don't know what to say." Then she gave another glance at the window, which showed the night drawing near, the darkness increasing every moment, with that noiseless, breathless pleasure which the night seems to take in getting dark, when we are far from home. She got up with a sudden, hasty

impulse. "Oh, if you please, Mrs. Glen, if you will be as quick as ever you can! for I must run all the way."

"That will I, my darlin' lady," said the delighted mother. It was she who had the whole doing of it, and the pride of having suggested it. Rob stood by, quite pale, his eyes blazing with excitement, his mind half paralysed with trouble and terror, hope to have, reluctance to take, fear of something unmanly, something dishonourable, intensified by the eagerness of expectation, with which he looked for what was to come. He stood "like a stock stane," his mother said afterwards, his lips parted, his eyes staring, in her way as she rushed to the desk at the other side of the room to find what was wanted. "You eedeot!" she said, as she pushed him aside, in an angry undertone. Had he not the sense even to help in what was all for his own advantage? Margaret pulled off her black glove and took the pen in her hand. She knew she would write it very badly, very unevenly—not even in a straight line; but

if she had to do it before she could run home, it was better to get it over.

“Oh, but I never wrote anything before,” she said, “Mrs. Glen; what must I say?”

“Nor me. I never wrote the like of that before,” cried Mrs. Glen, “and there’s Rob even—too happy to help us.” She had meant to use another word to describe his spasm of irresolution and apprehension; but remembered in time that he must not be contemned in Margaret’s eyes. “It will be just this, my bonnie dear, ‘I, Margaret Leslie, give my word before God and man, to marry Robert Glen as soon as I come of age. So help me God. Amen.’”

“Don’t put that,” cried Rob, making a hasty step towards her. “Don’t let her put that.” But then he turned away in such passion and transport of shame, satisfaction, horror, and disgust as no words could tell, and covered his face with his hands.

“Not that last,” said Margaret, stumbling in her eagerness over the words, and glad to leave out whatever she could.

“Oh, it is very badly written. I never could write well. Mrs. Glen, will that do?”

“And now your bonnie name here,” said the originator of the scheme, scarcely able to restrain her triumph. And as Margaret, with a trembling hand, crossed the last t, and put a blot for a dot over the i, in her distracted signature, she received a resounding kiss upon her cheek, which was as the report of a pistol to her. She gave a little cry of terror, and threw down the pen, and turned away. “Oh, goodbye!” she cried, “goodbye. I must not stay another moment. I must run all the way.”

Rob did not say a word—he hurried after her, with long strides, keeping up with her as she flew along in her fright by the hedgerow. “Oh, they must have missed me by this time. They will be wondering where I have been,” she said, breathless. Rob set his teeth in the dark. Never in his life had he been so humiliated. Though she had pledged herself to him, she was not thinking of him, and in all the experiences of his life he had never

yet known this supreme mortification. He had been loved where he had wooed. The other girls whom Rob had addressed had forgotten everything for him. He half hated her though he loved her, and felt a fierce eagerness to have her—to make her his altogether, to snatch her from the great people who looked down upon him, to make himself master of her fate. But this furious kind of love was only the excitement of the moment. At the bottom of his heart he was fond of Margaret (as he had been of other Margarets before). He could not bear the idea of losing her, of parting from her like this, in wild haste, without any of the lingering caresses of parting.

“Is this how you are going away from me, Margaret,” he cried, “flying—as if you were glad to part, not sorry? when we don’t know when we may meet again.”

“Oh, it is not that I am glad; it is only that they will wonder, they will not know—where I have been.”

“Will you ever be as breathless running to me, as you are to run away from me?” he cried. “Stop, Margaret! one moment

before we come near the gate, and say good-bye."

She yielded with panting breath. That sacred kiss of parting, which to do him justice, he gave with all the fervour that became the occasion, giving, as he felt, his very heart with it—how glad she was to escape from it, and run on.

"Oh, no! I will not forget—I could not forget," she cried.

Who was this, once more in the lovers' way? A dark figure, who, they could see, by the movement of his head, turned to look at them, but went on without taking any notice. Margaret, anxious as she was, recognized Randal Burnside, and wondered that he did not notice her, then was glad to think that he could not know her. Rob had other thoughts. Again found out—and by the same fellow! he said to himself, and gnashed his teeth. Randal was going over to Earl's-hall, a familiar visitor, while he, the betrothed husband of the daughter of Earl's-hall, had to skulk about the house in the dark, and take leave of his love under cover of the night. Not without bitter humilia-

tions was this hour of his triumph.

“We must wait till he is out of sight,” he said, hoarsely, holding her back. It was like holding an eager greyhound in the leash. “Oh, Margaret!” he said, and despite and vexation filled his heart, “you are not thinking of me at all—and here we have to part. You were not in such a hurry when you used to cry upon my shoulder, and take a little comfort from my love.”

This, and the necessity of keeping back till Randal had passed, touched the girl’s heart.

“It is not my fault that I am in such a hurry,” she said. “Oh, you were kind—kind—kinder than anyone. I will never forget it—Rob.”

“It was not kindness,” he said, “it was love.”

“Yes, Rob.” She put her soft cheek to his with compunction in her heart. She had been so eager to get away, and yet how kind he had been—kinder than anyone! Thus there came a little comfort for him after all.

But just then, with a sudden flutter, as

of a bird roused from the branches, someone came out through the gate, which Randal had not closed behind him. A figure of a woman indistinguishable against the dimness of the twilight, with a little thrill and tremor about her, which somehow made itself felt though she could not be seen.

“Is that you, Miss Margret? Bell sent me to look for you,” she said, with the same thrill and quiver in her voice.

Rob Glen started violently; it was a new shock to him, and he had already met with many shocks to his nerves that night. Her name came to his lips with a cry; but he had sufficient sense of the position to stop himself. Jeanie! was it possible in the malice of fate that this was the Jeanie of whom Margaret had told him? He grasped her in his arms for a moment with vehemence, partly because of that sudden startling interruption, and with one quickly breathed farewell on her cheek, turned and went away.

“Oh, Jeanie, yes, it is me! I am very, very sorry. I did not want to be so late. Have they found out that I was away?”

have they been looking for me?" cried Margaret. It was not, perhaps, in the nature of things that Jeanie should be unmoved in her reply.

"You're no looking after the—gentleman," she said. "He's gone and left you, feared for me; and you've given him no good-bye. You needna' be feared for me, Miss Margaret. Cry him back, and bid him farewell, as a lass should to her lad. I'm nae traitor. You needna be feared that Jeanie will betray ye. It's no in my heart."

"Oh, but he's gone, Jeanie," said Margaret, with a ring of relief in her voice. "And oh, I'm glad to be at home! They made me stay when I wanted to be back. Oh, how dark it is! Give me your hand, Jeanie, for I cannot see where you are among the trees."

Jeanie held out her hand in silence, and reluctantly, and Margaret, groping, found it, and took hold of it.

"You are all trembling," she said.

"And if I am all trembling, it's easy enough to ken why. Standing out in the dark among the black trees, and thinking

of them that's gone to their rest, and waiting for one—that was not wanting me. Eh, it's no so long since you had other things in your head, Miss Margret—your old papa, that was as kind as ever father was. But nobody thinks muckle about old Sir Ludovic now.”

“Oh, Jeanie! I think upon him night and day,” cried Margaret; and what with the reproach, and what with her weariness and the past excitement, she fell into sudden tears.

“Is that you, my bonnie lamb?” said another voice, and Bell came out of the gloom, where she, too, had been on the watch. “It's cold and it's dreary, and you're worn to death,” she said. “Oh, Miss Margret, where have you been, my bonnie doo? wandering about the house, and greeting till your bit heart is sair. Well, I ken your heart is sair, and mine too. What will we do without you, John and me? You are just the light of our eyes, as you were to the auld maister, auld Sir Ludovic, that was a guid maister to him and to me. Eh, to think this

should be the last night, after sae many years !”

“ But, Bell,” said Margaret, calmed by the sense of lawful protection and the shadow of home, “ it is not the last night for you ?”

