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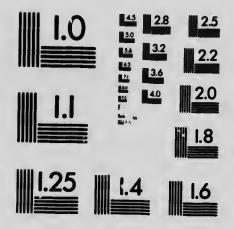
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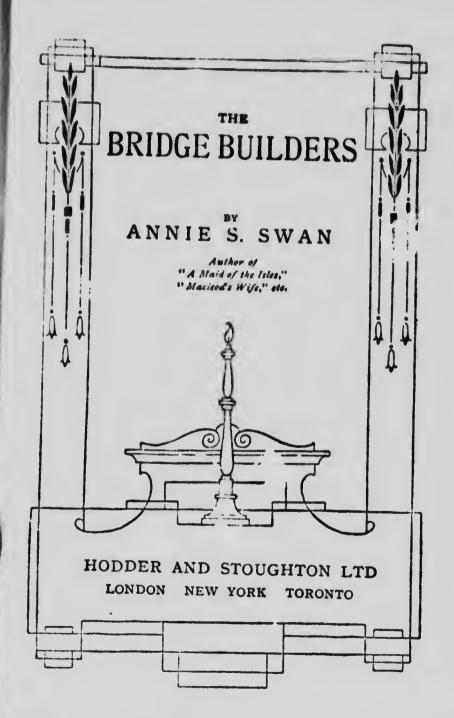


THE BRIDGE BUILDERS

# NOVELS AND STORIES BY ANNIE S. SWAN

A MAID OF THE ISLES
MACLEOD'S WIFE
THE BRIDGE BUILDERS
THE IVORY GOD
THE STEPMOTHER
LOVE GIVES ITSELF
MARY GARTH
CHRISTIAN'S CROSS
LOVE, THE MASTER KET
A MASK OF GOLD
NANCY NICOLSON
THE MAGIC OF LOVE

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# CHAPTER I.

#### THE COMING OF THE BOAT.

THOSE who have never braved the rocking of the tempestuous strip of sea which divides Barras from the Mainland have no idea of the beauty of that enchanted isle, which those who know and love it have no hesitation in calling the gem of the Western Seas.

Rocky, forbidding, and unapproachable from three sides, on the fourth it had a long strip of shelving beach with snow-white sands lying to the left of the snug little harbour, which, as a safe and natural anchorage, cannot be surpassed. To the right, clear of the hamlet which dots the rising upland, on a sudden promontory, stands the old keep of the Mackinnons, the original cradle and heritage of the race.

How any branch of them ever came to drift to Western Perthshire, and establish themselves there, belongs to one of the mystic pages of Scottish history which will never be unravelled.

From time immemorial Barras had been the heritage of the eldest son, and Achree, in Glenogle, the portion of the second.

The Mackinnons had never, even in their palmiest days, been rich, because it was inbred in them to spend with a royal hand when they had it; and, when it was all gone, to tighten the belt and hold their heads hig er than before. They took poverty, as they took most of the happenings of life, gallantly, only sorry when their empty coffers rendered it impossible for them to do for their own

folk what the natural kindness of their hearts dictated. The bond between both the Barras and the Glenogle Mackinnons and their people was one of cioseness and affection. It is a happy condition which the new order of

things is diminishing every day.

The winds which beat upon the shores of Barras, though high and frequent, are not austere. To the enchanted isle, the Lady of the Spring comes early with gracious steps and overflowing hands. It is the islanders' proud boast that nowhere are there such primroses and daffodils, and that they deck the woods and little glens of Barras at least a month before they deign to show themselves on the mainland. Certainly its airs are kind, and there is in consequence a luxuriant vegetation which seldom fails to awaken wonder and admiration in the southerners who from time to time, renting Barras from the Mackinnons, come to make holiday there.

Upon the sunny shore, in the golden hush of an April afternoon, walked Isla Mackinnon, niece to the chief. watching, with eyes which had strained themselves tired. a tiny black speck in the middle distance, moving on the water, and heading for the island. It was the tri-weekly mail-boat, the only means of communication, except the private yacht or the fishing coble, between Barras and the mainland. The arrival of the boat is the event of the Barras day. Long before its red funnel is clearly discernible, the folk begin to collect at the harbour-mouth, ready to cluster on the end of the little pier whenever she

reaches her anchorage.

A year had passed since certain tragic events, culminating in the death of her brother by his own hand, which left Isla the last leaf on the tree. It had been a year of strange searching of heart for the lonely lady of Achree, and her relatives, to whom she was deeply attached, had been amazed that she had contented herself so well. Not even once had she betrayed the smallest wish to leave the island, even to accompany her cousins on a day's shopping to Lochshane, the little mainland town from which the train starts for the great world beyond. The house of

Achree was still let to Americans, and, though many mourned and shock their heads over the changed fortunes of the Mackinnons, Isla herself had never seemed to fret nor rebel against her strange destiny. She had learned to love the strangers, who now called Achree their home, and in Rosmead's hands felt that the future of Achree was safe. She had given him her whole heart, a gift so rich and rare that it might have made him a humble as well as a proud man.

She was expecting him that day, so none need wonder at the royal colour in her cheek, the light in her eyes, the gallant yet sweet bearing of her. She still wore mourning, though the little tucker of clean lawn at her throat gave relief, while the sombre black seemed to add dignity to her lithe and beautiful figure.

She was quite alone on the shore; neither her uncle nor her aunt had volunteered to accompany her, while her two girl cousins had already departed to London to enjoy their bit of the gay season, without which life would seem ineffably dull to them.

Nearer and nearer came the approaching steamer, and Isla's agitation visibly increased. Could she venture among the crowd, she wondered, to meet and greet him before so many interested and curious eyes? Her step acquired the spring of pure excitement, the colour wavered more and more in her cheek, the lovelight deepened in her eyes, then grew misty as the sea when the fog swoops down.

For she loved the man whom she supposed to be hasting to her side with a love that had neither height nor depth, nor any other measure, but was just all of her. Across her shoulder was slung by a shabby strap an old marine glass she had filched from the Castle gun-room. Steing herself against a friendly boulder, she tried to foc. the deck, and sweep its limited space so that she might discern the figure she sought.

She had it in her mind's eye at the moment, tall and broad and straight, with big shoulders, and a fine strong, square face, clean-shaven, and redeemed from sternness by the amazing tenderness of the mouth.

The grey, piercing eyes—ah! had she not looked into their depths and there read love for herself?—the strong, perfect passion of the man who had kept himself clean and fine for the mate he believed God had kept for him from the beginning. But though the glass made every detail of the deck visible, and every figure discernible, she failed to

find the one she sought.

There was no one corresponding to her lover. The letter in which he had fixed the day and the hour of his arrival lay in her bosom. It had been only brief, and hinted at rather than expressed the passion of his soul. The year of probation was over; she had asked him to leave her for a year, and on the very day when it elapsed, she had received his mandate asking whether he might come. Isla had ordained this time of waiting, because she had been trained in a very hard school, and had learned that usually it is fatal to hasten vital matters. She believed, and had observed that the products of blind haste in the serious affairs of life are usually misery and regret. She, who had had so little happiness in life, could afford to wait a little longer, just to make sure.

But now she was ready for complete surrender. She would look him fairly in the face, as she had done on a certain night in London when they had come face to face with the reality of things, and had known beyond all question or doubt that they were made for one another.

She would tell him that she cared, and how much. This lover who had come so late, and had ousted all others, should have his due. She would show him how rich can be the reward of those who wait. Then she would give royally, as all the Mackinnons did.

Her heart beat, her eyes swam in a happy mist at the

prospect.

But why was he not in the bow of the boat, looking out as eagerly as she for some signal or message? A great fear suddenly began to swoop down like an evil bird upon her heart. Surely—surely she had had misfortune and dool enough; it was time the sun arose on her life—more than time, for she would soon be thirty, and in certain quarters

that is accounted age in a woman. She had that very morning before her glass swept a secret tear over the fine lines about her mouth and eyes, and the somewhat sharpened contour of her face. What if all her charm should be gone for him, if he had met someone younger and fairer in the interval? After all, there had been neither bond nor promise between them, not even an ordinary good-bye. When, a crushed and broken thing, she had crept away in the chill morning from the shooting lodge of Creagh, she had scarcely thought of him except as she might have thought of something inevitable and sure, like the hills of Glenogle. Perhaps she had tried him too hard. A sudden terror and haste of spirit descended on her, and, moving towards the harbour mouth, she stood a little apart from the folk, and watched the boat rounding beautifully for its haven. No, certainly Rosmead was not there, or, if he were, he was hidden in the bowels of the boat. But the idea of him, great and glorious lover of the wind and the sea, shut up in a noisome, stuffy cabin, especially when he was hastening to her side, was unthinkable. Presently her heart seemed altogether to stand still, for she suddenly recognised another figure—a tall, slender, spare figure, with a plaid about the shoulders, and a soft felt hat drawn well down over his brows. It was Cattanach, the Glasgow lawyer, the man who had engineered the affairs of Achree since ever she could remember.

What was he doing there? Surely a bird of ill-omen, if ever there was one! She had not even heard from him for three months. The last time was when he had sent the quarterly cheque for Achree from Peter Rosmead. She walked unsteadily across the last strip of sand, mounted the slope to the little old steps which would bring her upon the pier, and was even relieved to see that her uncle was not on the pierhead.

She knew that, aware of whom she was expecting, he had purposely absented himself, though it was seldom indeed that the Chief of Barras was missing from the incoming of the boat.

She walked slowly along the rough cobbles of the harbour-

head, until it verged on the smooth wooden paving that had been added, so that there might always be at low tide or high tide sufficient water for the incoming craft. She gave greeting here and there to the village folks, and by the time she reached the pierhead a little crowd had gathered and all the stir of the mooring lent charm and life to the pretty scene. Barras approached from the sea, when the sunshine flecked its green braes and lent a smile to its frowning cliffs, was a picture for the gods. But it was too remote for painting folk. Never a one had sought to immortalise its beauty.

Still hungrily Isla's eyes swept the narrow deck space. But among the mere handful of passengers there was none bearing semblance to her gallant lover. Her heart sank in her breast, and she had scarce a smile for the old lawyer, who, when he saw her, had pitiful depths in his kind eyes and sorrow in his heart. For he was the bearer of bad tidings, and had some as a substitute for the man she had

expected to meet.

He lifted his hat, and came bareheaded to her on the pier, and shook hands without for a moment being able to find a fitting word.

"I hope I see you well, Miss Isla; but, indeed, you

look it?"

"I am quite well, thank you, Mr. Cattanach; that is, in the body," she answered, with just a ghost of her remembered smile. "What brings you here? You must not think it very rude of me to ask the question, but I came expecting someone else."

He nodded gravely.

"I know—your tenant, Mr. Rosmead. It is because of his inability to come that I am here to-day, bearing his letters and regrets. He has been hastily summoned to America."

"To America!" she said, and her cheek paled. "Why?

Has anything happened there?"

"Yes, something big and disastrous. The bridge his firm had built over the Delaware has been swept into the river, and there has been appalling loss of life."

"Oh!" she said, and a little gasp came from her lips.

"The bridge he was so proud of."

"The bridge he was so proud of," repeated Cattanach gravely. "In my hearing more than once he called it his lifework."

"But how did it happen? What went wrong?"

The lawyer hesitated a moment.

ł

"Mr. Rosmead hardly knew himself, but beyond doubt there was some fault in the construction. I saw him the day before yesterday. He sailed last evening at four o'clock from Liverpool for New York. He was almost in despair."

"But why despair?" she asked with slowly whitening

face. "Surely none can blame him."

"He says they will. He blames himself, because though he remained in America on his last visit long enough, as he thought, to make absolutely certain about the foundations, he ought to have seen the thing to the end. He blames nobody but himself, and says his reputation has been swept with its buttresses to the bottom of the river."

It may be questioned by the casual reader why Cattanach was so unnecessarily cruel and circumstantial in his account of this disaster. But he knew well the nature of the woman with whom he was dealing, and that she had never in all her thirty years of life been afraid of the truth. Nay, she had sought it, in season and out of season, often to her soul's hurt and her unspeakable anguish. But it must also be added that he was unaware that there had been any serious lovemaking between the tenant of Achree and its girl owner, though he had fondly hoped and even prayed for it.

"I have a letter for you in my brief-bag," he continued. "But we agreed yesterday that it would be better for me to come and see you and explain."

"But why?" she asked, with a kind of quiet dignity. "There is no explanation due to me through a lawyer from Mr. Rosmead."

"He appeared to think there was," answered Cattanach

heavily. "But shall we talk here or at the Castle? Is

there an inn on the island where I can put up?"

"There is an inn, of course; but my uncle will expect you at the Castle, and of course it is what I would like," said Isla, then, rather quickly awaking to a sense of the Highland hospitality, which ought not to fail in Barras of all places on the face of the earth. "What luggage have you?"

"Only my suit-case."

"They will see to its being sent up. Ah, there is the young groom with the hand-cart expecting Mr. Rosmead's luggage, I suppose. We will walk together, if you don't m nd, and talk as we go. By the short cut it is only ten minutes."

"But perhaps we need not take the short cut," suggested Cattanach, looking round the beautiful inlet of the bay with the satisfaction of an eye that loved beauty.

"But have you lunched?"

"Oh, yes, and quite decently, on the other side at Lochshane. I hope Sir Thomas and Lady Mackinnon and your cousins are quite well?"

"All are well. My cousins have gone as usual to London, but my aunt did not care for it this year. They have gone with the Ellon Jeffreys on an indefinite visit."

"This is truly a beautiful spot, and I am glad to see that it has restored your health, apparently com-

pletely."

"I did not know I had lost it. I was only tired last year when I came with the shock of my brother's death and all that happened with it. Tell me, have you news of Glenogle? Elspeth Maclure, for some unheard-of reason, has taken to not writing. Her last letter came here just before Christmas. She used to be a faithful scribe of the doings of the glen. How is everybody?"

"I am afraid I have not many details, but it was at Achree I had the conversation I referred to with Mr. Rosmead. He wired me to come at a moment's notice,

and I just managed it."

"Well, and what was the interview about? I suppose

he will leave his mother at Achree, as she fully expected

it to be her home for several years."

"No. They are all going back immediately; that is to say, the three of them, Mrs. Rosmead and her son and youngest daughter, Mrs. Rodney Payne, I understand, will spend some months in Paris before rejoining them."

Isla's face paled again, and she stood still in the roadway

and looked the lawyer straightly in the face.

"What does this mean, Mr. Cattanach? Please to tell me exactly what it does mean?"

"It means that Mr. Rosmead desires to relinquish his

tenancy of Achree."

"Relinquish it without consulting me! But surely that is very strange and quite out of the usual. Can't we hold him to it?" she said hardly, for her quick Highland pride was up, and when she thought of the events immediately preceding her coming to Barras her cheek burned.

Cattanach listened in embarrassed silence, for he did not like his job, and only his respect for the American tenant of Achree had induced him to accept the mission on which

he had come.

"Mr. Rosmead will probably explain in the letter, which I shall hand to you presently," he answered, as the mailbags trundled past them on a trolley, and were hauled up to the little white-washed Post Office on the brae. "He desired me personally to bear his kind messages, and to set forth the extraordinary and unexpected circumstances which have necessitated this sudden change in all his plans."

"Well, until I read the letter, Mr. Cattanach, perhaps you will enlighten me just a little further. This sounds as

if Mr. Rosmead had lost money."

"I understood from him, though I sincerely hope that he was taking the gloomiest view possible in the circumstances, that he considered himself as practically a ruined man. He indeed said he would have to spend the rest of his life in building up another fortune, as well as another reputation, and that he feared it would be an unequal struggle."

Isla kept her face away, and Cattanach was unable to

discern whether there was any softening in her eyes. He was considerably surprised at the hardness with which she was taking it. He had expected a little disappointment and a genuine sympathy with the Rosmeads, but not this.

"Then it is a question of money entirely—I mean as regarding Achree? You don't think they have just tired of it, and make this an excuse?"

"I don't think so. They are all devoted to Achree and Glenogle, and they have made a good many friends there."

"And where are they going?"

"Rosmead's presence is required at Washington, I understand, but his people go on to their home in Virginia."

"I thought they were so rich that nothing mattered," said Isla in a low voice.

"Apparently not, from what Mr. Rosmead said; and, further, he seemed to be of opinion that some member of his firm he had trusted had been playing fast and loose in his absence. America is a queer country, Miss Isla, and there doesn't seem to be much tenure in money or in anything else. Then the standard is undoubtedly lower than ours; we have got to remember that in all our dealings with them."

Isla did not demur, but ... the back of her mind there was an infinite wonder. Was it Peter Rosmead they were talking of, partly excusing, partly judging? Until an hour ago she could have sworn that there was no standard of conduct on earth higher than his. They came without further speech to the little white gate which closed a private path cut steeply in the face of the cliff leading directly to the courtyard of the Castle. Isla's pallor was gone as they began to make the steep ascent, and the flame deepened in her cheek with every step.

"Will you take your letter now, Miss Isla?" Cattanach asked, with his fingers on the fastening of his brief-bag.

But she : .ook her head.

"When we get to the house it will be time enough. My aunt and uncle, of course, are waiting there, in expectation of welcoming Mr. Rosmead."

"If it will make it any easier for you, Miss Isla, I can

o on and explain," he began, out of the goodness of his heart, but the high pride of her look stayed his words.

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"How can it matter who tells them? It is the necessity for letting Achree and subjecting oneself to this sort of thing which hurts; one tenant or another does not alter the fact. See what a beautiful view we have from this little platform, and when we get to the top it is even finer, because we get a wider sweep. When it is clear we see Wester Ross and a hundred miles of the loveliest coast-line in the world."

Thus she would have dismissed the subject of their talk, as if it were fully exhausted. Cattanach, who proved her fibre in some of the bitter happenings of her life, thought he had never seen her finer.

But the sadness of it continued to oppress him, for, after all, she was but a woman-creature, and somewhere the need and anguish of her woman's heart were hid. It seemed, however, that with their ascending footsteps her courage soared afresh. Again and again she would pause on the rocky path to direct his attention to this or that, and when at last the rampart was reached he might have dreamed that she had suffered even a momentary vexation. Sir Tom, strolling to and fro, fully expecting to have to extend a welcome to the American tenant of Achree, was thunderstruck to behold Isla with the Glasgow lawyer in her train.

"Mr. Rosmead has not been able to come after all, Uncle Tom," cried Isla almost gaily. "But he has sent a very good deputy. Excuse me, and I will go to tell Aunt Jean."

Once more Cattanach's fingers went swiftly to the fastening of his bag, and he drew out the letter, and offered it. It was accepted without even a word of thanks, and, grasping it lightly, she walked away.

Sir Tom, his kindly grey eyes troubled, for some intuition warned him that something had gone amiss, bade the tawyer briefly welcome to Barras, and then waited till Isla, entering the house, was out of hearing.

### CHAPTER II.

# " OF MAN'S LIFE A THING APART."

IMMEDIATELY his niece was out of sight Sir Tom planted the point of his stout blackthorn stick on the gravel and turned an angry eye on Cattanach's face. "Now, what the devil, Cattanach, is the meaning of this?"

"Mr. Rosmead could not come, Sir Tom; he has been suddenly recalled to America, and he sent me to explain."

"He had not the right!" cried the old chief stormily. "Look you, what right had he to do the like of that? It just shows what a mistake it is for us to extend the hand of friendship to outsiders and to imagine we shall receive the right treatment at their hands. I tell you they don't understand, Cattanach; their standard is not the same. How dared he send you here with any such message? Not but that I'm glad to see you, for yourself; you know that isn't my point."

"He had to catch this week's boat; the case was

urgent," said Cattanach, heavily.

Then Sir Thomas stamped his foot, and waved his black-thorn towards the house. "More urgent than that fine creature there, whom I love as if she were my own, for there isn't her equal in broad Scotland, and I would have been proud to have fathered her. But my brother Donald was one in a million, and he has left one in a million behind. Yet this damned American stepped in and upset everything, harried the poor thing's feelings, and worked on them, and now he has the audacity to do this. I tell you it's—it's damnable, and nothing short of it."

His choler had got the better of him, he grew purple in

the face, and spluttered on his last sentence as if it would choke him.

"I would like to try and explain-" the lawyer tried to intervene.

"You can explain to the day of doom, Cattanach, but it will never better this insult. Why, the man doesn't know what it cost her Ladyship and me to offer him welcome here! We don't want him! He is not of our kind or class, and for no creature but Isla would we have put our prejudice out of sight. And now he is off, sending a message by a lawyer. Excuse me, Cattanach, but I'm not myself. Had to get this boat indeed! What is this boat, or the next boat, or twenty boats in comparison with a womar. like Isla Mackinnon, who stooped from her height to smile on the like of him, an American tradesman, with nothing but his moneybags to recommend him!"

"And even these, to all appearance, he has lost," put in Cattanach, anxious to get a foothold, and saying the thing that would get him one faster than anything. Because it was undoubtedly the American dollars that had smoothed the American pill to the Barras Mackinnons, though they had never ceased to mourn because Isla had given the friend and lover of her childhood, honest Drummond of Garrion, the go-by at the last moment for an upstart. He stared at Cattanach a moment incredulously, as if some

great light were suddenly dawning upon him.

"So he has lost his money. Tell me how, Cattanach. Probably it was never honestly got, and it is only just retribution that has overtaken him."

"I don't think it is that kind of thing. Do you remember -but I don't think you will-that less than two years ago he left his folk at Achree, and was absent in America for about eight months?"

"I remember, of course, and it was when he was on his way back, and Isla had run away from Lady Betty Neil at Nice, that he met her in London and got round her."

"You remember too, then, perhaps, that he was then building a bridge over one of the big rivers there, and had to stay to see the job properly under way."

"I think I do remember hearing something about it, Cattanach, but, indeed, my interest then in the man was not very keen, though for an American I must say I had

thought him a decent chap."

"He is all that," answered Cattanach fervently, "and I would not be too hard on him, Sir Tom; I mean. give him a little time. He may, nay, I am sure, he will come well out of this yet."

"He had need to," growled Sir Tom. "Well, and what has all this to do with him running away just now?"

"It has everything. The bridge is down, and from end to end of America they are down on him, saying his firm have broken their contract by using bad stuff to the danger of human life. There has been an appalling loss, for there were two laden trains on it at the moment, and a gale blowing from the south."

Sir Tom's eves widened with interest.

"Now we're getting nearer home," he said with a sort of grim chuckle. "So the bridge came down, and they say they put rotten stuff into its construction. Well, I shouldn't be surprised. How did he look over the news? a bit white about the gills, or did he bluff it?"

"He looked like a man who had looked over a yawning pit into perdition," answered Cattanach. "I could say this for the man, Sir Tom, that if there is truth in what they're saying over here, Rosmead was never at any time

a party to it."

"But he is culpable even if it happened out of his knowledge, for of what use is an expert or a pastmaster of a profession unless he can make this sort of thing impossible?"

Cattanach had no answer ready.

"That letter you handed to my niece," said Sir Tom in a quietened voice. "Do you know what was in it?"

"I don't."

"Well, anyway, it's a most unhappy business for us all. Just think, Cattanach, what a good solution to the problem of my poor niece's life it would have been had she married Garrion. It was what ought to have been, and what

would have been, but for this American invasion of Glenogle.

Why can't they stop in their own country?"

"For the same reason that the Scotch don't stop in theirs. They want to inherit the earth," replied the lawyer with a half-smile. "I am with you about Mr. Drummond of Garrion, Sir Tom. It would have southered everything."

"Perhaps it may come to pass even yet," said Sir Tom, with pious fervour. "But tell me before we go to her Ladyship, how does this affect the tenancy of Achree?"

"He gives it up. It was only a yearly tenancy, though Mr. Rosmead fully expected to remain indefinitely. The ladies of his family liked it, and had no thought of leaving it."

"But can't he leave them there while he goes to mend

the broken bridge and his reputation with it?"

"No, they are hanging together as a united family do in misfortune. And it is a very grave misfortune, carrying most, if not all, the money he has earned with it. He said as much to me. The money was his, Sir Tom; won by his own courage and genius and hard work. As a family they had nothing, though they have the oldest blood of the South in their veins, and pride to match it. They were not common Americans, and they can go to their family home in Carleton, in Virginia."

"Carleton, in Virginia? Write that down for me, Mr. Cattanach. Ah, there is her Ladyship at the door looking

for us. I thought Isla would have been telling her."

Cattanach did not think so. More likely was she to be in the privacy of her own room, or in some chosen nook by the wide seashore, fighting this fresh lion that had sprung in the difficult pathway of her life.

"Where is Mr. Rosmead?" asked Lady Jean shrilly, scarcely ready with a greeting for the lawyer in the depth

of her surprise and disappointment.

"You haven't seen Isla then, my dear," said Sir Tom. "Come in, and while you are giving Mr. Cattanach some tea we'll explain the situation, though it isn't a light task, I promise you."

Tea was laid in the square hall of the Castle, which at

all seasons of the year was the chief living-room of the family. It was very spacious, and though the stone walls were guiltless both of plaster or paper, their four feet of thickness defied alike the heat of summer and the cold of winter. Many trophies of war and of the chase hung on them, and the cold stone flags were carpeted with rich, thick, Turkey rugs, which gave both comfort and beauty to the place. Flowers were everywhere; their fragrance filled Cattanach's nostrils as he stepped through the inner swing doors and met all the cheerful beauty gathered there. A big, low, gate-leg table was spread with the substantial tea beloved in Scotch country houses, and the kettle sang merrily on its stand.

"I hope Mr. Rosmead is not ill?" said Lady Jean anxiously, as she set herself down in her accustomed place

at the table.

"Give the man his tea, my dear, and then he'll talk. Where's Isla?"

"I don't know. I understood that she went to the pier to meet Mr. Rosmead, Tom. You know she did," she added reproachfully. "Don't you remember how you teased her by saying you would get there before her."

"Did I? Then I was a fool for my pains. Had you any lunch, Mr. Cattanach? Would you like something

more substantial than hot scones or shortbread?"

While they were thus fencing with the situation, Isla had stolen out of the house by another door, and was already halfway down the cliff steps. There was a little landing, with a quaint seat cut in the stone halfway house, for those climbing to the Castle by the "Eyrie Stairs," as someone had once christened them. In this snug corner, with the sheer rock above and the sea beneath at full tide, she was completely cut off both from observation and interruption, for no one except the household was permitted to use the Eyrie Steps, chiefly because, unless they were intimately known, there was a certain amount of danger in the ascent. A sudden word spoken, a sound that would startle, a backward step, and there might have been swift tragedy. So far, the Eyrie Steps

were guiltless of tragedy. But one was enacted on them that sweet spring afternoon, when all the world seemed

young again, and every thorn bush hid a lover.

She sat there a long time, and once or twice her hand stole to the bosom of her dress to what was hidden there. At long last, and after she had sat a good twenty minutes, she drew out the square envelope which Cattanach had put into her hand. She looked at the address, written in the fine, strong, flowing handwriting she had often admired, and which had always seemed so characteristic of the man. She had even in her proudly jealous and critical moments compared it with Neil Drummond's small. crude, schoolboy hand, and had, comparing the handwriting, compared the men. Everything that Rosmead touched or essayed in her mind was characteristic of his fine, strong, generous nature. In this she had been less than just sometimes to Neil, whose faithful devotion to her she had so ill repaid. It was strange that his face rose up before her at the moment side by side with Rosmead's with an irritating persistence. She had broken her troth to her first lover, and perhaps now she was to suffer a like disappointment with him, and understand by fellow-feeling the anguish of frustrated hope.

Ashamed and irritated by the strange medley of her thoughts, she finally opened the letter, not gently nor carefully as she had opened the former one asking whether he might come, but rather with a hasty hand, and one which trembled, and when she saw how it began the heart of her seemed to fail altogether. The sheet was stamped with the Glenogle address, but bore no date. Thus it

ran :-

"DEAR MISS MACKINNON,—The man who writes to you to-day is not the man who wrote to you yesterday, or the day before, or any of the other days in which he tried to voice the feelings of his heart on paper. Although you did not bid me write to you when we parted, I have written you many love letters which never reached you. This, which cannot be a love letter, must be the last. The

thing I have to tell you is one of the bolts from the blue which no man, even if he were a heaven-born genius, could foresee. Yesterday I was a free man, and in the fullest sense an independent one, with an assured position and money at my command, not a gigantic fortune, but enough to render me reasonably comfortable for the future. Today I am a broken man without reputation or means, compelled by one of the strangest and most undeserved happenings of life to go back to my own country to face

and fight ruin and disgrace.

"Let me briefly tell you that the bridge over the Delaware River, of which I was so proud, and in which you deigned to be so kindly interested on that never-to-beforgotten night when we met in London, has been swept away. More than that I cannot tell you, because I am as yet without full details, though I know from the newspapers that there has been deplorable loss of life. Private advices from New York, however, inform me that the blame of the engineers is in every man's mouth, and that the case, after investigation and report, will probably go for trial. To a man in my position this means ruin on the face of it. Even if I am acquitted I will spend my last shilling if need be to prove that I kept faith with the Government and the public, and that, if there has been scamping, it was none of my doing. The weak joint in my armour is that I left the contract in other hands, when I ought to have remained on the spot until it was finished to the uttermost bolt and screw, and not only finished, but tested beyond all possibility of our being deceived.

"But the bridge could not have come down, even in a high gale and under the pressure of the traffic which was on it when it collapsed, unless there had been scamping somewhere. I go to America to-morrow not only to face the music for myself, but to find out who is responsible for the scamping. Alas! I fear that already I am as certain as a man can be who is responsible, and why it was done. But I need not enter into that here; it does not concern you, and perhaps would not even interest you. The thing I have to deal with is that I must break faith

with you, not only in the smaller matter of failing to beet you at Barras as arranged, but in the larger matter. How

can I write of it? How can I give you up?

"There are men born under unlucky stars beyond a doubt. I am thirty-eight years of age, and I never knew real happiness, the happiness to which every sane, wellliving man is entitled, until I met you. And then I had but a taste, and I have to give it up for ever. For, knowing what your life has been, my dear, how devoid of brightness and ease and peace, I cannot, and I will not, ask you to share my broken fortunes, or to wait indefinitely in the feeble hope that these will be restored. I am not without hope of winning back some part of the position I have lost, but the fight will keep me on the other side, and the probability is that I shall never come back to Scotland.

"It is certain that I shall not have in the near future, or perhaps ever, anything to offer you, any position I could ask you to share with me. So it must be goodbye.

"I try to grasp what this means, but it is not possible. I would try, if I could find the words, to tell you what I feel for you-the one woman in the whole wide world. There will never be another, there never has been, and there never will be now; the fates are united against us.

" If I can keep together the old home at Carleton for my mother, it will be as much as I can do. I have left all my instructions with Cattanach, and I told him to wind up the

little bit of business that was between us.

"And now goodbye. If this looks bald and cold and altogether impossible, try to think what the men of my race have been taught to give up, and to hide their feelings in the act. I will not ask you to write, nor even to remember. But your face will be before me in all the years that are coming, the lean horrible years, devoid of hope, and I will do my duty because you have showed me how. For that inestimable lesson I shall bear you a debt of gratitude to the grave. It is so dark with me to-day that I have no commonplace words of hope for your future. I have little interest, I fear, in the future which cannot concern me. I dare not even offer to be your friend. Goodbye,

God bless you. I am unable to write more. I do not know what I have written, nor what I am writing now, but I am, yours till death,

"HYLTON P. ROSMEAD."

She sat quite still, staring down at the closely written sheets, but made no endeavour to read them through again. There was no need, since every word seemed bitten into heart and brain, as if by some corroding acid. The great stupendous fact staring her in the face was that it was all over; he had gone away and the words he had written put her out of his life for ever. What she was conscious of, beyond and before all else, was the absolute finality of the whole thing. There was not one loophole of escape or hope. He bade her an eternal farewell. A low shuddering moan cleft her parted lips, and she looked across the expanse of the shining sea, and even stretched her hands to it with a sort of wistful passionate appeal.

"Oh, how could he, how could he? He might have given me the chance! I would have gone! I would

have gone!"

She dropped her head on her hands, and before she was aware the letter had fluttered from her lap, and was gone away on the wings of the April wind. Presently, horrified, she saw it swoop like a seabird on the wing down on the gently heaving sea, and in an instant her resolve was taken. At the bottom of the steps an old coble was moored, the coble in which many a Barras boy had had a hairs breadth escape. She must go after it. The sea was calm, and she would quickly overtake its gentle drifting. It was the only thing to do unless she did not care into what careless hands the letter might fall. She was skilled in handling a boat. Far away in distant Lochearn she had learned the whole art on far more treacherous waters than the kindly Western seas. In less than five minutes she was in the old coble, and manfully pulling in the direction of the tiny white speck which danced away tantalisingly every time she thought she had it within reach. From the ramparts of the Castle, where they were taking a stroll

and a smoke, Sir Tom and the lawyer beheld the coble and its solitary occupant.

"Why, God bless my soul, I believe that's Isla, Cattanach! Are your eyes good? What do you say, eh?"

"It is her hat, anyway," answered Cattanach. "Now

she's stooping for something. What can it be?"

"I'm sure I can't tell, and I don't like her to go out like that. The old coble mayn't even be seaworthy; Malcolm's end in Lochearn has given us all a wholesome terror of small craft."

"But the sea is very smooth, and apparently Miss Mackinnon is managing the boat perfectly."

"Say, Cattanach, I'm speaking to you as a friend now;

you know her very well, don't you?"

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"I may say I know her intimately, Sir Tom."

"How do you think she'll take this? Of course, both Lady Mackinnon and I had resigned ourselves to the expectation that when he came here to-day something would be settled. I am sure that Isla expected it, too. I sincerely hope she hasn't too much to build on him. You never know with that quiet sort of women. When they're all words, or even tears, don't you know, it's easier to fathom and to deal with them. I like her, Cattanach. I couldn't like her better if she were my own, and she's dead game, too. One can't help being proud of her. How do you think she'll take it?"

"I am afraid, Sir Tom, she will take it hard, though

not harder than Rosmead himself."

"But surely there is hope of some way out of this calamity. A man isn't going to be eternally damned for one mistake. If they can't prove wilful scamping, and Rosmead would be above that, what can they have against him but ill-luck?"

Cattanach shook his grey head. The vision of Rosmead pacing the library at Achree was before him; the memory of his set and haggard face would never leave him now.

"We must hope for the best, Sir Tom, but certainly Rosmead spoke and acted that day as if everything was over for him."

"Oh, he might be suffering from the effects of shock, of course. In America, where everything is more or less shoddy—even to the people—that kind of thing cannot really permanently injure a man as it would in this country."

Cattanach did not argue the point. He knew all Sir Thomas Mackinnon's limitations, his insular prejudices, his abounding and colossal pride in his own country and

his own folk.

"Miss Isla is rowing in. She has apparently got the thing she was after," he said presently. "Where would she take the boat from?"

"The boat; oh, it lies at the bottom of the Eyrie Steps. Tell you what, Cattanach, Donald and I built that boat with our own hands, and an occasional help from old Macnab, the boatman, at Lochshane. He came over once a week all the summer we were at it, just to superintend operations. That was sixty odd years ago. But it isn't a lady's craft. Why, man, we've been round and round the island on her scores of times, and once we ventured to the mainland in winter, and were storm-stayed for five days. Ah, these were the days! Let us take a daunder to the top of the steps, and see whether she's coming in. If she wants a hand at mooring I'll go down."

But when they got to the steps, walking slowly and talking the while, Isla had already regained the halfway house, and was sitting there with her back to them, and her chin

on her hand, looking out to sea.

"I think we'd better leave her; come," said Sir Tom, with a troubled note in his voice. "Come and see the stables. Egad! I wish I had a houseful of boys; girls take it out of a man, one never knows where you are with them, and you have to pick and choose both your words and your ways with them." They spent nearly an hour inspecting the various outposts of the Castle, and when they re-entered the house Isla was sitting quietly there with her aunt. To outward showing there was no difference in her, but some aw all were conscious that something had changed, something snapped in the bright, brave, gallant creature whom they all loved.

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She smiled as they came through the door, and spoke quietly to her uncle. "I have just been telling Aunt Jean about my letter from Mr. Rosmead. He is very sorry not to be able to come. But he has gone to America, and it is unlikely that he will come back, ever." She added the last word after a little hesitation, and with a small short breath that was almost a sob. "It ends his tenancy of Achree, and of course I shall have to go back to Glenogle at once. If Mr. Cattanach will tell me what day he intends to leave, I can be ready to travel with him."

# CHAPTER III.

#### HER OLD LOVER.

NEXT morning about eleven Cattanach, with Isla in his charge, sailed over the tumbling sea to the mainland. The leave-taking with Barras and her kinsfolk was somewhat painful for Isla, but such large and more intimate concerns occupied her being that she met it dry-eyed.

"There is only one redeeming and consoling point about it all, Tom," observed Lady Jean as they watched the lessening speck on the misty sea. "At Lochearn she will

at least be within reach of Neil Drummond."

"I wouldn't build myself on that if I were you, Jean," her husband answered promptly. "For one thing, a man can't be expected to go on making himself a useful buffer for a lass's whims. From all I can hear, he made himself cheap enough before. No, my dear; I much fear that Isla, like some other unwise folk, is likely to fall between two stools."

"But Neil was crazy about her, and I have never got rid of the feeling that this ploy with the American was a kind of mental aberration with Isla and couldn't last. It was not possible there could be any real affinity between them."

"As to that, I don't know, of course, because every woman, even the simplest, is a riddle beyond the reading of any common man. Isla is a tougher problem than most, that's all. You just get so far and no farther with her, then something looks at you out of her eyes, and you know you've come to the end of your tether with her.

and have to wait her next move with what patience you can. But I like her, Jean, I like her weel, and it's about time she came to the end of her sorrows."

So saying, Sir Tom blew his nose violently, and walked

away out of love with life.

For Isla's convenience, and in order that she might get more directly home, and avoid Glasgow, the travellers went from Lochshane by a somewhat circuitous and slow route to Perth, which they reached too late in the evening

to get farther.

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"I do wish you would go on to your destination, Mr. Cattanach," said Isla, pleading with him again as they approached the city. "It is quite unnecessary for you to stop. You see I am at home in Perth, and they know me quite well at the George, and will make me most comfortable."

"If you please, Miss Isla, let me stop the night too. Indeed, I am tired enough, and have no desire to go farther. In the morning, if you are still of the same mind, I will leave you, though I do not think you should go back to the Glen alone."

"Why not?" she asked with a faint melancholy smile.

"Surely in Glenogle, if anywhere, Isla Mackinnon should be safe and among friends. At least she once was; there was hardly a cottage door she could not open, sure of a welcome. Many strange and horrible things can happen n life, it is true, but that that could happen, would be unthinkable and impossible."

"The Glen is as it was where you are concerned, and I will say no more. But you will do nothing rashly or without consulting me? Remember, I am wholly at your disposal in Glasgow, and will come at your bidding, what-

ever I may be doing, when you send for me."

"Thank you, Mr. Cattanach; so I have one friend left pledged to me? It is a good knowledge for one situated as I am."

He had no answer ready, for the pity of it sank into his heart again.

"But you must not forget that my own servants and

friends, Diarmid and Margaret, are still at the Lodge of Creagh, eating their heads off, as Margaret Maclaren expresses it, though if they eat nothing but that for which I pay in hard cash, I expect to find them worn to skeletons. To say nothing of Elspeth Maclure and all the folk in Lochearn itself!"

Cattanach noticed that she made no mention at all of friends in her own station, of the Drummonds or Lady Eden, or others to whom she might have been expected to turn in her loneliness, and all of whom would have made

her gladly welcome to their homes.

She went early to bed and must have slept, for in the morning her face had won back its rounded look, and her eyes had lost their weariness. Her spirits seemed to have risen too, and when they breakfasted together she was

quite cheerful.

"You will probably wish to relet Achree, will you not?" he asked anxiously, for now when they were about to part he became conscious that he had perhaps been remiss in his legal advice. But for the greater part of the journey Isla had been so preoccupied and silent, that he had received no encouragement even to refer to her affairs. She had not so much as mentioned them, and had spoken but little on any other theme.

"As to that, I can't say. I can decide nothing till I

have been there."

"But this is the time. If it is to be done, we must advertise at once in the London papers. I could write to the estate agents after I got home to-day."

"Wait," said Isla decisively. "The only thing that is troubling me now is whether the Rosmead servants are still

at Achree."

"As to that, I have no information. Probably they would only remain long enough to set the house in order.

Were none of them taken over from you?"

"Oh, none. Could our folks serve Americans?" she asked, with a very slight inflection of scorn. "Besides, you forget how small the staff was, only Diarmid and two women."

Cattanach inclined his head. He could see how active her brain was, that all her faculties were alert and ready for whatever might lie in front of her. Yet he was acutely conscious of something that had gone out of her, some vivid quality which she had preserved until now through all the soreows of her reined house. Though unmarried himself, he was dimly aware that it had something to do with the supreme interest of a woman's life. Again he marvelled sore, and with questioning at the Almighty's dealing with Isla Mackinnon.

Cattanach travelled with her as far as Stirling, and there left her to make Doune and Callander, and so to Balquhidder. the place of memory and poignant spell. A fine rain was filtering through a filmy white mist when she stopped there, so that she could not see many yards up the long glen, and nothing at all of the frowning hills at the head, towering over the sleeping-place of the Mackinnons. Perhaps it was better so. She had sent no warning of her coming to Lochearn, and there was no conveyance of any kind at the station. Also, and this gave her an odd stab, there were no less than two new faces among the porters, and not one to give her greeting. She took it as prophetic of what was coming. To them she gave brief instruction regarding her luggage, and buttoning her waterproof over her short black serge walking suit, set out to walk the familiar way. One or two were already in front of her, and she purposely slackened her steps, so that they might get ahead. It was a day of singular beauty, a real April day, with a tantalising and exquisite sheen glittering through the mist. Quite suddenly, as she came near to the gate of Edinkip, the sun shone out upon Ben Voirlich, showing its clear top against a vivid patch of blue. But all its lower slopes were veiled in the circling and rolling mist, like sea foam in a summer day, glinting mysterious in the sun. Isla stood still, spellbound by the sheer beauty of it, and when all the freshness of these mountain solitudes washed clean by the winter snows and the spring rains enveloped her she uplifted a heart of sheer gratitude to Heaven because she had come home.

In this uplifted mood she came to Lochearn, but her eyes shadowed and avoided the placid waters of the Loch, about which so much tragic memory clung. There her brother Malcolm, last of his race, pushed by the stress of the circumstances his own folly had created, had deliberately made an end of himself. The horror of it was upon her still. It seemed incredible that more than a whole year had elapsed since the dawn of the black day for Achree and Glenogle. As she sped by the little kirk and the Manse, and came within sight of the huddled houses of the village, with the white front of the hotel showing through the budding greenery of the trees, her one desire was to escape from anybody who would recognise and question her. Had there been a field path or a circuitous route to Achree, she would have taken it that day, beyond all doubt. Fortunately, she chanced upon the village between twelve and one o'clock, when most of the folk were indoors at their midday meal. She sped like a hare past the hotel door, at which a post-gig stood, keeping her umbrella well down over her face, though there was scarcely a drop now trembling on the swish of the gentle wind.

Once clear of the hotel she breathed more freely, fearing nothing now till she should reach the old bridge and farmhouse of Darrach, where abode Elspeth Maclure, who had been nurse at Achree, and had married one of the Glenogle crofters. But before then, if she had a mind, she could scale the low dry-stone dyke, and keeping in the lea of the hill, altogether escape the scrutiny of Darrach's curious eyes. And they were curious. In the old happy-golucky days Isla had sometimes made mock of Elspeth's close watching of the Glenogle road, and twitted her with having eyes in the back of her head, so few of the comings

and goings did she miss.

About a stone's throw from Darrach gate she stepped over a low bit of the dyke, and sped like a hare past the whitewashed farmhouse, with its kind but watchful eyes. She was not ready yet for Elspeth Maclure's tongue, for her endless questioning, nor even for the love which would underlie it all her

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After Darrach the solitude became profound. The sky had now cleared almost wholly, and the air was soft and balmy as a child's kiss. The green shoots of the heather were showing on the bare uplands, and all the air was full of that indescribable melody and hum of life which marks the opening spring. With this benign beauty spread before her grateful eyes, Isla suddenly became conscious of how tired she must have been of the rugged cliffs of Barras, and the wide expanse of its sad grey sea. But presently all else was swept from her mind by the sudden gleam of the white gateway at Achree. It was closed, and there was no smoke from the chimney of the little lodge where no gatekeeper had dwelt these many years, not since the glory had departed from Achree. As she essayed with trembling hand to lift the latch, she observed how trimly everything was kept, a narrow strip of grass edging the avenue cut as fine and smooth as velvet. and not a weed visible on the rolled ground, nor a rent in the fence, a twisted wire, or a broken bough; all spoke of a fostering care to which Achree had until then been for many years a stranger.

At least they had cared greatly for her home, they had rished and tended it, and she must try to forget the

In the momentary uplifting of her whole being at herself once more among the scenes so familiar and beloved, she had put into the background her own hurt. She had done it fiercely, fully conscious that she had the whole of life to realise and mourn over this fresh blow dealt by Fate.

