THAT LITTLE CUTTY

AND OTHER STORIES

That Little Cutty

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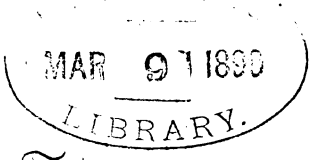

Fine money.

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THAT LITTLE CUTTY

CHAPTER I

'MARRIED!' the mother said, with a cry of pain and distress.

This was at the end of a moment of such wild and overwhelming joy as had scarcely ever been seen before in the sober house of Bruntsfield. Altogether it had been an extraordinary day. That morning, Mr. and Mrs. Pillans, after some uneasiness about the want of letters from their daughter, who was absent on a visit, had received from the friends she was supposed to be visiting a letter of inquiry as to why Jeanie had never arrived. The countenances of the parents had grown ghastly as they read. Jeanie had never arrived! It was inconceivable to them, and as they could not believe that she could be at fault, or that her will had anything to do with this, their minds naturally jumped at the most terrible conclusions. She had been spirited away

somewhere—she had been robbed—she might have been murdered—'or worse, or worse,' her mother said to herself, with lips out of which every vestige of colour was gone. Jeanie was their eldest child—the eldest of two, who were left to them after many bereavements—a slip of a girl, not much over sixteen, as light, and as merry, and as tuneful as any bird that ever sung on a bough. She had made life bright for the sober pair, whose previous existence had known many sorrows, and to spare her even for a visit at Dalrulzian had been an act of self-sacrifice on their parts. They had counted the days till she should return. But when this fatal missive fell upon their hearts like a stone, carrying them to the depths, they did not know what to think or to say. She had been put into the coach, which passed the very gate of Dalrulzian, by her father himself. The guard had been feed to take care of her, and an old lady, who was travelling beyond Perth, was made acquaintance with, and complimented, and bowed down to, on Jeanie's account. 'She is a young thing,' Mrs. Pillans had said, 'not used to be from her mother; if you would be so

kind, mem, as to give an eye to her, and speak a word now and then to keep up her heart.' 'That will I, mem,' said the old lady, with great alacrity; and thus they had watched the coach driving off with Jeanie, nodding from the window, with more composure than they could have hoped. But Jeanie had never arrived. Could it be possible? Could such a thing happen? There had been no accident, nothing at all to account for it; but Jeanie had never arrived. They had looked at each other aghast, and it was not till some time later that the full force of the misfortune had burst upon them. Jeanie, at her age, so young and so bonnie, one who had never been 'from her mother,' as Mrs. Pillans said, without the habit of 'fending' for herself, as some girls (poor things) were obliged to do. What had become of her? They shivered and grew paler still, as they bethought themselves, that it was seven days since they saw her off so carefully. Seven long days! and, oh heavens, what might have happened in the meantime. Mrs. Pillans put on her big bonnet instantly, and her heavy veil of Spanish lace with large flowers which hung loosely over it; but her

husband stopped her as she was rushing out. 'Margaret, my woman, you must stay at home,' he said; 'you must be here, whatever happens, to receive her, poor bairn—if she is let come home, or if I can find her. Our Jeanie may be coming back in meesery,' the good man said, with a quiver in his voice, 'and where should she go, but to her mother? Margaret, my woman, night or day, till we get her again, you must not be away.'

A groan of that terrible suspense, which is the woman's share of mortal misery, came from the mother's breast. But she agreed, after a moment, that her husband was right. If anything had happened to Jeanie, and she came home and did not find her mother, no doubt she would fly away again, and be seen no more. So Mrs. Pillans went back again to her bedroom, and put away the big old-fashioned leghorn, with its great yellow feather and costly lace veil. These were very handsome articles of their kind, and had filled many a bosom with admiration and envy, for the Pillans were very comfortable, and did not require to deny themselves (in moderation) anything they wanted. She put them away very carefully, but hurried back to the

parlour, one of the windows of which commanded the road. She did not move out of sight of that window all day. She bade the nurse gave little Willie his dinner, and leave her undisturbed, for she had a sore head. This, though it is not a graceful expression, was the Scotch for a headache in those days. Mrs. Pillans had no headache, but she had a heartache, and every vein in her was throbbing with excitement and unspeakable pain. She tried to sit still, but she could not, and for most of the long day walked up and down, trying to delude herself every time she turned her back upon the window that by the time she came back to it some carriage, some little trim figure, might have arisen upon the way. Ah! would she ever see that little trim figure again, or feel the touch of those arms round her, and Jeanie's breath, so 'caller,' so sweet, upon her cheek? If it was possible to be twice as wretched as she had been when the news first came, Mrs. Pillans accomplished that as the afternoon began to fade, and her husband's usual hour of return approached. He had promised to return at once if he could hear anything, so that evidently he had heard nothing—and might not, perhaps, and might

not! The poor woman, wringing her hands with a burst of sudden anguish, asked herself, if the night came on without any news, how could she bear it? But while this was going through her mind, at the very bitterest moment, the door flew open behind her, and Jeanie herself—Jeanie, fresh and fair, out of breath, and with her heart thumping wildly, but as trim, as neat, as smiling as ever, like a fresh flower out of the fields—flung herself into her mother's arms.

The exclamation recorded above was the first coherent word Mrs. Pillans said—the joy had taken all her senses, as she said afterwards, away from her. She did not ask a question; she did nothing but hold her child in her arms, and repeat her name, and satisfy herself that nothing had happened that involved trouble or shame. Had Jeanie come back like a shadow, stealing, silent and heart-broken, into the shelter of her home, which was what she had feared, she would have gathered up her daughter into her arms with the silence of infinite pity and tenderness. But the light was dancing in Jeanie's eye, her cheek was as fresh and sweet as ever, her frock (and it was her best frock) as pretty

and neat. Whatever had happened, harm had not happened. But when the first burst of ecstasy was over, Jeanie had detached herself from her mother's arms. She had gone a step backward, and placed herself by the side of another person, who was standing nervously within the door. A slim young man, not very much taller, or very much older than herself, with a downy young moustache upon his upper lip, and a look of appeal and alarm in his eyes. And then it was that Mrs. Pillans dropped down on the nearest chair, and looking at them, with a shade of horror creeping over her joy, cried 'Married!' in a tone that no words could describe.

Jeanie stood against the wainscot of the parlour, which brought out her little figure to perfection, her rosy tints, her bright ribbons, the pattern of her dress, which was made of fine printed linen, gay with scattered rosebuds, with the gloss of the flax upon it, a gown and petticoat of the same, such as girls of her period wore. She, too, had a leghorn hat, with a long feather, and a little black mantilly, as it was called, over her shoulders. She put out her hand to the youth behind her with an air of protection, and stood, her eyes

sparkling, her little figure all one sweet defiance, confronting her mother. What a difference from the terrible picture of youthful ruin and misery which the anxious imaginations of the parents had conjured up! Triumph was in the little heroine's eyes. She was no more afraid of Mrs. Pillans sitting there with the tears of joy upon her cheeks, but fright and wonder in her countenance, than—our children are afraid of us—and what could I say more? 'Well!' she said, with her little air of audacious self-defence. 'You never sent him away. You said we were too young: but I'm not so young now as when you said that, mother, and Edward is older, too. And then there was so much to think of. The regiment might be sent away—you might say we were never to see one another again: which you said you would—but you never did it, mother.'

'Oh, Jeanie. You little cutty! When you know it was because I had not the heart——'

'But you never did it,' said the little special pleader. 'You let him come, and you let me see him; and you never said he wasna to meet me on the road. Mother, here is

poor Edward, too frightened to say a word. What will you do to him? It was not his fault, it was all mine. Could I let him be sent away, not knowing if he would ever see me again? Could I let him break his heart, mother?' said Jeanie, half laughing, half crying. 'We have been ill bairns. I deceived you, but I never told a lie. I only said nothing. We've been very ill bairns. But look at us both, Edward and me, come to beg your pardon; and we'll never, never do it again!'

The two culprits should have thrown themselves on their knees when this was said, but the Scotch have a still greater dread of scenes than the English, and they did no such thing. What really took place was that Jeanie, stealing closer and closer, and dragging Edward after her by the hand, finally got once more into her mother's arms, while the young husband, standing behind Mrs. Pillans' chair, made his humble appeal to her, in a very boyish way by softly patting her shoulder, while the little wife coaxed and pleaded. 'Give him a kiss, mother. He was always fond of you—that was what made me like him first—he has no mother of his own; and now he belongs to me, and I belong to him.'

'Oh! my Jeanie—my wilful bairn! do you think that's a reason? How can we like the lad that takes you from us,' Mrs. Pillans cried; but she felt the soft appeal of Edward's hand on her shoulder all the same, and her heart melted. It was not a very difficult process to make her heart melt.

'Was that what granny said, mother,' said the bold little bride, between two kisses, 'when my father came?'

'Oh, you little cutty, you little cutty!' was all the poor mother's reply.

They were so much excited that they did not hear the steady step coming down the little avenue and up the stone steps to the ever open door, as it came every day at the same hour. Mr. Pillans had come home heart-broken. He had been unable to hear anything of his child; but he would not be later than his usual hour, that he might, at least, comfort his wife, and be comforted by her. 'Two can bear a thing better than one,' he said to himself, planning, in his disturbed mind, where he should go after he had taken counsel with his Marg'ret. When he came in sight of the house, he had looked anxiously and long at every window, at every corner,

thinking if there were good news that she would have contrived some sign of it to cheer him as soon as he was within sight. But the windows were all blank, even the parlour window, where his wife's face, looking out for him, had been his daily welcome for years. 'She'll have gone out, poor woman, to look for her bairn,' he said to himself, and went over his own threshold with a sigh. But what was this sound of weeping, and talking, and kissing? The good man fell a-trembling like a child. He could scarcely open the door; but they were too much occupied to hear, and thus he entered softly, and stood looking on for full a minute before he was perceived. At sight of his daughter the load was lifted from his heart, and it did not want a second look to tell him exactly the state of the case. He nodded his head to himself after the first shock of joyful surprise. To be sure—to be sure! not desirable, far from desirable—but yet—God in heaven be praised—there was nothing wrong with the bairn. He heard the last saucy speech, while he stood dumb with intense emotion and relief. He did not want to burst out crying like the women—he stood on his dignity—instead, he

broke forth, all at once, into a long, quavering laugh. 'Was that what granny said? 'deed was it, and a great deal more.'

'Father!' cried Jeanie, suddenly growing pale, and clutching her mother more tightly round the neck. As for young Captain Sinclair, it was now his turn to bestir himself. He gave up those pats which were going through Mrs. Pillans' black silk straight to her heart, and went forward to meet the newcomer. 'I have nothing to do, sir, but throw myself upon your mercy,' he said, 'but do not blame her, for it's me, only me, that am to blame.'

'Sir,' said the father, 'it's fine speaking! You've taken our treasure, and now you throw yourself on our mercy. What can we do to you? Am I likely to strike you, do you think, through my bairn?'

'Father!' said Jeanie, again. She was frightened and breathless, but still bold. She went up to him with a kind of timid daring, and put her hand through his arm. Her cheeks were wet with tears, but her eyes shining. She clasped her hands upon his arm, clinging to him. 'Was I to let him break his heart?'

'Lads do not break their hearts. I can say nothing for silly things like you.'

'Then let it be like that,' cried Jeanie. 'I am a silly thing. I am like you, father. If he had gone away, I would have broken my silly heart; and then when you saw it, and watched me dwining, like poor Mary Scott not so far off, and put me in my deep grave with little Effie and the rest, what would you have said then?'

'You are cruel, Jeanie,' said her father. 'Heart! there is no heart in you young things. You mind your mother of one bairn she has lost to make her heart soft till she forgives the lad that has stolen another.'

'Patrick, Patrick! She didna mean it!' cried his wife, through her tears.

'I didna mean it, father. I never thought of it. And it's me I'm asking you to forgive,' said the little cutty, rubbing her soft cheek against his sleeve.

'You!' He laughed again, and held the clasped hands close to his side for a moment. 'Well, you've come home. There's grace in that. Forgive *you*. We're likely folk to make a quarrel with our own bairn. Go away to your mother. I've got something

to say to this fool of a lad. You'll follow me, sir, to my room.'

'To your room!' cried Jeanie, in alarm. To expose her husband unprotected to her father's wrath was a risk she had never contemplated, and it filled her with dismay. She clung with both hands to Mr. Pillans' arm, lifting up her face with the most wistful of looks against his heart. 'Let me come, too,' she said, her pretty mouth quivering, and all the lines of her face dropping into pathetic, childish apprehension of that most tragical of all calamities, a scolding from her father. How was Edward to encounter that alone? 'Let me come, too.'

'You will stay with your mother, Jeanie. The lad is less worth than I think him if he is feared to tell his story, on his side, eye to eye with me.'

'Jeanie, stay with your mother,' cried the young man. 'I am not afraid, sir; it is what I wish. Darling, trust me—and trust him.'

Mr. Pillans was a good man, but he was mortal, and her father. He put the girl away from him almost roughly. 'It's new to me,' he said, 'to hear my bairn bidden to trust

me. We have to put up with all things; but it's a novelty. Perhaps he has kindly instructed her to trust you, too, Margaret. You will try your best to console her for the want of him for ten minutes. I must speak to the young man.'

Jeanie paid little attention to the sting of wounded feeling in her father's words. Seventeen is so full of its own concerns—and it is so difficult to realise those of others at that inexperienced age—and what in heaven or earth could be so important as the danger of cross or harm to Edward? She followed them to the door, mutely communicating her sympathy to her partner with her eyes and hands, which clasped his as he passed her. Edward, for his part, showed more courage. He held his head high as he went out, turning back to give a smile and nod of encouragement to his little bride. When the door closed Jeanie stood still for a moment with her hands clasped; then began to pace up and down with all the impatience of excitement. Her mother stood by with feelings impossible to describe—with a sore and wistful spectatorship, a kind of cruel amusement and bewilderment to see the child, who had

been such a child a week ago, entered into all the agitations of a woman—independent, absorbed in her own affairs. Jeanie made no further appeal for her mother's forgiveness. She was for the moment quite indifferent to her mother. Everything had been buried and swallowed up by this new tie.

'Oh, if he's hard on my Edward!' cried Jeanie. 'If he says cruel things to him! Oh, if they would have taken me with them! Why should you try to part us, and scold us separate? We could bear it better together. Oh, if he's hard on my Edward when he gets him all alone!'

'You have very little confidence in your father,' said Mrs. Pillans. 'Jeanie—Jeanie, when was your father hard upon either lad or lass.'

'Oh, mother, how should you know? It's Edward I am thinking of,' cried the girl. 'He's not one to stand up for himself. If it was me, he would fight for me like a lion. But for himself—and he canna manage my father, he will not know how to speak to him; he canna manage him like me.'

'You little cutty!' said her mother; '*you*

manage your father! without thinking in the meantime that you have enough ado to beg our pardon for yourself.'

'I'm no thinking of myself,' was all that Jeanie said.

CHAPTER II

BUT the reader does not need to be told that the interview was much less dreadful than Jeanie supposed. The young man told his story with manly simplicity. It was wrong, there was no doubt. But how was he to contemplate the idea of perhaps being parted from his Jeanie, if the parents were to carry out their threat, or if the regiment should get marching orders, which might come any day?

'You think it is a small matter then that we should be parted from our Jeanie?' Mr. Pillans said, with a grim smile.

'No, I did not mean that. Perhaps we may stay still where we are for a year more; there's no certainty. And besides, sir,' said the young man, 'it's the course of nature. I suppose you married, too, because you could not bide apart, Mrs. Pillans and you?'

This had a better effect. The father was subdued. He gave vent to his feelings in a short cough. 'You're a clever lad,' he said.

'No, I am not a clever lad. I am very fond of my Jeanie. But tell me yourself, do you think I could help it? If you wanted us to forget each other you should have had no mercy—you should have sent me away.'

'I should have taken your advice, that's clear,' said Mr. Pillans, once more with an unsteady laugh. 'If I had to do it a second time I would know better. It appears I'm but a fool in comparison with your wisdom. It is the young, not the old, that know best.'

'Yes, sir,' said young Sinclair, promptly, 'where love's concerned.'

'Love! Do you know the meaning of the word, my lad? Ay, ay, your love's a grand passion. It will drag her into trouble before her time—it'll carry her off at the tail of a regiment, and her so young—it will take her away out of her home. There's other love that is not like that—that would take care of her against all its own interests, while ye expose her to all the angry airts.'

'Say what you like to me,' said the young man, with the air of a martyr. 'I deserve it —I have a right to bear it; but do not be hard upon my Jeanie, for she's young and tender, and that I could not bear.'

Once more Mr. Pillans regarded the youth with that bitter amusement which had already passed over his face. 'I'm not to be hard upon his Jeanie! Do you know whose Jeanie she was a week ago? Not yours, but mine!'

'No,' cried young Sinclair, 'she was mine all the time. It's long since we spoke of this. It's been all settled that we were to do it as soon as ever the opportunity came.'

Mr. Pillans' countenance changed greatly while this speech was being made. His eyes opened wide, and shone as with a gleam of lightning. Then this stormy aspect of his countenance gave way to an unwilling smile. He uttered once more a little sharp, short laugh, which was like a cry, and when he spoke, 'The little cutty!' was all he said.

Such conversations have a way of prolonging themselves, but if they had talked till Christmas what more could have been said? The thing was done. These good people

could not strike the youth through their daughter, nor could they make Jeanie unhappy, however small was her consideration for them. And after a while things settled down into their new order. Mr. Pillans saw that everything was made secure and legal, settling the little fortune which was one day to be his daughter's as securely as it could be done, with the full consent of the young husband, but to the great indignation of Jeanie; and the east wing of Bruntsfield House, which was vacant, was furnished for them, and there the young couple began their life. Bruntsfield had been a fine house in its day, but so long as it had belonged to the Pillans these rooms had never been used. They had been Jeanie's favourite place for play when she was a child—nay, until a very short time since, for what was she now but a child—scarcely seventeen? When the young pair had with much delight, like two children over a doll's-house, furnished their nest, their life became the daily amusement of the parents, to whom they were nothing more than a pair of children still. And a very pretty sight it was. Sometimes the spectacle of Jeanie's entire absorption in her husband, and indifference to her

parents, gave these kind people a stab, and brought the tears to their eyes. But after that they would laugh—how could they help it?—to watch the pair of turtle doves; and it may be imagined how this sweet yet sometimes painful amusement increased when little Jeanie—the little creature whom they taught to walk and to talk so short a time before—became in her turn a mother, and produced a baby, which turned her little head with pride and happiness, and, must it be confessed? her mother's head, too, who felt as if the little warm, soft bud of humanity thus brought forth was doubly her own, and could not contain herself for joy and importance and pride. When she carried it, all wrapped in pretty flannels worked by her own hands, to meet her husband on his return from his business, her countenance was lighted up as with some inward light.

'What, Marg'ret! you silly woman, at your time of life. You look as if ye had found a hidden treasure,' said her husband, himself fain to conceal the quiver of his middle-aged face as he bent over the small bundle.

'I'm just a very silly woman,' said his

wife, 'that's true. A woman's never so old but her heart warms to a baby in her arms. And my Jeanie's bairn!'

'Jeanie's bairn! She's but a bairn herself,' the new grandfather said.

But this was the very thing that made it so pretty to see them. When Jeanie, throned in invalid state, with a cap tied over her curls, and a loose blue gown tied with pretty ribbons, was first revealed to the family with her baby, fancy what a sight it was! There were none of the relations—the Scotch cousins who came trooping in—who did not laugh till they cried at this wonderful spectacle. It is pretty to see a little girl with her doll, but how much more pretty to see the matronly dignity upon this little smooth brow, the air of experience and importance diffused over the small rose-face—the inborn conviction in Jeanie's mind that of all the matrons about not one knew how to manage that lusty morsel of humanity but herself. 'Give him to me,' she said, with an ineffable, impatient superiority, when the creature cried; and it did cry by times, as it did everything else, with a vigour and cordiality which showed how soon it is possible to develop a human will

and temper in the most infinitesimal compass. It cried and it laughed, and it sucked its independent thumbs, and kicked out its pink feet before other babies had begun to do more than snuffle; or so at least both Jeanie and Mrs. Pillans thought. The latter had always been of opinion that Jeanie herself had been the most 'forward' child ever seen; but she was shaken in her faith by the sight of this wonderful thing, miracle of miracles, which was Jeanie's baby. And if you had ventured to speak of that bundle of flannel as 'it' before either of these ladies, short would have been your shrift. It! That is an indignity which few young mothers can tolerate. This was HE, in capitals, a Son, with two most male and manful names—Patrick Edward. No nonsense about these, no softening vowels at the ends—Patrick Edward Sinclair; you might have written General or Admiral before them without any incongruity; and yet all these strong syllables belonged to this pink flannel! This was one of the whimsical circumstances about 'the creature' which made Mr. Pillans open his mouth in a big roar, a roar which somehow got weak at the end and made his eyes shine. There had not been

such a delightful joke at Bruntsfield since it began to be a house at all.

The baby was about three months old when Mr. Pillans, one evening taking a stroll up and down the little avenue which led to the house, met his son-in-law returning from duty. It was one of those lovely, lingering nights about midsummer, which are so beautiful in Scotland. It was between nine and ten o'clock, but still the skies were luminous and the air light with an unearthly sweetness. If ever the fair spirits of the beloved, who are in heaven, come back to walk on earth, it should be at that wonderful hour when it is not day nor evening, but a moment of heavenly suspense which is both. His house behind him, with all the doors and windows open, was full of happiness. It had been his wife's custom to join him in this stroll, but she was (he knew) with Jeanie, bending over the cradle in which the miraculous being lay, or cutting out short frocks for it, or occupied with it in some other engrossing way. The grandfather was not jealous, he was happy; all was going well with him; his house all open, fearing no evil—neither thief nor spy, neither the chill of evening nor any evil in-

fluence—was a symbol of his honest, open soul, in which peace dwelt. He heard little Willie, who could not go to sleep because of the light, singing drowsily in his bed as he began to doze. He heard the movements of the servants, and now and then a laugh, and now a subdued burst of some old Scots tune, as Robina, the housemaid, or old Mrs. Foggo, the cook, crossed a distant passage; and the gardener was watering the flower-beds with his boy behind him, taking advantage of the long light. The lamp was burning in the parlour, showing that pleasant, comfortable room, like a picture, ready to receive, when he should be tired of his stroll, the master of the house. Never was a moment in which there was less foreboding of evil. The trees waved their soft branches overhead with a gentle rustle; the roses were sweet upon the wall; and heavenly thoughts were in the good man's heart.

'He makes me down to lie
In pastures green: He leadeth me
The quiet waters by,'

he was saying to himself; for the psalms were more familiar to him, as to most Scotchmen, in old Rouse's metrical version than in

any other; and he had turned towards the gate for the last time before going in, when he met Sinclair, returning from the Castle, where he had been on some late business connected with the regiment. He was adjutant, and he had various things, beyond his ordinary duty as an officer, to do.

'Is that you, Edward?' Mr. Pillans said. Then he received a most painful and unexpected shock. Edward was very pale, his face had a wild and distracted look, his hat was pushed up upon the back of his head. What was the matter? Had the lad been drinking? Good Lord, what a sight for little Jeanie! Mr. Pillans was not hard or intolerant, but when he thought of his innocent little daughter it made his heart ache. 'Where have you been, my lad? what have you been doing with yourself?' he said, taking hold of his son-in-law by the arm.

The young man turned to him with a gasp. 'I am nearly out of my senses,' he said. 'I don't know how to break it to you. Now, indeed, I feel what it is; and you'll never forgive me—you'll never forgive me—though I am nearly beside myself.'

'What have you been doing?' said his

father-in-law, holding him fast by the arm.

'Doing! I wish it were only my doing,' the young man began. Mr. Pillans wavered in his first notion, but still he could not help a suspicion that something was wrong.

'If you will tell me frankly what it is, without concealment, without equivocation, anything that can be done I will do for you as if I were your father. If it's money——' said Mr. Pillans.

Edward turned and looked at him with bewildered eyes. There was a moment's silence, then he said, slowly, 'We have got our marching orders; we have got the route, as the men say——'

Was it the night that came on suddenly at a bound, or was it the sudden darkness in its master's heart which overshadowed the house in a moment—took the light out of the skies and the colour out of the flowers? He did not say a word, but loosened his hold on Edward's arm and threw him from him with a gesture of repulsion, as if he would have thrown him out of existence—out of the very world.

'I know, I know,' cried young Sinclair

almost weeping, 'you cannot say anything to me that I have not said to myself. Your home so happy and all that is in it; and you so good, like a father to me, though I defied you; and I'm bringing misery to you and desolation, and taking away your dearest. But how could I help it? Say what you please to me, sir, say what you please! I will bear it; you can think of me as nothing but an enemy now.'

