

the noo ye'd tell her a'—eh, David, and ye'd tak' her frae me, forbye."

"Fordie," brokenly said the other, "I did not think I should come to care so much, but I'd give the rest of my life to hear her call me *father* once."

"I have lost a son," mournfully responded the other, "and ye wad tak' frae me my dochter too."

"You've been a good father to her, Fordie, stern man though you are."

Fordie paced up and down the room twice or thrice, and then pausing before the other, said, as if speaking hurt him:—"If ye think it weel, David, I'll gie her tae ye; I'll gie her tae ye—but think ye o' the lass herself."

Benoni rose, and laid a trembling hand on the other's arm. "I've been *David* for these few minutes, Fordie, and I have been weak—for I'm getting old—and I love the lass, God knows! But I am wrong. She has had trouble enough. I'll not try her further.—I've been a coward for a minute, Fordie, but, please Heaven,—no more!"

There was silence now. From the courtyard Jean's voice floated up through the open window of the room, and another voice with it. Both men caught their breaths in their throats.

"She shall never know through me, Fordie, while you live, though I told her she should be told my story some day; but she'll be leaving us both, maybe, and 'tis better as it is, I doubt not." And Benoni smiled sadly out towards the voices floating up to them. The two men shook hands silently.

But they were both wrong concerning Jean. She suspected the truth. And in future days, when Black Fordie was in his last illness, all was told, and in losing one father she found another.

But now a thing more important to her happiness was near. It perplexed Fordie and Benoni; it made havoc with the peace of Venlaw and Brian; it compelled into action all Jean's womanliness and character.

Down in the courtyard Andrew Venlaw walked with Jean. The weeks and months had passed, and to-morrow again was Beltane Fair. The time of Andrew's leave was up. He must return to his duties in that far-off region of Hudson's Bay or make up his mind to remain where he was; and to remain where he was meant to marry Jean; and to marry Jean meant that Brian must go. These things they had not said to each other,

yet they were in the minds of all. In the town of late Andrew's name had been coupled much with Jean's, and this they both knew, and Black Fordie and Benoni knew it, and both of these had spoken in Jean's presence concerning her and Andrew, as though they were accepted of each other. At last, by a hundred little things, Andrew came to believe that Jean would not say No to him if he asked her. It did not make him proud; it humbled him, because he read the true meaning of her gentle acquiescence. Her affection, her respect, her sense of justice were with him, but her love was with his comrade.

"And now," he said to her, his mind at last made up after some heavy hours, "I'm goin' back, Jean, the day after Beltane Fair."

"Back whaur, Andrew?" she said, a whiteness spreading on her face.

"Back to the land they call 'God's Country,'" said he—"to the Arctic circle, or thereabouts."

She drew slightly from him, but she did not speak.

"Have you nothing to say to my going?" he added, with a painful smile.

"I—I am very sorry; but must you go?"

"There's only one thing that would keep me," he replied.



"Laid her hand to his lips."