She closed the gate, and pulling all her forces together, walked steadily up between the sombre firs, and the budding larches and birches, towards the house. Then sudding there smote upon her ear a sharp incredulous bark, then another of deeper tone, and yet again a third, and ir a rediately her astonished eyes beheld the three dogs, Mardo and Bruce and Janet, whom she had imagined still at Creagh with Diarmid and Margaret Maclaren. Oh, what joy! what wild passionate exhibition of love and welcome! Isla's eyes were wet enough now, as she tried

to take them all in her arms at once, putting up her veil so that their dear faithful tongues might lick her face. It was a very orgy of welcome, and sent her round the last curve of the avenue with a lighter heart. And there, sure enough, in the low doorway stood Diarmid and Margaret, and it seemed for a brief space as if the past had been nothing but a hideous dream, and as if she had never been away from the home she held so dear. Tears were running down the old butler's cheeks, and though Margaret Maclaren was made of sterner stuff, she also was visibly moved.

"Oh, you good kind dears, how did you get here? I never expected to see you to-day. I thought I should find the American servants still in possession, and that I should have to tramp up to the Moor of Creagn to find a bit of home."

They both wanted to speak at once, but finally Margaret gave way with what grace she might, and Diarmid made haste to explain.

"The day pefore yesterday, Miss Isla, Mr. Rosmead—but will ye not come in and sit down, Miss Isla, for ye look white and tired, and it's maype that ye ha'e walkit frae Balquhidder."

"Yes, yes, I have walked from Balquhidder, but that, as you know, is nothing to me," she answered feverishly, for the sudden mention of Rosmead's name had made the blood recede from her heart, and set her trembling within. "Come in. You can tell me inside."

The door went wide to receive her, and when her foot touched the soft carpet, and she saw there many things which did not belong, and never could belong to Achree, she turned upon them sharply.

"Are they not all away?" she asked. "Why are these

"Oh, Miss Isla, they could not pe takin' carpets and such like," put in Margaret eagerly, for she had been much impressed with the generosity of the Rosmeads, and their complete desire to leave everything comfortable for her mistrees

"I will pe tellin' Miss Isla, Marget, if ye please," said Diarmid, with great dignity. "Please let me pegin where I lef' off. The day pefore yesterday, no it wass Tuesday, Man. r Rosmead came ridin' up the glen to the Lodge of Creagh, and askit speech wi' me. He telt me then, Miss Isla, that something had happent that obleeged them to pe leavin' Achree at a moment's notice, and goin' ower the seas again to Ameriky. He said that he wass to haf gone to Barras to see yoursel', but that on account of the telegrafts and such-like he had gotten, it would not pe possible, and that it was needfu' for him to sail upon Thursday, that wass yesterday.

"Then he said to Marget an' me, we wass to shut up the Lodge at Creagh and go doon to Achree to get ready for you, so as to pe here at any moment that you might arrive. We cam' yesterday, and they wass all cleared oot, an' the hoose jist as ye see it. But oh, Miss Isla, it iss not the same hoose; it is warm and comfortable, and they have

spent a heap on it."

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"Maype I micht get in my word now, Diarmic "observed Margaret, bursting with importance. "Mister Rosmead may haf done all that, but it wass to me that his mother gave over the hoose, and telt me all apoot the things that are left. An' forby she gave me a letter for you wrote with her ain hand, Miss Isla. I haf it up the stair. Will ye come up an' see a' ower the hoose, or will ye first tak' your lunch?"

"She will tak' it, of coorse," said Diarmid, fussing about her with delight. "Come in the dinin'-room, Miss Isla. The table iss laid. I had Jeems up from the Hotel to Creagh with the cairt to bring doon the silver chest and the linen box and ither things ye might like. Wass I richt, Miss Isla? for she"—(here he cast a withering glance Margaret)—"she was on my tap a' the time, finding faut wi' every single thing I did."

"Everything is right, quite right," answered Isla, in a low difficult voice. "Only I do not know this Achree."

Even in the dining-room the shabby, worn, old Kidderminster carpet had been covered with a beautiful soft felt

of a delicious blue colour, against which the white walls showed finely. There was more comfort, also more beauty, but she was in active revolt against it all. comfort and beauty of every arrangement, rendered easy by the abundance of money at disposal, was undeniable, but Isla could not reconcile herself to it.

Her eye softened, however when she saw the darns in the old damask tablecloth, and caught the gleam of the frail old silver salt cellars and muffineers of Queen Anne's period, and the heavy cut-glass jug and tumbler set ready for her lunch. A bunch of early primroses nestled in an old blue delft bowl in the centre, and it was all deliciously like home.

"Everything is quite right, and I will just take my lunch, if it is ready, before I go upstairs. How thoughtful and dear of you to think of making it ready!"

"I laid the table last nicht, Miss Isla, for fear you should get here quicker than we thocht, an' Marget had the fire

lichted in your room."

"The room Mr. Rosmead's mother had, Miss Isla," put in Margaret. "An' they've potten a new spring mattress on the bed that iss a treat, all covered with blue and white sateen that micht be satin for fineness."

"I shall have it out," cried Isla rebelliously; "and

get back my own feather bed."

"I wouldna, Miss Isla. I'm sure ye will not haf the hert when ye see the beauty of it, and hangings of blue silk at the windy, and mats o' the same on the table, and the drawers tied wi' bows at the corner, a fair treat to see."

"Go and poor the tatties, my wummin, that'll do more guid to Miss Isla than blue bows," said Diarmid scathingly.

In a short space of time Isla ate of the tender lamb fed on Glenogle braes, and tasted Margaret's incomparable bread pudding, the secret of which she had refused to give away for twenty years, and when she rose she was refreshed and the world seemed a little less dark. alone up the winding stairs, and there swept upon her in a great flood the memory of a day when Peter Rosmead, the American, and his sister Sadie had come on their first

visit of inspection to Achree, and they had laughed together in the dungeon-room.

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She could not repress a little thrill of admiration when she came to the big guest-chamber which had been so cunningly decorated to add to its beauty. And there on the mantel-piece she saw a big square envelope addressed in Mrs. Rosmead's small very delicate handwriting. She took it down, and opened it without delay, and presently a softer look stole into her face, and she felt ashamed of her past hardness towards the gentle sweet woman who assuredly had naught to do with what had happened.

"My dear," it began, "you will permit me to call you so for the last time, for it is unlikely we shall meet again. I am too old and too frail ever to come back to Scotland. though I had hoped I might end my days in this beautiful home of yours, and see fresh hopes blossom on its threshold. But God has willed otherwise for me and mine. My son tells me he has made you acquainted with what has happened, and how he has to go back to America to clear his name of the wicked aspersions they are casting upon it. That this should have happened to my son, I, his mother, who know him so well, feel to be the most unjust thing in the whole of a life that has been made up of endurance. It is needless for me to praise my son to you; you have already proved him for what he is. He speaks as if his life were over, but I shall never cease to pray that God will bring him back to Scotland some day, and not too late. This has taken the heart clean out of him, and put ten years on to his life. Now, my dear, a word concerning the few things we must leave in the house. It would not be possible for us to remove them now, or at any time. Will you take them as a gift from the old woman who has had so many happy days in this sweet spot, and who will never forget it? I beg you to do this, and to think no more of them except that they, having once been in Achree, must belong there; they can never be put elsewhere. But I know that your Highland pride is as high as your Highland hills, and so I am not sure. If you will not suffer them

under your roof, then give them elsewhere; only I do not wish to know to whom. They never will be of any use to Goodbye, and God bless you. If we never meet again, yet I will never forget you. More I cannot, dare not say.—Yours affectionately,

"HELEN CARLETON ROSMEAD."

Isla laid the letter down, and from her bosom drew the crumpled and discoloured sheet that had been rescued from the Barras seas. She smoothed it out, and deliberately read it through once more; and once more the finality of it struck home, the finality and the cruelty. For she had given him her whole heart, surrendered her soul into his keeping, and to a woman like Isla Mackinnon it is no light thing, but the most supreme that life can hold. And he threw it back; he did not even give her the chance to stand by his side, to be to him all that a woman can be to a man whom misfortune has overtaken. She did not understand that in the country from which he had come, the women are sheltered creatures, who must be spared and saved at all costs. Whoever suffers, they must not; they must have their gewgaws, their ease, their comfort, their idle days. He had classed her with these, and so put her out of his life, as a man resolutely turns his eyes from some bauble for which his purse cannot pay.

"A Builder of Bridges" he had called himself, but he could not bridge this little gulf, which seemed to Isla of no account at all. The only thing that mattered surely in

life was love; and it had failed.

Well, she would live without it; there were other things. Surely she would lay hold of these, and show the world how a Mackinnon, thrice bereft, could still hold up her head.

Diarmid's wheedling voice and knock at the door dis-

turbed the even bitterness of her thought.

"Mr. Drummond of Garrion, Miss Isla, just arrived, in the library awaitin' your pleeshur."

#### CHAPTER IV.

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#### TENDER AND TRUE.

ISLA sprang up, eager on the spur of the moment to deny herself to her old friend. She was not ready to see him yet.

But once more the inevitableness of everything swept over her, and she sat down a little helplessly, wringing her hands. No man or woman, however determined and self-sufficient, can order life without taking account of others. All the strands are complicated and indissolubly woven together, and it is not human hands that can unravel them.

She reflected that, sooner or later, if she proposed to remain in Glenogle, she would have to meet all she had known in the old days. Why, then, better begin now!

"Tell Mr. Drummond I will be down in a few minutes, Diarmid. Is he alone?"

"Yes, Miss Isla, and ridin'. He put in the beast wi' his own hands."

Diarmid closed the door, and Isla walked to the toilet table, bedecked with blue bows, and took a survey of herself in the mirror swinging there. She was struck by the oldness and hardness of her face. The colour was no longer clear and delicate there, but of an even paleness, and her mouth seemed long and thin and determined.

"I might be forty," she muttered to herself. "Well, it is so much the better. Perhaps life will be shorter than it might have been to a happier woman."

She dipped her face and hands in the water that she had suffered to grow cold in the shining brass jug, smoothed her hair, brushed the dust from her skirt, and walked

steadily down the stairs. She was conscious of a sharp and increasing sense of embarrassment, for she had not seen Neil Drummond, nor yet heard from him, since that day, fourteen months before, when they had met on the Moor of Creagh, and she had told him definitely that she could give him no reward for his long devotion. Her cheeks burned at the memory of the words with which she had confessed to Neil her love for Peter Rosmead.

"I would follow him to the end of the world without a question or a doubt," she had said, " and I would not have

a wish apart from his will. That is how I care."

But Rosmead had not even given her the chance to prove

herself; he had simply put her out of his life.

The humiliating acuteness of this memory caused a certain high pride of bearing, and the colour had not left her cheek when she entered the library and Drummond sprang to

A very manly attractive figure he made in his smart well-cut riding suit, and Isla, smiling and trembling a little, thought that he, too, had aged, and that he had completely lost the appearance of extreme youth and boyishness which had sometimes tempted people to forget that he was Laird of Garrion.

"So it is true," he cried, with a joyous note in his pleasant voice. "They told me at Kingshouse not an hour ago that you had been seen in the train, then again at Balquhidder they described somebody that answered your description. When did you come?"

Isla drew her hands from his warm kindly clasp, and motioned him to a seat, imagining her ordeal was about to

"Only just this morning, of course, as I was seen in the train, and tracked to Balquhidder. You are just as of yore,

Neil, always about in unexpected places."

He threw back his head and laughed, and somehow again it struck Isla that her old lover had changed in some indefinable fashion. She had got so used to his lover-like attentions that, while it would be too much to say that she missed them-for certainly never could they have

been more unwelcome—the complete friendliness of his manner puzzled her.

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He might have been a brother or some near kinsman only anxious to do her service. There was not a hint of memory or reproach, nor any assumption of lover-like interest. While the relief was immense, yet somehow she felt as if all things were slipping from her grasp, and that presently she would find herself stranded derelict on the shore.

"I meant, of course, when did you leave Barras, and how are they all there? And did you make that ghastly journey alone? And are you going to stop here, or is it only a bird of passage you are? as you have been for the last two or three years, just spreading your wings for a minute or so in your old haunts."

"Dear me, what a long speech, Neil! But it has so many questions, I don't think I'll try to answer them. Tell me first, how they are at Garrion—Kitty and dear Lady Betty."

"Kit is fine, and saucier than ever. My aunt is not so well. She has been very little out this winter. And I think you might have written to her oftener than you did, Isla. She fretted over your silence."

The reproach, honestly uttered, because Neil himself had felt her neglect of his aunt, did not fail of its mark.

"I do nothing but wrong, Neil, and I am not worth anybody's consideration or kindness," she answered, with a quick wounded note in her voice. "I might try to tell you how strangely the year has passed at Barras, and how I seemed not to be the same Isla Mackinnon, but a strange new kind of person, cut off from everything. But I will come to Garrion one day very soon, tell Lady Betty, and make peace with her."

"They all have the same tale of woe, Isla. I took to haunting Darrach trying to get word of you from Elspeth Maclure, but it was no earthly good. Well, now you have come back I suppose it won't be for any length of time. May I ask a question about the Rosmeads, Isla, or may I not?"

"You may ask, but I know little about them," she said, and the note of strain sounded poignantly in her voice.

"All sorts of rumours are about; the oddest that some bridge he has built has been swept away, and that he is to be tried for it. Of course, that is quite ridiculous, for if he knew anything at all, surely Rosmead knew his business. I did see mention of the disaster in the newspapers one day at the beginning of the week, but I didn't even read it. So many things of that kind happen in America; trains toppling over bridges and embankments seem to be of everyday occurrence," said Neil airily, not having the slightest idea that he was treading on the edge of a precipice. "You can tell us what has actually happened, and shut people's mouths."

"What actually happened is just what people say," answered Isla steadily. "The bridge is down, and Mr. Rosmead's reputation with it. He himself has told me so."

Neil looked at her dumfoundered, for the manner and tone to which she had steeled herself might have indicated that she was speaking of a stranger in whom she did not take the smallest interest.

"But, my-my dear," he said stupidly, "it can't be. Do you really mean to say that Rosmead will be held responsible for this disaster?"

She inclined her head.

"Need we talk about it, Neil? America is far away, and, as you say, the happenings there cannot be classed with the sane order of our lives here. They are outside our scheme of things."

Drummond stared at her, open-eyed, wondering whether he heard aright. Back upon his memory also rushed the

words spoken on the Moor of Creagh.

"That is how I care!" He heard the low tense vibration of her voice still, had often heard it in his lonely rides across moor and hill, trying to rid him of his pain. Could this be the same voice, the same woman speaking

"Isla, there is something here a simple chap like me can't understand. God knows, nothing could be farther

from my mind than to seek to pry into your concerns. At least you will acquit me of that. But if there is any way in which I can help or be of the smallest use, either by speaking or doing or even by just holding my tongue, you have only to command me, and it is done."

She seemed to ponder a moment, quietly wringing her hands. Then she cast upon him a look he never forgot.

"I can't speak about it just yet, Neil. Let us talk of other things. I am afraid I shall want your help a great many times now I have come back to Achree. I am going to live here, and—and manage it myself."

"For good, for always?" he asked anxiously.

She nodded.

"Yes, I thought it all out as I sat in that interminable train from Lochshane to Perth. Mr. Cattanach told me that there had been only two offers for the home farm since Chisholm died, and both of them unsatisfactory. I will keep it myself. It will give me something to do, and Donald Maclure will help me. So I shall be coming presently to ask all sorts of advice from you about cattle and sheep and winter fodder, and the succession of crops."

Neil's eyes, wide with questioning, clave to her face.

He saw the nervous hands still working on her lap, the rapid rise and fall of her bosom, the red fluctuating in her cheek.

The whole thing was a mystery, but the only conclusion he could come to was that Isla had gone back on Rosmead, because of his fallen fortunes; that her pride would not permit her to be associated with anything that savoured of public obloquy or disgrace. And yet, was such an attitude worthy of Isla, who in every elation of her life had displayed such tremendous courage and self-sacrifice?

"Of course it will be grand news for all the Glens that you are coming to make your home permanently here. We all expected it, though in somewhat different guise. Have all the Rosmeads left this country?"

"They have all left, and for good," she answered steadily, and there fell a moment of strained silence.

" I will never let my house again," she went on presently.

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"For, someho.", when one comes back to it nothing is the same. One is haunted by the strange folk that have been living in it and from whom one cannot get away."

"I could understand that feeling, and certainly the inside of Achree is not as it used to be. I suppose you will be packing up all their stuff and sending it after them, though I think it was mean of them to give you the trouble."

"I will not do that, I think," she answered. "But I have not made up my mind. There are so many things to face and to think about that I'm in a muddle yet. Now, you have had a sickening, I am sure, of me and my affairs. Let's talk about something else. Tell me about the new folk at Dunmohr. Glasgow iron-founders, aren't they? Mr. Cattanach was telling me about their riches and their display."

"Oh, but they are quite decent folks, Isla, and though it was an awful thing to see Dunmohr change hands like that, it might have been worse, for at least Dennison is a good Scottish name, and their money has been honestly come by," said Neil generously.

"Is there a family?" asked Isla, but though her lips asked the question her eyes were far away.

"Quite a large family; five or six, I believe."

"Have people called on them?"

"Some of us have," said Neil cautiously. "My aunt refused, but Kitty and I went, though we didn't find any of them at home. Lady Eden is thinking about it, and if she goes I suppose the rest will follow like sheep. Meantime I do believe the Glens are waiting on that."

Isla smiled a far-away smile.

"I don't envy them their position at first. Did you happen to hear what they paid for it?"

'Sixty-five thousand."

"Sixty-five thousand!" she repeated, in an awe-stricken voice, and seemed to ponder it in her mind.

"Neil," she said suddenly, "if Dunmohr fetched that enormous sum of money, how much is Achree worth?"

Drummond did not like the question, but he answered it to the best of his ability.

"Well, you see, Achree is out of repair. The new house at Dunmohr is what tempted the Glasgow folk. Then the acreage is twice as much. Thirty thousand would be the outside price Achree would fetch in the open market. But don't be tempted, Isla. Whatever you do, stick to the old place."

"Oh, I was not contemplating it; only money is very powerful, don't you think, Neil? It seems to oil the

machinery of life," she said wistfully.

"There are things it can't buy, nevertheless," said Drummond stoutly, feeling that Isla was wandering in dangerous and desolate places from which she would have

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"Oh, but perhaps we, the old folks of the Glens, Neil, have exaggerated them all. Do you think that even Achree has been worth what it cost the Mackinnons? Take my father, for instance. If he had sold it when he retired from the army, what luxury and comfort he might have had! He might even have been alive still. As for me, I am sick of it, deadly sick! I want money, Neil. I need it, and money I must get from somewhere to make life possible."

A kind of horror was in his eyes as he listened to these wild words. In the old days Isla had despised money, regarding it merely as a necessity in some small degree. To hear her speak in slavish worship of it appalled him.

"Oh come, Isla!" he began; but she stopped him with

a sudden imperative wave of her hand.

"I am come back to Achree a new Isla Mackinnon, Neil. Either I am confusing values or getting hold of the right ones. Anyway, I don't believe any more that people should starve and stultify themselves for the sake of a place and of mere family tradition. The whole idea is false, and I don't believe either that such a point of view is good for the people who may be dependent on the place, the small farmers, I mean, and the crofters. It is nothing but sentiment, and false sentiment at that."

"You are a new Isla Mackinnon indeed!" was all that Drummond could say, but there was a mournful note in

his voice as if he were not sure about the change.

"The thing that chiefly concerns us at present, anyhow," he continued more cheerily, as he rose to his feet, " is that you have come back to Achree, and that you are going to bide. That will be good news for them at Garrion. Have I your permission to tell them, and can they come over as soon as they like?"

"Yes, of course, why not? But since I have behaved so badly to them, and especially to Lady Betty, let me come over first and make my peace," said Isla, rising too. "Tell her I'll come to-morrow."

"But how will you come? Has Rosmead left a beast

in the stable of any kind?"

"No, he had none, unless the sheltie they used for the moors is there yet. But I have my bicycle, Neil, if Diarmid remembered to bring it down from Creagh."

"Can I fetch you, Isla, to-morrow morning at eleven

or twelve, and take you over to lunch?"

She looked at him oddly, he thought, and it was a minute or two before she spoke. And then all she said was, "I

"Let me decide. It's a long pull to Garrion on the bicycle, Isla. I'll tell you what; just you wait here till you hear something from us. In all probability Kit will come over herself with the cart. Well, I'll be going back with the great news."

Isla followed him very quietly out of the library, and when they came to the hall-place, she seemed to hesitate

as if loth to let him go.

"What is it, Isla?" he asked kindly. "Is there anything you would like me to do for you? Just speak, and if it is in my power consider it done."

She leaned against the old oak table in the middle of the floor, and folding her arms across her chest, spoke out

"Everybody will be asking endless questions of me, Neil. I wonder whether I might ask you to help to shut

"Yes, you may, though what it is they have to be shut about I'm sure I don't know. You don't want them to stop saving they are pleased to have you back in Glenogle? If it's that you want, it can't be done," he said, with his slightly humorous smile, which brought out all the fine lines of his mouth, and restored the vanished boyhood Isla had missed.

He waited patiently, but Isla was a long time in coming

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"It isn't easy, Neil, to speak about it at all, but it is easier to tell you than anybody, for you are the most understanding person I've ever met," she said; then, "it's about the Rosmeads, they'll be asking questions. They've gone back to America for good, and never will come back to Achree, or even to Scotland again."

"But Rosmead will, of course," put in Drummond

sharply.

"Rosmead will not," she repeated clearly, "I have his own word for it."

"Then we shall not get keeping you long,' said Neil, harking back in his mind to the refrain, " I will follow him to the ends of the earth." "Don't tell me that you are going to turn your back on us all, and become an American citizen."

"No, I shall never marry Mr. Rosmead. Don't you see

everything has come to an end between us."

"Good God!" said Drummond, staring hard at her, and unable to disguise his horror. It was nothing less. "What has happened?"

"Only that—that it is not going to be convenient for Mr. Rosmead to marry me after all," she said, with a strange shrill note in her voice. "He—he has other and

more important matters to engage his attention."

"Good God!" repeated Drummond again, and his colour rose in his honest face, and Isla saw him clench the hand that held the riding-switch as if it itched to be laying it about somebody's ears.

"He is a ruined man, and has acted as he considers in my best interests," Isla went on drearily. "He has released me from my promise to him, without giving me

any choice."

Drummond did not speak for a moment.

" I had better not say anything, Isla, for I would say too much. This is a thing that needs digestion. But, tell me, what is it you wish me to say to them at home, and outside as well, if they ask me, which they certainly will?"

" Just say that my engagement to Mr. Rosmead is broken off, and that I intend to remain in Achree for the present,

Drummond bowed his head. Watching her narrowly he was unable either to gauge the depth of her feeling, or to judge what was the best line for him to take. Condolence would be out of place, for that small head had never been more proudly carried, never had she seemed more remote and inaccessible than at the moment when she was laying bare to him the fresh tragedy of her life.

"I will do my best. If I don't say anything, you understand, don't you, Isla? It's not a subject on which a man

like me can hope to express himself moderately."

"I understand, but of course we must not be too quick to misjudge. Mr. Rosmead's standard may differ from ours. It may even be so high that we can't even grasp it."

Isla spoke with perfect sincerity, but Drummond took

it ill.

"I'll say goodbye, Isla, and go out and chew this. There is only one word that meets the case, in my estimation, and that I mayn't utter in your presence. I haven't got the hang of things where you are concerned yet. I can't forget the last time you and I spoke of Rosmead on the Moor of Silence. I've got to adjust my point of view, once more, that's all. But of one thing you can be sure, I'll make it as easy as I can for you outside, and at Garrion. Don't do anything till you hear again from me."

He shook hands with her, and his grip hurt, while his kind eyes met hers in a full glance of brotherly sympathy and comradeship.

But nothing more. The situation was not complicated by any recurrence of lovemaking, or by a hint that he felt to her otherwise than as a friend. He had given her back her promise that day on the Moor of Creagh for ever !

Isla ought to have rejoiced at this tacit intimation that his hurt was cured, but did she? Ah, who shall gauge or probe the depths of the heart of a woman, which is ever a riddle she can hardly read herself?

As she wandered back to the library, feeling the house oddly empty, and the world but a chill place of bitter memory and false hope, some old words she had read somewhere recurred to her memory.

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart;
"Tis woman's whole existence."

"It shan't be mine! It shan't be mine!" she cried, clenching her passionate hands. "I'll make a way for myself, and show them that it is possible for a woman to live a full, useful, and happy life altogether outside the sphere of men."

A brave boast, but a vain one. Already Destiny was

weaving a fresh coil for Isla Mackinnon.

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Across the quiet waters of Lochearn, as she went to bed that night, she caught the gleaming lights of Dunmohr through the trees.

The Glasgow folk were talking of her, and on the morrow began the unwinding of the coil.

## CHAPTER V.

# THE "GLASGOW FOLK."

"WHERE'S mother?" called out four voices in chorus, when James Dennison, the new Laird of Dunmohr, entered the dining-room, where his family were already seated at

"She has a bit of a headache, and her breakfast is going up," he answered, nodding to them collectively. ye are not needin' to tumble up the stair helter-skelter, Maggie Hastie is waitin' on her. Jinnat, come back an' pour oot my tea!"

But Jinnat only laughed over her shoulder, and dis-

appeared.

"Never mind, father, I know how you like it," said Mab, the youngest and flower of the flock, as she slid into her sister's chair and took off the highly embroidered tea cosy, product of one of the numerous bazaars which Mrs. Dennison patronised in Glasgow every season.

"I hope it's only a headache, sir?" said Archie, now the oldest son at home. "Somehow the place isn't the same

without mother."

"Dear me, what mother's bairns ye all are to be sure," quoth he, who was the biggest bairn of them all. "She's

tired wi' the flittin', that's all."

"Well, she will do everything herself," said Mab, as she handed up her father's cup. "What do you think, father. Yesterday I saw her down on her knees in the boudoir, showing the upholsterer's men how to lay her carpet."

"Well, and what she showed them would be richt, lass," answered Dennison stoutly. "For what your mother does not ken about a hoose is not worth kennin'."

"She certainly makes a place like a home quicker than anybody I've ever seen," said Archie, as he helped himself to kidney and bacon from the sideboard.

"What can I send you, sir? Here's some of Jimmy's

trout, try one?"

"Ay, I micht if there's plenty pepper an' saut on them.

Guid sport yesterday, Jimmy, lad?"

Jarues Dennison was one of Glasgow's self-made men, and the best of the type. Born in the home of a Paisley veaver, one of the Pen folk who contributed so much that was worthy and fine to the web of Scottish life, he had gone out as a matter of course to work at the early age of nine, and had been practically self-supporting ever since.

Before he was twelve he had signed on as an apprentice in the great Clydebank engineering and shipbuilding firm of which he was now the honoured head. How is such a career shared and hewn, the casual observer may well ask, in these days when the pathway of youth is so safeguarded

and made easy by individual and State alike?

The answer is ready. It is shaped and hewn by the sweat of the brain and of the body, by self-denial and scanty sleep and incessant toil, and dogged perseverance, all of which are being rapidly eliminated from the calendar of youth. In that strenuous fight the eight-hours' day has no part; no, nor the slacker's output. All is of a piece, solid, fine, invincible, like the giant oak of which the good ships' timbers are hewn.

The success that had followed hard upon James Dennison's life of hard toil and far-seeing ability had left him simple in his tastes and in his heart as a little child. The speech of his forefathers he neither had disdained nor abandoned, and one of the loveliest attributes of his character was his absolute devotion to the wife of his youth.

To outward appearance Mrs. James Dennison was not the ideal for a man's devotion. She was short and squat, had grown very stout in middle life, her face was ruddy

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like a winter apple, and her laughing eyes, under their grey brows, had lost much of their early brilliance. Also, she took no pains with her appearance. Her clothes cost money, but she did not know how to wear them. It is not too much to say that though she was glad to think that her Jimse had got on well, the growing luxury of her domestic state and the increasing needs of her very good-looking and smart family occasionally irked her. Her greatest treat was when she could surreptitiously tie a big, white apron about her ample waist and fleck round with a duster, showing the "huzzies" how work should be done. Yet, with it all, her household, from her Jimse down to the "tweeny" in the kitchen, and the boot-boy in the scullery. adored and revered her. She wielded a sceptre as omnipotent as that of any autocrat, and owned the secret which many women more richly endowed would give a world to acquire. Perhaps we may come up to it as v.e follow her influence through these pages. She was the real Laird of Dunmohr, just as she had been the absolute head and heart of the big Glasgow West End mansion that had been their home for the last fifteen years.

It may be permissible, however, to whisper even here that her only guile was love, and that her sunny heart refused to look on the dark side, or to recognise evil in man or woman. She had an excuse for every fault, and love for every sinner. Consequently, fear was slain in her presence.

It was James Dennison's avowed intention to retire gradually from active participation in the vast concern on the Clyde, and the purchase of a permanent home in the country was the first step towards it. He was now in his sixty-fifth year, and had two capable sons with him at the works, but when he talked of the day when Fairburn should be given over wholly to the boys, his wife's eyes merely twinkled. She knew him through and through, and that in his ears than the wild cry of the whaup or the purl of the mountain burn.

These things might do for the Sabbath, or for the recreation of holiday-time, but they could never fill up the sum

of a man's life—at least, not a man like her Jimse. The two elder sons, Hugh and Archie, were in the business, while Jimmy, the third, was at Oxford, a student at Magdalen. His career had not been decided on. He had taken almost every available classical prize in Glasgow, and was bidding fair to follow suit at Oxford. Money being plentiful, there was no occasion to hurry his decision. Meanwhile, he was enjoying to the full the splendid fishing in Glenardle.

They had been settled scarcely a month in Dunmohr, and Archie had come down for every week-end. The intervening nights he spent either at his brother's house at Dowanhill, or, when pressed at the works, he would sleep there in the comfortable, though simple, suite of rooms his father had furnished for emergency. Like his father, Archie was devoted to work, and to all the interests of Fairburn. He was absolute master of every technical detail, having begun at the lowest rung of the ladder, and had no favour shown him in the shops though he was his father's son. That was the part of it Archie loved best. and when the boat was finished, he loved it all the more. because he knew every rivet and bolt and screw that had gone to her fashioning. Hugh, on the other hand, had a fine head for figures, and their father often said to his wife how well off he was with two such steady and capable sons.

The family life of the Dennisons was builded on the rock, and though the pair had had many differences, as two strong personalities must have, there had never been any real cloud on their happiness. Dennison was a big gaunt man, with a somewhat harsh-featured face and a pair of extraordinarily bright and piercing blue-grey eyes. His scanty grey hair matched the old-fashioned straggling beard, which he had never taken off in accordance with the new clean-shaven fashion. Archie favoured his father, but was of a more refined type. He was considered one of the handsomest young men in Glasgow, and one of the most eligible partis. In fact, Archie Dennison was in a fair way of being spoiled completely, and had arrived at the

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conclusion that he had but to desire a thing, and it was his. But Destiny had not begun to treat him seriously as yet. They were all deeply interested in their father's latest investment, and prepared heartily to enjoy their life at Dunmohr.

It is possible that could the old-established dwellers in the Glens have overheard some of their remarks, their eyes might have been opened. Social climbers the Dennisons certainly were not, and whether the big folks of the Glens called or not, was a matter of small moment to them. They had one another, they had their own Glasgow circle, they were wholly independent of the social conditions of the Glens, which, so far as they were presently concerned, were undeniably chilly. While Lady Eden and sundry others were taking the case of the Dennisons to avizandum, and openly resenting the fact that Dunmohr should have passed into the hands of such people, the Dennisons were settling themselves down comfortably, enjoying their new house, and the sense of freedom, and all the beauty of Glenardle, without giving the exclusive neighbours a single thought. It is not too much to say that had Mrs. James Dennison been obliged to receive one of them in her apron, she would not have been in the least put about. Presently, indeed, that actually happened, and was an eye-opener to more than one in the Glen.

There was perhaps less talk than anal at the breakfast table, for already the motor was at the door that was to take them to the station for the nine o'clock train.

"Will you go up this morning, if mother isn't so well, sir?" asked Archie, as he rose from the table.

"I'll just pop up and see what she's saying to it," answered Mr. Dennison, rising too.

"I'll come up with you, father. I haven't seen mother yet."

They went together up the wide richly carpeted stairse, and entered the spacious bedroom furnished in satinwood and pink damask. At the door they met Janet, and she stepped back with them. Janet was a demure staid-looking person, very neat in her dress and a little it was riously ather's eir life

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old-maidish in her ways. In Glasgow she had been devoted to work among the poor, and there was hardly a charitable or philanthropic Committee on which her name did not appear.

She was likely to feel the complete change in the order of their lives more than any of them, and was already planning some scheme for the continuation of her manifold

activities.

"Mother's all right," she assured them, as she settled her eveglass more firmly on her somewhat piquant nose; she was seldom seen without the eyeglass, Mab declaring that she often forgot and slept in it. "She is making quite a good breakfast. But you are not going up to Glasgow this morning, are you, father?"

"I'll see what your mother says to it," answered Dennison, with his usual caution. "You go down and get your

breakfast. Archie and me'll go in."

They entered the room together to find mother sitting up in her bed, a gracious figure, ready to smile on the whole world.

"You are a fraud, mother," said Archie, as he dropped his big firm hand on her shoulder, and patted it gently. The Dennisons were not a demonstrative family, and open

endearments they loathed.

"Are ye gaun up the day, Jimse?" she inquired, the long sweet roll of the Glasgow tongue falling musically on their ears. "I never saw the like. Ye are as eager as ye were when we began in Whiteinch first, only it was five o'clock in the mornin' then, instead o' nine. Are ye hearin' that, Archie, lad?"

She patted the satin eiderdown across her knees, and shook with laughter, so that the pink silk lace negligée she wore about her shoulders became disarranged, and Archie

had to adjust it.

"I'm not goin' then, Lisbeth, the day," said her husband, "so you are wrong for wance. Tell Hugh I'll see him the morn aboot the Austrian contract, and to do naething or I come."

"But ye needna bide for me Jimse," said his wife

stoutly, "I'm gettin' up in a meenit or twa. Ye ken fine you'll be hingin' aboot like a knotless threid maist o' the day. You retire? Deil a haet o' ye! Well, I'm no blamin' ye. Maybe noo you'll understand what I had to pit up wi' when we gaed first oot to the big hoose at Dowanhill, and I had to sort oot the wark for six hizzies an' no pit to hand mysel, besides wearin' my best goon to my reakiest. Ye had better tak' your faither away, Archie, or there'll be twa sair heids in the hoose afor denner-time, culy see that he comes hame early; there's a good lad."

She spoke about them both precisely as if they were schoolboys needing to be kept in strict order.

She's a trum-major, isn't she, Airchie, but I'm no caun the ac;. I've twa or three things to settle wi the factor, and the Austrian business can wait."

"We.!, I'll go, mother, goodbye, and maybe when I come down you and father will have settled who is going to be Laird of Dunmohr," he laughed as he went out of the door.

When it was closed, Dennison sat down on the front of the

"Lisbeth, have ye noticed onything oot of the common wi' Archie lately?"

"Ay, I have. I've thocht him very quate lately. What is't, do ye think?"

Motherly anxiety, the most acute, was in her eyes, and for a moment Dennison hesitated to deepen it.

"It micht be a lassie," he said quaintly. does not seem to be onything eise to account for it."

"Well, if it was only that, an' she was a richt lassie, like Hugh's wife, we wouldna be mindin'. Airchie is twenty-seevin. Ye were a faither afore that, Jimse."

"Ay, but lads brocht up like oors dinna mairry in sic a hurry, Lisbeth. Their mithers make them ower comfortable. Isabel Gilmour is a' very weel for Hugh; he disna mind her high-falutin' style, though mind ye, I think they are spendin' faur ower muckle, but she would not suit Airchie. There's a cauldness aboot her that wad send him

"It's Airchie ye are speaking aboot, Jimse. I've never thocht he had ony truck wi' the deil," she said quickly.

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"No—no, he's a good lad, but it is in him, Lisbeth. Ye haven seen him as I have among men an' oot among the big things o' life. He has a quick jealous temper, an' whiles he acts on a stupid impulse. A good wife will make or mar Airchie. I could wish I saw him wi' wan."

"Oh, there's time enough," she answered, relieved.
"We canna afford a third hoose for a year or twa," she added, with her old economical turn, which so often showed in unexpected places. "I'm no' needin' to lose Airchie, though, maybe," she added musingly, "he micht meet somebody doon here he wad like."

"Unless she be the richt kind, he'll be better at your apron-string, for a year or twa yet," concluded Dennison.
"I'll go doon an' see him aff."

But at that moment the hoot and start of the motor rent the air, and all he could do was to rush to the window, and wave to his departing son.

The car, one of the new luxuries necessitated by a house five miles from the station, made short work of the distance between Glenardle and Balquhidder. Archibald Dennison, leaning back in the luxurious seat, puffing at his cigar-looked the picture of prosperous ease, typical product of the giant industries of the West, which builds up fortunes undreamed of by the simple dwellers on the land, even when the rent-roll is long and fairly substantial

Once upon the main road from Killin and Genogle, it had to be hooting perpetually to warn passengers to the side of the road.

On the last slope of the brae which led up to the station, Archibald Dennison was struck by a woman's figure, walking with a fine gallant step, right in the middle of the road. She was in black, a trim well-cut skirt and close-fitting jacket, absolutely devoid of trimming, while a small toque of soft tulle rested on her beautiful hair. He was tempted to take a good side glance at her; as the motor whizzed by she was holding her so irt a little aloof as if she

feared contamination, and he felt himself well rewarded for his pains.

"You don't have to know who that lady is, Grieve, do you?" he inquired of the chauffeur, when he alighted.

The man shook his head. He was a Glasgow lad, and liking his new job very well. Also, he was of an inquiring turn of mind; and already had acquired an astonishing amount of information regarding the natives.

"She's strange, Maister Airchie. I've never seen her hereaboots afore."

Archibald gave the man a cigar, an extravagance of which he was often guilty, and of which his father disapproved, and passed up the steps to the platform. A good few passengers were there already, and it was likely to be a full train, as the return of Easter holiday makers had begun.

Dennison watched with an eagerness which in no way surprised him, for he had always had an eye for a pretty face and a neatly turned ankle, for the appearance of the figure that had interested him on the road.

When she came, at last, and he saw her at close quarters, his admiration increased. So far, he had not had any opportunity of meeting any of the ladies of the district. Very few callers had as yet found their way to Dunmohr, and these he had missed. But so far he had not seen anything to make him regret the omission. But there was something about this woman which drew him like a magnet. His quick eye discerned that though she had passed her first girlhood, her figure had lost none of its svelte grace. The walk had brought a delicious colour to her cheeks, and her smile, as she greeted this one and that, was winning and sweet. She appeared to be well known, and every greeting she received was touched with deference.

"Who is that lady?" Archie inquired of the stationmaster at last, unable longer to stifle his curiosity and

"Which, sir? Oh! that one, Miss Mackinnon of Achree, sir, only just come back from her uncle's, Sir Thomas Mackinnon's, away in the Western Islands. Achree has

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i been let for the last year or two, sir, to some American folk."

Archibald nodded, fully enlightened, and his interest deepened and quickened as he watched the poise of her beautiful body, and the dignified charm of her face.

"After all," he muttered to himself, "there's something in breeding. Now, Mab is pretty, and Janet looks nice, too, but compare them——"

At the moment the signal fell quickly, and high up on the slope the train appeared, gliding like a serpent to its appointed place.

There was a good deal of bustle and, apparently, some difficulty in finding accommodation for all the passengers. At the last moment the door of the first-class compartment in which Dennison was seated was thrown open, and the station-master himself showed in the lady whom he had so much admired.

"I'm very sorry, Murdoch," she murmured, and her voice was as sweet as the rest of her. "Thank you very much, but I think you must represent to your Company that an extra third-class coach is required at Balquhidder on Monday morning. I can change at Callander."

"A' richt, ma'am, it doesna much matter, for surely you are entitled to a seat," he replied, as he closed the door, and stepped back to get the train off.

In the compartment these two were quite alone, and it was a non-smoker. Archie preferred his smoke in the open, and unless he had company he knew, seldom entered a smoking compartment. Secretly pleased at the happy chance that had given him such a charming travelling companion, though, so far, she had not as much as glanced at him, he inquired politely what he could do for her in the matter of windows.

"It is Quite all right now, thank you," she answered, but without looking at him, which piqued him a good deal. For being one of Glasgow's handsomest and most eligible partis he was not accustomed to such complete indifference on the part of the other sex. In fact, he had been a good deal spoiled by women, and imagined himself pretty well

irresistible. Not that he suffered any such objectionable assumption to colour either his thoughts or his actions towards women; it was rather a conviction which, because it was deeply rooted, did not require to be talked about. He believed that when he wished to settle down he would have no difficulty in obtaining the wife he desired.

He had a book in his pocket, which he opened. His companion, however, apparently quite oblivious of his presence, sat still, looking straight out of the window, her expression indicating that she had plenty of absorbing

matter engaging her thoughts.

Suddenly, however, she opened the neat black morocco bag, with the silver clasp, and took some papers out of it. Then she seemed to look for something further, and, not finding it, appeared troubled. Still quite oblivious of him, she laid out everything the bag contained on the seat at her side, and then searched her pocket, her colour rising, and other signs of perturbation becoming visible in her

"You have lost something, perhaps?" suggested Archie, slightly raising his hat and bending forward anxiously.

She smiled in a remote, but not unfriendly fashion, as she suffered her eyes to meet his for a moment. He had a good face, and his manner was beyond reproach. She had no idea who he was, but, at least, he was a decent person, to whom one might speak.

"I am afraid it is my purse," she said rather ruefully. "I had it in my hand when I was careering up and down the platform looking for a third-class seat. I think it must have slipped out of my hand just as I was getting in, and

fallen between the train and the platform."

"How unfortunate! Are you going far?"

"To Glasgow, but, you see, it has my ticket as well as my money in it. I shall have to get out at the next

"Oh, that seems unnecessary!"

"I am afraid not; you see, though I am well known here, I should be at a loss further on, when the ticketchecker came round. I am sorry, because I have an

important appointment in town to-day, and the next train will be too late."

Dennison pondered a moment, wondering whether he

might presume.

"I am sorry indeed, but—but might I offer to—to step into the breach, don't you know," he said, and the likeness to his mother crept out in his face as he spoke. "My name is Dennison. You may have heard it. We have just recently come to Dunmohr, in Glenardle."

Isla smiled, and gave him a sort of greeting in a little

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"Oh, you are Mr. Dennison! I ought to bid you welcome to Lochearn, I suppose? I am Miss Mackinnon of Achree."

"And will you permit me to be of use to you in the matter of a sovereign?"

Isla laughed outright.

"Well, if you put it like that, I think I shall be more than glad," she said frankly. "As we are in a sense neighbours, it is not like taking it from a stranger, and I can send it across by hand this evening, after I return."

Dennison thrust his hand into his pocket, and then, to

his dismay, found it empty.

"I'm blessed if I'm not in the same boat. I put on another suit this morning, and forgot to transfer my stuff. I haven't even my season."

They looked at one another comically for a moment, and

then Isla gave a little sigh.

"Then I haven't any choice. I shall simply have to get out at Strathyre, and go back, after I've sent a telegram

to Glasgow."

"If you'll leave it to me, Miss Mackinnon, I'll manage it somehow. I know several men on this train, and some others will come in at Callander. I'll get a couple of sovereigns, somehow."

Isla pondered a moment, and then said she would.

It is possible that this unconventional behaviour was rendered easier and more natural to her by the fact that she had been so long on her own resources, and had been

obliged, by circumstances, to step out of the shelter which usually hedges about women of her class.

She concluded that she could trust Archibald Dennison, though her acceptance of his travelling courtesy would necessitate an early call on his mother at Dunmohr.

The ten minutes' wait at Callander was utilised by Archie in taking toll of an acquaintance he saw get into the train there, and he returned presently in triumph, bearing two sovereigns, one of which he presented to Isla, along with a return ticket from Callander to Glasgow. She thanked him profusely.

"I don't know what I should have done without you. Fortunately, I had not very much in my purse," she said, as she tied the sovereign in a corner of her handkerchief, and put the ticket in her glove.

Other passengers entered the compartment at the moment, and they talked no more.

At Glasgow they parted with an exchange of friendly bows, and Isla reiterated her intention of returning the money that evening to Dunmohr.

The moment she was outside the station, she dismissed the incident from her mind as of no importance, but Archie Dennison pondered it all the way to his works at Fairburn. Plenty of business awaited him there, and, after he had glanced through the letters, laid ready opened for him on the desk, he touched the bell for his typist. She came to him immediately, with a slightly heightened colour in her attractive face. But her half-smile provoked no response.

"Morning," he said curtly. "I haven't much time to spare, so let's get to work. I've an appointment at the Exchange at half-past twelve."

She sat down at the opposite end of the big writing-table, and laid her tablets demurely in front of her. He regarded her for a moment, not failing to note the extreme neatness of her attire, and how the morning sun brought a sheen on her reddish gold hair, and tinted her creamy skin.

Usually they sat together at the table, but to-day he moved to the fireplace, with the sheaf of letters in his hand,

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ed ut at d, d and standing there proceeded to dictate, with a little more than his usual haste and brevity.

Once or twice she pressed the end of her stylograph to her lips, as if inwardly vexed. But she was too wise to say anything, or to ask a single question. Something had happened to put him out of temper. It was her place to wait until he should choose to tell her what.