Still Mr. Pillans did not say a word. He resumed his walk towards the gate, stumbling, scarcely seeing where he went, while the young man followed him wistfully, talking, explaining, deprecating. 'I never thought what it would be to you till now. I have been hanging about, not daring to come in. Oh, sir! try and not curse me; you know now you can trust me with her—you know I adore my Jeanie. We will write every mail; we will never, never forget all you have done for us.'

Mr. Pillans turned round again and clutched him by the arm—'Done for *you!* Do you know, man, you're speaking of *my* daughter —*my* child? What would I do for her? more, a thousand times, than I'd do for my-

self! And here are you, a bit of a lad, with your adoring. Adore her! what are you going to do for her? Trail her along at the tail of the regiment in poverty, on the sea, in barracks, following a sodger! Her! that has been happit and covered from every wind that blew—that has never known a trouble in all her life, except what you've brought—that has had her mother and me between her and all harm!'

'I am her husband, sir,' said the young man; 'I will stand between her and all harm.'

'You! you are a bonnie one to say so. What harm has ever come to her but through you? and even if you had the will to do it, how could you do it? You'll have to do your duty like the rest, and who will take care of Jeanie when you're marching and counter-marching? or if you were killed, let's say—a soldier is set to be killed—what would become of her then? Good Lord! my Jeanie! left maybe to come back (where are you going?), a bit of a bairn like her, to come back a widow, with helpless bairns clinging to her. And all because you adore her. Is that a way to adore her? to expose her to

meesery and trouble? My lad, if you had a heart in you, or anything like a heart——'

Poor young Sinclair was entirely overcome by the father's passion—'What would you have me to do?' he said.

Mr. Pillans took him by the arm again and hurried him away behind the house to a little corner in the garden, where there were some seats under the trees. It was a place where Jeanie and her young husband had spent many a happy hour. Some great rose-bushes made a little thicket round. It was invisible from the house, and Mr. Pillans was not aware of the cruelty of bringing the poor young man here, where everything was associated with Jeanie's image, to make him give up Jeanie. For this, and no less, was his object. 'My lad,' he said, almost crushing the young fellow's arm with his heavy hand, 'no man in the world can take her from you—she's yours for life and death, and her bonnie babe. But would it not be a grand thing to leave her here safe and sound, to know she was out of all the hardships you'll have to face, and the dangers you'll have to run; to feel, whatever happened to you, your Jeanie was well cared for, and

guarded and petted by them she belongs to——'

'She belongs to me, sir,' the young man said.

'Ay, ay,' said Mr. Pillans, with anxious acquiescence. 'That's true, that's true. She belongs to you—nobody will gainsay that. She's your bonnie wife, and there's few like her; but, Edward, my man, think a little!—not eighteen yet. You will mind she was three months short of seventeen when you ran away with her and married her, without ever asking my leave. Not eighteen! How is she fit to face your life? Would you like to see her among those garrison ladies, all dirt and finery? or fighting with your small pay to make it do? or eating a dreary morsel by herself, and pinching herself in that, when you're at your mess? Her to do all that, and not eighteen; and spending lonely days, or, maybe, falling into ill hands that would teach her bad lessons, and her so young! For you could not be always at your wife's side—you would have to leave her, to go upon expeditions, maybe fighting, when you had ten chances to one never to come back again, and her left alone. Edward, you're a

kind lad, you have a heart in your bosom. You're very, very fond of our Jeanie——'

The two men were as near weeping as ever two women were. As for the poor young soldier, he was half hysterical, with all this cruel heaping up before him of miseries unforeseen. He, too, was very young, very fond, penetrated by sympathy and compunction. Sobs came from him against his will, and large drops of moisture had gathered beneath Mr. Pillans' heavy eyebrows. There was no woman present to be frightened by these signs of emotion.

'What are you wanting me to do?' at last poor Sinclair said.

Mr. Pillans was an advocate with a good reputation, but he had never pleaded before the courts as he pleaded that day. If he had, his fame would have stood on a very different level. He made it appear to the young husband that there was but one way which love and honour both demanded—to leave his wife and child behind, safe in her father's house. The regiment was ordered to Botany Bay, then a convict settlement, the other end of the world, and when they got there, what a place to live in—no fighting, perhaps, but

the most miserable of duties, and amid the most wretched of populations. The father promised everything, undertook everything. He would leave no stone unturned to negotiate an exchange—to get Sinclair transferred to another regiment, brought home, promoted—everything that interest could do, if only he would leave his wife safe (as was his first duty), and go out by himself until such time as his father-in-law's exertions brought him back. The conversation was prolonged until the night fell, and it was in darkness that they crept into the house, where Mr. Pillans had sent the gardener with a message to say that Captain Sinclair and himself had gone to take a walk, and were not to be waited for for supper. This had been received with great dissatisfaction by Jeanie, but milder remark by her mother, who smoothed down the young wife's displeasure by a 'Hoots! the man's daft about that son-in-law of his. You see a man likes a fine lad to talk to, just as a woman she's fond of her Jeanie,' Mrs. Pillans said, with her soft, maternal smile. Jeanie was glad and proud that her father should like her Edward (though how could any one help that?)

'But you can tell my father he's not to come in and kiss HIM to-night. He does not deserve it, taking Edward away,' Jeanie said, pouting, as she permitted herself to be put to bed, with her mother in attendance; for though she was as well and strong as any little wife need to be, it was sweet to keep up those little invalid ways which made Jeanie herself once more her mother's baby. 'She says you're not to kiss HIM to-night, to punish you for taking Edward away,' Mrs. Pillans said, smiling, when she met the two gentlemen in the parlour; 'but, Lord bless us, Patrick,' she added, 'there's something wrong, my man.' They had intended to keep it even from her, but that was a vain attempt; and it is impossible to describe the state of mind into which the revelation threw her. It was like a thunderbolt in the midst of all their quiet happiness. But though Mrs. Pillans was struck to the heart she shook her head at her husband's plan. When they were alone, she even went so far as to remonstrate with him. 'It will never answer, Patrick,' she said, shaking her head. 'Why will it not answer? There will be a struggle. But she will never know till he is gone, and she will have to

give in.' Mrs. Pillans shook her head more and more. 'Do you think I would have given in if they had tried to part me from you?' she said. This was an argument that might have touched any man's heart; but he would not yield his plan. 'You and Jeanie are two different things,' he said. 'My dear! she is nothing more than a bairn.' Mrs. Pillans lay, with her face to the wall, and cried half the night through; then resolutely stayed her tears that Jeanie's peace might not be disturbed by the traces of them. And she was loyal to her husband's device, even though it was against her daughter. But she shook her head all the same.

How they all kept the secret from Jeanie no one of the conspirators afterwards could tell. But by superhuman efforts they did so. They took her across the Firth for change of air, and there she was out of the way of all gossips who might have betrayed to her what was concealed so carefully by all around her; and newspapers, in those days, were unfrequent, and Jeanie was too young to care for reading of this kind, so that everything went on smoothly until the very day of the departure. Edward had to go to Leith in the

evening, making some excuse of business, in preparation, as he said, for certain changes next day. And Jeanie, quite unsuspicious, made no special inquiries, but chattered about his return on Saturday with all the ease imaginable. She held up HIM to be kissed as the poor young soldier went away; then giving the baby to her mother, went out to the door to see Edward get into the post-chaise; for, in those days, that was the only convenient mode of travelling. It was late in the afternoon, almost evening, but still full daylight, and poor Edward had hard ado to take his last look of her with the composure necessary to keep up the deception. She told him his hands were cold as he held hers at the window of the chaise. 'And you have not a bit of colour in your cheeks—are you sure you are quite well, Edward?' she said, with sudden alarm.

Poor fellow, he was ghastly—he could not make any reply; and but for Mr. Pillans' artifice, who startled the horse and made an imperative sign to the driver to go on, there is no telling what disclosures might have followed. They were all in a state of speechless agitation, except Jeanie, who knew

nothing. 'They'll have to hurry,' Mr. Pillans said, stammering, 'or they'll—they'll lose the boat at Kinghorn.' As for Mrs. Pillans, she retired with the baby, and putting him into the arms of one of the maids, shut herself up in her own room, and did not appear for a long time. This atmosphere of trouble surrounded the poor little girl, and confused her, she could not tell why. On ordinary occasions, when Edward went away, mother, father, and brother took pains to be with her, to 'divert her'—to keep her from thinking. But to-night, when somehow there seemed more need of this than usual, they both abandoned her, Mrs. Pillans to shut herself up in her room, whence she announced that she had a headache through the keyhole —a thing that, in all Jeanie's experience, had never happened before. 'May I not come in, mother?' 'No, my darling; go and get a turn on the sands before dark. That will do you more good. Go with your father and Willie.' Jeanie turned away from the door, bewildered. And when she went to look for her father he was gone. There was nobody but Willie to accompany her on her walk. And Willie was very strange and full of

mysterious allusions. 'When's Edward coming back,' he said. 'On Saturday,' Jeanie replied. 'On Saturday! Oh, no so soon as that,' said Willie; 'they're only cheating you. It'll no be near so soon as that.' 'What do you know about Edward?' Jeanie asked, indignantly. 'I ken mair than you,' said little Willie, 'but I'm no to tell.' And then he screwed up his little red lips tight, and would deign no further reply. Jeanie was disturbed, but not nearly so much so as the occasion required, for Willie liked to tease his sister, though he was only ten—too young to be very skilful in that endeavour. And besides, how should he know, a little boy, anything that was unknown to her? She came in, however, sooner than she had intended, and heard the nurse, who had been her own nurse, crooning to the baby, walking about with him till he should go to sleep. The woman sang and talked in a breath—

'Baloo, my lamb, lie still and sleep,
It grieves me sore to hear thee weep;
Baloo, my boy, thy mother's joy,
Thy father wrought me great annoy:
Baloo, my lamb—'

'Ay, ay, my lamb, that's just what it is,' said

the nurse, in her croon, 'thy faither's wrought her great annoy. She's just a poor sacrifeesed lamb hersel', my bonnie, bonnie bairn; and, eh, if she but kent what's happening the nicht, or the morn's morn—Baloo, my boy, thy mother's joy—oh, if she but kent what's happening the nicht, or the morn's morn——'

Here Jeanie leapt in upon the woman like a young deer, and seized her by the arm—'Janet, what do you mean? what do you mean? What is going to happen that I ought to know?—tell me, for I will hear!'

'Miss Jeanie—I'm meaning Mistress Sinclair, my bonnie lamb; oh, my dearie, take you care or you'll waken the bairn!'

Jeanie grasped her arm violently—'What is it, what is it,' she cried, 'that is happening to-night, or the morn's morn?'

'Oh, my bonnie darlin',' cried the nurse, 'it was an auld sang I was singing; and, there you see, there you see, you've wakened the bairn!'

'What is the bairn to me?' cried Jeanie, wildly, 'what is it that is happening to-night, or the morn's morn?'

The woman looked at her in consternation; perhaps she pinched the poor little baby, perhaps it was only the cessation of the

lullaby and the rocking movement that awoke it; it began to cry, but Jeanie took no notice. All at once she had become indifferent to her child. 'I *will* know,' she cried, stamping her foot upon the floor; 'oh, what is the bairn in comparison? Tell me, tell me, if you ever cared for me, Janet! It's something about my Edward—put him down, let him cry, but tell me what it is that's to happen to-night, or the morn's morn.'

'You maun satisfy her yoursel', mem,' said the nurse, turning to Mrs. Pillans, who came into the room in alarm. 'I canna look in my bairn's face and tell her lees about her man, no me! and I have this innocent to look to—you maun satisfy her yoursel'.'

Jeanie turned upon her mother like a wild creature, seizing her by both her hands, 'What is it about Edward, mother? He's ill—he was like a ghost when he went away—or you know something that has never been told to me. What do I care for baby or anything! Dinna speak to me, dinna speak to me about the bairn!—Edward!—what is happening to Edward?—oh, it's cruel, cruel, to keep it from me!'

'My darlin',' said Mrs. Pillans, 'my

bonnie Jeanie! that is what I always said. I would not have done it; but, my pet, it was for your good, to save you a sad, sore parting—it was to save you—it was for your good.'

'Parting!' Jeanie cried, with a shriek. The poor little girl was half crazed. She pushed her mother away from her, and flew out of the room without another word. As she did so, she ran almost into her father's arms. Edward would have reached Kinghorn; he would be crossing the Firth by this time, Mr. Pillans thought. His heart smote him a little for what he had done, but he said in his heart, as his wife was saying, that it was all for her good. Far better for her to remain safe in her father's house, than to sail away in a miserable troopship to the end of the world, following a regiment. *His* child to follow a regiment! it was an idea he could not bear. When Jeanie rushed out upon him, wild, like a mad creature, Mr. Pillans was coming in, heavy at heart and remorseful, and anxious as far as he could to avoid her. He meant to come in very quietly, and slip away to his own room, and pretend to be very busy with his papers—

for he did not feel that he could confront the poor little victim to-night.

But there she was, wild with despair and fury, clutching him with her two little strained hands. 'Edward!' she cried, 'where is my Edward, father?—I'll not be parted from him —I am going with him—I am going after him—I am going to my husband. No, no! I'll not hear a word—you have cheated me already. And where's my Edward, where is he? Good-bye to you all, for I am going away.'

'Jeanie,' cried her father, grasping her in his arms, 'what is it you have heard about Edward? There is nothing—wrong with Edward. If he has not told you, it was not our place to meddle——'

'Patrick!' cried his wife, in a tone of warning. 'Oh, my darling, come back, come back to your bonnie baby! Listen to him, wakened and crying for his mother. Come back to your little bairn!'

But Jeanie would hear no more. She struggled with her father, twisting her slender frame out of his grasp, with the strength of passion. 'Oh, what do I care for my baby?' she cried. 'I am going after my husband. You've cheated me, and blinded me, and I

will never trust you more. Let me go, father, let me go! I am not going to stay with you, nor with HIM, nor anybody but my husband. No, I want no clothes; I want nothing. I'll not wait the night. Do you think I could sleep, and Edward away? Oh, what would you say, mother, if it was you, and they had taken your man from you? Dinna speak to me! dinna speak to me! Good-bye to you all—I'm going after my husband!' she cried, bursting from her father's hold, and flying out wildly into the road. Poor Jeanie was distraught. She rushed along, her fair hair flying behind her, along the road to Kinghorn; and it was not till the first impulse had failed her, and her steps began to flag, that, in her passion and terror, she became capable of thought, and reflected that she could not run all the way to Kinghorn. And she met some of the village people, who stared at her, thinking her mad. And then the poor little girl stopped breathless, and tried to think and to recollect herself. She had almost started off again, when she saw her father close behind her. Mr. Pillans was a humbled and broken-down man. 'Do not shrink from the sight of me,' he said.

'Jeanie, you'll never get to him like that; come back, and we'll think what's best to be done.'

'I'll not think,' cried Jeanie; 'no, no! I'll not think, nor go back, unless you promise me to get a chaise this moment, and take me after him—this moment! or I'll walk all the way. I'm strong enough, and I'm not frightened for the dark, and I know it's not more than ten miles, and a straight road to Kinghorn.'

'Jeanie! Jeanie! Will you break your mother's heart? And think of your baby. There's no boat to-night. Come in and go to your bed, and the night will bring counsel. You shall do what you like, I give you my word, in the morning.'

Jeanie looked at him indignantly, with her blue eyes blazing—

'The morning,' she said, 'when Edward's gone! I am going now. I'm a married woman; I can get a chaise for myself, and I need nobody to take care of me. You'll maybe let Janet bring me my bonnet and a shawl to put about me. The folk would think me daft if I crossed the Firth without a hat upon my head or a thing on my shoulders. Good-bye, father; you need not trouble yourself any more about me.'

There was nothing for it now but to yield. Mr. Pillans, very heavy-hearted, but too much excited to realise the parting which was thus made so summary, went to order the post-chaise, while Jeanie, very breathless and agitated, and scarcely to be persuaded to enter the house at all, was wrapped in a cloak by her mother and prepared for her journey. Jeanie was too much excited to hear any reason. Her mind had room for no idea but one. She would not so much as look at the baby, by whom they did all they could to move her. Perhaps she could not trust herself to look at her child; but, indeed, her poor little mind was too much disturbed, too passionately excited for any thought but one. She kept a watchful eye even upon her mother, lest something should be done to detain her, and scarcely ventured to breathe till she was in the postchaise with her father, speeding along the coast by the side of the Firth, which lay blue and still in the evening light. If it had been blowing a hurricane, Jeanie would not have remarked it. There were no steamboats in those days; and it was too late for the passage boat from Kinghorn, the usual ferry, at that hour of the

night. It was not difficult, however, to engage a boat to make the passage. Jeanie sat in the bottom of the boat with her shawl wrapped round her—for it is cold on the Firth in the middle of the night, even in July—and fixed her eyes upon the lights opposite, never moving, scarcely answering when her father spoke to her. They reached Leith in the first gray of the morning, just in time to see the embarkation of the regiment, which was going to London first, no small voyage of itself. On the pier young Sinclair was standing, very pale, shivering, and disconsolate, watching his men as they marched on board. He turned round at the first sound of Jeanie's voice, and clutched at her with a cry of joy.

'I never believed that you would let me go,' he cried, with a confidence which made the angry, downcast father feel as if he had received a blow. What good is it to be a father—to be a mother—to love your children and bring them up so tenderly? the first stranger that takes their fancy is more to them than father and mother. This was what Mr. Pillans said to himself, as, with a very brief leave-taking, he went away.

CHAPTER III

It may be supposed that this was a night of much agitation in the little sea-side house which had been deprived so suddenly of its chief inmate. Mrs. Pillans was in a state of indescribable commotion. A kind of cruel satisfaction was in her mind which wounded her, yet gave her a certain pleasure. She had known it would be so. She had never approved the plan or believed in it. Deception could never come to any good, she said a hundred times; and in her heart she could not help a painful approval of Jeanie, and sympathy with her; though how she could leave the baby was incomprehensible to the mother. And her spirit was swept by gusts of terror as to the effect of this sudden summons upon the delicate young constitution of her child, and upon the baby bereaved of its sustenance. The latter was easily enough pro-

vided for, but who was to take care of Jeanie? only her husband, not much older than herself; 'and how is a young lad to understand?' Mrs. Pillans said, shaking her head. She stayed in the same room with the abandoned child, taking it into her tender arms, feeling a consolation in the very touch of it, which nobody but a woman could understand. With her, too, the excitement and the consciousness that this little creature's life depended on her care, took something from the anguish of the parting, which had been too hurried, too full of agitation, to feel like a parting at all. And though she thought it impossible that she could sleep, she still did so, with the baby in her arms; and the morning was not so dreadful to her as she expected when she awoke, and all the events of the night returned to her mind. In the forenoon Mr. Pillans came back, very gloomy and depressed, to give her the news of the sailing of the transport with Jeanie on board. The regiment was bound for Chatham, or some such place; thence to be drafted to another ship, and take its way across the seas. Jeanie had waved her hand to him with a sort of triumph from the deck, where she stood holding her husband's

arm, as the vessel, with all the red-coats in it, sailed out of Leith harbour. God be thanked it was a fine day, and the water like glass. The parents sat together and talked it all over mournfully enough. 'Did she never ask for HIM?' Mrs. Pillans said. 'Never a word,' replied her husband. This was the one thing the mother could not understand. 'She is so young—not much more than a bairn, herself,' she said, apologetically; and then she took her husband by the arm and said, 'Come ben, and see HIM. He'll have to be yours and mine, Patrick, since he's deserted, poor lamb.' In truth the situation was cruel enough for the poor baby; but HE was none the wiser; he crowed at them in his nurse's arms, and a thrill of pleasure ran through their wounded hearts. Jeanie had left them her representative, and if ever there was a child assured of love to shield and care for it, Jeanie's deserted baby was that child. They went back to Bruntsfield very shortly after, the reason for their absence from home being removed by Jeanie's flight, and there the baby grew and flourished, suffering no harm from its mother's departure. There was great discussion among all the kindred and

acquaintances, as may be supposed, of the entire story, and Jeanie's conduct was the subject of much division in many families. The young people approved it in general—and even some of the old people—and Mr. Pillans was severely handled by his friends. But by and by the commotion quieted down, and though everybody asked, 'What news from Jeanie?' it began to be accepted, as a matter of course, that the young couple had done a not imprudent thing in leaving their baby to be cared for at home instead of subjecting it to all the privations of a long voyage. It was 'a responsibility' for Mrs. Pillans; but then it did not appear that she herself was afraid of that.

In the meantime, Jeanie was not so wise as people gave her credit for being. After the excitement of the moment was over, when she felt that nothing further could be done to separate her from Edward, the poor little mother was not only ill, but very miserable, and felt the absence of all the care and service which had been lavished upon her all her life, more than words could say. The voyage to the Thames was a good one on the whole, but the sea did not continue to be like glass

all the way, and even in this respect Jeanie was miserable enough. As long as she could keep upon deck, clinging to her husband's arm, the case was bearable; and Edward, poor fellow, did everything he could to make up to her for the want of all ministrations but his own. When Jeanie, however, saw the poor soldiers' wives — forlorn enough, poor souls, though they were the privileged women of the little band, permitted to accompany their husbands—with their babies (and they all seemed to have babies) — the sight was more than she could bear. She would disappear again almost as soon as she had come on deck, and throw herself into her little narrow berth and cry till her pretty eyes were blurred out of all shape and colour, and her very heart sick. She made a heroic effort to hide from Edward what she was suffering, and so long as he was with her it was possible to keep up; but he had his duty to do, and when she was alone the poor little thing broke her heart unreservedly, and was as miserable as ever girl of her years was. 'Oh, my baby! Oh, my bonnie little man! Oh, my bairn—my little bairn!' the poor young creature would moan. When they

got to their destination, it turned out that there would still be weeks to wait before the transport was ready, and the battalion was one while at Chatham and another at Portsmouth, lingering and weary, till it received its final orders to embark. Perhaps the novelty of these movements helped her to conquer herself, and it is certain that she made a heroic effort to represent to herself that HE would be better off—far better, with her mother, now that he had lost his natural food. How was a baby like that to support a long voyage? Edward was very soon brought to take this view of the case. He had been very proud of his child, and delighted with him; but to have Jeanie back again with no divided interest, able to go with him wherever he went, without leaving half her thoughts behind, was a still greater happiness to the young fellow. And he acquiesced with a philosophy which instantly woke in her the germs of rebellion. They had been sitting talking one evening of HIM. 'My mother,' Jeanie was saying, with a quiver in her voice, 'has no reason to complain. If I've come away, I've left her something better than myself. Oh, my bonnie little man!

He was taking such notice! If I only passed him he would laugh to me and put out his bonnie arms: and never so happy as when I took him. I think I feel him, with his wee head down close, and his cheek like velvet.'

'My darling!' said Edward, 'but think, we owe your mother something for your running away. He will be all to her that he was to you. He will be like her very own. She will have all his bonnie little ways to cheer her.'

'But he's no her very own!' cried Jeanie, with a start. 'He's my bairn—nobody's in the world but mine. Oh, my little baby! She's only his granny, after all.'

'Yes, my own love,' said Edward, soothingly; 'but think what a comfort to her; and it will be far better for him—the quiet and the good air, and the cow; fancy! instead of our long voyage and no comforts. If you were taking him with you, my darling, and doing everything for him, it would make me wretched—it would wear you out.'

'Make you wretched! to have your own son—your own bairn? Oh, men are not like women,' cried Jeanie, springing to her feet.

'I thought different once;—but now I see my mother's right, and Janet and everybody. You're no like women; you've no heart for your children. Edward, I canna live without him! Oh, my little baby—my own little bairn! I cannot live without him! I will go out of my senses if I do not get back my boy!'

'Jeanie—Jeanie, consider a moment. You, so delicate as you are, and no maid to help you. And I thought you had made up your mind. He will be far safer with your mother. And your mother, herself, Jeanie—think of her that's been so good to us.'

'I canna think of anything,' cried the girl. 'What am I heeding about my mother. I want my bairn! I want my bairn!'

