MAY.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD,"

"THE MINISTER'S WIFE," "OMBRA,"

&c., &c.

"*Maggio*
Non ha paraggio."
ITALIAN PROVERB.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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MAY.

CHAPTER I.

In the meantime, the young women at Pitcomlie, as they were entitled by Mr. Charles, had been spending their time very agreeably. Verna had got the house well in hand. She had re-arranged everything. The very furniture had been changed from one room to another. "We must at once give the house a character," she said, "so that it may be seen to be your house, Matty, and not the old Heriots'. There are a great many old-fashioned things which must be cleared away. We must give it a character;" and she went about the rooms, pulling the furniture hither and thither. Verna, unfortu-

nately, though she had zeal, had no knowledge; she thought the results of a modern upholsterer's work, spick and span new tables, chairs, and carpets, all ordered without consideration of expense, would produce something infinitely better than the present aspect of the room, which had been lived in, loved in, suffered in, for so many years, and had acquired a human character of sympathy which makes even wood and velvet poetical. She did not understand the old inlaid cabinets, which had been Marjory's pride, any more than she could understand that insane desire for "a view," which apparently had tempted "the old family" to open its windows so to the stormy sea.

"One cannot escape the sea at such a place as this," Verna said; "we must put up with it, though I don't care for it; but to turn all the windows that way, *on purpose*, when there is quite a pretty garden behind, and a sheltered corner, with flower-beds, and all that. I have written to Mr. Freestone, and he is coming down on Saturday to see about a new wing."

This talk was carried on for the advantage of

young Hepburn, who had come, as he now did daily, to ask how the ladies were; and if he could do anything for them.

"A new wing!" he said; "but you will find that highly expensive; and the house has always been thought a large house."

"Always been thought!" said Verna, with some scorn. "By those who don't know what sort of a house my sister has set her heart upon. I do not think it a large house; but it is a very good sort of foundation to work upon. By the time Tommy is of age, he is sure to be Master of the Hounds, High Sheriff of the county, or, perhaps, even Lord-Lieutenant—for I suppose the Heriots are well known to be one of the best families in Fifeshire; and then, of course, he will require room to give balls and other entertainments; he will be very grateful to me, you may be certain. My plan is to pull down the old house—"

"To pull down the old house!" Hepburn repeated, in growing consternation.

"And to build on the additions there," Verna continued calmly. "I have it all in my head.

Unfortunately, I can't draw very well, but I have made a kind of an elevation, as they call it. The end of the new wing will come just where the old tower does; and the new drawing-room, which will be fifty feet by forty, will look out upon the lime-tree avenue. It will be delightfully shady, and we can have the flower-beds close under the windows. Then upstairs we can have some new rooms; it will be a great improvement. The drawing-room here is not a bad room, but it is dingy; and so are the dining-room and library. In short, I don't doubt it was very nice for the old people, Mr. Hepburn—the old gentleman, who, I suppose, never saw much society; but my sister is young, and, of course, will recover her spirits—"

"Do you think she will?" said the sympathetic Johnnie. "Are there not some gentle natures that mourn for ever?"

Verna looked at him with a doubtful glance, dubious for the moment whether she should help him to a little real insight into her sister's inclinations, or whether she should keep up the pathetic aspect of affairs. And it appeared to her that

the latter was so very much the most advantageous mode of action, that, though the temptation to reveal the truth had come strongly upon her for a moment, she hastily repelled it. "Yes, indeed," she said, shaking her head; "that is very true; but, dear Mr. Hepburn, my sister is very young; we cannot expect that she will always be as she is now."

"Ah!" said Johnnie; "but we may hope, at least—I mean, she can never be more perfect than with that sweet air of resignation; that look as of one whose existence has already passed into another world."

Oh, what a temptation it was for Verna to give him a little sketch—such as she could so well have done—of the real Matty! Anyone who has had to sit by and hear a fool elevated into a saint by some still more foolish worshipper, will understand her secret exasperation. But there were a great many things to be taken into consideration. In the first place, Matilda's melancholy aspect was much her best one—when she cried she did not require to talk and commit herself, as otherwise she must have done infallibly; and, in the second place, Verna knew that to attempt to keep her

sister in subjection, without affording her the relief of a worshipper, was hopeless, and young Hepburn ranked high in her list of ways and means. She shook her head accordingly, subduing herself, and acquiesced in this noble picture of Matty; but added: "You must remember, Mr. Hepburn, how young she is; and even if she should not care for society for herself, she must, some time or other, see the advantage for her children. And we all have a taste for fine rooms and handsome furniture," Verna added, with a princely air. "It is a weakness, no doubt; but the Bassetts are all famed for it. Matilda will never be happy till she has given a character to the house."

All this would have been infinitely comic to any man who had not been captivated by Mrs. Charles Heriot's afflicted beauty. But young Hepburn was like most people in that condition; he accepted, as the most dignified truth, what would have appeared the most transparent nonsense in other circumstances. He did more than this; he allowed Marjory's home and kingdom, in which he had worshipped her since ever he could re-

member, to be spoken of as "good enough for the old people," and acquiesced in the fact that the Bassetts required something more magnificent, and that the house must have a character given to it, before it could become a fit habitation for Mrs. Charles and her sister. He was not a fool, nor unfaithful to his traditions; he was a great lover of poetry, the most intellectual person, by a long way (except the Minister, whose intellect took, as was right and natural, a Biblical form,) in the neighbourhood of Comlie. Few men in the East Neuk were to be compared to him in the way of accomplishments and general cultivation; but yet he was guilty of this foolishness and meanness without in the least being aware of it—or, at least, with an uneasy consciousness which he would not permit himself to be aware of. And yet his heart was not false to the ideal which had been his highest vision of excellence all his life. Had he spoken of Marjory, it would still have been with enthusiasm—though with that servility, which is common to men in love, he allowed it to be necessary that Mrs. Charles should "give a character" to her house. When Mrs.

Charles appeared, however, and he had the honour so often accorded to him of escorting her round the garden (which Matilda, too, much preferred to the cliff) he made a gentle remonstrance against Verna's energetic measures.

"I hear that there are to be several changes," he said, timidly. "Miss Bassett has been telling me about a new wing."

"Yes," said Mrs. Charles. "That is Verna's way. She always likes to be pulling things about. I declare I think she was quite pleased to see that ugly old ruin, that she might pull it down and make everything tidy. It is a fancy she has."

"But—do you think the old house—ugly?" said Hepburn, still more timidly.

Mrs. Charles was leaning on his arm; she was looking up at him with those pretty blue eyes, into which tears were ready to come at a moment's notice—a sweet dependent creature, seeking support and sympathy. Johnnie Hepburn knew a great deal better on this point than she did. Had the old house of Pitcomlie been his, he would have worshipped every stone of it. He

knew all its associations, historical and otherwise, to the family; but yet he dared go no further than to ask humbly whether she too thought it—ugly? His mental servility was such that, if Matilda had said "Yes," boldly, no doubt he would have acquiesced.

"Well, isn't it?" said Matilda, with a momentary feeling that she might be committing herself. "Verna thinks so, I'm sure. And then it is of no use; and what is the good of keeping an old place without a roof, or windows, or anything, full of rats, and I daresay snakes, and all sorts of creatures. That is what I hate about ruins. I suppose there are no scorpions in this country?"

"No, nor snakes either," said Hepburn, relieved. "I see now why you dislike it. There is nothing of the kind indeed; and old Mr. Charles Heriot used to keep the ruins in capital order. The old house has so many associations, you know—to the family."

"Oh yes, to the old family, I daresay," said Matilda; "but I don't know anything about their mouldy old ancestors. Verna has such a pretty

plan that she drew herself—a beautiful long drawing-room, with a nice range of windows opening into the garden, and those new ribbon flower-beds that are so pretty, just like the border of a shawl, close under them. You must see the plan. Verna has quite a genius for that sort of thing, and she says it would give such character to the house."

"But then Miss Bassett is not the lady of the house," said Hepburn. "She cannot feel as you do, who are the representative of the Heriots. Of course she does not care about the associations as you must do."

"Oh no; she can't do anything at all unless I like it," said Matilda, "of course. I let her do a great many things, because she likes fuss and bustle, and I don't. I let her manage the servants, and order the dinner, and all that. But of course it is only because she is my sister. She has no power over anything unless I say she may have it. Everybody must know that."

"It is like you," said Johnnie, admiringly, "to put yourself aside so as to indulge your

sister. It is exactly what one might expect from you; but perhaps in happier circumstances, when you feel a little more interest in these secondary matters——"

"Do you think she takes too much upon her?" asked Matilda, quickly. "Oh, you need not be afraid to speak! She is my sister, to be sure, but we have been separated so much, and I quite know Verna's faults. It is quite her way to take too much upon her. If you think she is setting herself up as the lady of the house, or anything like that, I shall put a stop to it at once."

This put Johnnie into an unfortunate position, for he could not allow it to be supposed that he was finding fault with Verna, or undermining her with her sister. He said hastily:

"Oh, no, I had no such meaning. I thought perhaps—if you were to exercise your own judgment you would be kind to the old house. We are fond of all traces of antiquity here; and I have a special love for those old gables, and the roofless walls, and narrow windows—"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Charles, archly, "we know

why that is. Because you were so fond of the old family. And of course Marjory was devoted to all that old stuff."

"No, indeed!" said Hepburn, blushing and stumbling in his words; "indeed you misunderstand me. I admire the ruin for itself, and I like it for its associations, without— Of course I have the highest respect for Miss Heriot."

"Oh yes, indeed—the highest respect! I like that!" said Mrs. Charles. "I wonder what Marjory would say if she heard you? Oh, yes, even if you did not blush and look so conscious, we have heard all about it, Mr. Hepburn. When is it to be? And I wonder if she likes you being here so much? If I were in her place I shouldn't, I tell you frankly. If I were in her place——"

"Pray don't speak so," cried poor Hepburn, really distressed. "I am not so fortunate as to be able to hope that Miss Heriot takes any interest in what I do. Very much the reverse. She has always been like the moon and the stars, quite above my sphere."

"Oh, you are a great deal too humble," said Matilda, quite excited with this congenial subject, "but you ought not to come here so much if you want to please Marjory. I am sure she hates *me*. That sort of superior solemn kind of woman always hates us little things. Perhaps because the gentlemen like us," Mrs. Charles added, with a momentary giggle. Then remembering her *rôle*, "Dear, dear," she said, with a sigh, "to think I should talk such nonsense! as if what gentlemen thought mattered any more to me."

Hepburn could not but press gently to his side the soft little hand that rested on his arm. How charming her simplicity was, her naturalness, the light-heartedness of her youth cropping up in spite of her grief!

"I hope, however," he said, "that you do not think us quite unworthy of consideration—for that would be hard, very hard upon us."

"Oh, no," said Matilda, "indeed I always say frankly that I like gentlemen's society much the best. Women are so jealous of you, and so nasty

in their ways. I don't pretend to be very clever, but I do like to be with some one who is clever. And one feels at once the superiority when one hears gentlemen talk. It is so different from our chitter-chatter. Isn't it now? I like to have some one I can look up to," said the woman, who was a fool, looking up, with all the skill of her folly, into the face of the foolish young man who was intellectual. Oh, poor Johnnie! He had a dim notion in some corner of his mind that what she said was silly, and yet he was ready to fall down at her feet and worship her. The silliness quite achieved his downfall. He had been wavering, all but conquered; but now the final *coup* was given to him. He murmured something in sudden delirium, he did not quite know what. Neither did Matilda know what it was; but she knew that she might henceforward guide him at her pleasure through all the ways of imbecility. She had snatched him from Marjory, too, which was a great addition to the pleasure. Marjory was clever, and Verna was clever; but here was something they could not do.

The conversation was interrupted at this beatific moment by the appearance of Verna, important and full of business as usual.

"Dr. Murray is in the drawing-room," she said, "and you must come and see him, Matty. They are the first people that have done more than leave cards; and you would not see them when they called last time. He is the clergyman. You must come now."

"Clergyman? I suppose you mean the Scotch Minister," said Matilda. "Why should I go? I have nothing to do with him. You don't suppose I shall go to his miserable old conventicle. Go and see him yourself, Verna. You understand that sort of people. I am engaged; am not I engaged, Mr. Hepburn?" she said, smiling upon her new slave. But Johnnie was not destitute of the prejudices of a man born in the East Neuk.

"Don't you think you could see him?" he asked with hesitation. "He is a man of some distinction. He is a very well-known man, and he was a great friend of Mr. Heriot's—"

"Oh, one never will hear an end of the old

family," said Matilda, "but if he is such a great person I suppose I must go. I always thought a Scotch Minister was a kind of Dissenter—oh, do tell me, Mr. Hepburn!—just for the poor people, a sort of man that would not take the liberty of calling. I am so ignorant, don't be disgusted. I know I am silly; but I will pay such attention to what you say."

Johnnie led her in, and expounded to her how matters stood. He gave her a sketch of Scotch ecclesiastical history, which was quite brilliant, so eager was he to make himself understood; and Mrs. Charles clung to his arm, and looked up at him, and said "Yes!" with little notes of admiration. What a quick pupil she was! he thought. Needless to add that Matilda was just as wise at the end as at the beginning, and, in short, paid not the slightest attention. It was thus that they entered the drawing-room. Verna followed closely behind. When Matilda appealed so sweetly to her companion, "Am not I engaged, Mr. Hepburn?" a thrill of alarm had passed through Verna's soul. Could it be possible that the word meant more than met

the ear? Had the flirtation which Verna had encouraged, by way of diverting Matilda and keeping her occupied, already come to a serious issue? It was incredible. Charlie was not yet six months dead, poor fellow; but the sister, who knew Matty, was alarmed, and followed closely, with all her senses about her, watching and listening. A mixture of wonder, admiration, contempt, and partial envy, filled her mind. Nobody knew so well as she what Matilda was; to think that any man should be such a fool! Verna, it must be remembered, used very plain expressions. And yet she admired her sister for this one thing which she could do, and which Verna herself could not do. She admired, and wondered, and half envied. How did she do it? And how was it that other people could not do it? And oh! what a fool the man was!

CHAPTER II.

MRS. MURRAY was standing in the middle of the drawing-room in a state of dismay. The change which had come over it was greater than the actual transformation. One soul had gone out of the place, and another, a totally different soul, had come in. I suppose if this could be done with our bodies, we should cease to recognise even those familiar garments of flesh and blood. The furniture was the same, the old walls were the same, and yet the place was different. The Minister had found on the table, spread out to invite attention, Verna's new plan, made out in very bright colours, which caught the eye—and was reading to his wife the words "new wing,

on the site of old tower," with a tone of consternation impossible to reproduce. The good people had come with friendly meaning to do what they could for the two young strangers, whom they were sorry for as having been thus suddenly thrown into a new country without any knowledge of its habits and traditions.

"Depend upon it, my dear, it is chiefly *gaucherée*," Dr. Murray had said, with a very broad accent on the last syllable. "Half of what is called rudeness is just shyness—and so it must have been in this case."

The excellent Doctor said this as a compliment to Mrs. Charles's beauty, which precluded the idea of impertinence on her part. Mrs. Murray had not seen Mrs. Charles, and therefore was unaffected by her beauty, but she accepted the suggestion as possible. Marjory was no doubt hasty, and Miss Jean crabbed, and very likely "the young women at Pitcomlie" were only *gauches* — not intentionally disagreeable. But when Matilda entered, leaning on young Hepburn's arm, Mrs. Murray was confounded. Johnnie Hepburn! he whose hopeless devotion

to Marjory had been known over all the country—who had written verses under so thin a disguise that no one could possibly mistake it, to her, in the "Fifeshire Journal"—who had tormented all her friends with offers of service, and who finally had come here upon Marjory's business a messenger from her! Matilda did not relinquish his arm till she had reached the centre of the room, when she performed a curtsey to her guests.

"Excuse me if I put up my feet," she said, as she placed herself on a sofa. The Minister's wife could do nothing but sit and look at her, so entirely was she taken by surprise. Naturally it was Dr. Murray, as the most important person, who spoke first.

"I hope you have quite recovered from the fatigues of your journey, Mrs. Charles Heriot?" he said. "Sad as it was, and sore as this home-coming must have been, I hope you have now settled down. It is a favourable time of year for this part of the country, and I may say, under Providence, that it's a very good season. We have had more bright weather than

ordinary, and everything is looking very well. I hope you are beginning to like your new home?"

"Yes, I suppose it has been good weather for Scotland; but not at all like what we have been used to. I think sometimes I shall die of the cold," and she muffled herself closely in the shawl which she had thrown off on coming in, "and the children feel it so very much."

"Oh, but it's new life to the children, my dear! You'll soon find that," cried good Mrs. Murray, "though yours are very young to be sure. My eldest daughter's children have just come to the Manse, from the Bombay Presidency. Poor things, they were white enough and miserable enough when they came, but since then they have flourished every day."

"Oh, indeed," said Matilda, with a stare; "but my children have always been taken such care of; and they feel the cold very much."

As if our bairns were not well taken care of! Mrs. Murray said to herself, and she was wroth in her heart, and concluded that this was more

than *gaucheréé*, whatever the Doctor might say. The Doctor was not quite so easily discouraged.

"When you have been here a little longer," he said, "and have got used to our ways, you will find it a pleasant neighbourhood—a very pleasant neighbourhood. St. Andrews is not too far for a drive, and there are a great many very agreeable families—"

"Oh, I shall never care for the Fifeshire society. They must be so stiff and so dry," said Matilda; "and then they are all such friends of the old family, and set against us—"

"My sister means," said Verna, "that people have not been very nice since we came. We have had a great many cards, but nobody has really paid us a visit, except yourselves."

"They would think she was seeing nobody," said Mrs. Murray, softly, "and very natural;" but once more the Doctor made himself the spokesman, drowning the gentle voice of his wife.

"I have always heard," he said, "that there was a natural stiffness about our Scotch manners;

but Mrs. Charles may be assured, and I take it upon me to say so, though I'm not a rash man by nature, that all that will soon disappear before her face. I hope it was not impertinent to look at the plans on the table. They are, perhaps, for some house in England?"

"Oh, no, indeed, for this house," cried Verna, delighted. "This drawing-room, you see, is not much of a room, and that horrible old ruin close to us does so frighten my sister."

"Frighten her! why should it frighten her?" cried Mrs. Murray. "You're not meaning the old house?"

She turned to Hepburn with a look of dismayed inquiry, and he dared not say anything. How could he say a word that would cross that beautiful sensitive creature? but at the same time he had the fear of ridicule before him, and of the two people both looking at him, before whom he did not wish to show how foolish he was. He compromised, and fell between two stools, as was natural.

"Mrs. Charles has taken a—repugnance to it. I have been telling her it was on a mistaken

idea. Snakes and scorpions don't exist in ruins here. That is why she is nervous," faltered Hepburn.

"Oh you naughty Mr. Hepburn," cried Matilda; "you know you confessed you did not care a bit about the ruin, except for——. But I will not tell upon you—you confessed it was nothing but association; and as I never associated with anybody here——"

Dr. Murray was too much absorbed to notice this last speech; he was solemn, and not to be trifled with.

"Do you know, Madam," he said, "that this is a very serious thing you are thinking of doing, a very serious thing indeed. Father and son have preserved the old house of Pitcomlie as long as I can remember. It was habitable in my young days—"

"That's true," said Mrs. Murray. "When I came here a bride, the old Laird—not the late Mr. Heriot, but his father, who died soon after—led me on his own arm to the best room, that was over the great door. The old lady of Pitcomlie was dead, and he had no woman-person, except

the servants, in his house. It was a very handsome room, and but for its old age it's that still; and I would do a great deal myself before I would see it pulled down."

"I assure you," said Verna, "there is no other way of doing—and then to us, as my sister says, it has no associations; besides, it is not beautiful, and of no use; and it is there the new wing must be built."

"Does Mr. Charles know?" asked the Doctor solemnly.

"Oh, please don't talk of Mr. Charles!" cried Matilda, vaguely perceiving that her side was having the worst, and beginning to cry; "it reminds me so of my poor dear Charlie. I cannot bear to hear the name. Please call him old Mr. Heriot, or something. When I think how I am left alone to struggle with everything, and poor, poor dear Charlie, who never would let the wind blow upon me! Please don't talk of the old man by his name—please!"

Mrs. Murray's kind eyes were quite moistened by this appeal.

"No, my dear!" she said soothingly; "no, my

dear! Well, well do I know the feeling; and when I mind that dear boy—what a fine fellow he was—just the age of my Robert! Many and many a time I have held him in my arms. Oh, my dear, I beg your pardon!" cried the kind old woman, rising—with the tears dropping from her eyes, to kiss the young widow on her sofa. Matilda did not know what compunctions were expressed in this caress; and, to tell the truth, she submitted with a very bad grace to the salute, which she rather thought was a piece of presumptuous familiarity on the part of the Minister's wife towards herself, a lady of property. The Doctor, however, this time resisted the beauty and the tears, and was less easily moved than his wife proved herself. Beauty is a fine thing, and tears are touching; but an assault upon property —property which, to a certain extent, is national, the antiquities which give importance to a parish—is not to be permitted even on such considerations. Dr. Murray was alarmed. If this was done in the green tree, what would be done in the dry? The Heriots of Pitcomlie were the chief heritors in the parish; and what if they should

take upon them to interfere with the church or churchyard?

"I am sorry," he said stiffly, "to have roused such very painful but natural feelings. I will endeavour to be more guarded again; but what I would ask is, does he—of whom we speak—know about this proceeding—or rather, I should say, this intention on your part? If he does not, I fear it would be my duty to tell him—"

"Could he do anything to us? he has no right," cried Verna, "to interefere."

"I hope he could; I hope he has!" said the Doctor. "He is joint guardian with the mother; and it will be my duty to let him know."

"I will not have old Mr. Heriot interfering!" cried Matilda. "He has nothing to do with us. Poor Charlie put him in his will only out of compliment—"

"Hush!" said Verna softly, giving her a look; "do you think really he would mind? Do you know I thought they would have been sure to do it themselves, but for money, or something? I hear that old Mr. Heriot was for ever paying his eldest son's debts; and I thought, probably, that

was the reason why the ruins were allowed to stand. But if you are sure he would object, why then I will put all the plans aside," said Verna magnanimously; "and wait until he comes."

"Why, Verna, your heart was set on it!" cried her sister.

"Not so much set on that as on keeping right with the other guardian, and keeping you right!" said the magnanimous Verna, whose eyes sparkled with resolution. Dr. Murray was somewhat stiff in his response, but still he was very laudatory; and Verna bowed and smiled, and accepted his praises.

"It is better in every way to take no rash step," said the Doctor; "if by any accident—which Heaven forbid—the lands should pass to another heir—"

"How could that be?" said Verna, suddenly turning pale to her very lips. It did not occur to her that the fragile lives of her little nephews were the slight threads that bound her to this kingdom, which she had been assuming should be hers for life. A sudden precipice seemed to

open at her feet; she stood aghast for the moment, gazing at him with eyes dilating, and pale cheeks. Then she recovered herself, and said hastily, glancing at Matilda: "Ah, I understand! but you should not suggest such a thing before their mother;" and placed her hand upon her beating heart.

"It is a thing that must always be taken into consideration," said Dr. Murray. "You forget, my dear young lady, that one in a succession is quite different from the possessor of independent property, which, perhaps, he has acquired for himself; he can alienate nothing, and he has no right to destroy anything. The next heir—"

"Oh, please," cried Verna, with unaffected alarm, raising her hands in an attitude of supplication; "don't make me unhappy with your next heir! I shall do nothing more—indeed I shan't—till Mr. Charles comes. It was not my sister; it was I who wanted it. Please, please don't say any more!"

But even after the visitors were gone, Verna could not shake off this uncomfortable impression. She went about all day with the words

echoing through her head, and filling her with a hundred fancies. As it happened, both the children were ailing with some innocent baby-ailment. Verna went to look at them a dozen times in the course of the evening; she felt their foreheads and their pulses, and gave them their medecine with her own hands. Their father and uncle, both vigorous young men, had been cut off within a few weeks of each other; and why should these tiny children escape the dangers to which so many stronger people succumbed? The next heir! What loss, what misery and ruin, was in the suggestion! The poor little babies themselves and their mother seemed to Verna to have but a secondary part in it; but to herself, it would be destruction—an end of all her hopes—at once of the actual and of the ideal. She put the plans in the fire that very night with heroic resolution, and blotted out from her mind those dreams of a great drawing-room, and even of a snug bed-chamber, sheltered from all the winds, in which she had indulged. These were glorious visions, but they were not worth the risking of her power and influence. She said to herself that she knew

when to draw back, as well as when to advance, and spoke of them no more.

Meanwhile young Hepburn, much against his will, had felt that decorum bound him to take his departure when the Murrays did; and notwithstanding various signs from Matilda, propriety prevailed. He walked down towards Comlie with the Minister and his wife; and, as usual in such cases, his virtue was very indifferently rewarded.

"I hear you are a great deal at Pitcomlie, Mr. Hepburn," Mrs. Murray said, looking at him.

She had never addressed him so formally before. That painful attempt to convert Johnnie into John, which we have all of us made when the Johnnies of our acquaintance grew into men, had been her greatest effort hitherto; but now she looked him in the face with a disapproval which there could be no mistake about; and he felt the chill, being highly sympathetic and susceptible to all the risings and fallings of the spiritual thermometer.

"Yes," he said, uneasily; annoyed to find

himself blush, and with a desperate attempt at carelessness. "Sometimes I can do little things for them; they don't know anybody, nor the ways of the country—"

"That is very well seen," said Mrs. Murray, with emphasis; "but Mrs. Charles is very pretty," she added; "a bonnie creature! and that goes further than anything else with some folk. Men are so easily led away," she went on, reflectively; "even my old Doctor, that is a very wise man in his generation, and should know better—"

"What are you saying about me, Mary?"

"I was saying you were wiser than most men, Doctor," said the Minister's wife, "and yet not so wise but what you are led away by a bonnie face, like other men."

"It is not, however, the bonnie face in this instance," said Hepburn, feeling his mind much lightened by being united with the Doctor in a broad and general accusation. "It is the sad position, the melancholy circumstances. To see so young a creature left solitary; arriving

among strangers, with little children dependent on her, and no one to sustain her—"

Mrs. Murray was too tender-hearted to resist the pathos of this picture.

"And that's true!" she said; "that's true. Poor thing! She may be a little carried away by her new position; but I cannot think she's without feeling. No, she's not without feeling. What she said about old Mr. Charles was very true."

"That is all very well," said the Doctor; "but we cannot allow such proceedings as these young women contemplate—not if I had to appeal myself for an interdict to the Court of Session. An admirable specimen of old domestic architecture, really in very good preservation, though the roof is gone in some places—and fully described in my account of the parish. No, no; it will never do. If you have any influence with them, John (the Doctor had never said Johnnie in his life), you should let them know seriously that this kind of thing is quite out of character—quite out of character! I have always defended the mother's rights in the

way of guardianship; but an attempt like this makes me doubt."

"Well, Doctor, I must say I wonder at you," said Mrs. Murray; "because a young woman does not understand your domestic architecture, as you call it, you begin to doubt whether she should have the care of her own bairns! I cannot see the connection."

"Perhaps not, perhaps not, my dear," said Dr. Murray; "but it's very reasonable, for all that."