For about twenty minutes she applied herself wholeheartedly to her work, and there was nothing but the passage of business matters between them.

When he came to an end, she turned round and looked at him searchingly, and with a certain amount of familiarity not usual from a humble member of the staff to one of the heads.

"Well," she said inquiringly, "what's the matter to-day?"

### CHAPTER VI.

#### A MAN'S WAY.

"THAT'LL do," he said, without appearing to notice her question. "The others can wait for Mr. Hugh. But I forgot that he had gone to Abington for the week-end. Probably he won't turn up till to-morrow morning."

"No," murmured the girl, as she smoothed the loose sheets covered with shorthand notes, but without making

any other motion to depart.

"I said that'll do," he repeated irritably, after watching her for a moment, tapping with the end of her stylograph on the pad.

"Oh, all right," she said, rising with some appearance of displeasure. "If that's to be the way of it, I don't mind. But what have I done to offend you?"

"You; oh nothing, Miss Jeffreys."

"Miss Jeffreys!" she repeated. "Why not Mollie?"

"Not in business hours, and, look here, don't you think it might be as well if we made some kind of a change. This isn't good enough. I'll have young Mason to take down my stuff after this. It's too beastly awkward."

"Oh, well, just as you like, but why? What's upset the apple-cart this morning, Archie? Anything I've

Her pertness disappeared, and there was a wistfulness both in her look and in her voice which the soft-hearted Archie had not been able to resist before, and which perturbed him now.

"Nothing whatever. Don't go imagining things. How

could it be anything you have done?"

"Well, I thought it might be, considering how you look at and speak to me. Can I see you to-night, at the old place?"

"What for?"

"Just to talk things over. I'm not very easy in my mind just lately, and—and, I want to speak to you about my mother."

He looked the distaste he felt.

"It isn't so easy now," he began; but she merely

laughed.

"What isn't so easy? Why it's ever so much easier. Nobody knows where you are, or asks what you've been doing. You're trying to get out of it all now. Archie, don't tell me, I see it in your eye. I've been expecting something like it for a good while, but now I know it's true. I suppose since you have become landed gentry things are all going to be different, but my mother knew yours when she was a girl, and there isn't so very much difference. Your father got on, and mine didn't, that's all."

"Oh, stow it, Mollie!" he began, and at the moment the door was swiftly opened, and Hugh Dennison entering, caught the sound of the girl's name. He looked the immeasurable surprise he felt. She coloured, picked up her belongings, and slipped out. Then Hugh looked straightly at his younger brother, and there was a kind of cold displeasure in his glance. He was the proudest and the most ambitious of all the Dennisons, and had furthered his social position by marrying the daughter of one of Glasgow's oldest families. He heartily approved of the purchase of Dunmohr, and had removed himself and his family with much joy and haste to the splendid West End mansion which had been the home of the Dennisons in the last ten years.

"Archie, did I hear aright?" he asked in his most pompous manner. He was a small man, very neat and dapper in all his movements, and immaculate in his dress. "I sincerely hope not. That sort of thing is, well, to say

the least of it, the limit."

"What sort of thing?" asked Archie, beginning to trim

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his finger nails in a very leisurely and rather aggravating fashion.

"What I heard just now. When a man begins to call his typist Mollie, well, somebody has got to look out."

"Well, as it won't be you, you needn't trouble your head," suggested Archie indifferently. "It doesn't concern you in the smallest degree."

"But that's just where you are wrong, it does. Isabel wouldn't like it."

"What has Isabel got to do with it? She's your wife,

I take it, not the boss of the whole show."

Archie Dennison did not love his stuck-up sister-in-law, though he did not withhold from her a certain meed of admiration for the way in which she completely managed Hugh. Like many small men, Hugh Dennison had an exaggerated opinion of his own merits and attributes—but his wife put him in his place, labelled him neatly, and arranged her life round him. She was under no illusions whatever regarding her husband, whom she thought one of the most ordinary of men; she had married him simply on account of his father's position, and his own prospects.

Of all the Dennison family the only one Isabel really respected and inwardly feared, was the old man. Him she could not mould, and, if he chose, as he had done on one occasion, to come to one of her smart dinner-parties in his office clothes, she dared not say a word. But it

galled her all the same.

She liked Archie, and would even have indulged in a mild flirtation with him had he been responsive, but she made no appeal to Archie Dennison. He liked something warmer and more human in the women he honoured with his attentions.

"Well, would father and mother like it, or Janet or Mab? Hang it, play the game, Archie, ay the game.

And she's such a common thing, too!"

"Who's a common thing? Oh, Miss Jeffreys. Well, den't hurt your dignity talking about her. Father isn't coming up to-day, partly because mother isn't very well, and partly because he has a big day on with the factor. to call

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ll, 't ll, r. He wants Bergmann's business to lie over till to-morrow, and I've 'phoned them to that effect. I was just getting through with the letters, fancying you might not get up from Abington till to-morrow."

The Hugh Dennisons had a country house at Abington,

where they had been spending the Easter holidays.

"Oh, we all came up this morning. I told Isabel I couldn't spare any more week-ends, now father has gone to Dunmohr. We can't all play the holiday game. Nothing serious with mother, I hope?"

The quick anxiety leaped into his voice, for whatever they might be in relation to others, in their worship of their

parents, the Dennisons were as one.

"Oh, nothing, overtired herself superintending the upholsterer's men. I did hear them say that she had been showing them how to lay the carpets," answered Archie, with a chuckle.

"Poor mother! Do you think she's going to like Dun-

mohr, Archie?"

"I think so. Janet will be the only active rebel. There aren't enough Committees and mothers' meetings for her down there, unless she starts reforming the natives. Hers will be the next season-ticket on the books, you take my word for it."

"Any of the county folk called yet?"

"I haven't heard of any, so far. It would be rather good fun, wouldn't it, if they had entered into a conspiracy to cut the Glasgow folk dead?"

Hugh did not like the remark, and showed it in his manner. "They can hardly afford to do that. After

all, it's money that counts in these days."

"There are a good many things left yet that money can't buy, my man," answered Archie, thinking of Isa Mackinnon's clear-cut face and the witchery of her voice.

"Name them. It's all a matter of price, from birthday

honours downwards."

"Maybe," answered Archie, as if he were rather tired of the theme. He put on his cap presently, and went out to make his daily inspection of the engineering shops. It

was a task his father never omitted, and, moreover, it was his habit to quietly watch the younger men at their work, especially likely apprentices on the outlook for promotion. He slipped about quietly, apparently observing little, but neither man nor boy could be long in the Fairburn works without learning that very little escaped the master's notice. Often unexpected promotion would come to a lad, who, plodding away quietly and conscientiously at his work, had no idea that he had been weighed in the balance and not found wanting. In like manner, sundry, who liked their ease, and were more given to sport and play than work, found themselves left very low down on the ladder, when

they were not actually dismissed.

In the works, Archibald Dennison was his father's own son. He was a prime favourite with the employees, chiefly because he had learned the business from the foundation, and served his apprenticeship to every branch. Then he had a hearty comradely way with him, different from Hugh, who, like many men hemmed in at home, was a martinet wherever he found those under him who could not resent his treatment. The technical details of the work did not interest him greatly, and as a workman he had not been a success. But he had an extraordinary head for figures, and had carried everything before him in mathematics at Kelvinside Academy. He was likewise a very keen business man, intent on making money, because money meant power. Since his marriage he had deteriorated in this respect, for his wife was a frank Mammon-worshipper, and never had enough. Her ambition was to give the smartest dinners and receptions in the West End, and now she could reasonably look forward to the day when she should be Mrs. Hugh Patrick Dennison, of Dunmohr. She had already tried the effect of the magic words on a blank envelope, and had greatly admired it, though admitting to herself that Lady Dennison would look even better. She thought her mother-inlaw a perfectly impossible person, and was genuinely relieved when the family took their departure into Perthshire. For nobody could ever be certain what Mrs.

Dennison would do or say in any circumstances, she being a law to herself in all matters of conduct.

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But it may be said here that she never made a mistake on the side of rudeness or unkindness, and that her natural courtesy, though it might be bluntly expressed, never left a sting be..ind, or failed in a kind of personal dignity. She had, however, been known to raise a titter in her daughter-in-law's drawing-room on her at-home day, an offence not easily forgiven by Isabel.

Archibald Dennison put in a good day's work. Having finished his round of the works, where he found a good deal to engage his attention and interest in every department, he went to keep a luncheon appointment with the man who had wanted to meet him at the Exchange. By three o'clock he was back at the works again, and kept busy there till seven.

"Tell Isabel I won't be out to-night, Hugh," he said, as his brother was preparing to leave about six o'clock.

"Oh, why—I rather think she's counting on you. There are some people dining to-night—the Youngers, and Captain Parr, and a brother officer from Maryhill. Edie came up with us this morning."

"Oh, then it's off, so far as I am concerned," said Archie, rather grimly.

Edie was Isabel's younger sister, and the Gilmours had done their best to engineer a match between her and the handsome second son of the Dennisons, Isabel frankly abetting. But Archie had made up his mind regarding Edith Gilmour, and all her blandishments were wholly lost upon him.

"Don't look so glum, old man," he said, seeing dispeace in Hugh's eye. "I'll 'phone to Isabel, and make it all square with her."

He did so about half an hour later, when he remembered it, and had to take a scolding over the wire. But, by dint of chaffing and flattery, of which he was a pastmaster where women were concerned, he managed to leave her in good humour, promising to appear dutifully after dinner, and spend the latter part of the evening in making himself

agreeable to her guests.

He dropped in at his Club, ate a modest dinner, and about eight o'clock took the car out to St. George's Road. Leaving it there, he plunged into one of the small, rather dingy side streets, composed entirely of high blocks of tenement houses, and at the farther end rang a certain bell. mediately the outer door was opened for him, and he ascended three flights of stairs to a landing on which Mollie Jeffreys stood expectantly waiting for him.

"Evening," he said casually. "Are you long home?"

"About an hour. Mother isn't in. Come in, won't you?" She held open the door, on which there was a shining brass plate, bearing the words, "Mrs. Jeffreys, Ladies' Nurse," and passed into the narrow little lobby, and hung his hat on the familiar peg. He hated himself as he did so and cursed the day he had first paid a visit to that snug, little house, which had once held a great attraction for him. It was a very commonplace house, typical of a hundred others in the same street, and in other streets close by. The sitting-room was furnished with a saddlebag suite and imitation walnut frames, and there were oleographs on the walls, and a gramophone on the glass-backed sideboard, and a high overmantel, with many shelves, on which stood cheap Japanese ornaments, above the fireplace. But the little fire was cheerful, the hearth immaculately bright, and a pretty piece of white embroidery work, on which the girl had been busy, lay across der blue-lined workbasket on the table.

He dropped into the easy-chair which stood at one side of the fireplace, and the girl, darting a contented glance

at him, took up her embroidery.

"Will your mother be long?" he asked, after studying her intently for a few moments in silence, noting the neatness of her attire, the pretty contour of the arm showing the half-sleeve of the white blouse, and the blue ribbon twisted in her hair. It was quite a pretty picture for a man who cared, but Archie Dennison's roving fancy had flickered out, as it had done before.

"She's gone to a case at Garnethill, and will be away a week or ten days."

"And you live here by yourself all the time? It can't be very comfortable. I wonder you like it, or that your

mother allows you to do it."

"We can hardly help ourselves," she answered, a trifle hardly. "I can't keep my mother and myself and pay the rent off my salary. It's not so very big."

"It's paid at the current rate, isn't it?" he asked, and though she did not lift her eyes they flashed a little under

their heavy lids.

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"I suppose it is, but I could get more if I took a little

trouble, maybe."

"Well, you should," he said calmly. "Don't get in a tantrum, Mollie. I'm only suggesting, as a business man, that it is everybody's duty to get the most they can in this world. That's business."

"Business!" she repeated. "But I'm sick of business, and you said that I wouldn't need to stop always at it."

"Well, and I can say that again," he answered lazily, as he drew out his cigarette-case. "I suppose I may smoke? I haven't had one since after lunch."

"Oh, yes. You've got very civil spoken all of a sudden," she said, looking over her seam at him, with a little touch of coquetry, which he lazily enjoyed.

"I'm getting my manners brushed up at Locheare,"

he said, with a laugh, in which she joined.

Seeing him sitting there, talking in the old friendly fashion, her jealous fears were lulled to sleep. She recalled the first night he called at the house; it was very wet, and they had an appointment to walk in the country, but he had called early to say that they had better postpone it. Her mother being out at one of her cases, she had invited him in, and they had spent a cosy evening together, and that had been the beginning of many such. It had all been very pleasant while it lasted, and Archie Dennison, finding something he liked in the girl's responsive nature, had done a good deal of love-making of a non-committal kind.

He was by nature, or habit, incapable of a sordid intrigue, and he had never sought to analyse his feelings towards Marian Jeffreys. He had only liked her dainty ways, her clear business head, her common sense. He had discussed all sorts of things with her; from business downwards, lent her books, and talked over them with her, and told her, incidentally, a good deal about himself.

It was a clear case of philandering, which did not mean, and had never meant anything, beyond the pastime of the hour. The unfortunate thing about such pastime is that it often develops into a serious affair, on one side or the other—more often on the woman's side than the man's.

It had been going on for a little over two years, during which Marian Jeffreys had kept herself like a little hermit, for the sake of the man she loved. A girl so attractive was not without lovers, of course. At the time when her friendship with Archie Dennison began, she had been on the point of engagement with one of the clerks in a neighbouring shipbuilding yard who belonged to the same church, and whom she had known for years.

But all this was over now, and she was simply waiting, in the hope that one day her new lover would speak the irrevocable words, and ask her to share his life and future.

Dennison admired and respected the girl, who in all the months of their friendship had never spoken one light word, or cheapened herself in any way. He had tired of her, that was all, in the man's common immemorial way. When that is said all is said, but, unfortunately, it is then that tragedy begins.

"I say, Mollie, the fat's in the fire," he began, sitting forward, and keeping his cigarette between his fingers, looking so handsome at the moment that a woman even more exacting than Mollie Jeffreys, would have forgiven him anything.

"Is it? What do you mean? Have you told your father?"

"Told my 1 ther what?" he asked, with an odd rasping note in his voice.

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About us," she answered innocently. "Told him, like, that we would be getting married one of these days."

It was a bow at a venture desperately sped. Mollie never knew how she had the courage to say that; it just came over her all of a sudden that she would try to bring things to a head. She had not liked Dennison's manner and words in the office that morning. They had rankled in her mind, and produced a state of painful irritation which had made her most unhappy.

She was quite straight in all her dealings with him, and she believed that she had the right to the same treatment at his hands.

But she did not know the slippery nature of his type. Archie Dennison had not for a moment seriously contemplated marrying the office typist. He had thought her a good pal, and had made a certain amount of love to her, without realising that by so doing he might set a match to the whole passion of a woman's heart.

Her question startled him with a vengeance, and he stared at her for a full minute in silence. She met his gaze steadily, and without flinching, and certainly never had she looked more attractive and alluring.

"That's the last thing I should dream of asking my father, Mollie. Marriage! Why, I've never even thought of it! My sister-in-law has nicknamed me the Complete Bachelor, and it suits me to a 'T.' That reminds me, I was due at a dinner-party at Hawkshill to-night, and I braved her displeasure to come here."

"Well, why did you do that?" asked Mollie calmly, betraying no hint of what was surging in her soul.

"I was coming to it, if you'd only give a fellow half a chance. You remember when Hugh bounced into the office this morning. Well, he happened to overhear me calling you by your name; then the fat was in the fire."

"What did he say?" asked Mollie, in a voice of intense

interest, bordering on excitement.

"Gave me a little virtuous advice, in his best go-to-meeting style. I believe the actual substance was, 'When a

man calls his typist Mollie somebody has got to look

"And what did you say to that?"

"Me! Oh, I laughed at him. Poor old Hugh, he was speaking in his wife's best style. Even his opinions are second-hand nowadays. It's Hugh's awful example that will keep me a complete bachelor, for I'm soft, Mollie, far softer than Hugh, and I should be converted into a doormat instantly."

He took the bantering line, because he imagined it might

be the safest.

Mollie was very quiet, even ominously so, and there was something in her face he did not see before, and which rather disturbed him.

"Of course he was right, Mollie," he said more gravely. " I believe people are beginning to notice things. Of course I can't always remember that you are Miss Jeffreys, and a member of the staff. It has been all very pleasant, little girl, but, probably, it has been a mistake, looked at from both points of view. But it hasn't done any harm, and neither of us are a halfpenny the worse for it."

She was looking at him now with a vengeance, and he saw the colour begin to recede from her cheek. Fearing a scene, the very suggestion of which filled him with mortal

terror, he went on, rather hastily.

"Now, don't get shirty; of course I don't mean that we are going to drop acquaintance altogether, or anything of that sort; but, don't you think it might be better if you got another post? There wouldn't be any difficulty, you know that as well as I do. And probably you could get more money. For everybody at Fairburn knows how much you are worth."

It is natural to his kind to take the line of least resistance where a woman is concerned, and he hated the look of strain which had sprung to the girl's face. He saw it slowly relax under his spell.

"Oh, of course, if that is what you mean I might think of it. I've once or twice felt it a bit awkward myself," she said, with a small, nervous laugh. "It's like being a

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e a l watchman on a tower, isn't it, or at a gate where some things mustn't be let out. I daresay I could get another job easy enough, but I was hoping Fairburn would be my last. I've been in business nine years, and I'm getting a bit sick of it."

"How old are you, Mollie?"

"I'll be twenty-five in October, and I started at the typewriting school when I was fifteen, just when I left the school. But I have learned a lot since then."

"I am sure you have; you've been a very plucky little girl," he said sincerely enough.

Then he took out another cigarette, lit it, and rising, said he would have to be making tracks for Dowanhill.

She stood up, too, and leaning her hand on the edge of the table looked at him rather wistfully.

"Archie, I do wish I could see inside of you, and just see for once what you are actually thinking."

"It might be an unprofitable glimpse," he assured her laughingly. "At the present moment I'm thinking what a beastly fag it is having to dress, and make yourself agreeable to Mrs. Hugh's guests."

"I hate her, Archie. She looked at me as if I were dirt the other day, when she came to the office seeking him."

"Don't worry, she looks at me in that way, too. We are all doormats where Mrs. Hugh is concerned. All but my father. It's as good as a play to see him putting her in her bit, without being in the least aware that he is doing it."

"If there were more men like Mr. Dennison in the world it would be a better place for most folk, but especially for women," said Mollie, with a sudden touch of passion.

"Didn't know you had put the guvnor on a pedestal, but he deserves it. Well, I must be going. Look out for another berth, win you, Mollie, for now that Hugh has scented something there'll be little peace. You see, his soul is not his own, and he's probably embroidered the story already to his wife. We don't want any trouble of that kind, do we?"

"No, no; but I'm not very happy in my mind, Archie.

I wish you would be serious about things."

"My dear girl, I am serious, mortally so. I don't want your name bandied about. We've been too good pals for that, and I won't ever forget you."

He leaned towards her, gave her a light kiss-not the first by any means—and rather hastily left the house.

The line of least resistance, easy at the moment, would, perhaps, have consequences further reaching than either of them could foresee.

Could he have looked back into the empty house he might

have realised what he had done.

Mollie Jeffreys stood still until she heard the closing of the door, held back from seeing him out by some strange secret pride. But when she heard him go, and the click of the Yale lock, she gave a little cry, and throwing herself, face downwards, on the hard springs of the saddlebag couch, tried to face the shattering of a dream.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### THE NEW ISLA MACKINNON.

ISLA MACKINNON walked from the station to Cattanach's office in St. Vincent Place, and was immediately admitted to his presence.

She had now been a full week at Achree, and had definitely made up her mind what she was going to do. Various letters had passed between her and the lawyer in the interval, but a personal interview had become necessary for the signing of certain documents, and for discussion of some points it was difficult to make clear in letters. Cattanach had, of course, offered to come to Glenogle, but Isla had replied that she had some shopping to do, and would combine the two.

Cattanach, as he rose to greet her, was pleased to see that she looked both well in health, and was apparently serene in spirit.

He remarked upon it as they shook hands.

"It is so beautiful in Glenogle just now, Mr. Cattanach, it would be a shame if people did not look well. I can't imagine how I endured Barras and its cold seas so long. Spring was in my blood that day you came to fetch me, and that was the cause of my unrest."

He wondered whether she remembered with a secret shame her demeanour that day on the Barras Pier, when he had explained that he came as a substitute for Rosmead.

"There is no air, of course, like our native air," he assented. "And you have been very busy, I am sure, setting the place to rights. Where shall we begin?"

"At the beginning," she said, smiling, as she laid down her bag and drew off her gloves. "But, first, let me tell you what happened to me this morning. I lost my purse at Balquhidder Station. I had it there, because I bought my return ticket and put it back in my bag, as I thought. It had twenty-seven shillings in it, besides my ticket."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Well, how did you manage to get here? Even Miss Mackinnon of Achree would find it difficult to get past these argus-eyed collectors. They're extraordinarily vigilant of late on all the lines, as many people have been travelling without tickets."

"A very mean kind of theft," said Isla briefly. "I met a knight-errant in the train who lent me a sovereign, after he had borrowed it himself."

Cattanach looked mystified. It seemed such a very

unusual thing for Miss Mackinnon to do.

"Who do you think? Why one of the new Dunmohr folk, a son probably. He introduced himself, and asked if he could help me. He was so very nice about it, that I accepted gladly. And I must say that if he is a fair sample of the new family that have come to Glenardle I don't know why anybody should hesitate to call upon

"Are they hesitating?"

"I rather think so. Lady Eden told me herself they

were impossible."

"From what point of view, I wonder?" said Cattanach, as he leaned back in his chair. "In Glasgow they are highly respected, and have the very best possible position. And they are rich enough to be independent of opinion down there. I hope you will get to know old Mr. Dennison. He is one of the very best. If I were to start trying to tell you of his benefactions and his good deeds done in secret, and where they are least expected or deserved, we should never make an end."

"I am sure that I want to know them very much, and I shall make a point of calling very soon," said Isla quietly. "Well, and so you don't quite approve of my intention to live alone at Achree, and farm Achnacoil."

"Disapprove is too strong a word," he asserted, with a smile. "It was the loneliness of your life I thought of when I wrote. The idea of you alone in Achree troubled me."

"Better alone there than anywhere surely," she said brightly. "Loneliness, Mr. Cattanach, is a thing of the spirit. Poor Achree has been driven from pillar to post, and now a woman is going to try what can be made of the acres people call hungry."

"Well, well," said the lawyer. "There is no reason

why you should not achieve a modest success."

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le n "It is all I seek, bread to eat and a roof to cover me, among my own people. These will suffice Isla Mackinnon now, to the end," she said with an odd thrill in her voice. "I have thought it all out to the smallest detail, and I see myself not only achieving a modest livelihood, but making money. For I shall let the house with the shooting in the autumn, and every penny of that will go to pay off the mortgage. I and my people will live off the place, and if it gives us no more than loch trout and a few eggs, and a bit of butter, with a morsel of mutton, and a rabbit or two, we shall fare well."

"But the servants?" suggested Cattanach.

"I shall have only Diarmid and Margaret Maclaren, and I will shut up all the house except the rooms we must live in. Is there anything unreasonable, or not feasible, about that, Mr. Cattanach?"

"From your lips it sounds all right, but there will be some that will mourn for you, my dear, and I shall be one."

Two bright tears started unbidden to the girl's eyes, and

were immediately dashed away.

"Look here, Mr. Cattanach, you are, and always have been, Isla Mackinnon's friend, and the function of a friend is not only to counsel and reprove, but to strengthen the feeble knees. See how biblical I have become, though, I think, my metaphors are a little mixed. But you follow me? I want you to stand by me, and even if I make mistakes, just let them slip by, don't you know, for this is what will save me."

The note of passion in her voice, as it rose and fell on the last words, seemed to lift the veil for one brief and terrible moment from the desolation of her woman's heart.

" Mr. Cattanach, don't forget that Isla Mackinnon stands before you and the world a jilted woman, and if there is a more bitter experience on earth I have yet to come across it. For what reason this has come upon me only the God who made me can know. I ask no questions. I try not even to rebel, but it is at Achree, and at no other place, I will dree my weird. Now, do you understand, and may I count upon your help?"

"You may, I pledge myself to it," he made answer, and

his tones were full as was his heart.

Then they fell to discussion concerning ways and means, and he was amazed at Isla's grip of affairs.

By the time she left the office in St. Vincent Place her future, as she imagined it, was not only outlined, but set

in its appointed groove.

She lunched with the lawyer at the Windsor Hotel, and then went about her shopping with a light heart. It was not the usual shopping which a pretty and high-bred woman might be supposed to indulge in on a rare visit to the city. Her purchases consisted of merely two skirts of homespun, made serviceably short, a knitted sports coat, thick enough to keep out the winds of Glenogle, and two pairs of brogues wherewith to tramp the fields. Then a little minding for Diarmid and Margaret and she was ready for the three o'clock train.

When she got off it at Balquhidder she saw a drag to which were attached the big red roans from Garrion, waiting in the road. Knowing the man, who had been a long time in Garrion service, she stopped to inquire for him and his.

"Are you meeting somebody, William?"

"No, mem. It was Captain Urquhart I wass bringin' to the Oban train, and now I am waiting for two parcels, but they are slow up there, whatefer, and will nefer pe troublin' themselves till their own time comes."

"You are going back to Garrion then?"

"Yes, mem."

"Then you can take me," she said, and the next moment she swung herself, with her usual agility, to the high seat.

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It was a sudden impulse, and yet all part of a concerted plan, for now that she had definitely settled her future it would be well that everybody should know, and that they should be made to understand, that a working woman, farming her own land, would not have time for the cultivation of social claims. She enjoyed the drive up the glen, and when they swept by the kirkyard, lying under the solemn majesty of the hills, her eyes grew dark and moist for all the hopes that were buried there, deep, away from every eye but God's. These were strange phases through which Isla Mackinnon was passing, and, doubtless, all had their part in the building up of a strong fine nature. But some, nay, most of them, were bitter, and to her at the moment God seemed far away.

As they began to ascend again towards Garrion, which stood deep in the heart of a pinewood, on the slope of a hill, her spirits rose.

These noble solitudes made a mighty appeal to her, and seemed to thrust into the background all that was meaner and smaller. A feeling of more settled happiness stole into her heart.

Surely Fate had dealt the last blow, and now she might at last be at peace.

The house of Garrion had a long imposing frontage, and was more like the Georgian houses of the south. It had been built by a former laird, whose English wife hated what she called the "pepper casters" of the Scotch baronial style. It was a very comfortable house, and, unlike the old-fashioned castles in the Glens, which always give one a cramped feeling on entrance, its hall was wide and spacious, even noble in its proportions.

When Isla saw a motor at the door, she felt as if she would like to draw back, but that would have been foolish.

"Whose car, do you know, William?" she asked, as she prepared to alight.

"The new folk. They haf three, I am told, an' it must tak' a heap o' petrol to keep them goin'."

When Isla passed into the house, she found a tea-party gathered in the hall. Kitty sprang upon her with a little

squeal of delight.

"Oh, Isla, you dear, so good of you to come! Neil has been trying to surround you with mystery, for some base purpose of his own. He wouldn't let me come over to Achree. Oh, my dear, but I'm pleased to see you !"

She unwound Isla's scarf from about her neck, and drew her in triumphantly towards the crackling and scented

log fire, which made a cheerful heart to welcome her.

' Neil hasn't come in yet, but we are expecting him every moment. Let me introduce to you the lady we have been speaking of, Mrs. Dennison, Miss Mackinnon of Achree."

Isla looked quickly and with undoubted interest at the face of the new lady of Dunmohr, and found it good. It was a kindly, gracious, motherly face.

Isla returned the pressure of the warm kind hand.

"My dear, we have been hearing a lot about you since we've come to the Glen, and everything that is good. I was only saying to Jimse this morning that I hoped you were not going to be among the proud ones, but would come soon and see us. I want to show you my lassies, Jinnat and Mabel."

"Among the proud ones!" laughed Isla. "I have nothing to be proud of. Why, even this very day I was travelling without a ticket on the railway and would have been run in, perhaps, if your son had not come to the

"My son!" repeated Mrs. Dennison. "It'll be Airchie

you are meanin', eh?"

"I don't know his name," said Isla, as she dropped into a chair," but I am his debtor to the extent of one sovereign, which he had to borrow," she added, with a touch of delicious laughter which infected them all.

The little story set them all at their ease, and presently Neil entering, in his riding garb, which above all others he liked and most affected, came in to find quite a merry party. When he saw Isla he looked unbounded astonish"How do you do, Neil? Let me tell you that to-day I have been existing entirely at the expense of the public. I borrowed a sovereign, to begin with, from Mrs. Dennison's son, to take me to Glasgow. I had a free lunch from Mr. Cattanach, and a cab to the station, at his expense. And I came up here in your drag without so much as by your leave. Don't you think it is a good way for the woman farmer to start on her new career?"

"I don't care how you got here so you have come," he answered, as he crushed her small hand in his big brotherly clasp. "Where's Aunt Betty, Kit? Won't she come down if she knows Isla is here?"

"Not to-day, Neil. Captain Urquhart said goodbye to her in her bedroom. Our aunt is eighty-one, Mrs. Dennison, and she has got a spring cold, and we are terrified to let her out of her room."

Mrs. Dennison was instant with remedies for spring colds, and though her language was homely, and her accent very pronounced, Isla felt her heart oddly drawn to her, and moved her chair nearer, anxious to have further speech with her.

"I have only just returned to Achree, Mrs. Dennison, and I will come soon to call at Dunmohr. But I have no horses, and I shall have to be a walking visitor always."

"Well, and what for not? I tell them they walk too little. The motor cars are fine for cairryin' folk ower the country, but walkin's the best for the health. I was born at Gleniffer, an' thecht nothing of walkin' into Glasgow when my work was done."

"I have always been used to it," laughed Isla. "So that it would never be a hardship."

"I have not been at your place. We was just thinking of calling when we heard that your folk had left in a hurry. What was it for? When they came to call on us they spoke as if they never wanted to leave Achree again."

Isla's face changed.

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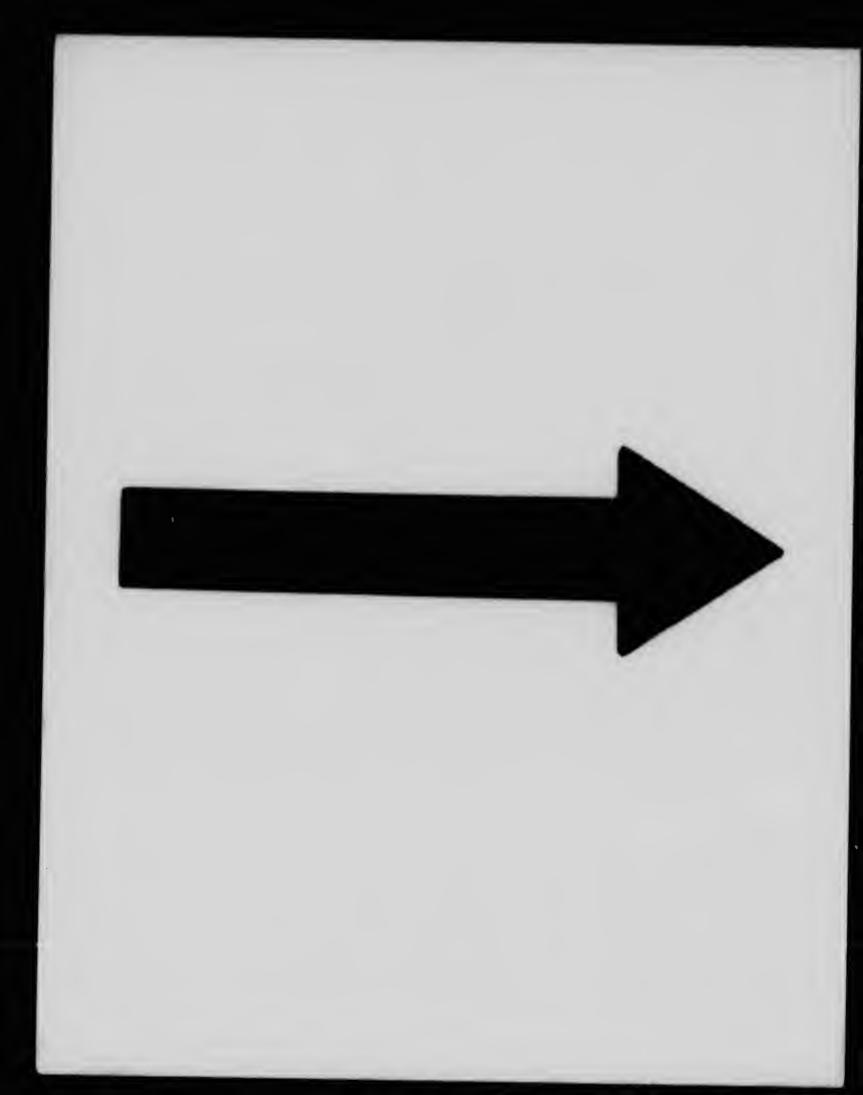
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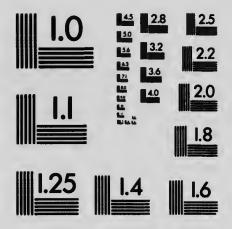
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"Their own urgent business summoned them to America."



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"Ay, so we heard, but Jimse thought it terrible queer. An' he liked Mr. Rosmead. He said he was one in a hunder, and when Jimse Dennison says that aboot a man he deserves it, for I've never hardly kent him mak' a mistake."

"I have heard how clever and how good your husband

is, Mrs. Dennison. I heard it only to-day."

"Whae frae?" she inquired with the eagerness of a child.

"From my lawyer, Mr. Cattanach."

"Oh, ay, I ken him. He lived with his mother in Victoria Circus. Oor hoose was not far from his. He was a good son to his mother while she lived, Miss Mackinnon. They said he never mairret on her account, and noo it is not likely he ever will. But he's a good man for a lawyer. An' are ye settlin' at Achree noo then?"

"Yes, for good, I hope. I will let the house with the shootings if anybody wants it. We have a little house up at Creagh, at the Moor of Silence, that will hold me in the autumn, if necessary, but meantime I am going to

enjoy my summer in Achree."

"But it'll be terrible lonesome for a young leddy like vou."

"As to that, I am used to loneliness. I am the last leaf

on the tree, Mrs. Dennison."

"Eh, lassie, to hear ye it gars me very near greet," said Mrs. Dennison, and out went the kind plump hand to pat Isla's where it lay slim and beautiful on the black of her gown. "But you must just come often to Dunmohr. We ha'e plenty horses an' pownies, forby motors, and we'll mak' ye very welcome, my dear, to the very best we have got. Is it a bargain, then?"

"I will come, thank you, Mrs. Dennison, just as often as I can, but I am going to be a working-woman who has her living to get," answered Isla, and Mrs. Dennison pendered these cryptic sentences in her heart for several minutes.

Presently Kitty, who had flown upstairs to tell Lady Betty of Isla's arrival, reappeared.

"You are to go to Aunt Betty at once, Isla. If you

don't we shall have her down, with Heaven knows what

disastrous consequences."

Isla drank the rest of her tea, shook the crumbs from her lap into the spacious fireplace, and with a little nod to the company, disappeared up the wide gallery stair to find her way to Lady Betty's room. She paused before she entered it, because she knew that an ordeal awaited her, and that it required all her courage to meet it. But at last she opened the door very softly, and looked in.

"May I come in, dear Lady Betty? It is Isla Mac-

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"Come, my lear, and welcome. It is fain I am for a sight of you. Come and tell me how it is with you, and what is all this that has happened to you."

Isla ran forward, and kneeling down by the couch, folded her hands on Lady Betty's silken lap, and for a

moment hid her face, while her bosom heaved.

"Each day a little bit hurts afresh, Lady Betty," she said at last. "It is why I have not been before. But

you knew I had come back to Achree, and why?"

"I knew you had come back, and that the American folk had gone away, and that is all, my dear. When Neil told me he had seen you at Achree, I tried to get at the bottom of things, but it was no use. Neil either could not or would not tell me the meaning of it. Have you anything to say? Perhaps it should be said now, lassie, and be done with it."

" They have gone away, Lady Betty, and I shall never

marry Peter Rosmead now."

"But why?"

Isla swallowed something in her throat and rose rather

slowly to her feet.

"If I could tell you I would, Aunt Betty; only he has gone away, and in his letter he said he had no need of me."

The colour began to flame in the old lady's cheek.

"He said that to you, Isla Mackinnon, an upstart Argerican, who had won the best we have in all the Glens, he said that to you!"

" He did, Lady Betty, and I do not understand it. He

said the gulf was impassable, that he had nothing to offer me, that he released me from my bond. He gave me no choice, don't you see, nor even left me an address."

"Then you did not answer his letter?"

"I did not. He closed our acquaintance, that is all, Lady Betty. Please do not let us talk about it any longer." "Come here, Isla."

Isla came slowly back from the middle of the room, because she knew the searching power of these coal-black eyes, and greatly at the moment feared it.

"Your pride is high enough, as we have all proven, but this is the cruellest that has happened yet, am I not right?"

"You are quite right, Lady Betty, it is the cruellest that has happened yet."

"You cared for him, lassie, you had given him all your heart."

"Oh, I had, and the trouble with Isla Mackinnon is that once given the gift can never be recalled. I shall care for him to the end of my days, and he knows it, and I know it,

yet nothing can be done." "T'ere will be a judgment on the man, Isia, and I cannot think that he is right in his mind. He has disappointed us all, for when I got over the regret about Neil, I was glad

for your sake, because he was worthy of you."

"But he isn't unworthy now, Lady Betty. Whatever happens I shall believe in Peter Rosmead, and know that he acted for what he believed to be the best. Only he misunderstood and belittled the heart of a woman, that was all, and he is not the only man that has done that."

Lady Betty shook her old head to and fro incredulously.

"Your faith is great, bairn, and deserved a better reward. I am an old woman not long for this world, and I should have died easier had I seen you attled in a home of your own, but I'll never, I doubt, see in the w."

'Never, Lady Betty, at least not the kind of home you are thinking of. But surely you will wish me well in Achree, and let the light of your countenance shine on me sometimes there presently when the spring winds are gone and summer comes."

Then she set forth briefly her plans for the future. Lady Betty listened, amazed at the high courage. the calm and fine resourcefulness of the creature whom sorrow might

bend, but could not break.

"You are the most wonderful creature, Isla Mackinnon, that God Almighty has sent to these parts, and I believe He is not done with the making of you yet. Come and kiss me, my dear. You've lifted me up the day, for I tell you I was feared for the moment when I should look upon your face."

They talked a little about other matters of more general interest, and presently Neil came up to say that Mrs. Dennison was going, and had offered to take Isla home.

"But if you'll stop to dinner with us, Isla, I'll drive you over myself, and be mighty glad of the chance," he urged, with something of the eagerness of yore. Lady Betty, watching with an almost fearful intensity, wondered whether perhaps in some day to come things might be patched up once more between her nephew and Isla Mackinnon, and whether one of her most cherished dreams might yet have fulfilment. After a moment she decided no. For the light had gone out of Neil's eyes, and his whole tone and manner towards Isla was brotherly and nothing more. Lady Betty stifled a sigh, as Isla stooped to kiss her, saying she would take Mrs. Dennison at her word, and get back to Achree before dark.

The big Limousine, luxuriously upholstered, and fitted with silver fittings, was snorting at the door when they got down, and Isla dropped a pretty curtsey to Mrs. Dennison.

"My debts to Dunmohr seem to be piling up," she said with a gaiety which Neil thought forced. "But I cannot resist your kind offer. I am anxious to get back quickly."

So Isla drove away with the Glasgow folk, and that was the beginning of the next epoch in her career.

## CHAPTER VIII.

# GATHERING UP THE THREADS.

A FAST motor annihilates distance. Never had Isla covered the nine miles between Garrion and Achree in so short a time. The car was half-opened, Isla facing the delicious air, through which they rushed at speed, her lips parted, her eyes brightened with sheer physical enjoyment of the experience.

"I should like to go on for hours like this" she said spontaneously, and Mrs. Dennison smiled, well pleased.

She sat opposite her with her back to the wind.

"I'm gled ye like it, my dear. I'm in luck to ha'e such fine company. I'll tease the lassies when I get hame. They've been a' terrible anxious to meet ye."

"I had no idea anybody was interested in me," said

Isla. "Tell me, how many daughters have you?"

"Only twa, Jinnat, she's what they ca' serious-minded. She tak's her heid up wi' ragged schools an' missions an' rirls' clubs. An' for Committees, she's for ever sittin' on

Mrs. Dennison pronounced the word with the full emphasis on the first syllable and the last, which caused Isla

"I'm afraid she won't find many Committees in Glenardle. Doesn't she miss it all?"

"Ay does she, and I winna be surprised if she's askin' asea son ticket frae her faither presently. But she workit far ower hard last winter, and she's as thin as a rake. I was quite gled to get her awa' ooten it."

"But it is always better to have plenty to do, isn't it?"

"It is that, but there's moderation. I suppose you have plenty now wi' a' that big place to look efter?"

"I shall have presently," Isla answered, with a little

preoccupied air.

"And are ye to live in that bonnie auld white hoose your lee lanc?"

Isla nodded.

"It will not be good for ye, my dear, not good at am. Ha'e ye nae folk then?"

It was rather a poignant question, but, assured of the kindly interest prompting it, Isla did not seek to evade it.

"My only relatives are far away in the Western Highlands, on an Island called Barras. I have been living there for the past year, while Achree has been let. But I am going to stop at home now, and manage the place myself."

"Weei, it's very brave of ye, but unless I am sair mista'en ye will not be left long to do that, my dear. For I never saw a mair winsome crater in a' my born days. There's a something aboot ye that lays a kind o' spell ower folk. I ha'e heard aboot it, but now I see ye, I ken what they meant."

Isla's laugh, almost as merry as of yore, rang out of the eddies of the air. It was good for her, very good to be in the company of this simple-hearted motherly woman, who could not pay court to rank or wealth or anything except goodness, and who offered to gentle and simple alike the

treasures of her kindly human sympathy.

"It is delightful to think of you at Dunmohr, Mrs. Dennison; and when I get up in the morning and look across the loch and see the smoke, I shall be glad, remembering you are there. It has been a shut-up house so long, and that is always a sad and bad thing for any place. Why, he we are already at my gate? Do you know, we've come here in fourteen minutes. Aren't you afraid of being nad up for exceeding the speed limit? Isn't that the proper expression?"

"It's that rascal, Tom Methven. I maun get the maister to speak till him. But it's Airchie that is the real culprit.

He's aye been a whirlwind since ever he was a laddie in

"Won't you let me down here?" asked Isla, when the car stopped, and the chauffeur sprang out to open the white gate. "There is nobody in the Lodge at present, and it is always a little awkward for friends calling. It is only a little distance."

"Well, if ye dinna mind, we are goin' to Balquhidder to

meet Airchie. Hoo is the time, Tom?"

"We've twelve meenits, mem-plenty time to drive up to the hoose."

But Isla would not hear of it. She held out her hand to

Mrs. Dennison, and again warmly thanked her.

"Aye, but I'm no lettin' ye awa like that withoot promisin' a day to come to Dunmohr. I want ye to see my man an' my bairns. I'll tell ye what. Will ye not come to your dinner on Saturday night. They'll a' be at hame then, an', like as not, Hugh and Easybel, that's my guiddochter, will be doon for the week-end. Say you'll come, and I'll send the car for ye at seven o'clock."

"It is very kind. Yes, I will come, but you mustn't spoil me with too much luxury. Remember, I'm a workingwoman. And there is always an old landau one can hire

from the inn."

"Never you mind the auld cab. Take what we can get, my dear," said Mrs. Dennison delighted ' should like to get a kiss, but no' just yet. Year est your glamour ower me, my dear, and I'll be sp till I get showin' ye off to them a' on Saturday. △DOOT ye

Isla stooped down, lightly brushed the kind cheek with her lips, and sprang from the cushioned seat of the limousine

like a bird.

Her heart was light as she walked up the avenue in the sweet light of the sunset, and the world began to look a brighter place.

She was welcomed at the door by Diarmid, and after she had laid off her outdoor garb she summoned them to a little conference in the dining-room.

" I want to tell you, Diarmid and Margaret, of my plans

for the future. I have been to Glasgow to-day to see Mr. Cattanach, and so far as we can settle things, everything is settled. I am going to stay in Achree myself. And I will not let Achnacoil, but farm it myself with Hamish, and occasional advice and help from Donald Maclure. But I must consult you two, because at the present time I can't afford to pay any more servants, and what I want to ask is whether you will be willing to stop and do for me here if I shut up the drawing-room, and live only in the library and dining-room. It is you, Margaret, who will have to decide, what do you say?"

"What would you be expeckin' me to say, Miss Isla?" inquired Margaret, with excessive dignity, while Diarmid glared upon her as if daring her not to acquit herself well. "And wass there any need to pe speirin' any such thing?"

"Well, but it means a good deal of work, though I shall not have any visitors, and I will give as little trouble as possible. I shall bring the piano down to the library, and when it is the dead of winter, why, I could eat there too, to save fires."

"Jist say the kitchen at wance, Miss Isla, an pe done

with it whatefer," said Diarmid, in grim irony.