And when this agony had once burst out there was no stopping it. Edward had as little power over the mother's passion as Mr. Pillans had over the impetuous despair of the young wife; and to tell the truth, it was not difficult to re-awaken in his own boyish bosom a longing for the baby, which had been so delightful a toy, and so great an object of pride. The two sat down and wrote an imploring, commanding, beseeching, threat-

ening letter, requiring that the baby should be sent or brought at once to his longing parents. They sat up till late at night pouring forth their entreaties, and having no frank, prepaid their letter with a sense of magnificence and independence impossible to describe. In those days the posts were slow and the postage dear. It would be nearly a week before they could have a reply; but as nothing better was possible, they made up their minds to it. And now Jeanie leaped into all the flutter of happy preparation. She calculated that her mother, always indulgent, would in all likelihood set out at once with the boy—and out of her misery mounted at once into unreflecting happiness, feeling herself cured of all her ills. She and her husband ran about everywhere like two children, and, excited by all the crowding events, lived a year of confused, expectant happiness in those seven days. But, alas! the disappointment at the end was black enough to extinguish all this in a moment. Instead of Mrs. Pillans' arrival with the child, which Jeanie had made sure of—which she had even posted herself at the window to watch for, while Edward, still more sanguine, went to the coach-office to

wait the arrival of the coach—there came a letter—the kindest, most tender, and loving of letters, but Jeanie thought the most cruel missive ever sent out by a tyrannical parent. Both the father and mother wrote to say that the child was far better in their hands; that Jeanie would have enough to do to take charge of her own comfort on the dismal voyage—that to care for her child besides would be to kill her, and a hundred arguments more. Jeanie read this with a white and rigid countenance—with cries of fury and pain. She was transformed into a little angel —or, if you prefer it, demon—of passion. When Edward, poor fellow, tried to soothe her, and to echo the arguments (which had been her own arguments) about the advantages to the child of remaining at home, she flung away from him with a blaze of indignation. He was almost glad that he had to leave her for his duty, though he went to that with a heavy heart. What would she do? She had chosen him and left her child. Would she leave him now and return to the baby? Edward had heard many tales in his life about mother-love—how it was more powerful than any other passion. He went

about his duty that day with a heavy heart, not knowing what sacrifice might be required from him when he went back to her. He was overawed by the force of feeling, which was beyond his own experience, in Jeanie's impassioned, undisciplined little heart. But what could he do? He did not know what might be going to happen to him that day when he went back to the lodgings, which had been a little paradise as long as Jeanie was there.

His worst fears seemed to be realised when he went in. A little travelling bag stood on the table, open, crammed with things thrust into it anyhow; and Jeanie's cloak was thrown over a chair. She met him with a pale and resolute face. Poor Edward did not know what to do. It seemed to be his to take the passive part, to endure, as women generally have to do. Something swelled in his throat, so that he could scarcely speak. 'I have brought it all upon you,' he cried, piteously. 'I cannot forbid you, though I am your husband. Are you going to give me up, Jeanie?' the young man exclaimed, with a bitter cry.

Then she began to laugh in her excitement.

'Give you up! me give you up! Me leave him! oh, do ye hear him speaking? That's all he knows. I'll never give you up, Edward, if I was to be cut in little pieces; but you must not say a word—not a word—you must let me do it or I will die. I am going to bring my boy.'

'Jeanie! you? and I cannot get away; a journey like that, days and days! you cannot do it, it will kill you! Jeanie, Jeanie, do you mind how young you are, and how delicate? No, no, I cannot let you kill yourself—you must not do it!'

'But I WILL!' said the girl. She looked about fifteen as she stood beside him in her simple frock, with her fair hair knotted up for the journey, and her blue eyes blazing; but Edward, proud of her even in this bold rebellion, thought she looked like a general ready for some daring expedition. And what was there more to be said? Jeanie carried out her intention. There was not in any of these people who loved her strength enough to subdue the energy and the force of this passionate nature. That evening, with many fears, Edward went with her to the coach and put her in, anxiously looking for some female

fellow-traveller who would have a care of her. But Jeanie scorned all such precautions. She feared nothing. 'I will be back in a week, and I will bring HIM, and we'll never be parted more,' she said. Poor Edward walked about half the night after their parting, almost beside himself, when he had no longer the support of her confidence, imagining all kinds of dangers. Never be parted more! To the superstitious mind there is something ominous in such words, and everybody is superstitious when their most beloved are in danger. He could not rest; he could not sleep when at last he went into the dreary desolate lodgings; and to think that Jeanie, his little Jeanie, was in the stuffy corner of a stage-coach, unprotected, so young as she was, and so bonnie and so delicate! no wonder he could not sleep.

The household at Bruntsfield did not know what was happening, but, without knowing it, they were very uneasy. When they read in the papers that the regiment was to set sail on the 20th their hearts were in their mouths, as Mrs. Pillans said. What if they might be driving their own child to despair? As soon as a step of this kind has

been taken the mind begins to rebel against it — to suggest a hundred evils that may follow. 'Oh, how dare I, how dare I take pleasure from my own lassie?' Mrs. Pillans said to herself, when she sat with the baby on her knee. He was all her consolation and delight, and she was not afraid of the responsibility; but to deprive his mother of him, what right had she? She was in a dozen minds to set out after all to see her Jeanie, as the days went on. Her happiness in the child went from her. 'We have no right to him,' she said to her husband. 'He's twenty times better here than he would be with them,' Mr. Pillans said.

And so the days went on; they were terrible days to everybody concerned. No sooner was his wife gone than poor Edward heard, with unspeakable terror, that there were good hopes that the transport might be ready sooner than was anticipated. Good hopes! The young man was more miserable than can be described. He would desert, he thought, like one of the men, if Jeanie did not arrive in time. And the parents, though they knew nothing, were excited and anxious, wondering if their decision would make their

child wretched—compunctious and remorseful, longing yet terrified for the next letter. The weather had changed, too, to make things worse; it rained persistently day after day, as sometimes happens in autumn, and from being warm became all at once unseasonably cold, damp, dark, and miserable.

'Let us be thankful,' Mr. Pillans said; 'if the weather is so ill now it will be all the better for them when they sail.'

This was all the poor comfort they took to themselves. The letters were delivered late at Bruntsfield. It was in the afternoon that they came, and Mrs. Pillans had been watching at the parlour window for a long time before the hour on the day of the return post, her heart sick with thoughts of what Jeanie might say. Was it, perhaps, wrong to keep her child from her, even after she had left him? even when it was for his good? She waited and waited, unable to compose herself, and when it became evident that the postman must have passed without bringing any letter, her heart sank with a disappointment beyond words. It was getting dark by the time she gave up all hope, and her husband had not yet come home, and the rain

was pouring down from the skies, pattering drearily on the branches, and everything outside was miserable. She left the parlour and went to the cheerful fire-lighted room which the baby inhabited, feeling at once the happiness of having such a refuge, and the wrong of depriving her child of it. As she looked out at the side window in passing, she saw a little figure in a cloak, dragging feebly along the back way through the garden in the darkness and the rain. Her heart was touched by the feeble step, the drenched clothes, the forlorn appearance altogether. She stopped for a moment at the kitchen door as she passed. 'Turn nobody from the door this miserable night,' she said; 'if any poor body comes, give them a warm drink and a seat at the fire. There's somebody coming by the green walk now. If you cannot be happy yourself, it's aye a comfort to make some poor body happy,' Mrs. Pillans added to herself, as she went into the warm nursery, where the firelight was leaping in happy reflection about the walls, and the child drowsing in his nurse's arms. She folded back her gown and took the baby on her knee, and forgot for a moment her anxieties

and troubles. 'Look till the bairn, mem—how he turns his bonnie eyes to the door,' cried old Janet; 'ye would think he was looking for somebody.' At this Mrs. Pillans recollected herself, and gave a heavy sigh.

Oh, how it rained! pouring down from the muddy skies, pattering on all the leaves, bowing down every flower and bush, turning the gravel into something like a wet and glistening beach; and oh! how the poor little limbs ached that had been imprisoned in a coach for so many days and nights. Jeanie, more discouraged by her loneliness and her youngness and helplessness than she could have thought possible, had scarcely ventured to creep out of her corner even to take needful food; and though her spirit had never failed her, so far as her enterprise itself was concerned, yet it had failed her altogether for her own comfort. She had never stirred when she could help it. When she got to her journey's end she was numbed and stiff, and so weary that she did not know how to move when restored to locomotion. And how it rained! She had eaten next to nothing. She had slept, she thought, by intervals, all the way, but had never un-

dressed or extended her poor limbs for all this time. And cabs were not in those days. A 'hackney coach' was a thing to be thought of and ordered beforehand. And along the whole glistening length of Princes Street, when she stumbled down out of the coach, feeling as if her feet did not belong to her, but were somebody's else, there was nothing to be seen that could help her to her home—nothing for it but to walk through the rain. Half stupefied as she was, Jeanie pulled herself together bravely. She drew the skirt of her dress through her pocket-hole, which was the usual mode of fastening the little train out of the way, and drew her cloak closely round her. She had a little bag suspended upon her arm underneath the cloak, and that was all her baggage. So prepared, giddy with fasting, weary with want of sleep, her face like that of a little ghost, her eyes feeling like hot coals, she set bravely out to walk; but before she got to Bruntsfield, consciousness had almost forsaken the poor little traveller. She had sense enough to trudge on, and that was all. She was scarcely aware where she was going, what she was going to, when she made her way up the

green walk behind Bruntsfield House, while her mother glanced out of the window. They did not know each other. Mrs. Pillans was but a shadow to Jeanie, and Jeanie 'a poor body' to the tenderest of parents. But the bewildered girl still went on. She pushed open the kitchen door, feeling the warmth and light flash over her with a sense of revival, and hearing vaguely the cries of alarm and remonstrance with which she was followed, as she stumbled across the bright, warmly-lighted place, pursuing her way. 'Where are you going, where are you going, poor body?' cried Mrs. Foggo, the cook, who was rather blind, and saw nothing but the outline of the drenched figure. The housemaid, who met her in the passage beyond, shrieked, and running into the kitchen, fell down upon her knees. 'Oh, the Lord forgie us sinful folk. Miss Jeanie's dead, and I've seen her ghost,' shrieked the woman. Jeanie neither heard nor saw. She pushed the doors open before her, groping with her hand, holding fast by every aid that presented itself. Then another sudden burst of cheerful light flashed before her eyes—her mother sitting full in the firelight with the

baby. Jeanie made a rush and a clutch at them, with a last despairing effort. 'I'm come for my boy,' she said; and then tumbled down helpless, overdone, on the carpet, at her mother's feet.

The commotion that arose in the house need not be described. She was raised up and her wet things taken from her, and she herself laid in the fresh soft sheets, and her baby laid by her. When Jeanie came to herself, she was in a little paradise of comfort, if she had not been aching still, aching all over, with fatigue, and cold, and excitement. But her mother was by her with every care, and by next morning she sat up, smiling, and covered the boy with kisses, and would not let him be taken out of her arms. Jeanie, it is to be feared, was still occupied with herself and her own concerns. She consented to stay in bed and rest that day, but the next she was bent on returning, taking HIM, as she said, to his father, and making no account of Mrs. Pillans' bereavement. Her mind was absorbed in her own new family, thus formed —herself, and Edward, and HIM. Bruntsfield had fallen a long way back into the shadows. The parents gave each other many

a wistful look when this became apparent, but they were people of sense, and would not fight against nature. The very next afternoon a letter came from Edward, announcing the hastening of the embarkation, and entreating his wife to lose no time in returning. She jumped out of bed on the spot, and rushed to the baby's drawers to pack up his little wardrobe. What could the parents do? They started at six o'clock next morning, with their daughter and their grandchild, in a post-chaise. They were thrifty people, but they could spend when it was necessary; and thus, once more, travelling night and day, took Jeanie and her boy to 'the South,' that she might go away from them, and leave their hearts desolate. She would not show them mercy for so much as a day. And they had all a feverish horror of arriving too late. Their schemes had ended in such confusion, that they had not the courage to detain her — to invent excuses to keep her, as their hearts whispered, till it should be too late. What would have been the good? She would have followed her Edward in the next tub that set sail. And they got to Portsmouth, alas, in abundant time, the transport still

having failed to be ready for the embarkation; though Edward, almost distracted with nervous anxiety, spent all his spare time on the road, walking out miles from the town to meet them, before they could possibly have been within his reach; such was the terror into which he had fallen, that he might, at the last moment, be defrauded of his wife and his child.

Mr. Pillans stayed in London, and sent the others on. He had taken a great resolution. A determined man can do much when his heart is set upon a thing. He had been muttering to himself all the way, 'What a blessing it was that it was only Botany Bay Edward was going to, and not a place where fighting was going on'—a thankfulness which somewhat exasperated the ladies. 'Do you think Edward wouldna fight with the best?' Jeanie cried, indignant; while Mrs. Pillans added —'Oh, Patrick, man, hold your tongue! No doubt it's a blessing; he'll be out of danger. But what like a place is Botany Bay to send a fine lad to, with a young wife and an innocent bairn?—among thieves and murderers —the Lord deliver us.' Mr. Pillans made no reply. He had promised Edward once to

do what he could to obtain an exchange for him, but nothing had been done; now, however, matters were desperate. When he had sent the ladies on, without saying a word to them, he went to one of the public offices, at the head of which was a great functionary with whom he had sat on the same bench in the High School of Edinburgh, and stood shoulder to shoulder in many a 'bicker,' and for whom he had fought with mind and body to secure his election when he began to be a great man. These were the days of interest, when it was everything to have a friend in office; when your influential acquaintance inquired what you meant to do with your fine boys, and sent you a writership for India, or a pair of colours, under a frank, by the next post. Happy days! if, perhaps, they had their drawbacks, there was much to be said for them. Mr. Pillans marched in upon the great man with the fresh Edinburgh air about him. He said, briefly, 'If ever I was of any use to you, serve me now.' You may be sure it was a nuisance to his friend; but still friendship was friendship: and the High School reminiscences did not go for nothing. After a great many comings and goings a

solution was found to this troublesome question. 'The Lord be praised that he's under orders for a place where there's no fighting,' Mr. Pillans once more devoutly said.

He was two days in London. When he got down to Portsmouth by the coach, the embarkation had not yet begun; but the little party at Captain Sinclair's lodgings were very melancholy, perceiving the horrors of the separation as they had never yet done. Mr. Pillans walked in among them with a heartless cheerfulness.

'I suppose, Edward,' he said, 'as there's no fighting, it would be nothing against your honour to go back to Leith, to the garrison, and let the rest go their gait?'

'You might as well ask me if it would be against my honour to go to heaven, sir; and just about as likely,' poor Edward said, with a groan.

His father-in-law gave vent to a chuckle, and took the baby out of Jeanie's arms.

'And how's a' with you, my braw lad?' he said. 'So you're to be a little Botany Bay bird, and no a Scots laddie after all?'

'Patrick,' cried his wife, 'I desire you'll hold your tongue, and not break all our

hearts! We're eerie enough, without saying cruel things like that.'

The others were all on the verge of weeping, while the grandfather, with the child on his knee, chirruped and chuckled. At last he brought forth a bundle of papers out of his pocket.

'I saw Sandy Melville in Downing Street, as I came through, Margaret. He's one that owed me a day in harvest, as the proverb says. And here's a present to you, Jeanie,' said her father.

The sorrowful party began to perceive there was meaning in this untimely cheerfulness. 'If there had been fighting, they could never have done it, and you could never have done it,' said Mr. Pillans. 'The Lord be thanked, Edward, my man, that it's only Botany Bay.'

It was a happy family that returned to Scotland, leisurely, a few days after this, taking pleasure in their journey, after the battalion sailed. The papers which her father threw into Jeanie's lap secured a permanent appointment for Edward in the Leith garrison. And thus, after the storm which had swept over their lives, peace came back. But Jeanie

was never quite sure that she did not regret the escape which transferred her young life out of heroism and suffering back again into the tranquil warmth of home.

'The Little Cutty! It would have been more diversion to her to make us all miserable,' Mrs. Pillans said.

DR. BARRÈRE

CHAPTER I

Dr. Barrère was a young man who was beginning to make his way. In the medical profession, as in most others, this is not a very easy thing to do, and no doubt he had made some mistakes. He had given offence in his first practice to the principal person in the little town where he had set up his surgery by explaining that certain symptoms which his patient believed to mean heart disease were due solely to indigestion; and he still more deeply offended that gentleman's wife by telling her that her children were overfed. These are follies which a more experienced medical man would never commit; but this one was young and fresh from those studies in which, more than in any other profession, things have to be called by their right names. In his next attempt he had nearly got into more serious trouble still, by his devotion to

an interesting and difficult case, in which, unfortunately, the patient was a woman. From this he came out clear, with no stain on his character, as magistrates say. But for a doctor, as often for a woman, it is enough that evil has been said. The slander, though without proof, has more or less a sting, and is recollected when all the circumstances—the disproval, the clearing-up, even the facts of the case have been forgotten. He was, therefore, not without experience when he came to settle in the great town of Poolborough, which might be supposed large enough and busy enough to take no note of those village lies and tempests in a teapot. And this proved to be the case. He was young, he was clever, he was *au courant* of all the medical discoveries, knew everything that had been discovered by other men, and was not without little discoveries and inventions of his own. He was still young, a few years over thirty, at the age which combines the advantages of youth and of maturity, strong in mind and in body, loving work, and fearing nothing. If his previous encounters with the foolish side of humanity had diminished in some degree his faith in it, and

opened his eyes to the risks which those who think no evil are apt to run in their first conflict with the stupidities and base ideas of men, he had yet not suffered enough to make him bitter, or more than wary in his dealings with the narrow and uncomprehending. He no longer felt sure of being understood, or that a true estimate of his intentions and motives was certain ; but he did not go to the opposite extreme as some do, and take it for granted that his patients and their surroundings were incapable of doing him justice. He was sobered, but not embittered. He was wise enough neither to show too much interest nor to betray too great an indifference. He listened seriously to the tale of symptoms which were nothing to anybody but their narrator, and he restrained his excitement when a matter of real importance, something delicate and critical, came under his view. Thus it was proved that he had learned his lesson. But he did not despise his fellow-creatures in general, or think all alike guilty of affectation and self-regard, which showed that he had not learned that lesson with extravagance. He was kind, but not too kind. He was clever, but not so

clever as to get the alarming character of an experimentalist — in short, he was in every way doing well and promising well. When the untoward accident occurred which cut short his career in Poolborough he was universally well thought of and looked upon as a rising man.

It may be well before going further to indicate certain particulars in his antecedents which throw light upon Dr. Barrère's character and idiosyncrasies. He was of French origin, as may be perceived by his name. The name was not so distinctly French as held by his father and grandfather, who ignored the nationality, and wrote it phonetically Barraire. In their days, perhaps a French origin was not an advantage. But in the days when Arnold Barrère was at college this prejudice had disappeared, and he was himself delighted to resort to the old orthography, and liked his friends to remember the accent which it pleased him to employ. Perhaps the keen logical tendency of his mind and disposition to carry everything out to its legitimate conclusion with a severity which the English love of compromise and accident prevents, were more important signs of his origin

than even the accent over the *e*. Dr. Barrère for his part did not like to elude the right and logical ending either of an accent or a disease. It annoyed him even that his patient should recover in an irregular way. He liked the symptoms to follow each other in proper sequence ; and the end which was foreseen and evident was that which he preferred to have occur, even when the avoidance of it, and deliverance of the sufferer were due to his own powers. Like his nation, or rather like the nation of his forefathers, he was disposed to carry out everything to its logical end. His outward man, like his mind, bore evidence of his parentage. He was about the middle height, of a light and spare figure, with a thickly-growing but short and carefully cropped black beard, his complexion rather dark but very clear, his voice somewhat high-pitched for an Englishman, with an animated manner, and a certain sympathetic action of head and hand when he talked, scarcely enough to be called gesticulation, yet more than usually accompanies English speech. He seemed, in short, to have missed the influence of the two generations of English mothers and manners which might have been supposed to

subdue all peculiarities of race, and to have stepped back to the immediate succession of that Arnold Barrère who was the first to bring the name to this island. These individual features gave a certain piquancy, many people thought, to the really quite English breeding of the doctor, who had never so much as crossed the Channel, and knew little more French than was consistent with a just placing of the accents, especially upon the letter *e*.

It would be unnecessary to enter into full detail of how he formed acquaintance with the Surtees, and came to the degree of intimacy which soon developed into other thoughts. It is a proper thing enough in a story, though not very true to real life, to describe a young doctor as falling in love, by a sick-bed, with the angel-daughter who is the best nurse and ministrant that a sick parent can have. Members of the medical profession are not more prone than other men to mingle their affections with the requirements of their profession, and probably a devoted nurse is no more the ideal of a young doctor than a good model is that of a painter. As a matter of fact, however, it was while attending Mrs. Surtees through a not very

dangerous or interesting illness that Dr. Barrère made the acquaintance of Agnes. He might just as well have met her in the society which he frequented sparingly, for there was no particular difference in her sphere and his: but there were reasons why Miss Surtees went little out, less than most young women of her age. Her family was one of those which had ranked amongst the best in Poolborough in the time of their wealth, and no one could say still that their place was not with 'the best people' of the town. But with a mercantile community more than any other (though also more or less in every other) wealth is necessary for the retaining of that position. Women who go afoot cannot keep up with those who have carriages and horses at their command, neither can a girl in whose house no dances, no dinners, no entertainments are ever given, associate long on easy terms with those who are in the full tide of everything, going everywhere, and exchanging hospitalities after the lavish fashion of wealthy commercial society. And this was not the only reason that kept Agnes Surtees out of the world. There was one more urgent which was told,

and one which no one named but every one understood. The first was the delicate health of her mother. Dr. Barrère was aware that there was not very much in this. He knew that had she been able to drive about as did the ladies who were so sorry for her, and clothe herself in furs and velvet, and take change of air whenever she felt disposed, there would have been little the matter with Mrs. Surtees. But he was too sensible to breathe a word on this subject. He held his tongue at first from discretion, and afterwards because he had found out for himself why it was that Mrs. Surtees' delicate health was kept before the public of Poolborough. It took him some time to make this discovery; but partly from hints of others, and partly from his own perceptions, he found it out at last.

It was that these two ladies were involved in the life of a third member of their household—a son and brother whom the 'best people' in Poolborough had ceased to invite, and whose name when it was mentioned was accompanied with shakings of the head and looks of disapproval. Dr. Barrère did not even see Jim Surtees until he had been acquainted with his mother and sister for

nearly a year—not that he was absent, but only that his haunts and associates were not theirs. He was a young man who had never done well. He had been far more highly educated than was usual with the young men of Poolborough; instead of being sent into the counting-house in his youth he had been sent to Cambridge, which was all his father's pride and folly, the critics said, exempting Mrs. Surtees from blame in a manner most unusual. It was supposed that she had disapproved. She had come of a Poolborough family, in business from father to son, and knew what was necessary; but Surtees was from the country, from a poor race of county people, and was disposed to think business beneath him, or at least to consider it as a mere stepping-stone to wealth. When he died so much less well off than was expected, leaving his family but poorly provided for, then was the moment when Jim Surtees might have proved what was in him, and stepped into the breach, replaced his mother and sister in their position, and restored the credit of his father's name. In that case all the old friends would have rallied round him; they would have backed him up with their

credit, and given him every advantage. At such moments and in such emergencies mercantile men are at their best. No one would have refused the young man a helping hand —they would have hoisted him upon their shoulders into his father's place; they would have helped him largely, generously, manfully. Alas! Jim Surtees did then and there show what was in him. He had neither energy nor spirit nor ambition, nor any care for his father's name or his mother's comfort. He said at once that he knew nothing about business. What could he do? it was entirely out of his way. He scarcely knew what it was his father dealt in. Cotton? Yes—but what did he know about cotton, or book-keeping, or anything? The young man was interviewed by all who knew him; he was sent for by the greatest merchants in Poolborough. What he ought to do was set before him by everybody who had any right to speak, and by a great many who had none. But nothing moved him. He knew nothing about business—he would do nothing in it. Why should he try what he could not do? And with these replies he baffled all the anxious counsellors who were so eager to

convince him to the contrary. Then there were situations suggested, even provided, for him; but these were all subject to the same objections. Finally it came about that Jim Surtees did nothing. He had not been long enough at Cambridge to take his degree. He was modest about his own capacities even when pupils were suggested to him. He did not know enough to teach, he declared, till his modesty drove the anxious advisers distracted. What was to be done? Jim Surtees eluded every expedient to make him do anything. At last he dropped altogether, and the best people in Poolborough were conscious of his existence no more.

These were the circumstances of the Surtees family when Dr. Barrère made their acquaintance. He thought for some time that the two ladies lived alone, and that their withdrawal from society was somewhat absurd, based as it was on that delusion about Mrs. Surtees' health; but a little further information made him change his mind. He changed his mind about several things, modifying his first impressions as time went on. He had thought the mother one of those imaginary invalids who enjoy that gentle level of ill-

health which does not involve much suffering, and which furnishes a pretty and interesting *rôle* for many unoccupied women; and he had thought her daughter an angelic creature, whose faith in her mother's *migraines* was such that she cheerfully and sweetly gave up the pleasures of her youth in order to minister to them. But as Dr. Barrère changed from a doctor into a friend; as he began to ask admittance at times when he was not called for, and when, last seal of a growing intimacy, he began to venture to knock at the door in the evening after dinner—a privilege which he pleaded for as belonging to the habits of his French ancestry (of which he knew so little)—his eyes were speedily opened to many things which a morning visitor would never have divined. The first time he did so, he perceived to his astonishment Agnes on the landing, half concealed by the turn of the staircase, eagerly looking down to see who it was; and her mother, though so little able to move about, was at the door of the little drawing-room, looking flushed and wretched, far more ill than when he had been called in to prescribe for her. For whom was it that they were looking? It could not

be for himself, whom nobody had expected, whom they received with a tremulous kindness, half relieved, half reluctant. After a few such visits he began to see that the minds of these poor ladies were divided between pleasure in his society and fear to have him there. If he stayed a little longer than usual he saw that they became anxious, the mother breathless, with a desire to have him go away: and that even Agnes would accompany him downstairs with an eager alacrity as if she could not be comfortable till she had seen him out of the house. And yet they were always kind, liked him to come, looked for him, even would say a word which showed that they had noted his absence if for a week or so he did not appear: although while he was there they were ever watchful, starting at every sound, hurrying him away if he stayed beyond his time. The sight of a tall figure lurching along the street, of some one fumbling with a latch-key, of which he was sometimes conscious as he went away, was scarcely necessary at last to make him aware what it was that occasioned this anxiety. Mrs. Surtees saw love dawning in the doctor's eyes. She would not shut out

from her patient girl the chances of a happier lot: but what if the doctor should meet Jim! see him coming home sodden and stupid, or noisy and gay. As Dr. Barrère became intimate they had spoken to him of Jim. He was studying hard, he was writing, he was always busy, he was not fond of society. There were so many reasons why he should never appear. And by and by the doctor, with a great ache of pity, had learned all these excuses by heart, and penetrated their secret, and misconstrued their actions and habits no more.