Hepburn felt with great secret content that he had escaped in the midst of this discussion, and he came boldly to a pause at the next corner, to take leave of his companions. But he was not so safe as he supposed.

"I am going to write to St. Andrews to-day," said Mrs. Murray, as she gave him her hand. "I will tell Marjory that you are very kind to Mrs. Charles, and go to see her every day. It is very kind, though it is, perhaps, a little dangerous; but then, to be sure, you have a great deal of idle time on your hands."

This shot was double, hitting both ways, and

sent the unfortunate young man away in a fever of indignation, suppressed wrath, and uneasiness. There could be no doubt that he had a great deal of spare time on his hands; but few people like to be told this. And he was not anxious that Marjory should be made aware of his daily devotions at Pitcomlie. He did not return there, as he had intended to do, but took a long walk in a contrary direction, and reflected with much annoyance upon this unlucky encounter, and all the comments of which he would be the object.

"After all, I have a right to go where I please," he said to himself—which was as true as anything could be, yet did not reveal a comfortable state of mind. "And I do not know how they could get on without me," he added, also to himself, a whole hour after, with a gleam of complacency in the midst of his uneasiness. But he was not prepared to give up his allegiance to Marjory, or to meet again even in imagination the smile with which she had recognised his first infidelity. He wanted still, like so many other people, to keep both delights,

his ideal and his foolish fancy, both together. Indeed, it may be said that Mrs. Murray's threat had as serious an effect upon Johnnie Hepburn as that other appalling threat of another heir had upon Verna. Both of them felt, with a thrill of alarm, that their position was an assailable—nay, a dangerous—one, and that it was impossible to tell what an hour might bring forth. And both of them were moved instantaneously to the adoption of a more prudent course. Verna sacrificed her plans for the new wing, and Johnnie sacrificed the enervating delight of another hour's philandering. Thus they propitiated Fate; which, however, seldom accepts such sacrifices. The chief sufferer by these prudential measures was Matilda, who, being impervious at once to reason and to sentiment, did not understand her sister, and was much annoyed by the withdrawal of her attendant, who amused her, if nothing more. She was the person really sacrificed, and that without seeing any reason for it. She yawned through the afternoon, until benign Providence sent her a soft slumber, which carried her through the

time till dinner; and certainly it was hard, though natural, that she, the only one who had no responsibility, should thus be made the principal victim.

CHAPTER III.

MARJORY'S letter was brought to Fanshawe before he had left his room in the morning. This room was in the Albany, and though a most comfortable chamber, was not luxurious, nor of a character to have called forth the strictures of any reasonable Mentor. There were no opera-dancers on the walls. Fanshawe had long got over the period of artistic taste which delights in opera-dancers, if indeed he had ever gone through it. The few prints on his walls were good. To be sure there was a racehorse or two, but of these, of late days, he had the grace to be ashamed; and over his mantel-piece he had quite lately hung a print of one of

Raphael's Madonnas, in which he thought he saw a resemblance to Marjory. It was a fantastic resemblance, wholly existing in the imagination of the beholder; but such compliments of the heart have been paid before now even to plain women, and Marjory was not plain. It seemed to Fanshawe—to carry out the fantastical character of the idea—that it was only in his best moments that he saw this likeness. Sometimes he looked for it vainly, and called himself a fool to have entertained such a notion; but at other times it would shine out upon him, filling him with a kind of heavenly pleasure — that pleasure which glows in a man's heart, and makes him feel his own nature exalted in a consciousness of the excellence of his love. Marjory's little notes were very rare delights, and this all the more so for being utterly unexpected. He had written to her a long letter only two days before, and he had expected no reply. Was it possible that this could be the answer? The question was all the more interesting to him because he had delicately implied in his letter an inclination to visit St. Andrews. He had heard so much

of that ancient borough; he had been quite excited by the account some of his friends had given him (he said) of the charms of the place; and London was empty, void, null, and unprofitable; he had never seen it so vacant, so uninteresting; he could not believe that he had ever found any pleasure in such a mental and moral desert. So he wrote, not without a certain eloquence. The centre of the world had shifted; it was no longer in London, but in St. Andrews; this, however, though he implied it, he did not say. And to receive so rapid an answer seemed to him a fortunate sign. He jumped out of bed in haste, and clothed himself, that he might read it with due respect. But soon the vague delight of anticipation on his face changed into something more serious. Marjory's note was singularly different from the diffuse and much implying epistles which he was in the constant habit of addressing to her. In this there was not a word more than was absolutely necessary. It ran as follows:—

"I have made a discovery which is of the very

deepest importance to us, and to the memory of my poor brother Tom, who was your friend. I have no right to ask your help, but I do, knowing you will not refuse me. Come to me, I beg of you, for Tom's sake. I write in great haste to save the post. Oh, Mr. Fanshawe, come!

"M. H. H."

Across this brief letter was written, very much blotted, a single line. "I have found——" He made out as much as this, but the last letters were so blotted that he could not decipher them. It looked like a name. Whom had she found? or what could have happened to excite her so? But he scarcely paused to ask himself these questions. He was too late for the day mail to Scotland—how he cursed himself for his indolence!—and had to wait the whole day through till the evening. At one time he thought of telegraphing to her; but there lingered a hope in Fanshawe's mind that perhaps she had sent for him of her own impulse, and that "everybody" was not in the secret, a hope which he loved to cherish. He waited accordingly, most drearily,

trying to get through the time as he best could, and finding it drag so that the day seemed to him as long as all the preceding year. He went from one club to another, by way of getting through the time; he went and made all sorts of ridiculous purchases; he looked at his watch about a million times; indeed, he kept dragging it in and out of his pocket, and watching the slow fluctuations of light in the afternoon, like a man possessed by one sole idea—which was a perpetual calculation how soon it would be nine o'clock.

Fanshawe arrived next day at St. Andrews, with a mist of excitement about him, through which he seemed to see but dimly the actual features of the place. He watched the long lines of the Links flying past the windows of the railway carriage, as he had seen all the intermediate plains and hills of the Scotch border and Midland counties since daybreak, with a strange sense that he himself was making no progress, but that they were rushing past and away from him. When he saw at last the group of spires which ended those long lines of grass, and stepped out

upon ground which did not fly under his foot, it was as if he had dropped from the clouds into some mystic country which could not but bring him the uttermost weal or woe, yet was unknown to him as fairyland. He felt a tremour in his very frame as he stepped into that strange world, where it seemed impossible to him to conceive of the common accidents of every day, where there could be nothing, he felt, but great emotions, passions, excitement—events which he could not foresee, changes which he dared not anticipate. To fall into the ordinary stream of people arriving at a railway, calmed him down to some extent, and he set out to walk into the town without any self-betrayal. But he had not gone far before he saw a slight tall figure, clothed in black, detaching itself from the groups on the Links, and coming towards him with a step and bearing which he could not mistake. He stood still, restraining himself with difficulty from the cry of joy that seemed ready to burst from his lips. They say that love is but an accident in a man's life, while it is everything in a woman's; but it would be nearer the truth to say that a

man's absorption in this dream cannot last, while a woman's may. Nothing could be more absolute than Fanshawe's absorption at this moment in thought of the woman thus approaching him. Adam, when he saw Eve, the only human companion for him, could not have been more entirely bound and limited to the one being. This man saw nothing else, heard nothing else, felt nothing else in heaven or earth. He had asked himself sometimes whether he was at all, what is called, in love with Marjory Hay-Heriot. He asked himself no questions now. He did not care for what she was going to tell him, for what her business was, for the discovery affecting her family, for his friend's memory, or anything else. He felt, saw, heard nothing but her. He did not seem even to have strength enough in himself to go to meet her. The very sight of her had caught him as in a trance of rapture. He felt that he could have wept over the hand she held out to him, like a baby, and mumbled it like an idol-worshipper. That he did neither, but only grasped it, and gazed at her with eyes full of speechless joy, seemed to

him the most wonderful power of self-control. But Marjory's eagerness was of a very different kind. As always, one of the two was at a disadvantage. He thought first and only of her; she thought of a great many other things, and then finally of him. Common consent allots this state of feeling to the man, but common consent is often wrong. It depends upon which of the two, man or woman, is the most deeply in earnest. "*L'un qui se laisse aimer*" is not always of the masculine gender, as a great many people know.

Marjory came up to him with an eagerness and satisfaction which would have been—oh! how delightful—had there not been other causes for it. She held out her hand to him, and then took his arm as if he had been her—brother. Yes, a great deal too much as if he had been her brother; but let that pass; it was very pleasant all the same, and then she said,

"How good of you to come! but I knew you would come. I felt myself safe in appealing to you."

She had thought then of appealing to some

one else! This was not satisfactory; but Fanshawe was too happy at that moment to insist upon having everything his own way.

"Could there be any question about that?" he said, smiling at her with that look of imbecile emotion which no woman can mistake. Marjory, however, was too deeply absorbed with her own private anxieties to pay much heed to his looks. She said nothing more that could give him an opening for the disclosure of any personal feeling; but rushed into her story at once, a proceeding which was flattering, yet unsatisfactory. It was with an effort that he brought himself to attend. Even though it was the voice which most interested him in the world which spoke, herself, her presence, the sensation of her vicinity, the glimpse of a new world about him—a world entirely identified with her, a new scene of which he knew nothing save through her, strange people passing who sent her greetings from over the way, smiles as she passed them—did so entirely occupy and bewilder the new-comer, that it cost him as serious an effort as he had ever made in his life to understand what Marjory

was saying to him, or even to listen to what she said. She told him such a story as might have caught the ear of any man capable of listening, but yet somehow it did not catch Fanshawe's. Her hand on his arm, her head bent forward, so much more eagerly than he had ever seen it before, even the fall of her dress, the very hanging sleeve that touched him, the veil that once fluttered across his face, all and every one of these things dissipated his mind. He had no intellect at all to speak of at that moment, and hers was in the liveliest action. By moments, a half comic sense of his incapacity to come up to her requirements seized upon him. He grew rueful and humble as he was compelled over and over again to ask for new explanations.

"Forgive me, I did not quite catch what you said. Will you tell me that again, Miss Heriot? I am stupid. I did not quite make out—"

After a great many of these interruptions, Marjory began to feel a little check upon her enthusiasm, and to grow chilled in her warm expectation of sympathy.

"I fear I am making too great a call upon you," she said coldly, drawing back with a perceptible diminution of warmth; and there can be no doubt that for that moment the accusations against Fanshawe which she had opposed so warmly rushed back upon her mind all at once, though with a generous effort she thrust them away from her. The light failed all in a moment out of her eager upturned face, her head returned to its ordinary pose of quiet and proud decorum, something changed even in the touch with which her hand held his arm. Fanshawe woke up to this with sudden alarm. He roused himself in a moment from the haze and torpor of happiness in which he had not known what he was doing—or rather he leapt out of it suddenly, startled by the sense that his happiness, if he did not rouse himself, might slip out of his hands.

"You find me very stupid?" he said, "I am sure you must think so; but I have some excuses I cannot tell you of—and there is one that I can tell you; I have been travelling all night."

"To be sure, I should have thought of that," said Marjory, but she did not resume her former tone; and poor Fanshawe, knowing it was so different a reason which had made him dull of comprehension, had to accept the excuse which he had given for himself, of being weary, though he felt it the most miserable of excuses. He had to put up with it, though he felt that it gave her quite a false impression of him, and brought him low in her eyes, a thing which people are compelled to do often, yet which is always hard. They walked on together accordingly. Marjory, with a little impatient sigh of submission, giving up her great subject for the moment; and talked of the journey and its fatigues, and the time occupied, and what the traveller thought of the country he had passed through, &c., &c. He was perfectly able to understand whatever she said to him now; fully roused up, with his intellect restored to him, and all his senses. But she was courteously, gently silent, accepting what he chose to say to her—to the poor wretch's infinite misery and confusion, need it be said?

Mr. Charles caught a glimpse of them from the window of the club. He was sitting quietly discussing a match; but when he saw this sudden apparition, he started up and went to the window.

"Bless me! that's very like Fanshawe," he said to himself; and after a long gaze, which assured him that it was Fanshawe, and no one else, he retired, much perplexed, to his chair, and henceforward left the most exciting game that had been played for years to be discussed by the other speakers. "It's not that I have any objection to him personally," Mr. Charles mused, not knowing what to make of it; and then he asked himself what it was he had heard of Fanshawe?—that he drank, or gambled, or something? What was it? Thus a lively scandal had crept up in Mr. Charles's mind by means of the very simple and passive one promulgated by Mr. Seton. He was much troubled. If Marjory should really show a liking for one whose reputation was compromised in any such way, what was he, her uncle and guardian, to do? To be sure, she was old enough to judge

for herself, which was a great relief to his mind; and the chances were very strong that she would prefer her own opinion to his, in any circumstances. But still Mr. Charles saw very stormy waters before him, on the supposition that Marjory liked Fanshawe, and that Fanshawe gambled or drank. He took his way home in an anxious state of mind, and found that his fears were so far justified. Mr. Fanshawe had sent his bag to the "Royal," but he had walked across with Miss Heriot to dinner. He was very conciliatory, asking many questions about golf, and doing his very best to make himself agreeable. If he had not been such a faulty person, he would have been a great acquisition to the little party. But then, Mr. Charles asked himself, was it right to countenance the introduction into Marjory's society of a man who gambled or drank? What would Miss Jean say? He felt himself so weak in this respect, that he instinctively resorted to her judgment, as the only standard he knew of. If it was on Marjory's account (and what more likely?) that Fanshawe had come—and if Marjory liked

him, what then was Mr. Charles to do? He had not (he said to himself) a father's authority; he would not for the world make the girl unhappy; and yet how far would this be from marrying her well? "Confound marrying!" Mr. Charles said, with unusual emphasis, when he found himself left alone after dinner—the unexpected, and, so far as he knew, uninvited guest having left him "to join the ladies," at a very early period. He had never married himself; and Marjory was very well off, and had everything her own way—far more, probably, than she would have with a husband. If she did anything to change this beatific state of affairs, the blame would be on her own head. Mr. Charles washed his hands of it for his part. But yet he could not wash his hands of Marjory, nor of Miss Jean and her requirements; and there never was old bachelor disposed to a quiet life, yet anxious to please everybody, whose mind was more painfully bewildered and held in suspense.

Fanshawe hastened to the drawing-room, more anxious to regain his lost ground than even

to conciliate the uncle, though that, too, seemed to him very necessary. He found Marjory seated in her usual place in the deep, narrow window, with a background made up of pale sky, a gleam of deeper-coloured blue, which was the sea, and a pale shaft of the ruin between, as graceful and light as Gothic art could make it. Her profile was marked out against these deepening tones of blue, and the grey time-bleached canopy work of the old Cathedral enclosed it like the picture of a saint. This was how he felt it, being, as the reader perceives, in an excited and exalted condition of mind; for in reality, Marjory was neither like a Saint nor a Madonna, being too human, too modern a woman for any abstractions. But if men in love did not fancy such things, what would become of poetry? He drew a chair to her side, approaching as near as he dared venture, or rather as near as he could; for little Milly, her sister's shadow, sat on her footstool with her golden locks in a glory round her, leaning upon Marjory's lap, and dividing her from all newcomers.

"I am not so stupid as I seem," said Fanahawe. "I have my wits about me now. Will you tell me all about it again?"

"Not all," said Marjory, laying her hand upon little Milly's head. Poor little Milly! She had been in the highest spirits about Fanshawe's arrival; and the wretch felt her so dreadfully in his way! He restrained his impatience, however, as he best could, with a sigh which roused a certain sense of the humour of the situation in Marjory's mind.

"I hope you have quite recovered from your fatigue," she said.

"Do not be too hard upon me," said poor Fanshawe. "It was not fatigue. My head was turned with being here, and seeing you again. But tell me, now? I have shaken myself up, and come back to ordinary life. We are still mortal; we have to tie white ties, and dine on fish and mutton, as if we were on common unenchanted soil, and not in Fife at all; therefore, I am capable now of listening and understanding. Tell me as much as you can."

This speech roused Marjory to a certain

girlish levity, notwithstanding the seriousness of the situation.

"It is a new thing to hear Fife spoken of as if it could be enchanted soil," she said, with a smile, which felt to Fanshawe like a stray ray of sunshine. And then her face grew graver, like that of the Virgin Mother in his picture. "All I have to say is—about *her*," she added, her voice sinking almost into a whisper; so low as to tantalize Milly, who was listening with all her ears.

"About whom?"

"You did not understand me? I feared so, Mr. Fanshawe, I know now what poor Tom meant when he was dying, when he thought he had told me. I have found Isabell!"

CHAPTER IV.

"AGNES, this gentleman was one of my brother's friends; you may say everything to him that you have said to me."

This Marjory said in her own drawing-room in St. Andrews, where she stood between Fanshawe and the homely stranger, who had attracted so much of her attention and curiosity before she knew why it was. The girl's appearance was unchanged; she stood with a certain suppressed defiance still in her aspect, before the lady whom she had distrusted, and whom even now she felt disposed to approach with caution. She was Isabell's sister, but she was not like Isabell. The refinement and grace of the other were alto-

gether wanting to her; she was in perfect keeping with her homely dress, her rustic manners—even the air of half-irritated, half-distressed antagonism with which she looked at her novel companions. Agnes Jeffery was in no way superior to her condition, except in so far as she was superior to all conditions in the force of a vigorous and loyal nature; she looked from one to the other with doubtful eyes.

"You may ken the gentleman, Miss Heriot, but I don't; I dinna feel justified in disclosin' the affairs of my folk to every new person that may come in. It's no our way; maybe when folk are more frank, and tell everything, it's easier for them; but it's no our way."

"You trusted me," said Marjory; "and this gentleman is as I am" (she did not think of the meaning that might be put upon her words—not at least till long afterwards, when they filled her with confusion; but Fanshawe did, being more interested in these words than in any revelation the stranger could make to him). "He saw my poor brother Tom die; he heard him—as I told you—make an effort to reveal all this to me; he

has done everything for us, and he will help us now. You may tell him as you told me."

"Is he anything to you?" said Agnes gravely, searching Marjory's face with her eyes.

And that young woman, utterly disconcerted, caught another glance at the same moment—a look which was full of the most wistful entreaty, yet just touched with fun, and an involuntary sense of all that was laughable in the question. Fanshawe felt as if life and death were involved for him in the reply; and yet he could not quench that twinkle of mischievous consciousness, which poor Marjory felt, too, notwithstanding the gravity of all the surrounding circumstances, and the solemnity of the question. Her eyes fell before the double look fixed upon her; her face flushed deeply; she cleared her throat, and faltered in uttermost confusion. It required all his anxiety, supplemented by all his self-control, to keep down the laugh which almost mastered Fanshawe's muscles and faculties. If he had laughed, woe betide him; for in moments of emotion, no one likes the idea of being laughed at; and Marjory's temper was something less than

angelic. She conquered herself with an effort, and answered at last steadily.

"Mr. Fanshawe is my friend," she said; "he is the friend of the family; he is (this Marjory said proudly, remembering Seton's report of him, remembering Mr. Charles, and bearing her testimony with a certain consciousness of doing something to set him right with the world), one of those men who will work and suffer, if need be, for their friends—as you have worked and suffered, Agnes. He will not weigh what is enough or too much to do. Of all my friends, and we have many, he was the only one whom I felt I could appeal to—who would pause at nothing. Is that enough for you? It ought to be; for it is what you have done yourself."

Agnes looked at him with growing surprise, and at Marjory's excitement, which reflected itself in Fanshawe's astonished face. The girl divined, as Marjory herself did not, that he was bewildered, abashed, even humbled by this praise. He stole round to her side, and took her hand and kissed it humbly.

"What can I have done to make you say

this?" he cried; "how have I deceived you? I did not mean it. I have done nothing to deserve this."

The girl's eyes were very sharp, enlightened by the habit of observing others. And she was not sympathetic enough to care for the natural emotion which she was clever enough to perceive. She said with that disregard for them, as soon as she was herself satisfied, which is common to the uncultivated mind:

"Miss Heriot, I'll ask no more questions. If you'll sit down, and let me speak, I'll tell you all there is to tell. Maybe I would not have come had I known what you wanted; but I'll tell you now."

This brought the others to a very abrupt stop. Fanshawe withdrew, feeling himself somewhat snubbed, if truth must be told, and in a state of mind—in respect to this girl and her sister—very different from the attitude of enthusiastic devotion in which Marjory had depicted him. But he listened, nevertheless, feeling himself pledged to an interest which was more deep than he really felt. What was Tom Heriot to him? But

Marjory was everything; therefore he made an effort, and threw all his attention into the new tale.

"I take it for granted," said Agnes, with that *brusque* tone of suppressed excitement, sometimes scantly courteous, which often characterizes the Scotch peasant, "that you have told the gentleman all that my poor Bell told you; she did not do it with my will; but since it's done, and she's called in the help of others to right her, instead of her ain folk, I have no further call to resist. You have told the gentleman how they were married—"

"Married!" said Fanshawe, with a slight start.

"What did you think else?" said the girl, turning upon him with sudden defiance. "Did you think it was a light lass, of no account, that you were to hear of? for if sae, I'll go away and trouble you no further. It is clear that you have not been prepared to hear of my sister Bell."

"Agnes, you must not be so hasty," said Marjory, humbly. "Mr. Fanshawe—I told you —have you forgotten—last night—"

Fanshawe had not forgotten last night, and was not likely to forget it; but he had, it must be allowed, received the information given him with less seriousness than it deserved. He had to make the humblest and most abject apologies to both of the somewhat stern judges before whom he stood—Marjory, who was abashed by the dullness of her pupil, and Agnes who was all in arms. After this interruption, however, he was on his guard, and the narrative proceeded more smoothly. It was not of a very novel character. Tom Heriot had married Isabell Jeffrey, not entirely as the heir of Pitcomlie should have married its future mistress, but yet lawfully, according to the customs of the country, and to traditions fully accepted in the class to which she belonged. They had pledged themselves to each other as man and wife in the presence of the people in whose house they had met, a man whom Heriot had employed to take charge of his dogs while shooting in the district from which the sisters came, a mountain village in Perthshire. The marriage had been concealed, as such marriages

generally are, until the last moment, when it had been necessary to avow it for the sake of poor Isabell's character. But by that time Tom Heriot was dead, and could no longer be appealed to—and even the mother, utterly cast down by the shame of her favourite child, had refused to believe the unlikely story.

"There was nobody but me, nobody but me," said Agnes, warming with her tale, "that kent my poor Bell would never lie. My mother; my mother is a decent woman, of a decent honest family. Lightheadedness or shame never was heard of in her kith or kin; all douce, steady folk, constant at the kirk, and mair thought of than the very Minister himsel'. It made her wild. From no believing at first that anything was wrang —which was natural—for wha could believe it? she went off in a mad way to no believing Bell. I can excuse her, for my part. If I had not trusted Bell from the very first, I would have killed her with my hands. John Macgregor and his wife had gone away, nobody kent where. There was no a creature to stand by her to say it was true. Oh, Miss Heriot! you've heard Bell's story, but

no mine. You can never ken the days that passed, and the weary nights—her in a way to want a' the comfort that kindness could give her, and lifting up her white face a' the time without support or help, to say to them that would na believe her, 'The bairn is my man's lawful bairn, and I'm his wife.' Oh, I'm no heeding," cried Agnes, "though there's a man here! I'm no one to speak o' such things before a gentleman. But to see her in her trouble, aye crying out in her pains, 'I've naething to think shame of, mother, there's naething to think shame of!' I'm hard," said Agnes, stopping suddenly, "but no so hard as to withstand that."

"You were always her support and comfort," said Marjory, taking her hand, and with tears in her eyes.

"Was anything else possible? I kent our Bell, ay, better than my mother. She was aye delicate. She never could stand what I could stand. She would aye read her book when she had a moment—no like me that am just a country lass—and oh, so bonnie! When gentlemen came by, they would make errands for a drink of water,

or to warm their feet, or to light a cigar, or the like of that, just for the sake of a good look at her. Mr. Heriot was a pleasant gentleman. He had aye a good excuse. He would have this question and that to ask my mother, as if it was her he was wanting. The Lord forgive him," cried Agnes, "if he meant to deceive! for he is dead and gone, and canna be punished—and I wouldna wish him to be damned for ever and ever, though he would weel deserve it, richly deserve it—if he wanted to deceive!"

Notwithstanding all her interest and all her sympathy, this was hard for Marjory's proud spirit. She moved uneasily in her chair, she grew hot and flushed, her brow contracted, her foot beat upon the carpet.

"He did not mean to deceive," she cried, impatiently. "I know he did not. He thought he had told me. Such a thing was not possible—"

"I hope so," said Agnes, composing herself. "But he kept Bell without a written word, not so much as a 'wife' in his letters, nor signing himself her husband—no a single word. They

had good reason to think she was deceived. And the little bairn was no sooner born—ye havena seen him, Miss Heriot; he's like your bonnie little sister with the gold hair—than a friend saw in the papers that Mr. Heriot was dead in England. Oh, that terrible time! Sickness is ill, and grief's warse, and shame the warst of a'; but a' three at once upon one bit delicate head, a' three! and neither consolation nor support, neither pity nor fellow-feeling! Ye may think I'm whiles no very civil nor respectful to them that's above me. I canna help it; my heart's bitter at you a'—bitter! bitter!—at them that lead the poor and simple astray, and leave them to bear the wyte—them that go away and enjoy themselves, and live—or even that go and die—and leave other folk behind to pay the price. It's them I hate."

"But the people who could have proved all this?" said Fanshawe. "Surely you speak too strongly. If there are people who can prove it, why blame Mr. Heriot? He was snatched away from this life; he had not time for anything. But if it rests on the testimony of witnesses—"

Agnes turned round to look at him, with the colour gradually rising over her face. The look of defiance was still there, but over it, as it were, like another surface, was a flutter of painful hesitation and humility — humility which was compulsory, and all the harder on that account. She looked at him with a dilation of the eyes expressive of such mental strain and painful exertion, as he had scarcely ever been conscious of witnessing before, and with a thrill in her voice, answered him steadily, looking him all the time in the face.

"It rests on my sister's word, Sir, which is as the word of an angel out of heaven; for we've nae testimony—nae testimony! It rests upon Isabell's word."

Fanshawe's countenance changed. He could not help it; he was not used to conceal his sentiments; but almost before he was capable of realizing this new and strange avowal, the girl had started to her feet.

"I am going home, Miss Heriot!" she cried. "You meant nae harm, but ye've given me

another stroke—and we've borne enough from you and yours—"

"Agnes," cried Marjory, arresting her. "You cannot go away from me; whatever happens, we must work this out together. What has any one done?"

"Look at him!" cried the girl, with pale indignation. "Oh, this is what I kent would happen if I was made to leave my ain way—to go among gentles, and make them believe, and summer and winter every word! He thinks it's a lie. What does he care for our Isabell and her bairn? He cares for you; and he thinks that what I'm telling you is a lie!"

Fanshawe did not contradict her. He looked at Marjory gravely, with a certain anxiety in his glance. He thought, as was natural enough, and as men so often think in respect to a woman's judgment, that she had been led away by her feelings. He made her a little warning sign with his head.

"If, as you tell me, her own mother did not believe this story, is it wonderful that I should

hesitate?" he said. "I do not think it is a lie; but I fear she may have been deceived."