"You leave it to Diarmid an' me, Miss Isla. When we get into proper harness again maype you'll pe astonished. At Creagh we had not enough to do, and wass eatin' oor heids off and forever fetchin' forpy. This will pe good for us. An' it is the good news, isn't it, Diarmid? For it was terrible quate up there on the Moor of Silence, an' I for wan was gled to get away."

"I am afraid we shall have to go up for a couple of months or so in the autumn, if I am fortunate enough to let the house with the shooting. Thank you, my dears. Now it will be permissible for us to settle down and arrange

our thoughts."

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They left the room, and after they had passed through the swinging green baize door which shut off the back premises from the hall, Diarmid, sixty odd years, and all, suddenly lost his balance, and caught his confrère round the waist. "It's a Hieland Fling I should pe dancin', Margaret."

"Get awa, ye auld fule," said Margaret tartly, though a moisture was stinging her eyes. "I'll see that ye get up an hoor earlier in the mornin', my man, for you'll hae to do a sicht mair than ye ever did at Creagh, unless ye want to lay my puir auld stiff legs in Balquhidder."

"I like to hear ye when I'm doon on the back o' six every mornin'. I'll tell ye what, Margaret, we'll better get mairret, an' if that doesna' stop us fechtin', it will at

least tie us to the place."

"You're a haverin' auld man, Diarmid, an' it's not likely that at my time o' life I'm to mak' such a fule o' mysel'.

Forby, what would Miss Isla say?"

"I believe she would be pleased. Some day when she is very blithe I will ask her, an' syne I will go to the Rev. Maister Williamson, an' put in the cries."

There was a very queer look on Margaret's face as she

turned away.

Isla, having now a definite plan of campaign, passed the rest of the week in getting all the affairs of the farm put in order. When she consulted Donald Maclure he scratched his head.

"I will do what I can, of coorse, Miss Isla, but the place has been let gang to rack an' ruin wi' thae Malcolms. There will not be a penny aff the hay this year-jist look at it It'll tak' twa year at least to .lean up the grund, an' t! we may look for something to grow on it. But first of a, ye maun get rid o' John Bain, for I will not work wi' him. No decent man could."

Isla, who knew all the faults and failings of the Glen folk, and was lenient to them all, just smiled into Donald

Maclure's stolid gloomy face.

When Saturday evening came, Isla was conscious of a distinct thrill of anticipation over the dinner at Dunmohr. At ten minutes past seven o'clock the hoot and roar of the big motor broke the stillness of Achree, and it snorted up to the door in fine style. Isla, ready in the hall, had her old fur cloak, with its shabby sealskin collar, carofully wrapped about her by Margaret, who whispered after she had put

her inside, and tucked the lovely, soft, moleskin rug about her:

"Eh, Miss Isla, this is something like! It ocht to be

yours! I hope it will be some day."

Somehow the ride brought to her memory a night on which she and Peter Rosmead had driven from Stirling together to the Moor of Silence, alone together under the stars, happy with the happiness of two children, in spite of the tragedy that overhung Achree.

"Oh, how could he? How could he put it all away?" she said to herself then and there. "I wonder what are

men made of that they can do it?"

But presently the flashing lights of the Dunmohr Lodge arrested her poignant and futile memory, and she dashed something from her eyes and lifted her head again, and said to herself there were as good as Peter Rosmead left in the world, and that to-night she was going to meet them.

The solid comfort and luxury of the interior of Dunmohr, the riot of light and colour and fragrance, rather took her breath away. There was more display than the rich Americans had ever shown in Achree, and it filled her with amazement that people could have so much morely to spend. There were, however, no men servants in the house, a fad of Mrs. Dennison's, to which her family had to give way. All the men servants employed by her husband were in the stables and about the home farm. But the women were smart enough. Two of them were in the hall to wait upon Miss Mackinnon had she needed them, tall, strapping, fine-looking young women, dressed in soft grey, with voluminous aprons, and splendid streamers at the back of their caps.

She emerged from her old cloak a very simple, slim figure, in a gown of dead black, the very same gown she had worn on the only night she had ever dined with Peter Rosmead, and from which the clever fingers of Lady Mackinnon's maid at Barras had since removed the high yoke. About her throat was a single string of pearls that had been her mother's, not large, but perfectly matched, and milk-white, like the skin they touched. They were

her only ornament, yet never had a figure more distinguished swept through the stately halls of Dunmohr. In the drawing-room, to her no small delight, she found Mrs. Dennison quite alone, dressed in an expensive, but not becoming, frock of blue brocade, with a large diamond star glittering on her ample breast. She struggled out of the depth of her gold-coloured brocade chair to greet Isla with genuine joy of welcome on her face.

"There ye are, my dear; eh, but ye do look bonnie! A low goon sets ye fine; now Jinnat canna wear it, her

banes prevent her."

"Her banes!" repeated Isla, with a little ripple of

laughter in her voice.

"Ay, up here, ye ken, jist where your neck is like the snawdrift, and as smooth as an ivory ba'. Ye dinna look

mair than twenty-wan."

"I'm sorry to hear that, for I've been trying all the week to look patriarchal. Nobody is going to take me seriously in Glenogle, and Donald Maclure has no respect whatever for my knowledge of land and sheep and cattle beasts."

"Never you mind them, I am sure that whatever ye try to do, you'll do weel. Tak' this nice chair near the fire, an' I'll tell ye aboot the folk. They are a' in their bedrooms gettin' ready. Hugh and Easybell have come, and there's somebody else I was not ex'ecting, the Rev. Maister Whiteheid, frae the East End of Glesca, you haven't happened to hear o' him, I suppose?"

Isla shook her head.

"I know very little about Glasgow, Mrs. Dennison. My only visits there are to my lawyer, Mr. Cattanach."

"Well, this man is making a great stir baith wi' his preachin' an' his work amon' the puir folk. Jinnat has been workin' wi' him off an' on for the last three years, an' it's my belief he has come doon efter her."

"No?" said Isla. "How intensely interesting."

"Jimse, he thinks the same. He came to ca' this afternoon, an' we found oot that he was takin' a week-end at the hotel at Strathyre, so, of course, we askit him to dinner. You jist watch and see whether ye think there's onything atween him an' Jinnat."

"Would it please you, Mrs. Dennison?"

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"Yes; what for no'? It's not money that makes for happy, my dear. I often say to Jimse, I was a heap happier when we lived in a little hoose near the yaird, an' I had jist wan servant to help wi' the bairns. Jinnat doesna care a haet aboot this kind o' thing. Mab, she's different again. Here comes Mab, so oor little crack's ower. But you'll look oot, won't ye, Miss Mackinnon?"

Isla nodded delightedly. It was very quaint and delicious to be thus included in the far ily confidence. She looked forward more and more to her evening.

"What a lovely creature!" she murmured to Mrs. Dennison, as she saw a girlish figure in soft blush pink chiffon at the far end of the long room.

It was long since Isla had seen anything so exquisite as Mabel Dennison, and when she came forward with a kind of shy grace to be introduced, closer inspection only deepened her admiration. She wore her golden hair simply dressed with a little fillet of black velvet across the parting, and her skin was like lilies and roses, her every movement girlish grace.

"I have heard such a lot about you, Miss Mackinnon since you came, and since mother met you at Garrion, she has been talking in the time about you. Here comes Janet, too. Are we all late then, mother?"

"No, no. ' sent for Miss Mackinnon early," her mother has sened to assure her.

Janet, in a white frock made high, and not very becoming to her somewhat sallow looks, came forward, adjusting her pince-nez to get a better look at the guest, in whom they were all more or less interested.

The sisters presented a great contrast, yet Isla found something pleasant and attractive in Janet Dennison's thin eager face, and her eyes were quite beautiful.

The rest of the family trooped in then, Mrs. Hugh holding her head very high, her latest ornament, a diamond com, made in the shape of a tiara, flashing with every movement

of her head. She was a little overdressed for a quiet dinner in the bosom of the family; beside her Isla Mackinnon certainly struck a note of dignified simplicity, which might have been a rebuke. Anyhow, Mrs. Hugh conceived a dislike of Isla, at the very moment of meeting, which she never afterwards put away. The new Laird himself came last, a fine figure of a man, his big kind face aglow with real genuine hospitality. He was never better pleased than when he had his house full.

His manner, if a little more dignified, was quite as hearty as his wife's, and Isla felt that she was really made welcome to his house, and that she had found another friend. When Archibald, looking very handsome in his evening suit (he had taken special pains with his dressing, spoiling three ties in his efforts to get a bow tied to his satisfaction), came to greet her, she took something from her little bead reticule, which hung on her slender arm.

"I must pay my debts before I break bread in your father's house, mustn't I? It has been burning a hole

in my pocket all the week."

Archie felt inclined to protest, but something in her manner warned him that his best move was to pocket the sovereign quietly, and say no more about it.

"I hope you had enough," was all he said. "Afterwards I thought what a fool I had been not to give you

two."

"I brought back three-and-sixpence," she answered; then her attention was arrested by the entrance of the Rev. Mr. Whitehead, and then the smart tablemaid announced that dinner waited, and Isla went down to the dining-room on her host's arm.

## CHAPTER IX.

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## THE BOSOM OF THE FAMILY.

It was a beautiful dinner, exquisitely cooked and served, and though everything was rich and good there was no offensive ostentation. Three bowls of daffodils stood in the centre of the table, and there were six candlesticks with yellow shades. The table of highly polished mahogany was bare, and showed up the beautiful tracery of the lace mats. Mrs. Hugh sat on her father-in-law's other side, opposite to Isla, who had Archie on her other side. But it was to her host she talked most of the time, and all Archie's efforts to please seemed to fall a little short.

"I hear that you are going to manage your own place, Miss Mackinnon, and I will be greatly interested in your experiment," said Mr. Dennison. "I am an amateur myself at the business, so perhaps we can compare notes."

"Oh, but the cases are so different. Mine is such a small poor place," said Isla quickly. "If I just manage to get along without disaster, and keep the folk together, that is all I can expect."

"I'm afraid you have spoiled your people, Miss Mackinnon," Archie ventured to say. "I hear on every hand how indulgent you have been to them, and how they have got the better of you."

The words offended Isla, and her eyes flashed a little as she bent them on his handsome face.

"Whoever told you that, Mr. Dennison, did not speak the truth. Nobody has got the better of me that I am aware of. It is a hateful phrase."

"Archie is accustomed to deal with the Glasgow mechanics, and some o' them need a canny bit watchin', Miss Mackinnon," said his father, stepping into the breach.

But Archie, determined to right himself in Isla's eyes, blundered on.

"But, isn't it true, Miss Mackinnon, that the Highland folk in their own Glens are incorrigibly slack and lazy, and that is the reason for the poverty in the Highlands."

"It is the reason outsiders give," Isla answered spiritedly. "Perhaps after you have lived here for a time, and have learned about our climate and our land, you will understand."

"I have certainly had some weird specimens of Highland girls in my house," put in Mrs. Hugh. "They don't

know how to begin to work."

"I have never had anything else but Highland servants, and I have found them the best in the world," was Isla's answer. "Come to Achree, and I will show vou two."

"I am sure there are good folk both among Highland and Lowland," put in Mr. Dennison, with that kind broad touch which made him so human and so lovable. as Miss Mackinnon says, it is early for us to criticise the Highlands. We are very new besoms, every one of us."

With that Isla laughed, and said she was sorry she had

spoken with such heat.

Mrs. Hugh, conscious that she had somehow put her foot in it with the first guest of the county at Dunmohr, tried to do her best to make amends. Also she tried to impress Miss Mackinnon by chattering incessantly of her house in Glasgow, her social engagements, her dinners, and her balls. Archie could have gnashed his teeth at her, for he, too, was in Isla's black books, but meant to choose his time and place to humble himself.

It was not a long dinner, and soon the men were left to their smoke, in which Mr. Whitehead joined, though his face was a little gloomy on account of all the magnificence he had met with at Dunmohr. He loved Janet

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Dennison, but how dared he ask her to leave all this and share a little two-storied house in the East End, and disburse his modest salary of three hundred and twenty pounds a year. All his host's kindly efforts to make him happy failed to set him at ease, and he regretted the incredible folly that had induced him, after stupendous effort, to make this wholly unjustified little gap in his working life.

Of the four men sitting round the table only the old man was immune from worry and care. Hugh was commissioned by his wife to insist that they should get a new motor car, as she did not see why they should go without when there was so much money running like water at Dunmohr, and he was not sure how his father would take it. Archie was betwixt two fires, his obligations to Marian Jeffreys and his newly born passion for Isla Mackinnon, which had come upon him like a great flood. Most of his life he had had what he wanted, and he meant to have it now. Mollie must go to the wall. But he was not sure how; he must wait the development of events. Very soon the brothers, finding the discussion between their father and the minister on social problems very uninteresting, rose and said they would join the ladies. Robert Whitehead's ch nce had come, and as the door closed he knew that he was going to take it, though the bare idea of it filled him with a sort of cold horror. It was not fear of Mr. Dennison, since none but a fool or a bad man could fear a personality so lovable and so human; it was sheer shrinking at his own audacity.

When the door closed on them, Mr. Dennison pushed over the silver cigarette box and a box of the finest and mildest Havanas. He liked the young man, and he wanted to hear more about his tackling of the big East End problems, about which few knew more than the iron-founder, who gave so much for the relief of those less blessed than himself. But, while grudging nothing, he often felt that the money was a mere drop in the ocean, and that the roots of the evil were not so much as touched. Any effort that would throw light on these dark problems of

sin and poverty and misery was, therefore, welcome to him.

"You were saying, Mr. Whitehead, as they went out, that you hoped a good deal from the new Guild of Service you've built up at your church. Tell me about it."

The minister proceeded to outline the aims and objects

of the Guild in question.

"We don't give money, except in special cases, and after consultation. We are aiming at the forging of a personal bond between the people who are making good and the other sort; and I must say, after a year's experiment of

it, we are greatly encouraged to go on."

"I suppose they visit, and what not, at folk's houses? That has to be very carefully done, Mr. Whitehead. The old system of district-visiting was good in its inception, but it was ruined by them that took it up. A lot of busy and idle women, who had little sympathy with puir folk to begin with, and not an atom of common-sense in their heids. They started wi' the assumption that they were dealin' wi' the lower orders, and that they had a perfect richt to lift the lid of the stew-pan and see what was in it."

Whitehead smiled, and pushed his hand through his

heavy dark hair.

"You are quite right, but I don't think we have ever had that brand of district visitor in Parkgate. At first they were drawn from our own folk, which is chiefly a workingclass congregation, then the few who came from the outside, like Miss Dennison, were the right sort."

"Jinnat certainly liked the work at Parkgate, and her mother thinks she is fretting for the want of it," said Mr. Dennison innocently, and was surprised to see the sudden

flush overspread the minister's face.

There was a moment's strained silence, then Robert Whitehead, impelled by some strange impuls, spoke out that which was in his heart.

"Mr. Dennison, I owe you an apology, for I am under your roof to-night practically under false pretences. I did not come to Strathyre to get a holiday. It is not the time to

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of the year for holidays yet. I came simply and solely to see your daughter. What you say about her awakens a hope in my heart which may seem to you wholly unjustifiable. But, sir, I love your daughter, and I am in your hands."

Mr. Dennison pushed back his chair, and rose to his feet a good deal disturbed, for this was the first man who had sought his daughter, and there were undoubted difficulties in the path.

"I suppose Jinnat knows why you have come, Mr. Whitehead?"

Whitehead, who had risen also, shook his head most emphatically.

"No, sir, she does not. I have striven not to betray myself, because I was quite well aware that I had hardly the right, perhaps, to think of one whom circumstances have placed in such a very different position. I am a poor man's son; I am proud of my people, and would not have them otherwise for the world. My father is a small farmer in the Lanark hills, and has not been able to do anything for his sons, except deny himself to give them a good education. That he has done. My salary is three hundred and twenty pounds a year, and often I have not taken it all, for the people are poor, and the need in my parish is great. That is the whole situation. If you think I have been too presumptuous I am willing to go away. and never see Miss Dennison again. I believe I am right in saying she has no idea how I feel towards her. I have done my best to hide it."

He spoke with a good deal of manliness, and Mr. Dennison's by no means hard heart was touched by the pathos of the words.

"This will need to be talked over an her mother, Mr. Whitehead, and I will be much obliged if you will not say anything to Jinnat in the meantime. I am not prepared to say that if she should care about ye, I will step in between ye. What I do say and feel rather strongly is that she is not fitted to be a poor man's wife."

"Certainly she would make a tremendous sacrifice if

she came to Parkgate Manse," said the minister, with a significant glance round the stately dining-room, with its cheerful brilliance of light and silver.

"Poverty is not a bad thing for the young, provided it is not too long prolonged. Of course, if she married you, I

would do something-

But here the minister held up a deprecating hand.

"Mr. Dennison, I beg you to believe that I have not thought of that, and I am afraid I could not accept anything beyond the usual providing," he added, with a faint melancholy smile, as if the word conjured up some impossible vision.

"But, why would you not, Mr. Whitehead?" asked Dennison patiently and wonderingly. "It is surely a man's duty and his privilege to do as much as he can for

his daughter."

"Yes, but it would be bad for me. I had a College chum who married a rich wife, and he never did a good day's work after it. If my path were made too easy in Parkgate parish, it could not be the same. A gulf would

be fixed between me and my folk."

"Then it would be Jinnat that would have to be sacrificed," put in Mr. Dennison bluntly, though he felt a new respect for the man, and longed to brush every obstacle away. But he was far too keen a business man, and experience had made him too wise, to rush things, or to permit himself to be carried away by the emotion of a moment. So he preserved the somewhat grave, and even stern, demeanour which Whitehead knowing only his more genial moods, keenly felt.

"You will not say anything to Jinnat the night, Mr. Whitehead? But, look, come to luncheon to-morrow

unless you hear to the contrary."

"I am preaching in Balquhidder kirk: Mr. Macfadyen has gone up to Parkgate for me; I could not have got away otherwise."

"Well, that will not make much difference. will be over by one o'clock, will it not? We don't lunch till two; in point of fact, it is an early dinner on Sundays

here; my wife has never altered from her first household plans."

"I am to come, then, if I hear nothing to the contrary?" said the minister.

Mr. Dennison pondered a moment.

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"That would not be fair; you would hardly preach a good sermon wi' that hangin' ower ye like a sword. I'll tell ye what, I'll come to Balquihidder kirk myself wi' the car the morn, an' bring ye back. Then I can gi'e ye a bit o' comfort, or the reverse, afore ye have to see Jinnat."

He held out his hand as he spoke, and all the old kindliness returned to his face.

"I may say here, Mr. Whitehead, that personally I would be quite pleased to have ye for a son-in-law, for I hear nothing but good of ye, and working in your parish has certainly been good for Jinnat. It has given her a purpose in life. Keep your heart up. I am an auld man, an' this I can say, that maist of the happenin's of life are for our good, even at the time when we canna see it. Noo let us go to the ladies."

When Archie Dennison entered the drawing-room he found Isla sitting by his little sister Mab on a big couch, a little apart from the others. They made a pretty picture, the glow and radiance of Mabel's youth, the soft billows of her pink gown showing up the clear delicacy of Isla Mackinnon, and accentuating her very rar bind of beauty. It was not such as catches the meretricious eye, the privations of her girlhood and the trials of her young womanhood had robbed her of part of that. What was left was a high and singular beauty of the soul. It had an extraordinary effect on Archie Dennison, who had never been attracted by anything in a woman unless she had what he called looks. It was Mollie's high colour and vivid personality that had drawn him at the beginning. For that now he called himself a fool, as many a young man has done, before he found the pearl among women.

"Miss Mackinnon and I were talking about Garrion, Archie. She has known them since they were all little. They all played in one nursery, she says. To look at Mr.

Drummond in his kilt you can't picture him in a nursery,

"Where did you see him in his kilt?" asked Isla, apparently of a set purpose, ignoring Archie's imploring eyes.

"It was at the Highland ball at Edinburgh. Janet and I were there last winter, and somebody pointed him out to us. Archie will have to get a kilt, but there is no Dennison tartan!" she said, with her merry laugh. "Perhaps Miss Mackinnon will help us to make a Dennison

"Go and ask mother whether the Morrisons have a tartan," suggested Archie, and Mab jumped up full of the idea. She had thrown herself whole-heartedly into all the life of the Glens, and was even then reading up all the printed lore she could find. For the first time in her life she had got the story of Rob Roy by heart, and was an enthusiastic chaperon of all their Glasgow visitors to Balquhidder. At the present moment she was engaged on the secret history of the Frasers of Dunmohr, and was finding it of thrilling interest.

"Mabel is going to blossom into a first-class Highlander,"

said Archie, striving to speak at his ease.

"She is the most beautiful creature I have ever seen," said Isla, with such warmth in her tone that he felt en-

couraged to proceed.

"Miss Mackinnon, I want to ask your pardon for what I said at the table. It was most rude and unpardonable to a Highland lady, but what could you expect from us. We are very new; we need teaching. If you are so kind as to help us, we shall soon cease making such horrid

Isla's expression remained more serious than he liked.

"There was nothing said at which I could take offence. I hope I did not show it. I am quite accustomed to hearing remarks like that, and I suppose Highland pride is proverbially quick," she answered quietly. "Pray, don't look so distressed. I have quite forgiven you, if there is anything to forgive. It is just that you don't under"But I want to understand," he blurted out, like a great schoolboy. "There isn't anything I want to understand more."

"Then go and study under your father and mother," came her quick retort. "They never make any mistakes, no matter where they might be."

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A gratified flush mounted to Archie's brow at this tribute to his parents, and Isla liked him better for the quick affectionate glance he sent in his mother's direction.

Mab danced back to them before he could find an answer to this speech in which Isla accepted the olive leaf.

"There is a Morrison tartan, Archibald, but mother says it's very ugly, and she hardly thinks it would pass muster in the Glens."

"I must go and ask her about it," said Isla, and the next moment had removed herself to Mrs. Dennison's side.

"Isn't she perfectly sweet, Archie?" said Mabel, in a thrilling whisper. "I hear that every man in all the Glens has proposed to her, and I don't wonder at it. You look as if you were going to, too, but don't, Archie, at least not yet. She has murder in her eye."

"Shut up, you imp," said Archie savagely. "Here's father and the minister, a dull chap, if ever there was one. He's hardly suitable for present company."

"Ask Jen," said Mab saucily. "I say, Archie, Isabel looks as if she were going to a hunt or a charity ball. I'm sure Miss Mackinnon thinks she has on too many diamonds. I'm so glad I don't like jewellery. I haven't a scrap on me anywhere; but when I'm twenty-one I'm going to ask father for a string of pearls like Miss Mackinnon's."

Mr. Dennison came in and asked for a little music, and Archie, who had a really fine tenor voice, was quite pleased to oblige. He had to ask his sister-in-law to play his accompaniment. She was a good pianist of the mechanical order, and always enjoyed her own performances.

Janet and Mab sang a duet together, and then they asked Isla.

<sup>&</sup>quot;I don't know anything but some of the old cradle

songs of the Glens," she answered. "They have never been set to music, my mother made some of them—the music of them, I mean—and they are only in my memory. I will try, if you like, but I am not sure whether they will come back. I am sure I haven't sung them for at least five years."

She moved to the piano without the slightest affectation, willing to add her mite to the evening's entertainment, which she liked very much, feeling herself right in the middle of a real home. The piano was a beautiful instrument, as soft as velvet to the touch. Isla, thinking of the tinkling old instrument at Achree, and of the spinet which was still in her mother's bedroom, caressed the white keys with her tender fingers. And presently all the soft sweet woe of the past seemed to sweep over her like a flood, and striking a low soft note, she began to sing. It was something so different from anything they had ever heard, that she simply held them spellbound. Her voice was low and very sweet, with many undertones in it. Presently they saw that she had forgotten them, and was singing to somebody that was not there. When she stopped suddenly, and rose, her eyes were full of tears and her mouth trembled.

"I must ask pardon, I forgot. These old melodies are not quite canny, they weave a spell on one's heart. Now, dear Mrs. Dennison, I think I must be going home, if you will be so kind as to order the car for me."

"My dear, come an' sit doon an' tell me where ye got thae auld cradle songs. I feel as if I had a' the mitherless bairns in the world roond me, and wanted to mither them a'."

"I am sure you do it," whispered Isla; "at least you have comforted me."

With that word, and declining all their efforts to detain her, she glided away out of the room. Mr. Dennison went out with her, and put her cloak about her with big kindly hands.

"It's been a pleasure o' a very rare kind to me an' my wife to have ye here, Miss Mackinnon. It was worth coming to Glenardle for, and there is just one thing I

would like to say, if at any time you should happen to need the advice or the help of a business man that has made his ain way, and kens a good deal about the world in general, James Dennison is at your service."

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Isla thanked him, returned the warm pressure of his hand, and sank into the luxurious depths of the limousine with a little fluttering sigh of content. She had greatly enjoyed her evening, and the whole family interested her in an extraordinary degree.

As James Dennison turned back towards the drawingroom door the minister appeared, saying he must set out on his five-mile walk to Strathyre.

"Now, that was a pity, for when Tom was out he might just as well have taken you to Strathyre," said the Laird kindly. "Will ye no wait or he comes back?"

"No, thank you, I shall enjoy the walk. It is nothing on a fine night. Good night, Mr. Dennison, and thank you."

So the other guest took his leave, and the family were left to discuss the evening. There was very little said about Isla, curiously enough. Even Mrs. Hugh, though consumed with jealousy, because there was something about Isla Mackinnon both elusive and unapproachable, held her peace. When Mrs. Dennison, who always went up to her room at ten o'clock, no matter what the occasion or company, bade them good night, her husband followed her.

"Let the woman wait a meenit or twa, Lisbeth. I want to speak to you. The minister is efter Jinnat. He spoke to me the night, after the lads left us at the table. I'm to gi'e him his answer the morn. What do you say?"

"It's for Jinnat to say, isn't it, Jimse?" she said anxiously, as if not sure in what mood her husband actually was.

"Yes, but he has behaved very straightly; he hasna said a word to her. Have you any idea?"

"Yes, I think she'll tak' him, and that that is what has been at the bottom o' her restlessness a' this while "

"Then, ye would be quite pleased?"

"Are you not, Jimse?"

"I like the man well enough, but he's very poor, Lisbeth, and we have brought up oor family wi' routh of everything."

"That'll no mak' ony difference to Jinnat, if she cares for him, as I did for you. Did I ever speir hoo much you

had in the week, Jimse?"

A tender smile crept about his grave lips.

"That was different, lass. We hadna been brocht up in Highland castles. Then I may say he has oor leave to speak to her?"

"You could help them, of course; pey the hooserent,

or something o' that kind."

"He will not let me, Lisbeth, an' he is richt."

"Well, he canna prevent me giein' her a bit sovereign noo and again. I thocht he was the richt sort. It'll be the second break, Jimse."

"Ay, lass, an' when they begin to gang they follow on quick. I suppose you an' me'll be left suner or later sitting

like twa corbies by the fireside."

"You can be corbie if ye like; I micht be something cheerier. Even a tappit hen wad be better," she said, with a smile and a tear. "Hoo did ye like Miss Mackinnon; isn't she a bit o' a witch?"

"She is that. The man that gets her will have to be

abune the common. Lisbeth."

"I wonder she's no mairret long syne. If she would tak' up wi' Archie, now ! " said Mrs. Dennison musingly.

"Archie! He's no' fit, guid lad an' a' as he is."

"He's thinkin' aboot her, Jimse."

"Toots, you've gotten sweetheartin' on the brain, Lisbeth."

"Well, ye can gi'e me a kiss, an' see whether that'll

help me," she said, and had not to ask twice.

At ten o'clock next morning, when the Rev. Mr. Whitehead was about to leave Strathyre in the hotel gig for Balquhidder kirk, a note was brought to him from Dunmohr. All it contained was these few words"DEAR MR. WHITEHEAD,—I thought it might help you to preach better if you heard beforehand that Mrs. Dennison and I have no objections to your speaking to our daughter to-day, if you should have the opportunity.—Yours faithfully,

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" JAMES DENNISON."

# CHAPTER X.

### THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW.

NEXT afternoon, when Janet and her minister had gone out together to explore the beauties of Glenardle, over which Ben Voirlich keeps close watch and ward, Archie hunted the house over for Mabel, and found her curled up, with a book and a basketful of apples, on the corner of the sofa in her own particular den.

"Look here, kid, I want you to go for a walk with me. I'm stranded in this beastly hole. Come on, get your

things on."

Mab surveyed him with calm eyes of scrutiny. By reason of her girlish spirit and her merry ways, she had always been more of a favourite with her brothers than Janet. Men, as a rule, do not like their women folk to be too serious.

"Where do you want to go?" she asked, with her white teeth in the rosy skin of a Canadian apple. "Everything depends on that."

"We'll go where you want to, of course," said Archibald,

with a noble disregard of the truth.

"It mustn't be to Glenardle, for I saw Jen and her minister heading that way. Say, Archie, do you think it's a case?"

"A case of what?"

"Spoons between Janet and the Rev. Mr. Whitehead."

Archie opened his eyes wide.

"It would never do, kid. I don't suppose he has a red cent to bless himself with; though I believe he is a decent enough chap."

"Jen has no proper appreciation of money, and the things it can buy, and she loathes this place. She'd prefer a Glasgow slum every time. She says it's there you get in touch with life."

"But the governor would never consent," said Archie

confidently.

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"Won't he; then I'll tell you something: I think he has. Rev. Robert asked him last night after you and Hugh came out of the dining-room. Father sent a note to Strathyre after breakfast this morning, and then went to Balquhidder church to fetch him down. Don't look much like disapproval, does it?"

"What a ferret you are, Mab," said Archie, looking a trifle uncomfortable, fully aware of several affairs of the heart he had on his own conscience, and a little afraid of

his sister's rough handling of them.

"Ferret! anybody could see that except a man. He sees nothing. It has simply got to be hammered into his skull. Well, where do you want to go?"

"Where do you?"

"I don't mind, bar Glenardle," said Mabel, as she slipped from her perch. "Can we take dogs?"

"Of course."

"Well, just wait a minute, I shan't keep you more than that," she answered, and was as good as her word. Slipping a white jersey over her pretty frock, and setting a cap of the same at a fascinating angle on her fair head, she indicated that she was ready, and they emerged from the house together.

"I suppose old Hugh and Belle have gone to sleep, they always do on Sunday afternoon. Matrimony seems to have a pretty average stodgy effect on most people. Let us preserve ourselves from it, Archibald; thus only shall

we keep our youth."

Archie laughed, and tucked his hand through his little sister's arm. She was a good little comrade, always sunny-tempered and happy, untroubled by problems, and quite contented to shine just like the sunbeams.

All the Mabs in the world on whom the sun shines, and

who radiate it themselves, are dear and necessary to us.

The trouble is perhaps that we have too few.

"Where shall we go, the other side of the loch?" he suggested innocently. "We've pretty well explored our side. I'd like to see Glenogle."

Mab stood still, and faced him with a kind of comical

menace.

"Archie, I do believe it's Achree you're after, and Isla Mackinnon. Do own up. If you're not honest Injin about it this minute, I won't budge another step. I won't be dragged forth under false and base pretences."

Archie capitulated on the spot.

"Well, then it is, and I've a mind to get a look at that

old place, and if you don't come I'll go mys if."

"Oh, I'll come. You wouldn't be safe otherwise. I know the frame of mind you're in. Say, pretty soon I'll be like Miss Mackinnon, the last leaf on the tree."

"And that won't hang very long," put in Archie. you're a fascinating little witch, and getting prettier every

dav."

'Archibald Dennison, if you offer any more of your base flattery, I'll neither go with you nor let you go yourself. But, I say, we shan't get in, you know. We don't know her well enough to pay calls on Sunday afternoon."

"Don't we? The mater and she seemed pretty thick

last night, I thought."

"Oh, but we're not built on mater's line. She's the most privileged being ever born. Say, Archie, did you ever see Belle show up worse. She had too many clothes on."

"Hardly enough over her shoulders, I thought," put

in Archie ruthlessly.

"Well, that's what I mean, stupid! She was overdressed. Why, Miss Mackinnon's frock alone simply set her down, consequently she hasn't a good word to say to her. I wonder what makes Belle so high and mighty, and Hugh such a worm. Whoever you marry, Archie, don't let her trample on you."

"I'll not. Hugh's a shining example of what ought not

to happen in matrimony."

It was a beautiful afternoon, in the early summer, with that peculiar lightness and rarity in the air which we do not get at any other season of the year. Everywhere the hint and glory of the opening of summer, part fulfilment of the promise that never fails. Seed-time and harvest, and the glorious growing time between! Both these young creatures were conscious of the mystery and the miracle, and their hearts responded to it.

"Say, kid, I do believe the country's the thing, don't you know. It's fine here, isn't it?"

"Rather; I never want to leave it, even for an afternoon, and to think I used to fancy a walk down Sauchiehall Street, and tea at a tearoom, the acme! Shows what poor ignorant creatures we can be! Say, Archie, don't you think a loc must have happened to Miss Mackinnon? She doesn't look quite like other women."

"How do you mean, Mab?" he asked interestedly, only too glad to talk on the theme of which his mind was full, and at the same time to receive any light on the personality that had made such a powerful appeal to all that was best in him.

"Well, she's on a different plane. A lot of awful things really have happened to her. Her father, General Mackinnon, fell down dead suddenly when they were living away up at some God-forsaken lodge on the moors, then her only brother drowned himself in the Loch, not so far from our gates, they say. And she has no money, and can't really afford to live at Achree, yet look how composed and splendid she is, only her eyes are sad, except when she laughs, then they seem to dance. If I were a man I'd simply go crazy about her."

"You would, eh?"

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"I would. Somebody told mother's maid that she was engaged to the American man who was shooting tenant in Achree, but, of course, that can't be true."

"Why couldn't it?"

"Well, because anybody who had been engaged to Isla Mackinnon could never look at another woman."

"But she might have chucked him; found out something she didn't like about him."

"Well, she might, but I don't think she'd be hard on anybody, unless they told lies or did mean things. That, I'm sure, she never would forgive. Say, Archie, isn't this a ducky little village? I must come and make a sketch of the hotel front. It looks like a Highland castle itself."

At the moment wheels sounded behind them, and a high dogcart, in which were two roans, driven tandem,

swept up to the hotel door in fine style.

"That's the Garrion people, I know," whispered Mabel. "Mother's been there, but, of course, I don't know them. Wish I did. I think they'd be nice. Isn't this a lovely road? We went in the motor to Killin one day, and right up there beyond the Moor of Silence, it was heavenly; so still and quiet; almost eerie! All that belongs to Miss Mackinnon, but nothing can live on it but grouse and mountain hares, so she isn't very rich, poor dear, but she never would want much money. She's the kind of woman who can support a dignified existence on nothing. Wonder where I've got all my lore? I'm learning something fresh every day. This is the gate of Achree, and they have gone in, for the wheel marks and the hoofs are fresh on the gravel. Well, what next?"

"I suppose we shall have to go back. There's somebody coming over the bridge, Mab; I believe it is Miss Mackinnon."

He felt himself redden under the healthy tan of his cheek, and Mab, observing the signs, was mightily interested.

"Well, we must just go on casually to meet her, and if she's decent and asks us in, let's go. That's what we're out for anyway, isn't it?"

Isla, walking quickly, waved to them with evident

pleasure.

"Good afternoon; isn't it a delightful day. Of course, you will come up and have tea," she said, as she shook hands with them both. "I've just been to the per's

house. A little new baby arrived last night, the eleventh, and they are very poor. I hope you are all quite well at Dunmohr to-day?"

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"Oh, quite," answered Mabel, for it was to her the words were addressed.

Once more Archie felt himself somewhat kept on the outside, but it put him on his mettle, and he took an inward vow that he would go in and win.

"I am afraid you have got visitors already, Miss Mackinnon," said Mab, as they passed through the gate. "A man with a pair of red roans, driving tandem."

"Neil Drummond, from Garrion; well, the more the merrier," said Isla pleasantly. "I hope your mother is quite well this morning, Miss Mabel."

"Please don't call me that. Everybody calls me Mab, and nobody respects me," said Mabel forlornly. "But I prefer liking to respect any day."

"Sometimes they go together, don't they, Mr. Dennison?" said Isla, conscious of the fact that she had treated Archie Dennison rather off-handedly. At her own house it was impossible for her to be anything but truly gracious and hospitable. All the traditions of Achree insisted on it.

They found Neil Drummond standing just within the doorway, looking out anxiously. He lifted his cap, and came forward, evidently well pleased.

"How do you do, Isla? Kitty has gone in, because they said you would not be long. Now you have come, I'll just put in the cattle."

"Can I help you?" asked Archie quickly. Then perceiving that no greeting passed between the two men, Isla stepped into the breach.

"Looks as if you haven't met yet! This is Mr. and Miss Dennison, from Dunmohr, Neil—Mr. Drummond of Garrion, Miss Dennison."

The introduction was duly acknowledged, and Archie went off to the stables to help Garrion to unyoke, while Mab was invited into the house by her hostess. Kitty had got no farther than the hall, where, though it was the month of May, a peat fire, supplemented with a big log.

glowed and crackled, filling the place with its delightful

Then there were more introductions, and they sat down happily to talk and wait for the men coming back and the arrival of tea.

Mab, with her delightful naïvete and freedom from conventionality, was easily the centre of attraction when the men came back. Listening to her rattling talk, Neil looked at her queerly once or twice from under his big brows as one might regard an entirely new specimen of humanity, and seemed both amused and drawn to her. She looked lovely, and her good spirits and sunny temper were so infectious that once or twice Isla's merry laugh rang out, creating sweet echoes in the old house that had long been absent from it.

"I begin to think I am going to like being solitary

Chatelaine of Achree," she said presently.

"I thought a chatelaine was a thing that hung on a bag? Mother has one, all jingling silver stuff, which she wears when she wants to be specially smart. Belle gave it to her for Christmas once, telling her that it was the very latest mode," said Mab reflectively.

"It has another meaning. A woman who lives alone and is mistress of a house is sometimes called a chatelaine."

"Only when it is a big house like this. Can we see the dungeon-room, Miss Mackinnon, and is it true that you go down a trap stair out of a room into it? It gives one the most delicious creeps to think of it."

"It is quite true, and Miss Drummond shall show it to you presently," smiled Isla. "How many lumps or Jagar shall I give you in your tea, Mr. Dennison?" She spoke very kindly, and Archie promptly stepped towards the table where she sat. Neil, evidently interested in Mabel, remained at the other side of the hall, and talk became quickly animated. When tea was over the Drummonds and Mabel Dennison disappeared through the swing door to find the narrow winding stair leading to the dungeonroom.

"Don't you want to go too, Mr. Dennison?" asked Isla.

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# THE OLD LOVE AND THE NEW

"No, I would rather stop here and talk to you," he answered fervently. "I suppose your friends are very old friends?"

"Oh, very; they have lived here with me when we were children as much as three months at a time, and I was once at Garrion for six months. Our fathers were in the same regiment, and we seemed to share everything in these days. It makes a difference to one's feelings, of course."

"I should say it does," said Archie, a trifle ruefully, wondering just what was the relationship between Isla and young Drummond. He tried to reassure himself with what Mabel had said, and with the reflection that if there had been love even on one side it must have come to

something long since.

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With Isla Mackinnon's past, Archie, however, was not in the least inclined to concern himself. The thing that had come to him in a flash that day in the Oban train was something entirely different from anything he had yet experienced. To stand well with her, to win her if possible, that was his whole passionate desire, besides which everything else, all the miserable half-hearted love affairs of his susceptible youth, faded away into nothingness to be fiercely regretted, but never compared. Like many another, he wished with all his heart he had kept himself a boy in heart for the one woman who had come to alter everything. Perfectly unconscious of this extraordinary impression she had made on young Dennison. Isla did her best to talk to him, a little half-heartedly perhaps, because she did not feel deeply interested, and she was rather relieved on the whole when the others returned. She found his humble deference slightly embarrassing.

Apparently the trio who had been exploring the dungeonroom had arrived at a very good understanding, for when Mab presently suggested to her brother that they had better be going, there was a hurried pact made for them to meet one day at Garrion for the purpose of exploring a secret passage which Neil unblushingly assured them

had been used by Rob Roy.

"Oh, Neil Drummond, how dare you perjure your soul

like that?" cried Isla. "Don't believe him, Miss Mabel. Poor old Rob Roy; there are more lies built on his reputation than on any other in the world."

"Play the game, Isla," said Neil, with eyes full of laughter. "And don't be so high and mighty because you happen to have a secret dungeon. Who knows what we might unearth if we turned up a few floors at Garrion?"

I have enjoyed myself, dear Miss Mackinnon," whispered Mabel at the door. "And I must go home and hug father for bringing us to Dunmohr. It's a thousand times more exciting and interesting than smoky old

The brother and sister walked down the avenue together in an odd silence. "Archie, don't you think they are very different from the people we used to know in Glasgow?"

"O Lord, yes, can't be mentioned in the same breath," said Archie, and switched an unoffending daisy from the

sidepath with quite unnecessary vigour.

"And aren't you glad we've got to know them? I shall make mother take me to Garrion on Tuesday, or go on my bike if she can't. I think I'm going to have a ripping time here. I must read up both Glenogle and Balquhidder before Tuesday, just to be even with Mr. Drummond. Isn't he an awful tease?"

Archie made no response, and his expression seemed preoccupied.

"You wear a worried look, Archie. Did Miss Mackinnon sit on you while we were exploring the dungeon-

" No, no, but I'm in a hole, kid, and I'm just wondering how I'm to get out of it, and whether you could help me."

"What kind of a hole?" asked Mabel, intensely interested at once, as she cast an inquiring look at the handsome profile turned away from her at the moment.

"I'm not sure. It's a girl, of course. Half the scrapes

a chap gets into are through girls."

"How exciting! Who is she? Do I know her?"

"You may have seen her, but that's all."

"Well, tell me quick."

"Take your time, kid. Supposing we take an abstract case first? You're always reading novels, you say. I've forgotten how many it is you devour in a week. Have you ever come across a case like this. A man played the bally fool with a girl not quite in his own station, don't you know, walked out with her, and all that, and sometimes went to see her at her mother's house. Then quite suddenly he knew it was all rotten fooling, because he met the only woman that really matters in his or any man's life. There always is only one. The pity of it is that so few of us can wait till she comes along, but must go experimenting on this one and that, until there's the very devil to pay. Beg pardon, kid, but you understand, don't you, that I'm feeling a bit hipped?"

"I understand, but who is the girl, Archie? Of course,

I know that the other one is Miss Mackinnon."

"Well, the girl in Glasgow is Miss Jeffreys. She's one of the typists at the office. Perhaps you've happened to see her."

"Yes," said Mabel, and her happy voice fell a little.
"I know her quite well. Everything, of course, depends on how much you've said to her. Did you ever talk about marrying her, Archie?"

"I never did. She has spoken about it often."

"Then she expects it?"

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"I suppose she does. That kind of girl always would, don't you know? Mind, I'm not saying anything against her, Mabel; that would be low down. She's quite a good sort, and as straight as a die. But marry her, good Lord; I'd rather cut my throat.'

Mabel did not look in the least alarmed at this extravagant speech. She was deeply, intensely interested, and

on the whole sorry for her brother.

"What do you think of doing then? If you are really off altogether, and want to marry Miss Mackinnon, you'll have to tell Miss Jeffreys, and play the game, too, Archie. It's the only way."

Archie groaned both in spirit and aloud.

"Don't I know it? But it isn't going to be easy

especially if she stops on at the office. Hugh came in the other day and heard me call her Mollie. Of course, he made his few remarks suitable to the occasion. You're the only one I can count on. The mater and the governor would hate anything like that."

"Of course, they would, Archie, and so do I; but there's only one way. Before you even begin to look at Miss Mackinnon, you'll have to get clear of Mollie Jeffreys. I'm

sure you see that for yourself."

"I do, and I'll do my best. Here comes Jen and the minister, and I believe it has come off, after all, they look so absurdly pleased with themselves. Mum's the word, kid, and to-morrow I'll see what I can do."

### CHAPTER XI.

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#### UNDER A CLOUD.

THE deck of an Atlantic liner is as good a place for meditation as any, provided a man can cut himself off from interruption or association from his fellow passengers. Rosmead, the great American contractor, the bridge builder, whose name was known on two continents, and who at an age when most men are still struggling to achieve. was associated with some of the biggest engineering enterprises in the world, was singularly favoured in the matter of solitude on the voyage out in the White Star liner "Baltic." His women folk, always indifferent sailors, and feeling too much overwhelmed by the disaster that had come upon Peter, remained in their state-rooms. Then the season of the year was that in which the American invasion of England usually begins, so that each eastward-bound ship was laden to its utmost capacity, while the outward bound contained their full complement of emigrants and secondclass passengers, leaving their saloon list very small. But there were one or two who knew Rosmead, and who had moved if not in his set, in the States, who were yet considerably interested in his affairs. The disaster to the bridge, and its consequent loss of life, was, of course, public property on both sides of the Atlantic, and a topic of deep and painful interest to most Americans. A man and woman sitting together on deck chairs after dinner, on the third night out, beheld the tall figure in travelling coat and cap down well over the eyes, pacing restlessly round and round the deck, looking neither to the right nor

to the left, but apparently engrossed to the utmost in his

thoughts.