“ Ay, my bonnie pet, it’s that or little else. When you’re gane, Miss Margret, a’ will be gane. And my lady’s a good woman, but I couldna put up with her, and she couldna put up with me. We’re no fit for ither service, neither me nor John—na, no even in your house, my bonnie lamb, for I know that’s what you’re gaun to say. Nae new house nor new ways for John and me. We’re to flit into a bit cot o’ our ain, and there we’ll bide till the Lord calls, and we gang east to the kirkyard. God bless ye, my bonnie bairn. Run up the stairs, nobody kens you were away—for weel I divined,” said Bell, with an earnestness that filled Margaret’s soul with the sense of guilt, “ weel I divined that ye would have little heart for company this sorrowful night.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN Margaret stole into the long room, where the family were assembled that evening, she heard a little discussion going on about herself. Ludovic had risen up, and was standing with an uneasy look upon his face, preparing to go in search of her; while Jean was asking who had seen Margaret last. Randal Burnside had come in only a few minutes before, and was still standing with his hat in his hand; and he it was who was explaining when Margaret entered.

“I saw her with Bell as I came in,” he said (which was so far true that he lingered till Bell had met her). “I fear she has been making some sad pilgrimages about the house. Has she ever left Earl’s-hall before?”

“Never—not for a single day,” said kind Lady Leslie; and there was a little

pause of commiseration. "Poor Margaret!" they all said, in their various tones.

They were seated at one end of the long room, two lamps making a partial illumination about them, while the surrounding space lay in gloom. The books on the walls shone dimly in the ineffectual light, the dim sky glimmered darkly through the windows, opening this little indoor world to the world without. Mrs. Bellingham had got her feet up on a second chair, for there were no sofas in the long room. Sunday was a tiring day, and Lady Leslie had yawned several times, and would have liked had it been bedtime. She was a woman of very good principles, and she did not like to think of worldly affairs on Sundays, but it was very hard, at the same time, to get them out of her head. As for Miss Leslie, she had got a volume of sacred poetry, which had many beautiful pieces. She remembered to have said some of them to her dear papa on the Sunday evenings of old, between thirty and forty years ago, and though it was a long time since, she had been crying a little to herself over the thought. Effie

was, perhaps, the only thoroughly awake member of the family, for it had just been intimated to her that her Aunt Jean, after all, had invited her to go to the Highlands to be Margaret's companion, and her heart was beating high with pleasure. Aubrey had whispered to her his satisfaction too. "Thank heaven you are coming," he said; "we shall not be so very funereal, after all." It was while she was still full of smiles from this whisper, and while Randal stood with his hat in his hand, giving that little explanation about Margaret, that Margaret herself stole in, with a little involuntary swing of the door of the West Chamber, through which she came, which made them all start. Margaret was very pale and worn out, with dark lines under her eyes; and she came at an opportune time, when they were all sorry for her. Instead of scolding, Lady Leslie came up and kissed her.

"My dear," she said, "we all know how hard it must be for you to-night;" and when the ready tears brimmed up to the girl's heavy eyes, the good woman

nearly cried too. Her heart yearned over the motherless creature, thus going away from all she had ever known.

This kiss, and the little murmur of sympathy, and the kind looks they all cast upon her, had the strangest effect upon Margaret. She gave a little startled cry and looked round upon them with a momentary impulse of desperation. It had never occurred to her that she was deceiving anyone before. But now, coming in worn with excitement and trouble of so different a kind, all at once there burst upon Margaret a sense of the wickedness, the guiltiness, the falsehood she was practising. She had never thought of it before. But now when she gave that startled look round, crying "Oh!" with a pang of compunction and wondering self-accusation, the whole enormity of it rushed on her mind. She felt that she ought to have stood up in the midst of the group in the centre of the room, even "before the gentlemen," and have owned the truth. "I am not innocent as you think me, it is not poor papa I am crying for. I was not so much as thinking of

papa," was what she ought to have said. But there was only one individual present who had the least understanding of her, or even guessed what the start and the exclamation could mean. When she opened those great eyes wide in her sudden horror of what she was doing, Lady Leslie, a little frightened lest grief should be taking the wilder form of passion, unknown to the placid mind, in this poor little uneducated, undisciplined girl, did all she could to soothe her with gentle words. "We are all a little dull to-night," she said. "My dear, I am sure the best thing you can do is to go to bed."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Bellingham, "we are all going to bed. Though it is not a day when one is supposed to do very much, yet there is no day in the week more tiring than Sunday. We always keep early hours on Sunday. By all means, Margaret, go to your room and get a good rest before to-morrow. You have been making a figure of yourself, crying, and you are not fit to be seen; though, indeed, we might all have been crying if we had not felt that it would

never do to give way. When you think," said Jean, sitting back majestically with her feet upon the second chair, "of all that has happened since we came here, and that nobody can tell whether we will ever meet under this old roof again!"

"Let us hope that Margaret will come back often; and I am sure she will always find her brother's house a home," said Lady Leslie, still holding her hand and patting her shoulder kindly. All these words came into her mind in a confusion which prevented her from realising what they meant. She saw Jean shake her head, and demand sadly how that could be, if Ludovic were to sell the house as he had just been saying? But even this extraordinary suggestion did not wake Margaret's pre-occupied mind. They all said "Hush!" looking at her. It was supposed among them that the only one who would really suffer by the sale of Earl's-hall was Margaret, and that to hear of the idea would be more than she could bear. But in her confused condition she took no notice of anything. She did not seem to care for Earl's-hall, or for the family trou-

ble, or for anything in the world except this strange thing which absorbed her, and which none of them knew. The lamps and the circle of faces were like a phantasmagoria before her eyes, a wreath of white sparks in the darkness, all pale, all indistinct against the dim background. Randal only became a little more real to her by dint of what seemed to her the reproachful look he gave her. She thought it was a reproachful look. He had seen her out-of-doors, though he had not taken any notice of her. She remembered now that he had not even showed her the civility of taking off his hat.

“He has no respect for me any more,” Margaret said to herself, and this thought went deep with a pang to her very heart.

Bell was waiting for her in her room, where already her boxes were packed, and most of her preparations made; and poor Margaret, her mind all confused with a sense that what was supposed to occupy and engross her was scarcely in her thoughts at all, gave herself up into the old woman's hard yet tender hands, as passive as a child, with all the ease that

perfect confidence gives. She was not afraid of Bell, nor did she feel the guilt of keeping from her that uncomfortable secret which was no happiness to her, poor child, and which she would so gladly have pushed aside from her own mind had it been possible. "Eh, I wonder if onybody will ever take the pride in it that I have done," Bell said, taking down her young mistress's hair, and letting it fall in long soft undulation of silky brown over her hands. She turned her head away while she brushed, that no tear might drop upon it. "Na, naebody will take the same pride in it as me: for I've been a' ye've had to bring ye up from a bairn, my bonnie, bonnie darlin': and nae ither woman can ever be that. It's like taking the heart out o' my breast to see you turn your back on Earl's-hall."

The same words had been said to her not very long before, and in a way which ought to have touched her more deeply. Margaret trembled a little with the recollection. "But I will come back again, Bell, and see you," she said with a far more ready response. She pulled

down the old woman's arms about her neck, and clung to her. "Oh, I will come back!" she cried, "Bell, there will never be anybody in the world like you."

"You maunna say that, my bonnie lamb. Many, many there are in the world better worth thinking upon than the like o' me. I am no sae selfish a creature as that; but you'll keep a corner for your old Bell, Miss Margaret, aye, and auld John too. He's just speechless with greetin': but he canna yield to shed a tear—and a temper like the auld enemy himsel'. But it's no temper, it's his heart that's breaking. You'll no forget the auld man? and whiles ye'll write us a word to say you're well and happy, and getting up your heart?"

"How will I ever get up my heart?" cried Margaret, "in a strange place with nobody, nobody! not one that cares for me."

"Whisht, whisht, my darling. You'll find plenty that will care for you, maybe ower many, my bonnie doo, for you'll be a rich lady and have a grand house, far finer than pair Earl's-ha'. And oh, Miss

Margret, above a' take you great care wha you set your heart on. There's some that are fair to see and little good at the heart, and a young creature is easy deceived. You mustna go by looks, and you mustna let your heart be tangled with the first that comes. Eh, if Sir Ludovic had but lived a little longer, and gotten you a good man afore he slippit away!"

Margaret was silenced and could not say a word. If he had known *this*, what would he have thought of it? would he have handed his little Peggy over to the first that came? Would he have chosen for her, and made this confusing harassing bondage into something legitimate and holy? Margaret received the thought of that possibility with a gasp, not of wishing, but of terror. It seemed to her as if she had escaped something, from which there could have been no escape.