Finally the doctor made the acquaintance of Jim, and to his great surprise not only liked him, but understood why the mother and sister were not always miserable, how life varied with them from day to day, and how even Mrs. Surtees was often cheerful, though never unwatchful, never at ease. Dr. Barrère thought with justice that nothing could be more miserable, more inexcusable, than the life the young man was leading. In theory fate should have put into every honest hand a whip to scourge such a good-for-nothing. And sometimes the doctor felt a righteous wrath, a desire to scourge till the blood came:

but it was not so much out of moral indignation as out of an exasperated liking, an intolerable pity. What might happen in the house in those awful moments when all was silent, and everybody at rest save the mother and sister watching for Jim's return at night, neither the doctor nor any one knew. But at other moments Dr. Barrère found it impossible to resist, any more than the women did, the charm of a nature which had not lost its distinction even in the haunts where he had lost everything else. He even tried to attract and draw to himself the prodigal, entertaining visions on the subject and fancying how, if there were a man closely connected with the family, himself to wit, Arnold Barrère, and not merely women who wept and reproached and condoned and wept again, but never made a determined stand, nor struck a decisive blow, there might still be hope for Jim. It could not be said that this told as a motive in the fervour with which he offered himself to Agnes Surtees. The doctor was in love warmly and honestly, and as he made his declaration thought, as a lover ought, of nothing but Agnes. Yet when she hesitated and faltered, and after a

moment broke the long silence and spoke to him openly of her brother, there was the warmth of a personal desire in the eagerness with which he met her confessions half way. 'Jim is no drawback,' he said eagerly—'to me none. I can help you with Jim. If you will have me there shall be no question of depriving him of any love or care. He shall have me in addition to help him to better things.' 'Oh,' Agnes had cried, giving him both her hands in the fervour of love and trust, 'God bless you, Arnold, for speaking of better things for Jim.' And it was on this holy ground that their contract was made. Henceforward there were no concealments from him.

Dr. Barrère was not a man to let the grass grow under his feet. There was no reason why his marriage should be delayed. He wanted to have his wife—a possession almost indispensable, he assured Mrs. Surtees with a smile, to a medical man; and the mother, anxious to see one child's fate assured, and still more anxious, catching with feverish hope at the help so hopefully offered for the other, had no inclination to put obstacles in the way. The marriage day was settled, and

all the preparations thereto begun, when the sudden horror which still envelops the name of Surtees in Poolborough arose in a moment, and the following incidents occurred to Dr. Barrère.

CHAPTER II

He was going to visit a patient in a suburb one dark October night. But it could scarcely be called dark. There was a pallid moon somewhere among the clouds whitening the heavy mist that lay over the half-built environs of the town—dismal blank spaces—fields which were no longer fields, streets which were not yet streets. The atmosphere was charged with vapour, which in its turn was made into a dim, confusing whiteness by the hidden moon. Everybody knows how dismal are these outskirts of a great city. A house built here and there stood out with a sinister solidity against the blank around. New roads and streets laid out with indications of pavement, cut across the ravaged fields. Here there was a mass of bricks, and there a pool of water. A piece of ragged hedgerow, a remnant of its earlier state, still

bordered the highway here and there; a forlorn tree shedding its leaves at every breath of air stood at the corner where two ways met. Dr. Barrère was no ways timid, but he felt a chill of isolation and something like danger as he pushed his way towards one of the farthest points of the uncompleted road, where one house stood shivering in the vague damp and whiteness. He had to cross the other branching road, at the corner of which stood the shivering poplar, which shed its leaves as if with a perpetual shrinking of fear. There he was vaguely aware of something standing in the shade of the ragged hedgerow—a figure which moved as he passed, and seemed to make a step forward as if awaiting some one. To say that it was a figure he saw would be too distinct—he saw a movement, a something more solid than the mist, which detached itself as if with a suggestion of watchfulness, and immediately subsided again back into the shadows. Dr. Barrère, though he was not timid, felt the thrill as of a possible danger, the suggestion having something in it more moving than a distincter peril. But if there was a man lurking there waiting for some passer-by, it

was not at least for him, and he walked quickly on, and presently in the interest of his patient, and in the many thoughts that hurry through every active brain, forgot the curious hint of mystery and danger which had for a moment excited his imagination.

When he approached the spot again on his return, even the suggestion had died out of his mind. His eyesight and all his faculties were keen, as befits his profession, and he saw, without being aware that he was seeing, everything that came within his range of vision. Accordingly he perceived, without paying any attention, the vague figure of a man crossing the opening of the road where the poplar marked the corner, coming towards him. He saw the solid speck in the white mist approaching—then in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, this vague silhouette in the night became a sudden swift scene of pantomimic tragedy, all done and over in a moment. A sudden movement took place in the scene; another something, almost less than a shadow, suddenly came into it from behind the poplar. No, these words are too strong. What came into the night was the

sound of a crashing blow and a fall, and another figure, in a different position, standing over something prostrate, raining down, as in a fit of frantic passion, blow on blow. Passion, murder, horror, came in a second into the still confusion of the misty air. Then, swift as the sudden commotion, came a pause—a wild cry of consternation, as if for the first time the actor in this terrible momentary tragedy had become aware what he was doing. The spectator's senses were so absorbed in the suddenness of the catastrophe that there was time enough for the whole drama to enact itself before he found voice. He had broken mechanically into a run, and thought that he called out. But it was not (it seemed to him in the hurried progression of ideas) his cry or the sound of his approach, but a sudden horror which had seized the man (was he a murderer?), who had in a moment come to himself. When the doctor at full speed, and calling out mechanically, automatically for Help! help! reached the spot where the prostrate figure was lying, the other had taken flight down the cross road and was already invisible in the distance. The doctor's first care was for

the victim. He was not an avenger of blood, but a healer of men.

Presently there appeared around him two or three startled people—one from the nearest house carrying a small lamp, which made the strangest, weird appearance in the misty night; a passer-by on his way home; a vagrant from the deserted fields. They helped the doctor to turn over the murdered man, who was still living, but no more, and who, it was evident to Dr. Barrère's experienced eyes, was on the point of death and beyond all human help. The lamp had been placed on the ground close by, and sent up an odour of paraffin along with the yellow rays that proceeded from its globe of light, and the figures kneeling and bending over the inanimate thing in the midst looked more like a group of murderers than people bringing help and succour. Some time had elapsed before the means of transporting him even to the nearest house had been procured, and by that time there was no longer any question of what could be done on his behalf, and all that was possible was to carry away the body. Dr. Barrère walked beside the melancholy convoy to the nearest police station, where

he made his deposition: and then he went home in all the tremor of excitement and mental commotion. He had fortunately no visits to pay that evening of any importance; but he was too much stirred and troubled to remain quietly at home, and after a while hurried out to Agnes, his natural confidant, to tell her all about the shock he had received. It struck him with surprise to see, when he entered the little drawing-room, that Jim was with his mother and sister. It was a thing that had very seldom happened before. He sat apart from them at the writing-table, where he was writing, or making believe to write, letters. The sight of him struck Dr. Barrère with a certain surprise, but he could not have told why. There was no reason why he should not be found in his mother's drawing-room. It was true that he was rarely to be seen there, but yet sometimes he would make his appearance. This evening he had dressed for dinner, which was still more unusual: perhaps he was going out to some late evening party; perhaps some one had been expected to dinner. These thoughts flew vaguely through Dr. Barrère's mind, he could not have told why. There was no

particular reason why he should thus desire to penetrate the motives of Jim Surtees' behaviour, or to explain to himself why the young man was there. The speculation passed through his head without thought, if such an expression may be used, without any volition of his, as half our thoughts do, like the chance flight of birds or butterflies across the air. They did not detain him a moment as he came forward with his greetings, and met the pleased surprise of the reception which the ladies gave him. 'I thought it was too late to look for you,' his Agnes said, with a brightening of all the soft lines of her face, as if the sun had risen upon a landscape. And then, as it was cold, a chair was drawn for him near the fire. 'You have been kept late on your round to-night,' said Mrs. Surtees. 'Have you any very anxious case?'

'It is no case that has kept me,' said the doctor. 'I have had a dreadful encounter in the road. You know that district up beyond St. George's-in-the-Fields—those half-built, desolate villas and cottages. The roads are as lonely as if they were in the middle of a wood. A new quarter by night is as bad as a bare moor.'

Agnes stood listening with her hand on the back of his chair, but still a smile upon her face—the smile of pleasure at his coming. Mrs. Surtees had let her knitting fall upon her lap, and was looking at him, listening with pleased interest. They had not perceived the agitation which, indeed, until he began to speak, he had managed to suppress. 'And what happened?' Mrs. Surtees said.

'I have been,' he answered, his voice breaking in spite of himself, 'the witness of a murder.'

'Good heavens!' The ladies were too much startled to put another question except with their eager eyes. They drew closer to him; the hand of Agnes glided to his shoulder from the back of his chair. What she thought first was that his emotion did honour to him.

Then he described to them briefly what he had seen—the lurking figure in the shadow which had alarmed himself as he passed first, but which he soon perceived had no hostile intentions towards him; the appearance of the man approaching from the opposite direction as he returned; the sudden assault; the rapid, breathless, horrible suddenness of the tragedy. The ladies hung upon his lips,

making exclamations of horror. It was not till afterwards that Dr. Barrère became aware that the young man at the table behind made no sign, said not a word. He had told everything, and answered half a dozen hurried, faltering questions before Jim made any remark. Then he suddenly stirred behind backs (the group at the fireside having forgotten his presence) and asked, 'What are you talking about? What's happened?' in a deep half-growling voice, as of a man disturbed in his occupation by some fuss of which he did not grasp the meaning.

'Oh,' said Mrs. Surtees, wiping her moist eyes, 'did you not hear, Jim? The doctor has seen a murder committed. God preserve us! I feel as if I had seen it myself. A dreadful thing like that coming so near us! It is as if we were mixed up in it,' she said.

'A murder? Are you sure it was a murder? It might be nothing more than a quarrel—how could you tell in the dark?' said Jim, always in the same gruff, almost indignant voice.

'If you had seen it as I did you would have been in no doubt,' said Dr. Barrère, turning half round, and catching a side view

of the tall figure slouching with hands in his pockets, his face clouded with a scowl of displeasure, his shoulders up to his ears. This silhouette against the light gave him a thrill, he scarcely knew why. He paused a moment, and then added, 'After all you may be right; it was murder to all intents and purposes—but whether it was intended to be so there may be a doubt.'

'You are always so ready to come to tragical conclusions,' said Jim in easier tones. 'I daresay it will turn out to have been a quarrel, and no more.'

'A quarrel in which one is killed is apt to look like murder.'

These words gave them all a shivering sensation. Even Jim's shoulders went up to his ears as if he shared the involuntary shudder—and Mrs. Surtees said again, drying her eyes, 'It is as if we were mixed up in it. Poor man, poor man, cut off in a moment, without a thought!'

'It appears he is a well-known and very bad character,' said Dr. Barrère. 'I feel almost more sorry for the poor wretch that did it. The cry he gave when he saw what he had done still rings in my ears.'

'Then you think he did not mean it, Arnold?'

'God knows! You would have said he meant everything that passion and rage could mean to see the blows; but that cry——'

'He repented, perhaps—when it was too late.'

'It was horror—it was consternation. It was the cry of a man who suddenly saw what he had done.'

There was a pause of sympathetic horror and pity. Then Jim Surtees went back to the writing-table, and Dr. Barrère continued his conversation with the ladies, which, however they tried to break into other and happier subjects, returned again and again to the terrible scene from which he had just come. They spoke in low tones together over the fire—the doctor recounting over and over again the feelings with which he had contemplated the extraordinary, sudden tragedy, the rapidity with which all its incidents followed each other, leaving him scarcely time to cry out before all was over. He was naturally full of it, and could speak of nothing else, and his betrothed and her mother, always sympathetic, threw themselves entirely into

the excitement which still possessed him. It was late when he rose to go away, soothed and calmed, and with a sense of having at last exhausted the incident. It startled him as he turned round, after taking leave of Mrs. Surtees, to see that Jim was still there. And the aspect of the young man was sufficiently remarkable. The candles on the writing-table behind which he sat had burnt low. They had escaped from the little red shades which had been placed over them, and were flaring low, like a level sun in the evening, upon the figure behind, which, with his head bowed in his hands and shoulders up to his ears, seemed unconscious of all that was passing. Jim neither saw nor heard the doctor move. He was absorbed in some all-important matter of his own.

Next day Dr. Barrère was still deeply occupied by the scene he had seen. He was summoned for the coroner's inquest, and he was, as was natural, questioned by everybody he met upon a subject which was in all men's mouths. It was equally natural that he should return next evening to bring the account of all the encounters he had gone through and all that was news on the subject

to Agnes and her mother. Once more he noted with surprise that Jim was in the drawing-room. Was he turning over a new leaf? Had he seen the folly of his ways at last?

They were sitting as before over the fire, Dr. Barrère telling his story, the ladies listening with absorbed attention. The interest of this terrible tragedy which had taken place almost within their ken, which they were seeing through his eyes, was absorbing to them. They wanted to know everything, the most minute details, what questions had been asked him, and what he had replied. Jim was still behind backs at the writing-table with the two candles in their red shades, which did not betray his face, but threw a strange light upon his hands and the occupation in which he seemed to be absorbed. He was playing an old-fashioned game with small coloured glass balls on a round board, called solitaire in the days when it was in fashion. The little tinkle of the balls as he placed them in the necessary order came in during the pauses in the talk like a faint accompaniment. But no one looked at him: they were too much absorbed in Dr. Barrère's report.

'And are you the only witness, Arnold?' Agnes asked.

'The only one who saw the deed done,' he said. 'It is very rarely that there is even one witness to the actual fact of a murder. But there is other evidence than mine; the man is supposed to have been seen by various people, and there is a dumb witness of the first importance, the stick which he must have thrown away, or which dropped from his hand in the horror, as I shall always believe, of his discovery of what he had done.'

At this point there was a ring as of the glass balls all tinkling together on the board. The doctor turned round, slightly startled in the high tension of his nerves, and saw that Jim had upset his plaything, and that the balls were rolling about the table. But this was far from being an unusual accident in the game, and neither Mrs. Surtees nor Agnes took any notice, their nerves were not strained as Dr. Barrère's had been. The mother spoke low with a natural thrill of horror and pity. 'And is it known,' she said, 'is it known to whom the stick belongs?'

Before Dr. Barrère could reply there came

a knock to the door—a knock not at the door of the room in which they sat, but below at the street door, a thing unusual indeed at that hour, but not so startling in general as to excite or alarm them. But perhaps all their nerves were affected more or less. It was very sudden and sharp, and came into the calm domestic atmosphere with a scarcely comprehensible shock. They all turned round, and Jim, the doctor saw, had suddenly risen up, and stood with his face turned towards the door. The summons rang through the silence with an effect altogether out of keeping with its simplicity.

'Who can that be so late,' said Mrs. Surtees. 'Jim, will you go and see?'

'It must be some one for me,' the doctor said.

'Poor Arnold! I hope it is some one near,' said Agnes faltering—for neither of them believed what they said. It was something terrible, something novel, some startling new event, whatever it was. Jim, instead of doing as his mother wished, sat down again behind the writing-table, within the shelter of the red shades on the candles, and they all waited, scarcely venturing to draw breath.

Presently the neat parlour-maid, pale too, and with a visible tremor, opened the door. She said, with a troubled look at her mistress, that, Please there was some one downstairs who wanted to speak to Mr. Jim. Mrs. Surtees was the last to be moved by the general agitation. She said, 'For Mr. Jim? But let him come up, Ellen. Jim, you had better ask your friend to come upstairs.'

Once more there was a terrible, incomprehensible pause. Jim, who had fallen rather than re-seated himself on the sofa which stood behind the writing-table, said not a word; his face was not visible behind the shaded lights. Mrs. Surtees threw a glance round her—a troubled appeal for she knew not what enlightenment. Then she said breathlessly, 'What has happened? What is the matter? Who is it? Ellen, you will show the gentleman upstairs.'

Heavens! how they stood listening, panic-stricken, not knowing what they were afraid of, nor what there was to fear. Mrs. Surtees still kept her seat tremulously, and Jim, lost in the corner of the sofa, suddenly extinguished the candles—an act which they all seemed to approve and understand without

knowing why. And then there came a heavy foot ascending the stairs. Mrs. Surtees did not know the man who came in—a tall soldierly man with a clear and healthful countenance. It even gave her a momentary sensation of comfort to see that Jim's 'friend' was no blear-eyed young rake, but a person so respectable. She rose to meet him with her old-fashioned courtsey. 'Though I have not the pleasure of knowing you,' she said with a smile, which was tremulous by reason of that causeless agitation, 'my son's friends are always welcome.' O heaven above! her son's friend! Dr. Barrère was the only one among them who knew the man. The sight of him cleared the whole matter in a moment, and shed a horrible light over everything to the doctor's eyes. He made a sudden sign to the newcomer, imploring silence.

'I know this gentleman, too, Mrs. Surtees,' he said, 'he is one of my—friends, also. Would it be taking a great liberty if I were to ask you to leave us for a few minutes the use of this room? Agnes, it is a great intrusion—but—for God's sake take her away!' he said in his betrothed's ear.

Mrs. Surtees looked at him with some surprise and an air of gentle dignity not entirely without offence. 'My dear,' she said to Agnes, 'Dr. Barrère would not ask such a thing without good reason for it, so let us go.' She was not a woman who had been accustomed to take the lead even in her own family, and she was glad, glad beyond description, to believe that the business, whatever it was, was Dr. Barrère's business, and not—anything else. She accepted it with a trembling sense of relief, yet a feeling that the doctor was perhaps taking a little too much upon him, turning her out of her own room.

The two men stood looking at each other as the ladies went away, with Jim still huddled in the corner of the sofa, in the shade, making no sign. Dr. Barrère saw, however, that the stranger, with a glance round of keen, much-practised eyes, had at once seen him, and placed himself between Jim and the door. When the ladies had disappeared the doctor spoke quickly. 'Well,' he said, 'what is it, Morton? Some new information?'

'Something I regret as much as any one can, Dr. Barrère. I have to ask Mr. Surtees

to come with me. There need be no exposure for the moment: but I must take him without delay.'

'Take him!' The doctor made a lost effort to appear not to perceive. He said, 'Have you too seen something, then? Have you further evidence to give, Jim?'

There was no reply. Neither did the superintendent say a word. They stood all three silent. Jim had risen up; his limbs seemed unable to support him. He stood leaning on the table, looking out blankly over the two extinguished candles and their red shades. The officer went up and laid his hand lightly upon the young man's shoulder. 'Come,' he said, 'you know what I'm here for: and I am sorry, very sorry for you, Mr. Jim: but no doubt you'll be able to make it all clear.'

'Barrère,' said Jim, struggling against the dryness in his throat, 'you can prove that I've not been out of the house—that I was at home all last night. I couldn't—I couldn't, you know, be in two places at one time—could I, Barrère?'

'Mr. Jim, you must remember that whatever you say now will tell against you at

the trial. I take you to witness, doctor, that I haven't even told him what it was for.'

Jim ground out an oath from between his clenched teeth. 'Do I need to ask?' he said. 'Doesn't everybody know I hated him—and good reason too—hated him and threatened him—but, God help me, not to kill him!' cried the young man with a voice of despair.

CHAPTER III

Dr. Barrère was left to break the news to the mother and daughter. He never knew how he accomplished this dreadful office. They came back when they heard the door shut, evidently not expecting to find him, believing that he had withdrawn with his 'friend'—and the anxious, searching eyes with which his Agnes looked round the room, the mingled terror and pleasure of her look on discovering him, never faded from his mind. Mrs. Surtees was more disappointed than pleased. She said, with an evident sudden awakening of anxiety, 'Where is Jim?' And then he had to tell them. How did he find words to do it? But the wonderful thing, the dreadful thing, was that after the shock of the first intimation there seemed little surprise in the looks of these poor ladies. The mother sank down in her

chair and hid her face in her hands, and Agnes stood behind her mother, throwing her arms round her, pressing that bowed head against her breast. They did not cry out indignantly that it was not—could not be true. They were silent, like those upon whom something long looked for had come at last. The doctor left them after a while with a chill in his very soul. He could say nothing; he could not attempt to console them in the awful silence which seemed to have fallen upon them. Agnes tried to smile as he went away—tried with her trembling lips to say something. But she could not conceal from him that she wished him to go, that he could give no comfort, that the best thing he could do for them in their misery was to leave them alone. He went home very miserable in that consciousness of being put aside, and allowed no share in the anguish of the woman whom he loved. It was intolerable to him; it was unjust. He said to himself as he walked along that the tacit abandonment of Jim, the absence of all protest on their part that his guilt was impossible—a protest which surely a mother and sister in any circumstances ought to have made—was

hard, was unjust. If all the world condemned him, yet they should not have condemned him. He took Jim's part hotly, feeling that he was a fellow-sufferer. Even were he dissipated and reckless, poor fellow, there was a long, long way between that and murder. Murder! There was nothing in Jim which could make it possible that he could have to do with a murder. If he was hasty in temper, poor fellow, his nature was sweet, notwithstanding all his errors. Even he, Arnold Barrère, a man contemptuous of the manner of folly which had ruined Jim, a man with whom wrath and revenge might have awakened more sympathy—even he had come to have a tenderness for the erring young man. And to think that Jim could have lain in wait for any one, could have taken a man at a disadvantage, was, he declared to himself with indignation, impossible. It was impossible! though the two women who were nearest to him—his mother and his sister—did not say so, did not stand up in vindication of the unhappy youth.

When he had exhausted this natural indignation Dr. Barrère began to contemplate the situation more calmly, and to arrange its

incidents in his mind. The horror of the thought that he was himself the chief witness affected him little at first, for it was to the fact only that he could speak, and the culprit, so far as he was concerned, was without identity, a shadow in the night, and no more. But a chill came over that flush of indignant partisanship with which he had made a mental stand for Jim when the other circumstances flashed upon him. He remembered his own surprise to find Jim in the drawing-room when he arrived at Mrs. Surtees' house; to see his dress so unusual, though scarcely more unusual than the fact of his being there. He remembered how the young man held aloof, how the candles had flared upon him neglected. The little scene came before Dr. Barrère like a picture—the candle shades standing up in a ludicrous neglect, the light flaring under them upon Jim's face. And then again, to-night: the senseless game with which he seemed to amuse himself; the tremble of his hands over the plaything; his absence of interest in the matter which was so exciting to the others. Why was Jim there at all? Why did he ask no question? Why keep behind

unexcited, unsurprised, while the doctor told his story? And then the reason thrust itself upon him in Jim's own words—'I couldn't be in two places at once, could I? You can prove that I was here last night.' Good God, what did it mean? Jim—Jim!—and his mother and sister, who had sunk into despair without a word, who had never said as women ought, 'We know him better; it is not true—it is not true.'

Dr. Barrère went home more wretched than words can say. Hard and terrible is an unjust accusation; but oh, how easy, how sweet, how possible, is even the shame which is undeserved! A century of that is as nothing in comparison with a day or hour of that which is merited—of the horror which is true. He tried to hope still that it was not true; but he felt coming over him like a pall the terror which he could now perceive had quenched the very hearts in the bosoms of the two women who were Jim's natural defenders. They had not been able to say a word—and neither could he. Dr. Barrère stood still in the middle of the dark street with the damp wind blowing in his face as all this came before him. A solitary passer-by

looked round surprised, and looked again, thinking the man was mad. He saw in a moment, as by a revelation, all that was before them—and himself. The horrible notoriety, the disgrace, the endless stigma. It would crush *them* and tear their lives asunder; but for him also, would not that be ruin too?