"By Tom?" said Marjory. She was almost as indignant as the other. "If Isabell has been deceived, then Tom—my brother, has been a—— What can I say? Is there a word bad enough—vile enough?"

He was cowed between these two young women. He dared not say, as he might have said elsewhere, that men do not form the same harsh judgment of such deceptions. He made a gesture of deprecation, holding up his hands in entreaty.

"You are too hard upon me," he said. "I did not mean to blame either side; but if this is so, why cannot these people—the witnesses—be produced?"

"Let me speak to him, Miss Heriot," said Agnes. "Maybe the gentleman thinks it's a' my invention from beginning to end? and it's me that must speak. I've been to seek them, Sir, a' over Scotland, from one end to another. I've been directed here, and I've been directed there. I've gone after them night and day. I've written

letters to them. I've sought out their friends. The little infant is three months auld, and all that time I've been on the road. I had left my place for Isabell's sake; she didna tell me why, but since I've found it was for him, that it might not be said he had a near friend in service. All the little siller I had, I've spent seeking them; and, oh, I canna find them, I canna find them!" cried the girl, suddenly breaking down, and bursting into passionate weeping. "I've prayed the Lord on my knees, and He'll no send them; and I cannot find them; and my bonnie Bell will die before I can clear her name!"

Her voice had risen loud and shrill in the height of her emotion, and now she sat down and covered her face, struggling with her sobs. It was not in Fanshawe's heart to remain insensible to this outburst. He sat looking at her with a guilty face, as if he were the author of her distress.

"Can I do anything?" he said. "Is there any way of helping her to find them if they are to be found?"

But there was not in his tone the enthusiasm

for the search which Marjory had expected to move him. The very sound of his voice chilled instead of invigorating her. While Agnes slowly recovered her composure, Marjory informed him in detail of the inquiries which had been made. These were very primitive, unskilful inquiries. The girl knowing of few means of procuring information except the simple one of going to ask for it, had wasted a great deal of time and much labour on a comparatively narrow round. She had indeed written to various people whom she believed to be Macgregor's relations to ask information about him, but the idea that he and his wife might be reluctant witnesses, or adverse altogether to the establishment of the truth, had made her distrustful of letters.

"How could I tell that they would not get out o' my way, if I sent them word I was coming?" she said. "How was I to ken that they werena enemies? And even if they were friends, they mightna like to take that trouble, or their maisters mightna like it. Few folk like to take trouble; and when you just send them a

letter—Na, na, I went mysel. I would never trust to that."

In short, poor Agnes had distrusted everybody. She had distrusted Miss Heriot up to the last moment. She distrusted her still, notwithstanding Isabell's better instinct. She looked at the two together at the present moment with a watchful eye, not half sure that they were not plotting something against, rather than in favour of her search. When she heard them speak of the loss of time, her heart swelled within her. She who had done everything so carefully, so warily, letting nobody know, treating everybody as enemies, making so many subtle, simple schemes to entrap the missing witnesses, was it possible that, after all, she had been letting the precious moments slip out of her hand, the last days of her sister's life? Agnes was glad to go away, leaving the last and only possible traces of the missing Macgregors in Marjory's hands, to go out to the silence of the long seaside walk, and to cast her troubled mind abroad to seek out new means of working. She knelt down under the shadow of the Maiden's

Rock, in a crevice of that natural tower, and poured out all her passionate heart in an impassioned prayer. "Oh, bring them to me—bring them!" she prayed, demanding a miracle with pathetic earnestness. There are circumstances in which it is more painful to receive help than to be kept without it. Agnes, poor girl, endured the aid which had fallen upon her with a proud agony of submission, feeling that her heart was torn asunder by the necessity. She had so set her heart upon doing it all herself; she had taken pleasure in her hardships and wanderings, her long walks up and down, and the painful inquiries that never came to anything. And oh, if all this had been but a loss of time! She tried to contradict the thought, though a consciousness that it was true would keep creeping chill upon her. But oh, if the Lord would but step in and direct her, and make her find them now! If He would but prove that the race was not to the swift nor the battle to the strong! If He, the last resort, the final resource in everything, would but bring them to her—put them, as it were, in her hand!

Agnes opened her eyes, and clambered down from the rocks, her heart aching with the hope that she might yet meet with strangers on the way, and find that her prayer had been answered. But there was no one to be seen on the long stretch of seaside path, not a soul anywhere. And thus in her humiliation she went slowly home, feeling as if this work, the work that might save Isabell's life, was taken out of her hands.

CHAPTER V.

THE two who were left behind were not much more comfortable than Agnes. Marjory, for her part, could not but feel somewhat humiliated too. She had appealed to Fanshawe in the fervour and exultation of her heart, just after she had been roused by the blame she had heard of him, into, perhaps, an unjustifiable adoption of his cause. When he had been blamed, she had asserted his good qualities so indignantly, that faith in what she had herself said had moved her to put him to the test, with a generous and proud confidence. He might be good for nothing, so far as himself was concerned; but he was good for everything to his friends. And

lo! at the very first touch, he had been found wanting. He had taken twenty-four hours even to understand the story; and now, when he understood it, he displayed no desire to take up the cause of the injured, no readiness of belief in her, no wish to exert himself in her service. She could not but see that to secure her own society, to be near her and associated with her, Fanshawe would interest himself in almost anything; but that was a very different matter from the generous interest she had expected, and the active help she had desired. She had thought nothing less than that he would go off instantly, scarcely asking a moment to breathe and repose himself, in search of the missing witnesses; and lo! he never suggested the possibility of looking for them at all; he did not even seem to consider himself involved in any way in the matter—as, indeed, he was not, Marjory proudly confessed to herself. She was disappointed, mortified, cut down in her own estimation; though why she should have been so, simply because he had failed her, it is difficult to say. Marjory did not utter her disappoint-

ment in words, but she adopted a still more effectual way of showing it. She ascended into regions of lofty politeness which froze the very soul of the visitor within him. She addressed him as she might have done a potentate who had paid to an inferior power the unexpected honour of a visit. She carefully banished all allusion to the business, which yesterday had occupied and excited her so much, from her conversation—and turned that upon trivial subjects, upon the passing events which figured in the newspapers, upon St. Andrews, and the ruins, and golf. Poor Fanshawe was utterly and dismally crushed by this treatment. For an hour after Agnes's hasty departure, when it had been put in force, he held out under it as best he could, pretending to wish to hear about the Cathedral, and the Castle, and the old town of St. Rule. It was when she suggested a visit to the antiquities after lunch, in company with Dr. Smith, who knew so well how to explain them, that his fortitude failed. He went up to her side with something like timidity.

"It was not for the ruins," he said, half reproachfully, half timidly, "that I came."

"Well, perhaps not," said Marjory; "but when you are in a place where there are interesting ruins, you are bound to visit them, don't you think?"

Fanshawe made no direct reply; but slightly encouraged by her tone, drew a chair near her.

"And it was not for golf I came."

"I suppose not, seeing you do not know anything about it. Nothing but utter ignorance," said Marjory, beguiled to a smile in spite of herself, "could have excused the extraordinary questions you put to my uncle last night."

"Were they extraordinary questions?" he said, still more encouraged. "No, I did not come for the golf, nor for the sea, nor for St. Andrews, nor for society. I came, because you sent for me; an inducement which would have taken me to the end of the world."

"Pray don't remind me how presumptuous

I have been, and foolish," said Marjory, reddening, "to send for you, without considering whether you would agree with me about the importance of the cause."

"Miss Heriot, I agree with enthusiasm that I am at your service, always and everywhere."

"Pray, pray, Mr. Fanshawe! don't make me feel more ridiculous than I do already. Let us talk of other things."

"Why should not we talk of the one that interests you most—of that you sent for me about?"

"Because, simply, it does not interest you," said Marjory, looking at him with a smile—that steady, forcibly kept-up smile of incipient quarrel which is so far from agreeable to encounter.

Poor Fanshawe was in despair. He ought to have been pleased, on the contrary, had he had his wits about him; for such quarrels never arise between indifferent persons. He started up from his chair, and made a rapid course round the room, and seized upon the brief

notes of address and reference which Agnes had left.

"I will go away, then, and execute your commission," he said, in an altered voice; "since that is all you wanted me for. It is too good for me, I allow, that you should employ me at all, and for that I am grateful. But I think you are a little hard upon me," he went on. "You make no allowance for the feeling I have in seeing you drawn into such a connection; placed in the position of sister to a girl who—and brought into constant contact with this sister. I have that to get over before I can approach the subject dispassionately. You do not know what sort of people such women are."

"Do you?"

"God forgive me, Miss Heriot—I have been as other men!" he said, reddening like a girl. "No, by Heaven! I don't know, except by report and common acceptation; not much—"

"I do," said Marjory, calmly; "I know these two women, and I know the class from which they spring; but that is not the question.

I have formed my opinion strongly on the subject. I do not ask you to make it yours."

"It is mine, with all my heart—anything you believe," said Fanshawe, very wretched, and yet once more with that glimmering of fun which spoilt the pathos of so many a fine situation. Marjory, at this moment, was not inclined to see any humour in it. She went on severely, and with a tremendous courtesy which shrivelled him up.

"I could not, of course, ask you, whose experience in every way is much greater than mine, to adopt my opinion; and nothing but a momentary hallucination, which I hope you will be so very kind as to excuse, could have made me think of transferring to you my work. I beg your pardon for it. It is the absurd way in which we are accustomed to have things done for us—the difficulty a woman finds in moving anywhere without a host of explanations. But pray forgive me; feeling as I do, it is my business to complete poor Agnes's work, and clear up the matter, whatever it may cost me Of course, there is no

reason in the world why I should not do it myself."

"You reject my assistance, then!" said Fanshawe, ruefully. "You take it out of my hands? Miss Heriot, is that fair?"

"I do nothing of the kind," she said; "it is a very important question to me; but not, as stands to reason, with you. You had never heard of the Heriots six months ago, Mr. Fanshawe. It is the most absurd thing in the world to suppose that their interests could be of supreme importance to you."

And she held out her hand once more with that steady smile of polite offence and mortification, for the papers which he still held. He stood for a moment irresolute, looking at her; then he drew out his watch.

"Yes," he said; "I see I have just half an hour to catch the next train. I am off, Miss Heriot. The notes are vague enough, but still possible. 'Suspected to have gone into service as a porter at one of the hotels in one of the Channel Islands; but may have gone to Australia or New Zealand.' That was a puzzler, I allow,

for our friend, who did her journeys on foot. You shall hear from the nearest of these places as soon as possible; and in the meantime, I may as well, I think, send advertisements to all the papers for John Macgregor—that is worth trying."

"But, Mr. Fanshawe, I must not—I cannot—accept such a sacrifice."

"You will say good-bye to me," he said, holding her hand; "and think of me—say once a day, will you, Miss Heriot? Let me see, the best time would be in the afternoon, when one is apt to get low. Think of me then—say from four to half-past four," he said, with once more that gleam of fun in his eye. "And I hope I shall not have to go to Australia." Then he made a momentary pause, and looked at her wistfully again. "Will you come to meet me?" he said, "When I come back?"

"Mr. Fanshawe! I beg, I entreat!"

"But you must promise," he said, with a short laugh. "Good-bye; till we meet again."

What was till they met again? the kiss on her hand? This question, the imbecility of which

can only be explained by her extreme agitation, was the only thing that fluttered through Marjory's mind in that hasty moment, which was over like a dream. She ran to the window and threw it open, and gazed after him. He was gone, actually gone—upon his errand—which might lead him heaven knows where; no doubt she had sent for him with this very purpose; but though she had felt the most sensible mortification when he appeared unwilling to undertake it, yet, nevertheless, his sudden departure quite stupefied Marjory. It put Isabell and Agnes, and their whole story, completely out of her head. She sat down at the open window and watched him as long as he was in sight, and it was with difficulty that she restrained herself from going after him in the strange state of excitement into which his sudden departure threw her. All this was without any action of her mind at all—a sudden whirl of involuntary feeling, nothing more.

But it is impossible to describe the consternation of Mr. Charles when he heard of the departure of their visitor. This was when he returned to luncheon, which he did at the cost of

some personal inconvenience—for he had to return to the Links for a match at three o'clock. It was sheer benevolence that brought him, and fear least Marjory should feel herself uncomfortable —thus receiving a stranger, "and no man in the house." The announcement, however, took him entirely by surprise. "Mr. Fanshawe away!" he said; "bless me, Marjory, what has taken him away? What did the man come for, if he was to go away so soon? I was just saying to myself to-day, if he was the same as he was at Pitcomlie, we might have a difficulty in getting rid of him; and here I find he's off! Maybe, my dear, it was your fault?"

She was annoyed with herself for blushing; but she answered calmly enough: "I do not think so, uncle; he took me very much by surprise."

"Well, my dear," said Uncle Charles, "you must manage your own affairs, and no doubt you'll do it well; but you must mind that though he's a very pleasant person, and was very serviceable, we've heard but a poor account of Mr. Fan-

shawe. I cannot say I recollect, just at this moment, what it was I heard—"

"Whatever it was," said Marjory, with some heat, "I do not believe it, Uncle Charles."

"Well, well!" said Mr. Charles once more, in a tone of soothing; "I do not bid you believe all you hear, my dear; still it should not be altogether neglected; that's not wise; in short, far from wise. To tell the truth, if he is not away in a pet about something I know nothing of, I'm not sorry, for my part, to be alone to-day. I am vexed by some news I have from good Dr. Murray. I will have to go over there."

"Has anything gone wrong?"

"These young women," said Mr. Charles, shaking his head; "I doubted it from the appearance of them. These young women are behaving themselves very strangely, my dear; they are turning everything upside down. From what I hear, they are meditating meddling with the house; pulling something down, or putting something up, I cannot tell which; but it's a thing that must not be allowed—nay—so far as I'm aware—guardians have no such power. I mean

to speak to Mungo Barmaster this afternoon, and see what he says. But the end of it will be, that I shall have to go over myself," said Mr. Charles, as if there was in that suggestion something very terrible and decisive. He knitted his gentle brows, and repeated once more, with a wavering swing upon his long legs, "I will have to go over myself."

Here another impulse seized upon Marjory, which she obeyed suddenly in her excitement, by way of relieving her own highly wrought feelings.

"Uncle Charles," she said, "there is something on my mind which I would like to tell you. I do not know what you may think of it, whether it may trouble you or please you; but anyhow, it is not a thing we can be indifferent to. I once showed you a letter I had found among poor Tom's papers."

"Among Tom's papers! Ay! do you say so? I've no recollection—"

"Yes, uncle; think! you must remember. It was from a woman."

Mr. Charles roused himself at once.

"A thing that should never have come under your eyes! I said so at the time. Try to forget it, May. Some women I have seen have a morbid sort of curiosity about such persons; but not you, my dear. Try to put it out of your mind."

"You mistake, uncle," said Marjory, gently. "I thought you were mistaken at the time. It is more important than you think. I have seen her—"

"You!" cried Mr. Charles, stammering with sudden anger. "You! Now this beats all! If your brother was coarse enough to think of such a thing, you, Marjory, a delicate young woman, you should have had more feeling."

The implied blame brought the colour warmly to Marjory's cheeks.

"Hush! Uncle Charles. I knew at the time you were mistaken."

"Which is likely to know best, you or I?" said Mr. Charles, with not unnatural exasperation. "May, I am not your father, and I have no real authority; but still you obeyed me when

you were a little bairn, and I am your nearest friend. There must be no more of this, no more of this! A young woman has no right to compromise herself."

"Wait, uncle, till you hear me; it is more important than you think. I met her by chance, not knowing who she was. She is very ill—dying. She did not know me any more than I knew her; but I have come to know her story. Hush! wait, Uncle Charles—She was Tom's wife; and she has—a son—"

Mr. Charles turned pale; his lower lip dropped in his surprise, as if he had been struck by sudden illness. He shook so that the pencil he held between his fingers dropped.

"What—what?" he said. "Nonsense! it's raving, it's madness! I'll not credit a word of it; it's some story made up. May, May, tell me it all over again; what does this mean?"

"It means," said Marjory, with sudden composure, which came to her she could not tell how, "that unless we take care to clear it all up, and prove the truth or falsehood of this story,

there will be a disputed succession in our family to be fought out; perhaps when we are no longer living; but, one day or other, it will certainly be fought out."

"Bless me! bless me!" said Mr. Charles, walking about the room in great agitation. "What is this? what is this? A disputed succession, a wife and a child—did you say a child, or a son? And, God bless me! if it's true, what kind of a woman must she be that he never dared acknowledge her? He knew how his father wanted him to marry—and a son! Did you say a son? This is the most astonishing piece of news, Marjory," Mr. Charles added, coming up to her, "if it can be relied upon, that I ever heard in all my life."

"I thought it would startle you; but you do not think now I could have helped taking an interest, Uncle Charles? When I heard of the child——"

"God bless us!" said the pious philosopher again. He was too much excited to remain still. He walked up and down the room, repeating broken sentences to himself. "But the mother

must be come of very indifferent folk; she must have little to recommend her; she must be some girl that has known how to take care of herself. And then the story may not be true; you must take into account, May, that it's very likely it may not be true."

"That is exactly what I think we must find out—without sparing either money or trouble, Uncle Charles."

"Lord preserve us!" said the old man; "and in that case the other little bairn would have nothing to do with it? and these young women—Marjory, my dear, I see the hand of Providence in this. Does she give full particulars? has she proof? I would not say a word, nor interfere one way or another, without strong and clear evidence. Has she proof?"

"Yes," said Marjory, out of the fulness of her heart. She had no need herself of any proof of Isabell's story. Her face was guarantee of that; and she had a second visionary confidence, as strong or stronger than her trust in Isabell—which was that Fanshawe would find all that was wanted. Thus she took upon herself to

answer, as it were, for both of these persons, in her warm affirmation, rather than for the abstract truth. As a matter of fact, the evidence, she knew, was not forthcoming; but Marjory believed in *her*, and she believed also in *him*.

"And these young women at Pitcomlie;" said Mr. Charles, with a gleam of momentary triumph. He was ashamed, however, of his emotion almost before he had expressed it. "That is, my dear," he said, "if there is any truth in the story; which is a thing I scarcely believe."

CHAPTER VI.

THE confidence which Marjory thus injudiciously, and on the impulse of the moment, shared with her uncle, was premature and indiscreet. No doubt it is hard to shut up a discovery of importance in one's own bosom, and for a woman accustomed to all the continual intercourse and confidence of domestic life, to carry on a series of secret operations, is almost impossible; but the relief afforded was not so great as she had hoped. Mr. Charles could think of nothing else. He questioned and cross-questioned—who was Isabell? what were her people? where did they come from? how did Marjory know that they were respectable or

trustworthy? how had she made acquaintance with them? To these questions she could give but scanty answers. Mr. Charles groaned when he heard of the irregular marriage. He shook his head till it ached with the movement.

"In all our records," he said, in piteous tones, "I do not believe, May, that such a scandal has ever happened before. We've had none but virtuous women, my dear, none but good women, and clever women, May. It has always been our strong point. God bless us! and all to end in two fools like these young women at Pitcomlie, and a—— I humbly beg your pardon, my dear."

"Uncle, this girl, who is dying, is like a saint."

Once more Mr. Charles shook his head.

"I never heard yet of a saint that made an irregular marriage," he said, "and as for her dying, my dear, if she's really the heir's mother, far the best thing she can do will be to die. A woman like that would be a dreadful sort of apparition at Pitcomlie. Whatever her people are, they cannot be in a position that would do

the infant any credit. Lord preserve us! am I speaking of my own family?" cried Mr. Charles, feeling the wound go to his heart. "One a fool, and the other a—— Poor fellows, they've gone to their account—but there must have been some imperfection in those two lads, my dear, though they were your brothers; there must have been some imperfection. They say the wife a man chooses is the best revelation of his own character. You need not be angry, my dear; I am saying nothing against the poor boys."

"Let us say nothing at all about it, uncle, till we know."

"That's easy said, that's easy said, my dear. You may be able to put it out of your mind, but I cannot. The whole future of the family! Perhaps I had better see the girl, May, and examine her myself?"

"Uncle, she is ill."

"I'll do her no harm, my dear," said Uncle Charles; and he resumed the subject in the morning, to Marjory's dread. He had been brought up to the law, and he had some faith, as was natural, in his own knowledge. "If I

once hear her story, I will see at once what is to be made of it," he said; and as he had been further stimulated by another letter about the proceedings, or intended proceedings of Miss Bassett, the old man was much in earnest. It was the agent of the Bank in Pitcomlie who had sent him this information, and Mr. Charles had come down to breakfast with his hair standing on end, at all the audacities that were contemplated. "I know no precedent—no precedent," he said, with his forehead puckered into a hundred lines. "They say women are conservatives; but I never heard of rebels like them, when they take that lawless turn. A man would think twice before he would meddle with an old-established house; he would think that the past might have its rights, no to speak of the future."

"I don't think folly is of either sex," said Marjory, who was not fond of hearing her own side assailed; "though Verna is not a fool——"

"Verna!" cried Mr. Charles, in his indignation, "she is out of the question, May. I might stand

something from your brother's wife. She's a foolish creature, but she's not without good points—at all events she's pretty, which is aye something; and she is poor Charlie's widow; but the other young woman! Do you know, my dear, it's my duty to see this girl, and hear her story myself?"

All that Marjory could do was to effect a compromise—to go herself and prepare poor Isabell, putting off Mr. Charles's visit for another day. Mr. Charles accordingly went out, though late, and hung about the Club all the morning, talking with every lounger who came in his way (and their name was legion). He told nothing, he was quite convinced; and yet, oddly enough, a vague impression that some story about the House of Pitcomlie—some romance in real life, such as now and then fills every county with lively interest and delight—was about to be made known to the world—came into existence. There were various versions of it instantly created by the conversationalists of the Golf Club.

"I don't know what's afloat among the

Heriots," said Mr. Morrison, of St. Rule's; "auld Charlie is going about like a clucking hen; he has some mystery under his wing, that's sure. Either it's some new claimant turned up from Australia, like the one they're making so great a fuss about in London, or——"

"I don't see how that can be," said Major Vee or Captain Eff. "All the Heriots and all their comings and goings are too well known in Fife, and besides, there never was one that disappeared, or did anything he oughtn't to have done."

"They're a fearfully respectable family," said another golfer, with a great emphasis on the adjective; "but Tom Heriot was thrown away upon them. He was not of that mould. If anything's gone wrong, or there's a chance of revelations, I back Tom to be the hero. He was never one of your cut and dry men, foredoomed to be a Laird, and do his duty."

"He was a simple ne'er-do-weel," said Mr. Seton, "like his friend Fanshawe, whom I saw in the town the other day, by the bye. They

were an excellent pair. And there's a sympathy among that sort of people. Miss Heriot, who is as proud as Lucifer, and looks down upon most people, was hanging upon that fellow's arm. If it's some peccadillo of Tom's, no doubt Fanshawe was in it."

"I don't see what Miss Heriot could have to do with any peccadillo of Tom's," said another speaker. "Whatever you may say against women, toleration of their brother's peccadillos is not one of their faults. But Mrs. Charles, I hear, is making a bonny business at Pitcomlie, pulling down the house to build some fine castle or other. That's enough, I should say, to account for old Charlie's troubles. He's like a hen on a hot girdle, fluttering about everywhere. God be praised, he's engaged for a foursome at three o'clock with old Adam of St. Edgar's, and the two Wolffs. A bonny time they will have of it. I saw him lose a putt yesterday that an infant might have played. And talk of putting——"

Here the speaker went off into golf, and left the Heriots. Mr. Charles, however, fulfilled the

prophecy in every respect. He produced the most unchristian temper in the partner of his game, and gave his opponents an opportunity for gibes innumerable. Up to this present date a description of the worse putt ever made on the Links, as perpetrated on that unhappy day by Mr. Charles Hay-Heriot of the Pitcomlie family, is told for the edification of beginners. The reader, who knows the reason why, will not blame Mr. Charles. He could not, as he acknowledged, get all these complications out of his head. His placid soul was torn by so many unforeseen calamities. The existing state of affairs was bad enough, and the personal contentions which lay before him, the struggle with "these young women," in which Mr. Charles felt it quite possible that he might be worsted, would, had there been nothing else, have been enough to embitter his peaceful days. The other question, however, came into it with a painful excitement. It did not obliterate the first, as it ought reasonably to have done, since, if the second story was true, Mrs. Charles could have no authority or place at Pitcomlie. Some minds have a faculty

for getting all the annoyance possible out of their surroundings, just as some others get all the sweetness possible. Mr. Charles hugged both to his bosom. He groaned over the possibility of having to insert a name never heard of before, and the record of an irregular marriage into the genealogical papers of the Heriots, which had not known such profanation from the time of the Jameses. Talk of the whaling captain, indeed, who had vitiated the blood of the Morrisons! perhaps it was a judgment upon Mr. Charles for his remarks on that flaw; for this was a thousand times worse than any whaling captain. And yet while he groaned over the prospective humiliation, he afflicted his soul at the same time with thoughts of how he was to manage Mrs. Charles and her impertinent sister, who took so much upon her, and yet was not so much as related to the Heriots. The one misery was incompatible with the other; but yet he took the good, or rather the evil, of them both.

The existence of this doubting, questioning, perplexed, and perplexing companion by her side was no addition to Marjory's comfort. She post-

poned her visit to the cottage for motives which she scarcely ventured to define—foremost among which was a vague reluctance to meet Agnes again, and to discuss with her the work which she had taken out of her hands. In every such enterprise there comes a moment of discouragement, of painful difficulty, of disgust even, with circumstances which at first filled the mind only with pity and fellow-feeling. Marjory felt that she would gladly have turned her back on the matter altogether; she would fain have forgotten all about it from the day when she first saw the patient face of the sick girl at the cottage door. What had she to do with it? Such an intruder is usually rejected, or at least held at arm's length by "the family." A *mésalliance* is seldom acknowledged or insisted upon by the sister of the man who has made it. Sometimes it occurred to her that it was even unmaidenly on her part to have interfered in the matter; after all, such a marriage was, she said to herself, no marriage at all—unblessed by religion, unhonoured by publicity, a secret expedient to make guilt less guilty—was not that all that could be said for it? and yet what a difference this poor

formula made! Without it the girl was a lost creature, covered with shame; with it she was surrounded by the sanctity of a woman wronged, almost a martyr; and yet it was nothing, nothing! a mere expedient to make guilt less guilty. This was only one of a hundred ways in which Marjory contemplated the subject; and hers was a woman's view of the matter altogether, though not less forcible on that account. The sting of these thoughts was that they had never occurred to her before. She had committed herself in many ways—to Isabell; and still more, to Fanshawe; she had filled the girl with false hopes, and, perhaps, still falser hopes had been raised in the man's mind by her appeal to him. She had sent him out against his will, against his own idea of what was needful—and now she repented! This is the danger of possessing an impulsive temperament. Such disgust and discouragement seldom come until the world has been set on fire by the hasty spirit. Marjory felt (for the moment) that she would gladly have turned her back upon it all now; she would have liked to go away to the end of the world, and get out of sight and

hearing of everybody who could remind her of this chapter of her existence. So she thought; and the fact that she could not have taken three steps in her flight before compunction and a revival of all her anxious interest would have seized her, dragging her back again, had really nothing to do with the question. She kept away from the cottage, fearing any intercourse with the sisters, whose cause, for the moment, she felt herself to have abandoned. And it was not until she was roused from this curious discouragement, by the sight of an advertisement in the second column of the "Times," calling upon John Macgregor to disclose himself, that she was roused to something of her former feeling. This took her by surprise; to her consciousness all progress had been arrested, and everything stayed by the change in her mind; she had done nothing, and she had concluded that nothing was being done. But the sight of the advertisement roused her; she saw that she had set forces in action that could not be stopped, and whatever her own languor might be, she had no longer any right to keep still. As soon as she had realized this, her

disgust evaporated like the dew on the grass, and good sense and judgment regained the upper hand. John Macgregor might still be in Scotland, notwithstanding Agnes's failure, and in that case, the "Times" was a very unlikely vehicle of communication with him. She bestirred herself instantly, with a glow at her heart, which, after all, was not immediately caused either by devotion to her brother's memory or regard for Isabell. Who was it that had called Fanshawe good-for-nothing? Marjory laughed softly by herself at the ludicrous inappropriateness of the word—good-for-nothing! She had heard his voice as it were in the dark, calling out to her, telling her he was at work, encouraging her to go on. Marjory filled all the Scotch papers with advertisements during the next week; she demanded John Macgregor from all the winds; but still she did not go to the cottage. Now that she had fairly re-commenced work, it seemed to her that she must wait until she had something to tell.