"But that's far from your thoughts as yet," said Bell, "and it's no me that will trouble your bonnie head with the like o' that before the time; and the ladies will take great care—I'm no feared but what they will take great care. They will keep

poor lads away, and poor lads are aye the maist danger. Here I'm just doing what I said I wouldna do! but eh, we're silly folk, we canna see how the bairns are to be guided that gang from us: as if God would bide in Fife as well as the like o' me: as if He wasna' aye there to haud my darlin' by the hand!"

Bell paused to dry her eyes, and to twist in a knot for the night the long locks of the pretty hair in which nobody again would ever take so much pride.

"And, Miss Margret," she said, "you'll no let some light-headed thing of a maid tear thae bonnie locks out o' your head with her curlings and frizzings? Sir Ludovic couldna endure them. He would aye have it like silk, shining in the sun. He never could bide to see it neglected. The ladies even, though they're no so young as they once were, did you ever see such heads? But yours is as God made it, and as bonnie as a flower. And you'll aye mind your duty, my bonnie darlin', and your prayers, and remember your Creator in the days o' your youth. And dinna think ower muckle about your

dresses, nor about lads—that will come in its time. I'm just beginning again, though I said I wouldna do it! But oh, to think it's the last night, and I'll never put you to your bed again, nor gie you good advice, nor keep you from the cauld, nor take it upon me to find fault with my bonnie young lady! I canna tell what will be the use of me mair when my bonnie bird flies away."

"Oh, Bell, I will come back, I will come back!"

"Ay, you'll come back, my darlin' bairn; but if you come a hundred times, and a hundred to that, you'll never be the same, Miss Margret. The Lord bless you, my bonnie lamb—but you'll never be the same."

Whether this was a very good preparation for the long night's rest which Mrs. Bellingham thought necessary for travellers, may perhaps be doubted. But Margaret soon cried herself to sleep when Bell withdrew. She was too much exhausted with excitement to be further excited, and this gentle chapter of domestic life, the return of the faces and

voices, and looks and feelings familiar to her, gave some comfort to the girl's overworn brain. They interfered between her and that strange scene in the farm-house. They formed a new event, a something which had happened since, to soften to her the trouble and commotion of that strange interruption of her life. She slept, and woke in the morning with a sense of relief which at first she could scarcely account for. What was it of comfort and amelioration that had happened to her? Was it all a dream that her father was dead, that her youthful existence was closed? No, it was that she was going away. Margaret shuddered and trembled with wonder to think that it was possible this could be a relief to her. But yet it was so. She could not doubt it, she could not deny it to herself. When she ought to have been broken-hearted she was glad. To go away, to escape from all that was so secret and so strange was so much a comfort to her, that she had almost forgotten that she was leaving home at the same time, going out upon a strange and unrealised existence, leaving the friends of her infancy, the

house she was born in, all the familiar circumstances of her life, and her father's grave, where he had been laid so lately. Margaret felt vaguely with her mind that all these farewells ought to have broken her heart, and she shed a few tears because Bell did so, because old John, speechless and lowering like a thunder-cloud, turned his back upon her and could not say goodbye. John had tossed her trunks on to the cart with the rest with absolute violence, as if he would have liked to break them to pieces; his face was dark with woe which wore the semblance of wrath. He turned his back upon her when she went to shake hands with him; and Margaret turned from the door of the old grey house with tears dropping like rain, but oh! for her hard heart! with an unreasonable, unfeeling sensation of relief, glad to get away from Earl's-hall and Rob Glen, and all that might follow. They thought it was, perhaps, the society of Effie which had "made it so much easier" for her; and Mrs. Bellingham congratulated herself on her own discrimination in having thus

pleased Ludovic and consoled Margaret. Dr. Burnside and his wife, who came to the railway to see the party off, applauded her tenderly, and bade God bless her for a brave girl who was bearing her burden as a Christian ought. Did Randal know better what it was that supported her, and made even the sight of the grave, high up upon the mound, a possible thing to bear? Did he know why it was that she went away almost eagerly, glad to be free? She gave him a wistful inquiring look as he stood by himself a little apart, looking at the group with serious eyes. Randal was the last to divine what her real feelings were, but how could Margaret tell this? He thought she was calmed and stilled by the consciousness of a new bond formed, and a new love that was her own, and was grieved for her, feeling all the vexations she must encounter before this love could be acknowledged, and doubting in his heart whether Rob Glen, he who could press his suit at such a moment and keep his secret, was a lover worth acknowledging. But Randal had no right to interfere. He looked at

her with pity in his eyes, and thought he understood, and was very sorry—while she, looking at him wistfully, wondered, did not he know?

Thus Margaret went away from her home and her childhood, and from those bonds which she had bound upon herself without understanding them, and which still, without understanding, she was afraid of and uneasy under. Sir Ludovic and his wife left Earl's-hall at the same time to join their children in Edinburgh, and there to make other calculations of all they could, and all they could not, do. Perhaps when they were at a distance, the problem would seem less difficult. Earl's-hall was left silent and solitary, standing up grey against the light, the old windows wide open, the chambers all empty, nobody stirring but Jeanie, who was putting all things into the order and rigidness of death. Bell, for her part, sat downstairs in her vaulted room, with her apron thrown over her head; and John had gone out, though it was still morning, "to look at the pitawties," with a lowering

brow, but eyes that saw nothing through the mist of unwilling tears.

That very night Rob Glen came back to his seat under the silver fir, and gazed at the vacant house with eager and restless eyes. He was not serene, like his mother, but unhappy and dissatisfied, and with a great doubt as to the efficacy of all that had been done. Margaret had mortified him to the heart, even in giving him her promise. He was a man who had been loved, and to be thus accepted with reluctance gave a stab to his pride which it was hard to bear. And perhaps it was this sentiment which brought him, angry and impatient and mortified, back to the neighbourhood of the house from which his new love had just gone away, but where, he could not but recollect, his old love still was. Jeanie had gone about her work all day with that arrow in her heart. She had known very well what was coming, had watched it even, as it came, and sadly contemplated the transference to her young mistress of all that had been so dear to herself. She had followed the course of the story almost as distinctly as

if she had been present at all their interviews; seeing something, for her turret had glimpses of the wood, and guessing more, for did not Jeanie know? But yet to see them together had been for the moment more than Jeanie could bear. It had seemed an insult to her that Rob should come, leading her successor, to the very house in which she was; and her more charitable certainty that he did not know of her presence there, had gone out of her mind in the sharpness of the shock. And when her work was over, Jeanie too went out, with a natural impulse of misery, to the same spot where she had seen them together. "No fear that he'll come here the night," Jeanie said to herself bitterly; and lo! before the thought had been more than formed in her mind, Rob was by her side! She gave a cry, and sprang from him in anger; but Rob was not the man to let a girl fly from him, over whom he had ancient rights of wooing. His countenance was downcast enough before. He put into it a look of contrition and melancholy patience now.

"Jeanie," he said, "will you say no-

thing, not a word of forgiveness to an old friend?"

"What can the like of me say that could be pleasant?" said Jeanie; "you're far ower grand a gentleman, Maister Glen, to have anything to say to the like of me."

"You know very well that you are doing me a great deal of injustice," he said, sadly; "but I will not defend myself. If I had but known that you were here—but I did not know."

"I never heard that you took much trouble to ask," said Jeanie; "and wherefore should you? You were aye far above me. There was a time when I was silly, and thought little of that; but I ken better now."

"I don't know that I am above anybody; there are many people that are above me," he said with a sigh, and a look of dreary vacancy beyond her, which deeply provoked yet interested the girl in spite of herself.

"Ay," she said, "you will feel for other folk now; you will ken what it means now. But I've naething to say to

you, Maister Glen, and I'm wishing ye nae harm. A's lang ended that ever was between you and me."

"Are you sure of that, Jeanie?" he said.

It was not in Rob's nature to let anyone escape from him upon whom he had ever had a hold.

"Ay, I'm sure of it," she cried; "and you are but a leer and a deceiver if you dare speak to me in that voice, after what I've seen with my ain e'en—after the way I've seen ye with Miss Margret. Oh, she's ower good for you, ower innocent for one that hasna a true heart! Last night, no further gane, I saw you here with my bonnie young lady; and now, if I would let you, that's how you would speak to me."