CHAPTER IV

THE trial took place after a considerable interval, for the assizes were just over when the man was killed. In that dreadful time of suspense and misery proof after proof accumulated slowly with a gradual drawing together as of the very web of fate. The stick which was found by the body of the murdered man was Jim's stick, with his initials upon it, in a silver band—alas, his mother's gift. He was proved to have had a desperate quarrel with the man, who was one of those who had corrupted and misled him. Then the *alibi* which had seemed at first so strong disappeared into worse than nothing when examined: for Jim had been seen on his flight home; he had been seen to enter furtively and noiselessly into his mother's house, though the servants were ready to swear that he had not gone out that night;

and all the precautions he had taken, instead of bringing him safety, only made his position worse, being shown to be precautions consciously taken against a danger foreseen. All these things grew into certainty before the trial; so that it was all a foregone conclusion in the minds of the townspeople, some of whom yielded to the conviction with heartfelt pity, and some with an eager improving of the situation, pointing out to what horrible conclusions vice was sure to come.

Meanwhile this strange and horrible event, which had held the town for more than nine days in wonder and perturbation, and which had given a moral to many a tale, and point to many a sermon, held one little circle of unhappy creatures as in a ring of iron—unable to get away from it, unable to forget it, their hearts, their hopes, their life itself, marked for ever with its trace of blood. The two ladies had roused themselves from their first stupor into a half-fictitious adoption of their natural *rôle* as defenders of Jim. God knows through how many shocks and horrors of discovery Jim had led them, making something new, something worse, always the thing to be expected, before they had come to that

pitch that their hearts had no power to make any protest at all. But when the morning rose upon their troubled souls they began to say to each other that it could not be true. It could not be true! Jim had now and then an *accès* of sudden rage, but he was the kind of man of whom it is said that he would not hurt a fly. How could it be possible that he would do a murder? It was not possible; any other kind of evil thing—but not that, oh, not that! They said this to each other when they rose up from the uneasy bed in which mother and daughter had lain down together, not able to separate from each other—though those rules of use and wont which are so strong on women made them lie down as if to sleep, where no sleep was. But when the light came—that awful light which brings back common life to us on the morning after a great calamity —they looked into each other's pale face, and with one voice said, 'Oh no, no, it cannot be!' 'Mother,' cried Agnes, 'he would not hurt a fly. Oh, how kind he was when I was ill, when you had your accident—do you remember?' Who does not know what these words are—Do you remember? All

that he was who is dead; all that he might have been who is lost; all the hopes, the happy prospects, the cheerful days before trouble came. No words more poignant can be said. They did not need to ask each other what they remembered—that was enough. They clasped each other and kissed with trembling lips, and then Agnes rose, bidding her mother rest, and went to fetch her the woman's cordial, the cup of tea—which is so often all one poor female creature can offer to another by way of help.

No, no, he could not have done it! They took a little comfort for the moment. And another strange comfort they took in a thing which was one of the most damning pieces of evidence against Jim: which was that he had quarrelled violently with the murdered man and denounced him, and declared hatred and everlasting enmity against him. The story of the quarrel as it was told to them brought tears, which were almost tears of joy, to Mrs. Surtees' eyes. The man who had been killed was one of those adventurers who haunt the outskirts of society wherever there are victims to be found. He had preyed upon the lives and souls of young men in Poolborough since

the days when Jim Surtees was an innocent and credulous boy. It was not this man's fault that Jim had gone astray, for Jim, alas, was all ready for his fall, and eager after everything that was forbidden; but in the fits of remorse and misery which sometimes came upon him it was perhaps no wonder if he laid it at Langton's door; and that the mother should have held Langton responsible, who could wonder? The facts of the quarrel were as so many nails in Jim's coffin: but God help the poor woman, they gave consolation to his mother's heart. They meant repentance, she thought, they meant generosity and a pathetic indignation, and more, they meant succour; for the quarrel had arisen over an unfortunate youth whom the blackleg was throwing his toils around as he had thrown them around Jim, and whom Mrs. Surtees believed Jim had saved by exposing the villain. The story was told reluctantly, delicately, to the poor ladies, as almost sealing Jim's fate: and to the consternation of the narrator, who was struck dumb, and could only stare at them in a kind of stupor of astonishment, they looked at each other and broke forth into cries at first inarticulate which were

almost cries of joy. 'You do not see the bearing of it, I fear,' said the solicitor who had the management of the case, as soon as out of his astonishment he had recovered his voice. 'Oh, sir,' cried Mrs. Surtees, 'what I see is this, that my boy has saved another poor woman's son, God bless him! and that will not be forgotten, that will not be forgotten!' This gentleman withdrew in a state of speechless consternation. 'No, it will not be forgotten,' he said to Dr. Barrère. 'I think the poor lady has gone out of her senses, and little wonder. It is a piece of evidence which we can never get over.' Dr. Barrère shook his head, not understanding the women much better than the lawyer did. This gave them consolation, and yet it was the seal of Jim's fate.

Dr. Barrère himself in the long period of waiting was a most unhappy man. He stood by the Surtees nobly, everybody said. No son could have been more attentive than he was to the poor mother who was entirely broken by this blow, and had suddenly become an old woman. And he never wavered in his faith and loyalty to Agnes, who but for that noble fidelity would, everybody said, have been

the most of all to be pitied. For Agnes was young, and had all her life before her, with the stain of this crime upon her name; and if her lover had not stood by her what would have become of her? The people who had been doubtful of Dr. Barrère, as half a Frenchman, as too great a theorist, as a man who had not been quite successful in his outset, began now to look upon him with increased respect, and his firmness, his high honour, his disinterestedness were commented upon on all sides. But in his heart the doctor was far from happy. His life, too, seemed in question as well as Jim's. If the worst came to the worst, he asked himself, would society, however sympathetic for the moment, receive the family of a man who had been hanged—horrible words!—without prejudice? Would there not be a stigma upon the name of Surtees, and even upon the name of him who had given his own as a shield to the family of the murderer? He did his duty—no man more truly. He loved his Agnes with all the warmth of an honest heart, taking his share of all her trouble, supporting her through everything, making himself for her sake the brother of a criminal, and one of the

objects of popular curiosity and pity. All this he did from day to day, and went on doing it: but still there were struggles and dreadful misgivings in Dr. Barrère's heart. He was a proud man, and except for what he made by his profession, a poor one. If that failed him he had nothing else to fall back upon, and he already knew the misery of unsuccess. He knew what it was to see his practice wasting away, to see his former patients pass by shamefacedly, conscious of having transferred their ailments and themselves to other hands, to be put aside for no expressed reason out of the tide of life. At Poolborough he had begun to forget the experiences of his beginning, and to feel that at last he had got hold of the thread which would lead him if not to fortune, at least to comfort and the certainties of an established course of living. Would this last? he asked himself; would it make no difference to him if he identified himself with ruin—ruin so hideous and complete? The question was a terrible one, and brought the sweat to his brow when in chance moments, between his visits and his cases, between the occupations and thoughts which absorbed him, now and then, suddenly, in spite of all the pains

he took, it would start up and look him in the face. 'He had a brother who was hanged,' that was what people would say; they would not even after a little lapse of time pause to recollect that it was his wife's brother. The brand would go with them wherever he went. 'You remember the great murder case in Poolborough? Well, these were the people, and the brother was hanged.' These words seemed to detach themselves and float in the air. He said them to himself sometimes, or rather they were said in his ear without anything else to connect them. The phrase seemed already a common phrase which any one might use—'The brother was hanged.' And then cold drops of moisture would come out upon his forehead. And all the possibilities of life, the success which is dear to a man, the advancement of which he knew himself capable—was it all to go? Was he to be driven back once more to that everlasting re-commencement which makes the heart of a man sick?

These thoughts accompanied Dr. Barrère as he went and came, a son, and more than a son, to Mrs. Surtees, and to Agnes the most faithful, the most sympathetic of lovers. At

such a moment, and in face of the awful catastrophe which had come upon them, any talk of marriage would have been out of place. He had, indeed, suggested it at first in mingled alarm and desperation, and true desire to do his best, in the first impulse of overwhelming sympathy, and at the same time in the first glimpse of all that might follow, and sickening horror of self-distrust lest his resolution might give way. He would have fled from himself, from all risks of this nature into the safety of a bond which he could not break. But Agnes had silently negatived the proposal with a shake of her head and a smile of pathetic tenderness. She, too, had thoughts of the future, of which she breathed no word to any one, not even to her mother. All that was in his mind as subject of alarm and misgiving was reflected, with that double clearness and vivification which is given to everything reflected in the clear flowing of a river, in the mind of Agnes. She saw all with the distinctness of one to whom the sacrifice of herself was nothing when compared with the welfare of those she loved. He was afraid lest these alarms might bring him into temptation, and the temptation be above his

strength; and his soul was disturbed and made miserable. But to Agnes the matter took another aspect. All that he foresaw she foresaw, but the thought brought neither disturbance nor fear. It brought the exaltation of a great purpose—the solemn joy of approaching martyrdom. Arnold should never suffer for her. It was she who would have the better part and suffer for him.

The dreadful fact that it was Dr. Barrère only who had witnessed the murder, and that he would have to speak and prove what he had seen, became more and more apparent to them all as the time drew on. His description of the blows that had been rained down wildly on the victim, and of the lurking figure in the shadow whom he had noted, as he passed the first time, took away all hope that it might be supposed the act of a momentary madness without premeditation. The doctor had told his story with all the precision that was natural to him before he knew who it was that would be convicted by it; and now it was no longer possible for him, even had his conscience permitted it, to soften the details which he had at first given so clearly, or to throw any mist upon his clear narrative. He

had to repeat it all, knowing the fatal effect it must have, standing up with Jim's pale face before him, with a knowledge that somewhere in a dim corner Agnes sat with bowed head listening—to what she already knew so well. The doctor's countenance was as pale as Jim's. His mouth grew dry as he bore his testimony; but not all the terrible consequences could make him alter a word. He could scarcely refrain a groan, a sob, when he had done; and this involuntary evidence of what it cost him to tell the truth increased the effect in the highest degree, as the evidence of an unwilling witness always does. There was but one point in which he could help the prisoner; and fortunately that too had been a special point in his previous evidence: but it was not until Dr. Barrère got into the hands of Jim's advocate that this was brought out. 'I see,' the counsel said, 'that in your previous examination you speak of a cry uttered by the assailant after the blows which you have described. You describe it as a cry of horror. In what sense do you mean this to be understood?'

'I mean,' said Dr. Barrère very pointedly and clearly—and if there had been any

divided attention in the crowded court where so many people had come to hear the fate of one whom they had known from his childhood, every mind was roused now, and every eye intent upon the speaker—'I mean——' He paused to give fuller force to what he said. 'I mean that the man who struck those blows for the first time realised what he was doing. The cry was one of consternation and dismay. It was the cry of a man horrified to see what he had done.'

'The cry was so remarkable that it made a great impression on your mind?'

'A very great impression. I do not think I have ever heard an utterance which affected me so much.'

'You were hurrying forward at the time to interpose in the scuffle? Did you distinguish any words? Did you recognise the voice?'

'It would give an erroneous impression to say that I meant to interpose in the scuffle. There was no scuffle. The man fell at once. He never had a chance of defending himself. I did not recognise the voice, nor can I say that any words were used. It was nothing but a cry.'

'The cry, however, was of such a nature as to induce you to change your mind in respect to what had occurred?'

'I had no time to form any theory. The impression it produced on my mind was that an assault was intended, but not murder: and that all at once it had become apparent to the unfortunate——' Here the doctor paused, and there was a deep sobbing breath of intense attention drawn by the crowd. He stopped for a minute, and then resumed, 'It had become apparent to the—assailant that he had—gone too far; that the consequences were more terrible than he had intended. He threw down what he had in his hand, and fled in horror.'

'You were convinced, then, that there was no murderous intention in the act of the unfortunate—as you have well said—assailant?'

'That was my conviction,' said Dr. Barrère.

The effect made upon the assembly was great. And though it was no doubt diminished more or less by the cross-examination of the counsel for the prosecution, who protested vehemently against the epithet of 'unfortunate' applied to the man who had attacked in the dark another man who was

proceeding quietly about his own business, who had lain in wait for him and assaulted him murderously with every evidence of premeditation, it still remained the strongest point in the defence. 'You say that you had no time to form any theory?' said the prosecutor; 'yet you have told us that you rushed forward calling out murder. Was this before or after you heard the cry so full of meaning which you have described?'

'It was probably almost at the same moment,' said Dr. Barrère.

'Yet, even in the act of crying out murder, you were capable of noticing all the complicated sentiments which you now tell us were in the assailant's cry!'

'In great excitement one takes no note of the passage of time—a minute contains as much as an hour.'

'And you expect us to believe that in that minute, and without the help of words, you were enlightened as to the meaning of the act by a mere inarticulate cry?'

'I tell you the impression produced on my mind, as I told it at the coroner's inquest,' said Dr. Barrère, steadily; 'as I have told it to my friends from the first.'

'Yet this did not prevent you from shouting murder?'

'No; it did not prevent me from calling for help in the usual way.'

This was all that could be made of the doctor. It remained the strongest point in poor Jim's favour, who was, as everybody saw to be inevitable, condemned; yet recommended to mercy because of what Dr. Barrère had said. Otherwise there were many features in the case that roused the popular pity. The bad character of the man who had been killed, the evil influence he was known to have exercised, the injury he had done to Jim himself and to so many others, and the very cause of the quarrel in which Jim had threatened and announced his intention of punishing him—all these things, had Jim been tried in France, would have produced a verdict modified by extenuating circumstances. In England it did not touch the decision, but it produced that vague recommendation to mercy with which pity satisfies itself when it can do no more.

Dr. Barrère took the unfortunate mother and sister home. Mrs. Surtees, broken as she was, could not be absent from the court

when her son's fate was to be determined. She was as one stricken dumb as they took her back. Now and then she would put her trembling hands to her eyes as if expecting tears which did not come. Her very heart and soul were crushed by the awful doom which had been spoken. And the others did not even dare to exchange a look. The horror which enveloped them was too terrible for speech. It was only after an interval had passed, and life, indomitable life which always rises again whatever may be the anguish that subdues it for a moment, had returned in pain and fear to its struggle with the intolerable, that words and the power of communication returned. Then Dr. Barrère told the broken-hearted women that both he himself and others in the town who knew Jim, with all the influence that could be brought to bear, would work for a revision of the sentence. It was upon his own evidence that the hopes which those who were not so deeply, tremendously interested, but who regarded the case with an impartial eye, began to entertain, were founded. 'I hope that the Home Secretary may send for me,' he said; 'they think he will. God

grant it!' He too had worked himself into a kind of hope.

'Oh,' cried Agnes, melting for the first time into tears at the touch of a possible deliverance, 'if we could go, as they used to do, to the Queen, his mother and his sister, on our knees!'

Mrs. Surtees sat and listened to them with her immovable face of misery. 'Don't speak to me of hope, for I cannot bear it,' she said. 'Oh, don't speak of hope; there is none—none! Nothing but death and shame.'

'Yes, mother,' said Dr. Barrère, and he added under his breath, 'whatever happens —whatever happens—there shall be no death of shame.'

CHAPTER V

THE recommendation to mercy was very strong; almost all the principal people in the town interested themselves, and the judge himself had been persuaded to add a potent word; but as he did so he shook his head, and told the petitioners that their arguments were all sentimental. 'What does your lordship say then to the doctor's testimony?' was asked him, upon which he shook his head more and more. 'The doctor's testimony, above all,' he said. 'Mind you, I think that probably the doctor was right, but it is not a solid argument, it is all sentiment; and that is what the Home Office makes no account of.' This was very discouraging. But still there was a certain enthusiasm in the town in Jim's favour, as well as a natural horror that one who really belonged (if he had kept his position) to the best class, should

come to such an end; and the chief people who got up this recommendation to mercy were warm supporters of the Government. That, too, they felt convinced, must tell for something. And there reigned in Poolborough a certain hope, which Dr. Barrère sometimes shared.

Sometimes; for on many occasions he took the darker view—the view so universal and generally received, that the more important it is for you that a certain thing should come to pass, the more you desire it, the less likely it is to happen. And then he would ask himself was it so important that it should come to pass? At the best it was still true that Jim had killed this man. If he were not hanged for it he would be imprisoned for life: and whether it is worse to have a relative who has been hanged for a crime or one who is lingering out a long term of imprisonment for it, it is hard to tell. There did not seem much to choose between them. Perhaps even the hanging would be forgotten soonest—and it would be less of a burden. For to think of a brother in prison, who might emerge years hence with a ticket-of-leave, a disgraced and degraded man, was

something terrible. Perhaps on the whole it would be best that he should die. And then Dr. Barrère shuddered. Die! Ah! if that might be, quietly, without demonstration. But as it was—— And then he would begin again, against his will, that painful circle of thought—'the brother was hanged.' That was what people would say. After the horror of it had died out, fantastic patients would cry, 'The brother of a man who was hanged! Oh, no! don't let us call in such a person.' The ladies would say this: they would shudder yet perhaps even laugh, for the pity would be forgotten, even the horror would be forgotten, and there would remain only this suggestion of discomfort—just enough to make the women feel that they would not like to have him, the brother of a man who was hanged, for their doctor. Dr. Barrère tried all he could to escape from this circle of fatal thought: but however hard he worked, and however much he occupied himself, he could not do so always. And the thought went near sometimes to make him mad.

He had, however, much to occupy him, to keep thought away. He was the only

element of comfort in the life of the two miserable women who lived under the shadow of death, their minds entirely absorbed in the approaching catastrophe, living through it a hundred times in anticipation, in despair which was made more ghastly and sickening by a flicker of terrible hope. Mrs. Surtees said that she had no hope; she would not allow the possibility to be named: but secretly dwelt upon it with an intensity of suspense which was more unendurable than any calamity. And when Agnes and her lover were alone this was the subject that occupied them to the exclusion of all others. Their own hopes and prospects were all blotted out as if they had never been. He brought her reports of what was said and what was thought on the subject among the people who had influence, those who were straining every nerve to obtain a reprieve: and she hung upon his words breathless with an all-absorbing interest. He never got beyond the awful shadow, or could forget it, and went about all day with that cloud hanging over him, and frightened his patients with his stern and serious looks. 'Dr. Barrère is not an encouraging doctor,' they began to say, 'he makes you think you

are going to die'; for the sick people could not divest themselves of the idea that it was their complaints that were foremost in the doctor's mind and produced that severity in his looks.

But all this was light and easy to the last of the many occupations which filled Dr. Barrère's time and thoughts, and that was Jim—Jim alone in his prison, he who never had been alone, who had been surrounded all day long with his companions—the companions who had led him astray. No, they had not led him astray. Langton, who was dead, whom he had killed, had not led him astray, though he now thought so, or said so, bemoaning himself. Such a thing would be too heavy a burden for any human spirit. A man cannot ruin any more than he can save his brother. His own inclinations, his own will, his love for the forbidden, his idle wishes and follies—these were what had led him astray. And now he was left alone to think of all that, with the shadow before him of a hideous death at a fixed moment—a moment drawing nearer and nearer, which he could no more escape than he could forget it. Jim had many good qualities amid his evil ones. He was not a bad man; his sins were rather

those of a foolish, self-indulgent boy. His character was that of a boy. A certain innocency, if that word may be used, lay under the surface of his vices, and long confinement away from all temptation had wrought a change in him like that that came over the leper in the Scriptures, whose flesh came again as the flesh of a little child. This was what happened to Jim, both bodily and mentally. He languished in health from his confinement, but yet his eyes regained the clearness of his youth, and his mind, all its ingenuousness, its power of affection. Lying under sentence of death he became once more the lovable human creature, the winning and attractive youth he had been in the days before trouble came. All clouds save the one cloud rolled off his soul. In all likelihood he himself forgot the course of degradation through which he had gone; everything was obliterated to him by the impossibility of sinning more—everything except the one thing which no self-delusion could obliterate, the unchangeable doom to which he was approaching day by day. Jim had none of the tremors of a murderer. He concealed nothing; he admitted freely that the verdict was just, that

it was he who had lurked in the dark and awaited the villain—but only he had never meant more than to punish him. 'It is all quite true what the doctor says. I knocked him down. I meant to beat him within an inch of his life. God knows if he deserved it at my hands, or any honest man's hands. And then it came over me in a moment that he never moved, that he never made a struggle. It was not because there were people coming up that I ran away. It was horror, as the doctor says. Nothing can ever happen to me again so dreadful as that,' said Jim, putting up his handkerchief to wipe his damp forehead. And yet he could tell even that story with tolerable calm. He was not conscious of guilt; he had meant to do what he felt quite justifiable—rather laudable than otherwise—to thrash a rascal 'within an inch of his life.' He had expected the man to defend himself; he had been full of what he felt to be righteous rage, and he did not feel himself guilty now. He was haunted by no ghost; he had ceased even to shudder at the recollection of the horrible moment in which he became aware that instead of chastising he had killed.

But when his momentary occupation with other thoughts died away and the recollection of what lay before him came back, the condition of poor Jim was a dreadful one. To die—for that !—to die on Thursday, the 3rd of September, at a horrible moment fixed and unchangeable. To feel the days running past remorselessly, swift without an event to break their monotonous flying pace—those days which were so endlessly long from dawn to twilight, which seemed as if they would never be done, which had so little night, yet which flew noiselessly, silently, bringing him ever nearer and nearer to the end. Poor Jim broke down entirely under the pressure of this intolerable certainty. Had it been done at once, the moment the sentence had been pronounced ; but to sit and wait for it, look for it, anticipate it, know that every hour was bringing it nearer, that through the dark and through the day, and through all the endless circles of thoughts that surrounded and surrounded it, it was coming, always coming, not to be escaped ! Jim's nerves broke down under this intolerable thing that had to be borne. He kept command of himself when he saw his mother and sister, but with Dr.

Barrère he let himself go. It was a relief to him for the wretched moment. Save for the moment, nothing, alas, could be a relief—for whether he contrived to smile and subdue himself, or whether he dashed himself against the wall of impossibility that shut him in, whether he raved in anguish or madness, or slept, or tried to put a brave face upon it, it was coming all the time.

'It is sitting and waiting that is the horrible thing,' he said; 'to think there is nothing you can do. That's true, you know, doctor, in *Don Juan*, about the people that plunged into the sea to get drowned a little sooner and be done with it—in the shipwreck, you know. It's waiting and seeing it coming that is horrible. It is just thirteen days to-day. Death isn't what I mind; it's waiting for it. Will it be—will it be very—horrible, do you think—at the moment—when it comes?'

'No,' said Dr. Barrère, 'if it comes to that, not horrible at all—a moment, no more.'

'A moment—but you can't tell till you try what may be in a moment. I don't mind, doctor; something sharp and soon

would be a sort of relief. It is the sitting and waiting, counting the days, seeing it coming—always coming. Nobody has a right to torture a fellow like that—let them take him and hang him as the lynchers do, straight off.' Then Jim was seized with a slight convulsive shudder. 'And then the afterwards, doctor? for all your science you can't tell anything about that. Perhaps you don't believe in it at all. I do.'

Dr. Barrère made no reply. He was not quite clear about what he believed; and he had nothing to say on such a subject to this young man standing upon the verge, with all the uncertainties and possibilities of life still so warm in him, and yet so near the one unalterable certainty. After a minute Jim resumed.

'I do,' he said firmly. 'I've never been what you call a sceptic. I don't believe men are: they only pretend, or perhaps think so, till it comes upon them. I wonder what they'll say to a poor fellow *up there*, doctor? I've always been told they understand up there—there can't be injustice done like here. And I've always been a true believer. I've never been led away—like that.'

'It isn't a subject on which I can talk,' said the doctor unsteadily; 'your mother and Agnes, they know. But, Jim, for the love of God don't talk to them as you are doing now. Put on a good face for their sakes.'

'Poor mother!' said Jim. He turned all at once almost to crying—softened entirely out of his wild talk. 'What has she done to have a thing like this happen to her? She is a real good woman—and to have a son hanged, good Lord!' Again he shivered convulsively. 'She won't live long, that's one thing; and perhaps it'll be explained to her satisfaction up there. But that's what I call unjust, Barrère, to torture a poor soul like that, that has never done anything but good all her life. You'll take care of Agnes. But mother will not live long, poor dear. Poor dear!' he repeated with a tremulous smile. 'I suppose she had a happy life till I grew up—till I— I wonder what I could be born for, a fellow like me, to be hanged!' he cried with a sudden, sharp anguish in which there was the laughter of misery and the groan of despair.

Dr. Barrère left the prison with his heart

bleeding; but he did not abandon Jim. On the contrary, there was a terrible attraction which drew him to the presence of the unfortunate young man. The doctor of Poolborough Jail, though not so high in the profession as himself, was one of Dr. Barrère's acquaintances, and to him he went when he left the condemned cell. The doctor told his professional brother that Surtees was in a very bad state of health. 'His nerves have broken down entirely. His heart—haven't you remarked?—his heart is in such a state that he might go at any moment.'

