

James did not wait for David's return. He went back to his own lodging, and taking the note out of his pocket-book, spread it before him. His first thought was that he had wared £89 on his enemy's fine clothes, and James loved gold and hated foppish, extravagant dress; his next, that he had saved Andrew Starkie £89, and knew the old usurer was quietly laughing at his folly. But worse than all was the alternative he saw as the result of his sinful purchase: if he used it to gratify his personal hatred, he deeply wounded, perhaps killed, his dearest love and oldest friend. Hour after hour he sat with the note before him. His good angel stood at his side and wooed him to mercy. There was a fire burning in the grate, and twice he held the paper over it, and twice turned away from his better self.

The watchman was calling "half-past two o'clock," when, cold and weary with his mental struggle, he rose and went to his desk. There was a secret hiding place behind a drawer there, in which he kept papers relating to his transactions with Andrew Starkie, and he put it among them. "I'll leave it to its chance," he muttered; "a fire might come and burn it up some day. If it is God's will to save Donald, He could so order it, and I am fully insured against pecuniary loss." He did not at that moment see how presumptuously he was throwing his own responsibility on God; he did not indeed want to see anything but some plausible way of avoiding a road too steep for a heart weighed down with earthly passion to dare.

Then weeks and months drifted away in the calm regular routine of David's life. But though there was no outward change, there was a very important inward one. About sixteen months after Donald's departure he returned to visit Christine. James, at Christine's urgent request, absented himself during this visit; but when he next called at David's, he perceived at once that all was not as had been anticipated. David had little to say about him; Christine looked paler and sadder than ever. Neither quite understood why. There had been no visible break with Donald, but both father and daughter felt that he had drifted far away from them and their humble, pious life. Donald had lost the child's heart he had brought with him from the mountains; he was ambitious of honours, and eager after worldly pleasures and advantages. He had become more gravely handsome, and he talked more sensibly to David; but David liked him less.

After this visit there sprang up a new hope in James' heart, and he waited and watched, though often with angry feelings; for he was sure that Donald was gradually deserting Christine. She grew daily more sad and silent; it was evident she was suffering. The little Testament lay now always with her work, and he noticed that she frequently laid aside her sewing and read it earnestly, even while David and he were quietly talking at the fireside.

One Sabbath, two years after Donald's departure, James met David coming out of church alone. He could only say, "I hope Christine is well."