"Say, he's done, is Rosmead, Anna," said the man cheerfully. "Goin' out to face the music, poor devil. Can't say I envy him. A handy bullet would have been my way out."

"Well, I admire his pluck, Wilmer. I was looking at him through dinner to-night, and I believe he'll get the better of them yet. A man with that kind of mouth and

jaw can do most things."

" If his mouth and jaw get him out of this hole, Anna, you bet it'll be by the steepest lying ever heard in a Court of Enquiry," remarked Wilmer Hirst, in the same cheerful tone with which a man can speak of another's misfortunes. "Personally, I don't know what he can say, except put the blame on somebody else. They were talking about it in the smoke-room this afternoon, and they say his partner, Rodney Payne, has disappeared, and that Rosmead will have to face the music alone. They even said there is a warrant out for his apprehension, and that it was only his cable informing them of his sailing on this ship, and the captain's corroboration of the fact, which prevented it."

"Oh!" said the woman, and her soft voice had a trail of regret in it, "I think I'm sorry. Of course, it was a terrible thing to happen, but—but then, he mightn't be to blame."

The man, strong with the condemnation of the righteous who have never been tried or tempted, and whom Fate, fully conscious of their mettle, passes by, leaving the deeps of human experience to a different fibre, whistled softly.

"Bein' sorry's all very well, don't you know, Anna, but the whole thing was rotten. If you or me had been on the train, and gone down, then we'd have had a different

tale to tell."

"None at all, silly, as we should have been at the bottom of the Delaware River," she said, with a slight shiver. "I think we'd better go up from here, Wilmer. I'm getting the creeps watching that man whirling round and

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round. What if he just cleared the rail in front of us? He might, you know, and I'm not strong enough to stand tragedy to-night. Just when we were going to have such a lovely time in England it was tiresome of Mommer to get ill again, and insist on us coming over. Think, it's barely three weeks since we left New York."

"Never mind, we'll make good somewhere else, and Newport isn't bad," said Hirst. "If Rosmead would get over that rail it would be the best thing ever happened to him. They were betting on the finding of the Court this afternoon, three to one on criminal negligence and imprisonment for the same. That would be a mighty stiff pill for the Rosmeads. You can't deny they gave themselves airs, Anna?"

"I don't know enough about them, but I've heard of Mrs. Rodney Payne. She was at Placerville Academy with Lilah West, but nobody liked her. She was stuck up, and fancied herself, the way these old Virginians do. But she was so awfully pretty. Lilah said you could forgive her anything for being so good to look at."

"But she's not living with Payne any more. Didn't she divorce him?"

"Lilah knew all about it. It was a Spanish woman from Santiago that made the mischief. The firm was doing work down there, and Rodney was in charge."

"Well, they've come a cropper. Funny how it happens in some families," said the man, in the same cheerful tone. "Hulloa! There's the purser with something for Rosmead. They do play up to him all these Johnnies, and he takes it as his right, by George. If I were getting ready for court-martial I think I'd have the decency to stop below."

They watched with intense and quite open interest the little encounter between the purser and the hooded pedestrian on the deck.

"Marconigram, you bet," whispered Wilmer Hirst; and it's bad, see him crushing it up! Poor beggar, if only he'd come out in the open, and have a talk about things, we might put some heart into him."

"Doesn't he ever come into the smoke-room, Wilmer?"

"Never, and Affaric and Bull tried to talk to him, and they were plainly shoved off. So, you see, it ain't any good. Either he feels the shame of a guilty man or he's too hipped to talk to anybody. He's going below now. I'd like uncommon to know what was in the Marconi."

He would not be much the wiser. It was simply an intimation to Rosmead, from official quarters, informing him where the inquiry was to be held. The first decision had been Washington, but he was now informed that the Court would meet in New York, and awaited the arrival of his boat.

Rosmead went downstairs and knocked at the door of his mother's state-room. Formerly they had always occupied deck-rooms sometimes even the millionaire's suite, but Rosmead, anxious not to attract attention, and, moreover, fully conscious that everything had altered, had taken cabins as comfortable as he could find, at a moderate rate.

His mother and sister had two rooms adjoining. Sadie was very ill, too seasick to lift her head, but Mrs. Rosmead was only tired. At no time in good health, it was hardly necessary for her to excuse herself for remaining in her state-room on this occasion, it was absolutely the best thing she could do. She was not asleep, however, but was lying, slightly propped up, reading from a little vellumbound book which was her constant bedside companion. She had not yet reached the allotted span, but her life had been so full of tragedy that the longing to be at rest was now always uppermost in her heart.

"My son," she said, and stretched out her hand to him with a little mute gesture of sympathy, which expressed more than words.

He took off his cap, and stooping, touched her hand with his lips. Then he closed the door, and leaned his back against it.

"The inquiry has been shifted to New York. It begins Friday morning at ten o'clock, mother."

"Have you had a message?"

"Yes, from Abel Legarde. He'll be waiting, but I

think you and Sadie should go on home at once."

She looked the protest she was about to utter, but something in his eye froze the words on her lips. In these eyes she beheld the desolation of a man's soul, which claims the atmost solitude, and for which even love has no balm.

"Very well, Peter, whatever you decide will be the best

thing for you, Sadie and I will do."

"Travelling straight, and as comfortably as I can make you, you should get to Carleton on Saturday night or Sunday morning. Think of Sunday at home, mother."

"I do think of it, Peter, and I am afraid." Her white face, so exquisitely cut and lined like a cameo, had a little

flutter of fear on it.

"What are you afraid of, mother?"

"Of—of memory and silence, which are the portion of so many women, Peter. I would I were a strong man, for your sake, or that you had a brother to stand by your side."

Rosmead was silent for a space. Since this appalling thing had descended like a blank wall of despair upon them, there had been curiously little talk, in fact, practically none. The moment had come when speech had become necessary to Rosmead, and there was nobody but his mother.

He took off his coat, slipped the bolt in the state-room door, and sat down on the sofa opposite her bunk.

"Say, mother, do you think Rodney would have the

courage to shoot himself?"

A spasm crossed her face.

"Honestly, I don't. He'll get away, and when the

sensation has died out he'll creep out again."

Rosmead passed his hand across his brow. He knew the capacity of his mother's comprehension and sympathy, and his need was very great.

"Say, mother, it's an awful thing to say, but I do believe

Rodney, and nobody else, was responsible for this."

"But why, how do you make that out, and what end would it serve him? He goes down with you, remember."

"Ah, yes, but a man broken in reputation, like him already, has less to lose. Do you remember the day you and I went to Barden Hill and took Vivien away?"

"I do." Her lips whitened at the question.

"You saw what he was like that day, but you didn't see him a little later in the day when he came to have it out with me."

"What did he say?"

"He was like a madman. He loved Vivien, mother, as much as it was possible to love anybody, and it was me he blamed. I had the worst quarter of an hour with him I ever had with any man, and if I hadn't kept my temper there would have been murder done. He said he would make me pay. 'By God, you'll pay, Hylton,' he said, 'pay to the uttermost farthing. I don't know how it's going to be done, but I'll drag this Rosmead pride of yours in the gutter, and make you wish you'd never been born.' Well, he's done it, that's all."

"But I want to know how. It was not a thing a man

could do by himself, Peter."

"No, but men can be bought and sold, and Rodney was a pastmaster in the art. I'm sifting this thing to the bottom whenever I get to the other side, or at least as soon as I am a free man."

The significance of his words startled her, and she leaned forward in her bunk, her white wrap of soft wool falling away from her nightdress, and giving her a very fragile, ethercal look.

"Peter, you don't think-you don't think-"

"I don't think, but I know that I shall have to pay the Tombs prison, perhaps, and disgrace, but not lasting disgrace; I will sift it to the bottom."

The Tombs Prison! Her face whitened at the name.

"Peter, that will never happen. There have been railroad trials, trust trials, defalcations of every kind. You and I have both known them. But we've never known a man sent to the Tombs Prison through any such thing. There are ways of getting off. Besides, they can't prove anything." "No, they can't, but the loss of life, mother! By God. I see the thing happening every hour of the twenty-four hours, before my eyes. If I can bring this thing home to Rodney I'll shoot him like a dog, if it sends me direct to the electrocutor's chair."

The woman whose husband had died by his own hand, and whose married life had been one long tragedy, closed her eyes, and silently prayed that the cup might pass from her.

"Don't let us talk any more about it, Peter. I have faith that God will spare the innocent, so that the tragedy of our lives may not be deepened. Talking will not mend it."

"No, but don't you see it is a relief," he said, passing his hand across the face that these days had changed out of all semblance to his former self. He had grown thin and haggard, his eyes seemed sunken in his head and unnaturally bright, and had the desperate hunted look of a man who had been day and night face to face with horror and fear.

"Poor mother, and I thought I had got you into a safe port at last, where you could be at rest for the remainder of your life."

She smiled, but her eyes were soft with tears.

"Let us go back, since the veil is lifted, Peter, and talk of what we have left in Scotland. I don't want to pry, my son, but I should like to hear what you said to Isla Mackinnon, and what she said to you."

He looked at her strangely.

"I told her the truth, that was all," he said at last. "Told the truth, and said goodbye."

"That was all?"

"Was it not enough? Was it not my absolute duty? I did no more and no less. A broken life is not what any man dare offer to a woman like her."

"You think that Peter, but, you see, I am not sure, and

I believe you to be wrong."

He appeared to wonder at her words.

"She is no ordinary woman, Peter, and if she cared for

you enough to give up another man for your sake, then she cares greatly. I question whether you had the right to cut the bond without giving her the right of choice. She was not a child, but a woman, who has lived ano suffered, and I am nearly certain that you have made a

"It is because she has suffered so much that I had the courage to spare her, at any cost to myself," he said gloomily. "Besides, I shall not have the time for her, or for any woman. It is ordained that I go through life alone. And I've got to sift this thing to the bottom, and, after that, build again, build bridges high enough and strong enough to support my reputation."

His mother noted the deep passion with which he spoke, the solemnity of the words, which were of the nature of a

"And after that, supposing God gives you success, you go back to Isla perhaps, and ask her to take you again. I think you would find that you could not build a bridge wide or deep enough to cross that gulf—the gulf you have made with your own hands. Shall I tell you what you ought to have done?"

"You may, if you like, but it is too late. I am a man who has always managed my own affairs. You taught me early, mother. I was only sixteen when I had to make a tremendous decision, and say whether I would become an idle loafer or one of the world's workers."

"You have made some mistakes, and I have held my tongue, because they did not so greatly matter, and you had to build other bridges besides those of iron and concrete," she said simply. "But I will say this now, because I am speaking on a subject I know about. Instead of writing to Isla, you should have gone to Barras and taken her away. She should be here with us now. She should have stood by your side on the day when you face the inquiry. She should have been ready to stand or fall with you, and it is what would have made her a happy woman. Now, she will never forgive you, and she will be right."

He stared at her almost stupidly, filled with amazement

at the picture she drew; the definiteness with which she spoke.

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"I couldn't have done it, mother," he said hoarsely.

"It would have been wrong from the start. And afterwards, whatever they may do to me, the time will come when I will follow up Rodney and wring the truth from him. Isla would have been in the way. A man with a new wife can't afford vendetta."

"Vengeance is mine!" Mrs. Rosmead whispered, and, as if weary, slipped down on her pillow and closed her eyes.

Her son bent over her, kissed her with an infinite tenderness, and went back to his restless pacing of the deck, and his own whirl of thought, which had taken on a fresh complexion from the interview-Isla by his side, with her hand on his arm, her dear face close to his, her heart one with him in all a woman's love and faith! What if, after all, he had been wrong, and it was as his mother had said, he had done her an irreparable injustice and injury. For a moment his spirit quailed at the memory of her face as he had last seen it in the Louse at Creagh, on Malcolm's funeral day. What if the thing he had done proved the last straw to a heart that had often been near the breaking point? She had not answered, she would never answer, he told himself, and he would never know. What if the heart sickness of hope deferred and the final blow should snap the thread of life in that frail brave woman's body.

Anna Hirst, snuggling beside her new-made husband, in the lee of one of the funnels, pointed out Rosm. d's set and desperate face, whispering fearfully that she felt he was going to do it now.

Outward the good ship ploughed, speeded by favouring gales, and at the appointed time was berthed at the dock, when a swarm of reporters simply flew aboard. It was Rosmead they were after, but not a word, not a single syllable, could they wring from him. He heard them as he heard them not, attended to his mother and sister, got his baggage through the customs, and drove with them directly to the station, whence they would take train for the South. Then he himself drove to the Holland House,

where he was well known, and had his favourite room, and from thence he telephoned to his lawyer and old College friend, who had come to New York to meet him. That he had not been at the landing stage Rosmead had taken as ominous, but when Legarde appeared it was at once explained. "I thought it better to keep out of the way, old chap," he said, as he wrung Rosmead's hand. appalled at the devastation one week had wrought in his appearance. For in the late autumn Legarde had paid his first visit to England, and part of his holiday, the most enjoyable part, according to him, had been spent at the Castle of Achree.

Legarde himself was a tall lean man, with the bent shoulders and the somewhat eager hawk-like look of the American professional man. Things were looking black for Rosmead in New York, but he abstained from emphasising that fact.

"Say, it's hit you hard. You're up against it, Hylton; there ain't any use denying it, but you must keep your heart up. There ain't any use goin' under, you know.

We've got to put on a stiff shirt front."

Rosmead thrust a cigarette into his nervous mouth, and Legarde saw his hand tremble. The hubbub of the landing stage, the impertinent stares, and curious questioning had undoubtedly unmanned him. Legarde was gravely concerned to see it, fully aware of what the next few days would hold in the way of torture and strain.

"Well, light up, Abel, and let out the worst on me. I'm ready. What do you think will happen, and what

is my line of defence?"

"Presently, Hylton. I suppose you know Rodney

has disappeared?"

"Of course, I knew he would; but he doesn't count meanwhile. Say, what time does the inquiry open on Monday?"

"Ten o'clock."

"And this is only Thursday. We'll have just time to go down to Argansett and see the bridge. I can't do a thing till I see it."

"But there isn't anything to see, Hylton," said Legarde, with a groan. "I've been there. It's ghastly, it'll bowl you over, there isn't anything but the piers left. It's a nightmare, I tell you, that'll haunt you to your dying day."

"Have they got the—the trains up?"

"No, but most of the bodies have been recovered."

Rosmead rang the telephone bell, and ordered up a timetable, and threw up the window, though the air was too warm for May.

"I need air, Abel. Let it be for a minute or so. We'll go down this afternoon, and come back by the Saturday night train. Of course, you needn't unless you like."

"Oh, I'll come. It'll be my duty to keep you in sight now till the examination is past," said Legarde lightly.

"What's the general opinion?" asked Rosmead, with another oddly nervous gesture in the direction of his hair.

"The general opinion is—well, just graft, Hylton,

nothing more or less."

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"The thing I've been fighting all my life! Of course, I can't get off, Abel, for it was my plain duty, knowing Rodney Payne as I did, to stop on the spot and see that he made good. But I thought the worst was over, that there was nothing he could spoil, and I also thought Alison and the rest could be trusted. You never saw Alison, did you?"

"No, and I never will now. He was in one of the trains, Hylton, the East-bound one, on his way to get married,

and his body was one of the first to be recovered."

"Good God!" said Rosmead, and at the moment the bell-boy handed in the time-table. Legarde took it, and

began to make study of the trains.

"Alison must have had confidence or he wouldn't have crossed the bridge in the train," said Rosmead presently. "What time can we get a train? I want to be off now. Nightmare or no nightmare, I must get there!"

"Are your mother and sister in the hotel?"

"No," answered Rosmead. "They've gone back to Virginia. We don't want any women fooling round just now, Abel. This is a man's job."

But even as he spoke Isla's face flashed before him as he had seen it last with the slight look of strain, the pathos in it, and the wistful expression, like that of a child, in her eyes.

"I wish I'd never been born, Legarde. Life's a pretty average rotten business, as far as I can see, for most folk. It's been particularly so for me. I thought I made good in every way. But I'll never get the better of this. Everything's gone, Abel, but when I've got even with that scoundrel Rodney Payne, I'll be ready to quit, not before."

Legarde answered nothing. He was not sure even whether Rosmead, at the close of the Government inquiry, would be a free man.

## CHAPTER XII.

# BLOOD ON THE LINTELS.

THE man who has been born in old Virginia has the right, according to all the traditions of the South, to take

a special pride in himself.

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> He belongs to the aristocracy of the States, and though he may not be admitted to the sacred circle of the Four Hundred, which is supposed to represent exclusive society in New York, the probability is, if he is a true Virginian, that he would decline the honour.

> There is a particular enchantment about the Southern States, a glamour of romance, which the war partly des-

troyed. Yet something remains.

The old home-places, for instance, with their immense frontages, their wide piazzas, their vast accommodation, dating back to the days when slaves swarmed everywhere at call—most of these remain intact. But there is less money in Virginia than formerly, and it is not from the Southern States that the money-makers, the millionaires, are drawn.

They have many of the idiosyncrasies of the older civilisations, and are proverbially careless of the things that money can buy. They love beauty, however, glow and colour, music and art, to them life is more of a poem than a hard reality. Consequently there were some who said that if the ill-fated bridge had been given to a Northern firm the disaster would never have happened. As is usual, when a man is down, all the events and incidents of his past likely to damage his cause, were carefully and industriously collected and spread abroad. Tales of the

waste and extravagance in the old Rosmead homestead passed from mouth to mouth, how foolishly indulgent Rosmead's grandfather had been to his slaves, and how they clung to the idea of slavery to the last, how his father had been wild and dissipated, and how many hearts he had broken, including that of his own wife.

All these stories were exploited with their usual embroideries, that had small semblance to truth, and with careful omission of all the kindness and consideration, the warm human sympathy and self-sacrifice, which from time immemorial had flowed out of Carleton to bless the

When the two Rosmead ladies drove up the long avenue in the soft sweet light of the sunset on the Sunday afternoon, a curious stillness fell upon them. This terrible bomb flung by Fate against their family fortunes had robbed Sadie of her usual high spirits. She had gone down from the first, and seemed unable to lift her head. And though she had a sort of affection for Carleton, she had not desired specially to come back to it and all its painful associations, which in Scotland she had so happily buried out of sight. In a word, Sadie was, frankly, in tears.

"I don't want to come home, mother. I know now I don't want to see Carleton or live in it any more. It's a place of dreams and visions. And I'm sure it's bad for

you to come."

" Many things have to be endured by women, Sadie, and this is one. Peter wished us to come, and this, meanwhile, is our place. Here we must wait for what will happen."

A sort of terror crept into Sadie's frank eyes.

" Mother, do you think they could do anything to Peter, put him in prison or anything? Is he afraid of it, do you think? I've never spoken to him about it. I simply couldn't. When a man has that look in his eyes, he wants his women-kind to let him alone."

" It depends on the kind of men conducting the inquiry, or whether Peter has any friends on it. His only plea is ignorance, but a man in his position has not the right to advance it. He says that. We can't tell what will

happen, we must just go in and wait. It is the woman's portion."

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"It's the hardest," observed Sadie gloomily, "and I wish I'd been a man."

But her face brightened when presently they swept round the bend of the avenue and came in fine style to the front door, where the coloured servants were ranged in a state of mad excitement. Old Mammy, who had nursed all the Rosmeads on her ample bosom, was sobbing with excitement at the sight of her ladies coming home. Sambo, the butler, a magnificent person, did his utmost to preserve his dignity, but when he saw Mrs. Rosmead's fair frail face, and caught the wave of her hand, he, too, broke down, and tears rolled down his shiny cheeks. The Carleton household consisted entirely of the children of freed slaves, and the conditions of service had hardly altered, except that they could not be sold off the place, and could leave at will. But none of them ever left, or would ever leave. Carleton was one of the old plantations on which the slaves had been cared for like children, and when decree was made absolute that freedom should be given, many of them refused it. But all that was of the past now, though the tradition of love and loyalty remained.

Mrs. Rosmead's tired heart lightened a little at all the evidences of devotion among those she had known practically since childhood. She had been a ward at Carleton, before her marriage, and had been brought up with the Rosmeads, so practically had not known any other home.

"Now, bress the Lord, marm," cried Sambo, as he ran forward, struggling to be the first to open the carriage door. "Bress the Lord, oh my soul. How is my deah missus? I ain't got no sleep, not a wink, in Carleton, since ze good news come fro. Bress ze Lord!"

Mammy pushed him aside and clasped her dear mistress in her arms, almost lifting her from the carriage. Then all the rest crowded round, young servants, children from the cottages, a laughing, gesticulating crowd, all alive with welcome. After they had escaped somebody started to

sing "The Year of Jubilee," and it was to a great haunting chorus that the two women entered the portico of their old home.

It was to Mammy Mrs. Rosmead turned for information they had not been able to get in England. As the faithful servant waited on her in her own room the talk went on.

"Massa Peta, mam, how is he? Wen Sambo an' me an' the rest 'ear 'em on the Bridge business, it rends our ole hearts, mam, and we wonders why ze Lord He no' send fire from heaven to shut their mouths. Our Massa Petah do sech a thing, ses Sambo! For the lands' sake, git yore mouths clear of the devil's lies afore ye speak. I tell ye he's one of the Lord's anointed. Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?"

The negro speech is generally well embroidered with scripture phraseology, which they sometimes use with

marvellously picturesque effect.

"They be sayin' down to Carleton, mam, thet Massa Peta 'e go to gaol for it, but if they go to put Massa Peta in gaol, why the prison doors will be found open in ze morning, jes as they was fer Paul and Silas. Ze good Lord He will see to thet, bressed be His Name."

In spite of her heaviness of heart, Mrs. Rosmead felt herself soothed and comforted by the faithful creature's talk. Insatiable gossips all the negroes are, and she knew well that everything that could be known regarding the disaster, and the sensation it caused, would be known at Carleton by her own staff.

"So they are blaming him like the rest of the world," she said, rather bitterly. "Has nobody a word to say about the other partners, about Rodney Payne, for instance."

Mammy wrinkled her brows, shook a massive fist, and stood arms akimbo in the middle of the floor. Her brilliant red head-dress gave her at the moment a rather martial appearance.

"Massa Rodney, mam, don't you feah. The Lord 'e aint gone done wi' 'im yit awhile. When ze Lord 'e thinks Massa Peta got about as much as he kin bear like, wy

then He'll bring Rodney Payne along. Don't yo fret, mam, 'e aint gone done wi' Massa Rodney yit, not a long while."

"I suppose he hasn't been seen about Carleton for a good while?"

Mammy, with an air of great importance, prepared to

impart an interesting item of information.

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"Mam, 'e come to Carleton, lemme see, jes' in the last month or so, comes a sneakin' round the house, to hear wot he kin 'ear. Me an' Sambo never seen 'im, ef we 'ad wy 'e wouldn't 'a known what he knows now. It was news of Massa Peta he were after, and Miss Vivien. Got hold of that foolish Rose, mam. As I tole 'er after it was the ole whippin' post she wanted, and would 'a done 'er good. For no good Nigger will give away things out of her massa's house. But yo know what Rose is, mam, give her a dime to buy a ribbon for 'er 'air and she'll sell 'er immortal soul for certain. Well, Massa Rodney, he asts all about Massa Peta, when he was goin' to marry the Englishwoman, then Rose she pile it on an' tell 'im t was a reel Princess Massa Peta was gwine to marry, wiv the right to wear a crown if she liked."

Mrs. Rosmead scarcely smiled.

"He asked about Vivien, too, did he?"

"Yus, an' Rose she go on wid the lies somethink great," said Mammy, with a chuckle. "Said Miss Vivien was to marry, too, somebody that had more money than 'e could ever spend, an' was the 'ead of the English Parliament. That made him plum mad, yo bet."

"Mercy, Mammy, where did she get all that?"

"Out of 'er 'ead, mam, to be sure. It's a small 'ead, is Rosie's, but full o' imagination. She done it to make Massa Rodney mad, an' my didn't she jes?"

"What did he say?"

"Said as 'ow a mighty big spoke was agoin' to be put in the Rosmead wheel."

"Mammy, can you give me the date when that happened. The actual day, I mean, and will you stick to it?"

Mrs. Rosmead knew well whom she was dealing with.

Sue had been brought up on a large plantation, and knew the Negro conception of exactness and truth. Most of them are like children, full of inconsequence, and not disposed at any time to take things seriously. A loud burst of emotion is their expression of grief, but sustained anxiety and care are not possible to them. The Rosmead homestead differed in no way from the rest of Virginia. They had a household of children, irresponsible, happy, loving, and, up to a point, absolutely loyal.

"Dunno, missus, specs Rosie would know. Shall I

fetch her?"

Mrs. Rosmead hesitated a moment. She was dead tired, and felt unequal at the moment to interrogating the pretty housemaid, who was Mammy's grand-daughter, and had been about the house since she had rolled, a small black bundle, off the verandah steps a few weeks after she was born.

"Not now, Mammy, but this is important, very important. Before Master Peter comes back this information must be got, and put down in black and white."

"Right, mam, shore ole Mammy sho'll see to it. Ain't

the English Princess a comin' then to ole Virginny?"

She put her head on one side with the wheedling air of

a child that wanted something desperately.

"I don't know, Mammy. This terrible disaster has upset everything, and driven all but the one subject out of Master Peter's head. It is nice to be at home again, but Scotland is a beautiful country. It lays hold on your heart."

"So it seems," said Mammy ruefully, "yit Sambo he reads out of the Golden Treasury Sunday afternoons about the rain an' the mist an' the snow, an' then we wonder 'ow yo an' Miss Sadie could stand bein' away so long from Virginny. Sho Carleton folks 'as been rite 'omesick for vo all."

Mrs. Rosmead believed it without doubt; she knew the warmth and affection of the South, and was in a measure glad to be once more in the midst of it. But Carleton must ever remain to her a haunted house, a place of sad and

poignant memory. At the far end of the piazza, where the creeper trailed off into the vinery, her husband had shot himself to escape the vengeance of a man he wronged. Under the old flat roof she had borne such sorrows as crush the heart of woman, and even yet, when she might have reasonably asked for it, there was no peace. She had now to wait with what patience she might until she should hear from New York the verdict which would decide her son's fate. They only realised after their arrival at Carleton the magnitude of the disaster and its probable effect on their position.

"Mother," said Sadie, bursting into her mother's sittingroom next morning, with a blaze of indignation in her eyes.
"Something's happened to—to lower us in our neighbours' eyes. Our reputation is hanging in the balance as
well as Peter's. In Carleton this morning, between the
Bellamy place and Colonel Richards', I had more cold

shoulders than I've ever had in my life."

"Perhaps you imagined some of it, my dear," said Mrs.

Rosmead quietly.

"Imagined it, mother. Now, I put it to you, am I that kind of person? I don't think so. I met Mrs. Colonel Richards first, and she just gave me a cool nod. Then Millie Bellamy coming out of her gate, spoke to me, and all she said was—'Home again, Sadie? They told us last night you'd come, but pa he didn't believe it. Wouldn't it be better if you'd stopped till things blew over?' I flared out then, and asked her what she meant, and I can't go over all she said, but it meant that they think, everybody thinks, that Peter, or Peter and Rodney, put cheap stuff into the bridge, and that Peter knew it was bound to come down sooner or later, and that was why he stopped in England so long."

"Well, and you-you spoke up, Sadie, I hope?"

"Spoke up. I dressed Millie down properly, mother, but what's the good? Does it alter the solid awful fact that that's what they're saying about Peter?

"Now, where's Rodney, mother? Millie as good as said he had committed suicide, because he had less cheek

than Peter, and knew the awful thing he had done." Sadie here stemmed the tide of her outburst, observing the gradual whitening of her mother's face.

"I'm sorry, mommer, but we can't blink it. We're right up against it. Oh, I wish I'd stopped in New York,

and stood by Peter."

When her mother did not speak Sadie's voice took a

sudden, sharp, rasping edge.

"Mother, why don't you say something? Surely you don't for a moment think that there is anything in what that lying spiteful Millie Bellamy said. Peter couldn't, mother! Don't, for Heaven's sake, say you think he knew anything about it."

'No, no, Sadie! I have faith in Peter. He is one of the best. I was only thinking of the curse that dwells on this house, it has never lifted since I came a bride to it. There was blood upon the lintels then, there is blood still."

"No, no, mother!" cried Sadie pitifully. say that in such a final voice. Vivien suffered, but don't say that this is just the beginning of things for Peter and

Then Mrs. Rosmead, observing the horror and fear she had awakened in her daughter's heart, blamed herself

for not keeping better guard on her tongue.

But Sadie's happy spirit was dashed, and for the next four days she never left the grounds of her mother's house. Tuesday morning, in the newspapers, they received the first information regarding the inquiry, but, after perusing it, were not much the wiser. It was full of technical detail, and the examination of expert witnesses, collected to show wherein the fault of construction had lain. On the afternoon of the fifth day, as the mother and daughter sat together on the piazza, waiting, with a sickly feeling of apprehension, and wondering why no message of any kind had come from New York, Peter came home. He was walking, and directly he came in sight Sadie flew to meet him, clinging to him hysterically, trying to gather from his looks what had actually happened. He looked at least ten years older, his face was ravaged with the lines

of crucial anxiety and mental torture. But he was there in the flesh, a free man, which was far more than Sadie had dared to expect. Her imagination had run riot in the last few days, and she had resigned herself to Peter in prison, serving a sentence for something he had never done, and adding one more to the great injustices of which the law from time to time can be guilty.

"Take it easy, old lady! What did you expect, eh?" he said, trying to free himself, and looking forward anxiously towards his mother, who had risen from her rocking-chair,

and was steadying herself by its arm.
"I never thought you'd come. What has happened,
Peter? Couldn't they prove anything, or is it adjourned?"

"No, it's over; come along and one telling will suffice."
Next moment his mother was in his arms, and in that
close embrace Peter Rosmead found some solace for the
torture and treason he had endured during the last three

weeks.

"Sit down, mother, and I'll be as brief as I can. On
the third day the inquiry fizzled out. There wasn't a
scrap of evidence to convict."

"Thank God!" came fervently from Mrs. Rosmead's

lips.
"They've done their best, but they have no proof, and even after salvage is complete, it is unlikely anything will be discovered. Whatever it was, it was planned and executed with fiendish ingenuity, mother."

"Peter, is it not possible that it might have been a visitation of God," his mother suggested in a low voice.

"No, mother, I think I know what happened, and it will be my immediate business to make sure, and to find Rodney Payne."

She put up her hand, with a deprecating glance.

"Leave him to his Maker, Peter, and let us be thankful together, that you have been acquitted."

Then Peter gave a bitter laugh, such as they never heard from his kind lips before.

"Acquitted, yes, because they could prove nothing; but every man of them was against me, mother, and I don't

need any other hell than I've been through these four days. And I'm a done man, so far as my business in my own country is concerned, a man of a broken reputation, and with an indelible stain on my character. They looked at me, every man of them bar Legarde, as if I had murdered the people in these trains."

"You are exaggerating, Peter," cried his mother, with a

wail. "They could not be so unjust, so cruel!"

"They could be, and they were," he said remorselessly.

"But had you nothing to say? You should have prepared a defence. What good was Abel Legarde if he

could not get that ready for you?"

"Mother, I had no defence, and I made none. I spoke the God's truth to them as if I had been at the Judgment Seat. That bridge ought not to have fallen. If the stuff was put into it as I ordered, and the work put through according to my instructions, nothing on earth could have brought it down. I told them that, and that I should spend the rest of my life in finding out where the flaw lay, and by whom it was permitted. I shall begin to-morrow. I am going back to Argansett to-morrow. I am only here now to tell you what happened."

Both women were awed into silence by the strange quiet virulence with which Rosmead spoke. Woman-like, they would have tried to bury the thing now it was of the past, and go on as if it had never happened. But Peter was made of different stuff. "I am glad you are safely home, mother and Sadie. I shall like to think of you here, for I shall be very little with you. And there will not be much money coming in for some considerable time. The firm of Payne & Rosmead is dissolved, and I personally will be bankrupt by the time all claims are settled. I will pay to the uttermost farthing. I shall not spend a cent on myself while there is a widow or orphan unprovided for out of this disaster."

They listened, still in awed silence, realising how widespread and never-ending were all the issues of this great Ur

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"It will clean me out, mother, but you and Sadie will be able to live right here till—till brighter days dawn."

He walked to the edge of the piazza, and spat on the ground as if some evil humour was in his mouth.

"I have heard of Rodney, mother. A man at the Holland House told me he has gone to Europe, and that his ultimate destination is Paris. When I have got clear here I will follow him to Paris and shoot him like a dog."

"No, no," cried his mother, with her old white head bent on her frail and trembling hands. "There has been enough blood; no more, no more, Peter Rosmead. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord, I will repay."

# CHAPTER XIII.

### MOLLIE'S MOTHER.

MRS. ANN JEFFREYS was a woman well known in the West End of Glasgow, where, among certain of the older-fashioned people, her services were much preferred to those of the modern nurse, who sometimes pays more attention to her personal adornment than to her patient's comfort, and who spends a considerable portion of time in upholding her own dignity, i.e. in holding aloof from many small duties, which, she avers, do not come within her particular sphere, but which, cheerfully done on occasion, would add considerably to the household comfort and her own value.

Nurse Jeffreys belonged to the old order of things, and, though thoroughly trained, she was not above doing an odd job about the house, or, when necessary, cooking an

appetising morsel for her lady upstairs.

During twenty-five years of service she had never been known to create dispeace in any home; consequently her friends were legion, and she was very seldom disengaged. Her husband had been a ship-carpenter, and, incidentally, a ne'er-do-well. After several years complete misery for Ann, who was a well-doing woman anxious to gather gear and get on in the world, he disappeared, and it was believed that he had been among one of the earliest batch of emigrants to leave the Clyde for Canada when the boom began first. He left Ann without a word of farewell, with a toddler on the floor and a baby in arms, worse than widowed, since the widow gets more sympathy than the deserted wife, who generally comes in for her full share of blame for the matrimonial failure.

But she was made of good stuff, and immediately set a stout heart to a stey brae and proceeded to make a living for herself and her children. The wife of the shipbuilder who had employed Jeffreys paid for her midwifery training, and helped her with recommendations afterwards. Very soon Ann needed no bolstering. In about five years she had built up a fine practice, which enabled her to keep together a little home and to pay a distant connection of Jeffreys to look after the bairns, of whom Mollie was the elder. She was a good steady girl, with whom her mother never had any trouble, but George—commonly called Geo—was an endless source of anxiety to her. The wayward blood of the Jeffreys ran in his veins, and he doubtless missed a father's wholesome discipline and guiding at an age when he needed it most.

His mother, shut up in other folk's houses, earning the bread they would eat and the money for their schooling, could not watch over him, and the aunt at home had no control. So Geo followed hard in his father's steps, and, after wringing his mother's heart with many an hour of bitter pain and anxiety, he also disappeared, saying he was going to Canada to seek his father.

Thus the two women were left to pursue their somewhat grey melancholy lives of hard work, brightened by less

enjoyment than falls to the lot of most.

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Her troubles, however, had not taken the heart altogether out of Ann Jeffreys. Contact with the world and much experience of folk, as she expressed it, had taught her that the world has little use for the long face and the tearful eye. It will listen for a minute or two perhaps, with a kind of half-sympathy, to a tale of woe, but presently it will go off at a tangent and vote the dismal one a bore. Ann Jeffreys carried a cheerful face into the houses where she made her monthly sojourns, and her love for little children undoubtedly helped her through. She loved and mothered every new arrival as if it has been her own, and invariably wept when the moment of parting came. And she was so discreet and wise and kindly with the mothers that they all loved her and would have nobody else.

She was now very comfortably off, and could, if she chose, discriminate among the cases she would attend. Being an old school-friend of Mrs. Dennison, she had, at her request, attended Mrs. Hugh when her first baby was born, but had refused to go on the second occasion. For this she gave no reason, nor did Mrs. Dennison ask for one. But Mollie knew that it was because she had been treated like a servant in the house by Mrs. Hugh, and kept strictly on the outside of everything.

She had been pleased when Mollie, properly equipped at a Typewriting and Shorthand School, had received a good appointment in Mr. Dennison's office, but as time went on she was not so sure that it would be a good thing in the end. Once she had come home unexpectedly of an evening for something she had forgotten in the maste of departure to a new case, and she had found Archie Dennison sitting with Mollie. The sight gave her an unpleasant start, for she knew the world and likewise the pride of the younger Dennisons.

Archie had looked a little put out when the big, comely, motherly-looking woman. who wore her nurse's garb so winsomely, suddenly appeared before them. But Mollie had only smiled. Ann, too wise to ask a question at the moment, or to add to the discomfort of the occasion, sat down and, drawing off her capacious cotton gloves, which protected her smooth white hands, inquired how his mother was.

"Quite well, thank you, Mrs. Jeffreys. I heard her speaking about you the other day," he added glibly. "I believed she wondered why you had been such a long time

in going to see her."

Ann knew the thing was made up, for she did not now pay calls on Lisbeth Dennison, who had moved wholly out of the sphere they had once occupied together. She was far too sensible a woman to seek to intrude herself where her presence might be awkward or unwelcome. She had certainly never found any sign or symptom of change in Mrs. Dennison, but she had taken care not to create or court it.

"Hoo does she like the country? I've heard you have gone doon about Lochearn to live," she said, much worried in her mind, and wondering whether and how she could get rid of Archie Dennison in order that she might set at rest her fears about her daughter.

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"She likes it very well. When you are less busy, Mrs. Jeffreys, I hope you will come down with Miss Jeffreys and spend a day. I'll speak to mother about it, and she'll write," said Archie, with the most astonishing coolness. But at the same time he rose to his feet. "I had a little matter of business to talk over with Miss Jeffreys," he said, as if conscious that some explanation was due. "But we have quite finished, so I'll say good night. I dare say you have things to talk over too."

He nodded good night to Mollie, who had risen, but it was Mrs. Jeffreys who walked with him to the door. It was on the tip of her tongue to put a straight question to him there, but something held her back. She bade him good night briefly, closed the door, and came back to the sitting-room, where Mollie was poking the fire and apparently tidying up the hearth.

"That's a gey queer thing, Mollie. May I ask whether it's the custom at Dennisons' to send one o' the firm to discuss business wi' you here at nicht?"

The colour was rather high in her cheeks, and her kind eyes were troubled and rebellious. Trouble enough in all conscience she had had with her wayward menfolk, but she was wholly unprepared for this. She had thought Mollie as discreet and safe as the Bank of England, and if she had ever thought of her marriage at all it was to some douce quiet young man, perhaps Andrew Soutar, the schoolmaster at Garnethill, who often came to see them on a Sunday. The idea of trouble with the Dennisons had most certainly never occurred to her, and she could not rid herself of a strong feeling of distrust and anxiety.

"Don't fuss, mother. I am quite able to take care of myself," answered Mollie, with a studied carelessness. "I hope you didn't say anything to him at the door. He only brought me a letter to show me—that was all."

"Mollie, ye are tellin' me a lee, an' ye ken it. Hoo long has 'his been goin' on?"

" What ? "

"Hoo often has Airchie Dennison been here? Are ye no feared for the folk seein' him on the stair? You'll get the sack one o' these days, my lass, if ye dinna look oot."

"Oh, no, mother, I don't think so," answered Mollie, with a provoking air of quiet confidence.

"Hoo did he find oot where you lived?"

"I told him, of course. You don't suppose he looked

up the Directory, do you?"

"Well, an' ye had a good impidence to tell him ony such thing, Mollie. What am I to think? Is he coortin' ye, then?"

Mollie made no answer.

"That kind o' thing never does a lassie ony good. Ye ken what the Dennisons are—the younger set o' them, onywey. Do you think for a meenit, like, that Mrs. Hugh wad ever tak' ony notice o' ye?"

"I'm not needin' her to notice me, mother. When I am, I'll let both her and you know," answered Mollie,

rather tartly.

She was not quite girl, and had been independent so long that she resented this cross-questioning, and a very

little more of it would cause her to lose her temper.

"You are showin' a very ill-kindet spirit, Mollie Jeffreys, and it is not calculated to mak' me ony easier in my mind. I will not have young Dennison comin' here, and, if you do not stop it, I'll find ways to stop it. Everybody kens what he is—he's like the sailors, wi' a lass in every port. I hear plenty about him in the hooses where I go. I thocht ye would have more spunk, Mollie, than to be wan o' a crood wi' a chap like Airchie Dennison."

Again Mollie made no answer, but merely stood with the pointed toe of her patent-leather shoe on the fender bar, her head on the edge of the mantelshelf, and her eyes fixed

on the fire.

Contemplating her, the anger died out of Ann Jeffreys's

face, and only the inward yearning of a mother's heart was mirrored there. She approached and laid a gentle hand on her shoulder, only, however, to have it impatiently shaken off.

"Mollie!" she said anxiously and kindly. "I'm not wantin' to thraw wi' ye, or even to speir ower mony questions. But I ken the world, and you dinna. What has Airchie Dennison said till ye?"

"He has said a good many things."
"Has he ever said marriage, then?"

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Mollie was silent a moment; then she flung up her head and met her mother's eyes.

"Archie Dennison knows perfectly well that he can't get me any other way, mother, and that is why he comes here."

"Are ye engaged then?" asked her mother, her face brightening a little, for, after all, stranger things had happened, and it was not so long ago since she and Lisbeth Dennison had dwelt on the same stair-head.

"I suppose it could be called that, but he has to wait, don't you see? There has been so much expense with them flitting to Glenardle, and the Hugh Dennisons are so extravagant, that he says he won't dare mention setting up another establishment to his father for a long time."

"And meantime he comes here and cheapens you, my lass! It's not good enough, and it's got to be stopped. Do you hear? I'll stop it, if you dinna."

"If you dare, mother, I'll never speak to you again!"
Mollie flared up. "I'll go away from this house and take
lodgings on my own hook somewhere."

Mrs. Jeffreys looked as if she had received a sudden blow, and in that moment of anguish she realised the fact that a mother's love can sometimes be held very cheaply and her claim entirely set aside.

"I hope you'll no do that, lassie. It would be foolish, looked at from every point of view. I'm no wantin' to boss ye, as ye seem to think, but surely I may be allooed to take some interest in ye!"

She spoke with a slight irony, and Mollie's eyes fell before that straight kind look. She was sorry for the way in which she had spoken, but the Scotch find it difficult to express penitence for anything, at least in words.

"You're forgetting. I'll soon be twenty-four, mother, and I'm quite capable of managing my own affairs. I mean to marry Archie Dennison, but it'll take time. You needn't be feared; but if you don't like it, I will stop him coming here."

id Mrs. Jeffreys quietly. "Well, I'll ha'e to be gettin' back. Will ye walk as far as the car wi' me, or are ye tired?"

"I'm no' tired, but it's raining, and my boots are off. I think I won't come, mother, if you don't mind," said Mollie.

She accompanied her mother to the door, bade her good

night, and went back to pore over the fire.

Ann Jeffreys had plenty to think of as she sat in the car which bore her out to Kelvinside. For the last three years since Marget Jeffreys, her husband's cousin, had died-there had been no permanent caretaker in the flat. A woman came in every morning to light the fire and prepare Mollie's breakfast in the winter. In summer she prepared it herself on the gas stove. She was handy about the house, a good worker and cook, and did not mind helping herself. She took her dinner out every day, and prepared her evening meal, usually a "toosie tea," herself. Often her mother was at home for a few days between her cases, and occasionally Mollie would ask some girl friend to share her flat for a week or two at a time, by way of a change, and she had never complained of feeling lonely. She had neighbours in plenty all round, and she also went out a good deal in the evenings, having many acquaintances.

Until now this sort of arrangement had suited mother and daughter perfectly, and they had enjoyed their freedom and the comfort of having nobody to consider but themselves. But as Ann Jeffreys sat motionless in the car, quite unconscious of the passage of time, she realised that

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the situation had had its undoubted dangers, and that she would be a wise woman if she were to alter it. She was turning over in her mind all the likely people she might invite to take Marget Jeffreys's place, when she was put out at the end of her street, and speedily brought back to a sense of her waiting duty.

Mollie, more upset than she would have owned, sat about an hour after her mother had left. Then she went early to bed, with a half-formed resolution in her mind.

She must try and get speech with Archie Dennison next day, and tell him her mother disapproved of his visits to St. George's Road.

It was really quite a few weeks since he had been there before, and indeed he had come that night with his mind made up to tell Mollie that their friendship had better come to an end. He had not had the chance, however, Mrs. Jeffreys arriving just at the moment when a suitable opening had occurred. And he was quite glad to escape. There was no doubt about it. He felt genuinely relieved as he swung down the stairs into the rainy street.

Next morning at the office there was no opportunity for private speech with Mollie, for Hugh was by the desk all the time the letters were being attended to. About lunch-time, however, as Archie passed through, he found Mollie alone. He could not but stop and speak to her, especially as her expression and to demand it.

"I want to tell you," she said, in a low voice, "my mother was angry last night, and gave me what for after you went away. She says you are not to come to see me at St. George's Road again."

"Well, and that's what I have been thinking, Mollie," he said readily. "One can't be too careful, and I should mortally hate if anybody talked about you."

"I shouldn't mind," she answered calmly. "But mother does. She asked me last night whether we were engaged."

She spoke voth a kind of merciless quiet which made the young man very uncomfortable.

"And you said 'No,' of course, with all the haste you

could," he said, trying to speak lightly, but unable to keep

the eager note altogether out of his voice.