One day, however, a sudden thought came to her of Isabell's dying condition, and of the possible consequences of suspense, unbroken by any ray of

hope. She set out towards the Spindle on a dreary afternoon, when the clouds hung low, and the sea was black with rising wind. It was the heaviest time of the day—that hour when life runs lowest—when Fanshawe had bidden her think of him. The few vessels visible were struggling between two dark leaden lines of sky and sea; nothing was cheerful or encouraging in the external surroundings. The waves came in with a threatening rush round the Spindle; the wind sighed with a sound of rain; and though she had not expected Isabell to be outside on such a day, yet a sense of unreasonable disappointment arose in Marjory's mind at the absence of the well-known figure from the cottage-door. The door was closed, and no one was visible about. In all the earth and air there seemed no living thing, except in the few ships—big and little, which struggled across the horizon.

"Oh mercy! to myself I said,
If Lucy should be dead!"

The thought was natural enough, so far as Isabell was concerned, but it filled Marjory with

remorse as she hurried forward. If Isabell were to die before, one way or other, this matter was cleared up!—it was but too likely she would; but the thought seemed to lend wings to Marjory's feet.

In the little cottage chamber, however, which she thought so still, there was pain enough to demonstrate life, could she but have known. It was a dark little room at all times, for though there were two windows, these windows were little casements composed of very small and very dim panes of greenish glass—one in the front of the house towards the sea, and the other to the back. A smouldering fire burned in the grate, at which stood Isabell's mother in her white mutch, making tea for her invalid. Isabell herself lay in the box, or press-bed, fitted into the wall, which is universal in such cottages. From the airless wooden enclosure her pale face looked out strangely, most unlike, in its pathetic beauty, to everything about. The mother's back was turned, but between the fire and the bed sat Agnes, her ruddy, comely countenance overcast with vexation and care. She was doing nothing, her head was

thrown back listlessly, and her hands laid in her lap. They were brown hands, bearing the traces of toil, and their idleness had a certain pathos in it. She sat, too, almost in the middle of the room, as if she had thrown herself down by chance, not knowing, or not caring where. As the mother went and came she stumbled over Agnes's foot, or her chair, and uttered a little querulous exclamation: "Canna you sit in a corner? canna ye get something to do?" she said. "I canna bide to see a woman doing naething; take John's stockings, if you'll do nothing else."

"I have nae heart for stockings, or anything else!" said Agnes with a sigh.

"Eh, woman! if I had been like that how could I have brought you all up?" said the mother. "Seven of a family, and no a penny nor a penny's worth in the world. Do ye think I hadna often a sair heart? and many a time darena sit down, for fear I should be ower tired to rise again. What are your bits of trouble to that?"

"Do you call yon a bit trouble?" said Agnes, pointing to her sister's bed. The mother's coun-

tenance darkened; she turned towards the fire again, turning her back on her sick daughter. "I dinna call that trouble at all," she said; "that's sin and shame."

"Eh, mother, ye're hard, hard! will ye never believe it—not even since you've seen Miss—her man's sister. Will ye no believe her, even now?"

"Dinna speak to me of her man," said the old woman indignantly, pouring the boiling water upon the tea with a certain vindictive movement. All this conversation was carried on in an undertone, that Isabell might not hear. "Her man has been a bonnie man to her; whatever was his meaning; he's brought her naething but misery and shame. What had she to do, giving ear to ane o' thae gentlemen with their false tongues? Gentlemen! I wouldna give an honest man for ten gentlemen—and so it's seen. Give her her tea; I havena the heart to look at her white face," said the mother, turning away; she went and sat down noiselessly in the room, and put up her apron to her eyes. How many different kinds of

suffering were shut up there together, all separate, and keeping themselves apart!

The tea was made in silence—the one cordial of poor women's lives—and then the little group subsided once more into their places.

"Have you any word from John?" said the mother, this time loud enough for all to hear.

"I have aye word from John," said Agnes, with a tone of indignation; "whatever happens, he never misses his day."

"But you've come to nae settlement yet about what's to be done. It's a wise bargain you've made, him and you—as wise almost as some other folk; to wait—till when?"

"Till I'm gone, mother!" said Isabell. "Oh, if you would have patience! I'll no be long. I feel the wheel breaking at the fountain, and the silver chain being sundered, as the Bible says. When I'm gone, there will be nae motive for keeping up all this trouble. I've been making a terrible stir and commotion, I know that; no for me—and yet I mustna conceal the truth—I had some thought for myself, too; to die so young is sore enough without shame. But if God will

have me bear shame, I must put up with it; and you must put up with it, Agnes. John's a good man; he'll never upbraid you with your poor sister, that ye did so much for; and you'll take my bairn. He'll never ken he had a mother but you—and you'll be good—oh, you'll be good to him! No, why should I greet?" she went on, looking with apparent surprise at a tiny drop that fell on her coverlet; "we must accept what God sends."

"Oh, hold your tongue, hold your tongue!" cried the mother; "God never sent wickedness. I'll no be contradictit in my own house—though, to be sure, it's no my house, for that matter. We were a' proud, proud of your bonnie face, and your genty ways; and our pride's had a fa'; yes, you may see, even your bonnie leddy that you were so sure of—your man's sister, as ye say—has come back no more. She's given ye up like a' the rest; and everybody will give ye up—till you humble yourself, Bell, and put away all your pretences, and do what Magdalen did. But naebody in heaven or earth will show mercy to a lie."

"Mother, you're that hard that ye make me sick," cried Agnes. "It's no a lie."

"Let her prove it, then!" said the mother solemnly. She was in accord with Mr. Charles, with Fanshawe, with all others except Marjory, who had heard the tale. As for Agnes, she started up from her seat as if unable to bear any more.

"I maun be away again," she cried; "I canna stand it longer. If your grand leddies and your fine gentlemen will do nothing for her, I'll take up my work again, myself—and I'll clear ye yet, Bell. I'll away to Edinburgh this very day, and see John; maybe him and me can think of something else. I'm 'maist glad they've failed ye!" cried the girl, with tears in her eyes; "for now I'll never rest day or night till I've done it myself."

"You'll think first what you're doing," said the mother; "going to visit a man that has no heart to marry ye; mind what's happened to your sister, and take heed for yourself."

"Oh, woman!" cried Agnes, turning upon her wildly—while poor Isabell, struck by this unex-

pected assault, lay back upon her pillows feebly sobbing; and it was at this moment that Marjory knocked at the cottage door.

CHAPTER VII.

THERE could not have been a more striking welcome than the celestial glimmer of light which came over Isabell's countenance at this sight. She stayed her weeping with an effort, she held out her thin hands; she looked at the new-comer with pathetic delight.

"Oh, you've come, you've come at last!" she cried with an unconscious reproach. She was so weak that the fit of weeping which she had restrained, interrupted her by an involuntary long-drawn sob now and then, like the sobbing of a child and Marjory thought that this sobbing too was her fault.

"I thought you would never come," said

Isabell, "it makes me nigh well to see you. Oh no, Miss Heriot, I'm no worse; I'm wearing away, wearing away, but no faster than everybody expected. Oh, it does me good to see you—to say your name."

"Did you ever hear of me—from—Tom?" said Marjory with hesitation, yet with a generous desire to make up for her late failure in interest. She had not melted into any familiarity as a more gushing nature might have done. Poor Isabell! this gave her an excuse to weep quietly, to expend her half-shed tears.

"Oh, I never called him by that name," she said, "I daredna'. It was aye his desire I should, but I never could say anything but Mr. Heriot. I liked to say it; it seemed like himself, grander than me, far above me—I was never anything but Isabell. Yes, Miss Heriot, he said once how good ye were, and that, whoever was hard, you would be kind. He called you May—is that your name?"

"Yes, that is my name." Marjory could not unbend altogether, could not tell this girl, though her heart yearned towards her, to call her by

that name, to call her sister, as so many effusive girls would have done. She answered quite simply and shortly without further expansion. Was it true that she would have been kind whoever had been cruel? Marjory had not much faith in herself so far as this was concerned. She remembered the horror which had taken possession of her when she had thought of this young woman becoming the mistress of Pitcomlie. All such feelings had fled away now; but yet she could not feel that Tom had any reason for his confidence in her. "I came to warn you, my poor Isabell," she said, "my uncle is anxious to come, to speak to you about all this; you must know that it is a very important matter for us. He is the only one remaining who has any right to interfere, and he wishes to come, to question you. He is an old man, and very kind; but he will not be satisfied unless he sees you himself; if it is not too much for you—"

"Oh," cried Isabell, with a long-drawn breath, "naething's too much for me! I'll be glad, glad to tell him all I can, to do anything I can to satisfy him or you. It's hard to tell the truth

and find nobody to believe you; but all I can do is to tell him, and leave the rest to God, Miss Heriot. Eh, what cause I have to trust in Him! A while ago I thought I never would hear the name again; and now there will be Heriots a' about me—you that are my kindest friend—and this gentleman. If it was not too much trouble, oh, might I see the bonnie little lady with the gold hair that Agnes says is like my baby? He's a Heriot too," said poor Isabell, with a wistful upward glance at Marjory's face. She was trustful, but yet afraid. She made a little fluttering movement towards something beside her in the bed, something that Marjory had not seen till this moment, and only divined now. "He's a Heriot too," the young mother pleaded, "oh, may I let you see him? If I once saw him in your arms I would be happy—"

"Bell!" said Agnes, in a voice of angry warning, "you said the bairn was to be mine, John's and mine—no an hour ago before this leddy came, you said it. It's her mainner and her voice and her flattering ways that have taken your heart."

"It's no that," said Isabell, "I'm doing you no wrong. You will be a mother to him, and he'll ken no other mother; but I would like Miss Heriot to take him just once in her arms, just to give him a kiss for his father's sake, just to see if he's no like his father. If it was no more than that—no to take him from you that have the best right—"

"My daughters, mem, are not civil to me," said the old woman coming forward for the first time. "You hear the one say that's it the other that has the best right; yet this bairn was born under my auld roof, and put first into my auld arms, me that bore his mother, and bred her up by the toil of my hands and the sweat of my brow. They think I've naething to do with it; that I'm to sit by and hear him given away from one to another and never say a word."

"It's John and me," said Agnes breaking in, "that can do best for the bairn."

"And who will love him best?" said the old mother, "you will have bairns of your ain. You will push him by and make no account of

him. He will have the orphan's fate. He will eat the bread of tears, he will have to bide in his corner, and haud his tongue, and walk wary, wary, lest worst should befall him."

Here Isabell turned with a cry to the unconscious infant at her side. They pierced her gentle soul with a hundred poisoned arrows without meaning it. Poor people do not build up foolish pictures of possible recovery round their dying up to the last moment, as some of us do. They never throw any sort of doubt upon that certain and near approaching termination. Not even a charitable suggestion that she might live to watch her child's growth was made by any one; nor did Isabell expect it. Perhaps on the whole this was the most real kindness, and it was the only treatment she had ever been used to; but yet in her delicate soul, she felt the want of tenderness without knowing how it was.

Meanwhile Marjory sat by bewildered, and listened to this dispute in confusion. She tried to interrupt them more than once, but their eager voices were too much for her. The strife was

a generous strife in its way; but was it possible that they did not know if his mother's marriage was proved what the child must become at once? She interposed at last as calmly as she could.

"If all the proof is obtained that will be necessary," she said, "if the marriage is proved, and everybody satisfied" (at these words Isabell turned round, took her hand and kissed it gratefully, while her mother retreated to the furthest corner, persistently shaking her head, and uttering sighs that were deep enough to be groans), "then I think our family will have to be consulted. It is not quite so simple as you think. There will be something also for us to do."

The old woman came back from her corner of the room, and Isabell turned wistful, smiling, beaming upon the speaker.

"Oh," she said, "it was what I aye hoped, but I daredna ask. My wee man will not have the hard life we've all been born to? Oh, I'm joyful, joyful of that! not for the money, Miss Heriot; but if you knew the difference of him and you, folk that have been gently

nurtured as they say in books, from the like of us; gently nurtured, that's what I would like—learned to speak soft, and think of others' feelings, and move quiet and be like him and you. Without money that cannot be; if he's to be brought up to work for his living like the rest, that cannot be."

"If you mean the rest of my bairns, Isabell," said her mother, hotly, "your wean will be real well off if he's like them. An honest working man may look any gentleman in the face. I've aye trained ye up to that."

"Ay, mother," said Isabell, "that's very true; but a gentleman's son is no like a ploughman's son; and oh, if my boy might be like his father! They'll no let me speak of his father; but Miss Heriot, I may to you."

"Yes," said Marjory, faintly. A fastidious cloud had come over her again. Tom, poor Tom, had not been to her an ideal being; it seemed to her that his education, and the result of it, might both be improved in a new human creature. But poor Isabell thought differently; a new world opened before her eyes, which were full of

tears, grateful tears, made sweet by an unexpected and unlooked for gladness.

"Oh, if I could live to see it!" she sighed, with a quivering smile. It was the first time that such a possibility had occurred to her. She threw a wistful glance into the future, which she must never see, and for one moment longed to live. Then for another moment the tears turned salt and bitter. "But that mayna be," she added, still more low. No, she could not live to see it; but still this sunset gleam had given a gentle radiance to her life.

"A little siller is aye a good thing. I'm very glad the bairn's provided for," said the old woman, looking at Marjory keenly. Pride kept her from further inquiry; her ears were keenly open, and her mind intent to find out more fully what was meant; but she would have died sooner than ask a question. Somehow, however, this simple speech of Marjory's changed the aspect of affairs to Isabell's mother. It gave a probability to the story of the marriage, which it had never hitherto possessed in her eyes; the moment that money is involved it gives reality to every-

thing. The old woman's feeling was very different from that vague sense of beatitude with which Isabell herself regarded the possibility of her child's future wealth; but Marjory was instantly aware of the deepened interest, the increased disposition to believe the story true. She went on to comment on what news she had of the search in which everything was involved.

"The gentleman you saw," she said, addressing Agnes, and feeling, to her great annoyance, that she blushed, "has gone off in search of these people. He is to go to Guernsey; first and in the meantime we have put advertisements in all the papers for John Macgregor."

"Adver-tisements!" said Agnes, with dismay. "To give him notice that he may get out of the way and hide himsel."

"Why should he get out of the way and hide himself?"

"It is how they aye do," said Agnes, obstinately adhering to her own theory. "Whenever a man is wanted for anything, that's what aye happens. And I would do it myself. If there

was an adver-tisement for me in the papers, I would leave my place, or change my lodgings in a moment. Eh, that would I! I would not let myself be taken in a net. And John Macgregor's no a fool—no such a fool as to come for an advertisement. Na, Miss Heriot, it would have been better to have left it to me."

The mother drew near, also interested in this question. It was the first time she had taken any distinct interest in it.

"I ken naething about it," she said, "but putting a man's name in the papers is like sending a hue and cry after him. I ken John Macgregor, though I put nae trust in him. Ye'll never tell me that he'll be brought back by that."

"No," said Agnes. They both came near, and stood by shaking their heads; while Isabell, with a face which gradually grew more and more keen with anxiety, raised her eyes to Marjory, and put her thin hands together.

"It's my last hope," she said.

Perhaps there was just enough of old-fashioned prejudice in Marjory's own mind to agree with

them a little, and she knew how strong that prejudice was amongst this class. But somehow the protest thus made against her proceedings roused in her again the fastidious and fanciful disgust which only occurred to her mind after she had thrown her whole heart into this effort.

"Well," she said, somewhat coldly, "if what I do is unsuccessful, you can then take it back into your hands. We can only adopt the means we think best. It is not my place to interfere at all; all my friends have told me as much."

"Oh, dinna say that!" said Isabell, with appealing eyes. They all fought over this patient, unresisting creature. To all of them it was a secondary matter—to her it was life and death. In the pause that ensued she was driven almost to despair. All that her imagination could conceive she had already done. She had told her tale, she had opened her heart, she had thrown herself upon their sympathy, she had appealed to them by every argument in her power. The only thing yet remaining to her she did now.

With a sudden movement, which was almost too much for her weakness, she lifted the infant by her side, and thrust it, without any warning, into Marjory's arms. Partly it was a simple artifice to prevent the possibility of a refusal, and partly it was the hurry of weakness which made this act so rapid. "This is—his bairn," said poor Isabell, falling back upon her pillow, and closing her pale eyelids. The tears stole softly out from under those lids, the hectic colour faded from her face. She turned her head aside, as if to avoid seeing the failure of her last experiment. And the others stood looking on with keen interest, with feelings vaguely quickened, with a sense of reality in the whole matter such as they had never felt before.

Marjory was disconcerted more than she could say. She was not used to young children. She had almost a repugnance to this morsel of humanity suddenly thrust into her arms—this creature, which should have come into the world amid the clamour of rejoicing, which should have been its mother's pride, the hope of an old family, the inheritor of wealth and influence, and

a kind of power. At the present moment it was its mother's shame; it was the shame of the dead man who had made no provision for it in this world, who had allowed it to be supplanted in his heedlessness, and made its future insecure; and over the child's existence a certain cloud of shame must always hover: legitimate indeed, but legitimate only by that expedient to make guilt less guilty—making only a hairbreadth escape from humiliation and ignominy. The baby was fast asleep; it was warm and downy like a little nestling taken suddenly out of the nest. Even the rapid movement did not disturb its utter calm. It lay on Marjory's lap, among the circle of agitated spectators, rapt in an absolute tranquillity which went to the heart of these women. The old mother began to weep. Agnes stood by with hungry eyes, ready to snatch the child from the stranger, who was as closely related to it as she, but who was an interloper, having nothing to do with it, she felt; while Marjory sat still, without touching it, with the long white dress streaming over her black one, looking into its sleeping face. Another scene came over her with

a flood of recollection, mingling itself somehow in this one, giving to it an added effect. Once before an infant like this had been placed in her arms by a dying mother. The child was Milly, who since then had been as her own child to the elder sister; and the tears rushed all at once like a stream in flood to Marjory's eyes as she recognised the likeness. It was as if Milly had been sent back again into babyhood; little rings of soft golden hair clustered about the baby head, the little face was waxen in its paleness, but every feature was like Milly. She kissed it with an enthusiasm which carried away all her repugnance.

"I will bring Milly to see you to-morrow," she cried, hastily; and then as she looked other likenesses stole upon her. A shadow of her father's face before suffering bowed him down, and of both "the boys," in those nursery days which came up so clear and fresh like a picture before her. Both the boys! Charlie most, perhaps, whose own child was not like him. Marjory's tears began to fall heavily on the little white nightdress made by poor Isabell's failing fingers

with all the nicety which love could suggest. She forgot how all three were watching her eagerly, waiting for every word she said. She held the child close as it lay in serenest sleep, unconscious of her scrutiny, its pearly little hands spread out in that ease of perfect repose which denotes at the same time perfect health and comfort. "He is a true Heriot," she cried, "God bless him!"

"And God bless you!" said pale Isabell, from her bed, with a gleam of joy over her worn face, which looked like sunshine. Agnes walked away with a trembling thrill of jealousy and keen displeasure. But the mother drew nearer.

"If the bairn is provided for, it will aye be something," she said.

Who could have divined what a strange little scene was going on in the dim cottage room, where so many different emotions surrounded that one passive and peaceful thing which slept through all—the little creature, possessing nothing in life but the soft, almost noiseless breath which rose and fell, regular, measured, unbroken, like a soft strain in music? Certainly the other

group approaching the cottage thought nothing of it as they straggled across the rocks, each taking his own way, and occupied with his or her own thoughts. They reached the door just when Marjory had risen and was replacing the sleeping baby in the warm nest from which he had been taken. She was stooping over the homely bed. Nothing could be poorer or more humble; but Marjory had forgotten all this. Her pride and pangs of revulsion had all gone from her; so had any doubts or difficulties that had ever crossed her mind.

"You must live, you must live, Isabell!" she was saying, scarcely aware of what she said.

And the poor young mother lay back upon her pillows with the countenance of one beatified. She shook her head quietly, but a wavering light had come into her face like the far-off glimmer of some lamp of hope that flickered somewhere in the distance. She had given herself up to death with that gentle resignation which is peculiar to the young and the poor; but she was young, and perhaps a voice powerful enough, the voice of a

a great joy, might yet call her back from the dangerous brink.

It was at this moment that a loud summons came to the door. It startled them all, and Agnes and her mother had a brief but earnest discussion as to whether the applicants should be admitted. Marjory paid but little attention for the first moment. She drew her shawl round her, and wiped the traces of tears from her eyes, and rose to go away before the visitors, if there were visitors, should appear. But her attention was roused when she heard what voice it was which asked admittance when the knocking had remained for some time unheeded.

"Is there any one in? Open the door, open the door!" said the new-comer

It was Mr. Charles. A murmur of other voices with him came in like a faint chorus; and once more quickly and eagerly came the knocking at the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. CHARLES had been seated all alone in the library of his house, a room which confused him much, seeing that it was a library, full of books, such as they were, yet not his, nor like anything that could have been his. Had he been condemned to sit much in this room, it would have been impossible for him to rest without remodelling and changing it; but thanks to golf and the club, he was not tempted to remain for too long a time at one sitting. This day, however, accident, which interferes with golf as much as with other things, had broken up one of the most promising matches ever arranged, and left Mr. Charles disconsolate. He came home to seek Marjory,

and found Marjory gone; even little Milly had her own engagements; and he was thus left to himself. It gave him a realization of the time which might come, if Marjory were to marry, for instance, and he childless, daughterless, with nobody to make any house feel like home, might be left to the cold comfort of George's Square. He did not like the idea. He sat down in the library, as we have said, with a statistical work before him—dry reading, but he felt still more dry. He was out of his element, absent from his favourite surroundings, alone; and everything was against him. How could he tell if he should ever again find himself comfortably established in his sunny old tower, in the room which he had garnished and arranged so carefully with all the accumulations of his life? "These young women" were about to pull down his old tower about his ears; or if they could be stopped in that, here was this other story, this strange marriage of Tom's, this peasant aspiring to the name of Heriot, with her child, who would bring into the old house the unknown qualities of some nameless race. And Marjory, with her head

full of this nonsense, leaving him just at the moment he wanted her most, to mix herself up with such a business! And Fanshawe, an English ne'er-do-weel—Tom's friend, no doubt, and not a bad fellow, but far from the sort of person to match with Marjory—brought into it, head and shoulders! No wonder Mr. Charles was put out. The statistical book, too, indulged in statements about Fife which made every drop of blood in his body boil separately; statements which he could not absolutely contradict, yet which he felt were untrue, and would not have believed had an angel from Heaven proclaimed them. He was reading something particularly offensive about the fishers of the East Neuk itself, and fuming over it, when the maid came to the door to say that some one outside was asking for Miss Heriot.

"They're awfu' disappointed to hear she's no in," said the woman. "They have the look of decent folk, as if they had come a long way. Maybe you would see them, Sir, and no disappoint the poor bodies? Miss Heriot is aye awfu' polite and ceevil to poor folk."

"Miss Heriot, I hope, is polite to everybody," said Mr. Charles. "You may show them in if their business is urgent. But stop; if it's only charity, or that sort of thing—"

"Eh, no, Sir; they're no folk to want charity," said the woman, dismayed at the suggestion.

And, half unwillingly, half pleased to get quit of himself and his loneliness, and the statistics, Mr. Charles closed his book, and prepared to receive the strangers. There was a little controversy at the door, as he could hear, as to which should enter first, which was quite audible. The woman would have yielded the *pas* to her lord; but while her modesty was slightly artificial, that of the man was perfectly genuine in its unalloyed loutishness.

"Gang you in, gang you in first; you've aye a word ready, right or wrong; and me, I canna speak," the bass voice grumbled, as the little struggle ended in the most natural way, and the wife appeared at the door.

This amused Mr. Charles to start with; and

it was with benevolent kindness in his look, that he invited his visitors to approach.

"Miss Heriot, my niece, is out. Come forward, come forward. You can tell me your business," he said.

The pair came in accordingly; a rustic pair, she advancing with bashful self-possession, he hanging behind in her shadow. They were middle-aged people; the man grizzled and ruddy, the woman a comely housewife, with a cheerful countenance which belied her timid gait. She advanced to within a few paces of the library table, at which Mr. Charles sat.

"You see, Sir, we've come a long way. It's no but what we would have waited for the leddy; but my man there was struck to hear it was a leddy, and thought maybe that in any case there would be mair comfort to his mind in seeing the maister—"

"Na, Jean; na, Jean," said the man; "that was nane of my thought; it was your ain."

"And what matter which of us it was?" said the woman, "the gentleman no heeding about us; and it's mair decent-like to put it on the

man, the head of the house. He thought, Sir, it would be mair satisfaction to see you, being a responsible person, than a young leddy, that's apt to take fancies in their heads."

"That may be, that may be," said Mr. Charles, not displeased; "though Miss Heriot is not one of that kind; but you were not to be expected to know. I'll be glad to hear your story, and do what I can for you."

"Oh, Sir, we're no folk that are wanting anything," said the woman; "we're well enough off, for that matter. My man is gamekeeper with Mr. Eclles, of the Langholm, and much thought of; with a cottage and a coo, and as little to complain of as we can expect in this weary world. My eldest lass is in service, and the second lad, he helps his father; and as for him that's out in the world——"

"Was it about them you wanted to speak to Miss Heriot?"

"No, Sir, I canna say it was," she answered, with a slight air of offence. "It was something altogether different; no concern of ours, as my man says."

Here the man interposed, plucking at her shawl.

"Jean, say it was in the papers, and be done wi't. What's the use of so many words?"

"Bravo!" said Mr. Charles; "You are a sensible man. Now, let us hear it; and be so good as to be brief, my good woman, for I must be on the Links at half-past four."

Mr. Charles grew quite energetic and brisk as he spoke. There is nothing an idle man loves like this playing at business—those fictitious bonds of engagements, appointments, and all the pretences at an occupied life, which when they are real, constitute a heavy bondage. He seemed to feel himself a most important member of society as he specified the hour at which he must be gone. The man obeyed this suggestion, once more nudging his wife; but the woman, with livelier instinct, saw through it.