'Dear me,' said the other, 'he has never complained that I know of. And a very good thing too, Barrère; you don't mean to say that you would regret it if anything did happen, before——'

'No,' said the doctor, 'but the poor fellow may suffer. I wonder if you'd let me have the charge of him, Maxwell? I know you're a busy man. And it would please his mother to think that I was looking after him. What do you say?'

The one medical man looked at the other. Dr. Barrère was pale, but he did not shrink from the look turned upon him. 'I'll tell

you what I'll do, Barrère,' said the prison doctor at last. 'I am getting all wrong for want of a little rest. Feel my hand—my nerves are as much shaken as Surtees'. If you'll take the whole for a fortnight, so that I may take my holiday—'

Dr. Barrère thought for a moment. 'A fortnight? That will be till after— I don't know how I am to do it with my practice: but I will do it, for the sake of—your health, Maxwell: for I see you are in a bad way.'

'Hurrah!' said the other, 'a breath of air will set me all right, and I shall be for ever obliged to you, Barrère.' Then he stopped for a moment and looked keenly in his face. 'You're a better man than I am, and know more: but for God's sake, Barrère, no tricks —no tricks. You know what I mean,' he said.

'No, I don't know what you mean. I know you want a holiday, and I want to take care of a case in which I am interested. It suits us both. Let me have all the details you can,' said Dr. Barrère.

CHAPTER VI

THE day had come, and almost the hour. The weary time had stolen, endless, yet flying on noiseless wings; an eternity of featureless lingering hours, yet speeding, speeding towards that one fixed end. And there was no reprieve. The important people of Poolborough had retired sullenly from their endeavours. To support a Government faithfully and yet not to have one poor favour granted — their recommendation to mercy turned back upon themselves: they were indignant, and in that grievance they forgot the original cause of it. Still there were one or two still toiling on. But the morning of the fatal day had dawned and nothing had come.

To tell how Mrs. Surtees and Agnes had lived through these days is beyond our power. They did not live; they dragged through a feverish dream from one time of seeing him

to another, unconscious what passed in the meantime, except when some messenger would come to their door, and a wild blaze and frenzy of hope would light up in their miserable hearts: for it always seemed to them that it must be the reprieve which was coming, though each said to herself that it would not, could not, come. And when they saw Jim, that one actual recurring point in their lives was perhaps more miserable than the intervals. For to see him, and to know that the hour was coming ever nearer and nearer, when he must die; to sit with him, never free from inspection, never out of hearing of some compulsory spectator; to see the tension of his nerves, the strain of intolerable expectation in him—was almost more than flesh and blood could bear. They had privileges which were not allowed in ordinary cases—for were not they still ranked among the best people of Poolborough, though beaten down by horrible calamity? What could they say to him? Not even the religious exhortations, the prayers which came from other lips less trembling. They were dumb. 'Dear Jim,' and 'God bless you,' was all they could say. Their misery was too great,

there was no utterance in it; a word would have overthrown the enforced and awful calm. And neither could he speak. When he had said 'Mother' and kissed her, and smiled, that was all. Then they sat silent holding each other's hands.

Through all this Dr. Barrère was the only human supporter of the miserable family. He had promised to stand by Jim to the end, not to leave him till life had left him—till all was over. And now the supreme moment had nearly come. The doctor was as pale, almost paler than he who was about to die. There was an air about him of sternness, almost of desperation: yet to Jim he was tender as his mother. He had warned the authorities what he feared, that agitation and excitement might even yet rob the law of its victim. He had been allowed to be with the condemned man from earliest dawn of the fatal morning in consequence of the warning he had given, but it appeared to the attendants that Jim himself bore a less alarming air than the doctor, whose colourless face and haggard eyes looked as if he had not slept for a week. Jim, poor Jim, had summoned all his courage for this supreme moment. There

was a sweetness in his look that added to its youthfulness. He looked like a boy: his long imprisonment and the enforced self-denial there was in it, had chased from his face all stains of evil. He was pale and worn with his confinement and with the interval of awful waiting, but his eyes were clear as a child's—pathetic, tender, with a wistful smile in them, as though the arrival of the fatal hour had brought relief. The old clergyman who had baptized him had come, too, to stand by him to the last, and he could scarcely speak for tears. But Jim was calm, and smiled; if any bit of blue sky was in that cell of the condemned, with all its grim and melancholy memories, it was in Jim's face.

The doctor moved about him not able to keep still, with that look of desperation, listening for every sound. But all was still except the broken voice of the old clergyman, who had knelt down and was praying. One of the attendants too had gone down on his knees. The other stood watching, yet distracted by a pity which even his hardened faculties could not resist. Jim sat with his hands clasped, his eyes for a moment closed, the smile still quivering about his mouth. In

this stillness of intense feeling all observation save that of the ever-watchful doctor was momentarily subdued. Suddenly Jim's head seemed to droop forward on his breast; the doctor came in front of him with one swift step, and through the sound of the praying called imperatively, sharply, for wine, wine! The warder who was standing rushed to fill it out, while Dr. Barrère bent over the fainting youth. It all passed in a moment, before the half-said sentence of the prayer was completed. The clergyman's voice wavered, stopped—and then resumed again, finishing the phrase, notwithstanding the stir and hurried movement, the momentary breathless scuffle, which a sudden attack of illness, a fit, or faint always occasions. Then a sharp sound broke the stillness—the crash of the wine-glass which the doctor let fall from his hand after forcing the contents, as it seemed, down the patient's throat. The old clergyman, on his knees still, paused and opening his eyes gazed at the strange scene, not awakening to the seriousness of it, or perceiving any new element introduced into the solemnity of the situation for some minutes, yet gazing with tragic eyes, since nothing in the first place could well be

more tragic. The little stir, the scuffle of the moving feet, the two men in motion about the still figure in the chair, lasted for a little longer; then the warder uttered a stifled cry. The clergyman on his knees, his heart still in his prayer for the dying, felt it half profane to break off into words to men in the midst of those he was addressing to God—but forced by this strange break cried 'What is it?—what has happened?' in spite of himself.

There was no immediate answer. The doctor gave some brief quick directions, and with the help of the warder lifted the helpless figure, all fallen upon itself like a ruined house, with difficulty to the bed. The limp long helpless limbs, the entire immobility and deadness of the form struck with a strange chill to the heart of the man who had been interceding, wrapt in another atmosphere than that of earth. The clergyman got up from his knees, coming back with a keen and awful sense of his humanity. 'Has he—fainted?' he asked with a gasp.

Once more a dead pause, a stillness in which the four men heard their hearts beating; then the doctor said, with a strange brevity and solemnity, 'Better than that—he is dead.'

Dead! They gathered round and gazed in a consternation beyond words. The young face, scarcely paler than it had been a moment since, the eyes half shut, the lips fallen apart with that awful opening which is made by the exit of the last breath, lay back upon the wretched pillow in all that abstraction and incalculable distance which comes with the first touch of death. No one could look at that, and be in any doubt. The warders stood by dazed with horror and dismay, as if they had let their prisoner escape. Was it their fault? Would they be blamed for it? They had seen men go to the scaffold before with little feeling, but they had never seen one die of the horror of it, as Jim had died.

While they were thus standing a sound of measured steps was heard without. The door was opened with that harsh turning of the key which in other circumstances would have sounded like the trumpet of doom, but which now woke no tremor, scarcely any concern. It was the sheriff and his grim procession coming for the prisoner. They streamed in and gathered astonished about the bed. Dr. Barrère turned from where he stood at the head, with a face which was like ashes—pallid,

stern, the nostrils dilating, the throat held high. He made a solemn gesture with his hand towards the bed. 'You come too late,' he said.

The men had come in almost silently, in the excitement of the moment swelling the sombre circle to a little crowd. They thronged upon each other and looked at him, lying there on the miserable prison bed, in the light of the horrible grated windows, all awe-stricken in a kind of grey consternation, not knowing how to believe it; for it was a thing unparalleled that one who was condemned should thus give his executioner the slip. The whisper of the sheriff's low voice inquiring into the catastrophe broke the impression a little. 'How did it happen—how was it? Dead! But it seems impossible. Are you sure, doctor, it is not a faint?'

The doctor waved his hand almost scornfully towards the still and rigid form. 'I foresaw it always; it is—as I thought it would be,' he said.

'His poor mother!' said the clergyman with a sort of habitual conventional lamentation, as if it could matter to that poor mother! Dr. Barrère turned upon him

quickly. 'Go to them—tell them—it will save them something,' he said with sudden eagerness. 'You can do no more here.'

'It seems impossible,' the sheriff repeated, turning again to the bed. 'Is there a glass to be had?—anything—hold it to his lips! Do something, doctor. Have you tried all means? are you sure?' He had no doubt; but astonishment, and the novelty of the situation, suggested questions which really required no answer. He touched the dead hand and shuddered. 'It is extraordinary, most extraordinary,' he said.

'I warned you of the possibility from the beginning,' said Dr. Barrère; 'his heart was very weak. It is astonishing rather that he bore the strain so long.' Then he added with that stern look, 'It is better that it should be so.'

The words were scarcely out of his lips when a sudden commotion was heard as of some one hurrying along the stony passages, a sound of voices and hasty steps. The door, which, in view of the fatal ceremonial about to take place, had been left open, was pushed quickly, loudly to the wall, and an important personage, the Mayor of Poolborough, flushed

and full of excitement, hurried in. 'Thank God,' he cried, wiping his forehead, 'thank God it's come in time! I knew they could not refuse us. Here is the reprieve come at last.'

A cry, a murmur rose into the air from all the watchers. Who could help it? The reprieve—at such a moment! This solemn mockery was more than human nerves could bear. The warder who had been poor Jim's chief guardian broke forth into a sudden loud outburst, like a child's, of crying. The sheriff could not speak. He pointed silently to the bed.

But of all the bystanders none was moved like Dr. Barrère. He fell backward as if he had received a blow, and gazed at the mayor speechless, his under lip dropping, his face livid, heavy drops coming out upon his brow. It was not till he was appealed to in the sudden explanations that followed that the doctor came to himself. When he was addressed he seemed to wake as from a dream, and answered with difficulty; his lips parched, his throat dry, making convulsive efforts to moisten his tongue, and enunciate the necessary words. 'Heart disease—feared

all the time—' he said, as if he had partly lost the faculty of speech. The mayor looked sharply at him, as if suspecting something. What was it? intoxication? So early, and at such a time? But Dr. Barrère seemed to have lost all interest in what was proceeding. He cared nothing for their looks. He cared for nothing in the world. 'I'm of no further use here,' he said huskily, and went towards the door as if he were blind, pushing against one and another. When he had reached the door, however, he turned back. 'The poor fellow,' he said, 'the poor—victim was to be given to his family after—. It was a favour granted them. The removal was to be seen to—to-night; there is no reason for departing from that arrangement, I suppose?'

The officials looked at each other, not knowing what to say, feeling that in the unexpected catastrophe there was something which demanded a change, yet unable on the spur of the moment to think what it was. Then the mayor replied faltering, 'I suppose so. It need not make any change, do you think? The poor family—have enough to bear without vexing them with alterations.

Since there can be—no doubt—' He paused and looked, and shuddered. No doubt, oh no doubt! The execution would have been conducted with far less sensation. It was strange that such a shivering of horror should overwhelm them to see him lying so still upon that bed.

'Now I must go—to my rounds,' the doctor said. He went out, buttoning up his coat to his throat, as if he were shivering too, though it was a genial September morning, soft and warm. He went out from the dark prison walls into the sunshine like a man dazed, passing the horrible preparations on his way, the coffin! from which he shrank as if it had been a monster. Dr. Barrère's countenance was like that of a dead man. He walked straight before him as if he were going somewhere; but he went upon no rounds; his patients waited for him vainly. He walked and walked till fatigue of the body produced a general stupor, aiding and completing the strange collapse of the mind, and then mechanically, but not till it was evening, he went home. His housekeeper, full of anxious questions, was silenced by the look of his face, and had his dinner placed

hastily and silently upon the table, thinking the agitation of the day had been too much for him. Dr. Barrère neither ate nor drank, but he fell into a heavy and troubled sleep at the table, where he had seated himself mechanically. It was late when he woke, and dark, and for a moment there was a pause of bewilderment and confusion in his mind. Then he rose, went to his desk and took some money out of it, and his cheque-book. He took up an overcoat as he went through the hall. He did not so much as hear the servant's timid question as to when he should return. When he should return!

After the body of poor Jim had been brought back to his mother's house and all was silent there, in that profound hush after an expected calamity which is almost a relief, Agnes, not able to rest, wondering in her misery why all that day her lover had not come near them, had not sent any communication, but for the first time had abandoned them in their sorrow, stood for a moment by the window in the hall to look if, by any possibility, he might still be coming. He might have been detained by some pressing

call. He had neglected everything for Jim; he might now be compelled to make up for it—who could tell? Some reason there must be for his desertion. As she went to the window, which was on a level with the street, it gave her a shock beyond expression to see a pallid face close to it looking in—a miserable face, haggard, with eyes that were bloodshot and red, while everything else was the colour of clay—the colour of death. It was with difficulty she restrained a scream. She opened the window softly and said, 'Arnold! you have come at last!' The figure outside shrank and withdrew, then said, 'Do not touch me—don't look at me. I did it: to save him the shame——'

'Arnold, come in, for God's sake! don't speak so—Arnold——'

'Never, never more! I thought the reprieve would not come. I did it. Oh, never, never more!'

'Arnold!' she cried, stretching out her hands. But he was gone. Opening the door as quickly as her trembling would let her. the poor girl looked out into the dark street, into the night: but there was no one there.

Was it a dream, a vision, an illusion of

exhausted nature, unable to discern reality from imagination? No one ever knew: but from that night Dr. Barrère was never seen more in Poolborough, nor did any of those who had known him hear of him again. He disappeared as if he had never been. And if that was the terrible explanation of it, or if the sudden shock had maddened him, or if it was really he that Agnes saw, no one can tell. But it was the last that was ever heard or seen of Dr. Barrère.

ISABEL DYSART

CHAPTER I

'You will have to make up your mind, my bonnie woman. Lads like yon will not hang on for ever at the pleasure of a—bit slip of a creature like you.'

'You were going to call me a worse name,' cried Isabel.

'Well: I was maybe going to call you a little flirt of a thing that delighted in mischief, and in turning older folk round her little finger.'

'Whatever I do, I cannot turn you round my little finger, mother! You just sit there and smile, and hear everybody speak, and do what you've settled to do. I would sooner try to draw Edinburgh Castle down from the rock than to change your mind; and what do I care for Uncle John or Aunt Mary—or —or a few lads, if you make me say it: when you just sit smiling there like Arthur's Seat and never mind!'

'Well, my dear, you are grand with your similes; but the Castle Rock and Arthur's Seat are curious images for me.'

Mrs. Dysart looked out of the seat in the window which she always occupied, upon the objects of which she spoke. It was a small square window, placed in a deep little recess in the thick wall, filled with greenish glass in small panes: and the prospect visible from it was no less than the distant city of Edinburgh —the Castle Rock standing up upright through the mist, and the great Salisbury Crags, and the softer slope of Arthur's Seat clear to the east, in misty sunshine. These salient points were by so much the most important things in the landscape and world, that they continually came into the talk, as they were always in the vision, of the people about. The room inhabited by these two people was an old-fashioned, low-roofed room with five windows, from two or three of which this matchless view was to be seen. One of the others looked straight into a great ash, a sort of forest in itself; and the last was over a bright, old-fashioned garden full of flowers and light. The walls were covered with the abundant growth of a

jargonelle pear-tree, upon which the pears had lately hung thick, ripe, and beautiful to behold. The flowers in the garden were chiefly dahlias, brilliant though unattractive; but this was partially made up for by the beds of mignonette, in its full autumnal flower, filling the whole atmosphere with a mild sweetness. The house was all old-fashioned, and so was the mistress of it, sitting in what was considered in those days an easy-chair, with stiff arms and a high seat, which gave her a dignity of which our low and luxurious seats are destitute. She had her feet upon a footstool, and a work-table open at her side with all the implements of her sewing arranged in blue silk compartments. Her dress was of black silk, not high to the throat, but closing over a spotless handkerchief of white net; and she wore a long white muslin apron reaching almost to the bottom of her gown. Her white cap was tied by white ribbons under her chin. There could not have been a more pleasing picture of a mother; but this garb, though so pretty in itself, made her perhaps look older than a woman of her years should have looked. Our mothers were certainly older in those

days than the mothers of girls of twenty are now.

Isabel, however, was more than twenty by a few years. She had remained unmarried much beyond the tradition of her family, 'till it was just a scandal,' her aunt said. She was so far before her age that the mischance of being too well off, too happy at home, which interferes so much with marriages nowadays, showed itself already in this young woman, so advanced for her period; though, indeed, there was perhaps another obstacle in the fact that Isabel was the youngest—the only one left at home—and that when she finally made up her mind to leave her mother's house, Wallyford would be but a solitary place and Mrs. Dysart a dweller alone. I do not mean to assert for a moment that this fact would have prevented Isabel's marriage had she made up her mind; for Mrs. Dysart was not only a woman of great resolution, but of indomitable pride, and would no more have permitted a daughter's sacrifice than she would have allowed herself to stand in need of being taken care of. 'Me! to keep my bairn out of her natural life!' she would have said. There was a great deal of

philosophy in the well-braced-up and independent mind of a woman of the better class of rural respectability—having no pretension, however, to be of a county family or superior to her neighbours—in those days: and a strong stand for what was natural and lawful and of good report. If her heart sometimes sank to think what her lonely days and lonely house would be when Isabel was gone, yet no cloud was ever visible upon her comely forehead on this account. It was the course of Nature. The last thing in the world which she would have accepted or agreed to was that Isabel should not marry. That was inevitable; as for herself, she would make up her mind to it as mothers have had to do since the world began.

'My dear, it's easy to speak of the lads and of doing what you like with them, at present. I'll not say for the minister. He's so superior to you, Bell, that he will just say, "It's her way, poor lassie," and give in to you however camstairy you may be; but yon doctor-lad is a dour fellow. I would not like, for my part, to take it upon me to oppose him——'

'Superior to me!' cried Isabel; 'that's

not the way to make me take to him, mother —though I know you were always in his favour. Superior! I would like to see the man——'

'That would say that? He'll not say it, my dear; but he's a man that is above the common clashes and little ways of thinking. He would not even feel it; he would say to himself, "Poor bit thing; she has her nerves and so forth"; or, "She's more sensitive than I am"; or——'

'I know you were always in his favour, mother,' said Isabel stiffly. 'A minister! That goes above everything with some folk. And you never could put up with poor Willie Torrence.'

'Put up with him!' said Mrs. Dysart. 'I can put up with just anything. Have I not put up with your sister Jeanie's man, that makes me grind my teeth every word he speaks?—Oh yes, I'll put up with him! but how you are to do it, yourself——'

'We'll see about that,' said Isabel, flushed and rebellious. Opposition made her instinctively turn in the forbidden direction, which Mrs. Dysart was too wise a woman not to know. But our wisdom does not always

guide our actions: or perhaps, indeed, she meant to move her child to a decision whatever it might be—thinking that better than the uncertainty in which, so far as Isabel herself was concerned, there was a vague pleasure. 'The little cutty was fond of having all the lads in the parish after her,' her Aunt Mary said. It is to be hoped that there were more 'lads' (which is a word that ought to be pronounced, as everybody knows, with a very broad vowel—not exactly 'laud,' as it is written by the ignorant Southron, but something inclining thereto) in the parish of Tranent than the young minister and the young doctor; and perhaps it was scarcely respectful to call a 'placed minister'—not a young probationer, to whom the title is specially appropriate—a lad. But Nature will be Nature even when the gravest title is put before a young man's name. Bishops even and Reverend Doctors make love and marry, and lay themselves open to undignified appellations sometimes—and the Reverend Mr. Murray was a young man in fact as well as in sentiment. And he was a handsome young man, much more so than Torrence, the young doctor, whose qualities were as

different as possible from those of the mild Murray—a sharp, quick-witted, practical-minded, yet, in his grim way, enthusiastic medicine man, eager in everything that concerned his profession, and sure, everybody said, to rise in it.

That, perhaps, was one thing which attracted Isabel. She, too, was full of spirit and ambition, not content to settle down quietly and tend the sheep in the quiet parish in which she had been born, if there was a prospect of something more stirring and exciting outside in the bigger world. The stir of the atmosphere about Torrence, the new wonders of science and discovery of which he spoke, and even his contempt for the stagnation of the rural world about, had a charm for this inexperienced girl. And yet there were things that jarred. It is rare when there is not something that jars between a young man and a young woman thus hesitating before the decision. While the tide has not yet completely carried away their lingering feet, the steps always keep starting from each other more or less, here and there. The man has his own side of this question, which, to do him justice, he does not, either by himself

or his exponents, much dwell upon; but the girl's little starts and pauses, her moments of alarm and uncertainty, the quick impression of a moment against, as well as the impulse towards, the man who is her fate, are often very apparent and very interesting. Isabel was in this condition now. The tide was drawing her on sometimes with a very swift impulsion, swifter than she was at all aware of: but now and then there came a sudden start and stop.

Willie Torrence had been her playfellow when they were children, and she had been accustomed to his constant society all her life. She had a hundred recollections of him through all his boyhood, not all of them favourable; sometimes there would leap into her mind a sudden picture of something he had said or done years ago—something, nothing—a look, a gesture which would cause one of these starts aside—though, indeed, he had just been as other boys, and Isabel had always liked him. Nothing like this ever occurred in respect to young Mr. Murray, who was good, and *nice*, and handsome, and far more respectful, even reverential, of the woman in her than Torrence—so respectful,

indeed, that Isabel, knowing she was not Miranda or Rosalind, was sometimes a little humbled, but much oftener, I am afraid, amused by his persistent imputation of all their splendours and delights to a little country girl by no means accustomed to such poetical adoration. Torrence's light call to 'Bell,' whom he had so addressed when she was a baby, was often more congenial to her than the 'Miss Isabel,' with the accent on the first syllable of her name, which the minister uttered as if it were the name of a Queen: and yet——

'I wish,' said Mrs. Dysart, 'if you have nothing else to do, that you would go down to your uncle, Isabel, and see if there's any more news about these dreadful things in Edinburgh. It is the day for the *Courant*, and he will be very full of it. I am not a person for murders and such awful stories: but Lord bless us, a thing that is just a danger and a horror to us all——'

'What should we have to do with it in a quiet country place?' said Isabel: but she said it simply out of contradiction, with the natural instinct of a healthy girl. For as a matter of fact, she had herself been very much

more nervous about the bit of road which lay under the shadow of the old house of Wallyford, a great old roofless and ruinous mansion within a stone's throw of the little Wallyford of to-day—since the dreadful news had come from Edinburgh of the murders of Burke and Hare, which scared the whole countryside far more than any crime of a more usual kind could have done. It was such a horror and a mystery as might well disturb the imagination. And it was a bad time altogether for the popular fancy. Stories of resurrection men and of desecrated graves were rife, and chilled the mind with horror, and the dreadful revelation of mysterious murders, how many and by what means accomplished no one could yet tell, gave a sombre excitement to the public, which had not the incessant reports we have now to satisfy its curiosity and subdue its terrors. A weekly paper was the most that any one had to bring him information of what went on from day to day, and even that was a luxury which but few allowed themselves for their own enjoyment alone. 'A look at the *Courant*,' or a share with three or four others in the *Scotsman*, according to the politics of the reader, was all that most people allowed

themselves. Uncle John, as an old navy man, was staunch for Church and State, and took the *Courant*, while the *Scotsman* was Mrs. Dysart's paper. She had a kind of surreptitious advantage in consequence, getting as it were two sets of news.

The house of Wallyford was an old-fashioned two-storied house, with a rounded projection on one side for the ample staircase, which was lit by a large long window : a cosy kitchen downstairs, with a red brick floor, through which the family went and came, leaving the front door for great occasions, was occupied by one large and powerful maid-servant, who performed all the work of the house, and was capable of as much again, even though the caps and kerchiefs of the Mistress were, as Janet said, very 'fyky,' and took a great deal of ironing.

'You'll be gaun out, Miss Isabell,' said Jenny—with the accent on the last syllable—which was a self-evident observation.

'Yes, I am going out,' said Isabel ; 'and, Jenny, you'll mind to take my mother her cup of tea.'

'The Mistress'll no want while I'm to the fore,' said Jenny with a glance of indignation.

Five-o'clock tea did not exist formally in these primitive days, but 'a cup of tea' has always been an institution.—'And you'll be hame yoursel in good time?' Jenny added, coming out to the door to look after her young mistress. 'The days are just creeping in dreadful, and the road's lonesome in the dark.'