"I said I supposed we were," she answered clearly. "And I explained what you told me-that, with all the expenses of your folk going to Lochearn and the amount it takes to keep your brother's house, your father would not hear of another establishment just yet."

Archie bit his lip under his brown moustache, and his

brows contracted.

To have told Mollie that was one thing; to have it passed on to her mother, who had the entree to half the houses in the West End, and who was probably as inveterate a gossip as the rest of her class, was quite another, and filled him with dismay and disquiet.

"It was a pity you said that, Mollie. I'm not saying it isn't true, but people in our position need to be very

careful."

" People in mine have to be, anyway, about their good name," she answered calmly. "That's what my mother says. She was awfully upset, I can tell you, and she's not done with me yet."

"But you're not a child, Mollie. Surely you can be trusted to manage your own affairs. Didn't you tell her

"I did, but mothers never think we grow up. Besides, I think she's right, Archie. I'm dead-sick of this way of going on. It has lasted about two years now. If only people knew-I mean the folk that ought to know, yours and mine—I shouldn't mind how long I waited."

Archie continued to chew his moustache rather savagely, feeling himself in a hole, and not knowing how to get out

of it.

"We must meet somewhere else, then, and have a long pow-wow about it. That's what I came for last night, and it's a pity your mother arrived when she did. Will you come out the Bearsden Road to-morrow night about the usual time? My brother and his wife are dining out, so I won't be under surveillance."

"Yes, I'll come, for I want things to be settled," she

answered quietly, and turned away to get her outdoor things to go out to lunch.

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Archie disappeared towards the room in the ya: I where the upper heads of departments usually lunched together.

Before Mollie stepped out of the door she suddenly met Mabel Dennison, whom she had not seen for several months —not indeed since the family had removed to Glenardle.

The Dennison women had never made a habit of popping in and out at the works or the shipyard. They came just occasionally. Mabel was there that day of a set purpose—to see Mollie Jeffreys, whom she knew slightly.

"Are you just going out to lunch?" she said pleasantly, admiring the neat well-dressed figure and the face, though at the moment it was set rather hardly. "I rather hoped I would see you to-day, Miss Jeffreys. Since we left Glasgow we are losing sight of lots of people we used to know."

She spoke so sweetly and kindly that, in spite of herself, Mollie thawed. Hoping for the best and, where the Dennisons were concerned, desiring it greatly, she concluded that it might pay her to linger a moment and have a little talk with Mabel.

"Oh, I'm not in a hurry. We get an hour and a half, you know, Miss Mabel, and we are not very busy in the office to-day," she said. "Won't you come in and sit down?"

"I don't mind if I do. I'm stopping at Dowanhill with my brother and his wife for a day or two—summer clothes, don't you know?" said Mabel, with her engaging smile. "Say, don't they have lunch here—father and the boys, I mean?"

"Yes, usually. But Mr. Dennison is not here to-day," answered Mollie coolly. "Mr. Hugh and Mr. Archie, I think, have gone to lunch."

"Well, I'll pop over presently and see if I can retrieve something from the remains. I want Archie to take me to a tearoom this afternoon, and, as you tell me they're not very busy, I can easily beguile him. I hope your mother is quite well, Miss Jeffreys?"

"She's fine—she's at a case out West, beyond the University. I saw her last night," answered Mollie, wondering what the radiant creature would say if informed

whom her mother had found at her fireside!

"You must come down one Saturday and see us at Dunmohr. You can't think how lovely it is there just now, and we simply all love it! All but my sister Janet. She is going to get married in the autumn and come back to Glasgow."

"Is she?" inquired Mollie, her eyes big with interest.

"I hadn't heard, or seen it in the newspapers yet."

"It hasn't been announced there. You see, it isn't a fashionable engagement. She's going to marry the Rev. Mr. Whitehead, of Parkgate Church. Ever heard of him?"

"I've seen his name in connection with meetings. He is a very good man, and does a lot of good among the poor,

doesn't he?"

"I suppose so. But they won't have anything much to live on."

"Do you think that matters much, Miss Mabel—if folk

are happy?" said Moilie, in a simple direct way.

"It must depend on the folk. Now, I couldn't marry a poor man. I should hate it all. I want to marry somebody with a big Highland castle. Oh, they are beautiful when you get at close quarters with them, Miss Jeffreys, and so are the people! It has altered all our points of view since we went to Dunmohr, and even Archie wants to marry a Highland lady now! No Glasgow girl could come up to the new standard."

She said the words deliberately, though with a small innocent smile, as if she spoke partly in joke. Immediately she was rewarded by seeing a tremor cross Miss Jeffreys's

face and her colour go a little grey."

"Does he? But you have been there such a short

time," she said, with difficulty.

"Oh, these things happen all of a sudden, and I hope it will come off. It would be a very good thing for him," said Mabel, not meaning to be unkind, but deeming it best to leave nothing to chance.

Miss Jeffreys took up her gloves and began to pull them on her nervous hands.

"I must be going now, or I won't be back punctually, Miss Mabel. The place I get my lunch in is about ten minutes' walk from here. Good morning just now. I suppose you know your way to the office lunch-room?"

"Oh, I think so," answered Mabel, and her merry eyes were saddened a little as they watched the trim figure in blue serge cross the yard.

She had learned what she wished to know.

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# CHAPTER XIV.

### UNDER A CLOUD.

In a cosy corner of a fashionable tearoom Archie and Mabel discussed the situation.

"She's a serious person," said Mab, with her usual insight, " and quite different from what I expected. She's nice, Archie."

Mab's eyes met his in a quiet steady look which slightly disconcerted him.

"I told you she was," he answered, slightly nettled.

"Any other sort wouldn't appeal to me."

"Then, what did you do it for? You might have known that you were building up trouble. A flirtation with the other sort wouldn't have hurt. All the boys do it. I believe; but this is different."

"Did she say anything?" asked Archie desperately.

"About you? Oh no. We talked for about three minutes only, but I found out all I wanted to know. cares about you, Archie."

"Well, I can't help that," he said, in an almost savage undertone. "Women give away their hearts too easily."

"Oh, they do!" said Mab, with a sudden fervour. "I've seen a lot of it, though I haven't lived very long. But I don't absolve you here, Archie. Mollie Jeffreys is not the kind of girl to obtrude herself on anybody. You must have gone after her, and you'll have to pay."

"I won't marry her," he said positively, and his brows narrowed in his most disagreeable look. "A man surely has the right to change his mind about a woman, and, if

everybody was honest about that kind of thing, there would be fewer unhappy marriages."

"Doubtless. But it's a pretty mean thing to pay a lot of attention to a girl like that and then, when you see somebody you think better, just drop her," said Mabel calmly.

"I thought you were going to help me," said Archie, with a virtuous air of reproach. "I wish I had never told you a blooming thing about it."

"I'd like to help you, but I don't just see how I can," she said perplexedly. "And, anyway, before a thing can be done it has to be looked at straight in the face. As I said, Mollie Jeffreys is a serious person, and the only thing you could do is to appeal to her generosity."

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But Archie was not cast in a very heroic mould. All his life long, especially where women were concerned, he had pursued the line of least resistance.

"A jolly rotten thing to expect a chap to do. If I were a girl, I'd have too much pride to make myself as cheap as that."

A slight wandering smile crept about Mabel's pretty mouth. She was very young, but a touch of her father's shrewdness was in her composition, and already she was quick at weighing up men and things.

"You must have told her—or, at least, let her understand—that you liked her. Everything depends on how much or how little you did say."

"Well, of course you know—or perh. ps you don't know—the kind of trash a man talks to a girl when she'll let him. Why, I've said the same things scores of times to other girls at golf and tennis and in sitting-out places at dances!"

"In your own set it's different. Everybody plays a little bit of the flirtation game there, and it doesn't do much harm, though I don't want to marry a man who has played it too often. I should feel as if there was precious little left for me. Supposing that you cared for Mollie Jeffreys once, and that now you care for someone else, I should just go to her frankly and tell her. I think she has prideevery nice girl has. She'll let you go, and there won't be

any trouble. But you'll have to do it now, and do it quite thoroughly, if you want to make an end of it."

Archie listened in a silence that was grim. His easeloving nature, with its innate shrinking from unpleasant things, quailed at the prospect. An opportunity would be his next evening when he went to keep the appointment he had made, on the Bearsden Road. He took a deep breath and drained his teacup, and marshalled his courage.

"I shan't like my job, but I'll do it. Gad, what a fool I've been! Supposing she takes it badly, threatens me with breach of promise, or anything ghastly like that?" he added, after a moment.

"She won't. She isn't that kind of girl."

"You seem to be very sure of the kind of girl she is," said Archie, slightly annoyed. "Pray, where did you get

your opportunities for studying her?"

"I read her through this morning. Her eyes are an open book. I'm most frightfully sorry you have done this, Archie. She won't get over it quickly, and we won't be able to forget about her."

Archie gnawed his moustache and muttered something about Mab rubbing it in. It was not his habit to face unpleasant things, and Mab's rather merciless handling of his peccadilloes hurt and humiliated him. But at the

back of his head he knew it was good for him.

As for Mab, she did not greatly care at the moment how he felt. He had done a mean thing. She was ashamed of him, and at heart she was deeply sorry for Mollie Jeffreys. If, by some sacrifice on her own account, she could have smoothed the way for her, she would have done it without a pang. But there was nothing she could do. The inevitable had happened, and the inevitable would happen once more. The woman would have to pay!

Mabel looked across the table at her handsome brother with considerable misgiving. At the moment she did not believe him in the least worthy of Isla Mackinnon, and she even hoped he would not succeed in his fresh pursuit. Isla deserved some one better than Archie could ever hope to be. And how would she look if this story ever came to

her ears? Mab, in imagination, beheld the slight stiffening of the beautiful figure, the curl of the sweet proud lip, the clear straight glance of her scornful eye.

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But she forbore to voice these later thoughts. Though very plain-spoken she was not vindictive, and even, up to a point, she was sorry for Archie. But she was sorrier still for Mollie Jeffreys.

Having chewed the cud of bitter reflection for a few minutes, Archie spoke again, in rather a subdued rueful voice.

"Then you honestly think I should tell her straight that I want to marry somebody else?"

"But do you?" asked Mabel. "You're attracted by Isla Mackinnon because she's a new sort. But will that last? It must be awful not to be sure, and to change so often. If I was like that, I'd hie me to a nunnery!"

"What do you know about anything? You've never had a sweetheart in your life."

"No, thank goodness, I haven't! If I've anything worth giving, I'm keeping it all—every scrap—for the right man when he comes along."

"You'll never find one worth it," said Archie savagely. "Every one of us has a little fling before the real thing comes along."

"I don't believe it. There are some, like father and mother, who never have eyes for anybody else but one another from start to finish. My marriage is going to be like that, or it won't ever come off. I wouldn't be like Hugh's wife for a fortune. She's—she's awful, Archie, and old Hugh is just a doormat for all her fads."

But Archie refused to be beguiled by side-issues, though he agreed with every word.

"I'll tell you something, kid, as you're so jolly decent, though a bit savage on me," he said, leaning across the table. "I went down to her place last night to tell her that everything must be off, and that, though our friendship had been very sweet—don't you know?—it would be better for us both that it should come to an end. And I was going to say that neither of us was the worse for it.

don't you know? I was just getting near enough when her mother arrived on the scene."

"Her mother?" said Mab interestedly.

"Yes—Mrs. Jeffreys, the ladies' nurse, don't you know? Mother knows her. You must have heard her speaking about her, and she nursed Isabel when Cuckoo was born."

"Oh, is it that Jeffreys? I didn't know. It makes it more complicated because, you see, mother might get

mixed up in it. Well, what happened then?"

"Oh, I scooted. I didn't like the look in the old lady's eye. It was, 'What are you doing here?'—don't you know?—with a vengeance! Well, this morning Mollie spoke to me, and said her mother was most awfully angry, and wanted to know what was in it, and what was going to happen."

"Naturally."

"Why do you say that? Mollie isn't a child. Heaps of girls have young men call on them in these days at their lodgings, and nobody thinks anything about it. This sort of fuss is antediluvian, Mab. Is a man going to be asked his intentions because he happens to go once or twice up a certain stair and knock at a certain door?"

"Well, go on. What happened then?" said Mab,

without answering.

"Oh, I said we'd better meet and have a pow-wow, and we are going to tc-morrow night. You're all going out to the Wardrops' dinner-party."

"I'm not. I'm going home to-morrow, Archie. I've

had enough of Glasgow, thanks."

"Well, we're to meet to-morrow night, and I suppose I had better take your advice and tell her quite straightly."

"Yes, do. But you roust be straight. Don't hedge about or make up other excises about business and what not. I assure you, Archie, we only thing which will appeal to Mollie is to tell her you care for somebody else, and therefore can't marry her."

"But she's as jealous as can be already. I believe that

would be fatal, myself."

"That's what a man would think, being the most

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hat ost conceited being on earth!" said Mabel calmly. "But try it. I know what I'm talking about. Now, we really must go, Archie. I've been out since eleven o'clock, and Isabel will be lecturing me about my shortcomings when I get back."

They parted at Assafrey's door, for Archie's business hours were not yet over. They had no further conversa-

tion about Mollie Jeffreys.

A small dinner-party took place at Highfield that night—a dinner after Isabel's own heart. The display was tremendous, and she evolved something entirely new in table decoration which provoked sufficient admiration to please her mightily. Also she had captured a couple of guests who, up till now, had eluded her persistent lion-hunting, and whose presence put the final cachet on her social position. In such benign mood she smiled on everybody, and she even admitted to herself that Archie and Mab were the handsomest couple at the table, and that she had no cause to blush for her husband's people.

Next day Mab left by the eleven o'clock train, and Archie had been informed by his sister-in-law at breakfast that he would have to dine out as the servants must get an off-night after their gargantuan efforts of the preceding

evening.

That suited Archie all right, but he had a heavy day in front of him, and an ordeal at night such as many a stronger man has shrunk from.

All day long he held a sort of court-martial on himself, and he was obliged to admit that he had not played the game. For a whole year he had made love to Mollie Jeffreys, and, finding her always a little aloof and distant, had tried to break down all her prejudices by assuring her that some day they should share a home together. The word marriage perhaps had not passed his lips, but he had implied it by every action of his life during that one year. The second year his passion waned, and he had begun to slacken off, with, however, occasional bursts of affection and comradeship which had helped to forge the bond a little stronger than before. And now it was up

to him, as Mabel had indicated, to cut that bond in the only possible way? Would he ever have the courage? He doubted it very much. Everything would of course

depend on Molly's mood.

He was first at the place of tryst—a certain rather dark gateway to an old house that had once been quite in the country, and the grounds of which were now waiting development by the speculative builder. They had discovered this charming and quiet resort one summer evening, and they had often met there, gone through a handy gap in the hedge, and in the fine old park among the trees had been lost to the world. There were no policemen so far out, and nobody had ever hailed them for trespassing.

He had to wait about ten minutes, and he was just getting anxious and beginning to walk back to the point where the car-line terminated when he saw, in the light of a rising moon, the slim slight figure that had once had the power to quicken all his pulses and send the blood about

his heart.

"I thought you weren't coming," he said, as he raised his hat and gave her good evening.

She did not offer her hand, and no other greeting passed

between them.

"I couldn't get out. Mother came round about sevenjust after I got home. She didn't leave again till after

eight. I didn't tell her I was coming here."

"Oh, did she say anything about the other night?" he asked, feeling that the best thing would be to grasp the first opportunity, and get it over as quickly as possible.

"Oh, yes. It was what she came about. She says she

hasn't slept any since that night."

"What kept her awake?—a crying kid?" he asked,

rather roughly.

"I don't think so. She doesn't have charge of this baby at night. It's the first one, and the mother is keen on it. No-we won't go into the park."

He had paused at the gap in the hedge through which they had often scrambled in order to find solitude off the

beaten track

only

He "Oh, all right!" he answered, and began to walk on by her side in quite the conventional way.

The footpath was wide, and the gas lamps had not ceased yet, so he could now and again see her face. They walked quite a hundred yards in silence.

"Well, and your mother put you through your facings, did she? Aren't you going to tell me about it, Mollie?"

"Presently. It's what I've come out for," she answered.

"But most of the questions she asked—the chief one, anyway—I couldn't answer."

"What was that?"
"Can't you guess?"

"I might—but I'd like you to tell me."

"She wants to know whether we are going to get married. If not, she says I must leave off ever seeing you."

"And what did you say to that?"

"I said nothing at the first, but, after a while, when she got very pressing, I said I was seeing you to-night and would tell you what she said."

"I suppose she would be keen enough on it," said

Archie, rather gloomily.

"No, I don't think she would. Her only concern is about me. Mothers are like that—all the good ones, anyway. She wants me to be happy."

"I question whether matrimony is a short cut to happiness, my dear," he observed lightly. "Judging from what

we see about us, I should say it isn't."

Mollie made no answer to that.

They walked another hundred yards or so in silence, and Archie cast about in his mind for some way out of the situation, which was even more perplexing than he had anticipated.

"Well, and what's the long and the short of it?" he asked presently. "Do you think for a moment that,

if we married, we would be happy?"

"It doesn't matter very much now what I think," she

answered quietly.

"Oh, but it does. It's the only thing that does matter. Matrimony is a tremendously big thing, and it mostly

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destroys everything, I think. I wonder why it isn't possible for men and women to be good comrades, as you and I have been these two years, Mollie, without it coming to this sort of thing. I call it horrible myself."

"Don't say that, if you please," said Mollie quietly.

"It is quite unnecessary."

"It's how I feel, anyway. We have been jolly good comrades, haven't we, now?"

"I suppose we have. I thought so once, but now I am not sure."

"Perhaps you've seen somebody else?" he said, eagerly catching at a straw that had not previously floated before his mental vision. "The schoolmaster chap! Has he been trying to get an innings?"

"No, he has not. Look nearer home, Archie," she said

quietly.

Convinced now that the only way out was that suggested and marked out for him by Mabel, Archie proceeded to walk in it, though with a good deal of heavy blundering and considerable misgiving.

" I'd better play the game, Mollie, I suppose, but I hate to hurt your feelings. I take all the blame. It's I who

have changed. I've seen somebody else."

"I guessed as much. Somebody in your own station, no doubt, who will do you more credit than I could ever

" No, you're wrong. It's somebody out of my stationabove it, if you like—and I question whether she'll so much as look at me," he said, candidly enough. "But now I've seen her I don't feel the same, and I want to be off with you, Mollie, except in a friendly way, you understand?"

"I quite understand."

"I feel an awful brute, and a cad, but you don't care so very much, do you, Mollie? After all, what has it amounted to ?-a few walks, a few visits to your place, a theatre or two, and that's all ! "

"Yes," she answered, in a low level voice which disquieted him more than anything," that is quite all."

"Of course, it won't mean that we shall never meet.

We can still see one another occasionally, only we needn't walk out or go together. It wouldn't be wise, especially now your mother knows and doesn't like it."

They passed under a lamp-post at the moment, and he imagined he saw a smile wandering across the grave lines

of the girl's mouth.

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"What are you smiling at, Mollie?"

"Was I smiling? I wasn't conscious of it. Shall we go back, Archie? I don't think I want to walk much farther, and I'll take the first car waiting at the terminus."

"Oh, well, if you wish it. But I don't feel quite satisfied. I haven't explained enough, have I? Do you want to

ask me any questions? I'll answer them if I car.."

"I don't want to ask a single question," she answered steadily. "And I've nothing whatever to complain of. It's just an end—that's all—of something that ought never to have been begun."

Silence again, and Archie furiously chewing his moustache, and guiltily fearing that she might have something

up her sleeve.

"Of course, it's all my fault. I've behaved badly, but I only meant kindness and all that, Mollie, and it was very enjoyable while it lasted. I hope you understand how I'm feeling about it—simply rotten."

"I understand everything."

"But I don't feel satisfied. You—you won't make trouble, will you, Mollie? It would be joliv bad for me at home. You know what the governor is, he would never let it down on me! I've lived in a state of stew for fear

Hugh would tell him about the other morning."

"You have? But there wasn't anything disgraceful in our friendship," she said, in the same exasperatingly level voice. "I'm a perfectly respectable woman, and I would not be afraid to stand up before your father any day—or your mother, either, or all your family put together I I'm as good as they are."

"Of course, you are. I didn't mean that. I have never meant it. I can't help the way I'm built, Mollie. I only

regret it."

"And you have a good impudence to ask me whether I won't make trouble. I may be only a working-firl, but I owe something to myself and to my mother. I'm not going to whine to you, Archie Dennison. I'll tell you quite frankly I did care for you more than I ever thought I could care for anybody, and, if you had married me, I would have made you a good wife. But I'm not breaking my heart over you now, or putting on a poor face to anybody about it. And more !- I wouldn't marry you after this, if you were the last man on God's earth, as you are the meanest. So that's what I think of you! Here's my car. Good night, and please don't come and sit by me, if you are going on it. You can go on the top and smoke off the rest of your cowardly fears."

She left his side, and, walking away very fast, was soon

out of hearing, but not out of sight.

Archie watched her climb into the car with a curious sense of futility and helplessness, feeling like a whipped hound, though at the back of his mind there was a sensation of undoubted relief.

He had got off more easily than he expected, or possibly deserved, and she had scored—yes, undoubtedly she had scored! She had behaved with a conspicuous dignity

and restraint which compelled his respect.

He walked a good half mile, and, on the route, he suffered many cars to pass him while he chewed the cud of his mingled reflections. Alternatively he cursed the social system which has poisoned for all time the relations between the sexes. He likewise cursed the fickleness of his own nature, for, if he had been strong enough to keep true to Mollie Jeffreys, he would have overridden every obstacle.

He was a free man, and Isla Mackinnon was down in Glenogle. And summer was in its zenith, and his blood began to course in his veins, but there are circumstances in which freedom can be too dearly bought. Something whispered to Archie Dennison that he was not yet done with all the follies of his youth.

### CHAPTER XV.

#### ANOTHER MISFORTUNE FOR ISLA.

TAKING advantage of the first opportunity which presented itself next day, Mollie Jeffreys asked for the privilege of a few moments' private conversation with Mr. Dennison. She had done her morning's work as usual in the presence of both the brothers, and it was not until they had gone out to the yard or one of the engineering shops that she sent the message to the private room.

Back came the lad to say that Mr. Dennison would see Miss Jeffreys now. Mollie was quite calm and self-possessed as she entered the presence of the head of the firm, from whom she had never received aught but kindness and consideration. He looked round quite kindly when she entered, took his gold pince-nez off his nose, and smiled at her.

"Well, Miss Jeffreys, what can I do for you?"

"If you please, Mr. Dennison, I want to give up my post."

"Give up your post!" he repeated. "And the reason?

Is it the usual one—eh?"

His tone increased in kindliness, for he was always pleased to hear of any of his employees entering the matrimonial estate, and he invariably marked the occasion with some generous and well-considered gift.

Mollie for the minute did not quite comprehend, but the significance of his smile continuing, she blushed rather

hotly.

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"I'm not getting married, sir, if you mean that."

"Then why are you leaving?" he asked, in evident surprise.

"I—I want a change, sir—that's all," she answered simply, but with a certain hesitation which Mr. Dennison noted.

"Is the work not to your liking, or the pay, my lass?" he asked, in the same kind interested tone. "I don't think we wish to lose you. You have performed your duties to our complete satisfaction. Both Mr. Hugh and Mr. Archie say that you are the best and the quickest

shorthand writer we've ever had in the office."

"Thank you, sir," was all that Mollie said. Then, after a moment, when her employer continued to gaze at her rather keenly, she said a trifle more hurriedly—"And if it would not inconvenience you very much, I should like to leave without notice. I don't mind forfeiting a week's pay."

"You could be spared, of course. But I'd like to get at the bottom of this," said James Dennison kindly. "It's not a common thing for our folk to leave like that. I don't care about it. I'd like to find out the reason. Have

vou had a better offer?'

"No, sir—though I know of a situation I think I can get. But that is not the reason. Please don't ask me. I just want to leave."

She was weakening under his steady kind gaze, and she felt mortally afraid lest these eyes, so keen and so far-

seeing, should probe her secret.

"Of course, if you are determined to leave, we can't keep you, Miss Jeffreys. But, as I say, it's not the sort of thing I like to happen with our folk. We try to make them comfortable and happy. If they are not so, it is their own fault—ch?"

"Yes, sir, it is that. I have no fault to find with my work, and you have been more than kind to me. I just

want to leave, and immediately."

"At the close of this day's work, like?"

"Yes, sir, unless it is going to inconvenience you."

"Oh, you can be done without—we all can," he said drily. "What does your mother say to this?"

"She doesn't know yet, sir."

"Ah, that's bad! Go home, like a good lass, and talk it over with her. Probably by to-morrow you'll have changed your mind."

Mollie shook her head.

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"No, sir, I will not. My mind has been made up for some time. And talking to my mother won't make any difference. She doesn't interfere with me. I have been earning my own living for seven years."

"She may not interfere, but she can advise. It's what

mothers are for. Are you fair determined?"

"Yes, sir, if you please."

"I don't please at all. I'm vexed about it. It's a kind of slur on Fairburn. We have prided ourselves on the way we keep our folk. There is nobody has been ill to you in the place, I hope?"

"Oh, no, sir," answered Mollie, but her voice faltered, or the ordeal was more searching than she had expected.

"And you don't want a holiday?"

"No, sir."

"So that's all you will say?" he said drily. "Very well. 'Wha wills to Cupar maun to Cupar,' but I'm not satisfied. If you are not coming back to-morrow, I'll give you a week's money now."

"Oh, no, sir. I would rather not take it. I won't take it," she said, and, with a hastily murmured excuse, she glided out of the room, leaving her employer rather

disturbed.

When he went down to the luncheon-room it was the first thing he spoke of to Hugh.

"Miss Jeffreys given notice, father! Oh, ask Archie about it," Hugh answered, on the spur of the moment.

James Dennison's brows instantly contracted, and a look of deep displeasure gathered in his eyes.

"Where is Archie?"

"Gone to the St. Enoch's Hotel to lunch with Kinnear."

"Then perhaps you can tell me how much or how little you mean by tellin' me to ask him?"

Hugh hesitated a moment. After all, he had nothing to tell.

" I spoke on the spur of the moment. I overheard him calling her by her Christian name one day. But you know Archie's foolish way with women. Probably it didn't mean

anything."

"I must find out whether it does. I don't like this, and she's a decent quiet lassie with nae nonsense about her," said his father, and at the moment one of the engineers came forward to speak to him, and the matter

was dropped.

But it did not go out of Mr. Dennison's mind, and he stopped half an hour later than usual at the office, hoping Archie would come back in order that he might tackle him there and then. But Archie, apparently, had found plenty to do in the city, and at half-past three his father left, being anxious to get the afternoon train home.

At the station he foregathered with Cattanach, the lawyer, whom he knew well both by experience and repute,

though he was not his man of business.

"Going my way, Mr. Cattanach?" he asked pleasantly, when they had passed the time of day.

Cattanach nodded.

"I'm going up the Oban line, worse luck."

"Oh, then, we can travel together."

"I don't know whether it will run to a first-class ticket, Mr. Dennison. But I'd like your company; so I'll be extravagant for once."

Dennison laughed and swung himself into a compartment, while the lawyer went back to the booking-office to

change his ticket.

Cattanach had a frugal mind, and, in certain directions, was even more careful than there was any occasion for. Although a bachelor, nobody could accuse him of spending too much on his own comfort or pleasure. He was Spartan in most rules of his life.

They had the compartment to themselves for the first part of the journey and prepared to enjoy a friendly talk.

"You are liking the change to the country, I hope, Mr. Dennison? I am surprised to hear how often you come up. Aren't you going to slacken off a bit by-and-by?"

"Maybe," answered Mr. Dennison genially. "I'm beginning to feel the lure of the life down there. Man, it's fine! I expect that in a year, or maybe less, I'll be little more than a sleeping partner at Fairburn."

"You've earned it," said the lawyer heartily. "I'm going to Glenogle on rather an unpleasant errand this afternoon."

"Ay, what's that?"

"You know my firm acts for the Mackinnons of Achree."

"So I've heard. I think it was my wife told me. But surely that bit lassie is not going to be harassed further? From all I can hear she has had a pretty tough row to hoe most of her days."

"She has. And I was in hopes that she was to get a little peace now. I don't think there is any breach of confidence in telling you part of my business at least, and I need a bit of bolstering, for I don't like my job. I suppose you have heard most of the story of the Mackinnons since you went to Glenardle?"

"I've heard bits—about the old General's sudden death, and how his rip of a son made away with himself in the

loch."

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"It's part of the harvest of his ill deeds that brings me here to-day, Mr. Dennison. When Malcolm Mackinnon left the Army he had some entanglement with a woman. He wanted to marry a sister of Rosmead who had rented the place—the man who went back to America at Easter. He had asked her to marry him, and she had said 'Yes,' and her money was going to inaugurate a new era for the old place. Then the Entanglement stepped in."

"In the flesh, you mean? The woman came here?"

"She did. She stopped at Strathyre Hotel for a bit, and gave him what for. Then he managed to persuade her to go back to London. It was after the announcement of his engagement to Mrs. Rodney Payne had been made in the London papers that the lady reappeared. I've never got the ins and the outs of the story, though I believe Miss Mackinnon herself knew all there was to tell. But it was a story she would keep her finger on, as you may imagine."

"I can imagine only one thing where Miss Isla Mackinnon is concerned, Mr. Cattanach, and that's upright and honourable conduct, such as befits a Christian gentlewoman," said Mr. Dennison, with a most unusual warmth.

Cattanach nodded in full accord.

"You're right, and I'm not surprised to hear you. You are just one of the few that would understand her without further ado. Well, to go on with the story. The woman who claimed to be the wife of Malcolm Mackinnon, through some form of irregular marriage, came down and stopped the affair with the American lady, and Mackinnon did not seem to be able to find any way out except by the loch. Immediately after, the woman returned to London, but not before she had had an interview with Miss Mackinnon. I heard that much from her. Now it appears that the woman is dead."

"Dear me, what a succession of tragic events!" said

Mr. Dennison involuntarily.

"More are following. I had a letter last week from a party claiming that Malcolm Mackinnon had left a son behind, born in lawful wedlock, and the folk that have been looking after the child are about to descend on Scotland to try to establish his rights."

Mr. Dennison sat back against the cushions, yet evidently

dismayed.

"Sounds a bit tragic for the poor lassie! What do you

think yourself, Mr. Cattanach?"

"I? Oh, I think it is a mere impudent imposture. I've been up in London, trying to sift it out, and I'm completely convinced that the whole thing is trumped up and wouldn't stand an hour in any Court in the world. But they're going to persist, it appears. The man who wrote to me, and whom I saw in London, is the brother of the woman who claimed to be married to Malcolm Mackinnon."

"She herself made no formal claim, did she?"

"None, so far as I understand. I've got to find out from Miss Mackinnon to-night exactly what passed at the interview they had together just after Malcolm's death. I believe it took place on the very day he was buried. I loathe the job, as I say—raking up the ashes of a particularly unsavoury past, and inflicting fresh pain on that noble creature who has sounded the depths of suffering, if ever anybody has!"

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"It has done its part in her, Cattanach. I never met anybody like her," said Mr. Dennison, with the same sort of reverent fervour.

The car was waiting for the Laird of Glenardle at Balquhidder station, and the lawyer was whisked to his destination more quickly than he had ever been before.

Diarmid's heart sank as he saw the tall lean figure of the lawyer at the door. His few previous appearances at Achree had been associated with evil omen. The last time Diarmid had seen him was at the funeral of the young laird.

Therefore his mien was grave as he inclined his head in answer to Cattanach's inquiry for Miss Mackinnon.

"Yes, sir, she's in. Come to the library, if you please."

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Cattanach," exclaimed Isla. "You are always welcome to Achree. And don't you think we are looking fine? I have been up to Creagh this afternoon, and everywhere there are smiling fields and good content. If only we have a kindly summer and a dry autumn we shall do wonders."

"The weather makes a difference," he said lamely, for the sight of her blithe face with the new light of courage and hope on it filled him with intolerable heart-sickness. How could he dash that light? Why should he of all men be singled out for such a loathsome task?

Her quick eye, which sorrow had made discerning, immediately noted the travail of his soul.

"Mr. Cattanach, what have you to tell me?" she said, and there was not so much as a falter in her voice. "Don't delay. I know it is something bad."

Then he blurted out without embroidery or palliation, at the same time opening his bag for the portentous correspondence through which he had been fencing with the situation for the past ten days.

"I did not come until necessity drove me, Miss Mackin-

non, for I hoped until the last that I should be able to

choke these impostors off."

"You think them impostors, then?" she asked, and she seemed to lean against the heavy carved rim of the library table, as if needing some slight support.

"I have not a doubt of it? Have you?"

" I-oh, no."

"I hate to torture you, my dear," he said gently, and she did not notice the caressing tone of his voice, or, if she did, was merely grateful for it. "But perhaps it might be as well if you could tell me what passed at the interview you had with that woman at Creagh. You remember you told me yourself that you had seen her."

"Yes. It was on the day of Malcolm's funeral, in the afternoon—the day before I left for Barras with my uncle and aunt. A great many things happened that day. After I saw her I spoke with Mr. Drummond on the Moor

of Silence."

She seemed to be marshalling her memories, and her expression was poignant, as if her soul was riven by them.

"And this woman—what had she to say to you? Try at least to tell me what seems to have any bearing on

this case."

"I can remember," she said presently, turning to him again, and her voice had a kind of shrill note in it, which he had heard before. "I was very sorry for her. I asked her one question quite straightly, and she answered it.

"Yes?" said Cattanach, and his voice too was eager, for everything depended on what he now heard.

"I asked her whether she was Malcolm's wife."

"And what did she answer?"

"She said 'No,' but that she ought to have been."

"And you think that, supposing for a moment that she had had a child of his, she must have mentioned the fact?"

"What do you think, Mr. Cattanach?"

"I think that she would, of course; for she would have been anxious to make provision for him."

Isla was silent for a moment again, and her expression

was that of a woman who handles a matter from which

her spirit shrinks.

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"Mr. Cattanach, my brother made many mistakes in his life. It may be that he sinned greatly, but my thoughts of him now are gentle, and I cannot believe that he would have asked Mrs. Rodney Payne to be his wife if there had been any bond of that kind between the woman and him. He would not have dared."

"I believe you. Then we must fight them—that's all, Miss Mackinnon!"

It was then that Isla's face went a little white.

"Fight them! Do you think it will come to that? Oh, I think, if the inner history of my people is to be laid bare in a Court of law I shall creep into the loch some night after Malcolm and be at rest."

Cattanach, sympathising with and understanding her to

the full, held his peace for a moment.

"I have seen them, Miss Isla. I went to London for three days last week for the express purpose. I saw the man calling himself Mrs. Bisley's brother and the little boy that he says is heir to Achree."

"You did?" Her eyes seemed to pierce his face.
"And what did you think? Was there anything there

to confirm their claims—anything at all?"

"Nothing in the child—though he was a nice little boy."

"Have they papers, or anything?"

"Oh, they have papers, and likewise letters of your

brother's spread over a considerable period."

"Letters!—and they would have to be read in public! Achree and the Mackinnons would be hauled through the dirt, Mr. Cattanach."

"Unless something can be done to prevent it, that is

what will happen."

"Where? Here in Scotland?—or in India—or where?" she asked hotly.

"In the Court of Session at Edinburgh."

"And they would call me?"

"They certainly would. If we elect to fight them, we shall have to marshal all our forces."

"And the Rosmeads would be mixed up in it? They might even call Mrs. Rodney Payne."

"It is within the bounds of possibility."
Her face, now quite white, seemed to harden.

"I will never consent. I could not bear it. It would kill me, Mr. Cattanach. As I have said, I will walk into the loch first and be done with it all. Death would at least be kinder to me than life has ever been."

The lawyer sat still, while the storm had its way. She did not weep, but the slim brave figure of her seemed to

be torn as if by some inward tempest.

"It is not fair—no!—nor right," she cried, and she beat with her strong young hands on the air. "I have done no wrong. Never once in my life have I been willingly unkind or cruel to a human being. I have tried to do my little best. But God will none of me. It is the wicked who flourish, who get everything! I shall have to readjust my point of view. There must be an end to Isla Mackinnon's striving. She had better go the common way."

The lawyer's mouth twitched, for the strain on him was great. He loved this woman, who was not of his world, with all the strength of a strong reserved nature that had never dissipated its gifts on lesser loves. And it was a very searching kind of trial for him to listen to her now.

"Listen, Miss Isla," he said heavily. "There is a way

out, I believe. They might be bought."

A quick light of apprehension and eagerness sprang into

her eyes.

"Is it a question of money, do you think? But where is it to come from? Even if there should be a law case, who is to pay the costs?"

"If we won our case, they would pay."

"And if we lost, what then?"

He was frankly unable to answer.

"When you saw them, did you suggest that they should be bought off?"

"I asked the man frankly what was his price," he admitted.

" And what did he say?"

# ANOTHER MISFORTUNE FOR ISLA 179

"Tried to bluff, talked high and tall about his nephew's rights. They can make trouble and talk, Miss Isla, but they will never establish that boy's claim to Achree, and very well they know it. It is merely a question of money."

"But supposing, for a moment, that we paid him a sum of money, would not that seem as if we had admitted the claim and had bought them off? That is how the world would regard it."

"Some might."

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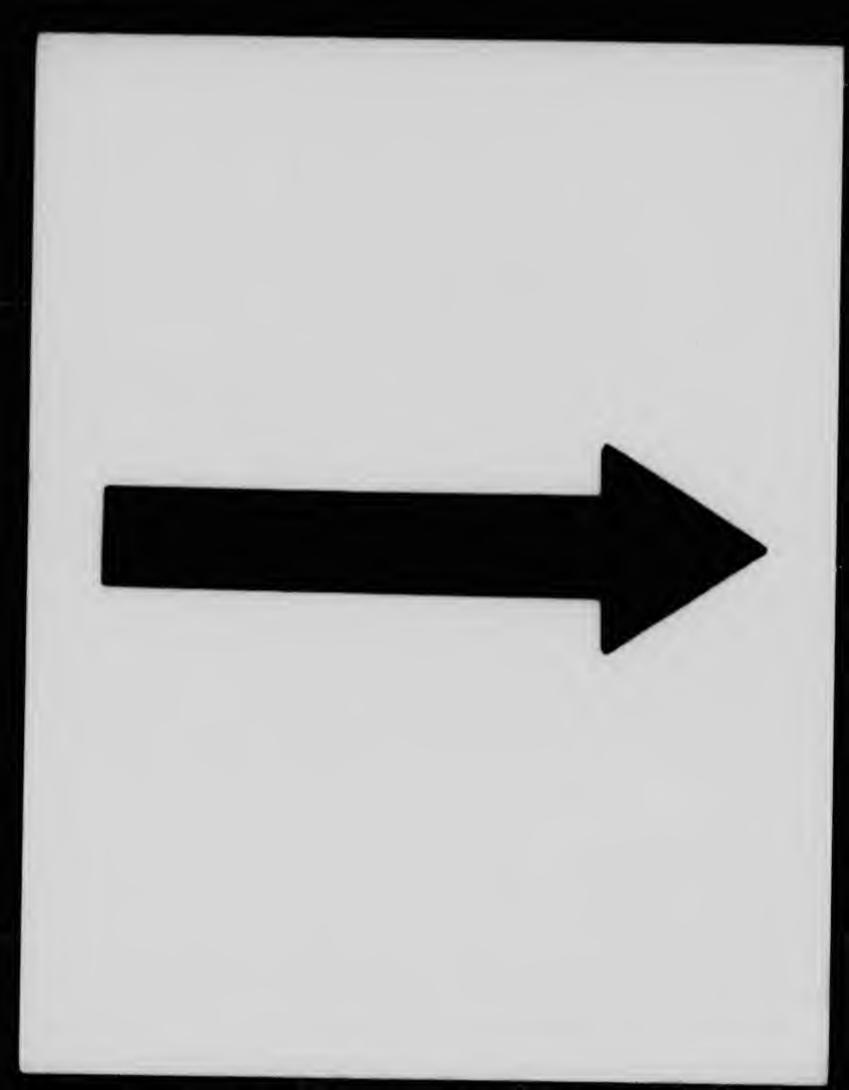
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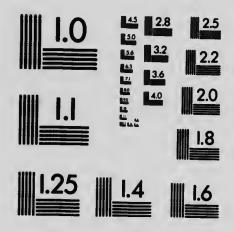
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"Then it will have to be fought. Oh, Mr. Cattanach, I am weary of my life!"



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#### CHAPTER XVI.

## WHAT OF MOLLIE JEFFREYS?

DENNISON'S talk with the lawyer drove the affair of Mollie Jeffreys out of his mind for some little time.

He had been extraordinarily drawn toward the young mistress of Achree, and already in his secret heart a new

ambition had sprung up.

He was perfectly well aware of Archie's admiration for Isia Mackinnon, and to him, personally, the idea was most alluring. For what could steady the wandering fancy of a young man's nature more surely, or more quickly make a noble man of him, than the love of a woman like Isla Mackinnon? More than once the sober hard-headed man of affairs, who had kept his imagination strictly in check through a long and strenuously successful business life, felt the lure of this particular imagination.

Since he had come to the Highlands the romantic and sentimental strain, which lies deep in every Scotchman and Scotchwoman worthy of the name, had made giant strides to the front. The glamour of Highland glens and inland seas and mountains had crept into his blood, and not even Mabel, with all her passionate joy in their new surroundings, surpassed him in the extent of these imagina-

tive flights.

In common with most other shrewd far-thinking people, James Dennison regarded as inevitable the passing of the old order of things. He saw that tradition, heredity, use, and wont were likely to have but small place in the new age. But at the same time he passionately desired that the new age should be worthy, and that it should offer

something tangible and valuable in exchange for the gifts that must go.

To build up a new era in Achree, to behold his son, fruit of his own tender and indissoluble marriage tie, become the head of a new family in Achree, with Isla Mackinnon as wife and mother, was the idea with which the new Laird of Dunmohr was obsessed.

When he reached home he was informed that Mrs. Dennison was in the kitchen garden, in which she took all a housewife's interest. It was a delightful garden, laid out on a sunny slope and walled all round, and it had trim box-edged walks and a queer, old, pagoda-lik? building at the top of the middle walk which was used as a summer-house. From the open front of the pagoda Mrs. Dennison saw her husband enter the garden from the lower gate, and she hastened out to meet him.

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"Ye are late, Jimse, surely?" she said. "I was beginning to think ye had missed the train."

He then told her of his meeting with Cattanach and part of the business that had brought the lawyer to Achree. James Dennison could keep his own counsel concerning both his own affairs and those entrusted to him, but he had no secrets from his wife.

She listened to him with the liveliest concern and interest.

"Eh, but I'm fell sorry to hear that about Miss Mackinnon, Jimse, and I hope that Cattanach will be able to settle it for her. She's had a terrible lot o' trouble, and it's time she had a bit rest noo. The lassies gaed ower to tea at Garrion this afternoon, Mab driving the new sheltie. Eh, but she's pleased wi' hersel', and would not go back to Glesca for a' ye could offer her!"

Dennison smiled indulgently as the vision of his youngest hope rose up before him. It pleased him well that his family were settling so finely in Glenardle. Suddenly he thought of Mollie Jeffreys.

"Lisbeth, do ye ever see or hear ony: ing now from your auld neebour, Ann Jeffreys?"

Mrs. Dennison shook her head.

"I havena seen or heard tell o' her since she wadna go to Easybell when Hamish was born. Her an' me had a wee dryness then, for she wadna tell me quite plain what for she wadna go to Easybell."

"I see. An' you have never seen her since?"

"Never wance. Why are ye speirin', Jimse? Ye

havena heard onything ill aboot her, I hope?"

"No. But her daughter gied up her place at Fairburn the day, for no reason that I could find oot. I was wonderin' whether ye could think of ony."

Mrs. Dennison shook her head.

"Did ye not ask her?"

"Oh, I askit her richt enough, but she would tell me nothing. There's something in the background I don't

like, Lisbeth, but I'll be at the bottom o't yet."

For some unexplained reason he hesitated to tell his wife about his faint suspicion concerning Archie and the girl. He knew that it was the sort of thing which would worry her. She had often spoken to him about Archie's love affairs, which had been legion in Glasgow, though none of them were serious.

"Did Cattanach think they would have to go to law, Jimse?" she inquired, as they turned down the broad

walk together.

The question indicated where her chief interest at the moment centred.

"It is what he does think. I wish it could be stopped,

Lisbeth. She would feel it beyond the common."

"Well, you an' Cattanach can lay your heids thegither, my man," she said, with a gentle lovable smile at her own acumen. "You have stopped bigger things in your time. Go over an' ha'e a talk wi' Miss Mackinnon aboot it."

Dennison looked at his wife, surprised, for the thought had already been in his own mind; only he had not

thought it feasible.

"Maybe I will go over the morn."

"You are not going to Glesca, then?"

"Not this week again. I was telling Cattanach I would soon be a sleepin' partner, Lisbeth, and it was not a joke.

They can get on fine without me at Fairburn, and I'm

finding plenty to take up my attention here."

"Well, I'm sure I'm pleased, my man," she answered, as she patted his arm. "Eh, but I like that lassie, Jimse, an' I think she likes me. We see a heap of one another. I've been at Achree twice this week."