"We might come again," she said; "another day, maybe, when the gentleman is no engaged."

"I can give you my time till a quarter-past

four," said Mr. Charles; and then there followed a little consultation between his visitors, a controversy as to how to state their case.

"It was about an advertisement in the papers. There's nae telling the meaning of an advertisement. It was something that was to be to the advantage of the person—"

"Ah! you are John Macgregor then," Mr. Charles said, with instant brightening up of all faculties, and great internal contentment that he was the first to hear.

"I'm no saying that. It's ane we have heard of—ane we ken, mair or less," said the woman; "a poor man's that's aye busy, and has little time to spare. We were to find out for him what it was about. Hold your tongue!" she said, turning round upon her husband. "Am I the one to speak, or am I no?"

"Oh, ay! you're the one to speak; but you've ower mony phrases," said the husband, muttering.

The wife turned round upon Mr. Charles with an air of compassion.

"Ye'll no mind his grumbling, Sir. It's my

man's way. He has real sensible thoughts, but an ill way of expressing them. A' that comes from me is really from my man; but the words aye fail him—"

"They don't seem to fail you," said Mr. Charles.

"Na, never!" muttered the husband behind backs.

"The Lord be praised!" said the woman; "what would become of the house and the bairns if there was not some person that had sense enough to speak when there was occasion for't? But as I'm saying, this man in the advertisement—It's a long way off for him to come, and as we were in the town for our ain concerns, we gave him our word we would ask. It's maybe about some poaching business; though that's a queer thing for a young leddy to take in hand."

"Does not the young lady's name suggest to you what the business may be?" said Mr. Charles, rousing up to this little conflict of wits, and feeling a sensible pleasure in thus being thrust as it were into the very front of the battle.

The two looked at each other.

"I told you so," said the woman.

"Then speak out; I'll no do it," said the man.

"Well, Sir," resumed the wife, "I ken just this much, that John Macgregor was ance in the service of a Mr. Heriot, a poor young gentleman that's dead, I hear? Eh, Sirs, to think how the young and the goodly die, and auld dry sticks aye live on and flourish! There's a man in our ain parish, sixty if he's a day, married upon a young lass—"

"That is not the question," said Mr. Charles with some heat, not liking the turn these remarks had taken. "If we were to keep to our business we'd get on all the quicker. This man was in the service of my nephew, Mr. Tom Heriot?"

"No altogether in his service. He keepit his dogs; he did an odd thing about the lodge now and then; he was just a serviceable person about the place."

"Well, well," said Mr. Charles, "since you know so much about him, you will probably

know that something is supposed to have happened in Mr. Heriot's life there, about which his friends are anxious to have information."

"Now what could that be?" said the woman, putting up her hand to her forehead, with that natural artifice which we call theatrical. It was exactly what commonplace actors would have done in the endeavour to look puzzled, and full of candid simplicity. "What could that be? I'm no so instructed in Mr. Heriot's life as I might be. John, ye'll may mind something? But if you'll tell me what it is, Sir, I'll tell our —friend; no that's he just what you would call a friend."

"Your memory is so good that I am sure you could recollect were you to try," said Mr. Charles. "Of course, as it is my niece that wants to know, not me, I am not authorised to make any explanations."

"Eh me, what a pity the young leddy's no at hame!" said the woman with ingenuous regret.

"But," resumed Mr. Charles, "you know that there are sometimes connections which a young man forms, unpleasant things for the

family. Young men will be young men, you know—and what's perhaps only the fancy of a day may leave results behind, and may bring great trouble into a family, If you had it in your power now to prevent a great deal of disturbance and heart-burning, and perhaps a law-suit, and the succession of an old estate from being disputed—I cannot tell—perhaps you know nothing at all about it—"

"Oh, my man kens a great deal more than he says. Now what can it be about, John?" said the wife.

In the meanwhile John was undergoing internal struggles of a very severe description. He was a large brawny man, more slow in speech and heavy in aspect than men in his position, rubbed up into sharpness, at least, by contact with imperious sportsmen, generally are. He twisted his limbs so that he seemed all shoulder, he screwed up his features till he seemed all mouth.

"I'll no do it," he burst forth at length, "I'll no do it! I'll no wrong a poor lass, nor be mansworn!"

"What does the haverel mean?" cried Jean. "John!" shaking him violently, "you're falling into ane of your ill turns. Lord save the man! if ye dare to lay a finger on me!"

"I'll no do it!" cried John, stretching forth his arm with a clenched fist at the end of it, which might well have made the weaker creatures beside him tremble. Even Mr. Charles felt a nervous tremor go over him. Finesse and intellect grew pale in presence of brute force thus displayed.

"Gently, gently, my good man," he said, "you'll be forced to nothing. To tell what you know, that is all anybody wants of you. The law you know, if the worst comes to the worst, will make you do that; on the other hand, if you will give your information to the family and prevent going to law, it will be to your advantage; you see the difference; the court will give you nothing; that's all I have to say."

"Oh, dear me, dear me!" said the wife, wringing her hands. "Oh, John, is there nae way you can please the gentleman? You'll no be mansworn, my bonnie man! you'll no wrong

the lass. Poor silly thing she's nigh her last by this time; and if the gentleman is that anxious and was to make it worth our while? Often and often we've spoken of Canada, John. The lads would soon make their fortunes there with their talents. It would be to swear naething; it would be but to hold your tongue and that's so easy to some folk! the gentleman would be content if ye were but to hold your tongue. And where's the harm? Isabell, she canna live if she was to be made a queen—and it's no for your auld wife that you would throw away all the bairns' prospects? Oh, John, my bonnie man!"

The "bonnie man" paused irresolute; needless to say that the pair had entirely misconceived the object of the advertisement, and the service sought from them. They had not thought it possible, or rather Jean had not thought it possible—for John's mind did not readily exercise itself on an abstract question—that "the family" could have any wish but to nullify, if possible, the irregular marriage; "no to get ourselves into trouble" had been the principle of the pair from beginning to end

of the transaction, and they had kept themselves out of the way of Agnes, whose search after them they had heard of. "We'll get ourselves into hot water, and you'll lose your place, and muckle Agnes Jeffrey can do to make it up to us," Jean had said. To swear falsely was a crime which neither of the two could have wound themselves up to; but to be silent! that was another matter. The tongue is an unruly member, doing much harm in the world; but to say nothing how good it is! Had Mr. Charles been a cynic he would have watched this self-controversy to an end, and no doubt enjoyed it, as knowing how it must infallibly end; but Mr. Charles was no cynic; he preferred to interrupt the struggle before it ended in the subjugation of John's wavering virtue.

"Look here," he said suddenly and sharply, "and hold you your tongue, Mrs. Macgregor, I'm speaking to your man. You were present when my nephew, Tom Heriot, married a girl up in Strathmore, Isabell—what was her name? They took each other as man and wife in your presence? Answer me aye or no, is that true?"

"I was there too," cried Jean astonished, "I'm as sure a witness as him; we were both together in our ain kitchen, no heeding the two young fools. I said to Mr. Heriot, 'dinna do't'—but wha was to make the young gentleman mind me?"

"Then it's true? You've told me a lie to begin with, woman, and you were willing to tell me another. Man, it's for you to answer. Your name is John Macgregor, and it's true?"

"As sure as death, as true's the Bible. I'm no a man of many words like her, but naething would have made me mansworn!" said John, in the pleasure of being personally appealed to. "And I'll no deny my name. John Macgregor's my name, ance gillie to the laird in Strathmore, then odd man about the Moors doing whatever turned up—then—"

"It's a speat when it comes," said Jean composedly, folding her hands upon her bosom and regarding Mr. Charles with a vindictive pleasure, "you've brought it on yoursel."

"This then is what is wanted of you," said Mr. Charles hastily. "To prove this; not to go

away, as you thought, and hold your tongues, and dishonour a woman, and wrong a bairn; what you've got to do is to prove this. Hold your tongue, woman—"

"Eh, Mr. Heriot!" cried the irrepressible Jean, "I've heard of the Heriots that they were kind; but, oh, what a blessed family to uphaud the marriage and right the lass! And it'll be something to our John's advantage," she added insinuatingly, "just the same? for though it's hard to haud your tongue it's sometimes just as hard to speak out and say a' the truth; and if we were to get ourselves into trouble in our new place—"

"Make your wife hold her tongue, John!" said Mr. Charles. "You can go to the kitchen, both of you, and get something to eat; and then I'll take you out to see the young woman—I'm meaning Mrs. Tom Heriot, my nephew's wife; and we'll settle this business—as it is not a pleasant business—once for all."

"We're to go and see—Isabell?" asked Mrs. Macgregor, faltering.

"I said Mrs. Tom Heriot, my nephew's wife."

"Come, Jean, haud your tongue; the gentleman wants none of your clavers!" said John, giving a vigorous tug to her shawl.

But Jean lingered; she took a few steps towards the door, and then turned back.

"Ye'll no say naething to Isabell of what we were speaking o'—nor of the proposition to gang to Canada and hold our peace. Oh, Sir, you'll no say anything?"

"It was your proposition, Mrs. Macgregor, not mine!" said Mr. Charles.

"Aweel, aweel, Sir, what does it maitter? How was I to know you were such a good gentleman? Eh, so few as is like you! but you'll no say anything? It was a' from a good motive—for my ain bairns' sake, and to keep dissension out of a family, and to pleasure you—"

"Go away, go away!" said Mr. Charles with a smile, which he tried hard to conceal; and a short time after he set out with his two strange companions for the Spindle, to find the cottage where Isabell was. This was the interruption which broke in upon Marjory when deeply touched and half-weeping, she sat with Tom's child upon her

lap, and her heart going back into her own childhood—when Tom, too, was a child. The knocking at the cottage door was not a more harsh interruption of the stillness than was the other interruption, which was about to come into this sad yet exciting chapter of her life.

CHAPTER IX.

MEANWHILE Fanshawe had been passing his time very uncomfortably, on the whole, wandering about the Channel Islands the first part of his journey, and asking himself half dolefully, half with a certain rueful amusement whether his next stage should be Australia or New Zealand. He had written to Marjory from London, where he returned within three days of his precipitate departure; but he had not had courage enough to write to her since, having felt that he must wait for something to tell. It would be difficult to describe the effect produced upon Fanshawe's mind by his late interview with her. She had disappointed him by her pre-occupation, wounded him by what he could not but feel to be indiffer-

ence to himself, and by the almost harsh readiness to take advantage of him, and employ him in her service, which she had shown. A man may be very ready to say that he will go through fire and water to serve the lady of his affections, and may mean it; but when that lady sends for him abruptly, and lays her commands upon him, calling him frankly, not for his sake, but because he can be of use—not all the serviceableness in the world will prevent the man from feeling that this is hard upon him. That no woman can accept such services without—one way or other—paying for them, is a consolation which suggests itself only to the calculating and cold-blooded lover. The generous soul that offers itself without hire or reward is very apt to despair of remuneration; but even while taking the yoke upon him, it is disagreeable for a man to feel that it is not him, but the use of him, that a woman wants. This was Fanshawe's feeling; he was glad to do all that man could do for her; but yet to be simply made use of was hard. And after all, Tom Heriot, and the Heriots generally, were so little to him in comparison with Marjory! But with these feelings

there mingled some which were very different. He felt a respect for her, because she was able to resist all that vague fascination which subjugated himself; he admired her insensibility; it seemed well that a woman such as she, should be slow to be won—if ever she could be won by such a man as himself, which Fanshawe felt to be unlikely enough. Sometimes he had moments of great depression on this score, and felt that the idea was not one to be entertained or thought of; and then again the atmosphere of dreams would steal over him, that atmosphere which envelops everything in a sweet mist and uncertainty, where nothing is sure, and all is possible. Her very decision, her energy, the way in which she had sent him forth—though he did not like it—increased his admiration of her. It was so unlike himself; so much better than himself. And the little fluctuations of temper, the shades of offence, of withdrawal, of partial anger, which showed themselves when he did not agree with her, or was not rapid enough in following her conclusions, were sweet to him, sweeter than all her excellences. These imperfections gave him something to forgive

in her, something to indulge, to throw the great golden mantle of Love over, and—no, not to forget. The flaws were the last thing he wanted to forget; but if there had been any chance for him of getting free of Marjory's fetters, that last chance had floated away, when she sent him upon this unpalatable quest. It seemed to him needless, it was unpleasant; and yet how it bound him with chains, which he could not and did not wish to break!

Men do not like to feel themselves inferior to a woman; but there are kinds of inferiority which a man in love may put up with—and to Fanshawe it seemed that Marjory would be to him what the soul is to the body, what inspiration is to the soul. This was how he put it, saving his own pride. It was not that she would do anything for him, but that she would stimulate him into doing; she would inspire him, he felt; she would bring all his buds of meaning into flower, and work within him a realization of those intentions which arose so often in his mind, and came to nothing when they rose. Through all his journeys he kept thinking of her in this strain.

She would be his inspiration. He could do something—something vague, he did not know what—but something worth doing, under the impulse which she would give him. What would she say? Would it be possible for her to accept a rôle in life which was so little encouraging as that of trying to put energy into him? Fanshawe did not ask himself this question—neither did he ask many more, which it would have been very well worth his while to ask. How, if she married him, they were to live; what he could do to make their marriage possible; where and how they were to establish themselves? these questions did not enter his mind—partly, perhaps, because he was still in the reverential stage of love, thinking of her vaguely as something better than all created things, yet impetuously too, as of something which could not be done without, which was necessary to existence. But perhaps it was, on the whole, because of his prevailing character of good-for-nothing that he was able to elude all the practical questions, and to let his love absorb him without any notion of how he could make the after-life possible. Besides, he said to himself,

if ever the question crossed his mind, he could do nothing at this moment; she herself had made it impossible for him to do anything. Had she not sent him away from all the uses of life, from all the efforts which he might have been making towards something better—on this wild goose chase—for her? This afforded him an answer to every objection of his own thoughts, and with a certain humorous sense of the cleverness of such a response to all criticism, he used it in imagination even to herself. "What could I do? how could I do anything? You sent me away from rationality to hunt for a needle in a bottle of hay." This was the imaginary reply which he made to her imaginary fault-finding. Ah, if the matter were but so far advanced as that! Then he would find a hundred answers, a hundred excuses. The only thing he would not be able to find—though this part of the subject he managed to elude cleverly—was any reasonable ground upon which to ask Marjory Hay-Heriot to marry him, or any feasible way of providing for her, should she be willing to share his fortune.

With these thoughts in his mind, and those

other thoughts carefully excluded from it, he wandered about the smiling isles which are enclosed in so wild a sea. He went, as he thought, to every inn over their whole extent—from the smallest to the largest—encountering endless experiences (which were not all disagreeable), and seeing a great deal of novel life. And he found nothing—no Scotch face nor Scotch accent even met his eyes or ears—or when by accident they did, they belonged to some one who denied the name of Macgregor, and was not to be identified in any way with the man he sought. He was retiring disconsolately from his last attempt to discover this undiscoverable personage, and questioning himself ruefully as to which was the nearest way to New Zealand, when some one came up to him on the pier where he waited for the steamer—a ruddy, red-haired young man or boy, not more than twenty, freckled up to the roots of his hair, and with a shrewd but innocent face. He was one of the porters on the pier, and Fanshawe instinctively stole his portmanteau out of the way, to keep it from the clutches of this predatory personage. He was very much

astonished to see the individual in question pushing towards him, evidently with a purpose; and still more startled when the youth addressed him.

"You were asking, Sir, for ane of the name of Macgregor?" he said, interrogatively.

Fanshawe turned sharply round upon him.

"I was doing so," he said; "what of that? Have you anything to tell me about him?"

"I'm him," said the young man, "that's a'."

"You are he!" said Fanshawe, in dismay, gazing at the youthful countenance with a kind of horror. The lad put his hand to his hat with a comfortable smile, which told how far he was from any consciousness of offence.

"Ay, deed am I. I'm from Perthshire as my native place, and I've been here a year. Whatever you want wi' me it can be nae harm, for I've a conscience vide of offence; and folk tell me you've been looking for me, Sir, all through the island. There's no question ye can put that I winna answer. I'm feared for nothing. I have a conscience vide of offence."

Fanshawe was amused in spite of himself. "You might perhaps suit my purpose better if you were not quite so blameless," he said. "It cannot be anything so young as you that I want. Is your name John?"

"No," said the lad, "my name's Willie; but wait a bit, Sir, we'll maybe shuit you yet, a' the same. John's no my name, but it's my father's; and he's no so young nor so innocent as me. It might be him ye wanted?"

"Does he live here?"

"Na, he's no sae foolish as that, or sae enterprising, if that's a better word? He's weel off at home, and has nae inducement. He's one of the gamekeepers to Mr. Eccles, of the Langholm. Before that we used to live up in Strathmore, in the parish of Drumglen, no far from Stainbyers, where he was aye glad of a job to attend upon gentlemen, either fishing or any kind of sport, and to take the charge of their dogs when they had dogs, or of their horses—and keep guns and rods in order—or even to give a hand at the lodge."

"That will do," said Fanshawe, in sudden delight. "Give me your father's address."

But here the lad paused. "He's in a responsible position now," he said, "a man with a great trust; he's risen in the world. If ye could tell me what you wanted with him, I'll write. It might be something that wadna be consistent with his position. I'm but twenty; I'm no heeding what I do; but my father's had a hard struggle with the world, and now he's got the better o't, he maunna compromise himself. I'll write and get an answer if you'll tell me what it is you want."

Fanshawe had to exercise all his eloquence to overcome these delicate scruples. The lad was his mother's son; but finally he got the information he wanted, and departed with a light heart in the steamer, carrying that precious address (already found out, though he did not know it) carefully enshrined in his pocket-book like a treasure. He was on his way to Marjory with this information on the very afternoon in which Mr. Charles trudged along the shore with his long legs, outstripping his companions. It would

have been wiser, no doubt, to have gone and sought out the Macgregors at once, but Fanshawe, who was thinking little of the Macgregors, and much of Marjory, preferred to go to St. Andrews to let her know how promptly he had executed her commission. Travelling is not rapid in Fife; he had to make his impatient way through a network of railways, one interlacing the other, and leaving the unfortunate traveller an hour's waiting here and there, at all sorts of out-of-the-way stations. His feelings during these delays need not be described; but he was compelled to submit, as all forlorn Britons are compelled to submit, to the vagaries of the railway companies. But for this he would have reached St. Andrews with his address, in time to join the party which had forestalled him. His information, of course, was not of the least importance by the time he reached his destination. He was just a few hours too late, as people so often are; but luckily he was unaware of the fact, and waited for Marjory in the room which was full of her presence, with a flutter at his heart, which prevented him from thinking very seriously

of anything. He sat down by the window where he had seen her sitting, and looked out upon the sea and sky against which he had watched the outline of her features, thinking it like the picture of a saint; and all the surroundings, which were full of her, filled up the heart of the man with such a soft enchantment that for a long time he was not even impatient. She was not certain to be gracious to him, but the scene was gracious, full of her breath and influence, and permitted him to wrap himself in the shadow, as it were, of her presence, embracing him gently with all the corners and all the draperies that were fresh from her touch, enveloping him in all the nameless associations of the place in which she lived. For a long time he yielded himself up to this fascination, finding a subtle pleasure in it which stole all his strength from him, until the long shadows of the evening began to deepen, and the maids came to communicate their wonder to him. The dinner hour had arrived, and not even Mr. Charles had come home. They had gone by the shore towards the Spindle, both Miss Heriot and her uncle. Could anything have

happened? Love is always fanciful, and takes fright upon any pretext. Could anything have happened? Fanshawe rushed out of the house in the subdued light of the evening, and set out over the cliffs at a pace which few people could have kept up with, fearing he knew not what, and not venturing to ask himself what he feared.

At the same hour, on the same afternoon, another visitor was entering St. Andrews, coming down from the higher ground inland upon the picturesque old town, and looking out anxiously for the first sight of its towers and ruins. Of all unaccustomed travellers this was Miss Jean Hay-Heriot, from the High Street of Comlie, in a black bonnet big enough to take in her lace "borders"—with her keen eyes noting everything along the unaccustomed road, which yet she knew so well. To visit St. Andrews at all, was a wonderful effort on her part; but to visit it at so late an hour that she and her old horse and rusty coachman must be compelled to pass the night "in a strange place," was more wonderful still. The reason of her visit was,

however, natural enough. Mr. Charles's mysterious intimations and hints of a mysterious something which was yet to be disclosed in his family, had already travelled over the length and breadth of Fife, with that amazing celerity which is peculiar to gossip of all kinds. It had reached Miss Jean's ears that day after her early dinner, when the Minister himself had "stepped across" to communicate the strange news, which he had learned at a meeting of Presbytery, in the most direct manner, from the Reverend Simon Stutters, of Kinnucher, who had it from Mr. Morrison, of St. Rule's, who had it from "auld Charlie" himself. The story, as was natural, had taken form and shape in these several transmissions, and now narrated circumstantially how Tom Heriot had been entrapped by the arts of a gamekeeper's daughter in the Highlands; how this designing creature had flirted, and held off and on, till she wound him up to the pitch of consenting to marry her privately; how then he went off in disgust and misery, and though popularly believed to have died of an injury to the spine got in the hunting-field, had in reality

succumbed to the severer malady of a broken heart; and how there was now a baby produced, who was said to be Tom's heir, to the great trouble of the family.

"I hear there's a great body of witnesses all ready to swear to it," said Dr. Murray; "but our old friend Charles, Miss Jean, as I need not tell you, is not of a very determined character, and perhaps if there was a bold front put upon it, we might hear another story. The worst is, there's nobody that I know of, unless it was a man of business, that has energy to take the matter up."

"Energy!" said Miss Jean, "it's not energy that's wanting. Marjory's a young woman, and will think it's not her place to interfere; but I'm not young to speak of, and I'll not see the old house pass to a gamekeeper's daughter without rhyme or reason. Hey, Bell! go and call John out of the kailyard, and bid him dress himself, and put to the horse. I'm going to St. Andrews; and put me up a change of linen, and a clean cap. Charlie's an old fool! but I hope you'll no say that I'm not a determined character,

Doctor. I'll know the rights of this before I'm a day older—and she'll be a clever lass, cleverer than I have ever seen one of her kind, if she imposes upon me."

"My dear Miss Jean," said Dr. Murray, "we all bow to your sense and your experience; but these kind of cutties are often very clever. I would not encounter one of them myself unless it was strictly in the way of duty—and you know a lady—"

"Oh, ay! I know your opinion of a lady," said Miss Jean, "which is very pleasant, and very fine, if we were all under five-and-twenty; but when a woman comes to be five-and-seventy, as I'm saying, that makes a difference. Johnnie Hepburn, this will be sore news for your friends up at Pitcomlie," she added, quickly turning, with a gleam of enjoyment, to the other visitor, who had been listening with consternation to the strange story. "Ye'll have a grand excuse to go and comfort Mrs. Chairles."

"I don't think my comfort is very much to Mrs. Charles," said Hepburn, with rising colour;

" but surely you don't believe, for a moment, that such a story as this can be true."

" Why should I no believe it?" said Miss Jean. She was profoundly sceptical, but she could not relinquish the opportunity of demolishing her adversaries, " these young women " at Pitcomlie. " We're a great people, Johnnie, and Scotland, though she's small, holds up her head with the best, and for my part I know none that can hold a candle to her—"

" That's true—that's very true," said the Minister, " but when you think of all our spiritual advantages, and what Providence has done for us, it's a terrible addition to our responsibility. That is what I always think of—a land that has been so favoured for generations—"

" But," Miss Jean went on impatiently, " whether it is that some weakness is needful to show that we're always human—these customs about private marriages are an awfu' snare and burden. It's a wonder to me that half the families in the land are no rent asunder with irregular marriages. There's some special Providence, I've aye felt, that must watch over

eldest sons. There never was one in our family that ever I heard of; and I ask your pardon, Dr. Murray, but Tom Heriot dying of a broken heart is beyond me; we've tough hearts in our family—they stand a good tug. He might have taken to drinking, or some other vice, to make himself amends; but to break his heart! Na—na—that's more than I can believe."

"I tell you what was told to me," said Dr. Murray, "and no wonder, poor man. What would his father have said? and all his belongings? and the county that would never have taken any notice of him—and not the least, Miss Jean, you—"

"Me! He could have put up with the want of notice from me; the world, in general, is but little regardful of what's said by a cankered auld maid. Most likely," said Miss Jean with a twinkle of her bright eyes, "he would have said it was envy because I had never been married myself. But that's neither here nor there. If it's a determined character that's wanting, Doctor, I'm away to St. Andrews. Chairlie is as weak as water, as you say—and

Marjory will be a fool, and will not like to move."

"Could I be of any use," asked Hepburn eagerly.

"In the interests of the other heir? Johnnie, my man, you're a fine lad." said Miss Jean, "and very accomplished. I do not know another man like you in all Fife for the piano and the like of that; but for a determined character —na—na—I'll go myself."

"I don't see what the piano has to do with it," said Hepburn angrily.

"Nor I either," said Miss Jean with a laugh, and she rang her bell, and gave her orders about her change of linen in such simplicity of diction that her guests took their leave. "Half-a-dozen shifts, Bell, for you never know what may happen at my age. Lord bless me! am I to learn new-fangled words to save the Minister's modesty, forsooth—and what's more modest than a shift? As for Johnnie Hepburn, I don't doubt that he calls all his clothing by nasty French names. Give me good Scotch that's aye clean and wholesome; and bring me a cup of tea—and let the carriage be round in half-an-hour. I'm

going on family business—you can say that to whoever wants to know."

"Eh! it's Miss May that's to be married!" said Bell, clapping her hands.

"You think that's something to be pleased at, you lightheaded taupie? When Miss May's married, there will not be one person of the name of Hay-Heriot worth their salt upon this earth—except me," said the old lady with moisture in her eyes, "and, oh! the old rag o' flesh and blood that I am! Go quick, and make up my bundle, you gaping thing! Miss May's no the fool to marry till she sees what's she's doing. I can see to that at the same time," Miss Jean added briskly as the maid left her. And with these double intentions she set out, meaning to dine comfortably at the end of her journey, and to carry confusion to the unrightful claimants of the old lands. But Miss Jean arrived to find the house empty, the dinner-table spread but vacant, the servants full of consternation. Miss Heriot must have fallen over the cliff—she must have been blown off the Spindle Rock—and Mr. Charles, in the effort to save her, must have

perished too. What so likely, it was known that they had gone in the same direction, and when no one came back for dinner, notwithstanding the well-known punctuality of the affrighted house?

CHAPTER X.