"Jeanie," he said, "it is all just that you are saying; but how do you know how I was led to it? You could not see that. She came out in her trouble to cry here—and I was here when she came. Could I see her cry and not try to comfort her? I don't pretend to be strong, to be able to resist temptation. I should have

thought of you, but you were not here, I did not know where you were. And she, poor child, was in great need of some one to rest upon, some one to console her. That was how it came about. You know me. I did not forget you; but she was there, and in want of some one to be a comfort to her. I am confessing to you like a Catholic to his priest, for all that you say there is nothing between us now."

"Oh!" she cried, "speak to me no more, Rob Glen. I canna tell what's ill and what's well, when you talk and talk, with that voice that would wile a bird from the tree."

"Why do you find such fault with my voice?" he said, coming a little nearer. "It may be as you say, Jeanie, that all is ended; but at least your good heart will do me justice. You were away, and here was a poor young creature in sore trouble. Say I've been foolish, say my life has gone away from me into another's hands; but do not say that I forgot my Jeanie; that I never did—that I will never do."

“Oh, dinna speak to me!” cried the girl, “dinna speak to me. I’m neither your Jeanie, nor I will not give an ear to anything you can say.”

“Then I will wait till you change your mind,” he said; and as she turned hastily towards the house, Rob went with her, gentle as a woman, respectful, with a sort of deprecation and melancholy softness. Perhaps she was right, he would allow, with a soft tone of sorrow. Life might be changed, the die was cast; but still it was not in Rob’s nature to let any one drop. He talked to her with a tone of studious gentleness and quiet. “At least we may be friends,” he said.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE party of travellers went to Perth, and from thence wandered among the hills and woods, and by the wild and lonely glens, to which that gate of the Highlands gives an entrance. It was all new to Margaret. In all her life she had seen nothing more imposing than the lion crest of Arthur's Seat, as seen across the stately breadth of the Firth, the low twin heads of the Lomonds, or in the far distance among the mists, the long withdrawing line of the Grampians. When she saw these misty hills nearer, when she watched the clouds at play upon them, and counted the flying shadows, and shared the instantaneous brightening of the sun-glints, what wonder that Margaret felt her heart rise in her breast notwithstanding all the trouble there. She had not thought it possible that the world

could be so lovely. The weather was fine, with now and then a rainy day, and the days were still long, though midsummer was past. Mrs. Bellingham and Miss Leslie were good travellers. Given two comfortable places in a carriage, and weather at all tolerable, and they were ready to drive anywhere, and to go on from morning to night. A bag fitted with all manner of conveniences, a novel, a piece of knitting, and plenty of shawls, was all they demanded. Even when it rained they could make themselves very comfortable in the hotels, finding out who everybody was—and did not object even to walking, within limits. And they knew about everything, which were the best routes, and how much the carriages ought to cost in which they preferred travelling; for it did not suit these ladies to go in coaches or other public vehicles along with the raskal multitude—and indeed as it was still only July the raskal multitude had as yet scarcely started on its peregrinations. As soon as they felt that their crape was safe under the shelter of large waterproofs they were happy. Mrs.

Bellingham took the best seat with undaunted composure; but Miss Leslie thought it necessary to go through a good many processes of explanation or apology before she placed herself by her sister's side.

“Oh, no! I cannot think of always taking that place: really, Margaret, you must have it to-day. You can see the view so much better. Dearest Jean, do make dear Margaret take my place. She sat all yesterday with her back to the horses, and I don't mind, not in the very least. I would much rather sit with my back to the horses. I never have been used to monopolize the best place.”

“Hold your tongue, Grace, and get in,” said Mrs. Bellingham. “I suppose you mean that I do—and I think at my age it is my place to have the best seat. You are only wasting our time, now that we really have a fine day. Now this is very comfortable. It is the kind of thing I always enjoy: a decent carriage, and horses that are not bad—I have seen better, but we might have a great deal worse; and two nice girls opposite, and a

gentleman at hand whatever happens, and as lovely a drive before us as heart could desire. We will stop for lunch at Kenmore, Aubrey, do you know Kenmore? it is close to Taymouth, which is as beautiful a place as any you could see. It always reminds me of Windsor Castle, except that it lies low, and Windsor is on a hill. We go by the side of Loch Tay, which is a beautiful loch, Margaret, not so picturesque as some you will see further west; but beautiful for all that. Now, Grace, the girls have settled themselves, and Aubrey is on the box. Are we to wait for you all day? You always keep us waiting when everyone is ready to start."

"It is only because I wanted some one to have this seat," said Miss Grace anxiously, "I have been this way before and the dear girls have not; or Aubrey, perhaps, dear Aubrey would rather be here than on the box? it would be much more amusing for you all, dear Jean, than to have me. Oh!" said the trembling lady, as her more energetic sister dragged her in with a grip of her arm, and the door was closed upon her. She kept asking

Margaret and Effie all the day to change places with her, and kept the party in a fidget. "For you see I have been this way before," she said. It was a bright day and Loch Tay lay before them, a sheet of light, between pale and golden, its fringe of trees wet with past rain, and big Ben Lawers rising huge into the blue air. Margaret felt that she had to make an effort to retain the sadness that she had kept round her like a mantle. How could she laugh, how could she let them talk, and chime in with irrestrainable reply and remark, when only such a little while ago—not yet a month ago—she said to herself. But when things had come so far as this, it was not to be supposed that the little veil of natural sentiment could keep her eyes always drooping. Her face began to glow again, to change from white to red, and back into that delicate paleness which was habitual to her. The clouds and the mists cleared away from her brown eyes. The scent of the young birches, the splash of the water on the shore, the soft shower of raindrops now and then shaken out over their heads

by some mischievous breeze as they passed, the atmosphere so heavenly clear, the sun so gay and friendly, beguiled her out of her trouble. In grief, as in sickness, there is a moment when the burden is sensibly lightened, the bonds relax for the first time. This moment came to Margaret now. She was terrified to feel how light her heart was, and what an involuntary glow of exhilaration had come over her. Nothing had happened to make her glad. She was only rising again in spite of herself into the beauty of the common day, into the light and brightness of her youth. And indeed, but for the sense that she ought not to be happy, Margaret might well have felt the well-being of the moment enough for her. The fresh air, and the pleasant progress, and all the beautiful sights around her, were brightened by Effie's bright countenance full of smiles and delight, and by the other companion on the box, who leant over them to shower down a flood of comments upon everything—comments which were generally amusing enough, and often witty to Margaret's simple ears. And even the

self-contented comfort of Jean, sitting well back in her corner, with her Eau de Cologne, her purse, her little paper-knife, her novel lest the drive should get dull; and Miss Grace's anxious regret to have the best side, and desire that some one would "change seats with her," were full of fun, full of amusement to the inexperienced girl. Nature betrayed her into laughter now and then, into smiles between times. It was only a month yet, not quite a month since old Sir Ludovic died; but was it Margaret's fault that she was only eighteen? These four weeks had lasted the length of generations. Now they were creeping into their natural length again, into mornings and evenings, soft and swift as the passage of the clouds. And the country was so fresh and sweet, and all the world so amusing in its varied humours. Her heart came back again into renewed life with a little thrill and tremor of unconscious yet half guilty pleasure. She could not be churlish enough to close herself up against all the seductions of nature and gentle persuasions of her youth.

Killin was one of the places where the party had arranged to stay, or rather where Mrs. Bellingham had arranged to stay. To have one person with a decided will and taste, and all the rest obedient in natural subjection or good-humoured ease, is the grand necessity for such an expedition. Mrs. Bellingham fulfilled all these requirements. She knew what she herself liked, and was very well disposed to make other people accept that, as the standard of beauty. And luckily Jean had been on Loch Tay before, and had arbitrarily decided like a despot of intelligence that on Loch Tay, Killin was the place to stay. She sat up in the carriage with a pleased importance as they drove in through the homely cottages, thatched, and tiled, and mossy, through the genial odour of peat in the blue air, past the swift flowing of the brown golden stream which winds its way into the loch round that island where the dead Campbells have their mansion as lordly as Taymouth, and how much more safe and sweet. Jean sat up in her place with a pleased relaxation of her countenance as the car-

riage drove round to the inn-door where Steward, her maid, who had gone by the coach with all the boxes of the party, stood in attendance behind the smiling landlord, but heading the homely waiters and chambermaids. Steward knew her place. To be mistress of a Highland inn would not at all have displeased her; but she knew very well that she was of a different and higher order of being from those smiling Highland maids with their doubtful English, and the anxious waiter who had so many parties to look after, and lost his wits now and then when the coach was crowded. A party taking so many rooms, and not illiberal in their way, though Mrs. Bellingham looked sharply after the bills, gave importance to everybody connected with them.