To this Isabel vouchsafed no reply. The road was not lonesome to her, who knew every step of it, if it was not perhaps just that bit already referred to where the great ruined house of Wallyford stood out with its roofless gables against the sky, casting a shadow which was blacker than anything Isabel knew. It was a bright October afternoon, and the sun was still high over Edinburgh Castle, shining red through the misty atmosphere and smoke which gave its name to Old Reekie. The trees were almost as bright in their garments of many colours as the sky—save those big ashes which still retained their green, and added to the shadows round the old house. Isabel went briskly along towards Musselburgh in her short-waisted, long-skirted pelisse of dark blue cloth, a slim figure with the lightest step in the world skimming over the long road. She was turning over her own little problem

in her mind—which, indeed, was no little problem to her, but concerned her whole life—when she set out: but the air and the freshness of the ruddy afternoon, lighted up by the glory of the trees, all red and golden, and the warmth of the sun, which threw a long shadow in front of her as she went towards Musselburgh, and the distant gleam of the bay before, its great waters glowing and heaving in the ruddy westering light—soon blew away everything save that nameless exhilaration of youth which movement and exercise and air bring back, whatever pre-occupation may have momentarily driven it away. Isabel had forgotten all about Burke and Hare, and indeed had ceased entirely to think of Willie Torrence and the Rev. James Murray, for some time before she arrived at the door of her Uncle John, who lived in a cosy little house surrounded by a shrubbery, on the way to the sea.

Uncle John was an old sailor, not holding any very high grade in the navy, but dignified in his retirement by the title of Captain; and his wife, a pretty little round-faced woman, fond of pink ribbons in her cap and everything that was cheerful. The old skipper took his

walk to Fisherrow every morning to the pier and harbour, to give his opinion upon the weather and hear what boats were out, and the fish that had been caught, and anything that might have happened to the *Lively Peggy* or the *Bonnie Jean*, or any other of the little red-sailed, heavy-timbered fleet. But that duty accomplished, without which it was doubtful whether the little port and the proper sequence of good and bad weather could have been duly regulated, established himself for the rest of the day in his dining-room, he on one side of the fire, and his wife on the other, not ill-pleased to hear a visitor at the door. It was a high day when it was the day for the newspaper, into which he plunged the moment his early dinner was over, while she sat patient, yet excited, waiting for the pieces of news which he read aloud. People thought it rather grand and decidedly extravagant of Captain John to take in the *Courant* for his own reading, instead of thriftily sharing the price with two or three neighbours : but then, to be sure, he and his wife had no children, no sons to set out in the world, which made a great difference : and they were very good about lending it in the end of the week. The

newspaper day was the only day when this good couple did not care for visitors, and it was with an exclamation of relief that Aunt Mary cried out, 'Eh, it's just Easabell,' when the door opened, making the girl 'Come in to the fire,' with a delighted welcome. 'Ye'll no disturb your uncle in his reading; and I have just an uncommon fine seedcake, new cut, to keep you going,' she whispered, setting Isabel down on a chair close to her uncle, who patted her arm affectionately, by way of greeting, as he went on. There was nothing unusual in this welcome to Isabel, who accepted the slice of cake with a smile, and did her best to bring down her mind to Uncle John's reading, which was emphatic if not very steady, since the good man had a way of losing his place.

'You're a great interruption to the reading,' said the old gentleman, when this happened, patting Isabel again with his large soft hand. 'You little thing, you put everything out of her head. She was breathless a moment since to hear of Burke and Hare—and now she's forgotten everything but a piece for Isabell.'

'It's an awful story,' said Aunt Mary, sitting down again. 'It's gruesome to hear of such things.'

'Such things! There's been nothing like it in my time,' said Uncle John. 'And these doctors—I cannot think but they're just as bad as the murderers themselves.' He brought down his fist upon the table with a subdued exclamation, which was not adapted for publication. 'I'd swing them up to the yard-arm alongside of the butchers themselves,' he cried.

'Oh John!' cried Aunt Mary; 'well-educated, clever men!'

'And all the worse for that,' said the sea-captain—then he resumed his reading; and Isabel, too, fell under the fascination of the terrible tale. Besides, was not that what she had come for, to take the fresh news to her mother? What with the reading, and what with the commentaries upon it, the twilight had begun to fall before she sprang up and declared she must run home. 'Before it gets dark. I'll be frightened to pass the old house,' cried the girl.

This was the reason why she was so late on the road, which indeed was lonesome in the dark, though so familiar. Isabel hurried on with her heart beating, and a sensation of fright quite unusual to her. I remember,

many years later, how almost every child in Scotland trembled for the possibility of something pouncing upon it out of every dark corner, a dreadful hand upon its mouth. To hear of that traffic in death when it had just happened was certainly more appalling still. She hurried along, trying to think of something else, until there rose before her the great old house of Wallyford, its roofless gables relieved against a sky still blue in the lingering evening light, but casting shadows of inky darkness on the road which wound under its walls. What a place for a horrible wretch to start out to seize unseen the hapless victim! To be sure, these men were in prison; they could do no more harm—but—; to be sure, there never were any villains like that about our countryside: to be sure——

But just as she came to the edge of the shadow, something did dart out upon Isabel. She gave a great cry of horror, and fled, but was caught by a strong arm. And then there rang a loud laugh into her ears. 'Did you think I was going to Burke you, Bell?'

But the shock was too much for the girl. 'Oh, Willie Torrence, Willie Torrence, how dare you frighten me so?' she cried, and

burst into wild tears. In his arms! it made her furious afterwards to remember—but at the moment she had no power of escape from that bold kiss with which he took advantage of the panic he had caused.

CHAPTER II

ISABEL ran upstairs to her own room in the dark, leaving him to make his way to the cheerful dining-room, where Mrs. Dysart sat wondering why her child should be so long of coming, and feeling a great relief when the sound of the opening door and Jenny's voice with its cry of, 'Eh, but you're late, Miss Isabell; and the Mistress waiting for her tea!' announced her return—though it was accompanied by the bass voice of Willie Torrence with its usual laugh and banter. 'She might have thought I was not caring to see that man to-night,' Mrs. Dysart said to herself with a little indignation, feeling that Isabel made a very bad return for her warning in thus flaunting her lover at the first opportunity in her mother's face. But Isabel flew upstairs with her face all smarting and glowing in the dark, and shut her door, and flung

herself into a chair, half sobbing with the thump of her heart against her breast. She was angry and frightened and indignant, and yet full of awe, feeling as if some mysterious bond had been drawn between herself and Torrence by that kiss, which made her countenance flame with shame and horrified alarm. She had not, oh, not by a very long way! made up her mind that she would accept Torrence if he offered himself to her. She had not arrived at any such resolution as yet: but she felt as if he had bound her, secured her against her will, made a link between them which it would be deeper shame still to break, now that he had kissed her, a thing which nothing short of a troth-plight could justify. She held her hand upon the place, to hide it, even though it was dark and nobody could see; then, as she recovered her breath a little, sprang up again and bathed and bathed it to take away the stain. Isabel's little chamber occupied the opposite corner of the house to the drawing-room, with two greenish windows in two deep recesses, looking towards the sea, which was not visible, but only showed a clearness in the distance through the openings of the trees. She had

no light but the faint glimmer from the evening skies and one little star, which shone through a pane, and was reflected in an old-fashioned long mirror upon the opposite wall. Though it was not nearly a century ago, Isabel had no means of making a light, such as are so familiar to us that we cannot realise what people did before they were invented. There were no matches in those days. She threw off her pelisse in the dark, not seeing, though she felt, how her cheek burned between the shame and the cold water, and how impossible it would ever be to rub out the spot which had been made upon it; and then very reluctantly smoothed her hair and took a clean handkerchief, smelling of lavender, from her drawers, and went down, still in the dark, pressing the fresh cambric upon the burning spot. When she went into the dining-room, her eyes dazzled by the light of the candles, and her hair still a little ruffled —for it was apt to curl by nature, and the water she had flung about her face had got upon it and aggravated this tendency—and found her mother calmly seated there and talking to Willie Torrence, who looked up at her as she came in, with perfect composure,

yet a twinkle in his eye, from the side of the fire—Isabel felt as if she were the guilty person, keeping behind backs to hide her secret and terrified to catch her mother's eye.

'You are very late, Isabel,' Mrs. Dysart said. 'I was beginning to think of sending out Jenny with the lantern; for that's a very dreary bit of the road by old Wallyford House, and I know you don't like to pass it in the dark.'

'It was just there I met Miss Bell,' said Torrence; 'so she was all safe. None of your ghosts will come near a doctor, nor yet a tramp—and they're the only dangers here.'

'There's no telling what the dangers are,' said Mrs. Dysart dryly.—'Will you just ring the bell, my dear, and tell Jenny to bring ben the tea? Dr. Torrence will take some with us; she can bring another cup: and the scones have been ready this half-hour past.—Bless me, bairn,' she cried, as Isabel came within the centre of the light, which proceeded from two candles, set in heavy tall silver candlesticks in the middle of the table, with a snuffer-tray between them, 'what is the matter with your cheek? It's as red as

fire, and a spot upon it as if it had been stung.'

'It was the midges,' said Isabel, not daring to lift up her eyes.

'The midges. It's too cold for midges now. It's more like the sting of some stupefied bee, booming against you in the dark. Let me see it. You must get some of my goulard water to bathe the inflammation away.'

'It's nothing,' said Isabel, turning her back. 'It's just the cold water that did it. It's nothing—it's nothing! Oh, mother, if you would just let me be!'

Here happily came the interruption of Jenny bringing in, upon a large tray, the pile of hot scones wrapped in a napkin, the urn full of water just on the boil, the silver teapot and tea-caddy. The table was already laid with a glistening, snow-white tablecloth, and many crystal dishes of jams and preserves, and the cups and the saucers arranged at the opposite end of the table. Isabel was very glad to be busy, lighting the lamp under the urn, and preparing to 'mask' the tea. It gave her a little pause to compose herself beyond her mother's scrutiny, and the wicked

glances which Willie Torrence, she knew, was casting upon her from the side of the fire. Meanwhile, the conversation that had been interrupted at her entrance was resumed.

'It's an awesome thing,' said Mrs. Dysart, 'to think of the poor relics of humanity being made a traffic of, even if it were nothing worse. They tell me the light at Inveresk churchyard is to be seen all through the night, and the men sitting with their guns. It's a terrible thing for you doctors to encourage; and you might have known what it would lead to. Oh, but I cannot think, though you will probably scoff at me, that the doctors are not much to blame.'

'And how do you expect we are to cure you of all your ailments, if we do not know the structure of your bodies,' said Torrence, 'and how every bone and muscle lies?'

'Indeed, I have no expectations of the sort,' said Mrs. Dysart with a heightened colour. This lady blushed to think that any man should know how her bones and muscles were put together. It was very indelicate, she thought, especially before a young thing, sitting there at the end of the table, whom this man professed to be in love with—if a

doctor, thinking like that, could ever be in love!

'Well, I know you're no believer in doctors. You think it's a finer thing to cobble the soul than the body,' he said with his loud laugh.

'And that's scarcely a pretty speech to make to a lady,' said Mrs. Dysart, offended; but she felt that to quarrel with a man, whom, after all, her daughter might marry, was not judicious—and she was grand at putting up with people when it was necessary—witness Jeanie's man! 'Is there no other way that you can make your studies but that horrible way?' she said.

And he laughed again. 'Unless there were windows in the living subject that you could see through,' he said. 'I allow that might be a better way.'

'And so,' said Mrs. Dysart severely, 'you throw the doors open to murder—that you may find out the secrets of your awful, awful trade.'

'Come, come,' he said; 'after all, not to say yourself, for you're bigoted, but Miss Bell now, if she were ill—you would soon send man and horse, by day or night, to get old

Bogle maybe out of his comfortable bed, to see what was wrong and put it right.'

'Old Bogle, as you call him—he's just a very respectable man of my own age—has more experience than your whole College of Physicians put together. But it's no out of the grave he gets it, nor yet from murdered men,' said Mrs. Dysart solemnly. She was full of the prejudices of her time, carried to a height of fanaticism by the occurrences with which at that moment every echo rang.

'Well, he's not much of a man, I know,' said Torrence; 'but I've every reason to believe he went through his classes like the rest. Don't take away an honest man's character, Mrs. Dysart: though he's old-fashioned, I'm well aware—and I, for one, would not trust Miss Bell's life, if there was a question of that, in his hands.'

At this the mother, suddenly seeing a vision of Isabel, her youngest, the only one remaining that was wholly hers, in the charge of an untrustworthy doctor—who was an old wife, as she knew in her secret heart—and perhaps swimming for her life with no better succour at hand, gasped and was silent, not knowing what other word to say.

At this, Isabel's voice suddenly rose from the other end of the table, where she sat shielded by the urn and teapot, the hot spot in her cheek gradually cooling down. 'Uncle John says that the doctors must have known these poor folk came by their death in no just way.'

'Eh, what's this?' cried Mrs. Dysart. 'Uncle John!' she repeated with an intonation which was not quite respectful. She did not think her brother-in-law was a Solomon. 'It is just like him,' she said indignantly. 'I am no great lover of doctors, as you all know; but to think of a set of men, with an education and all the advantages, conniving at a crime! No, no; you'll not tell me that.'

'I'm glad you do us justice so far,' said the young doctor. But he was a little subdued in tone. 'It is just one of the things that the vulgar are sure to say.'

Isabel recovered her spirit in the face of opposition, a wholesome and natural effect. 'I don't know who you call the vulgar,' she cried, 'but I think it was quite reasonable what Uncle John said. All your learning is to make you see in a moment what has happened. When I tell Dr. Bogle, whom

you think so little of, that I have a headache, he says: "Yes, it's from so-and-so, and so-and-so." And if you that are so much cleverer cannot tell when a poor person has been murdered, murdered! oh, that's not possible,' Isabel said.

'Miss Bell,' said Torrence, 'was so frightened with me appearing out of the shadows, she thought it was Burke himself, and was for off, like an arrow flying from me, till I came up with her, and—showed her it was me.'

Oh, to taunt her with it! to triumph over her on the strength of it—such a hateful, hateful insult! But Isabel's courage was taken from her, and she retreated, choking with anger and shame, behind the urn once more.

'But it is very reasonable what she says,' said her mother, reflecting. 'It's more reasonable than most things that come from John Dysart's muckle mouth.—Oh! I'm not blaming you, Willie, that had nothing to do with it; but a man that is at the top of the tree, and knows the human frame as—I know my stocking that I'm knitting: Lord help us! that's far the worst I've heard yet. It just

makes the blood run cold in your veins; they must have known! How could they help but know, Willie Torrence, I ask you? Oh, man, man, what a dreadful thought! Them that are bred up and nourished and trained upon pheesic all their days! and get a grand character from it, and so much thought of—how could they help but know? When there's dreadful deeds done of that kind, a doctor's always called at the trial to tell what it's been; and will you tell me that they couldn't see it here?'

'Well, Mrs. Dysart, if they were called to a trial and had their attention attracted to it, of course they would know.'

'Their attention attracted! to cold-blooded horrible murder!'

'How can I convince you,' said the young doctor, 'that unless your attention was called to it, that's not the thing you would remark? Science is a far grander affair than the way a man came by his death: that's just an accident: we must all die, and soon or syne it doesn't matter so much to the world. But knowledge is most excellent—the very song says that. And how can we tell what's to be done for our patients if we don't study and

study every nerve and every line? It becomes just a passion with some men—the chief, for instance, who is one of the greatest surgeons that ever lived. There's nothing in the world so beautiful to him or so engrossing, or such a grand pursuit, as anatomy. And when you're watching him and hearing him speak, and seeing him trace out, let us say the—— But no; I need not put names to the things to you, for you would not understand, and you would perhaps be horrified; but it's better than any play upon the stage, it's grander than any exhibition—you watch with your eyes louping in your head, and your ears tingling, and are just carried away!'

There was a little pause, for the young doctor spoke as an enthusiast, and enthusiasm has always the power of silencing the objections and impressing the minds of onlookers, especially if they are women. It was not till after an interval, recovering herself with a nod of her head in half-sympathy and admiration, that Mrs. Dysart resumed.

'I am not saying but what that's true. There's a great power in a clever man's utterance, though it is a gruesome subject. And I'm not blaming you, that are maybe

only a student, Willie—though you are a passed doctor, are you not?'

'Oh ay, I'm a passed doctor,' he replied with a half-laugh.

'Well: but a student still, always a student, I suppose, in these terrible ways? for they say more is found out every day. But, Willie, allowing for the Professor that might, as you say, be carried away by his subject, or the students that might have their heads turned, after him—my man, there must be some cool-headed reasonable person, say a colleague or an assistant or something, that would have his eyes open and would know. Will you tell me that there would be no one that would have his attention attracted, that could take a wonder where all these poor creatures came from, and would *know?* Oh, don't tell me that, Willie Torrence! for it would give me a poor, poor opinion of the doctors to whom we have to trust our lives!'

'I thought you could not have a poorer opinion of them than you have already,' he said with a subdued laugh.

'Oh laddie! but that's a different thing, a different thing altogether! giving a jibe at them for professing to know more than ever

was intended by their Maker, that's one thing —but to think of them as conniving at a dreadful, dreadful crime!—And there must be somebody — somebody that's not an enthusiast, that would have his brain clear, an assistant, or a dresser, or whatever you call it——'

'A dresser has only to do with patients—and is quite an inferior—and would not dare to have an opinion,' Torrence said with a flush of something like anger. 'The Professor's assistant would ill like to be put on that level.—But I must be going,' he added quickly, pushing back his chair as he rose. 'I've no right to be here at all, if I was not very weak-minded and subject to temptation. You'll excuse me if I run away. I have to catch the last coach into Edinburgh, or else walk, and it's a long trail six miles at this time of the night.'

'Dear me, you've but little time to catch the coach,' said Mrs. Dysart.—'Isabel, go you and let him out at the front door. It saves a good bit of road.—Good-night, then, good-night—we'll finish our argument the next time you are here.'

Isabel went out very unwillingly, and yet

not without a little tremor of anticipation, into the dark passage with her lover, between whom and herself she felt that such a bond existed as between her and no other man on earth, notwithstanding that every sentiment of her nature had been stirred up against him by his unwarrantable act. She was not surprised, though very angry, to feel his arm round her as she stood with her face to the door turning the stiff key and loosing the bolts. 'Bell,' he whispered in her ear behind her, 'I'm maybe going off to London, to London, do you hear? with a grand opening. Will you not give me your hand, and come with me, and be a lady all your life? I have a grand opening, better than I ever hoped: and I'll be Sir William, and you my lady, I give you my word for it, before all's done!'

'Mr. Torrence,' said Isabel with great dignity, 'if you waste another moment, you'll lose the last coach.'

He laughed, as she opened the door quickly into the clearness of the night, sheltering herself behind it, and compelling him to pass out: but then he lingered a moment and came back on the step. 'Think of it,' he said hurriedly; 'I'll come back for

your answer.' Then leaning towards her: 'And give me another, my bonnie Bell, before I go away.'

It would be impossible to describe in words the fury, the passion, the desperation of displeasure with which Isabel dashed the door in his face. As she stood in the darkness, inside, trying to recover herself, she heard his laugh in the air as he hurried away. Another! as if she had been a consenting party! This insult was worse even than the first, and harder to bear.

CHAPTER III

THE fumes of that excitement still troubled Isabel's brain next day. She scarcely heard what her mother was talking of during all the rest of the evening, and the first thing that came into her mind when she woke was that incident in the dark road—the big gables against the sky, the blackness of the shadows, and the encounter—which she thought had marked her for life. It seemed to her, as she dressed, that there was still a red spot on her cheek where *that* had been, and that he had put a brand upon her to mark her for his property, as the farmers do with their sheep. She rubbed it once more till it did really blaze, as she fancied, and again called Mrs. Dysart's attention. 'It must really have been a bee that stung you, Isabel. What a strange thing at this time of year,' her mother said.

And then there was the thought of what he had said at parting. He would come for his answer to-morrow. To-morrow! That was now this day. And why should there be such a hurry for an answer, and what did he mean by going to London? There had never been a word about it before — going to London! — when he was in the heart of everything in Edinburgh, and with the greatest doctor in Edinburgh, and so much thought of there. Never had such an idea been suggested till now. To London! The thought made Isabel's heart beat a little. None of her sisters had gone farther afield than Glasgow, and that was Jeanie, whose man Mrs. Dysart put up with so painfully, and who was never done flourishing the shops in Buchanan Street and the conveniences of a big town before the eyes of her mother and sisters. What would they think of a London lady that could walk in the parks, and see all the grand shows, and the King himself in the streets? Isabel's bosom could not but thrill in spite of herself with that suggestion. But what was all the hurry for, and an answer to-morrow, and everything brought to a crisis in a moment? The more she thought it all

over, the more her head went round. Willie Torrence had been her sweetheart all her life. That their intercourse might come to a sudden crisis at any moment, had always been a thing possible—but nothing so hasty, so immediate as this. To be summoned to accede to a sudden proposal, to take his hand and come with him, as if it was a thing which she was sure to do for the asking, and for which she was quite ready, was in itself an offence almost beyond pardon, even if there had not been the bold freedom, the outrage—for so the girl felt it—of the previous incident. What did Isabel care if he were Sir William twenty times over, and who was he that he should dare to think she would take him whenever he pleased to ask her? Her pride and her spirit were all in arms.

It added no little to Isabel's excitement that the young minister should choose this day of all others to make one of his visits. He came in early in the afternoon, coming through the garden, and was seen by Mrs. Dysart from the window, who exclaimed at the sight of him, 'Bless me, Isabel—Mr. Murray with a gun over his shoulder! What will be going to happen now? the volunteers

called out, and even the minister under arms? But that would mean an Invasion at the very least, and there's no Bonaparty to trouble the world now.'

Isabel was not interested by the prospect of an invasion, though her heart gave a jump to hear the minister with his light, active foot come upstairs. 'I'll take care o' it, sir—I'll take care o' it—if it disna gang aff of itsel,' Jenny was heard to call after him as the drawing-room door opened; and Mrs. Dysart plunged into the subject before the young man had found a chair. 'Was that you, Mr. Murray, carrying a gun?' she said. 'Lord bless me! I just cried out: "There'll be word of a new invasion." But perhaps it was just for a day's shooting, after all? There's no harm I know of,' she added apologetically, 'why a minister should not shoot a bird for his dinner as well as other men.'

'Not that,' he said with a smile; 'neither the one nor the other—but nothing very cheerful. I am going to take my turn to-night in the churchyard to watch our graves, that there may be no desecration. I have been up to Mr. Philip Morton's to borrow his gun.'

'But, dear me,' said Mrs. Dysart, 'there are surely plenty of men without the minister.'

'And why should the minister be behind when there's unpleasant work to do?' he asked. 'They do not like it, as how should they: and neither do I like it: but I would watch night and day,' he said, with a hasty rising of colour, 'before that last resting-place of my poor folk was disturbed—if it was to cost me my life.'

'And that it might well do,' cried Mrs. Dysart; 'for you're not too strong a man: you should mind that.'

'I am strong enough for my duty, as I think every man is,' he replied; 'it's never that that harms.'

'But there's very different notions on that point. Here was Willie Torrence maintaining with me the other night that a doctor's duty was just the other way; and he was earnest about it too, as earnest as you are,' Mrs. Dysart said.

Murray gave a quick unconscious glance round the room, which seemed to him in a moment to be full of traces of his rival: he saw them in Isabel's silent air bending over her work, as if entirely absorbed in it, taking

no notice of anything, she who generally was so ready to take her part in the conversation. He gave her a long regretful look, of which she was partly conscious, though she never lifted her eyes.

'And I would not say he was wrong,' he answered with a sigh. 'He's an enthusiast for his profession, as every man should be. I would not say he was wrong. But,' added the minister, 'I wanted you to tell poor Mrs. Anderson, if you'll be so kind, I've kept a special eye upon *that* spot. She will know what I mean; and all is safe, as safe as if her arms had been about the place.'

'Where her little Jeanie lies,' said Mrs. Dysart, her eyes filling with tears. 'Oh, Mr. Murray, you know what's in a mother's heart.'

'I have had one of my own,' he said with a glimmer in his eyes also.

How did Isabel know what all that meant? She never looked up, did not listen, but kept going over in her head the utterance of another voice: 'I'll be Sir William some day, and you my lady.' Very different—very much more interesting than this dreary talk of midnight watches and of graves—hot with life and ambition and excitement, things that

made the blood flow fast in your veins—and yet—— Her eyes were on her work all the time, and her needle flying as if for bare life: but she felt everything that was passing, and the conclusion to which her other lover was making up his mind. He, too, was acquiescing, putting her into the arms that had seized her so boldly, believing that she was ready to follow Willie Torrence as soon as he held up his finger. The girl felt as if she could have jumped up and cried aloud, and rejected that bold suit there and then.—To whom? To her mother and to the other, who was relinquishing his hopes so easily? Would they have known what she meant if she had cried out that 'No,' only 'No,' no more, which almost burst from her lips? They would have thought it nerves or temper, or perhaps an indignant throwing off of every blame from the other — the man she was supposed to love. When she rose to give her hand to the minister, and met his wistful regretful look, which seemed to question her very soul, her spirit rose in wild impatience, 'You should not find fault,' she cried hastily, 'with them that are not here to answer for themselves.'

