

eyes fell upon Brian, but not yet in greeting. "You remember, Brian—Brian Kingley, that you helped him awa'; and the last time that I saw you was in this room, when you brocht my brither tae me. You went with him across the seas. Tell me, is he leevin'?"

Without a word Brian drew from his breast a letter, and handed it over to her, and his eyes were bent on her with strange longing. She took the letter, looked at the writing on it, and then thrust it into her bosom.

"There have been sorrow and troubles since you left here, Andrew Venlaw and Brian Kingley,—bitter troubles. You hae done wrong to me either and tae me. I hae waited until noo. . . . Tell me," she added, looking at neither, yet looking at them all, "were harsh things done atween ye, or atween my brither an' onyane o' ye?"

She was still solemn, and her eyes suddenly filled with tears, and the look upon her face was the suffering and endurance of years.

Andrew Venlaw spoke. "I wronged you, Jean Fordie. I believed you—believed you—"

She pieced out his sentence—"evil," she said. "Do you think I can ever forgie ye for that, Andrew Venlaw?"

He stood like one stunned, but strong. "I dare not ask it," he responded, "but I have come, like an honest man at least, to acknowledge my wrong."

Then Brian spoke. "You must forgie him, Jean Fordie—before God, you must! for he did no wilful wrong."

The woman behind Jean started forward. "It was me that leed tae him," she said, and stood still, trembling.

Jean waved her back gently.

Brian continued: "The beginning of the wrong was mine. I make no excuse for myself. I was wild and thoughtless and bad—"

"And bad," Jean repeated after him.

"I didn't know how much that—that kiss would cost you," he added; "and indeed I didn't know how much 'twould cost me." There was bitterness in his voice.

She smiled a strange smile. "What has it cost you?" she asked.

He threw his head back as though something had caught him at the throat, and then he smiled back at her strangely too. "Something that can't be reckoned by figures," he replied; "nor yet by years; but part of the account I keep by a scar on my shoulder and an awkward arm."

"A scar! from whom?" she interrupted; "from whom?"

"From your brother," he answered, after a moment's pause. "And had it been in the heart, and not the shoulder, I could have had no quarrel with it."

She started painfully. A sudden anxiety ruled her features. She looked at him for a moment searchingly. "Did ye fecht him," she said, "because o' me?"

"No, I did not fight," he answered. "There was not—time."

Her eyes dropped to the floor. "I was a young girl when you went away," she said at last to these silent men before her. "I'm a woman now, young enech to care what the world says about me, auld enech to endure a' it thinks. Elsie here has done a' she could tae undo her falsehood, and I hae forgiven her. . . . And noo," she added, and she held out one hand frankly yet sadly to Andrew, and another to Brian—"noo I'll forgie baith o' yon."

She looked at Andrew seriously now; then dropped her gaze before the intense earnestness of his.

"Well," said Benoni here, with a grave lightness in his voice, "since we have done with sorrowful things, let us be joyful, as all home-comers should. And first, my dear, the showman claims your cheek, for he thinks he has earned one touch of it. He has tramped across the world, a meddlesome old man, with a flute under his arm, and his raree show left behind him and growing rusty at Cowrie Castle."

Now, for the first time since they had entered the room, a light spread on Jean's face, and she leaned over and kissed Benoni on the cheek. "Is that all the pay you ask?" she said. "It is little."

"Ha! ha!" merrily laughed the old man in retort, "indeed, it's not all I'll ask, for it's long between now and Beltane fair again, and I've lived so much on heathen victuals, that I could eat each day six Scotch meals of your making; and those six Scotch meals I'll have, and more besides, with a bed under this roof and a little good liquor now and then as the thirst seizes me."

"Ye'll hae a' thrace," she answered; "as many meals as it pleases ye—sic as they are—and no, you alane, but Andrew Venlaw and Brian Kingley if they'll stay till I've laid the table, and made a hot cake in the ashes. For Elsie and I—" she looked round, and paused.

Elsie was gone. She had stolen away when the change in the talk occurred. She