YOUNG Hepburn went out of Miss Jean's door with a face full of offence and a heart full of trouble. He was not thinking much of himself, however, so that the offence was evanescent; he was thinking of *her;* yes, of that Her, who, however hastily, unreasonably, and without adequate cause, had come to be the representative of womankind to the young man, superseding Marjory and all ideals. Matilda was not an ideal woman; he could not worship her in that guise, nor put her into any shrine. It is needless for me to pause and remark upon the curious unsuitability of perhaps the majority of mortal unions, the way in which young men or young women

prefer the individual least calculated to make them happy—and hold to that choice with an obstinacy worthy of the original folly. Poor Hepburn had been seized with this too common form of love-sickness; he was not blind; he saw well enough that Mrs. Charles was unlike anything that he had set before himself, in his days of imagination, as worthy of love; and already he had begun to say to himself that an ideal standard was folly; that a real human creature was above ideals; that to be genuine was best whatever the character of that reality might be. This was the first stage—afterward she went further, and said to himself that women were different from men; that justice was not to be expected from them, or an appreciation of anything above the ordinary level of facts; that they were not capable of understanding abstractions; that they were invincible to reason; and that after all, it was because she was so undauntedly foolish, so delightfully under the sway of her feelings, and had so different a way of judging—a method quite her own, and independent of law and rule—that men worshipped a woman. Yes, she was not as they

are, she was a fool, and yet a goddess—to be petted, put up with, laughed at, admired, thought more of and less of than was possible to any other created thing. This was Hepburn's way, as it has been many another man's, of making up to himself for having given over his whole being to the sway of a foolish woman. He made out that all women were foolish, and idealized her meanness, not being able to fit her to the ancient ideal he had once possessed. Women, perhaps, when they choose badly, do something of the same kind; but they are seldom so general in their conclusions. For the most part, they have a hankering after the ideal, which makes them always capable of believing in a higher kind of man; but men make their convenient theory into a general truth which, perhaps, is one result of their superior power of understanding the abstract. To have loved a fool is sufficient reason with them to conclude that all women are fools—and so Hepburn did. No, Matilda was not an ideal woman; she was not like the high feminine types of being which poets have created; but she was real, and all women were like *her;* from the old theory to

the new there is but a step, and this step he had made unawares. He set off now with a heavy heart to Pitcomlie, feeling that he knew exactly what she would say, how she would burst out in denunciation of "the old family," and declare that it was all a plot to injure her and her child. And strange as it seemed to him, he knew that Matilda would put real faith in this; she would have no difficulty in believing that Mr. Charles and Marjory had hatched an iniquitous plot, and that lawyers and judges, and a crowd of honourable men, were accomplices in the scheme against her. It was the way of women. What he should have to do would be to soothe and to console—and he did not dislike the office. Her theories would be idiotic, her rage unreasonable; but she would be so pretty in her anger, so fascinating in her tears; and to soothe them away, to coax her back to quietness, would be so pleasant! Thus the foolish lover justified Providence, which provides silly women for the delectation of the world; he liked it better than if she had been a reasonable creature, and he said to himself that all women were alike,

and that folly was the sweetest thing between earth and heaven.

Matilda was reclining on the sofa when he went into that drawing-room at Pitcomlie, which no longer bore the remotest resemblance to Marjory's drawing-room. The room was strewed with traces of the destructive tendencies of the little heir. He had been brought down by Verna, who felt it necessary, from time to time, to demonstrate how much the young mother was devoted to her children; and it was Verna who had caused Tommy's gorgeous new rocking-horse to be placed in a corner of the drawing-room. But on this particular afternoon the young Laird had given decided indications of a will of his own; he had torn the mane of his rocking-horse out in handfuls of horse-hair, which was scattered all over the room. He had thrown about the sofa-cushions, and made ropes of the anti-macassars; he had cast down several glass vases, and one of old china, breaking them into millions of pieces. Finally, he had been sent away in disgrace, howling so as to be audible half way down the Comlie road, where Hepburn

heard his shrieks; he hurried on in consequence, fearing hysterics, and was consoled to find it was only Tommy. The pretty mother lay on the sofa, fatigued with the passion which Tommy had driven her into. There were two patches of rose-red on her cheeks—traces of her excitement; and she held out her hand half-irritably, half-languidly to her visitor. "Oh, you have come at last;" she said, for he had not been at Pitcomlie the day before. Verna was sitting by with her account-books; she was making up the bills, and putting her affairs in order, and she was happy. The squabble with Tommy had not affected her.

"I was obliged to go to Edinburgh yesterday," said Hepburn humbly; "as I told you—to see my sister's trustees."

"Oh yes, I know!" said Matilda. "Business is always so much more important than anything else. You men will make any sacrifice to business—and leave your friends in loneliness, without ever thinking once—".

"Were you lonely?" whispered the gratified Johnnie; "how good, how sweet of you to

miss me! you never were out of my mind all day."

"Oh, that is what all you gentlemen say," said Matilda, with a little toss of her head. "As for your Fifeshire people," she went on, "I don't think much of them. But for a few cards that have been left, one would imagine there was nobody in the county. I don't know if it is their way here, or if it is that odious Miss Jean."

"I told you, Matty, when you were so rude to the Heriots—" said Verna.

"Oh, don't talk to me any more about that!" cried Mrs. Charles; "besides, I never was rude to the Heriots. They chose to take offence and go away; but was that any blame of mine? Was I to put myself at their feet, do you suppose, in my own house?"

"Have you heard anything of them lately?" asked Hepburn, with a certain solemnity in his tone and manner, which he tried vainly to banish. Verna looked up at him quickly, being more open to impression than her sister, and was the first to reply.

"Is there anything to be heard?" she said, looking at him.

Matilda's languor was a great deal more safe than the keen alertness of the other.

He answered, "No, oh no!—I suppose not, since you have heard nothing," with some confusion. It was the very best way of broaching the subject; but his confusion was real, and he did not think of that.

"Since we have heard nothing?" said Verna, raising herself to a very upright position. She had never been perfectly easy since Dr. Murray had thrown, quite inadvertently, into her mind that suggestion of another heir.

"Well," said Hepburn, with some impatience, "I have no double meaning. I supposed there must be nothing to hear as you have not heard. Otherwise, I have just been listening to a story—"

"What story?"

It was strange that Matilda kept silent so long; she was cowed, I suppose, by Verna's harsh and peremptory tone.

"They say," said Hepburn, hesitating, and

sinking his voice involuntarily; "indeed, I do not believe it, I give no credence at all to it. They say that Tom Heriot was married privately, and that there is a child—"

"What is that?" said Matilda, rousing up. "Tom Heriot married—and a child? Oh, what a wicked, wicked story! Oh, Mr. Hepburn, how can you say so, when you know, as well as I do, that we heard quite different, that it was all settled when the will was read, and that Tommy was the only heir—the only, only heir, everybody said. How can you make up such a story? It is only to frighten me, and make me unhappy. You know you don't mean what you say."

"Indeed," said poor Johnnie, abject in the penitence for which he had no cause. "I would not make you unhappy for the world. I thought it right to tell you as I heard—but I don't believe it. It will turn out to be a mere invention, of that I am sure; but as I had just heard, I wanted to find out whether you knew."

"Of course we know to the contrary," said

Matilda, laying herself back, somewhat excited, upon her pillows, satisfied so far with the explanation, and only angry with Johnnie in a coquettish tormenting way. But Verna, who had no such confidence, restrained her feelings, keeping her anxiety under. She was a great deal more anxious than her sister, and understood much better all that was involved.

"For simple curiosity, Mr. Hepburn," said Verna, "tell us what they say."

"Oh, it is just what is always said," he answered. "Tom Heriot, they say, was privately married—married irregularly, as sometimes happens in Scotland—"

"What sort of a thing is that—before the registrar, or something?"

"Oh, not so formal. In Scotland," said Hepburn, "if two people were to say to each other, before us, for instance, 'This is my husband, and this is my wife,' they would be supposed to be married."

"Supposed! but what would that matter? It would be no marriage at all."

"I thought there was always a blacksmith," said Matilda, from her sofa, laughing. "When there were Gretna Green marriages, there was always a blacksmith. I have heard of that. It must have been such fun, much greater fun than an ordinary wedding, with a breakfast, and just the same things as everybody else has."

"It would be no marriage at all," repeated Verna, with a certain harsh earnestness. "You hear me, Mr. Hepburn? No marriage at all!"

"Unfortunately, as much a marriage as though it had been done by an Archbishop," said Johnnie; "that is what they say; but I don't think Tom Heriot was the man to do it. I don't think there is any fear. I feel sure that, if there had been anything in it, they would have let you know first of all. It would be only your right; for there is nobody so deeply concerned."

"Of course we should have been the first to hear," said Verna, coldly.

She went back to her account-books, closing

the subject, and adding up a line of figures by way of proving to herself how calm she was. The effort was successful so far as Hepburn was concerned; but Verna did not convince herself. After a few minutes' absorption in the books, she rose in a fever of suppressed emotion, and went slowly out of the room, wrapping herself, as it were, in a cloak of sudden self-restraint. How she trembled! how cold she had grown suddenly, though it was a day in Summer! The other two did not notice her, being absorbed in their own comedy; but this was tragedy to Verna. The fact that she might have spared herself the trouble of such energetic self-repression, and that neither of her companions had taken the trouble to think of her at all, did not affect her, as it might have affected a more sympathetic spirit. What afflicted her was no sentimental sorrow, but real heavy misfortune—the loss of a life. Yes, she felt that it was her life that was threatened, not Matilda's fortune, or the patrimony of naughty little Tommy; it was she who was threatened, not they. She went out in a kind of despair, and sat down in a corner of the rocks, from which

she could see the old house against which she had meditated such treason. It seemed to her that some magical power must attend that wretched old place. Had she ever prospered since she proposed to meddle with it? She shivered as she looked at it, feeling as though it were a wizard, or a wizard's dwelling. Poor Verna! the tears came into her eyes, intense and bitter. To be sure it was only a report; Hepburn did not put any faith in it—nay, treated it as a simple piece of gossip; but to Verna, as to many women, the pain of it was its best authority. It would be so miserable a change, so dreadful a loss and misfortune, that somehow, according to the nature of things, it must be true.

In the meantime Matilda, from her sofa, began to claim the sympathy of her devoted admirer.

"Oh! Mr. Hepburn," she said, "if this were true! What should I and my poor children do if this were true? I should have nothing—nothing but my pension and the two children to bring up—boys, too! And oh! my poor

little Tommy! my little heir! What should I do?"

It was on Hepburn's lips to say that she would still have her husband's portion, the inheritance of the younger son, to fall back upon; but to console this gentle, disconsolate creature with mercenary suggestions of eight thousand pounds, seemed a miserable thing to do. He took her hand instead, and comforted her, and bid her not to fear.

"There are many that would be but too proud, too happy to be of use to you," he said. "Everything I have in the world—everything! though it is not much—"

"Oh, Mr. Hepburn! you are too good," murmured Matilda, and then she proceeded with her complaint. "Verna would leave me, I know," she said, "Verna has no feeling for anything above account-books. You saw how she kept adding them up, even when you were telling me of this dreadful report. That is her sphere—fussing about a house, and having the control of the bills and all that. I have often said, what a pity it was that we were not quite poor, for

then Verna might have gone out as a housekeeper and been happy. We never were rich," she added, with that frankness that went to Hepburn's heart, "but still ladies can't do such things. It is a pity, though I don't think I ever could be—a governess, for instance, though I may perhaps require to do something for my poor children. Oh, Mr. Hepburn! don't be too kind to me. Don't take my hand and that. It isn't—nice; for you know I am not a young girl, as some people might think, to look at me; but a poor widow—with no one to love me."

Here Matilda's tears overcame her—she covered her face with her handkerchief. She suffered Johnnie to do what he liked with her hand; and poor Johnnie moved beyond all control, overcome by her beauty and her tears, and her helplessness; touched by love at once, and chivalrous sympathy for her weakness and distress—Johnnie did what any such tender-hearted soul was sure to do. He threw himself on his knees by the side of the sofa—he laid himself and all his possessions at her feet—he combated all her feeble protestations, that it was impossible for her to love

again—that it was far too soon to talk to her like that—that she never, never could forget her Charlie. All these whispers of resistance, he quenched by other whispers, ever more and more tender. He would be a father to her children—he would watch over their rights—he could not bear to hear her say that she had no one to love her. Did not he love her? Had not he loved her from the first day he saw her? Gradually Matilda's protests sank lower and lower—and when the new butler, who occupied Fleming's place, opened the door to bring in his mistress's afternoon cup of tea, Hepburn rose from his knees, pledged to a hundred things which the young man in his enthusiasm undertook with rapture, but which were serious enough when he came to analyse them in detail. Mrs. Charles smoothed the fair locks which were slightly ruffled upon her forehead, and laughed a little laugh of bashful consciousness becoming her new position. "And, oh! you dreadful man," she said, when they were left alone again, "to go and make me commit myself like this before six months! I am so shocked, and so much ashamed

of myself. It is all your fault, coming every day and stealing into a poor little thing's heart. Oh, John! you must promise me—you must swear to me—never to say a word to anyone for a year at least. I could not bear it. It is not my fault that I am fond of you—but you must never, never, say a word—"

"How am I to go to St. Andrews then?" said the happy Johnnie, "to look after the children's rights? What pretence can I make, if I cannot speak the truth?"

"Oh, I cannot let you go to St. Andrews," said Matilda, "I want you here, I can't get on without you; and as soon as ever you see Marjory you will forget me. Oh, yes, you may say what you like, but I know you would forget me. And to be sure you could always say you were acting as our friend," she added, looking up into his face with a merry laugh, "a gentleman may always be a lady's friend. You are my friend, recollect, in public—only my friend—until it is a year."

She laughed and Johnnie laughed, though with an odd echo somehow about, which seemed

to mock him. But it was the way with women; dear, loving, tender, soulless creatures, how were they to be expected to resist a living lover for the sake of a dead husband? it was their way. It was too delightful to have this lovely thing all to himself, to stop and make a fuss about ideals. What folly they were! What ideal in the world was equal to the soft warm touch of that hand which clung to his, and that face which brightened as he bent over it? How happy he was as he sat by her, and poured all manner of nonsense into her ear! She was happy too; flattered, amused, satisfied, and full of a fluttering pride in the thought that before six months she had again been wooed. To be sure there were prejudices which might prevent this fact being made public; but still she had the satisfaction of knowing it within herself.

CHAPTER XI.

MARJORY was standing by Isabell's bed, putting back the infant into its place by her side when her uncle and his attendants were admitted into the cottage. She did not see the start of amazement with which Agnes and her mother recognised the strangers. She herself did not even remark their presence. Her mind was full of emotion much too warm and strong to be easily disturbed from the thoughts that occupied her, and her only feeling towards her uncle was that of impatience that he had followed her so quickly. That he should wish to examine into the whole matter personally was simple enough, and he had even insisted

upon it, in his conversations with herself; consequently she was not surprised at his appearance, but only annoyed by his haste and want of consideration for the invalid. If it had been a lady he would never have broke in upon her so, Marjory said to herself. And she showed her displeasure by taking no notice of his arrival. She bent over Isabell, smoothing her pillows, and arranging the white coverlet over her.

"My uncle has come," she said, "you will not mind? He is an old man and very kind at heart. If he seems a little abrupt it is only his manner. He is our only relative, he has a right to inquire; you will not be frightened? Answer his questions as you have answered me. He will be a good friend to—the child—and to you."

"My friends must be in a better place," said Isabell, with a faint smile.

"Yes, but we want the other too, for the child's sake," said Marjory. She was more excited than the dying girl. She began to picture to herself disagreeable questions which Mr. Charles might ask, suggestions he might make.

He was kind, but he had a different code of civility for "a country lass" from that which would rule his utterances to a lady. Perhaps in general he was not wrong in this; but Isabell was not a mere country lass as he supposed. With a sense of anxiety which was stronger than seemed called for by the occasion, Marjory stood aside, and allowed her uncle to approach. Then, for the first time, she noticed the homely pair who accompanied him, and saw Agnes, flushed with excitement, standing back in a corner watching them, forcibly keeping herself silent, but with an eagerness of eye and look which meant something. The old mother, too, was gazing at them with open mouth and eyes, saying at intervals, "Lord preserve us a'!" with mingled anxiety and surprise. This curious consciousness, on the part of the spectators, disclosed to Marjory that the strange visitors were not mere neighbours, as she had thought. And she, too, gazed at them eagerly—but ignorantly—without being any the wiser. Their real identity strangely enough never occurred to her. She had associated the finding of them with

Fanshawe, and with him alone. It is, perhaps, too much to say that she did not want them to be found except by him; but certainly she had set her heart upon his accomplishment of this commission. It would be, she felt, a proof to heaven and earth that his real character was very different from his reputation—that he was a true friend—a man to trust and rely upon. She had "no object" (as she said to herself) in her wish to prove this—but yet abstractly she did wish to prove it. It was a foregone conclusion in her own mind. Therefore she had no desire that these should be the missing witnesses, and the idea did not occur to her, eager and anxious as her interest was.

"Yes, yes, May, my dear," said Mr. Charles "I see, this is the young woman. How are you to-day? I hear you are not so well as could be wished. My niece, Miss Heriot, has told me a great deal about you. I am not wanting to be uncivil, my poor girl; but I cannot conceal from you that your story is very unlikely—very unlikely; without strong proof I cannot see how it could ever be believed."

He said this standing in the place which Marjory had given up to him, taking in everything around, the homely scene, the group which filled the room, rather than the individual whom he was addressing. When, however, he turned to her at the conclusion of his little speech, Mr. Charles gave a perceptible start. What Isabell might have been, in rude health like her sister, it would have been difficult to say, or whether the refinement and melancholy beauty of her face was purchased chiefly by grief and suffering; but certainly there was nothing in this pale and fragile creature, which answered to Mr. Charles's idea of a country lass. He stammered a little in his confusion. He said, stumbling over his words, "I—beg your pardon; I am afraid you are—not so well—as I thought—"

"I will never be well in this world," said Isabell. "I'm going fast, fast to a better, where a'body will understand. It was Miss Heriot put that first into my head—where there will be nobody that will not understand. I'm weak, weak, no able to tell it all over again; and oh, Sir, whatfor should I take all that pain,

no to be believed? What matter is it whether God clear my good name or no? He will do it some time —and right my little bairn. I'm tired, tired—oh, mother, I'm tired, my heart's beating; and my head's throbbing. Dinna ask me any questions. I want to rest—"

"Oh, Bell!" cried the mother, coming forward. "Oh, my Bell! tell the gentleman. Now is the time to say the truth, whatever it may be. And now I'll believe you, my bairn! I've been hard, and shut my heart. Now—now—if you'll say it again, I will believe you, Bell!"

The girl closed her eyes, and shook her head gently. "How often have I told you, and you wouldna believe me, mother? Why now, when my strength is failing, and my heart sinking?"

"Isabell!" cried Agnes, "speak to them—oh, for God's sake—look at me upon my knees to you," and she rushed forward into the midst of the room, and threw herself upon her knees, with tears bursting from her blue eyes and her hands raised in passionate supplication, "for the man's sake that's dead, that never loved you half

so well as I've done—for the bairn's sake that I'll be a mother to—Isabell! for the last time."

Wearily Isabell opened her eyes. "Am I dying then?" she said, with a feeble smile. "Eh, that would be good news! You would not put it to me so solemn if I was not dying. I'm wearied, sore wearied; but if it's the last time I must not think of mysel. My breath's going, mother, and my heart's fluttering; come and hold me by the hand, and Miss Heriot—where is Miss Heriot? Must I say it all over—every word? Sir, stand you there that I may see you. I was a foolish creature, and ignorant—knowing nothing. I didna pay attention when I should—I was fond of foolish things and dreaming."

"Bell, you were the best of my bairns; you never gave me an hour's trouble—till *that* time—"

"Whisht, mother, let me speak! Then I met with a gentleman—he was like *her* there—you bonnie leddy, that has come to me and comforted me, and been my stay. By her ye may judge him. He said I should be his wife before God and man. Never a thought of harm, no a thought

was in his mind. I'm dying and going till him. My man! no his sister there, a lady, could think less harm. Maybe I would have done what he said, good or ill; for he was like a god to me—a gentleman—no like common lads—but never a word of ill said he, mother, never a word. He said he wouldna go before the Minister, for it would be his ruin; but before decent folk."

Here the sound of a sob broke poor Isabell's interrupted monologue, a rude outbreak of emotion, sounding like a sudden discord. It came from the man who stood behind-backs, whose eyes had been gradually getting redder. The woman by him laid her hand upon him to restrain him; she had her handkerchief to her eyes; but was watching keenly through it, keeping her senses about her. Isabell was vaguely disturbed by this interruption; but after a moment's pause began again; her voice more and more broken by the struggling breath.

"They were decent folk; they would say the truth if they were found—John Macgregor and his wife—they wouldna have countenanced any sin; you may believe that, mother. Folk like

them would never have countenanced what was a shame to think of. I told nobody, because he said it - no one, not even Agnes. I aye hoped, and he aye hoped. But then there came the terrible news—the awfu' news; it was in the papers. If it was not that I'm going—to him—I couldna speak of that day. Dinna ask me more. I mind nothing more, till I wakened up, and my bairn was born; and I was a disgrace and a shame!"

"No, no, Bell; no a disgrace!" cried the mother, with tears streaming from her eyes. "It was a' for the truth that I fought—the truth. I born minded nothing more."

"And ye believe me now, because I'm dying! there's no other reason. I was as true then as I am now. Oh, if these decent folk were but here, that ken a'," she cried with an effort. Another abrupt outbreak of sudden sobbing come from the other end of the room; Isabell raised herself up—partly it was the beating of her heart that forced her into an erect position, partly a curiosity, which was stronger than her self-restraint. When she saw the strangers, she uttered a sudden cry; excitement blazed up like flame, over her delicate face, light-

ing wild lamps in her eyes, and bringing colour to her cheeks; a gleam as of stormy sunshine came over her. "They're here!" she cried, with an infantile laugh of pleasure, the last utterance of weakness. "Oh, make them speak! is it no true?"

"It's Gospel," cried the man, sobbing. "Oh, Bell, my bonnie woman, to see you come to this! it's a' Gospel truth. Speak out, Jean, if you're a woman, and no a stone; speak out, I tell you! It's true, Sir—as sure as death—as true as the Bible. God! woman, will ye no speak?"

"I'll speak if ye'll leave me time," said Jean. "I'm no to be pushed that gate, and pushed the other, and never left to mysel'. She was never an ill lass. I've kent her since she was this height; a bit genty creature, never just like other folk. Ye ken yourself, Sir, I said we could never swear against Bell—she's a good lass. There was some nonsense of the kind went on atween her and young Mr. Heriot—"

Isabell raised herself almost erect in her bed. Her fragile white figure shook with the heavings of her heart. But for this the flush upon her face, the overwhelming brightness of her eyes,

might have banished even from the spectator most deeply interested, any idea of mortal sickness. She looked at the woman with a smile.

"I'm dying!" she said, in a voice that was strangely sweet and strong. "Answer, before God—and me. Ye'll never see me mair—till the last day. Ye've my name and my bairn's in your hands. Speak out! I ask you nae favour; speak the truth—before God, and me."

"Oh, Bell!" cried the woman, terrified, raising her hand to her face; "oh, dinna look at me with those blazing e'en! Sir, we meant nae harm—John and me. We never made our house a tryst, with an ill meaning. He went on his knees to me to let him see her. We wer'na the folk to lead gentlemen astray, nor lasses neither; it was not our blame."

"Speak, ye deevil!" cried the man, furious; "or let me speak. It comes better from a woman. Who thinks of you and me? Sir, Sir! it's a' true."

The tears were running down his rough face. With his stumbling, awkward step, too big for the place, he pushed forward. "If we didna

come forrit before, it was for the fear o' man," he said. "She thought it was a story that would lose me my place—like as if we was entrapping lads to marry. Oh, Bell, forgive me! it was the fear of man."

"Mother, you hear!" said Isabell. She had forgotten all the others. A glow of gentle contentment stole over her face. The strength of excitement failed her; she sank back upon the pillows, which Marjory stealing in, had raised to support her. "Now I can depart in peace; now I'm clear; now I can go to my man. Oh, God be praised—that sent the decent folk, just in time."

"Isabell!" cried Agnes, throwing herself on the bed; "you're no so ill as that? It wasna that I thought you dying; you're no dying. I bad ye speak because they were here."

"Ay, ay! and I've spoken; and it's a' clear. The night's coming on, I canna see, Mother, you were saying—what was somebody saying? I hear a sound in my ears; it's the sea, or the wind—or maybe something more."

"Bell! what is it? oh, my Bell! It's her

heart. Raise her up, to get breath; open the window. She's aye speaking, speaking. Bell, speak to your mother. My darlin' it's a' clear."

"It's voices," she said, with an effort; "voices —like in the Bible—like the sound—o' a great multitude; grander than the sea, or the wind. Do ye no hear?—and one that says 'Isabell!' among all the angels, and the saved that cry day and night, 'Honour to the Lamb!' Oh, hearken. One's stopped, and it cries 'Isabell!' Ay, my man! I'm here—I'm here!"

Then a great silence suddenly fell over the cottage, a stifled sound of feet moving, faint rustling of dresses, tinkling of the glass in which they tried to administer something to revive her, and afterwards low sobs, broken cries, but not another articulate word. The conflict of wills and voices had ended. Without a word, another brief ineffectual struggle took place round the bed—the last struggle with death—vain, passionate, hopeless effort. Isabell did not die all at once; this hard life, which is so bitter to live, so hard to begin, is hard too to end. She could

not drop it from her so easily. For hours after they moved about that bed, saying nothing to each other, hiding their faces by times, stopping their ears not to hear the painful thrill of those last breathings, which seemed to shake the cottage. The doctor had time to come all the way from St. Andrews, and look at her, pitiful and helpless, shaking his head, and whispering that she did not suffer, that consciousness was gone and pain. But it was the middle of the night before the last breath died upon poor Isabell's lips. No one of all the awe-stricken party left the cottage at first. Marjory was with the mother and sister by the bed. Mr. Charles, pale as a ghost, sat in a chair in a corner, looking on with a wondering countenance of sorrow. Had any one suggested it to him, he would have gone away; but he was absorbed like all the rest, and thought of nothing but of the wonderful act that was being accomplished before him. John Macgregor was standing on the threshold outside, his great person heaving with sobs. His wife, crying, but still with her wits about her, prepared with ghastly matter of fact composure to make her-

self of use. This was the scene upon which Fanshawe arrived, in the early darkening of the summer night. The baby, whom everybody had forgotten, had just awoke with a cry by the side of its insensible mother. Somehow this sudden protest of life against the pre-occupation of all the attendants on the dying, gave a touch almost of humour to the tragic scene. Marjory lifted the infant, and it was into Fanshawe's arms that she thrust it, scarcely seeing what she did. "Take it to the woman," she said, turning away from him. Where was he to take it? He held the helpless thing in his arms, no one finding it ludicrous, or even strange, till Jean relieved him of it. And then he went and stood with John Macgregor, not knowing who he was, or what had happened, outside the door. But after all, notwithstanding his ignorance and dismay, it was Fanshawe who brought so much common sense and understanding to the scene as to send Mr. Charles home, and Macgregor, both of whom were in the way. He understood, by instinct, a great deal of what had passed, and though he did not divine who the man was, by whose side he had

been standing, yet it was impossible not to perceive that some preceding agitation, in which this man had been more or less involved, had taken place in the humble room, which now the presence of death filled to overflowing. Fanshawe sent the other men away, and remained himself to see what was to be done. Strangely enough this seemed perfectly natural both to himself and Mr. Charles. He went outside, and sat down on the rocks which hedged in the bit of velvet greensward on which the cottage stood. It was a strange vigil. He watched the last rays of the evening light die out, the revealing of the stars among the clouds, the gleam of living radiance which woke in them from the edges of those masses of vapour; and then gradually, slowly, the pale lightening over the Eastern horizon —the promise of dawn. He sat with the waves plashing up to his very feet, carried by the high tide which came in just about the time he took his place there—then ebbing slowly down among the rocks, further and further off, moving the gleaming, living line ever lower down. The pale variations of sea and sky, the

gathering midnight darkness that shut out both, all the mysterious sounds of Night and Nature went on around him; and death was overshadowing behind him, and a silent awe seemed over everything. To watch a whole night so, is such an experience as few forget; and to watch outside as Fanshawe was doing—with all the ghosts of the past and shadows of the future combining to increase the impression, was more wonderful still. And yet he felt it but little, his mind and soul being closed to external impressions by a preoccupation which is more absorbing than any other on earth.