“ You got my letter, Mr. MacGillivray,” said Mrs. Bellingham.

“ Ay, my leddy, oh, ay, my leddy; and I hope ye’ll find everything to your satisfaction,” said the landlord, opening the door with anxious obsequiousness, as if Jean had been the Queen herself, Miss Leslie could not but remark. It was a

pleasant moment. The sun was declining westward, the roar of the waterfall above the bridge came fitfully upon the air, the rush of the nearer stream sounded clear and close at hand, the cottage children ran in picturesque little russet groups to gaze at the newcomers. On the other hand Ben Lawers, clumsy but grand, heaved upward against the sky and cut its arch in two. The trees filled in all the crevices about, and in the distance Glen Dochart glimmered far away, opening up between the hills a golden path into the west.

“Make haste, children,” said Mrs. Bellingham, “for we will have to dine at the table-d’hôte, and that I know, by experience, waits for nobody, and a very funny business it is; but it’s a great pity we’re a month too early, and you’ll get no grouse.”

“That is a mistake indeed,” said Aubrey, “but after all we are only a fortnight too early, and the time may come when we shall have better luck.”

“And oh, darling Margaret,” said Miss Leslie, “I have had such a beautiful view! I am so sorry, I cannot tell you

how sorry I am that neither you nor dear Effie would take my seat !”

It had been a most successful day ; with no clang or bustle of railways, but only the horses’ measured trot, the roll of the wheels, the flash of the sunshiny loch, the honest Highland sunshine, sweet as heavenly light can be, but never scorching, only kindly warming, cheering, smiling—upon the wayfarer. And now it was very pleasant to see the friendly people at their doors—the Highland maids happy to please you, with their kind voices and looks of friendly interest, the waiter bothered to death, poor man, but anxious, too, that you should eat and show an appetite. Nowhere else is there such homely interest in the chance guest. Perhaps the bill is a trifle high : is it a trifle high ? not any higher than in England, though perhaps just a little more than in the big inhuman Swiss caravanserais where all the Cockney world is crowding. There are caravan-serais in the Highlands too ; but not at Killin. There still the maids smile kindly, and cannot bide that you should not be happy ; and the waiter (though drawn

three ways at the same moment) is troubled if you do not "enjoy your dinner." And the peat smoke rises in aromatic wreaths into the clear blue air, and the river flows golden in the sunshine, but above the bridge tumbles in foaming cataracts; and broad and large with a homely magnificence the loch spreads out its waters under the sun or moon. After the meal, grandly entitled a *table-d'hôte*, to which our party sat down in friendly conjunction with a stranger pair, whom Mrs. Bellingham was very condescending to, and whom it was odd not to know intimately, as they did to each other all the honours of the family dinner, Jean retired to the most comfortable room, where Steward brought her writing things, and her books and knitting. "I will put up my feet a little," she said, "but I advise the rest of you to go out for a walk. You should never lose a fine evening in the Highlands, Aubrey, for you never know what to-morrow may be. I know the place as well as I know my Bible. Go up to the bridge and look at the waterfall, for it is considered very fine;

and there is a man, where the boats lie, who sells Scotch pearls; you can tell him to bring them up to show us after you come in again. But go out and take a walk first, and get the good of the fine evening. I will just put up my feet."

"And, dearest Jean, as Aubrey is a kind of cousin—or perhaps it is a kind of nephew—to darling Margaret, don't you think I may stay with you? for it would be very selfish of me, dear Effie, and dear Margaret, to leave dearest Aunt Jean alone."

The younger people strayed out without waiting for the conclusion of the controversy which was thus opened between the ladies; for Mrs. Bellingham was quite able to dispense with her sister's society, though kind Miss Grace, with many a whisper behind her back, declared that she did not at all mind, but that it would never do to leave dear Jean alone. They went out discussing their own curious relationships with a great deal of natural amusement; for there was no doubt that Effie at seventeen and a half was the unquestionable niece of Margaret, who had not yet arrived at her eighteenth birth-

day. "And as Miss Leslie is my Aunt Grace, it is unquestionable that Miss Margaret Leslie must be my Aunt Margaret, most venerable of titles," said Aubrey, taking off his hat and making her a reverential bow. He protested that no Christian name could be added to the title of aunt which could produce so profound an impression of age and awe. Aunt Grace might sound skittish and youthful, and Aunt Jean be no more than matronly, but nothing less than a white-haired grandmother could do justice (they all allowed) to the name of Aunt Margaret. Effie, who was a great novel-reader, reckoned upon her fingers how many there were to be found in books. Thus discussing, they went lightly along through the soft Highland evening all scented with the peat. The sky was still blue and clear, but in the village street it was almost dark, glimmers of the never-extinguished fires shining cheerfully from the cottage-windows, and the few passengers about looking at each other with puckered eyelids, "as an old tailor looks at the eye of his needle," according to Dante. Some

one contemplating them thus, with contracted pupils and projected head, attracted the notice of the girls as they went along, in a little pause after their laughter—some one with a fishing-basket over his shoulder, who came to a sudden pause before them.

“Randal Burnside!” Margaret cried, with a little start. And Randal made a very elaborate explanation as to how he had been under an old engagement to come here to fish, and how much surprised he was to see them arriving whom he had parted from only about ten days before.

“I could not believe my eyes,” he said.

Why should not he believe his eyes? Mrs. Bellingham, when told of this explanation, declared indignantly that she had herself told him of her intention to stay a few days at Killin.

“What should he be surprised at?” she asked; but this was a question to which nobody could reply.

He turned with them, as was natural, and they all continued their walk together. There were no lamps nor other worldly vulgarities in Killin; there was no railway even, in those days, invading the silence

of the hills—nothing but the cottages, low, homely places, in pleasant tones of grey and red and brown, with soft blue penons of the aromatic peat-reek floating over them, and clouds of white convolvulus threaded up and down their homely walls—and the big shadows of the hills forming the background, or when you reached higher ground, the silver brightness of the loch. And how quiet it was! the distant roar of the wild water only heightening, as with a great abstract voice of nature, taking no note of humanity, the tranquillity and softened dimness of the village. The little group took in the stranger and increased itself, then unconsciously sundered and formed into two and two. Was it not the merest accident that the two in advance were merry Effie and the gay Englishman, and the two behind Randal and Margaret? Nothing could have been more natural. But Margaret's hesitating laughter was quenched henceforward. She was half ashamed of it, as not befitting her orphanhood and her black dress: and then she could not but think of the other evening, not so very long ago,

when Randal's appearance had startled her before: the time when he had not taken any notice, not even taken off his hat. Margaret had never got over the humiliation of that greeting withheld. He had seen her, for she had heard him say so: but then and there, she felt, Randal must have lost his respect for her, Randal, who had known her all her life. Even in the excitement of the moment this had given Margaret a wound; and she had not got over it, though that evening had so many recollections that were painful to her. Two or three times now in the soft gloom, as they walked along side by side, she raised her head and gave him a furtive timid glance, with the words on her lips, "Why did you take no notice that night?" But though her mind was full of it, she had not the courage to ask the question. Effie and Aubrey went on before, their voices sounding softly through the night, but Randal did not say very much, and Margaret nothing at all. The spell of the momentary gaiety was broken. A little moisture even stole into her eyes under cover of the night; and yet she was

not unhappy; if only she could have had the courage to ask why it was that he "took no notice." They went as far as the bridge and stood there, looking at the torrent as it foamed down, leaping and dashing in white clouds over the rocks. Margaret had never seen such a scene; even the brawling cataracts of the Tummel and Garry, which had been her first experience of the kind, were not like this. In the midst of the wild commotion a knot of stately firs held themselves aloof, entrenched in a citadel of rock amid all the rage of the torrents, the wild water raging on every side, but the tree-island, coldly proud, scarcely owning by a quiver of its leaflets the influence of so much passion roused. Randal said something to her as he stood by her, but she could not hear a syllable. She looked up at him and shook her head, and he smiled. Somehow he did not look (though it was so dark that she could scarcely see) as if he had lost his respect for her, after all.

