

The Laird paused, still with blind eyes and uplifted face.

"Across the moors I carried him," he went on, "till I came to your cottage, and the sun yet barely up. I laid him down under the peat-stack and I went in to break to you, as best I could, that you was a widow through me. You was asleep—the tears still wet on your cheek. I wak'd ye, and told ye. You wouldn't believe it until you saw him lyin' in the first sun under the lea of the peat-stack. Then ye just came to me and kissed my hand, and never a word," said the Laird, "even of thanks."

"I was too overcome," said the widow.

"But two days, after when ye waked him," said the Laird, "and you wasn't so overcome, you drank my health. You knew by that time that the accident meant a crown a week and a free cottage to you."

"And a lad born without a father!" cried the widow.

"I am coming to that," said the Laird. "When Simon was born I was for taking the lad and handing him over to some decent woman on one of the hill farms, to give him a chance, and get him out of his mother's clutches."

"And your Honour will remember," cried the widow tremulously, "that I cam' to you, and kneeled to you in this room, and begged you—you that once had a mother of your own, that well I remember her, dear lady, and your Honour's fondness for her!—to leave my bairn to me,—him that was only son to his mother, and her a widow."

"And I did," said the Laird, and dropped his chin. "And I believe," he said, and stared at the widowed form by the door, "that I lost that lad to God by so doing."

He paused; and the mother made no reply.

"God knows," he went on, not unfeelingly, "I did it for the best. A bad woman may make a good mother, and herself become a good woman through her child. Many's the time I've seen it," said the Laird. "And I thought—I hoped—I prayed, that maybe that child might be the turning-point in your life."