The faint grey of morning had begun to dawn when all at once he felt a soft touch upon his shoulder, and turned round, saw Marjory standing by him, like a ghost in the dimness.

"All is over;" she said, quietly; and then, "Have you watched with us all night?"

"All night," he said. "I could do nothing more. Can I do anything now?"

"Take me home," said Marjory. "I am too weary and sad to go alone. It is all over. She

has got away at last. Oh, how hard it is to get rid of life!"

Her tears fell upon his hands, which held hers. He looked at her wistfully, eagerly, in the dim light, by which he could scarcely see her face. How high life was beating in his heart as he listened to these words. Hard to get rid of life! as if it were not something priceless, full of happiness, full of possibility, which a man would do anything, bear anything, rather than be rid of; He put her cloak round her while she stood passively by him, worn out, with those tears on her cheeks—and then drew her hand within his arm, and led her away silently along the dim seashore with all its mysterious sounds. The light increased slowly, dimly, the pale morning broke as they moved along. To Marjory it was all like a dream. To him, what was it? Every moment he could see her more plainly, and feel her, leaning on him. Rid of life! Who would be rid of that which held such prizes still?

CHAPTER XII.

No house possessed by the Hay-Heriots had ever gone through such a night as that house by the Cathedral in St. Andrews had just passed. First there had been the blank dinner hour, with no one at home to eat the food, no one but little Milly who stood at the window and cried, and imagined misfortunes unutterable which must have befallen "my May." The crying of the child infected the whole house. One of the maids had joined her at the window, another climbed to the top of the house to an attic which commanded the road "east the town," leading to the Spindle, another had stolen outside to the door in the wall, where she

stood watching all comers and goers, with the wind blowing her ribbons about, and ruffling her hair. In the very midst of this suspense, Miss Jean's old coach, like a family hearse, came jolting heavily over the stones—for all the world, the excited listeners thought, like the Phantom Coach, which, as is well known, drives along the streets of St. Andrews at midnight, after a storm, carrying the drowned to the hallowed soil round the Cathedral ruins. Had it been dark, this resemblance would have been more than the nerves of the women could have borne, and the impression was scarcely lessened when Miss Jean herself, tired yet alert, with her sharp eyes looking out from the shelter of her broad "borders" and big black bonnet, got out briskly tapping upon the pavement with her cane. Milly stayed her crying, out of very excitement, to explain her sister's absence, and was then held silent by fear while the old lady remarked upon it. "A bonny like way to leave a house with a wheen maids and one bairn!" she said. "May Hay-Heriot must be out of her senses. Out of the house at seven o'clock—the hour ye dine—did

ye say it was the hour ye dine? Then it's worse than madness, it must be wickedness. Do not look at me as if ye would eat me, ye little spirit—"

"Then do not speak of May like that!" said the child passionately, smothering her sobs. "Oh! what has become of her—what has become of her? Something has happened; oh, Aunt Jean! let you and me go and seek her out. She never left us like this before. Oh my May! my May!"

"Hold your tongue you little haverel," said Miss Jean, "she is out to her dinner or something. Do you think Miss Heriot will leave her friends or her business because the table-maid is out at the door watching, or her own woman greeting at the window? Go in to your work this moment. Where is Mr. Charles? He will come in to his dinner and find nothing ready, and send ye about your business—or I would if it was me."

Then it was explained to her, by three speaking at once, that Mr. Charles too had gone out mysteriously towards the Spindle, accompanied by two strangers; and Milly, whose tears had

been stayed, began again to cry more piteously than before, and the maids to rush to the windows. Miss Jean gave some decisive taps of her cane upon the floor—"Fools!" she said, "have you not sense enough to see that they're both together with some sudden engagement they had no time to tell of? Stop this nonsense and bring ben the dinner—I'm hungry with my drive, and Milly, you're hungry with crying—"

"Oh, Aunt Jean, I could not eat a morsel. Oh, what will I do if there is anything wrong with May?"

"You're hungry with crying," said Miss Jean, "we'll wait for them no longer; bring ben the dinner. Is all the house to be turned upside down because they did not leave word where they were going? Help me off with my bonnet, woman, and dinna stand gaping. Milly, hold your tongue; is that the way to give me a welcome? You've let the child get low, you taupies, keeping her waiting. Bring ben the dinner, I tell you, we'll wait for them no longer. Shut the doors and the windows, and get the

spare room ready. I've come about business, Milly, and I mean to stay all night."

By these decisive means Miss Jean brought the house into composure and subordination, and put a stop to the growing romance which the maids had begun to build up. They said in the kitchen that Miss Heriot could not be going so much to the Spindle for nothing, that it was fine to talk about a sick lass, but that more inducement was necessary to take a young leddy there in all weathers, and that Mr. Chairles had found it out. This invention Miss Jean so far nipped in the bud, that she gave them all work to do, which occupied them fully and diverted their thoughts from this delightful fiction. The old lady had the spare room prepared for herself, and a fire lighted, a luxury never much out of place in St. Andrews, though it was but August, and the flush of Summer still ought to have been over the world. It was a gloomy night, dark clouds and darker sea, everything that was dismal and discouraging out of doors, and not much that was cheery within. Miss Jean herself, with many thoughts in her mind,

established herself in the drawing-room after dinner—having sent Milly, much against her will, to bed—to wait for some news of her relations who had thus left the house empty to receive her. She sat in the unfamiliar room, looking out upon the old pinnacles of the cathedral ruins which were associated with many an early passage of her youth—and going back into her life, lived in it as old people do, feeling it present with her, notwithstanding the lively threads of present interest which crossed each other like a network over that landscape peculiarly her own which lay behind. Her quick mind darted in a moment from recollections of an evening fifty years ago, when she had wandered, not uncompanioned, through these ruins, to many a speculation as to how her grand-niece, Marjory, her representative, might be occupying herself, and what manner of interference "auld Charlie" might be making in some possible complication of affairs.

For her nephew was "auld Charlie" to Miss Jean as well as to the youngest scoffer who called him by that name. The old maiden was contemptuous of the old bachelor. His age was an

object of greater scorn to her than it was to the young men who on the whole liked "auld Charlie." "A poor creature, a poor feeble old creature, with no character to speak of," she said of him. She scorned him for being what he was, nobody's husband, nobody's father, and amid the openings of her old dream, while still she seemed to herself to be straying down the vast nave traced out by its old pillars, with her hand upon some one's arm, who was dead and gone years ago—there recurred to her, now and then, a sarcastic criticism upon the old man who was so much younger than herself. She herself was two persons in one, difficult to identify in their separate characters: young Jean Hay-Heriot among the ruins, fresh and sweet as the youngest rose in the garden: old Miss Jean with her shrivelled face surrounded by her "borders," her wrinkled hand leaning on her cane. But as for Mr. Charles he had never been but one, the same figure throughout, always lean, long, dried up, occupied about nick-nacks, buried in old books, unbending to nothing but golf. "And now he's meddling with Marjory,"

Miss Jean said to herself with a vindictive gleam of her black eye, "him that knows no more about it than a man of wood! But I'll see to that, I'll see to that;" and then the sweep of the great west window caught her eye, and she was young Jean again, looking up at it to hide her confused sweet girlish face from some one who would gaze too closely. Which was the real one between these two? which the most true, the past that lives for ever, or the present that is but for a moment? The old woman sat absorbed in this bewilderment of mingled memory and observation, and did not think the dim hours long as they stole past her. She would not have the lamp brought in till late. She sat at the window as Marjory had done, her old head framed in by the delicate crown of the broken arch, perfect on one side, an exquisite flowing shaft of ancient stone, with canopy work fit for a queen of heaven—on the other nothing but gloomy sky and sea. The darkness closed over her but Miss Jean noted it not. The scene before her eyes had brought all her life back to her; in that very room she had danced a girl.

What need had she of lights, of books, something to divert her? as the sympathetic maid suggested who found the old lady in the dark and was sorry for her.

"Go away, and bring me the lamp in an hour. I like the gloaming," said Miss Jean in a softened tone.

"Gloaming! it was mirk as midnicht, and her an old witch, sitting in the dark," said the woman, reporting the circumstance below; and this further aggravation of a weird old woman seated by herself unseen at the window, seeing nobody could tell how far or how keenly, carried a still further element of mystery into the vague wonder and suspense of the house.

The arrival of Mr. Charles, which took place late, about ten o'clock, when it was quite dark, was the first thing that roused the old lady. He came in very unsteady on his long legs, with a somewhat dazed and pre-occupied look—too much absorbed by all the events of the evening to be much startled by anything that might happen, even by a visitor so unexpected. He came in and made some sort of greeting, taking her pre-

sence for granted in a way which bewildered her, and then threw himself upon a chair in the dim room. "She's dying," he said in that dull tone of spent excitement which expresses so much.

"Who's dying?" cried Miss Jean in alarm, starting from her seat at the window. "Not our May?"

"May?" Mr. Charles said with a kind of dull wonder. "May? She's yonder," pointing his thumb over his shoulder, "as she was at Tom's side, poor fellow! God be praised, no—it's not her; but that poor thing—"

"The—gamekeeper's daughter;—the—lass—? but that's too good news."

Mr. Charles looked at her with reproof in his eyes. "You know nothing about it. She is far from a common kind of lass; but that is a thing women never can understand," he added, taking a certain vigour from his opposition. "How those that are on the other side, should have any title to respect—that is a thing you can never understand."

"Maybe not," said Miss Jean with lively and instant assumption of the quarrel. "We're no

so clever as you. You can aye discriminate; ye see at a glance, and tell the good from the evil. We're weaker vessels; but, perhaps, if ye were to tell me some of the arguments that convinced your strong mind—"

Mr. Charles jumped up, galled at this speech and the tone in which it was utterred; but his weariness overcame him, and he sat down again, somewhat humbled. "No argument—no argument," he said, "the sight of her—that is all. I've left Marjory there. She'll not leave the bedside so long as life remains. I thought she might have come away now, for the poor thing is no longer conscious; but May feels it her duty to Tom."

"And you left her—a lady—a young woman—to come home alone."

"Ay," said Mr. Charles, and then paused, "I am meaning, not quite alone. There is that lad Fanshawe," he added in a deprecating tone.

"Fanshawe! him that was at Pitcomlie before—the English lad?"

"Yes, the English lad—I never thought of it till this moment; but he has a way of turn-

ing up when he's wanted that is very extraordinary—very extraordinary! To see him appear, like a ghost, at that cottage door—and not one of us surprised within. To be sure," Mr. Charles added with sudden gravity, "all our thoughts were turned another way."

"But my thoughts are not turned any other way," said Miss Jean. "I don't know what folly you're thinking of, her and you; but Marjory is my first thought. All this about your cottage doors, and your thoughts turned other ways, is not intelligible to me. I would like to know what you mean, Charlie. Who is this lad, and what has he to do with Marjory? You've left him to bring her home—in the middle of the night."

"No—no," said Mr. Charles, deprecating, "not so bad as that—not the middle of the night. And how could I help it? It was no place for me—a man that could be of little use. I came away by his advice. It's a long walk, and I've eaten nothing. And, perhaps," he said, pausing with his hand on the bell, "I should bid them get a room ready for Fanshawe—he must stop some-

where. So far as I know, the beds at The Royal may all be taken. I suppose I must give him a bed in this house."

"You know best who to take in, and who to leave out," said Miss Jean. "I never interfere with the arrangements of the house. Perhaps you would like me to go to The Royal? For otherwise, I have my boxes in the spare room."

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Charles, waving his hand; and he gave his orders with a degree of explanatoriness to which Miss Jean listened with grim impatience. "There's a gentleman, Mr. Fanshawe, that may be coming in late—with Miss Heriot; not that he's with Miss Heriot now, or more than just in the neighbourhood. But she may be kept late, and at my request he will bring her home—you understand?"

"Oh ay, Sir, I understand!" said the maid cheerfully; "the English gentleman; he was here the day already, waiting long, and very anxious about Miss Heriot. He went off after you to the Spindle, when he heard ye had gone that gait; he was just off a journey; but he would take no refreshment, no so much as a glass

of wine;" but aye, "where was Miss Heriot? where was Miss Heriot? that was all that was in his head."

"It was me he wanted, in reality," said Mr. Charles, looking anxiously towards Miss Jean; "on business. We have a great many business transactions, him and me; and put some cold meat or something in the dining-room. If Mr. Fanshawe is kept very late—as he may be, waiting at my request for Miss Heriot (for he is a young man, Aunt Jean, and I am an old one—he was more able to wait than me); he will have to sleep here."

"And will Miss Heriot be late, Sir?" said the maid.

"She's waiting upon a poor young woman that's dying," said Mr. Charles, with solemnity. "You're amused, Aunt Jean? I'm sorry that I cannot join you, after the scene I've been going through—nor see the cause."

"Oh, you blind auld beetle!" said Miss Jean; "putting it into the lass's head every word you said, to mix up May's name with this lad's! Who is the lad?—is he worthy of her? or does

he want her? or have you paid any attention, ye doited auld body, to what I took the trouble to say?"

"I have taken your advice," said Mr. Charles shortly; "much to my own discomfort; but nothing has ever come of it, that I can see."

"That's no answer to my question," cried the old lady peremptorily. "Is he worthy of her? and who is the lad?"

"So far as I can make out," said Mr. Charles; "he is very little to brag of; a good-natured ne'er-do-weel—nobody's enemy but his own."

"And that's just the bitterest foe of everybody that belongs to him," said Miss Jean; "and it's a man like that that you leave to bring May home; to wait for her, and feel for her, and bring her along a lonely road, and take advantage of all his opportunities—"

"The young man is a gentleman," said Mr. Charles eagerly, with an indignant flush on his face.

"And you're a fool, Charlie Heriot!" cried the old lady, growing red—as a woman of seventy-five could scarcely be expected to do. She was

angry and ashamed at his interpretation of her words; she got up hastily to retire to her room, every fold of her shawl quivering with indignation. "Judging by what you say, it is little use sitting up for her, I suppose," she said. "To think of a young woman like Marjory left to come home with a strange man in the middle of the night! You're a bonnie guardian, Chairlie Heriot; you give us all great encouragement to trust the young women of the family to you."

To tell the truth, something of the same feeling crept into Mr. Charles' own mind, mingled with shame, as he went down to the dining-room to eat his long postponed dinner, and refresh himself with a little bodily comfort. He began to feel much discontented, and ashamed. To leave Fanshawe to take care of her had seemed very natural in the midst of the excitement at the cottage, as soon as he had recognised that his own presence there was uncalled for. But in the light of Miss Jean's comments it had a very different appearance. He had put Marjory into Fanshawe's hands; he had accepted him as in

some sort her natural protector and companion. This thought entirely drove from his mind the real event of the night; the occurrence which had absorbed him so short a time before. Now that he was out of the shadow of the death-chamber, all that belonged to it flitted away from him. The same feeling was strong in both of the old people; they pushed death aside almost rudely, as a thing which once completed, should be thought as little of as possible—and plunged into the concerns of life again with eagerness. The scene had been solemn, the moment touching; but these were over, and life and its necessities were not over. Mr. Charles put himself upon three chairs in the dining-room, after he had eaten his late refection, and declared his intention of waiting there till Miss Heriot returned. He fell asleep very uncomfortably, waking up now and then with a crick in his neck, with pins and needles in his feet or his fingers, with an indescribable sense of discomfort penetrating even into his sleep. When he woke from a painful doze on his three chairs, he decided with himself that now he might venture to go to bed—that

she would not now come till the morning, when no one could make any remark. Accordingly, when Marjory, half dead with fatigue and emotion, reached the house, there was no one up to receive her. She had scarcely uttered a single word the whole way, and sometimes Fanshawe, holding her fast with her hand pulled through his arm, had half fancied she must have fainted or fallen into some stupefying trance, though the mechanical motion continued and she kept walking on, like one galvanized. When at last a sleepy maid was roused to admit them, the early morning sunshine was lying warm upon the silent streets and houses. As she entered, and he after her, on the strenuous invitation of the maid, who was partly hospitable and partly afraid lest anyone, "from our house" should be seen making his way to the Royal "at such an hour"—the stillness of the house came over them both with a strange half-alarming sensation. At the top of the stairs in the bright solemn early daylight Miss Jean stood, in her broad-bordered nightcap, and with curious flannel draperies wrapped about her, looking down

upon them as they mounted the stairs. Marjory was too weary to feel much surprise.

"Is it you, Aunt Jean?" she asked languidly.

"Is this the way you treat your visitors, coming in at this hour of the morning?" said Miss Jean, "and with so little regard to what folk may think? Let the young man bide below till I'm out of the way. I'll see you to your room, Marjory. You want some woman-person to see after you, and that taupie of a maid is snoring, disturbing my slumbers for hours past."

"I am sorry you waited for me," Marjory said in her strange stupor, "but when you know the cause—"

"Oh, ay, I know the cause," said Miss Jean, throwing a jealous glance over her shoulder at Fanshawe, who hesitated and lingered on the stairs. "I know the cause," she repeated, following Marjory into her room and closing the door with much severity, "but for my part I'm a great deal more interested, to tell the truth, in what may be the result."

Thus with one consent the elder members of

the party—the ones who had lived longest and were nearest the ending—thrust the death-scene away from them, and went on with the threads of life as if there had been no interruption of its ordinary course. This was what they cared for—the living, not the dead.

And Fanshawe, dazed too with his watching, with his strange long walk through the unnatural yet fresh and lovely morning, which had seemed to spy upon them all the way, with wondering looks, like a child, went into the room prepared for him—having added that picture of Miss Jean in her dressing-gown to all the others, of which his mind was full. He did not hear what she said, but he made out her sharp look of disapproval, and the jealousy of her watch over Marjory, thus peremptorily parted from him, and taken out of his keeping the moment she crossed the threshold. She had been so absolutely confided to him before, that the contrast was all the more remarkable. When he was safe in his room, the ludicrousness of the old lady's appearance came before him so strongly, that he laughed in spite of himself—and then was intensely ashamed

of himself, and crept to bed, feeling guilty in the daylight, feeling as if he had been doing something he ought not to have done. How strange to glide into the stillness of an orderly sleeping-room after an exciting night! And he was dizzy with his journey, with fatigue, and long waking. But still, of all the memories of the night, Miss Jean at the top of the stairs was the one that lingered most in his memory. He dreamed of her, and laughed in his sleep, and woke with a half-hysterical mixture of laughter and emotion, as much moved by that momentary comic glimpse as by all that had happened. But this levity, fortunately, nobody knew.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE party which met in the morning after this vigil regarded each other strangely, feeling the fever of their excitement still about them. Marjory did not appear, and it was from Mr. Charles that Fanshawe learnt that his own mission had failed, and that the missing witness had already appeared, a fact which he had guessed from all he saw, but had not been informed of. There was a long discussion over the breakfast table about this strange change in the family affairs, and all the revolutions it must bring about.

"An application must be made at once to the Court of Session to appoint tutors," Mr. Charles said, who was full of suppressed excitement,

" and these young women at Pitcomlie must be informed. It will be hard upon them, poor things, after all."

" They had nothing to do with the house or the family," said Miss Jean, briskly. " Strangers, all strangers; neither one nor another has any pity from me. Eight thousand pounds is not a bad provision for a younger son's widow, with nothing of her own; but take you my advice, Charlie Heriot, and be very clear in your mind about this bairn. I'm not fond of chance bairns coming in when nobody expects them. This lass, that you all think so much of, may have been everything that's good; but I would have the court to sit upon it, and make sure. I would trust nothing to chance, if it was me."

" We'll take every precaution — every precaution," said Mr. Charles; and then he fell into a reverie, from which he roused up slowly, with a look of satisfaction in his face, rubbing his hands. " I am glad," he said, " that I never began to dismantle my old room. I've thought of doing it more than once. If I could suppose," added Mr. Charles, changing countenance, " that

leaving Pitcomlie would be any heart-break to these young women; if they had had time to get attached to the place— But as one house or another is the same to them, and Mrs. Charles is not badly provided for, on the whole, with her pension and all— I hope it's not any way hard-hearted on my part."

"But you're old, Charlie Heriot," said Miss Jean, "old to be tutor to a little bairn. Granting that you may live as long as I have done, for instance, that's about fifteen years—and nobody can calculate on more—that would leave the boy just at the worst age. You're spare and thin, and I would not wonder if ye were one of the long-lived ones of the family; but granting even that you were spared to be as old as me—"

"You'll live twenty years yet, Aunt Jean," said Mr. Charles, who did not like the turn the conversation was taking.

"That may be, or may not be," said Miss Jean. "I'm very indifferent; a year sooner or a year later matters very little. To be sure when you're well over your threescore and ten, there's no saying—but it's never to be calculated on. If

this bairn is young Tom's lawful son, as you say, and but three months old, poor bit thing, he must have young guardians. The like of Mr. Fanshawe here now; or as women are coming into fashion, Marjory—"

Mr. Charles gave an alarmed look at the audacious proposer of such a conjunction. He was fairly frightened by it. He looked up with a certain consternation, to meet the bold response of Miss Jean's black eyes, twinkling with satisfaction at the thought of having thus bewildered him.

"Ye need not look at me in that alarmed manner, Charlie Heriot," she said. "There's nothing but what is strictly reasonable in what I say."

"If I were thought worthy of such a charge," said Fanshawe, startled too. "I should, of course, do my very best to acquit myself of the trust; but I have, at present, no connection with Fife—I have no claim to such a distinction; there must be many others much better qualified—"

"It's not a thing we can discuss," said Mr.

Charles, hurriedly; "it is not in our hands; there are a great many preliminaries. And in the first place there is one that's not pleasant. These young women, how are they to be told? They must be told. What would you say, Aunt Jean, would be the best thing to do? Perhaps as you are going that way, if you were to see them and break it in a quiet way? a lady is always the best to do that; there's more delicacy, and more sympathy, and understanding, and so forth. Some clergymen have a gift that way; but a lady is always the best."

"I am much obliged to you, Charlie Heriot," said Miss Jean, "but in my opinion you're the only bearer of the news that's possible. Nobody can do it but you."

"Do you really think so?" said Mr. Charles. "Now I cannot help thinking a stranger would be better—or perhaps a letter—that might be the best of all—a letter now. Unless Mr. Fanshawe here, that could bring no painful recollections to their minds, a young man quite unconnected with everything—and pleasant manners, and all that—would be so obliging as to drive out, and just

prepare them a little. My niece Marjory has so much confidence in Mr. Fanshawe. It is not a long drive, and the country is looking its very best. Would it be too much to ask, as a friend of the family?" Mr. Charles said, with an insinuating look.

Miss Jean's chuckle, and the look she gave him out of her sharp black eyes, overcame Fanshawe's gravity more than the proposal thus anxiously made. Even Mr. Charles saw the fun, and relieved himself and his anxiety with a long low laugh, under protest as it were—for laughing was far from appropriate at this juncture of the family affairs. But the most amusing thing of all was that, though they laughed at the idea of entrusting Fanshawe with this mission, after much talk and many suggestions, and a great deal of comic remark, it was after all he who went. He consented—because it was his fate, because it was propitiating Marjory's friends, because it was a proof to her of his readiness to serve all connected with her; but chiefly, it must be allowed, because it was his fate. This was what he was born into the world for; to do what people

asked him, to serve others, to be good for much so far as other people were concerned, but good for little to himself. Miss Jean looked on with a certain grim amusement while it was all being settled. She gave her opinion on the subject with her usual frankness.

"I would not have gone had I been you," she said. "I would have let old Charlie do his nasty errands for himself."

Fanshawe laughed with some conscious shame, feeling indeed that he had been somewhat weak; and the old lady resumed—

"Nobody thinks the more of you for being too kind. A willing horse is aye over-ridden; but that's not all. In this world folk take you at your own word, Mr. Fanshawe. They think little of a man that holds himself cheap. It's no advantage—either with man or woman. The best thing ye can do is to let folk see that a favour from you is a real favour, not easy to get, not given to everybody—"

"Miss Jean, you speak like Solomon himself," said Fanshawe, with mock reverence and real

confusion, "or rather like the Queen of Sheba, —which is the next wisest, I suppose."

"Maybe I am like the Queen of Sheba," said Miss Jean; "but it's men far from Solomon that I've come to see. You like Fife, I suppose, Mr. Fanshawe, that I find you back here?"

"I suppose so too," he said, with a rueful comic sense that he was by no means a free agent, "since you find me here, Miss Jean—as you say—"

"You should not repeat another person's words, it's not civil. And yet Fife has but small attractions for a young man. You're fond of golf, I suppose, like all the rest?"

"Probably I might be," he said, laughing, "if I had the chance; but I have never tried yet—"

"Oh, then you're one of those archæ-somethings, that make the old stones speak?" said Miss Jean. "Oh, but the like of me could make them speak better, if we were to tell all we mind and all we have seen."

"I am not an archæ-anything," said Fanshawe.

"Then it's very strange to me—very strange," said the old lady, looking him in the face, "what pleasure you can find in staying here?"

He laughed—this time an uneasy laugh, and felt himself redden uncomfortably. Why, indeed, should he stay here? To go on Mr. Charles's errands, to have all sorts of disagreeable offices thrust upon him, to be sent off, perhaps, at a moment's notice, to be made use of on all hands. This was what his past experience had been, and why should it be different in the future? The old woman's two black eyes, set deep in their shrivelled sockets, looked knowingly, not unkindly at him, with a gleam of amusement, but also with a certain sympathy. "There does not seem much reason, does there, why I should stay?" he said, and got up and went to the window to look out, avoiding her keen eyes.

"Young man," said Miss Jean, "I don't know much about you, and what I know is not the best that might be; but you're not an ill young man as men go. On the whole, I'm inclined to be on your side. And take you my advice.

Don't make too little of yourself; don't be at everybody's call; stand up for yourself, if you would have other folk stand up for you. So far as I've seen, your fault is that you're better than most folk. Don't be that, that's the worst of all mistakes."

"You mean that I am a yielding fool, and cannot say 'No,'" said Fanshawe; "but that, after all is scarcely the case. There are circumstances, perhaps, if I could tell them to you, that justify me—"

"No circumstances, but a man's nature account for that kind of conduct," said Miss Jean, briskly; "but if it's any comfort to you, I'm inclined to be on your side."