"What a row," said Aubrey, as they came away, "for such a cupful of water!

If it had been Niagara there might have been some excuse."

"That is just like the Highlands," said Randal, with that partial offence which always moves a Scotsman when it is suggested by any impertinent stranger that his country is not the equal, in every respect, of every other country under the sun. "It is not Niagara; and Ben Lawers is not Mont Blanc; but they impose upon us all the same."

"Hush!" said Margaret; "don't talk, one is enough." What she said was not very intelligible, but, indeed, the one voice *was* enough in the air. It seemed to her to declaim some great poem, some wild chant, like a sublime Ossian. The others went chattering on before, delighted with themselves and their jokes. And when the rush of the wild stream had sunk into a murmur, Margaret herself began again to wonder. "Why did he take no notice, *that* night?"

Next day, Randal joined them quite early. It was not a good day for fishing, he said. It was too bright. Besides, if they were only going to stay a day or

two, he could make up for his idleness afterwards. He had got a boat ready, and was bent on taking the ladies to Finlarig, and afterwards upon the loch.

“Of course, we are going to Finlarig, Randal,” said Mrs. Bellingham. “Do you think I have never been here before? Good morning, Duncan Macgregor. Have you any of your pearls to-day? Oh, yes. I should like to look at them. The little ones are beautiful, but the big ones are too milky. I like the small size best. You can come up and see us after dinner to-night, and bring them with you. Duncan and I are old friends; many a pearl I have got from him, and had them set afterwards at Sanderson’s, in Princes Street. I invented the setting myself, and it was very much admired—just a gold thread twisted round them. Margaret, you don’t wear any rings. I must have one made for you. Duncan Macgregor had much better come with us, Randal. I have no confidence in gentlemen rowers. You will go off with the girls as soon as we get to Finlarig, and then where shall we be?”

“ You will have your devoted nephew, Aunt Jean. My aunts are the aim and object of my life. I never think of anything else, sleeping or waking. How can you talk of being left alone so long as you have *me* ?”

“ I prefer Duncan Macgregor,” said Aunt Jean ; “ and as for your aunts, as you call them, you have only one. And I don’t want to see you pushed out of your place by that lad, Randal Burnside,” she added in a whisper. “ Just you keep your eyes upon him, Aubrey. I can’t think what business he has here.”

Mrs. Bellingham’s prophecy was so far fulfilled that the young men and the girls did somehow, as is their use and wont, manage to separate themselves from their elder companions, one of whom, at least, had every desire to further this separation. It was Randal who was the cicerone of the party, and who led them through the winding path, to that secluded sheltered palace of peace where the dead Campbells rest. They were not thinking much about the Campbells. Who, indeed, thinks of the silent occupants, be they Pharaohs,

be they Highland caterans, of those still dwellings of the dead? The Campbells lie in lordly guardianship of their loch and their trees, with their clan within call, and their castle scarcely out of hearing, and all kinds of Highland bravery—honeysuckles and wild roses in the summer, barberries and rowans in the autumn, flaunting upon the half-ruined wall that surrounds their tomb. The young people strayed that way, two of them full of talk and laughter, two of them quiet enough. Why it was that Effie and Aubrey fell together, it would be difficult (yet not very difficult) to say. But the reason why Margaret stayed her steps for those of Randal was easy enough. She wanted, constantly wanted, to ask him why he took no notice *that* night. For this reason she lingered while the others went on, looking at him now and then with a shy, eager look, which at once puzzled the young man, and filled his heart with a dangerous interest. She wanted to ask him something—what was it she wanted to ask him? Randal was on his guard, he felt. He had been warned effectually enough. Margaret was

not for him. Even if he had wanted her (which he did not, he said to himself with a little indignation), was not he forestalled? had not her heart been caught in its first flight? He might be sorry, but that did not matter much—the deed was done. And he was fully warned, completely forestalled, even if he had wished for anything else. But what was it she wanted to say? Probably in the innocence of her heart something about *that* fellow—for whom, poor thing, she must fancy, she who knew nobody, because she loved him that every one cared.

They came at last to a little sheltered glade close to the little river with its golden brown water. There was a beautiful barberry growing in a corner, which Margaret had caught sight of. She wanted a branch of it to put in her hat, she said—until she remembered that her hat was covered with crape. But Randal was cutting the scarlet grapes before that evident incongruity had occurred to her. She sat alone upon a bit of the broken wall close by, among ferns and ivy, and watched him.

“Oh,” she said, “I am so sorry I have given you the trouble. I forgot that it was crape I was wearing. It is very strange that one should ever be able to forget.”

“But you are—by moments.”

“Yes: it shows how little one knows. I thought I would die.”

“But that could not be,” said Randal, kindly. “The world would come to an end very quickly if grief killed; but it does not, even the most terrible.”

“And you will think mine was not like that,” said Margaret. “But I do not forget him, oh, I do not forget him! only—I do not know how it is. My mind will not keep to one thing. I suppose,” she said with a deep sigh, “it is because I have not very much mind at all.”

“Nay, you accuse yourself unjustly,” he said, with a half smile; “after the shock of a great event, a great trouble, there comes a time of quiet—”

“Oh!” she said, finding herself by no doing of hers brought to the point she desired, and turning to him with a sudden start, “Randal, I would like to tell you something. I thought I should have told

them all *that* night, when I came in, but I had not the courage."

"What is it?" Randal threw a twig of his barberries into the stream and watched it carried along, tossing on the swift current. She was going to speak to him of her love, the poor child; and his heart revolted against such a confidence. He could not look at her. Girls receive the confidences of men with interest, but it is very seldom indeed that a young man plays the same part to a girl.

"When I came in, *that* night: you all thought my heart was breaking because I was going away, and I did not dare to say otherwise. But oh, Randal! it was not *that*!"

"I understand;" he threw in another branch of the barberries and watched it intently, turning his head away from her. "It was another kind of parting that made you cry, you were thinking of——"

"Oh, I was thinking—how glad, how glad I would be just to get away, only to get away!"

"Margaret!" he turned round and looked at her quickly now. She was not

embarrassed nor blushing, as if the words could bear some happier meaning, but quite pale and serious, looking at the water, as he had been doing. Though he had known her all her life, he had of late given up calling her by her Christian name. It was the surprise that forced it from his lips.

“It sounds like wickedness,” she said fervently; “I can see that; but I do not mean any ill. I could not help it; things had been so strange. How could I help trembling and crying? all had gone wrong somehow; and oh, I was glad, so glad to get away, to be free! but if I had said so you would all have thought me—I don’t know what you would have thought me. But it came into my head that perhaps you guessed my true meaning, and thought it was a lie I was telling, and had no more respect for me.”

“Respect for you! that is not the word I would have used, Margaret. I have always—liked you—taken an interest in you ever since you were a little baby. How could I lose what you call respect?”

“But you looked like it, Randal. Why

did you pass me in the gloaming and never say a word? nor even nod your head, or take off your hat?"

"Margaret!" he cried in great confusion, "I—I thought you did not want to be recognised. I—thought you would like to think I had not seen you—I thought—"

"How could I do that?" said Margaret seriously, "for that could not have been true. I have wondered ever since if you thought me—a—a bad girl, Randal? Oh! I think I have no heart! I can laugh, though papa has only been gone a month. I—almost—forget sometimes that I am so unhappy; but I am not a bad girl, Randal. You might always take off your hat to me. You need not think shame to speak to me—"

"Margaret, for heaven's sake! who could have imagined you would take it so? I thought you—had some one with you whom you cared for more than—anyone else, and that you would rather I took no notice. I did not think I had any right to interfere between him and you."

"No," said Margaret with a deep sigh, "I suppose nobody could do that," and

after a pause she resumed, half smiling —  
“But you should not look as if you thought shame of your friends, Randal, “you should take off your hat even when a girl is not very wise. I thought you had no respect for me after that night.”