'Isabel!' cried her mother in dismay.

'And I don't,' said the minister, with a slight quivering of his lip; 'I find no fault. I just hold by my side, as he holds to his. We must all do that, if we're to act like men.'

'Bairn, what are you thinking of?' said Mrs. Dysart.—'She is just a great one for standing up for the absent,' she added, in an apologetic tone, as young Murray went away. But she, too, made up her mind that Isabel's choice was fixed, and that this great question was to be held in doubt no more. They both stood watching the minister go through the garden with his gun, involuntarily, almost unaware what they were doing in the preoccupation of their minds. Going away, Mrs. Dysart thought, carrying with him all her hopes of seeing Isabel established near her, and in the care of a good man. Her heart was heavy with doubts and fears for what might be before her child. 'You will maybe be sorry some day,' she said with a sigh.

'Sorry—for what?' said Isabel: and then she threw her work aside and hastened to her room, to put on her blue pelisse and hurry out—where? for a walk—for a long walk, she said to Jenny in the kitchen.—It was such

a fine day—at this season it was best to take advantage of every fine day——

Isabel did take a long walk, and as she came back, passed through Musselburgh, where there were more people than usual in the streets, and some apparent commotion which was no less unusual. She could not but hear some scraps of talk as she passed—something about a riot in Edinburgh, and some one who would have to flee the country—of which she took no conscious notice. What did a riot in Edinburgh matter to her? If she had thought of it, she would have taken care not to pass by Uncle John's house on her way home: but her mind was so full of other things that she never remembered this danger, until she had been seen and hailed from the window, where there was generally a watch kept in the afternoon, lest Isabel should go by. She was very reluctant to be thus stopped, her mind being too full for talk, and for finding answers to all Aunt Mary's questions. And what was worse still, here again was Mr. Murray, to whom she had betrayed herself so short a time before, and who met her with the same wistful, half-compassionate, half-reproachful look, as if—which was more

ridiculous than all the rest—she was doing any injury to him. But to resist Aunt Mary's entreaty was impossible. 'I was just wanting somebody to send upon a message to your mother—and the minister was offering to take it up himself, though it's a mile or more out of his way.'

'That's nothing, nothing!' young Murray cried.

'You're very kind,' said Aunt Mary; 'but now that Easabell's here, she can take it herself. Your mother will be dreadfully shocked, my darlin', and so will you your own self. It's just awful news.'

'There's a new edition of the *Courant* with it all in: and nothing but a change in the ministry, or rebellion in the colonies, or the King's serious illness, would in an ordinary way justify that,' said Uncle John. He had the paper all crisp and new in his hands. 'I got it as a regular subscriber, sent out by an express; and by this time that bit slip of paper is worth its weight in gold. Your mother will like to see it. It's more satisfactory than hearing of a thing like that just by word of mouth.'

'What is it, Uncle John?'

'It's not said,' cried Aunt Mary, 'that ainy-

body is blamed but just the Professor himself: the rioters were just keen after him: and his house has been mobbed and all his windows broken.'

'And they say he will have to flee the country,' the minister added in a solemn tone.

'I heard that in the town,' said Isabel, still indifferent, 'something about fleeing the country. But who is it? It cannot be these terrible villains, Burke and Hare?'

'My dear,' said Uncle John, 'it's worse in one way, though not in another. These fiends in human shape are safe in prison; and I'm hoping they'll go out from there only by the gallows. But to think of a Professor in Edinburgh College, and one of the first surgeons in the world, and an elder of the kirk, and a very respectable man——'

'Lord bless us!' cried Aunt Mary, 'it's enough to make a person mistrust the General Assembly itsel.'

'I am in a hurry to get back,' said Isabel shortly. She knew in her inmost soul that Mr. Murray would propose to 'see her home,' and this was more alarming to her than any news that could be in the papers—or so at least she thought.

There was a little trill of voices all beginning to speak at once ; but Uncle John rose up in his large seafaring person from his chair and dominated them all, waving the paper in his hand. 'Where do you think,' he said impressively, 'the last of these puir victims was found?—Isabel! in a box, in a cellar, in one of the grand new Edinburgh houses, the house of Stokes, the great Professor.'

'Dr. Stokes—that all the College folk were so proud of, and his name in all the papers!' cried Aunt Mary breathless.

Murray said no word ; but he placed a chair carefully behind Isabel, as if she might faint or fall.

'Dr. Stokes!' said Isabel, still unawakened. 'Yes, I know about him : he is the man that —— But he is nothing to us. I'll tell my mother ; but she will not be caring so very much.—You may keep your paper, Uncle John, and I must just run away home.'

'You don't understand, Isabel. If it was just him and no more! But there are others that cannot be forgotten when he's named. Oh, the shame to our College and all our grand doctors! But there's more still, more than that.'

'You see, they must all have known,' said Aunt Mary, 'not just one person alone.'

And the minister shook his head. 'Knowing all they know, I fear, I fear,' he said, 'they must have known.'

Isabel's head began to clear slowly: it had been confused with so many thoughts of her own, and had refused to take in any new thing: but now a sharp pang like a knife cut all the web of these thoughts and sent them flying away. 'Dr. Stokes,' she repeated, faltering; 'I—begin to mind. He's the chief that—that they all speak about: he's a great man.'

'Great in one way, not, it appears, in another,' said Uncle John with solemnity. 'I would say nothing if it was only him that was in question; for, as you say, Isabel, my dear, he's nothing to us; but there's more, more to think of than only him.'

'It's that poor, poor woman down by Eskside that I'm thinking of most,' added Aunt Mary, shaking her head.

Isabel had by this time come fully to herself: it had flashed upon her like a wild blaze of fire, lighting up the whole landscape, what they meant: but she would not allow it

to be seen how she was moved. 'I'll take my mother the paper,' she said, holding herself up with a sort of dignity, 'since you wish it, Uncle John: and tell her. I am sorry for Dr. Stokes, if—if anything happens to him, such a great man; but it's no—no—business of ours.—I must not stop another moment,' she cried hurriedly, 'for I was a little late last night, and the days are short, and it's soon dark.'

'If I might see you home, Miss Isabel!'

Aunt Mary frowned behind Isabel's back and shook her head. 'Let her be, let her be; this is no the moment,' she said.

Isabel herself took no notice of his petition; she hurried away, not even hearing him, preserving her composure with a great effort, but with a strange singing in her ears and beating in her heart. She seemed to have heard it all before—to have heard nothing else discussed—yet to have listened without understanding: till suddenly it was brought home to her what it all meant. Oh, what would it have mattered to her how much or how little the doctors knew? What were the doctors to Isabel? or even Dr. Stokes, though he was the greatest surgeon in

Edinburgh, and people came from far and near to his classes. The doctors must have known—she had heard nothing but this for twenty-four hours past. But why should she care? The doctors! What were the doctors to her? She repeated this over to herself with a strange bravado, saying the words again and again, as if that would make them true. But her whole brain was on fire, and there was a tightening and oppression in her breast such as Isabel had never felt before.

As she set her face to the wind, it came blowing down keen upon her, bringing voices upon it in broken gusts, flinging words and indistinct phrases in her face, sometimes like the noise of a distant tumult: 'He'll have to flee the country: he's been mobbed, and his windows broken: he'll have to flee the country,' in a hurry and roar of many voices. And then one small note came in, her mother's voice, saying: 'There would be an Assistant or somebody'; and then another—oh, quite another! that said in the dark—'I'm going to London, with a grand opening—and to-morrow I'll come for my answer.' Then the clamour seemed to rise once more over all the dim landscape, the voice of the crowd:

'He'll have to flee the country, flee the country, flee the country!' What a wild, hurrying, dizzying tumult and confusion of sound!

This strong excitement yet confusion which drove her along took all her girlish fright away when she came again to the dark corner of the road. The heavy shadows of the old house had no terrors for her that night. It was not so late, indeed, as the evening before. The sky was clear and still full of light, though there had already risen into it one clear little inquisitive star, the very star that had shone into her window last night and reflected itself in the mirror on her wall. It seemed to have come out now to look after Isabel, to make sure what she was going to do. And she was not surprised, though her heart gave a jump, when something detached itself from the shadow and a figure came forward to meet her. There was no jest of pouncing upon her this time, none of the rough play which had been carried to such unwarrantable lengths the night before. Her hands and her feet grew cold and her head hot in her sense of the great crisis in her life that had

suddenly arrived: but she went on to meet him silently, as if they were both figures in a dream. 'So it's you,' she said to him with a catch in her breath as they came together. 'Isabel! you've brought me my answer,' he said. And then they stood and looked at each other in the stillness of the twilight: and a confusion of all those strange echoes came once more over Isabel's brain. 'Will you have to flee the country?' she said slowly. It seemed the only thing there was to say.

'What do you mean—what do you mean? I am not going to flee the country,' he cried indignantly, though with no surprise in his tone. It seemed natural to him, too, that these were the only words she could say.

'And all the time,' said Isabel, 'all the time it was you: and you knew.'

'What are you talking about, Bell? Do you want to mystify me altogether? I'm come for my answer after what passed between us last night. Are you coming with me? That's the question before the house,' said Torrence with a forced laugh.

'They say he has been mobbed and his windows broken; and he's in danger of

his life. Oh, Willie! are they after you too?'

'I think you are out of your senses,' he cried. 'Give me no nonsense, but an honest answer. There's great things before me yet: I'll make a lady of you, Bell; you shall have a finer house than any of them, and a carriage, and there's no telling what we'll come to. Just put your hand in mine.'

'What is the difference between fleeing the country and hurrying away to London, that you never thought of before?' she said. 'Oh, Willie Torrence! and your mother? and all of us that were so proud of you.'

'You may be as proud as you like,' he cried desperately; 'a man may make a mistake and be none the worse. I'll be Sir William before all's done. The London hospitals know a man when they see him, not like those asses in Edinburgh. I'm safe enough. Come, Bell, give me your hand.'

'Oh,' cried Isabel, sinking her voice, 'you were never cruel nor an ill man. Willie! will you say you did not know?'

'What has that to do with it?' he cried, dashing his clenched hand into the air. 'I came here to ask a question, not to answer

one. Bell! just you mind what you're doing! You're letting your chance slip as well as mine.'

'I'm going home to my mother: and I've nothing more to say to you, Dr. Torrence,' Isabel said.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT a strange interruption of the tranquil composure of the little retired country-house would that have been which might have occurred at Wallyford when Isabel walked into it all flaming and throbbing from this encounter, if the atmosphere and the still walls had taken notice of any such things! But they do not, happily for the human creatures who breathe in and inhabit them. The quiet house, and Jenny in the kitchen occupied with her scones, and Mrs. Dysart in the drawing-room, who was just turning the heel of her stocking and absorbed in that operation, received Isabel quite unconsciously, without any disturbance in their calm, as if she had come from the prayer-meeting at Inveresk Kirk. It is true that after she had counted her stitches and got that momentous corner right to go on with, Mrs. Dysart

looked up and cried: 'Bless me, Isabel! what a colour you have gotten,' pushing up her spectacles to see the better.

'Yes, mother,' said Isabel; 'I have run almost all the way from Uncle John's.'

'There seems a great charm about Uncle John's,' said her mother; 'it seems to me you are always there.'

'They look out for me passing, and stand at the window and cry on me,' said Isabel; 'but there was a reason to-day; for here's a paper they've sent you, mother, with all the news of that—that terrible thing in Edinburgh.' Isabel held out the paper, turning her head from the light, that the commentary of her agitated face might not be seen.

'Bless me!' cried Mrs. Dysart, putting down her stocking. 'But it'll be yesterday's paper: this is not one of the days for the *Courant*.'

'It's a special edition,' said Isabel under her breath; and 'Bless me!' said Mrs. Dysart again. 'It's not a small matter they'll print the *Courant* for out of its usual. It'll be something great that has happened.' She paused a moment to add: 'Set John Dysart

up with his paper every day! The *Scotsman* is good enough for me.'

Isabel stood for a moment behind, watching her mother draw the nearest candle to her and spread out the paper. The small but clear light shone on Mrs. Dysart's eager face, lit up with keen curiosity, and on her white cap and the white kerchief at her throat, and the little thrill in her head and her whole person, of that desire to know which is so strong in the rural quiet. Isabel thought, half indignantly, that her mother would read all that had happened in the papers, but would not, could not, read what had passed in her, Isabel, standing close to her chair. And yet how much more important was the last to both of them! She stole away in the dark once more to her own room to take off her 'things,' and to bathe her face after that habit she had, which Mrs. Dysart thought so foolish, coming in from the cold air. She had forgotten all about that spot on her cheek that had so burned and stung the evening before. The greater incident had obliterated the less. But she did not venture to pause in the darkness to think. The current was running too strongly in her veins. She stopped for a

moment at the window and looked up at that star which seemed to know all about her, staring so earnestly as if its steady little ray went straight into her heart. She went back to the drawing-room immediately, subduing herself as well as she could, anxious to hear, yet with a feeling that she knew far, far more than could ever be in any paper. Her mother looked up quickly at the sound of the opening door.

'Here is terrible news indeed,' she said with an awe-stricken face. Then quickly changing her tone: 'Isabel, will you never get over that silly trick with the cold water? Your face is just burning like the kitchen fire.'

'I'll try and mind another time,' said the girl, with unusual humility; for indeed it was a great relief to hear so simple a reason for the blaze of excitement on her cheeks. 'But what is the terrible news? They were all speaking of it, all together, and I was not attending. I cannot bear to hear about murders and such things.'

'But this is worse than murder,' said Mrs. Dysart solemnly. 'Oh, Isabel, my heart misgave me! The very way he turned it off when I named the Assistant might have told

me. But then I never knew what Professor it was that was implicated. Oh, Isabel, my bonnie woman! I hope, I hope you'll not take it to heart. They say the Assistant was most to blame; and who do you think the Assistant was? Lord bless us! what things there are in this world that nobody would guess; but Bell, my dear, he's not worthy, he's not worthy! Who do you think the Assistant was?'

Isabel raised her head and looked her mother in the face. She had never in her life looked so bonnie, Mrs. Dysart thought. Her eyes were shining like two stars, but there was anger and impatience, not wonder or despair, in their look.

'I know very well,' she said almost fiercely, 'who Dr. Stokes's Assistant was.'

'My bonnie woman!' was all Mrs. Dysart could reply.

'And of course,' cried Isabel, 'they will put it all on him. But why was he to be wiser than his master? If he was the Assistant, he was not the great, great man. They'll break the Doctor's windows, but they'll be wanting the Assistant's life. It is just the way of the world.'

'Oh, my dear,' cried Mrs. Dysart, 'how does a lassie like you know the way of the world? You must not speak like that, as if you were full of experience.' She added after a moment: 'Would you not like to hear what the paper says?'

'I care nothing about the paper,' cried Isabel. 'I know more than the paper. Mother, I've seen Willie Torrence. He's away to London—with a great opening and everything before him. And he says he'll be "Sir William" before all's done. And he wants me to go too.'

'The Lord forbid! The Lord forbid! Oh, not that, not that, Isabel; not a man like that!' cried Mrs. Dysart, flinging up her arms in appeal to earth and heaven.

Isabel made no reply. She cared nothing now for the burning in her face, for the trembling of her hands, or that she had betrayed herself, and the tremendous ordeal she had just come through. The encounter with such great passions and unknown forces penetrated the girl's slight frame, so that every nerve and every thought was affected. What her mother thought of was that her child loved this man, and was going to fling

her fresh and innocent life into the turbid flood of his; or perhaps meant to do that for sheer pity and the passion of self-sacrifice, which is like a fever in young veins.

'Isabel!' she said, 'O God forgive me, you'll think I was always against him; but it's not that now. Isabel! my darling, I'll not say a word. But promise me you will take time to think. You'll do nothing in a moment, nothing rash to bind you for your life. Think how young you are, and what a long, long time you have before you—to repent in, if you take a wrong step just in a rush of feeling—now!'

'Will you let me see, mother,' said Isabel in a constrained voice, 'what the paper says?'

But she could scarcely read the printed words. She knew—oh, much more, how much more! And she did not know what to say, how to answer her mother, who thought perhaps better of her than she deserved; who thought that she was going to stand by him in his trouble, to be his defender and his consoler, and take that proverbial traditionary part of the woman, rallying to the man at his worst, helping him to carry through! Oh, but Isabel was not that woman! and she was

ashamed by her mother's instinctive certainty that she was. It would have been a finer, a far finer part, she believed, to play; the instincts of the girl would almost have vanquished her better sense had her excitement and agitation not been so great. She might have made that sacrifice in the rush, not of love, but of the quick sense that it was expected of her, had she not been so shaken by the encounter in the dark with that bold spirit, undismayed and unrepentant, like some great magnetic machine clearing, over everything that lay before it, its own blind determined way.

In the morning early, before the usual time of visitors, some one came to the front door of Wallyford, the door that was never used. Both mother and daughter were still so full of excitement, that the sound of the knocker went through them both as if it had been a summons of death. Mrs. Dysart said afterwards that she thought nothing less than that it must be the 'pollis'-officers come there to look for *him*; they would not have found him at his mother's, and they would hear that he was often at Wallyford, and this would be them. What Isabel thought has never been

disclosed; but she grew very pale, and stood stricken dumb in the middle of the room which she had been crossing to her seat in the window. 'Who will that be? God bless us! who will that be?' said Mrs. Dysart. But Isabel never spoke a word. It was too much for her. She put her hand to her throat, as if she could not get her breath.

Both the ladies felt that instantaneous relief which perhaps is the most potential sensation of ease and comfort in existence, when the door opened and Mr. Murray came in. Mrs. Dysart gave a little laugh to herself in the sense of recovered life and satisfaction. 'Come away, Mr. Murray,' she said. 'You gave us a fright with your knock at the big door. Most folk that know us well come round by the back door—Jenny's way, as we call it. I am just as glad to see you as the flowers in May.'

'Because I am nothing worse than James Murray,' he said.

'Oh, worse! Mr. Murray, you're just joking—there could be nobody better,' said Mrs. Dysart. 'Take a seat and tell us all your news. It's a long time since we have seen you here.'

This was not true, indeed, since he had been there the previous day; but in the trouble of her mind Mrs. Dysart was not quite sure what she said.

'I am a bearer of tidings now,' he said with a little heightening of his colour. He was very fair, and had a transparent complexion which rose and fell like a girl's. 'I would not have come so early but that I have news. I went in to Edinburgh last night, thinking I might perhaps be of use; and I thought you would be glad to hear.'

'I'm sure it is very kind of you, and done with a most excellent intention,' said Mrs. Dysart with dignity; 'but there is no news from Edinburgh, I think, that is of that importance to Isabel and me.'

'No?' he said doubtfully, looking from one to another, with a sudden sensation of being stopped short.

'There are none of our family settled there,' said Mrs. Dysart. 'I have a daughter married in Glasgow, and one in the Highlands, and one——'

'Mother,' said Isabel, 'will you let the minister speak?' She was sitting very upright, with two red spots upon her cheeks,

and her eyes fixed on that messenger of fate.

'Oh, speak by all means,' cried Mrs. Dysart with a faint laugh. 'Isabel is always set on the news—whatever it is,' she added nervously.

Mr. Murray snatched a glance at Isabel, sitting with her hands clasped tightly and those two red spots upon her cheeks. He said to himself bitterly: 'She can feel like that for him, while I——' And then he began his tale.

'There was something very like a riot in Edinburgh last night: there has not been so much excitement, they say, for many a year. Dr. Stokes did not venture to budge from his house. If he had been seen, he would have been torn in pieces, I believe. The populace is a terrible thing. It's like a wild beast licking its bloody paws.'

He was silent a little after this metaphor, half because of his own excitement, half to witness its effect on his hearers. They rewarded him by that long-drawn breath and shiver of attention which an orator loves.

'There was one that they were harder upon still. And that was—the Assistant, Mrs. Dysart. When somebody suggested

his name, there was a roar—like savage beasts. The Doctor himself might have been suffered; but him, the other one, they would have rended limb from limb. I was in great terror for—for Torrence, Mrs. Dysart. One of our own parish, and—and—and—a man with like passions'—Mr. Murray choked a little, and then went on—'a man in many things more fortunate and—gifted than any of us—a man that—— I thought it would be a good thing to be there, and perhaps be able to do something for him, or lend a helping hand.'

'Eh, Mr. Murray!' said Mrs. Dysart with a half-sob.

'You will perhaps think I am making too much of it—but it was a serious moment, a very serious moment. I stayed till it was quite late, and a shower came on, and the people dispersed. Every night that passes is something gained in a kind of natural tumult like that. At last, by God's providence, I met Torrence, Mrs. Dysart: and what a thing that it was me, and not some person with an ill meaning that had just to cry his name and get up a crowd in a moment. It was very wet in Edinburgh last night. I made him

take my big cloak that I had on my shoulder, and wrap it well round his chin and his mouth. And I walked with him myself to Leith, and saw him safe in the London smack. He has a great deal of courage. He would have faced them all, if I had not held him to his resolution. I saw him safe in the London smack, and stayed till she sailed at five in the morning with a good wind, and the dawn just beginning to break.—And I thought,' he said after a pause, with a break of excitement in his voice, 'that you and Miss Isabel, being old friends, would like to know he was quite safe—and in good spirits, considering all.'

Mrs. Dysart was crying quietly, overcome by sympathetic emotion, derived rather from the minister's strained voice and flushed cheek than from anxiety or grief. 'Eh,' she cried, only half articulate—'a friend—that sticketh closer than a brother.'

He lifted up his hand quickly. 'I'm not that kind of friend—I'm not that kind of friend. That's true of One that is the Friend of us all. It was because I thought that to hear of him safe might be—a relief to your minds.'

And then there was a moment of intense

silence in the room. It was broken by Isabel saying steadily: 'He will never come to Edinburgh more!'

'Oh,' cried the generous minister, 'do not say that either! It will blow over. When passion's worn out, reason comes in. There are no doubt many circumstances—that we haven't heard. And things will be explained. And if you come to that, Miss Isabel,' he added with a faint smile, 'there are other skies than Edinburgh, and other places—if none so fair. And if a man has—them that are faithful to him—to hold by him through all——'

Isabel rose quickly to her feet. 'There will be one that will be faithful to him, and that will be his mother,' she said. 'I hope you went first to her before you came to my mother and me?'

'I—I don't know that I thought of her,' the minister stammered, like a guilty man.

'And you came to us that were strangers to him! Oh yes, we know Willie Torrence well, since we were bairns together. But no more than that. And her that is his mother—his mother! Did you think what that means? You did wrong in that.'

'Isabel, Isabel! And how much more wrong are you, to be ungrateful for the minister's great kindness—all done to relieve our minds.—Oh, you are not to take any notice of what an impatient lassie says! I am truly grateful to you, Mr. Murray,' Mrs. Dysart cried, 'and so will she be when she comes to herself.'

'Miss Isabel is very right,' said the young minister. 'I am well reproved—I see I took a great deal upon myself in thinking—while it's true the mother's the first person, and no doubt about what must be in her mind.'

'The mother is just an auld fool,' Mrs. Dysart said, drying her eyes.

'That was too much my opinion,' said Mr. Murray, going meekly away.

There was not a word said between them as Mrs. Dysart, not Isabel, saw him to the front door, and solemnly closed it upon him when he was gone. He went away shame-faced to the mother, whom he had not thought of, with his news; and she returned almost abashed to the ungrateful girl who had not appreciated his kindness. She found that ungrateful girl sobbing upon the shoulder of the old sofa with her face hidden upon it.

'Oh, I'm glad he's away,' Isabel cried—'I'm glad he's safe away! And he'll get the grand house and the carriage that he promised me, and he'll be Sir William before he dies. But it's not me that is the faithful woman to stand by him. Oh, you may scorn at me, or you may scold at me, mother! I'm not good enough for that: but I'm too good for Willie Torrence. And that is all that I have to say.'

It was a great surprise, and perhaps a little shock, and yet an unspeakable relief to Isabel's mother. She would have almost liked her daughter to be that faithful woman —though that she should have been Torrence's wife would have filled her with despair.

The excitement blew over, the tumult ceased, the Professor resumed his classes. How far the suspicions of the populace were true or false, who could tell? Some people thought young Torrence had been made the scapegoat, and that if there was blame, it was the master first who ought to have borne the blame. And I believe he did bear it in a lifelong prejudice and sentiment of popular dislike, if in no other way. As for Torrence, nothing of the kind could subdue him. He

shook off the prejudice as he did the guilt, if there was any, from the buoyant shoulders of a man born to rise in the world. How far he regretted Isabel Dysart I am unable to say. But he was 'Sir William' before he died.

And all Musselburgh was glad in a neighbourly way when it was known, not very long after, that Mrs. Dysart's last daughter was to settle so near her as at the Manse. One in Glasgow, and one in the Highlands, and one——

'But Isabel, the Lord be thanked,' said Uncle John and Aunt Mary, 'just a mile or two away.'

THE END

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