Whatever comfort there might be in this, Fanshawe had it to console him on his drive. He set out without seeing Marjory. When he found himself driving not too quickly over those long country roads, on the business which was not his, and realised the disagreeable mission he had undertaken, he felt more weak and foolish than even Miss Jean had represented him to himself. For what was all this? To commend

himself to Marjory? or because it was his nature and his fate? He was thoroughly discontented with himself. Was he, who was thus driven hither and thither by the will of others, who seemed to have no business of his own in the world, but always and only the business of others—was he the kind of man to step boldly out of his groove, to begin an independent life, to ask any woman to share that existence? Nobody but those who are over-persuadable, ready to be overborne by the appeals made to them by their more indolent neighbours, and to take upon their shoulders burdens which are none of theirs, can understand how ashamed Fanshawe felt of his own amiability in the business which he had at present in hand—or how disgusted with the piece of work which Mr. Charles had basely thrust upon his shoulders. As he approached Pitcomlie, he realized more and more clearly how disagreeable it was. The sight of the house which had filled so important a chapter in his life made his heart beat. There it was that he had been roused out of the equanimity of his placid, easy-going existence;

and what good had that awakening done? None but to make him a dissatisfied instead of a very contented, happy sort of fellow; to show him the evil without opening the way to any remedy; to fill him with longings after the unattainable without conferring upon him the strength necessary to struggle and attain it. Marjory! the whole place was full of her; the cliff, with its velvet coverlet of green sward, round which so often by her side he had taken his "turn;" the sun-dial by which he seemed to see her seated; the roofless old house, against the grey walls of which he had watched her figure so often, and which formed so fit a background for her; everything was full of Marjory. The presence of her image there made it somehow more easy for him to do what he was going to do. He marched into the well-known drawing-soom, almost regardless of the servant who rushed after, pulling on his coat, to announce him. He saw with a certain sharp sense of sarcastic pleasure somebody rise hastily from Mrs. Charles's side, and retire into a distant corner. Somebody—that sentimental personage called Johnnie, whose presence had once made

him furiously jealous. He was ready to laugh now at the sight of this young man, whom he recognised at once with that attraction of jealousy and dislike which is as strong as love. Why was he so pleased to see Johnnie Hepburn start disconcerted from Mrs. Charles's side? It pleased him to think of telling it to Marjory; the power of discrediting her old admirer in her eyes was quite grateful to him; he was spitefully delighted—there is no other word that can describe his feelings. If Fanshawe had but thought of it, he might have felt himself quite delivered from the danger of being too amiable by this vigorous outburst of dislike and feelings quite unevangelical. But somehow it did not occur to him to judge his own sentiments in that uncompromising way.

He had a hostile reception; from the moment of his appearance the ladies at Pitcomlie made sure that he was coming on no friendly errand. Verna came in from the cliff through the open window, having caught a glimpse of him; she was very pale, with a scared look which Fanshawe could not understand. They both looked at him with a

stare of something like defiance, but took no other notice of his presence. This was very embarrassing at first. He faltered a little as he drew near, being very pervious to incivility, and all the smaller pricks by which the mind can be assailed.

"I have come to execute a commission from Mr. Charles Hay-Heriot," he said, looking round him almost pitifully for support. Johnnie Hepburn afforded none. He even turned his back and gazed out of one of the windows. He did not stand by a brother in distress. He was too much frightened for the women, if truth must be told.

"Oh, yes; to be sure; and I think we could guess what it was," said Matilda. "Pray speak out. Don't be afraid. You need not have too much consideration, or that sort of thing, for me."

"Indeed, I was told to have every consideration," said Fanshawe, perplexed. "Mr. Charles——"

"Oh, why keep up the farce of Mr. Charles?" cried Matilda. "Say Marjory at

once. We know it is all her hatching, this conspiracy; and oh! you may be quite sure whatever can be done, by law, against conspiracy—"

"Hold your tongue, Matty," said Verna, in a sharp whisper. "You fool! don't be always showing your hand."

"As if I cared!" cried Matilda; "as if I did not see Marjory's hand! Besides, it is well known that she keeps him to run errands for her, and do whatever she tells him. Oh! say it out! We are prepared for everything you have to say."

"Then my errand may be all the shorter," said Fanshawe. "It is only to tell you, from Mr. Hay-Heriot, that a discovery has been made about your brother-in-law, Tom Heriot. It has been found out that he was married, and has left a son—"

Here he was interrupted by a defiant peal of laughter, and looking up, surprised, saw both ladies laughing almost violently, as at the most excellent joke.

"Oh! this is too good," the one said to the other; "too good; just what we expected. But

Marjory might have invented something better," said Matilda. "I could have made up a better story myself."

Fanshawe stood, struck dumb, as a man of his breeding and character could not fail to be by such a rude and foolish reception of his message. He did not know how to reply. They spoke, as it were, another language, of which he had no comprehension.

"I had better withdraw, I think," he said. "I don't know what I can add, or reply; there is nothing, so far as I know, that I can say more."

"Oh, I don't doubt Marjory entrusted you with a great deal more to say!" cried Mrs. Charles. "She wanted to humble us; but you may tell her she shan't humble us. We are people who can defend ourselves. If she isn't clever enough even to make up a better story than this—"

"I think," said Fanshawe, "it would be well to leave Miss Heriot out of the discussion; she has nothing to do with it—and, as it is evident, that you do not in the least understand her—"

"What do you mean, Sir, by saying Mrs.

Charles does not understand?" said Hepburn, coming from his window. A burning flush covered the young man's face; his eyes looked hot and bloodshot, and the veins were knotted upon his forehead; he was suffering such agonies of shame and pain as few people, perhaps, have gone through; shame for the woman whom he loved. Yes, though he was ashamed of her, though he perceived her meanness, her prettiness, her folly, still he loved her. He had stood aloof as long as he could; now, when the tugging at his heart, as well as her impatient looks, called him to her side—when very shame impelled him to come to her defence, to save her from her own folly, to hide from himself the gnawing pangs of his own shame—that shame took the fiercer form of passion. If he had worn a sword he would have drawn it; if there had been any other foolish way of rushing into mortal conflict he would have adopted it. It was the writhing of his own pain which excited him, but he tried to make it look like indignation. "If you have anything to say to Mrs. Charles, Sir," he added fiercely, "or any objections to make, be so good as to address yourself to me."

"To you! why should I?" cried Fanshawe, more amazed than ever.

"Because she has given me the privilege of standing between her and all impertinent intruders," cried the unhappy young man, taking her hand in an agony of self-humiliation. Poor boy! he identified himself with her publicly at the moment when he saw most distinctly and suffered most sharply from the revelation of her character, which, to do her justice, she had never meant to withhold from him. He almost hated her in the vehemence of his love; hated her for not being what he would have had her, with a hatred which somehow intensified his passion. The sight was so strange and painful that it subdued the impulse of anger in Fanshawe's mind.

"In that case," he said gravely, "since I can neither fight with you, nor argue with you, I will withdraw, Mr. Hepburn; and Mr. Heriot's communication can be made officially—if necessary, to you. Good morning, I have no more to say."

Verna rushed forward as he opened the door.

Already her better sense had perceived the folly of her sister's words.

"Mr. Fanshawe, Matilda is always ridiculous!" she cried, breathless; "but we will not yield a step till we are forced—not a step!"

"So be it!" said Fanshawe; "though I hope your advisers will counsel you less foolishly. At all events, I have said what I had to say."

"Forget Matilda's nonsense, at least!" cried the sister. Matilda had thrown herself back upon her sofa, where the unfortunate Johnnie was kneeling by her, soothing her. "But I will not give up, I cannot give up!" she said passionately, under her breath, clasping her hands. She was not aware she had said it; her face, which was very pale, took a strange character of force and high purpose—yes, of high purpose, such as it was. She did not wish to defraud anyone; but she was struggling for bare life; she followed Fanshawe out, going with him to the door, with rising uneasiness—the more generous part of her character waking with her better judgment. "All that about Miss Heriot," she said, gasping, "was ridiculous; and Mr. Fanshawe, I am sure she did not mean to be rude to you; I never meant to be

rude to you; it was only temper and surprise. And oh, when a blow like this is coming, it seems so much easier when you can feel it is somebody's fault!"

"But you are much too sensible to believe so?" said Fanshawe, "who could—or would—attempt to deceive you in such a matter? Do you think an invention of this kind could ever stand the eye of day?"

"It is—it must be an invention!" cried Verna; and then, poor soul, she had recourse to that expedient which women employ by instinct, and which, did they but know it, always ruins their cause, though it may gain them a momentary triumph. She appealed to her companion, as if that could serve her. "Oh, Mr. Fanshawe," she said, "we should do well if we were but left alone. The place would soon be got into order. I have given up all my plans about the house. I should see that Tommy was brought up as he ought to be. Why cannot they let us alone?"

"Do you think it possible," he said, with some impatience, "that people like the Heriots are framing a lie in order to harm yon?"

She looked at him with dilating eyes, in which the tears gradually rose. She had no understanding of the question. It came natural to her to think that somebody must have done it. "I would try to do what they wished," she faltered, looking at him with a pathetic desire to understand. "I should be very glad to take their advice—I would do anything—"

"Miss Bassett," said Fanshawe; "supposing it could affect the question in any way—which it could not—but supposing, for the sake of argument, that these good resolutions of yours could affect the question; how long will you be able to do anything if this piece of news Mr. Hepburn has told me is true?"

"What piece of news?" She looked so scared that he was almost frightened by the impression his words had produced. "Oh, you think there is something between—? But that is unjust to poor Matilda. She could not think of such a thing so soon. She is only amusing herself. You are very cruel to my sister," cried Verna, turning her back upon him without another word. He went out with a smile, and jumped into his dog-cart, glad to get clear of the whole business.

It was nothing to him; but she, poor soul, fled to her own room—so passionately excited that she could scarcely keep still as she rushed up those warm, noiseless, carpeted stairs which had seemed to her like the very path to Elysium, a little while before. There, at least, howsoever things might turn out, her power and reign were over. She could have torn her hair or her dress, or anything that came within her reach, in her passion. It was all over. A mean and small life of dependance and servility was all that now remained to her. To be turned out one way or another, what did it matter? Nay, it would be better to be turned out with Matilda than by her; better to share her downfall than to be crushed by her triumphant prosperity. Thus of the three people affected by Fanshawe's message, there was but one person whom it affected mildly, and that the one most concerned. Matilda, after her fit of abuse of Marjory and the old family, shed a few angry tears, and then was comfortable again, and ready for such dalliance with her lover, interspersed by quarrels, as was her only fashion of mental amusement.

But it would be hard to describe the mingled passions in Hepburn's mind, as he knelt by the sofa, scorning, hating, adoring, the pretty, miserable, beautiful creature who had bewitched him. It was not her fault; all women were so; did not every sage bear testimony to it, from Solomon downwards? And the poor young fellow, in the revulsion of his feelings, took to admiring her more and more, dwelling upon her beauty, her movements, her glances, all the outward part of her. These were what women possessed to make men mad and happy—nothing more.

And Verna up-stairs sobbed in an hysterical passion. She had lost her very life.

CHAPTER XIV.

It is needless to trace all the steps by which the real heir of the Heriots was placed in such possession of his rights as a poor little orphan baby of three months' old could attain. Before his young mother was carried to the family grave, where she was laid, under silent protest from her humble family, who stood aloof with a pride familiar to the Scotch peasant, giving up the child with a certain grim and indignant reluctance—the infant was taken to St. Andrews, and placed under Marjory's care. This was done by Agnes, who all along had regarded Tom Heriot's sister as her rival and enemy. She carried the child herself, scorning all aid, to Mr. Charles

Heriot's house. If possible, her peasant appearance—the air of a respectable maidservant, which was natural to her—was more manifest than ever. She would not allow it to be supposed that she wished to approach herself, by ever so little, to the "gentles," with whom her sister had been connected.

"I've brought you the bairn," she said, confronting Marjory, with that defiant look which had never quite left her face; and she unfolded the sleeping baby from the shawl in which he was muffled, and laid him down upon the sofa, sternly repressing all sign of emotion. "He was to be mine," she said, briefly, "I promised to be a mother to him, but it's reasonable now that he should be in your hands. My sister, up to her last day," and here a spasm crossed the resolute features, "never knew that he was the heir—nor my mother. They thought the bairn would be provided for, that was a'. I knew well enough—but why should I have troubled her innocent mind, that heeded no such vanities? And I allow that a bairn like this, born the heir,

should be in the hands of the family. You and me will, maybe, never meet again—"

"Agnes," said Marjory, "you cannot think that I would wish to separate you like this from Isabell's child?"

Again Agnes's comely face was swept as by a wind of emotion, and again she banished all trace of feeling. "I know you are kind," she said. "It is your nature; but I'm of the nature that I canna bide kindness. I'll take it from my equals—but no from you—and nothing else can be between us—though I respect ye—I respect ye," she added, hurriedly. "I've no a word to say. If I had been to choose, I would have chosen different. I would rather he had been a poor lad's son, with little siller. I would have bred him up, and watched him night and day, and put my hope and my heart on him; but oh, being otherwise, it's a blessing of Providence that it's come to light now, and no later. Time makes no marks upon a helpless infant, as it would do upon a grown lad. It's best to part with him now."

Here two tears, big and bitter, fell upon the child's white frock, making two large spots,

which Agnes, taking out her handkerchief, did her best to wipe away.

"He shall know all that you did for his mother—all that you would have done for him," said Marjory. "He will grow up to reward you, at least, with his love."

"Reward me!" said Agnes, with a hot flush on her cheeks.

"I said, with his love," said Marjory, gently, "which is what no one would scorn, not the Queen."

"No, no the Queen. She's a good leddy," said Agnes; "but ye can take many a thing from them below you that you canna take from them above you. Love's no love unless you're a kind of equals. I would rather he kent nothing about us. We're no of his condition, and never can be. Eh, my poor Bell! my poor Bell! that was so pleased he should be a gentleman's son, without thinking that it parted him from all belonging to her," cried Agnes, the tears rushing down her face in a sudden tempest. Then she dried her eyes hurriedly. "Miss Heriot, I ken he's in good hands. We'll never trouble you,

and you'll no breed him up to despise us. I must away now; there's aye plenty to do, God be praised."

"But, Agnes, I shall see you again? You will not go away without coming to see the child and me?"

"It would serve no purpose," she said. "I'll see you where I once saw you before, in the churchyard. Oh, little did I think how I was to go there next! I grudge her to you, I grudge her to you! though I do not deny it's an honour, a' the honour that can be shown now—"

"All that we have ever had it in our power to show," said Marjory.

"I'm saying nothing against that," said Agnes, with her unquenchable look of rivalry, of unsuccessful rivalry, compelled to yield to superior power. She bent over the child, who slept peacefully on the sofa, for a moment, and then she turned and left the room with scant ceremony. Her heart was too sore for politeness, and politeness is not the cardinal virtue of her kind. Thus she passed away out of Marjory's life. The strange interlude of her connection with the Heriots must

have looked like a dream to her in after-days She never interfered, never claimed to see the child, never asserted any right to him. Partly with that stoicism which belongs to her class and nation, and partly for very love's sake, she gave him up, making the sacrifice absolute and perfect, as only a powerful nature can do. How could she ? many a feeble critic said afterwards. The peasant-girl could, because of love, and because she was tenderer and stronger than most; the effort rent her heart, but she did it, feeling the fitness of the sacrifice.

And the baby who had been born amid the peat-smoke in a Highland cottage, who had been frantically concealed at first, a shame to everybody belonging to him, entered upon another kind of existence without knowing it, in equal ignorance of his cloudy entry into life, and of this sudden revolution. He lay on the soft sofa, softly sleeping, placid as if he had not been laid in a hard bed, and pillowed on dying arms. He never knew any existence but that which he thus began, as it were, for the second time under Marjory's shadow. He had no surroundings but

those that belonged to the natural level on which he was to spend his life.

Fanshawe remained in St. Andrews while all these steps were being taken. His conduct was quite in accordance with his character. He intended to go away daily, but every day found some pretext to detain him. He lingered, and was ready to aid in everything required, and bade himself begone at night, only to feel that to go was impossible every morning. People made a hundred comments on him. He was gibed at, gravely questioned, made the object of many a conjecture, but nothing moved him. He stayed through the Autumn, with now and then a divergence into the Highlands for a day's shooting; he saw the Autumn steal into Winter, and never budged. Mr. Charles became so used to him that he received the suggestion of his departure with indignation at last.

"Go away! why should he go away? Where could he be better?" Mr. Charles said; and did his best to teach him golf, and initiate him into all the delights of the place. It was Fanshawe who stood by Marjory in the disagreeable assault she sustained from Mrs. Charles, who drove into

St. Andrews in the Pitcomlie carriage, and stormed so loudly against her husband's family, that the wanderers in the ruined Cathedral heard the sound through the open windows, and came gaping and wondering to listen. Matilda denounced every kind of vengeance upon the heads of those who had got up this conspiracy against her, and were about to hunt her and her orphan boy from their home.

"But do not think you will get rid of me," she said. "I am not the outcast you think. Providence has given me another home, where I shall be able to watch and find you out when you are not thinking. Oh, don't imagine you are rid of me!"

Poor Johnnie Hepburn stood by during this objurgation, shrinking from Marjory's eye, looking on, now red with shame, now pale with distress, while his future wife made this exhibition of herself. He stood between the ideal he had worshipped all his life, and the real upon which he had fallen, poor fellow, breaking not his bones, but his heart, by the fall. He was too much cowed to say a word. And neither of the

others said much; they allowed the young widow to drive off triumphant with the sense that she had humbled them all, and vindicated her superiority. "That must have done her a deal of good," Fanshawe said when it was over, "and it has not done you much harm."

"It has done me a great deal of harm," said Marjory, paling out of her flush of excitement, and looking ready to cry; and then after a while, she said softly, "Poor Johnnie!" These were not the words of a woman who had entertained any very elevated feeling for the man whom she thus pitied; but they were enough to make Fanshawe quite unhappy.

"Idiot!" he said to himself without any pity; and spent that evening mournfully by himself to the wonder of the Heriot household, and the consternation of Marjory, who felt that he had been her best support; and who had not an idea what he could mean by absenting himself on that particular evening when she was so grateful to him.

They were brought together also by another duty, not of an agreeable kind. Mrs. Charles gave her sister a summary dismissal when she her-

self left Pitcomlie. It was Spring when this occurred, and Matilda was to go to Edinburgh, her year of mourning being nearly out, to prepare for her second marriage. But Verna, whose courage and temper had both given way under the failure of all her hopes, protested so warmly and so injudiciously against this precipitate marriage, that there was a violent quarrel, and the weaker sister was turned out to find her way back to India, or where she pleased. She went to St. Andrews, not knowing why, and threw herself upon Marjory's compassion. She had nowhere to go to but India, where her father did not want her. Nobody in the world wanted poor Verna. While they were trying to arrange for her return voyage, she fell ill of a brain-fever, and lay between life and death for weeks. When she got better, somehow she had acquired a niche in the household of which she had intended to be the most active enemy. She stayed in her loneliness as Milly's governess, or in any other capacity that could be invented for her; and finally married Dr. Murray's successor, and made an admirable parish Minister's wife, interfering too

much with the poor people, but gradually learning their character. She and Mrs. John Hepburn were sometimes friends—when the latter was in want of help; and sometimes enemies, when Matilda felt well enough to be insolent; but Verna's vicinity made poor Johnnie's life less miserable, and his home less hopeless, than in her absence they could have been.

This, however, is an incursion into the future which we are scarcely warranted in making, seeing that the fate of the two principal persons of this history still remains unsettled. Fanshawe lingered at St. Andrews through all the Winter and Spring. He made himself of use to everybody, and was deeply ashamed of his own absolute uselessness. Never had he been so conscious of the good-for-nothing existence which he did not seem able to shake himself clear of. It closed his mouth in Marjory's presence. What could he say for himself? how could he recommend himself to her? He would go and sit by her, or walk by her side when permitted, silent, embarrassed; doing nothing to win her attention, wondering if she despised him, or if she pitied

him, or if she thought him worth thinking of at all? His feelings grew exaggerated and unreal in the profound consciousness he had of his own helpless unimportance, and in his constant surmises as to what she thought of him, and the questions concerning him which must arise in her mind. One half of these questions, however, never arose in Marjory's mind at all, and the other half appeared to her in a different light, and affected her differently; but the man was in love and humble, and never divined this. He lingered on, hoping for he knew not what; that something might break the ice between them, that she might offer herself to him, or something else equally improbable. Marjory's sentiments were of a very different character. She did not feel herself to stand on that vast pinnacle of superiority which was so visible to him; her eyes were not so clear as he supposed them. To be sure, he was not at all her ideal of what a man ought to be; but I am not sure that she liked him less on that account. Probably Marjory, like many other young women, supposed herself to prefer that glorious being of romance whom romantic girls

dream of, whom they can look up to, upon whom they can hang in sweet but abject inferiority, and who is to them, as Mr. Trollope says, a god. I say probably she supposed that she would have liked this; but I doubt much whether she would have liked it; for men like gods seldom appear to the visual organs of any but very susceptible feminine adorers, after five-and-twenty, and Marjory had reached that ripe age. But I fear she liked Fanshawe all the better for not being a god. She liked him for the very qualities which he felt she must despise him for. To her the vague and unsettled character of his life appeared but dimly, while his generosities shone out very bright. All her good sense and discrimination failed her in this point, as such qualities invariably do just at the moment when they might be of practical use. In matters so closely concerning personal happiness they never are of the slightest use; as soon as the heart is touched, such poor bulwarks of the mind yield as if they were made of broken reeds. She saw nothing ignoble, nothing unworthy in the life full of so many kindly uses, of which

Fanshawe thought with so much shame, yet felt himself incapable of changing.

"Most people come here for golf," she would say, when his long lingering was remarked. "Why should he not stay—for his own pleasure—if he likes it? Is golf such an elevating occupation?"

This was said, not because she despised golf, but because of him whom she felt herself bound to defend, and who had not even golf—who had only herself, for his excuse.

The way in which all this ended was as follows: Marjory had gone out to the Spindle on a bright Winter day to pay a farewell visit to that spot which had occupied so important a place in her past life. Who does not know the keen and radiant brightness of a sunny day in Winter, when there is no wind to chill the still air, no clouds upon the deepened blue, none of the languid softening of Summer, but every outline sharp, and every tint brought out by the radiant sun and clear atmosphere? The rocks unfolded all their glittering veins, all their ruddy stains of colour under the sunshine. There were no

trees to keep the fact of decay before the spectator by means of fallen leaves and bare anatomy of branches. The sea was like a great blue mirror, except where the crisped surface, still, though ruffled, betrayed some breath of wandering air. The sails of the fishing boats rose brown out of this dazzling surface, and in the distance some far white ships glided like great sea-birds along the bright broad line of the horizon to which both sky and sea went out widening and paling. The sun was warm, and Marjory seated herself, for a few moments, on a dry rock from which the sea had long ebbed. The stillness was more intense than it ever is on a Summer day—the brightness almost more intense too. She sat and thought of all that had passed there—of Isabell and her deathbed—of the strange way in which this corner of rocky beach had been thrust into her own story. She was disturbed and annoyed when she heard a step approaching, scattering the pebbles, and sounding through the Winter's stillness. She was still more disturbed, but perhaps not annoyed, when she saw that the intruder was Fanshawe. He

was the only intruder whose presence she could have endured; and when she saw him, she rose and went to meet him, taking the path towards home, which somehow made the encounter less embarrassing. He turned and accompanied her. It is a long walk, winding up and down by many a fold of the bold coast, now at the foot of the cliffs, now above—an endless walk to people who are embarrassed by finding themselves together; and yet not disagreeable—one of those opportunities of pleasant pain which few have the courage to avoid; and which may become, who knows, all pleasure, and no pain, by the chance of a sudden word.

"Do you know," said Fanshawe suddenly, after some vague conversation about nothing, "that I know what a poor wretch I am, Miss Heriot? If I was good for anything—if I was of the least consequence in the world, or knew how to make myself so, I should go away."

"Should you?" said Marjory; "I do not see the necessity. Do you know that I think you talk a great deal of nonsense on this point. You cannot expect me to agree with you, seeing what

a friend you have been to us; how much you have done for us ever since we knew you. You have been good for everything—"

"And yet," he said, "it is odd if you will think of it—that I have been of no real service whatsoever. I don't mean to say I had not the best intentions—but there is nothing so feeble as good intentions. About these Macgregors, for instance; they were found before I got back from my wild-goose chase. I meant well, but I did nothing."

"That is not the question," said Marjory loftily; "their coming was a mere accident. You did everything—the accident came in and balked you. I was half disappointed myself."

"Were you?" he said, looking at her with those melting, glowing eyes which betray secrets. And then he added quite abruptly: "The road is rough, will you take my arm?"

Marjory laughed. "I do not see how that follows," she said amused.

"No, it does not follow; nothing follows in life —except that the road is rough, you know, and facts count for something. They do count for

something—not for much, perhaps you will say—"

"Indeed, I am not such an infidel; they count for a great deal," she said, and though she needed no support, she accepted it to give him pleasure. But such was the fantastical nature of the man that, after the first gleam of delight that came across him at the touch of her hand, his brow clouded over.

"How good you are, Miss Heriot! too good. You drive me to despair when you are kind to me. Often, do you know, I have wanted to ask you whether, by any chance—people take odd fancies sometimes—you would have me, to try what you could make of me? and then you have been kind, and driven me to despair. It is no use, is it, telling you that I have been a greater fool than usual to-day? Do you know," he went on, holding her hand tightly in his arm, "if you would have had me, I think something might have come of me, perhaps—"

He looked at her so that she could not bear his eyes. It was a curious kind of love-tale; but not, I suppose, less embarrassing than another.

She withdrew her hand from his arm with difficulty, and with a little impatience. "Mr. Fanshawe, you vex me when you say such things—of yourself."

Each word as she said it was lower than the preceding one; and the last two were quite inaudible to poor Fanshawe. He gave a huge sigh that came from the bottom of his heart. "Well!" he said, "I knew how it would be; I felt sure that was about what you would say. And it is quite right—I am not good enough to look at you, much less to hope. But, Miss Heriot, I am done for now, and I don't care what becomes of me. Don't be kind to me any more."

Marjory looked up, and saw, to her wonder, the darkness that had come over his face. There was no time to be lost in trifling. She put her hand within his arm again—she looked at him smiling. "But I will," she said.

"You will—what?"

The question was foolish—the answer unnecessary. So are many questions, and many answers at that crisis of life. They got home somehow, and told the others what had happened.

"But I have nothing," Fanshawe said ruefully when he recounted the matter to Mr. Charles.

"We must make some arrangement—some arrangement," said that troubled sage, with many puckers in his forehead. Anyhow, it was a way of solving the question of Marjory's marriage, and that was worth a sacrifice.

The Fanshawes are now settled at Pitcomlie, the guardians of the baby heir. The useless man has become the most useful of men in that work which so many useless men could shine in, the management of an estate. He has found what he can do, and does it. And Mr. Charles sits in his room in the old Tower, and has come to the second volume of the family history. It will be a long time before he comes to the entry of "Thomas Heriot, married June 16, 18—, to Isabell Jeffrey," nobody's daughter, which it goes to his very heart to think of. Perhaps he will not live long enough to be obliged to record that there was once an irregular marriage and a nameless wife among the Heriots; but in the meantime the others keep the name of poor Isabell always sacred; and her boy, after his long

minority, will be the richest Heriot that has reigned for many a generation in the East Neuk of Fife.

THE END.

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