"I like her too. If we had her for a dochter-in-law, Lisbeth—her an' Archie in Achree, that would be fine,

wouldn't it?" he said, almost shyly.

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Mrs. Dennison stood still just at the old iron gateway to the garden and stared at him with a wondering smile.

"Eh, but ye are not blate, Jimse Dennison! But it would just be fine. Do ye think it could ever happen?"

"Mony a more unlikely thing has happened, Lisbeth. I would give a good deal if it could. She would make a man of Archie, and his portion would lift all the burdens frae the place she likes sae weel."

The smile on Mrs. Dennison's face grew very tender.

"Eh, Jimse, but you like to sort folk! If you had your wey, there wad be precious little trouble in this world or ony ither. It you've set your heart on this, I hope ye may get it, but I ha'e my doots. She wad never look at Archie."

"She might. He's a fine strappin' lad, an' he has plenty of brains. If he had a little mair ballast, there would be few to beat him, an' when I'L, away he'll be the real heid at Fairburn, an' never Hugh—mind that. Lisbeth! Archie kens hoo to handle men. In some respects Hugh is a stupid ass."

"I ken-an' Easybell, she does him no good in the warld," she said, with a little sigh. "So it's a matchmaker ye are turnin' oot in your auld age, Jimse Dennison !

Eh michty—sic fun l"

kind eyes danced and, in spite of himself, Dennison

joined in the laugh.

Quite late that evening, and considerably to his family's surprise, Archie arrived home. He had travelled to Stirling by train, then ridden on a motor bicycle to Glenardle, which he reached about half-past nine.

"I thought I'd rather come down and see you about Kinnear's business, father," he explained, when he broke in upon them in the drawing-room. "Yes, mother, I've had something to eat, though I could take something more. It's a sharp ride from Stirling, and the air is rather keen. It was lovely, though. Well, Puss, how's the history of the Highland caterans getting on?"

He pulled Mabel's golden locks, and nodded to Janet, who was deep in the pages of a new cookery book her mother had presented her with so that she might get some knowledge of housekeeping before she went to the East

End in the late autumn.

Archie was looking both handsome and winning, and his

father regarded him with a furtive anxiety.

"You see, Kinnear wants a definite answer from us by eleven to-morrow, and I thought there wouldn't be time to thrash it out, even if you did come up to town. I was sorry when I got back to Fairburn and found you'd gone. If there had been time, I would have come down to the station. Kinnear was mighty slow in coming to a decision. He kept me there jawing till nearly four o'clock, and now he has made up his mind, he wants our lowest terms on the nail."

"We can go into the thing a little later in the library,"

said the old man quietly.

He was much pleased with the expedition and resource Archie had shown in the matter of this big contract. Had it been left in Hugh's hands, he would simply have let it drift till the morning. Most certainly he would not have thought of hiring a motor bicycle to make up the deficiency of the train service to Balquhidder.

It was in these directions that Archie scored, and such actions as these had long since convinced his father that the younger son would be the head of the firm to the end

of the chapter.

A little later, after they had discussed the entire question of the Kinnear contract, Dennison a trifle reluctantly, for it was not a subject he liked to broach to his son, spoke about Mollie Jeffreys.

"I say, Archie, do you know of any reason why Miss Jeffreys should have given up her place?"

He put the question quite bluntly, and at the same time he kept his eyes fixed rather mercilessly on his son's changing face.

"Has she given it up?" he asked, rather confusedly, though perfectly aware of the fact that Hugh, with a peculiar satisfaction, had communicated to him at the earliest possible moment.

He had even tried to get speech with Mollie before he left Fairburn, but had not been successful.

"She has. I would not have thought so much about it, only she would not give any reason. Hugh seemed to think you could throw some light on the subject."

Archie laughed in the same rather confused way.

"Hugh spies ferlies, father. He thinks because one day he heard me calling her by her Christian name, that there was something at the back of it."

"And is there no?"

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The question was put with the old man's accustomed straightness. He was never one to beat about the bush, more especially in the handling of unpleasant themes. In his business life he had found courage an essential quality.

"What makes you think that, father?" asked Archie, to gain time.

"Stick to the point, my man," replied Dennison testily.
"Ha'e ye onything to do wi' the lassie giein' up her job?"
Then Archie lied straight—as men have done about

women since the world began.

"No, I haven't. So little have I to do with it that I had not the slightest idea she had it in her mind. Probably she wanted a rise of screw."

"She would have got that had she asked it, but she expressly said that there was nothing of that kind in her mind. What she did say was that she wanted a change. But up till lately the lassie has seemed quite contented, an' I canna call to mind a thing of the kind happening at Fairburn afore."

"We have the reputation of spoiling our employees at

Fairburn, father, and, faith, I be we it's true," said Archie, with an assumption of facetiousness he was far enough from feeling.

"That may be," said the old man thoughtfully. "Well, I'll take your word for it, Archie, for so far I've had no particular reason to doubt it. But, mind ye, this is the sort of thing that disna pay, and that both your mother and me would find it hard to look over. I'm for nc lassie to be the waur o' a Dennison, and when you are a bit aulder and want to settle doon with a wife of your own, there is nothing will cause you more regret than the way ye have played the fool among the lasses."

Archie started and reddened once more, for his father's words were rather scathing. He now heard for the first time that he had had any cognisance of his many affairs of the heart.

"I've been a bit of a fool, I admit, but there's never been anything in the least serious. It's the way I'm built. I can't help seeing a pretty face and a well-turned ankle," he admitted ruefully.

But James Dennison scarcely smiled.

" Hoo anld are ye noo, Archie?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Well, it's time ye were settlin' doon. I was a father at your age, and there is nothing like it for steadying a man. Ha'e ye never seen onybody ye could marry?"

Archie hesitated a moment. This conversation was so unusual, so wholly unexpected. And yet his father seemed so kind and so anxious that he wondered whether he might dare voice the hope that had been glowing in his breast for the past three months, ever since the day he had travelled to Glasgow with Isla Mackinnon, and she had cast her spell upon him.

"Oh, I've seen her right enough," he answered ruefully. "But I don't believe I have, or ever would have, the ghost of a chance."

"Wha is she? Do I ken her? Does she live in Glasgow, Archie?" asked the old man, with an almost pathetic eagerness.

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"No, she lives here! It's Miss Mackinnon of Achree. So now you know how far gone I am in presumption and folly."

Archie got up and began to walk the floor, for he was moved in the telling, as a man is who, for the first time, voices something intimate and sacred. Also, in a sense, it scared him to hear his own voice crystallising what so far had been something intangible, unattainable, but incredibly sweet. To his amazement he beheld the strained lines of his father's face relax, and a smile, both tender and kind, creep over it.

"Archie, if we have come to the Highlands for that, and nothing else, it would be worth while," he said at last.

Surprised at the words, Archie made a pause in front of his father's chair.

"It would please you, then? But do you think I would have a chance?"

"You will have a chance with the rest, my man, but you'll need to put your best foot foremost. A woman like her is not to be had for the mere glint of a man's eye. She has to be wooed and won. It'll do you good, Archie, even if she does not take you in the end. If lifts every man up to hitch his wagon to a star."

Once more Archie was spellbound with amazement. Could this be his hard-headed prosaic father talking in the soft sentiment, voicing so eloquently the wisdom of the soft it was an odd moment between father and son seither afterwards forgot.

"wen, I'm glad to know that it would please you," said Archie, with an odd touch of boyishness which made his face look almost like that of the child of long ago; "I'll go in and win, if I can. I've been doing my best up to now, but all I can say is that she has not forbidden me Achree."

For two persons there was little sleep that night in the House of Dunmohr; and in Achree, on the other side of the loch, one also was awake, though disturbed by a very different vision.

Archie was up early, and was off before his father came

down to catch the first train to Balquhidder. Glad perhaps to get away was he, for the Scotch are chary of laying bare their hearts to one another, and he needed time to get his bearings in the new direction whither he was hastening.

Arrived in Glasgow, his first read was to the hotel to see Kinnear, the Calcutta representative of a very big firm, anent some work to be done in India, and that business

occupied him till noon.

When he reached Fairburn the morning letters had already been disposed of, and Hugh had gone about his business in some portion of the great yards and shops which covered so many acres on Clydeside. One thing, however, Archie discovered a very few moments after he had entered the offices. Mollie Jeffreys was not at her

post.

This surprised and even disturbed him greatly, for his father had not mentioned the fact that she had decided to leave at a moment's notice. He kept on asking himself what it could mean—whether it held any portent, any menace of his future peace. He had but a sorry attention to give to business during the early hours of the day, and when he met Hugh at the luncheon-hour he looked keenly at his smooth satisfied face, wondering whether he knew more than he would tell.

"Morning," he said, with a careless nod. "I went to

Glenardle last night, after all."

"How did you get there?" asked Hugh, in surprise.

"I thought you missed the last train."

"I did. But I got to Stirling, where I hired a motorbike. I was at Glenardle by half-past nine, and I settled everything with the governor. Then I went straight to Kinnear's hotel from the station this morning, and the contract will be ready for signing to-morrow."

"Sharp work," said Hugh, with a slight uplift of the

brow. "Was it necessary?"

"It was. Kinnear would have been on the Tyne this afternoon if it hadn't been settled, and we should have dropped five or six thousand," said Archie drily. "The

old man was uncommonly pleased to see me, I can tell vou."

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Hugh felt disagreeably surprised, as he had been made to feel once or twice before in his life. Once his father had even accused him of slackness in business. It was not, however, that with Hugh Dennison, but rather a lack of initiative, which a man on hardly acquire. It is inborn, though it can be cultivated. While he would be thinking and pondering on the easiest and surest way of surmounting a difficulty, his father and Archie would have scaled the wall. That was the essential difference between the brothers, and the reason why James Dennison in his mind regarded his younger son as the future head of Fairburn, and his natural successor.

"You're a hustler, and no mistake!" said Hugh, with the same disagreeable dry note in his voice. "I'm not sure whether these methods pay in the end. After all, we don't need to employ them."

"If we don't, we'll get left, my boy, as sure as fate. Let's go and feed," said Archie, as if weary of the conversation.

At the table Hugh gave him a quiet personal dig.

"I suppose you know that Miss Jeffreys has got the push, and why—"

Archie turned blazing eyes on him. At the moment he was not in a me to stand much from his elder brother, whom, in certa. Aspects, he despised.

"She's got no push! The governor told me she gave notice of her own accord, and I'll tell you what, Hugh, you had a dashed good cheek to tell him that you thought I had anything to do with it! It's your own nasty mind, anyway—or Isabel's. You hadn't a shadow of ground for trying to make the governor suspicious."

Archie was now feeling particularly virtuous and strong, and he took the high hand with complete naturalness.

Hugh cowered a little under it.

"You had yourself to blare. It was up to me to tell the governor what I liked. And it wasn't the thing for you to be calling a girl in the place by her Christian name.

A man's character has been taken away from him for less."

"Oh, stow it!" said Archie savagely, and dropped the subject.

They did not go near each other for the rest of the

day.

Archie Dennison had a good deal to distract his mind from business that day. In the intervals when he could banish Mollie Jeffreys from his thoughts, his dreams were roseate. The knowledge that his father was behind him, eager to further his suit and achieve its happy consummation, was the most wonderful thing he had ever known in his life. It engendered a warm comfortable feeling of security and assurance which nothing else could have done. His father had been, in every relation of his life, a successful man. He had, by the sheer force of his personality, acquired most things on which he had set his heart; and, if he had now set his heart on Isla Mackinnon as a daughter-in-law—why, then, perhaps it was as good as done!

His heart beat faster, his pulses throbbed, lovely pictures of a future such as he had never imagined swept across his mental horizon. He could hardly wait forty-eight hours for the week-end, which would give him one or more opportunities of seeing her. He determined not to let the grass

grow under his feet.

He felt it becoming increasingly irksome to be a guest at Highfield, and, among other things, he decided that he would tell his father that he must have rooms of his own in town. The transfer of the big town mansion had been made to Hugh and Isabel on condition that there would always be house-room in it for such members of the family as, at any time, needed a roof to cover them. For this reason Mrs. Dennison had Archie's bedroom and little snuggery at the top of the house untouched. But already he was sick of the arrangement, while Isabel openly coveted the rooms to complete her nursery floor.

At teatime he informed Hugh that he would dine at the Club and probably sleep there, and after dinner, drawn by an irresistible impulse, for which he could not account. and which he vainly strove to overcome, he took a walk in the direction of St. George's Road.

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At the corner of the street who should alight from a car but Mrs. Jeffreys, evidently on her way to her own home? He could not ignore her, but with a touch of his hat he was about to move on when she stopped him.

"Good evening, Maister Archie. If ye are goin' my way I'll walk with you."

"I'm not going to your house, if you mean that, Mrs. Jeffreys," he said stupidly, and he inwardly cursed the incredible folly that had brought him in that direction.

"Weel, wherever you may be goin', I've a word to say to you. Mollie has left Fairburn on your account."

"Why on my account, Mrs. Jeffreys? We are all sorry to lose her—my father specially so. I have his own word for it."

Somehow, the mere mention of his father's name gave him courage to meet the half-sad, half-indignant glance of Mrs. Jeffreys's eyes.

"Ye may say what ye like, but you've hurt her, my man. You've made her care for ye, and she'll never be the same lassie again. You an' the likes o' you make life harder for working-folk, an' ye'll no prosper, Archie Dennison! My lassie's sair hert will come between you an' he best ye are after a' your days."

It was all she said, but Archie Dennison was conscius of a sudden chill as he passed on. It was as if some well-deserved and portentous malediction had descended on his head.

### CHAPTER XVII.

## "YOU CAN'T KEEP THE CHILD HERE !"

NEXT morning, with a couple of dogs at his heels, James Dennison walked into Lochearn village to post a letter. In his suit of rough tweed, and a cap of the same, he made a very presentable figure.

"The kilt's the next thing, Jimse," his happy wife had said, as she waved him a laughing goodbye at the door,

" and you've a grand leg for it!"

Inside the post-office, which was likewise the "a'thing" shop of the village, whom should he find but the very

person of whom his mind was full.

"Good morning, Mr. Dennison," said Isla, in a pleasant voice which, from its tone, might have indicated that there was no such thing as black care in the world. "Now, this is something like the thing, as dear Mrs. Dennison might say. I believe, looking at you to-day, that we really have a new Laird in Dunmohr."

James Dennison smiled as he raised his cap, bought his stamps, passed the time of day with the postmaster, and followed Isla out of the shop.

She was waiting for him at the little gate with quite

evident pleasure.

"If you have nothing better to do this morning, will you walk as far as Achree with me, Mr. Dennison? I believe I have something at the farm I want to show you."

"It's what I would like better than anything in the world," he answered gallantly. "Indeed, I came out in the hope of seeing you."

She did not express the smallest surprise. Already the

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Dennisons were her friends to whom, in some part, she might even unburden her heart. Some of the older circle, notably Lady Eden and her set, had been more than astonished at Isla Mackinnon's attitude towards the new folk. She, who had once been the most exclusive in all the Glens, appeared for some strange reason to have taken them to her heart, and she had an answer ready for all their jibes.

"They are the kind of folk we want in the Glens, if we have to have strangers," she said pointedly. "They have money, and—what is better—they have kind hearts, and, further, they are as Scottish as we are. We can't have too many of them."

"I have been at Balquhidder station with Mr. Cattanach, my lawyer from Glasgow," Isla explained. "You know him, I think, Mr. Dennison? At least, Mrs. Dennison said you did."

"I know him—yes, and a fine man he is, and a sound lawyer forbye, Miss Mackinnon. But the less we see of his tribe, maybe the better," he added cautiously. "They are like the doctors—we all run to them in emergencies, but are not too keen on them at other times."

Isla faintly smiled.

"Certainly every time Mr. Cattanach comes to Achree there is a fresh trouble. He told me last night that he travelled from Glasgow with you, and also that he had told you some part of his business."

"If he told you, then, it is all right, Miss Isla, but the things I hear do not pass my lips, unless there is a reason for it. My wife I did tell, for she is a part of myself, and I have never known her turn over a story without leave. I needna say that we are as vexed as if the thing had happened to oursel's."

For a minute or two Isla did not speak. The need for some counsel other than that offered by the lawyer was very great in her heart, and she turned instinctively to this kind old man, whose own heart was as a little child's for purity and simplicity.

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"Mr. Dennison, you are a very good man, I think?"

she said unexpectedly.

"What makes ye say that, my dear? I am not aware of bein' better than the lave. The old Adam is strong in

most of Adam's sons, and I am no exception."

"Oh, but you are! I hear about you in lots of places, and always it is the same story of your goodness and kindness. Tell me, do you really believe that God takes an interest in us here, or has anything whatever to do with our individual destinies?"

The question, put to an ordinary man, would have certainly been a poser. And James Dennison, though an elder in the kirk he had left in Glasgow, had not expected. and was perhaps not quite ready for theological discussion on the spot. His religion was the sort that expressed itself in straight living and upright dealing, and was seldom found in actual profession on his tongue.

But some sort of an answer the woman at his side certainly expected. Her half-parted lips, her eager quiet eyes, indicated a wistful waiting which demanded satisfaction.

"Most certainly I do," he answered, without hesitating.

"And you read the Bible, I suppose, and believe every word of it?"

"Yes, I may say I do, though there are pairts," he added cautiously, "which I don't approve of, because I dinna understand them."

Isla laughed at this naíve explanation of his attitude

towards Scripture.

"Well, that is delicious! It is just how I feel myself. I think parts of the Bible quite horrid, just as there are heaps of things in life I can't reconcile with belief in a kind merciful Heavenly Father such as we want to believe in."

"All things work together, I do believe," said Dennison

quietly.

"You do believe that? Then all the abominable things that have happened to me are to serve some good end? I must have been born very bad-almost beyond redemption-so much have I had to bear!"

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"'Whom the Lord loveth,'" began the old man; then he stopped short, remembering it was a passage he particularly hated. "I believe that the way so many good folk have a heap to put up wi' is that they can stand it better, and so set an example to a stupider kind of folk," he answered.

"But I don't want to be an example, or a precept, or a monument, or anything of that kind! I have never asked very much, only peace to live among my own folk and a little relief from grinding poverty. Do you know that in the last fifteen years we Glenogle Mackinnons have never had more than two hundred and fifty or three hundred pounds a year to live upon? In the last two years we have had more, because the place was let. But now I am back to the old thing. I could live happily enough on it—only it seems I am not to be permitted. If we have to have this horrible lawsuit forced upon us—why, then, I don't know what will happen. Mr. Cattanach says it will hardly be possible to raise another penny on Achree, so low have land values and property values fallen in the last year or two."

"He's quite right," assented James Dennison. "But from what Cattanach said to me I should doubt very much whether these folk will ever bring the case to a Court of

law."

"Oh, yes, they will. They are coming to Glasgow this very week to take Scottish counsel's opinion on it."

"You must take it too, then, Miss Isla."

She shook her head.

"I have no money to pay Counsel's fees. What do you think I should do, Mr. Dennison? Of course, Mr. Cattanach is very good, and I can never forget what a friend he has been to me ever since I can remember, but then he is a lawyer. If you were in my place what would you do?"

"Nothing in a hurry, my dear. That is the first thing. Just sit tight and see what happens. To do things in a hurry is to spread the thing when it is not wanted."

"I am sure that is true," said Isla, with a little fluttering sigh of relief. Then, standing still on the Darrach Brig

she waved her hand to somebody hanging clothes on the line in Darrach farmyard. "Excuse me, but that's a great friend of mine, Elspeth Maclure. She was my nurse long ago at Achree. She would be hurt if I hadn't time to notice her. Well, and you think I need not be in a hurry to do anything? I am so glad to hear you say that, for this very morning Mr. Cattanach seemed inclined to rush things a bit. But, what if they come to Achree? I could not bear to see them, and I fear they will come."

Dennison pondered a moment.

"I'll tell you what, Miss Isla. Come over to Dunmohr for a week," he said eagerly, "and leave word that if they want to see you, they can come there. I'll interview them for ye, if you like?"

She smiled; then standing still in the middle of the road with her two slim hands leaning on her shepherd's crook,

she said:

"Oh, but you are good, Mr. Dennison! How in all the world did you know that it is mothering I need at this very moment, and that I was casting about in my mind for some excuse to go over to Dunmohr?"

"Then, will ye come the day and bide till next week?" asked the old man eagerly. "It'll be blithe news for the

mistress, for you have stolen her very hert away."

"She has stolen mine, too, then," said Isla gaily, and the

load lifted as if by magic from her heart.

She was so conscious of the strength and ability and integrity of the man beside her that, now he had promised to undertake for her, everything was robbed of its terrors. It was an astonishing thing that had happened to her, and she was well aware of it, but the idea of questioning the claims of these new friends never occurred to her. She took them simply as a gift of God.

James Dennison was not altogether free of guile in the matter of that invitation for, in addition to the genuine and great pleasure it would be to them to entertain Miss Mackinnon at Dunmohr, it would give Archie a chance

such as he might never have again.

"You will come, then?" he said anxiously, when they

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came to the gate of Achree. "I will send the car for you in the afternoon before teatime."

"Oh, I'll come, sure enough," she answered gaily. "I will get my things together, and tell them at the house I am going to have a holiday. But in reality I am abandoning my post, Mr. Dennison."

"Not before time, my dear," he said, in tones of infinite compassion. "Ye have led a forlorn hope longer than ye should."

Her eyes filled with tears as he held open the gate to let her pass.

"I think I will not come farther now, Miss Isla, unless there is anything particular at the farm for me to see."

"At the farm? Oh, no, it was just an excuse to gain your company. Yes, I will be ready about four this afternoon, and I will give my servants instructions to let nobody into the house in my absence and that if anybody wants me, they can come to your house to see me."

So they made their compact, shaking hands upon it. But Isla did not thank him. Between two who understood each other so perfectly there was no need.

A little later in the day, while she was making her preparation for her unexpected visit, Neil Drummond rode up to the door. She waved to him from her bedroom window and ran down to have speech with him.

"I can't ask you to lunch, Neil, for there is only the leg of a chicken, and if you have it, I shall have to go without," she said laughingly, as they shook hands.

"Dear me, you have grown very stingy of late, Isla! Won't it run to more than a bone in these days?"

"No, and sometimes it is only a drink of milk and a kebbuck of cheese and a pat of butter, with one of Margaret's oat-cakes, and I like that better than all. How are they all at Garrion?"

"Aunt Betty is not well, and she wants to see you. She's failing, Isla, and for the first time in her life looks her years."

"Well, I'll come to-morrow, tell her. They will motor me over, I don't doubt, from Dunmohr."

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Neil looked the surprise he felt.

"Motor you over from Dunmohr! Have you got that length with them already, Isla?" he said jealously.

"Oh, no," she answered, smiling back, and she bent her head till it touched the mare's glossy neck. "But I am going over to-day to spend a few days with them for private reasons, of which I cannot tell you in a hurry, Neil. It hasn't anything to do with them really, but it is going to be convenient for me to be away from Achree just for these few days, do you see?"

"I hear you, but I'm a good bit from comprehension yet. If it was necessary for you, for any reason, to get away for a day or two, why not Garrion, Isla? Your old room is there yet, and nobody has been in it since you last honoured it."

She looked contrite, even smitten.

"Well, you see, Mr. Dennison was on the spot this morning, and it was his suggestion, and I just fell in with it. I am sorry if you feel hurt. Perhaps I could divide the time and spend half the week at Garrion."

"I think you'd better," he said darkly. "Kitty and I are dining at Dunmohr to-morrow night, so we shall meet

you there, I suppose."

Isla looked pleased, and then she seemed to hesitate a moment. Time was when it had been no burden but a relief to speak of her cares to any member of the Garrion household, but now there was no temptation. Why had she found it easier to open her heart to old James Dennison than she could ever find it now to confide in the handsome cavalier before her whom she had known since her cradle days?

Neil struck by the intentness of her look, stooped to ask what ailed her. There was kindliness, brotherly concern,

but none of the eagerness of old time in his eyes.

"I was only thinking, Neil, what a queer thing life is,

and how we change."

"Do we change? Yes, I suppose we do. Well, it is inevitable, because we grow older and everything seems different," he answered lightly.

## " YOU CAN'T KEEP THE CHILD HERE!" 190

"I suppose it is that. We grow older," she said, with a little gulp which seemed to indicate relief. "Well, must you go? My love to them, and, if it can be arranged, I will come over to Garrion on Monday from Dunmohr for a couple of days. I shall be able to tell you to-morrow

night after I have consulted with Mrs. Dennison."

"We had Lady Eden yesterday, Isla," said Neil, as he tightened his girth preparatory to riding away, " and she was bemoaning things in general and Dunmohr in particular. When she heard we were dining there-it was Kitty let the cat out of the bag-she just rose and went away. What she will say when she hears you are stopping with the folk as a guest, Lord only knows."

"Poor Lady Eden! Her borders need widening. Let her go to London and seek her living from its pitiless streets, as I did, and she will get to the bedrock with folk. And she'll get something to make her open her eyes wider,

maybe, if she stops long enough in the Glen!"

"You are a red Republican, Isla, and the worst of it is you've managed to infect us, and no man knows where it

will end." quoth Neil, as he rode away.

Once more he left behind him a slight inexplicable sense of chill and loss. The heart of a woman is a strange and inscrutable thing, unreadable as the face of the sphinx. Isla would have indignantly repudiated the idea that any man should wear the willow for her sake, but she could not help feeling piqued, now that she was irrevocably free, that there was nothing of the lover about Neil Drummond. He even took pains, she thought, to convince her of this.

A little smile of irony played about her lips as she continued her preparations. Some inward thought gave zest to them, because she knew that all she said and did and looked would be approved under the roof which soon

would cover her.

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At four o'clock sharp, as if every passing minute without Isla was grudged by those who owned it, up glided the big motor to the door of Achree, and, from its lee side, out looked the broad comely face of Mrs. Dennison herself, come to do honour to her guest. A quaint motor-bonnet

in the shape of the old mushroom hat, with a voluminous veil tied in a big fluttering bow under her chin, made an extraordinarily becoming frame to her sweet face, which was all smiles when Diarmid, with every token of respect, stood bare-headed before her.

"Is Miss Mackinnon ready? I am not in a hurry, tell

her; but would she speak a minute?"

"I'm here, Mrs. Dennison," said Isla's voice in the background, and she appeared with her gloves in her hand,

a trio of dissatisfied and wistful dogs at her heels.

"Eh, but I am pleased the day," quoth Mrs. Dennison, as she held out both hands, "and so is the Laird. I say, my dear, I have a little job to do in Callander. Will ye mind rinnin' in there afore we go home?"

"Why should I mind? I shall love it."

"Well, put on this, for it's a terrible wind when ye are

fleeing through the air."

She dragged a paper parcel from under the seat, and revealed a motor-bonnet of a lovely soft shade of lilac, with a flowing veil held in at the sides with little posies of violets.

"Oh, that will be much too grand for me!" laughed

"And I'm not a bit afraid of the wind."

"Eh, but I would like ye to put it on, for it would set ye fine. It's just an orra bunnit I had by me. Naebody has ever had it on, and naebody will, efter you, my dear. It will lie at Dunmohr till ye want it again."

Isla, who never stood out when the giving of pleasure to another was in question, immediately took off her hat, handed it to Diarmid, and put on the "orra bunnit."

Mrs. Dennison clapped her hands.

"Go and look at yoursel', my dear! There's a wee lookin'-glass here in the car. But it's a good look ye want.

You look like an angel!"

Isla stepped back to where an old Chippendale mirror occupied a small bare space among the swords and pistols in the hall, laughingly adjusted the bonnet, and tied the big soft bow, and came back drawing on her gloves.

"You're determined to make me sit in the lap of luxury, Mr. Dennison. Well, your blood be on your head! Good-

## "YOU CAN'T KEEP THE CHILD HERE!" 201

bye, Diarmid. Come over sure, if anything happens, and remember not to let anybody get inside Achree without my leave."

"They will not, Miss Isla, you may pe sure. The front

door will be lockit or ye come back."

She sprang in, and Diarmid arranged the rug about their knees, the wind stirring his thin grey hair. And when he stepped back to watch the great creature, easily managed as a child, respond to the chauffeur's touch, there was an

odd smile on his lips.

"There's mair in this, Marget, than meets the e'e," he said solemnly when he encountered Margaret behind him, she having stolen out to see what was going on. "It would not astonish me if the siller did row to Achree, efter a'! An' whatever they may say, they are fine folk at Dunmohr, and nae nonsense apoot them."

"You're a silly auld man, Diarmid, aye spying ferlies," said Margaret severely. "I'm surprised at Miss Isla mysel'. I've never seen her get so thick wi' frem folk

afore."

"Providence is guidin' her, my woman. It's you that canna see through a drystane dyke," observed Diarmid enigmatically. "Noo, we'll ha'e our tea, an' an egg til't, my woman, for the back bane o' a troot is not a denner for a man's stammick."

Margaret laughed and went off to prepare the meal.

Meanwhile Isla, having thrust black care behind her, nestled in the soft cushions of the car beside her kind friend, determined to enjoy the good that had come to her and not to suffer any spectre to annoy her.

It was a lovely summer afternoon, and as they sped through the enchanting scene it all seemed to take on fresh beauty for Isla Mackinnon, though she knew every turn of

the road and every ancient landmark.

They did not talk very much, but in the course of the spin Isla learned that the eldest daughter was to be married in their old church at Glasgow early in October, and, after a fortnight spent abroad, would settle down for the winter in her East End parish.

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y, d"But why not here—the marriage, I mean? Wouldn't you like that much better?"

"We micht, but Jinnat would not. She is not keen on

these pairts, Miss Isla."

"Drop the 'Miss,'" said Isla quickly, and Mrs. Denni-

son forthwith did, well content.

The shopping at Callander did not take long, and presently they were at the station, waiting for an incoming train.

"Archie micht be doon," said his mother, trying not to look conscious. "His faither wired to him this efternune. There's a big bit o' business in hand the noo, and the maister was sayin' he ocht to be in Fairburn to guide them. 'Hoots, no, my man,' says I. 'Ye was speakin' aboot bein' a sleepin' pairtner yesterday. Let the young ones rise and rin. But I will say for Archie that he is aye willin'. There was something he had to speak to his faither aboot last nicht, and there was nae train to get him here. What do ye think my lord did? Cam' as far as Stirling on the Edinburgh train and syne hired a motor-bike. An' he had only been on wan wance. That's the kind o' chap Archie is."

"I like a man to be like that," said Isla innocently. "The kind who stop to weigh up things don't amount to much."

"No, an' that's true. Here's the train, and there he is!" said Mrs. Dennison, and it did not occur to Isla to wonder how Archie knew to alight at Callander when his

proper destination was Balquhidder.

Genuine surprise, however, sat on his face when he beheld Miss Mackinnon beside his mother in the car. Something sprang into his eyes, and had Isla been a little more observant, she must have seen it. She was, however, quite pleased to see him. In the last few weeks she had altered her first slightly unfavourable impression of Archie Dennison, and had discovered that he had many admirable qualities. And his open worship of his mother she thought the finest thing she had ever encountered.

Isla settled down in Dunmohr as if she had been in very

## "YOU CAN'T KEEP THE CHILD HERE!" 203

truth a daughter of the house. The family vied with one another in showing her kindness, and she was so sweetly natural, so interested in everything, that their love for her

grew with every hour.

"It's the most astonishing thing, Mr. Dennison," said Isla next morning, when she was making the round of the home-farm with the new Laird, "how comfortable and happy I feel here, as if nothing could come near me to hurt me. I don't even think of what may be happening in Glasgow to-day, if these London folk should actually have arrived, as they threatened."

"That's right, my dear. Never meet a trouble half-way. Now, come and see my big lambs. They'll sune

be ready for the market."

But Isla did not seem inclined to drop the subject, which

was occasioning her own heart such surprise.

"But it is such a strange thing. I have been bearing burdens all my life, and now I suddenly feel as if there were none. It is you and Mrs. Dennison who have made me feel like that."

A gratified look came on the old man's face.

"We wish you belonged to us, my dear, and we would see that your burden-bearing was done with," he answered, and Isla patted his arm and began to talk about the lambs with a little expert air which secretly delighted James Dennison.

Archie was not making himself too obtrusive. He had gone to Glasgow by the early train, before Isla appeared downstairs, and thus left behind an impression of extraordinary devotion to business.

She and Mabel drove to Callander in the car that afternoon, to meet him, and in the evening the Drummonds came to dinner.

Isla, who had been writing some letters in her own room, had left herself insufficient time to dress, and was a little late in coming down. When she entered the drawing-room Neil and Kitty were already there.

It seemed strange for these three, who had often been together under the roof of Dunmohr in the days, to find

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that there was nothing to jar or even to make them regret the past.

The new order was a mighty pleasant thing, and Neil had never eaten a better dinner or seen a table more to his mind. Perhaps the close proximity of Mabel, with her flower-like face and her bewitching smile, had something to do with it. Once, looking down the table from her place of honour at her host's right hand, Isla caught a look in Neil's eyes at once startling and enlightening.

Here, in Mabel Dennison's face was the explanation of

his aloofness to his old love!

Surely it was a good thing, but—but a little sting remained.

It was all of a piece with the rest of things in the world, with which Isla, for the moment, felt out of tune. Her mood brought a little reckless light to her deep eyes, and presently Archie Dennison was startled by the wonderful smile she gave him, and by the sudden quickening of interest manifest in her voice when she begged him to explain to her a little more about the launching of the big ship which was to be ready in a fortnight, and which they hoped she would christen.

Archie Dennison did not understand how or why, but

his chance had come !

#### CHAPTER XVIII.

#### AT GLENARDLE.

"I AM not sure," said Isla, in rather an absent-minded way. "With a father and mother like yours, I would think every-

thing of that kind would be easy."

She was walking with Archie Dennison on a sheeptrack far up Glenardle, where it widened out to the Dunmohr Moor, famed as the best shoot the neighbourhood could afford. They had left an enchanting bit of scenery behind—a deep ravine, through which tumbled the mountain burn on its way to its leap at the Falls close to Dunmohr House. Clumps of elderberry and, here and there, a little patch of silver birches outlined the burn. But now they had emerged into the open.

Six of them had left the house on Sunday afternoon about an hour after luncheon. Janet and her minister had quickly lost themselves, and Mab with her father had taken another direction. Isla did not mind at all being left tête-à-tête with Archie. She liked him better every hour she spent in his company. Nobody but a woman could know how perfectly charming Archie could make himself, and it seemed as if in Isla's company he excelled himself.

He was so handsome, too, and, let them say what they will, looks in a man count for a good deal with women, and they forgive much in that which pleases the eye. Also, Archie had no airs at all. He was at his humblest and his best with her because he felt humble and altogether unworthy, and because his love for her was growing by leaps and bounds. There was a slight recklessness with

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his passion, too, and he did not care though she should guess his feeling for her. There had been moments even in the last half-hour when he was tempted to get rid of his secret without further delay. He was certainly heading in that direction by gently guiding the conversation into personal grooves, and trying to get her to take an interest in his thoughts, opinions, and ambitions.

"It is easy, and again it isn't," he said, a trifle ruefully. "You see, when the standard is very high one gets

a bit hopeless and just stumbles."

"Oh, but that would never make any difference to your mother," said Isla, with a smile. "I am sure there is nothing in the world that would make her happier than just to forgive people."

"Well, yes. But it would depend on the kind of thing,

don't you know?"

"Maybe. But, according to her, she has never had anything to forgive in her children. You are patterns, every one, and from what I have seen I don't doubt it in the least."

Archie reddened. He even looked round rather quickly

to see whether si e was laughing at him.

"Oh, come, Miss Mackinnon, we are just a pretty average crowd! Take me, for instance. I haven't done anything very wicked perhaps, but I have done a lot of things I could wish undone—especially lately."

"What are they?" she asked casually, at the same time watching the flight of a bird towards the upper slope of

the hill that they were skirting.

"Oh, well, I could hardly begin to tell you—stupid footling kind of things, wasting time and what not, don't you know? I tell you what, Miss Mackinnon, the self-made man scores in some directions."

"As for instance?"

"While he is making himself, if that's the right expression, he hasn't time for anything else," said Archie, with a touch of naïvete which Isla at the moment thought specially becoming.

She liked modesty in man or woman, and she was feeling

very kindly towards Archie Dennison just then, chiefly, it must be admitted, because he was the son of his parents.

"Well, he has got such serious things to occupy all his leisure, you see, that he hasn't time to make a fool of himself in any direction."

"And have you done that?" asked Isla, with a little sympathetic gleam in her eyes.

"Yes, I'm afraid I have."

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"Well, confess, and I'll absolve you as well as sympathise with you, for I've done so many foolish and unnecessary things in my life that I shall understand every one!"

"Even if I believe you, which I don't," said Archie, rather earnestly, "they would not be the same kind of things, for, you see, the standard for men and women is different."

"But that's going to be altered, I'm sure, in the new age," said Isla quickly. "Personally, I don't think it is necessary, because we must have a higher standard for women, if they are to be of any use as levers. Now, I am sure that at least the half of your delightful father's success is due to your still more delightful mother."

"He says it's all due to her," said Archie, with a laugh.

"And I must say, she's wonderful! Je heard him say—
perhaps he has told you already—the, at the beginning of things, he never took a step of any importance without consulting her. And nearly always he followed her advice. He says he has never known her make a mistake about a man. She has the most wonderful intuition."

Isla nodded.

"All this is lovely, and I could listen to it for ever! Do you know, it has done me no end of good to come here, and I shall always be glad that I have got to know your family."

"What do you suppose it is to us, then?" said Archie, rather recklessly.

"Oh, I'm not much good to anybody. I've had rather a hard life, and I've forgotten how to play. But I do believe that if I stopped here long enough, I should grow

young again and find the lost things—at least, some of them."

She stooped down to pick a little sprig of heath which had bloomed in advance of its later sister, the heather, hereby promising an early glow of the royal purple on the nills.

"We shall have a purple Twelfth," she said presently. "I shouldn't wonder if the glory was not off a little by

then. Isn't that a sweet thing?"

She stood still on the path with her crook on her arm and the little purple spray against her lips in a caress, and when she looked at Archie Dennison her colour rose, for there was that in his eyes she had seen in the eyes of other men when they looked on her face, and a sort of blind terror rushed over her.

"Oh, don't!" she cried, and turned away from him.

"Don't say a word. It will spoil everything!"

But Archie, who did not lack courage, was not to be

daunted by a woman's word.

"I can't help it. I simply must. I knew I would when I had a chance like this. Don't say it's never going to be any good, for it's a desperate thing for me! It means everything, and I don't care how long I wait or what probation you put me on, as long as I may have even the ghost of a chance."

"Oh, but!" cried Isla, a little breathlessly, "I am done with all that, and I'm old, too. I'm thirty and more. Soon I shall be quite middle-aged, and you deserve something better. You have the right to the very best a woman

can give."

"I would be content with the second-best from you," he said humbly. "Don't send me about my business altogether. Give me a chance to win you, to prove myself. I'll-I'll do anything you want."

They were still standing in the path, for Isla felt herself

strangely rooted to the spot.

"Just think how happy it would make everybody!" he began, but she stopped him with a little gesture he only partially understood.

"Oh, but don't you see that can't count! It can't ever count with a woman! I've had so much of giving up, of thinking about others! If ever I marry—and that is not likely now—I would need to be very sure."

"You could be sure of me. I would only ask the right to take care of you, and try to give you some brightness and happiness, and, after a time, you might—you might feel differently. Don't say 'No' positively, without giving me a chance."

Isla laughed a little hysterically and said they had better be going back.

She strode on in front, her slim belted figure in short walking-skirt and white silk blouse swaying a little less steadily on the track than before. But there was no doubt about her haste.

Archie followed rather dismally, conscious that he had been too precipitate and that he had perhaps destroyed his chance for ever.

Quite suddenly, at a little bend in the path close to a clump of silver birches, she stood still and looked at him very straightly.

"Mr. Dennison, don't think I am not grateful, that I don't appreciate what you offer. But there would be no equality in such an arrangement. You have the right to youth and wealth and everything—far, far more than I have to give to you or to any man! What do you and in me? I had thought myself beyond all that, and therefore quite safe in walking out even with such an eligible bachelor as you."

She spoke lightly and smiled, as if trying to put him at his ease, and to restore the friendly balance of the situation.

But Archie refused to be set aside.

"I ask you because I feel differently about you than about any other woman I have met. I am not going to pretend that I haven't seen others, or even had affairs, because that would be a lie. But since I've met you all life looks different. I want to be a better man, to realise the best I've got in this world—and the next, if you like!

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As my father put it the other day, I've hitched my wagon to a star."

Isla's face grew kind again in response to this appeal.

"I wish I could answer you differently, but I can't. I don't care about you in that way. And marriage needs the best we can bring to it."

"But the caring would be on the right side!" he cried eagerly. "And I would not ask too much. I would be

content with anything you choose to give at first."

"Ah, but the time would come when that wouldn't satisfy you. Believe me, I am wiser than you. I would save you from yourself. Shall we shake hands on it, and be as good friends as ever? I won't promise to forget, because there will be days when it will make me glad to remember that you have felt like this about me. But I will never marry. I can't. I have buried my heart. So now you will understand!"

"I want to dig it up again," he cried, with a touch

of his father's persistence.

But she began to walk on again, and soon they came up with Mr. Dennison and Mabel, who had crossed the lower slope of the hill to get a particular view of the loch. Isla, agitated more than she could have deemed possible, thrust her hand through Mabel's arm, and walked her on rather rapidly ahead.

James Dennison, quite aware that something had

happened, looking questioningly at his son.

"I'll just go back over the hill, father, if you don't mind," said Archie, rather dismally. "I've made a confounded ass of myself."

"In what way?"

"I've proposed to her, and she has refused me, of course. I'll need to walk it off."

Already a bend in the path had concealed the two girls, and James Dennison laid a detaining hand on his son's arm.

"Ye were in a fell hurry, my man. The time wasna ripe yet."

"How could I help it? The time for that sort of thing

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is when a man feels like it! But I'm not giving her up," he added savagely. "She was kind, and I mean to ask her again."

He plunged away from his father's side, nor did the old man seek to detain him. His own disappointment was keen, and he was of opinion that Archie had spoiled every-

thing by his rash haste.

He did not seek to overtake the two in front, and when he arrived at Dunmohr alone the girls had disappeared. He promptly went in search of his wife, whom he found enjoying her Sunday afternoon rest in what she called the "boodwar."

"Well, Jimse, had a good walk? I've had an 'oor wi'
Davit this efternune, honest man," she said, patting the
red-leather Bible lying to her hand. "It's a peety the
Psalms are not read as they were in my young days. I
got a prize for sayin' the hundred and nineteenth frae
beginning to end. Nane o' oors could ever do it. But
what ails ye, my man?"

Dennison sat down rather heavily, and smiled ruefully

into his wife's face.

"It's that young folk, Lisbeth! They are in sic a hurry. Here's Archie gane and popped the question to Miss Mackinnon, and been sent about his business!"

Immediately the Psalms of David were driven completely

from Mrs. Dennison's mind.

"Mercy me, Jimse, what for was the laddie in sic a hurry? Everything was gettin' on fine, and me drappin' in a bit word here and there! Who told ye about it?"

"He did," answered the shipbuilder, and he related the few brief sentences that had passed between Archie and

him in the Glen.

"Ah, well, we can do no more, Jimse, bar wait on what will happen next. If we are to get Isla Mackinnon for Archie, then we will get her. Let's leave it at that, and dinna you look so putten aboot. I wonder if ye would hae lookit as black if I had said no till ye thon day on Gleniffer Braes?"

While the 'derly lovers were trying to find some solace

for their undoubted disappointment in their reminiscences, Isla had reached the shelter of her own delightful guestchamber, where she sat down, a little perturbed, to review

what had happened.

There had been something a little tempestuous and overwhelming in Archie Dennison's wooing—the youthful fervour of it had carried her away. She gave an odd little laugh, and walked deliberately to the mirror to take survey, showing herself a very woman in the act.

"You can take a new lease of life, Isla, my dear, for you are not so old as you imagine. If I had been ten years

younger I would have said 'Yes' on the spot!"

When an "if" creeps into a woman's imaginings on any subject whatever, she is wavering, and things may be looked for to happen in the direction whither her thoughts

are engaged.

She took off her hat, smoothed her bright hair, beheld the colour in her cheeks, and the radiance in her eyes, and found them good. Then she gave a prodigious sigh, and cast herself on the bed to weep, because none of these things had been strong enough to keep Peter Rosmead, the man of her heart, at her side.

To her no small amazement she fell asleep, and she was wakened by a low tap at the door, and the voice of a maid asking whether she would like some tea sent up?

"What o'clock is it, and have they had tea downstairs?"

she inquired guiltily.

"It's a quarter to five, miss, and they're having tea in the hall now."

"Then I'm coming down," said Isla resolutely. "I won't be above five minutes."

"It will never do to make this seem an occasion, or to let these dear people know anything has happened," she said to herself as she vigorously rubbed her cheeks with the damask towel, fine and soft as satin. "I only hope he will have as much sense, poor boy! I must show him how to behave in trying circumstances."

She was conscious of a very tender feeling towards him. But when she descended to the hall-place where the family guest-

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were gathered, supplemented, to her no small astonishment, by Neil Drummond, she found that Archie was absent.

"Come away, my dear," said Mrs. Dennison, reaching out a kind hand towards her. "Had your Sunday afternoon nap, like the lave? And ye look the better for it."

