

your faces with shame for many a day, however cold the wind blows."

The two men dropped their swords into the sheaths, not yet speaking. Summer-Hair stood a little apart, looking at the Factor inquiringly, anxiously. At last Venlaw said: "You've come—from home, Benoni. Why?"

The reply was impressive. "There were two men, brave men! and they went mad one day. For, one did a light thing to a girl in the face of the world, and the other did a wrong thing when he would not trust the girl. Ill was spoken of her. The years went on, and the two who should have been there to set her right before the world, were waiting a chance, in another land, to bury their swords in each other—— But 'tis cold here for those that are not fighting, and if we may go on to the fort our story can be finished there."

The Factor nodded, and now, silent, they walked back to the fort abreast, the girl beside Benoni. Once the Factor turned, and, as if it had just occurred to him, held out his hand to Summer-Hair. "You showed Benoni the way, Summer-Hair?" he asked.

The girl nodded, but she did not speak. Again there was silence. Presently Brian said: "Benoni, were you playing on your flute just before you came?"

"As good a tune as ever was played out of heaven."

"Well," rejoined Brian, with a laugh which was half a sigh, "it blocked the way to heaven to one of us. For had you not played as you did, and detained the wrangle of our swords for a minute, you had come upon a dead man in the moose-yard."

"I don't know which one was to be the murderer," said Benoni, "but I do know that both of you are well this side of heaven till you've cleared the name of an innocent girl."

They spoke no more until they came to the fort. The gates creaked slowly outwards, and Venlaw was the last to enter. Before he did so he turned round and faced the empty plains. A desert of sand is sad and terrible in its desolation, but there is something majestic in a desert of snow, even when it strikes with millions of deadly needles through the heart. For, at its worst it has no torture, only God-like sleep. The Factor, looking back, thought soberly, not weakly, of how a waiting grave had been foiled of an occupant. At that moment there was in him the spirit of the North, which makes men brave, if it does not render them merciful. He thought of a day, ten years before, when he bade good-bye to Scotland. He paused

longer than he knew. A hand touched him on the arm.

"Ironheart," Summer-Hair's voice said, "when one comes to my father's lodge my father does not stand in the doorway, but hurries to give him welcome."

"I am forgetful," he replied, and he looked kindly at the girl. They entered the fort. The Factor roused some of his men, and a meal was prepared. When it was over Summer-Hair was led to another room, where she might sleep. The three men remained where they were. For a time nothing was said. Then Venlaw briefly explained to Benoni the occurrence of the day before, and the position of Brian and his followers. When that was done Benoni began to speak. Quietly he drew the picture of Jean's early life, of her mother's death, her love for her brother, and her devotion to her father—of her as she was in the old Castle, at her household duties, or at the loom; as she appeared in the streets, modest, admired, discreet; as in the church, reverent; as in the dance, blithe yet reserved; as always good and true.

Then, while they sat subdued, wondering at the simple power of the old man's recital, all Brian's assumed irony and nonchalance gone, all Venlaw's sombreness modified, Benoni spoke gravely of Bruce's crime, and of the anxious days preceding Beltane Fair; of the occurrence at the fair itself, briefly, firmly, severely.

"A man's only a man," he said, "and I've seen the day when the brush of a lip was pleasant enough to me. But the deed done that day was more than an idle thing." Here his voice became low, as if to speak was a trouble.

"You, Andrew Venlaw, listened to a woman who sought to make bad blood between you and Jean Fordie, and you believed the woman you loved—the plaything of this man."

Then he told them of Elsie's confession.

During his last words strange changes passed over the faces of the listeners; both became pale, and Venlaw rose from his seat. "Is this so?" he said, with a despairing voice.

"It is true," replied Benoni, and he drew from his breast a letter from Elsie, and bade Venlaw read it. The Factor took it, his hand trembling. When he had finished Brian took it from his fingers. Venlaw dropped into a seat, unhappy and dismayed. When Brian had finished reading he leaned his elbow on the table and covered his face.

"She has endured this shame ten years,"