Margaret pronounced the word *wise* as if it had been written *wice*, which the reader who is Scotch will be aware is a word with a quite distinct meaning of its own; a girl who is not *wise* means a girl who is wildly silly, without any sense, perhaps with not all her wits about her. What would Sir Ludovic have thought had he heard a speech so outrageously Scotch from his little Peggy? How he would have smiled, how he would have scolded! Randal remembered the old man’s amused reproofs; but his heart was too much troubled to permit him to smile. And the inference that lay in Margaret’s words was more than his intelligence could fathom. He was thrown into the wildest commotion of curiosity, anxiety, and wonder. Was it possible that there was no love after all between

her and Rob Glen? or what did her joy in escaping, her sigh at the thought that no one could interfere, mean? He answered her at last in a strain quite confused and wide of the purpose, like a man in a dream.

“If I should ever be able to do anything for you, to be of any use to you, Margaret, will you send for me, will you let me know? Whatever it may be, and wherever I may be,” he cried in his confusion, “if you ever tell me you want me, I will come to you if I am at the end of the world!”

She looked up at him with faint surprise, yet gratitude. “Yes, Randal,” she said; “now I know that you have not lost your respect for me. But how should I ever want anything?” she added with a smile, “there is Jean always to take care of me, you know.”

## CHAPTER XV.

MRS. BELLINGHAM did not stay long at Killin. How it came about, could never be discovered, but wherever the party went, in whatsoever admirable order they set out, it was discovered on their return that Aubrey was somehow at the side, not of Margaret, but of Effie Leslie. His aunt took him severely to task, when this dereliction from all the rules of duty had been made evident by the experience of several successive days. Aubrey did not deny or defy his aunt's lawful authority. "It is all that fellow," he said, "continually poking in before me, wherever we go, with his Margaret, Margaret! as if she belonged to him. I hate these men who have known a nice girl from the time she was *that* high. They are always in the way."

"And do you really allow yourself to

be put off your plans so easily, you, Aubrey, a man of the world? If I were you, I would soon let Mr. Randal Burnside find his proper place. Let him take care of Effie. Effie would do for him very well. She is the second daughter, and they are not very rich, and her sister has made but a poorish sort of marriage. Effie might do worse than put up with Randal Burnside. It would be doing them all a good turn if you would be firm, Aubrey, and insist on doing what we all wish."

"Surely," said Aubrey, "nothing can be more easy. I hope I know as well as anybody how to keep a presuming fellow in his right place." But, comforting as this assurance was, the very same thing happened the next day, and Mrs. Bellingham was not only angry but disturbed by it. She called Aubrey into her room at quite a late hour, when she was sitting in all the sanctity of her dressing-gown. Perhaps their tempers were a little disturbed by the fact that they were both chilly, he with his walk by the side of the loch to finish a cigar, she in the before-men-

tioned dressing-gown, which being but muslin was a little too light for the latitude of Killin.

“The same thing over again, Aubrey,” she said, “always that little flirt of an Effie. I declare I never see you pay the slightest attention to Margaret; and when you know how much all your friends wish you to settle—”

“All right, Aunt Jean,” said Aubrey with a tone of injury. “It is all those girls that will derange the most careful calculations. They are both of a height, they are both all black, it is only when you hear their voices that you can tell which is which: and if one will go off in one direction while you have settled all your plans for the other—”

“Ah, Aubrey, I am afraid it is just the old story,” said Mrs. Bellingham, shaking her head, “you like the wrong one the best.”

“That is a trifle,” said the dutiful nephew, “we were not born to follow our inclinations. The wrong always suits the best, that goes without saying; but I hope I am not quite a fool, and I was not born

yesterday. Your Effie may be all very well to chatter with, but what should I do with her? I should not choose to starve for her sake, nor I don't suppose she would for mine. It is Margaret for my money—or perhaps the other way would be more like the fact, it is her money for me. But what can a fellow do with the best intentions, if the other three make a point of thwarting him? The only thing to be done is this: send the little one home, and turn that other man about his business; when there are only two of us we are bound to be civil to each other," Aubrey said with fine ease, turning over the bottles on his aunt's toilette table. Mrs. Bellingham was struck by the thorough-going honesty of this suggestion.

"Well, that sounds very fair, Aubrey;" she said. "I would not expect you to say more. And to be sure when a girl makes a dead set at you, it is very difficult for a young man to keep quite clear. We must not do anything violent, you know, and it makes me much more comfortable to hear you speak so sensibly. Randal

Burnside, of course, will be left behind here, and Effie can go home from Stirling or Glasgow. And as we leave in two days, there will be no great harm done. But after that, my dear boy, I do hope you will not lose your time."

"Trust me for that!" he said. "Do you really use such an antediluvian cosmetic as Kalydor, Aunt Jean? you whom I always believed to be in advance of the age. Crème de thé is a great deal better; without it I could never have made up my mind to face the rude winds of the north. Have a little of mine and try; I am sure you will never use the other again."

"Oh, thank you, Aubrey; but I am very well satisfied with my own," said Mrs. Bellingham, who did not choose that anything belonging to her should be called antediluvian. "It is more refreshing than anything when one has been a long time in the air. Then that is settled, and I shall not have to speak of it again, I hope. But if I were you—a university man and a club man—I would show that I was more than a match for Randal Burnside, who never was at anything but

a Scotch college, and can't belong to anything better than one of those places in Princes Street. I would not allow myself to be put out of my way by a provincial. I should be ashamed to give in like that, if I was such a young man as you."

Aubrey shrugged his shoulders, and offered no further defence; and the remaining two days were passed happily enough, Margaret and Randal remaining upon terms of confidential intimacy, without any word on either side to make the situation more plain. *She* felt that she had committed her secret to his trust, and was partially supported in consequence in the bearing of it—and encouraged to forget it, which she did accordingly with a secret ease and relief beyond all words—while he, too, felt that something had been confided to him, something far more serious than she seemed to be aware of: and yet did not know what it was. Thus while she was perfectly at her ease with him, Randal was not so happy. He could not ask her a question, could not even let her see that he remembered the half involuntary confidence, yet felt the most

eager desire to know fully what it was which had been confided to him. How could he help her, how could he be of use to her if he did not know? This pleasant fiction of being "of use," and the eager prayer he had made to her to call him whenever and wherever she wanted him, was it not the natural protest of honest affection against the premature bond which had forestalled itself, which had no right to have come in the way of the real hero? He did not himself know that this was the origin of his anxiety about Margaret, his strong wish "to be of use." How could he be of use, how interfere between the girl and her lover, he whose only possible standing ground by Margaret's side, would be that of a lover too? But Randal, though he was very clear-sighted in general, had but a confused vision of things relating to himself, and deluded himself with the idea that he might "be of use," might help her, and do a great deal for her—if he only knew! And he did know that some kind of tie existed between her and Rob Glen; but no more. Whether it was wholly clandes-

tine, as it appeared, whether "the fellow" had secured her to himself under any vow of secrecy, whether anybody belonging to her knew, or suspected, Randal could not tell. And the frankness with which she had admitted himself to some sort of participation in the mystery made it more confusing and bewildering still. He could not put any question to her on the subject, but shrank from the very thought of such an interrogation, with a mixture of pain and shame, feeling his own delicacy wounded; that Margaret should have a secret at all was intolerable; he could not bear to be her confidant, to hear her acknowledge anything that marred the simple ideal of her maidenhood; and yet how was he "to be of use," if he did not know?

She, for her part, was greatly relieved by the little snatch of conversation which had conveyed so much. He had not lost his respect for her. He did not "think shame" of her. This was very comforting to Margaret. She had made it all quite clear, she thought, how things had gone wrong, and how it was a relief more than

a sorrow to leave her home ; and now she could be quite at her ease with Randal, who *knew*. Having thus spoken of it too, made the burden of it very much lighter. The thing itself was over for the present ; and it must be a long time, a very long time, before she would be forced to return to that matter. Perhaps some time or other she might be forced to return to it ; but not for such a long, long time. Thus all seemed easy for the moment, and Margaret thrust her foolishness behind her, and managed to forget. They had two more cheerful days. They took long walks into Glen Dochart, and went out on the loch in the evenings ; and Effie sang, who had a pretty voice and had been taught, whereas Margaret had a pretty voice, but had not been taught, and was fired with great ambition. And Aubrey took upon him to make researches into the crockery-ware in the cottages, by way of looking for old china, of which he assured them, he often “ picked up ” interesting “ bits,” at next to no price at all, in the neighbourhood of Bellingham Court. It did not answer, however, in

Perthshire, and Randal and the two girls being Scotch had to interfere to rescue him from Janet Campbell, at the post-office, who thought nothing less than that the man was mad, and intended to break her "pigs," which is genuine name of crockery in Scotland. All these things amused them mightily, and filled up the days, which were not invariably fine, but chequered by showers and even storms—which latter amused the party as much as anything, since there was a perpetual necessity for consultations of all kinds, and for pilgrimages in twos and threes to the window, and to the door, to see if it was going to be fine. During all this time Mrs. Bellingham persistently laboured to control fate—and to pair her young people according to her previous determination. That Randal and Effie should have taken to each other would have been a perfectly reasonable and suitable arrangement, and Jean felt that she could meet her brother and his wife with a pleasant sense of triumph, had she been the means under providence of arranging so very suitable a match. He was a very pleasant young

man, well-educated, sufficiently well-born, with a little money and a good profession—what could a girl's parents ask for more? But it is inconceivable how blind such creatures are, how little disposed to see what is best for them. With all the pains that she took to prevent it, the wrong two were always finding themselves in each other's way.

And perhaps it helped this result that Miss Leslie, all unconsciously, and in the finest spirit of self-sacrifice, did everything she could to thwart her sister, and to throw the wrong person in the way. It went so to her heart to see Margaret smiling as she talked to Randal, that she walked all the way home from the bridge by herself, though it was getting dark and she was nervous, to leave the two to themselves. "They will like their own company better than mine," Miss Leslie said to herself. And when Jean asked sharply what had become of Aubrey, Grace quaked, but did not reply that she had seen him taking Effie down the river in the gleam of compunctious brightness after the afternoon's rain.

“Dear Jean,” she said, “you must not be anxious. I am sure he will be back directly, almost directly.”

“Anxious!” cried Mrs. Bellingham. It was hard upon so sensible a woman to have to deal with persons so entirely unreasonable. Then Randal let fall various intimations that he had a great fancy for seeing Loch Katrine again.

“The fishing here is not so good as I expected,” he said. “I think I shall go further west.”

“I would not do that if I were you,” Mrs. Bellingham said, with a very serious face. “I would not be so long away from your good father and mother. Of course you will be going somewhere to shoot after the 12th. So is Aubrey. Ladies have not much chance in comparison with the grouse. And, do you know, I thought them very much *failed*, both of them. They are getting old people, Randal. I am sure you are a good son, and would do anything you can to please them; and I could see that your good mother did not like you to come away for the fishing, though she would not say any-

thing. As for Loch Katrine, I don't think it all likely that we shall be able to make it out.

Randal was at no loss to understand what this meant. He smiled to himself to think how mistaken she was, and how little it really mattered who went or stayed, so far as Margaret was concerned; but, after all, why should he follow Margaret, why should he run the risk of making himself hate Rob Glen, and wonder at his "luck" more than he did now? However, he said to himself, there ought not to be any danger of that. He did not think there was any danger. What danger could there be when there was a clear understanding that some one else was master of the field? But still he could not suppose that the moment of fate, the tragical moment at which he could be of use to Margaret, was coming now. And why should he insist upon going where he was not wanted? So he yielded and sighed, and took his dismissal, though both the girls protested.

"Oh, why will you go and spoil the party?" cried Effie.

“My dear,” said Mrs. Bellingham, “I am afraid there will not be much more of the party, for your papa is going to meet us in Glasgow to take you home.”

This threw a cloud over poor little Effie, who went to her own room in tears. Was it over then, this beautiful holiday? Margaret said good-bye to Randal with a cloudy look between smiles and tears.

“You will never pass me by again, as if I was not good enough to be spoken to?” she said, with a little broken laugh; and he once more hurriedly adjured her “if she should ever want anything,” “if she should want a friend to stand by her!” Margaret smiled, and gave him her hand like a young princess. “But how can I ever want anybody,” she said, “when there is Jean?” which was not so satisfactory. He felt more lonely, more dismal, more altogether out of place than there was any reason for, when, finally, Mrs. Bellingham packed her little comforts into the carriage, and Miss Grace entreated everybody to take her place, and the travellers rolled away, waving their hands to him as

he stood at the inn door. It is always a dismal thing to stand at the door of an inn and see the greater part of the party who have been rambling, walking, talking, laughing, and crying together, drive away. Randal felt his heart sink in his breast. To be sure, Margaret Leslie was nothing to him, except a child whom he had known all his life. He stood there and fell a thinking, while the landlord nodded and winked to the waiter, and the maids behind pitied the poor young gentleman: How well he remembered the little motherless baby in her black ribbons, whom his mother had once placed in his astonished arms! He had told Margaret of it only yesterday; but he did not tell her what Mrs. Burnside said. "It will be time enough for you to marry, Randal, when she is old enough to be your wife," the prudent mother had said. She would never be his wife now, nor anybody's who could understand her, who was worthy of her. To think of that creature falling to the lot of Rob Glen! The blood rushed to Randal's face, and he clenched his hands unawares; then coming to himself,

seized his fishing-tackle, which had been of so little use, and hurried away.

And Margaret was very quiet all the day after, leaving Effie to respond to Aubrey's witticisms from the box. It had come to be the habit that Effie should reply. Mrs. Bellingham was just as comfortably placed as usual, and had her Eau-de-Cologne, and her paper-knife, and plenty of shillings in her purse for the Highland tolls, and everything as she liked it; but she was not so amiable as in the earlier part of the journey. For one thing, there was not at all a satisfactory place for luncheon, and the wind was cold, and she had not the kind of large pin she liked to fasten her shawl.

"We are going to have a wet August," she said. "When August is wet the best thing to do is to get out of Scotland. It is bad enough anywhere, but it is abominable in the Highlands. There are the same sort of looking tourists you find in Chamounix, only poorer, and it is cold, which it is not in Switzerland; at least, it is not always cold in Switzerland. Your papa, Effie, is to meet us in Glasgow on

Tuesday, and then I think we shall go South."

Nobody said anything against this sentence. There are days when the wind is more keen than usual, when the rain is wetter, and the mud muddier. This was one of these days. It came down in torrents in the middle of the journey, and before the hood of the carriage could be got up a large piece of Mrs. Bellingham's crape on the side next the wind had been soaked and ruined for ever. This, her sister thought, was her own fault, in that she had incautiously thrown aside her waterproof; but she herself held it to be Effie's, who had thrown a shawl over that waterproof, "carefully concealing it," the aggrieved lady said. To have your crape ruined when you have just gone into mourning is a grievance enough to upset any lady's temper, and it cannot be said that any of the party enjoyed the drive on this ill-fated day.

After this the pleasure of the expedition grew less and less. Sir Ludovic, who met the party in Glasgow, took an oppor-

tunity to take Margaret aside, and talked to her with a very grave face.

“I hope you will see how wrong you are, Margaret,” he said, “about that lad. I have seen him, and he is as firm as a rock because of your encouragement. Do you think it is a right thing for a young girl like you to give such a man encouragement, and dispose of yourself without the knowledge of one of your friends? I told him I would never give my consent, but he as good as said he did not care a pin for my consent, that he had got yours, and that was all he wanted. But there is one thing I must insist upon, Margaret, and that is that you will hold no clandestine intercourse with him. It would not be—delicate—and it would not be honourable. It is only to save you that I don’t tell Jean. Jean would be neither to hold nor to bind. I don’t know what Jean might not do; but unless you will promise me that there shall be no correspondence it is my duty to tell Jean.”

“I don’t wish to have any correspondence,” said Margaret, drooping her head, with a burning blush. Oh, if they would

but let her forget it all ! but this was what they would not do.

“If you will give me your promise to that”—he said ; and in his pleasure at what seemed to him his little sister’s dutifulness, Sir Ludovic took her hand into his and gave a fatherly kiss on her forehead ; all which his sisters contemplated with wondering eyes.

“Dear Ludovic, how kind you are to darling Margaret !” cried Miss Grace, running to him and bestowing a kiss of her own, by way of thanks.

“I see no need for all this kissing,” said Mrs. Bellingham ; “what is the meaning of it ? I hope, Ludovic, you are not encouraging Margaret to make you her confessor, and to have secrets and mysteries from Grace and me, who are her natural guardians and her best friends.”

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