"I plead guilty," said Isla, conscious of a strange lightness of heart, for which she had no way of accounting. "I don't know when I slept in the daytime before. Afternoon, Neil! Did you ride on a bicycle from Garrion on a Sunday? Oh, fie!"

"Yes, I did, and I'm not ashamed of it," he answered boldly. "I came to see whether you are coming to us to-morrow? Aunt Betty is so uplifted at the idea that we got her down to lunch to-day."

"Yes, I am coming, quite early in the day, if it is convenient to my kind friends here," she said, with a little glance of appeal at Mrs. Dennison's face.

"We don't want to lose ye, my dear," she answered readily, "but old friends must be allowed the first claim—eh, Jimse?"

Isla turned her eyes on Mr. Dennison's face, and immediately she gathered from it that, somehow, he knew what had happened.

In business James Dennison could guard both his face and his tongue so that his mind would be as unreadable as a sphinx, but in private life and in all the affairs which touched his heart he was as transparent as a child.

Isla conceived a sudden terror of this great strong man, who somehow knew everything, and she even felt a little helpless. If had decreed in his inmost heart that she should marry his son—why, then, she could easily foresee the end! In this way he was a little like Peter Rosmead. These big captains of industry, by reason of the very qualities which have raised them to the height of success, are to be feared.

So she was not in the least surprised when, a little later in the evening, as they walked side by side on the low path at the water's edge within sight and sound of the soft murmur of the Falls, he frankly broached the subject. "Miss Isla, I don't know whether I am a wise man," he began, with a sort of diffidence. "My son has told me what passed this afternoon, and I would like to say that I am sorry your visit should have been made uncomfortable by any such thing."

This was not quite the utterance she had expected, but she was bound to make answer of some kind. The colour went high in her cheeks and she turned her eyes towards the loch, where the blood-red glow of the sunset gleamed

in unspeakable splendour.

"I am sorry, too, but not in the way you think, and I wish I could have spoken differently," she said, with difficulty. "I was taken by surprise, and I hardly remember now what I did say. Only, I think he understands that it is because I—I feel myself too old, and I am done with all that——"

Mr. Dennison waved what seemed an impatient hand.

"That is a reason that will not stand, and well you know it, my dear," he answered, rather sternly. "But what I do want to say is that my wife and I hope this will make no difference. It would grieve us very much if it made any bar to the friendship which has made us all so happy here in Dunmohr."

Isla's eyes filled with tears, for there was much appeal in the words and in the tone in which they were

uttered.

"Oh, how ungrateful and how horrible I should be if I made any difference," she cried impetuously. "I could almost wish I could have answered your son differently!"

"Archie himself will not be troubling you. He has

already gone away."

"Gone away!" she said, in a startled voice.

Mr. Dennison looked a trifle confused.

"Well, when he asked whether he could have the car to take him to Stirling, where he could catch a Glasgow train, what could I say, Miss Isla? I myself could not have remained here under the circumstances."

"Oh, but that is terrible! I could have gone back to

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"You could, but that would have been mair terrible still," he answered, with a slight smile. "It will not do the lad any harm. Probably by next week he will be able to meet you as if nothing had happened."

But Isla's eyes were troubled, and for a small space

she had nothing to say.

"I suppose your answer is final?" he said at last, greatly daring.

" I think so," she answered.

"One thing I must say before we put it away, my dear. It would have made his mother and me happier than anything in the world. He is a good lad, and the steadying he needs you would have given him. Already you have lifted him up and made a man of him. And what is the money for but to make our bairns happy? There is plenty of it—more than we shall ever spend in this world. There would have been no burdens left on Achree, my dear, and a new life would have been yours. But, as your heart does not incline to him, there is no more to be said. I hope you will forgive me for saying that much, but I was driven to it."

Isla stood still on the path and held out her hands. Her eyes were swimming in tears, through which a smile struggled, like the sun through the mists of the rain.

"If I had taken him, Mr. Dennison, it would have been for your sake and Mrs. Dennison's. And I do hope and pray that this will not make a particle of difference to any of us."

She spoke the words on the spur of the moment, but James Dennison treasured them, and carried them to his wife, and they extracted oceans of comfort from them. If only Archie would bide his time and go warily he might win her yet.

They put no objection in the way of her going to Garrion next day. The car came back for her after it had taken

Mr. Dennison to the morning train.

Isla's sweet mouth was trembling as she ran into the "boodwar" to say goodbye to the woman who had so mothered her that, for the first time in many years, she

had felt herself something of a child again. She clung to

her, and put her head on her breast.

"Oh, don't put me out of your heart! Let me come here just when I like, and whenever I need to come!" she said brokenly. "You've done me good. I've got back heaps of the lost things here—among others, faith in God. Goodbye, dear, dear Mrs. Dennison."

"Goodbye, my lamb an' dearie, and I'll keep on asking Him you've named to gi'e ye to me for my very ain !-

so there."

She dismissed her with a kiss, which Isla never forgot, and all the way to Garrion she probed fiercely into her own heart, and demanded of it how much or how little she could give.

At Garrion she was rapturously received by Kitty and Lady Betty, the latter of whom had risen in honour of the occasion, but was looking very frail indeed as she sat in her high-backed chair, with her hands clasped heavily on her ebony stick.

Isla greeted her with all the affection she felt, and she suddenly realised with a little pang that soon Aunt Betty would have to be numbered among the lost things, so far as bodily presence was concerned.

"There you are, my dear, and I must say I have never seen you look better. Years younger, isn't she, Kate?"

"It's the flesh-pots of Egypt, Aunt Betty. I'm getting so fat since I went to Dunmohr that soon I won't get into my clothes."

"Changed days for the Glens, aren't they, Isla? Kate, that woman has forgotten to put two handkerchiefs into my bag—the big one and the little one. Go and rouse her."

Kate departed obediently, too guileless to see that she

was being sent out of the way.

"Sit down, Isla. You are a sight for sair een! Changed days, I say, and nothing can surprise me. Soon there will be a bride from Dunmohr reigning here in Garrion."

Isla started.

"A bride from Dunmohr, Lady Betty? You don't mean to say-"

"I do mean to say, for I don't suppose the lassie will refuse him. She's a bonnie creature, and there is no guile in her. I hear the father and mother are the right sort, and, though the thing takes a bit of swallowing—why, we must make the best of it."

"Actually, Lady Betty? Has Neil asked her, then?"
"No, but he is going to. He has as good as told me."

She eyed Isla keenly, a little surprised at the mode of her reception of the news.

It would not be possible, surely, that at the back of her mind Isla grudged her old lover to Mabel Dennison, or expected that he would wear the willow perpetually for her sake?

But quite different thoughts were rushing upon Isla like a great flood—thoughts Lady Betty could not and did not share.

"I think I am glad! She's a sweet thing, Lady Betty, and neither she nor her folk will ever shame Garrion. Oh, dear, what a number of things seem to be happening which nobody expected or dreamed of!"

Quite late that night in her own room Isla sat concocting strange epistles, which she vowed would never see the post I But finally one passed the bar of her judgment, and she put it in an envelope, and addressed it, and shut it up in her letter case.

Perhaps to-morrow, if the cold light of day permitted, she would post it at Lochearn on her way down, for she thought she would go home next day.

The envelope bore the name of Archibald Dennison, and was addressed to him at Fairburn.

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### CHAPTER XIX.

#### MR. TOMLINSON.

THE young Drummonds had a luncheon engagement at Callander Hotel next day, otherwise Isla would not perhaps have been permitted to leave so early. She lunched alone with Lady Betty, and then William drove her and her modest belongings down to Lochearn in the pony cart. Neil had taken the fast roans to Callander, driving his sister and himself.

Isla desired William to leave her in the village, and go on with the bag to Achree, as she had some things to do, and would walk home. She lingered a few minutes at the post-office, and talking with this one and that, quickly put off half an hour. At the hotel Miss Macdougall was standing in the doorway, and as Isla paused to bid her good day and inquire for her rheumatism she fancied her expression a little odd.

A little boy about four, a fragile slim child in a blue jersey suit, was playing bare-headed in the sun, delighting in the antics of a puppy worrying an old tennis-ball.

Isla smiled on the child, because she loved all children, and there were not so very many now in Lochearn. Supposing that he was the child of some visitor at the hotel, she made a kind inquiry as to the number Miss Macdougall had at present.

"I hope you are having a good summer, Miss Macdougall? This glorious weather ought to bring people to

the Glens, if anything will."

"I have nothing to complain of, Miss Isla. The house has been more or less full since ever the fishing season opened. We have not a bed now."

"And who is that dear little boy? He looks rather

delicate, as if he came from the South."

"And that he does, though it is Mackinnon they are seeking to call him," answered the woman, looking away beyond Isla to the loch—anywhere but at her face. "I would not be telling you now, Miss Isla, only maybe it is right you should know what is going on in the place."

Isla's face flushed with a hot shame, then went so white that the kind woman stepped out and laid hold of her

arm with a gentle compelling touch.

"Come inside just a minute, Miss Isla, to my sitting-

room. Nobody will disturb us there."

Isla suffered herself to be led, for she had received something of a shock, and besides she would like a little more light thrown on this strange thing that had come to pass in the Glen. As she moved towards the house she looked back at the child, giving him a long searching glance which brought her no assurance. Then, shaking her head a little, she followed Miss Macdougall through the hotel door and along the passage to the small sitting-room at the back which she reserved for her own private use.

For the fraction of a second both were at a loss, for it was a delicate matter they were handling, and though Jean Macdougall had known Isla all her days, she was not sure yet how far she might go with her. She fancied she had

better wait for Isla to take the lead.

"Who is here with that child, Miss Macdougall?" asked Isla at length. "Tell me exactly what has happened, or

is happening."

"They came on Saturday night late, Miss Isla—a Mr. Tomlinson and a young woman who seems to be a nurse to the little boy. I had difficulty in giving them rooms. But as it was the last train they came by and as they seemed very anxious to stop, I said, if they could make shift till the morning, when a motor party would be leaving, I could accommodate them. It was only yesterday morning he told me who he was and that the little boy's name is Mackinnon."

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"Then you know the story, and what is threatening Achree?"

She nodded.

"Soon the whole of Glenogle and Glenardle will know

it, Miss Isla, for the man will not hold his tongue."

Isla was silent for a moment, struggling with herself. Her pride was in the dust, for, though all the Glens had known of Malcolm's waywardness, it was another matter to have a stranger coming from the outside to proclaim it from the housetops.

There was no help for it, however, but to face the situa-

tion, which she did with her accustomed courage.

"Miss Macdougall, there isn't any use trying to cover up things, especially as you tell me this man is talking everywhere. He claims that his sister was married to my brother, and that this is his son. It is a lie. I am sure of it!"

"And so am I, Miss Isla," said the landlady fervently, as sure as I stand here! And so I told him."

"So you told him?" said Isla, in swift surprise.

"Oh, yes. You see the man is no gentleman, Miss Isla, nor does he behave like one. I have even gone so far as to say that his room would be better than his company; but he is stopping here, he says, until he has been inside Achree and has a satisfactory interview with you."

Isla rapidly reviewed the situation in her mind.

"If that is the case, Miss Macdougall, obviously the thing is for me to see the man without further delay."

"Here, Miss Isla? I believe that at this very moment he is smoking on the seat at the top of the garden. At

least, he won't be ill to find."

But Isla seemed to shrink into herself at the suggestion, and she even moved away a little from the window, which looked on to the garden, lest she should be tempted to let her eyes fall on the man who had come to destroy the new harmony of her life.

"No, no; that would be undignified. I will go home and think a way out. Most probably I will send him a message of some sort. That he should come and plant

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Her anger was rising, and a red spot burned steadily on

her pale cheek.

"And I don't wonder at h. But it is not much 'cuttance' he is getting from anybody in Lochearn, Miss Isla," said Miss Macdougall sy upathetically

As Isla prepared to to she added another question a

trifle wistfully:

"Miss Isla, you don't think, surely, that any Court in Scotland, or the whole world, would give Achree to folk like that?"

Isla smiled a little wintrily.

"There is no knowing what the law will do. But you have had some opportunity of judging, Miss Macdougall. What do you think?"

"I think they are impostors. I'm sorry for the wee boy, though, for he is a sweet bairn, and he has no idea what

they are trying to do with him."

"I'll go, then, and send a message down. If by seeing him we get rid of him from Lochearn, Miss Macdougall, it is worth while. I would write it here to save time; only, you see, for obvious reasons everything must be done properly and with all the dignity we can muster."

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" said the warm-hearted landlady, and as she opened the door for Isla she grasped her hand quickly and kissed it in a most unusual burst of

feeling.

A little way across the gravel sweep before the door the child and the puppy were still at their game. Isla stepped deliberately forward and laid her hand on his sunny head.

"Look at me, my dear," she said so kindly and sweetly that the child instantly and without fear met her glance. It was very searching, and appeared to satisfy her.

"No Mackinnon there!" she muttered to herself.

"What is your name, my dear?"

"Malcolm Mackinnon," he said confusedly. "Uncle Ted says that is my new name, and that I must never forget to say it right when people ask me." "You poor dear!" said Isla, with a wavering smile as

she turned away.

She had not gone many steps when, looking back, she saw a man's figure in the doorway of the hotel beside that of Miss Macdougall.

"Who was that speaking to Malcolm?" he was asking

rather threateningly.

"Miss Mackinnon of Achree," answered Miss Macdougall. But when the man would have started forward she detained him.

"Don't go after her. She won't speak to you on the road, Mr. Tomlinson. Is it likely? Don't you try it! You would be sorry. Just wait. She is going to write to you."

'Has she been in here, then?" he asked suspiciously.

"She has," answered Miss Macdougall, and disappeared about her household duties.

About five o'clock a note was delivered by hand at the Lochearnhead Hotel, addressed to Mr. Tomlinson.

From some remote drawer in her escritoire Isla had unearthed some crested notepaper belonging to the days when there had been money available for such luxuries, and across the sheet she had written only these words:

"Miss Mackinnon will receive Mr. Tomlinson, if convenient to him, at Achree to-morrow (Wednesday) morning, at ten o'clock."

Isla rose early next morning, intensely disliking and shrinking from the ordeal in front of her. Never had she more keenly felt the awful loneliness of her position, and, as she was dressing, involuntarily her eyes travelled across the shining breadth of the loch to Dunmohr, where they loved her and would do all they could to ease her lot.

For the moment she felt tempted to send a swift messenger for Mr. Dennison. Then, as her thoughts lingered a moment or so on the new folk, she suddenly remembered with a hot flush and a nervous tremor that, in an impulsive

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moment, she had posted among other letters the one she had written to Archibald Dennison, bidding him hope.

"Oh, I didn't mean it! I didn't mean it!" she whispered to herself. "But now it has gone, it is Kismet. I must let it a-be."

But that thought troubled her a great deal more than the ordeal of interviewing the man from Lochearn, and it helped to divert her mind from the fresh complications in her life.

She had a distracting morning, indeed, and felt more than ever like a boat adrift without a rudder or compass on some unknown and tempestuous sea.

"If somebody or something doesn't come quickly to steady Isla Mackinnon, God knows what will become of her!" she said ruefully to herself as, greatly to Diarmid's concern, she made pretence of eating her breakfast.

"There is a man coming to see me from Lochearn at ten o'clock, Diarmid—a Mr. Tomlinson from the hotel."

"I've seen him—an ill-kindet chap," said Diarmid sourly.
"He wass apoot the place on Sunday, and again yesterday morning pefore you came home."

"Asking for me?"

"On Saturday hand ask, and when I told him you wass not at home hand synch went moochin' roon' the stables an' everywhere he could think on. I had just a fery good mind to pe setting the dowgs on till him for his pains."

"I hope that we shall get rid of him to-day, Diarmid," answered Isla.

Then she began to look at her letters, but she did so listlessly, as if not expecting anything of much importance. Two, however, were fimport to this story and must be transcribed as they were written.

One bore the Glasgow postmark, and though she did not recognise the handwriting when she opened it, her colour rose sharply, because it was a love letter for which she was hardly in the mood.

It was written on business-paper from the office at Fairburn. Isla did not know how many times the letter

had been fashioned—how he had hesitated on her name, and then, fearing to presume, had simply begun as if he might have been talking to her by word of mouth.

It was thus, in sincere, manly enough fashion, that Archie Dennison poured his soul out to the woman he loved.

"I cannot get you out of my head or heart, nor could I do my work to-day for the thought of you and the memory of yesterday. When I look back on it I wonder more and more at my own presumption, and I would ask your pardon for my haste. I am feeling to-day that, perhaps if I had waited and proved myself, given you time to know me, I might have had a chance.

"Worthy of you I shall never be. I know that in my inmost soul and need no telling, though there would be many ready and joyful to put me in my place. And I am writing to-day to ask you to forget Sunday, to blot it out of the book of your remembrance, and let me start

afresh to win you.

"I promise to be very good, not to persecute you, not to be a too insistent wooer. But I shall be there when you need me, and if years of devotion and service can count, perhaps I yet may be lifted up to a higher place in your

regard.

"Up till now I have led a selfish, careless, caseful life, but since you came into it everything has changed. I begin to understand something of life's deeper meanings and of the responsibilities a man may shoulder, thereby making himself happier and better and worthier to live.

"I ask no answer to this, because I hope that one day

soon I shall see you.

"Meanwhile, I am your humble servant,

"ARCHIBALD DENNISON."

It was a letter that any courtly knight might have written, but it perturbed the soul of Isla Mackinnon, and she laid it from her with haste.

It caused her to realise what she had done without sufficient thought but yesterday. The letter she had sent was name, if he

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suffiwas now beyond recall and must have immediate and farreaching consequences. Probably it might bring him that very day to her feet.

Her lips were working ver eyes restlessly troubled, as she pushed the letter aside and tried to find distraction in

the rest of her correspondence.

Presently, amid the little pile of letters, an envelope of thin, blue, foreign paper, bearing the Paris postmark, arrested her attention. Whom did she know in Paris? For the moment she did not recall the fact, communicated to her by Cattanach, that Vivien Rosmead—Mrs. Rodney Payne—had gone to Paris at the same time that her people had left for America.

Her fingers trembled a little as she broke the seal of this

most unexpected message from afar.

"31, Avenue Castellare, Champs Elysée, Paris, July 2nd.

"DEAR WOMAN,-

"I have thought so much of you these last few days that I must write to you to get peace to myself. And now when I lift my pen I don't know what to say except one thing. Will you come to me now, at once, on a visit, short or long, as you care to make it?

"I am all alone in my house here, which I am going to get rid of at the close of the season. I am negotiating about it now with some New York friends. Immediately the matter is settled I shall go back to Virginia. I expect that will be some time next month, or in September at

the latest. I cannot go without seeing you.

"So often I have wished to write, and even tried to, but never would the words come. We have things to say to each other which can only be said face to face. Life has been cruel to you and me, Isla, as it can be cruel only to women. And we ought not to hold aloof from each other, for I think we might find some crumbs of comfort in companionship for a little.

"I shall wait with what patience I can muster for news of your coming. Send no denial to her who has never ceased to love you.

"VIVIEN RODNEY PAYNE."

A little sob broke from Isla's lips then, and she rose from the table, trembling very much. Seldom had her post-bag been of more momentous interest or moved her so mightily. She felt that she was approaching another crisis in her life, and that she would need all her courage to meet it.

At the moment, as she sought to gather her stray papers and letters together with a nervous hand, Diarmid appeared to announce that the man from the hotel was waiting in the library.

Diarmid's glance was anxious as his young mistress passed him by, all her nervousness gone, her head held high, the innate pride of her race in her gallant bearing.

"Don't keep him long, Miss Isla, put ring if ye want onything," he said nervously. "It is not for the likes of him to pe takin' up your time."

Isla smiled and passed on.

When she entered the library the man was standing by the table, with his hand leaning on it with a slightly expectant look on his dark unprepossessing face. Isla bowed stiffly, searched his features swiftly, and detected there some faint resemblance to the purple lady who had once descended like a bird of ill-omen upon Glenogle.

"Good morning, Miss Mackinnon," he said, and the tones of his voice rasped on all her sensibilities. "I am

here at your bidding."

"I thought it better we should meet, though by no means necessary," said Isla, in her quiet, clear, rather hard voice. "I am, of course, quite well aware of the claim you have arrived in Scotland to make. My lawyer has communicated with me. I have no wish to go fully into that claim now, only there are one or two points I should wish to mention to you, and at least two others I would wish made clear myself."

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The man seemed uneasy, and he shifted from one foot to the other, his air of jaunty assurance visibly waning. He had heard much of Isla Mackinnon in the brief space of time he had spent in Lochearn, but nobody had enlightened him as to this side of her nature—this calm, proud, rather overwhelming side. He had expected to find her a weak woman, inclined to tears perhaps, and easily cowed.

"I have nothing to hide," he answered sullenly. "As I explained to your lawyer, it is the fullest publicity we court, and have come to seek, in order that the claim of my poor sister's child may be established."

Once more Isla inclined her head.

"I suppose you are aware that Mrs. Bisley paid two visits to this neighbourhood during the year my brother was at home before his death. On both occasions I had speech with her, and I travelled to London with her on the second occasion. On the journey she told me incidentally, without being aware who I was, a good many of the facts of her life."

Mr. Edward Tomlinson started and bit his lip.

"I, of course, was not in touch with my poor sister then. She was in London, I in Portsmouth, attending to my business."

Isla did not so much as inquire what that business was.

"She gave me, among other things, an account of her life in India with Mr. Bisley," said Isla calmly, "who, I understood from her, had not been dead very long."

"Bisley died in December, ninety-nine, Miss Mackinnon," said Tomlinson, "of dysentery at a station in the plains."

"I understood from her then that she had no children. That journey, Mr. Tomlinson, was made in the autumn the year before my brother died."

"My sister might not care to tell all her private affairs to a stranger," he answered, "and very probably you are

confusing her with somebody else."

"Possibly," said Isla quietly, "but hardly probably. The next interview I had with Mrs. Bisley was after my brother's death, on the day of the funeral, at the Lodge

at Creagh, where we were then living. She called at the house and asked to see me. It was very painful to me to see her," continued Isla, after a moment's pause, during which she continued to watch the man narrowly. "But I had no reason for refusing. Also, there was something about her which, in spite of all, I liked."

"Win was a good sort—a clinking good sort always," said the man quickly. "That's why justice should be

done."

"On that occasion," pursued Isla clearly, "I put several straight questions to her, which she answered truly, as I believe."

"What questions?"

"The only one which can concern this matter was this. I asked her whether she had been my brother's wife. She answered, 'No, but I ought to have been.' That would seem to close the matter, Mr. Tomlinson."

Tomlinson looked slightly nonplussed.

"After all, there is only your word for that," he said

bluntly.

"If there had been a child," said Isla distinctly, "that was undoubtedly the moment when she would have mentioned his existence. I fear you will have very hard work

to prove your case in face of this."

"Oh, we've got proofs—letters and papers," he said airily. "Probably my sister did not wa it to vex you any more just then. She had a kind heart—far too kind. It was her own undoing. We'll establish the little chap's claim right enough, if there's anything like justice in this queer country!"

"Then " are determined to bring the case into

Court?"

"Yes—unless, in the interval, you should be well advised to settle it privately."

" How settle it?"

"By giving the little chap his rights. It's what you would do if you were your own best friend or had anybody worth a red cent to advise you," he said glibly. "If you like, I'll bring up the papers—what I have of them

anyway—and let you see how strong a claim we can make."

Isla quickly shook her head.

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at you lybody "If them "I will not do any sort of business with you. Any further doings, any communications even, you wish to have must be made through my lawyer, Mr. Alexander Cattanach."

"Oh, I know the bloke—old fossil, couldn't see through a pane of clear glass! You're in a hole, Miss, if you've pinned your faith to him!"

"Meanwhile he is taking counsel's opinion, I believe,"

said Isla, in the same quiet dignified tone.

"Nothing can be done now in this bally country till October, they tell me, when the Courts sit again," observed Mr. Tomlinson discontentedly.

"And do you propose to remain at Lochearnhead Hotel

for the rest of the summer?"

"I haven't made up my mind. If I stopped on I might

perhaps bring you to reason."

"I shall not meet you again, Mr. Tomlinson," said Isla, as she began to move towards the door. "I merely sent for you to-day in the hope that perhaps when you heard what I had to say regarding your poor sister you might be convinced of the futility of your claim. I bid you goodmorning."

## CHAPTER XX.

## THE WALLS OF JERICHO.

For perhaps the first time in her life Isla determined to put in a frankly selfish day. After she had got rid of the intruder from Lochearnhead Hotel, she pondered for a few moments in silence, and then walked with a quite steady step to the kitchen to interview Margaret Maclaren.

"Pack me a small luncheon-basket, Margaret—some egg-sandwiches and a bottle of milk. I'm going up to the

Moor of Silence."

"What for, Miss Isla? It's a fearsome walk in that heat!"

"I'll go over the hill and take it slowly. Get the basket ready quickly, dear woman, for I am not fit to interview any more people to-day."

Margaret regarded her wistfully.

"Miss Isla, my dear, it's not what ye would call fell

trouble, iss it?"

"It might be, and then again it might not, Margaret," said Isla, with a far-away look in her eyes. "I've got something to make up my mind about, and it will take me the whole day."

"Till teatime, maybe," said Margaret coaxingly." Would ye not let me send up Jamie Forbes from the

hotel to bring ye doon?"

"No, no! Put the key of the house at the bottom of the basket, Margaret, and don't worry about me. If you like to take a walk yourself in the afternoon, about four, up the Glenogle Road, I'll come back that way, for I want to see Mrs. Bain as I come down." So saying, Isla went back to the library, sorted out her letters, put two of them in a safe place inside the fastening of her shirt-blouse, and went to get her hat. It was an old Panama that had once been her father's, and that her deft fingers had twisted into a shape becoming enough for her own wear. A loose scarf of white was tied about it, and it made both a light and pretty headgear.

After anxiously consulting the sky and the weatherglass, she decided that neither cloak nor umbrella would be necessary, and very soon, with her small basket in one hand, her stout shepherd's crook in the other, and Bruce, the only dog now able for the five-mile tramp over the hill, she set out for Creagh.

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It was a cloudless summer day. The heat, approaching the meridian, made a blaze on the hilltops; but the valley was clear, the waters of the loch shimmering like beaten gold under the long level rays of a glorious sun. The air was very still and soundless, so much so that the bleat of the smallest lamb could be heard a long way off.

Isla was in no haste. She had a long day in front of her, but not too long for the things she had to settle with herself.

Archie Dennison's love letter lay side by side with Vivien Rosmead's appeal inside her blouse, and these were to be considered when she could get clean away from every element likely to disturb or influence her choice. Up on the Moor of Silence, in the place of memories, she would be directed what to do. So meantime she gave herself up to a simple joy in the beauty of the earth, and out of the solitudes peace descended once more upon her racked and troubled spirit.

So strange was the march of her destiny, so many and so unexpected had been the threads lately woven into it, that she had the strange feeling of being on the outside, while stronger forces were legislating for her. If it was ordained that she was to become the wife of Archibald Dennison and merge her lot with his at Dunmohr—why, then, need she fight? It would be, it must be, the next best thing

But a woman like Isla Mackinnon undertakes no fresh responsibility lightly, and frankly she was afraid of the momentous crisis looming ahead. Perhaps, however, she told herself he might not exact too much. Rosmead would take all or nothing, but lesser men—such was the adjective she applied to Archie in her secret thoughts of him !—would be content with less.

As she trudged through the green heather shoots, which here and there showed signs of bursting into bloom, her spirits insensibly rose. She had always been peculiarly susceptible to the influences of nature, and on such a day

it was hardly possible to be sad.

A glorious sky overhead, with the larks trilling madly in the middle height, and all the delightful sights and sounds of country life about her, the peace of mighty hills and wide solitudes—all these had their message for Isla's soul, as they had often had before.

By the time she stood on the edge of the moor of Creagh she was conscious of being better, both physically and mentally, and she felt that she had got a fresh grip of

everything.

There was no one then living in the old Lodge. The gamekeeper, who had a cottage on the edge of the moor, occasionally opened the windows to let the sun and wind into the deserted rooms. It was too far from the beaten track, even from the ordinary cart road, to be a lure to tinkers or other undesirable travellers. It was still furnished with a few things, though all the personal belongings of the family had been restored to Achree after the Americans had left.

As Isla stepped up the grassy path to the wooden porch that had been built one winter to break the sweep of the north wind across the moor, all the memories of the past years swept over her like a flood. From these some stood out more poignantly than others, notably the day of woe when her father died and the estrangement between her brother and herself had taken concrete shape.

It was chiefly of her father she thought as she let herself in and drew up the blind in the dining-room, which she had with such loving care transformed into a sort of sittingroom for him, so that he might not too much miss the comforts of his old room at Achree.

It was very empty and bare now—a mere shell of a house. Yet Isla, as she sat down before the table in the long shaft of sunlight, which streamed through the uncurtained window, felt a strange kinship with those who had gone away.

The sun was kindly, almost human, in its touch, and she loved to feel its caressing warmth about her shoulders.

She drew off her gloves, laid down her hat, and then, seeing Bruce eyeing her wistfully, went to the little kitchen to get him a basin of water. After he had drunk his fill he lay down contentedly on the mat and promptly went to sleep.

It was now one o'clock, and she was glad of the modest luncheon, which she ate contemplatively and contentedly, and with no sense of loneliness or fear. The place was hallowed to her by thoughts of those who had gone.

When she had finished eating, and had given the remnant of the milk to Bruce, she sat down in her father's old easy-chair, and drew her letters from their hiding-place. Archie Dennison's she read first, and her expression was kindly as her eyes lingered with something of a girl's shyness over his impassioned words. After all, life could not be quite over for the woman who could inspire such love in the heart of a man! A little tremulous smile crept about her lips as she patted it and laid it face downwards on her knee. Then she read Vivien's over again, and as she read there came upon her a great desire to accept at once, to get clean away, as she told herself, from the Glen and all the worries of her immediate future.

If that impossible upstart who claimed a right to Achree should elect to remain at the Lochearnhead Hotel, how was she to suffer her existence for the next three months with no day immune from possible encounter with him?

She would not admit that, at the back of her mind in regard to Vivien's invitation, was a consuming desire to hear from some one who knew exactly how matters stood with Rosmead. When she should hear that, then, but not

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erself had before, the might be able to make Archibald Dennison a

happy man.

Sitting there in a silence which could almost be felt, she slowly evolved a decision for the future. She thought she would adhere to the promise she had made in the letter that by now was in the hands of Archibald Dennison, and thus with one drastic step get rid of all the problems of her future. With the Dunmohr folk a solid wall and buttress behind her, what could fate do more—the fate that had dealt so hardly with her!

A wonderful peace enveloped her as, sitting there, she took goodbye of the old Isla for ever. She felt precisely as if she were burning certain boats behind her, and, stepping into the one frail craft left, were embarking on some strange but quite safe sea, across which she should be wafted by favouring gales to some haven where nothing could trouble

her any more.

After a long rest she wandered through the house, and in the room upstairs where her father had been laid before they carried him to his long rest, she said a brief prayer.

Then, strong and purposeful, and, in a measure, at peace, she went upon her way. The Moor of Silence had not failed her! It had given the message and the benediction which she had come to seek.

She lingered long on the downward way, partly to give Margaret Maclaren time to meet her, and partly because there were one or two folks in the cot houses, far among these solitudes, whom she was desirous to see.

It was four o'clock when she left the last croft and turned down the Glenogle road. And presently she heard the hoot of a car in the distance and all the colour flooded her face, and she looked round a little wildly, wondering how

or whither she could escape.

If this were Archie Dennison come in search of her, she could not meet him. She was not ready for him. All her boasted willingness to give him the promise he wanted melted into thin air! For he was a very real and substantial personality, and perhaps might be less easy to satisfy than she had imagined.

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Presently the gleaming bonnet of the motor shot over the nearest slope, and her quick eye discerned the Dunmohr car. Next moment her relief was so great that she almost hysterically laughed. The Laird of Dunmohr sat in the motor, in the back alone! The car, answering swiftly to the touch, was brought silently to a stand at her side, and James Dennison sprang out.

"I called at Achree on my way frae the station, my dear, and they told me where I would find ye. And how are ye to-day?"

She smiled a little tremulously, imagining significance in his tone, and when he suggested, before she had time to speak, that they should walk a little way together, she knew what he wanted to say.

"You can turn, Tom, and go down as far as the first brig," his master said to the chauffeur. "We'll follow on foot."

He stood by Isla's side, watching the turning of the car, and spoke no more till it had glided down the slope it had just ascended.

"Now then, my dear, this is my new dochter, isn't it?" he said with a great tenderness vibrating in his voice. "My lad is nearly beside himself the day. He got your letter only this morning, and he would have been here to-night, only he has an engagement to speak at a public dinner. I had a fell job getting him to stick to that engagement."

Isla scarcely smiled, and there was just a moment's rather awkward silence. She did not know what to say. She could not at the moment respond to the shipbuilder's evident joy and satisfaction. Yet something she must say. He was waiting for it.

"Shall we walk on a little way, Mr. Dennison? It is easier to talk while one is moving, I think."

He turned, obedient to her slightest whim, but the silence between them remained unbroken for a full minute. James Dennison was a little disappointed perhaps, but he made no remark upon it.

"Mr. Dennison," she said suddenly, "do you think we have all to walk along a certain road in this life, and that

nothing we can do or say can possibly alter the course of it?"

This was something so different from what the old man expected to hear that he felt like standing still again to

look at her more searchingly.

"That would be takin' away freedom of the will, my dear, and God tak's that frae nac human being," he answered at last. "But why do ye put sic a question to me this day of all days?"

"I hardly know. I seem to have been always hemmed in all my days," she said, a little wildly. "Freedom of will is a thing I have never had. I have lived in bondage

to other folk, I think, since ever I was born."

"But it has not hurt you, my dear," he said, with a note of pride in his kind voice. "If ye are a specimen of what a human being is like when freedom of the will is denied, then it seems to me that the world might be a better place without it."

But even this sweet flattery could not lift the cloud from Isla's brow.

"Whenever things seemed to go well with me, and my heart would begin to sing again, then I would wake up one day and find myself in another cul-de-sac—a narrow way without outlet. That is what has happened to me now. I came back to Achree a broken woman, as I thought, for the man I expected to have married me left me. You have heard, I suppose, that I was engaged—at least that I believed myself to be engaged—to Mr. Hylton Rosmead, the American tenant of Achree."

"I have heard them speaking," he admitted, now deeply

interested.

"I was waiting for him to come to me at Barras. The very day and hour of our meeting was fixed, and then, quite suddenly, the thick pillar of cloud descended again, just as it did in the case of the Israelites to keep them from entering into the Land of Promise," she said drearily. "The bridge, which he always called his life-work, was swept away, and he simply wrote, saying that it must be all over between us, and bidding me goodbye."

"But what for? Surely he would come back, my dear?"

Her face hardened.

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"He will not come back. He is a man who can put away everything out of his life except his one set purpose —and with that he would let me have nothing to do."

"But he will pay for it," said Dennison sternly, for to him it seemed a cruel as well as an incredible story. "No man can do that kind of thing to a woman and expect to get off scot-free."

Afterwards these words returned upon his memory when he was called upon to deal with the tangle of Archie's affairs, and he could then smile at the bitter irony and truth of them.

"I want to tell you everything, Mr. Dennison," went on Isla feverishly, "because you are the most understanding person I have ever met, and because it will be easier to tell you than to tell your son.

"Two years back I had pledged myself to marry Neil Drummond, not because I cared for him—and that was where the wrong and the sin came in—but because he offered me a way out of all my sorrows and difficulties. I threw him over for Peter Rosmead. It has not hurt him, I think," she added, with a little fleeting smile. "But that does not alter the thing I did. It fills me with shame for myself every time I see him. When I came back from Barras I fancied myself a woman with a purpose as firm and high as Mr. Rosmead's. I had made up my mind to live my own life solely and alone, and to redeem my old home, to make such people as looked to me for guidance happy, and to show the world that a woman can be happy and useful apart from all the life of men. But I have failed."

"I'm not seeing it, my dear," said James Dennison kindly, "and I'm thinking that there is not one in all the Glen would say that you have failed."

"It was going to be a very hard thing for me to do," she went on, precisely as if she had not heard him, "for I have no money, and the burden on the place is heavy.

But I think I could have won out if this strange and horrible complication had not arisen. Where am I to get the money from to carry on a case in the Court of Session, leaving out of account the fact that it will kill me to have my folk dragged through it and their affairs in every mouth? I feel as if I were up in front of the walls of Jericho—one more blast and they will fall! I have in the last few days looked often at the loch and thought that its waves might just creep quietly over my head, and then there would be an end to all my heart-break.

"But something held me back. Then you came. Dunmohr was to me like a house of refuge for the destitute. You and your dear wife and your kind children just gathered me to your hearts, as it were, and I felt that the world was not so dreary after all. Then, when your son said to me last Sunday that he would guard my life and make it one of ease and happiness, do you understand how swift and awful was the temptation? I fell before it, and that is the whole story and the absolute truth. For, though I wrote that letter to him yesterday, I do not love him,

Mr. Dennison; so now you know-"

James Dennison walked some steps by her side, his face wearing a look of deep perplexity. He had no previous experience to help him here. He had had but one love affair, and that had marched by the one natural and easy way to its swift and happy consummation. He could hardly conceive of marriage without that resistless and powerful tide of affection which sweeps everything before it. And yet perhaps there were other foundations on which happy homes could be built. He was not sure. But sure of one thing he was. He was one with Archie in the desire to smooth the way for this dear woman's feet.

"I'm sayin' nothing, my dear, because I don't ken what to say," he answered, with a charming naïvete. "At least, ye are honest. May I ask one thing? Have ye said onything about this to Archie? He did not show me your letter, of course; only he telt me he had gotten it."

"I told him that I did not care for him, but that I would try to make him a good wife," she said simply.

"But, if it is necessary, I can tell him yet what I have

just told you."

"No," said Dennison swiftly, "it would not be wise, for the young are hot-blooded, and the day might come when he would look back. If he is willing to tak' ye like that—well, he tak's the risks, though I don't think," he added, with a swift glance at her beautiful face, "that wi' a woman like you, whose idea of duty is what yours is, there would be much risk."

Isla said nothing in reply.

Then he asked a timid question, a little reluctantly, as if fearing to intrude.

"Since you have told me so much, Miss Isla, will ye tell me one thing more? Have you—have you put this

Rosmead chap away out of your hert, like?"

"As to that," she answered dully, "I don't know. I never suffer myself to think of him, because it brings my pride to the dust. Oh, I am a poor wayward creature, Mr. Dennison. Never did woman need guiding more!"

"It's a queer tangle your life has been," he said quietly, "and it's fell sorry I am for you. This would seem to be a way whereby it could be smoothed out, and it would give me great joy and happiness to see you and Archie in Achree, and to help to clear your feet and build up the old place as of yore. And, forby, you would be good for the lad, Isla, for though he is a good lad, he needs ballast. You would steady him and make him the man he could be, if he got the right woman."

"If you think I could make him happy, knowing what you do, I am willing," she said, with a sweet humility. "And now I feel better—I was just like a bairn who had lost the road and suddenly has found somebody to bring her back into the right way!"

Dennison smiled a little unsteadily.

"It is a big thing you are asking me to decide for you. But we can only help one another a certain distance on the road, my dear. Then the time comes when we have to go our lee lane and look up."

A little sigh fluttered from Isla's lips. Of late she had

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felt herself far away, almost clean cut off from the eternal verities, and this seemed to bring her back.

Suddenly Dennison stood still on the road, and a happy

laugh broke from his lips.

"I have it! Let's go home and ask the mistress. She can aye find the way oot. I tell ye, Miss Isla, she's wonderfu'. I've seen me in a perfect hole, just gang hame, and in a jiffy I was oot o't! Let's go to the mistress."

He did not wait her leave, but whistled for the motor,

and quickly bundled her in.

That night Isla sat down at the dinner-table at Dunmohr with an old keeper-r.ng of Mrs. Dennison's on her finger

and a happy lover by her side.

Her own heart was in a strange tumult, yet strove to be at peace. But before she slept she wrote to Vivien Rosmead, saying that she would come in the course of the following week to Paris.

She could leave Achree and all its interests now in the

safe and strong keeping of Dunmohr.

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# THE KINDNESS OF THE DENNISONS.

CHAPTER XXI.

ARCHIBALD DENNISON, alert and eager, waited at the Buchanan Street station the arrival of the noonday train from the north. He was there by appointment to meet Isla Mackinnon, take her out to lunch, see to her belongings,

and her tickets, and put her on the London train.

Never had cavalier hied to the tryst with a better heart. A week had passed since that day of days when he had received her letter. He had been an engaged man for a whole week. His experience surely was not as that of other men, for, though Isla had pronused to be his wife, he had not dared to offer any of the demonstrations of affection which are a lover's privilege. She had literally, as well as figuratively, kept him at arm's length. So long as he remained there she was so sweetly kind that he told himself he would rather have her distant kindness than another's fondness. His hope and his courage were very high. He had everything on his side, and he told himself passionately that he would win her yet.

The train was seven minutes late, and when Isla looked out there was her cavalier. She smiled upon him sweetly, for she was so glad to get away, so full of a strange joy at the prospect of her unexpected journey into the unknown, with Vivien Rosmead's house for her haven, that she was once more at peace with the whole world. She had seen so little of Archie Dennison in the interval that she was prepared to be very kind and comradely to him, and to

leave him with a pleasant memory behind.

She was looking absolutely her best. There are women

who wear simple austere garments with a singular grace, who invest them with a positive charm. Isla, in her coat and skirt of fine black serge, her little felt hat with the white wing at the side, her well-shod feet, and her business-like travelling coat over her arm, was an alluring vision.

"It is most awfully good of you to come to meet me in the very middle of your working-day," she said, as she outstretched a frank hand. "Whether is it you or your

father I ought to thank?"

"Whichever you think has the best right," he answered, charmed by her smile. "But I say, you know, I don't want you to go away just now—in fact, I think, it's jolly rotten altogether. August is the holiday month. We shall all be at home for the Twelfth."

"And I would be out of a home—don't you see?—for Mr. Cattanach at the eleventh hour has found somebody for the shooting. They will stop six weeks. I shall be

back by then."

Archie's face fell ominously.

"I should just think you will be. Won't a week in Paris serve you?"

"That depends on my luggage. There is a big box.

What shall we do with it?"

"I'll get a chap to see to it. We'll just go into the Central for lunch. It's as good as any, and you don't want to be tired dragging about before you started out on your London journey."

All the Dennison men had a kindly, even masterful, way with women, and Isla was quite pleased to stand by and let him wait on her and see to everything. She understood the heart of a man better than most women, and she knew how the true man loves the dependence of his women-folk upon him, and how it calls out all that is best in him.

It might be that Isla had parted with some of her pride since she had made acquaintance with the Dennisons, who had done their best to spoil her. It was so evilently easy for them to do things, and they took such joy in doing them, especially if they involved the spending of money for her pleasure, that she had long since ceased to protest.

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She hung her coat over Archie's arm, smiled into his eyes, and said she would stand by while he went to dispose

of the baggage.

As she stood there, glancing at the busy throng which seldom slackens at the big termini, especially in the summer season, she became conscious that she was an object of very evident interest to a girl in a grey coat and skirt, carrying a small attaché case, who appeared to be waiting for some one. The girl had a sweet face, though it was a little wan and tireu, and there were dark circles under her eyes, which indicated either weakness or extreme weariness. Her eyes were very piercing, and they dwelt on Isla's face with ar intentness which presently began to disturb her so palpably that she proceeded to move away out of the range of her vision. But the eyes seemed to follow her, and when Archie reappeared she met him with evident relief.

"I say, Archie, do you see that girl back there by the bookstall—the one in grey, with the little brown case in her hand? She has been staring at me quite oddly for a few minutes. She looks rather ill, or as if she knew me or

something."

Archie turned his head: then his face flushed darkly,

and he slightly raised his hat as he turned away.

"Probably she is interested in you because she saw you with me," he said, getting the truth out quite naturally. "I know her a little. She used to be employed in our office at Fairburn. It's extraordinary the interest that sort of people takes in us."

Isla had seen the flush, however, and, while it did not

in the least trouble her, she felt quite puzzled by it.

As they walked across to the hotel entrance she was fully conscious of the girl's intent stare following them. Once inside the restaurant, however, she forgot the incident.

"Do you mind if I ask you to do all sorts of things for me while I'm away?" she said, as she leaned her elbows upon the table and looked across at him with a smiling earnestness which completed his undoing.

What could he reply but that he merely lived to serve her.

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pride s, who y easy doing noney "First of all, then, I want you to keep an eye on Achree, to go up to Creagh after the shooting tenant comes, and to see how Margaret and Diarmid are getting on; above all, to see that they are not harried by that man at the inn."

"I'll see to it," he assented fervently.

"Your father has promised to go over to Achnacloich at least three times a week, and, what between you and him and Donald Maclure, I am sure all my interests are going to be well looked after."

She was smiling still, but at the back of her eyes there was an earnestness and a little strong feeling, which might be gratitude, or something deeper.

"That's what you do with folk!" cried Archie, with all a lover's fervour. "But meanwhile I don't see you eating anything."

"Oh, yes, I am. This is delicious fish. One gets rather

tired of Loch Earn trout, don't you think?"

"I've never been able to catch one yet," said Archie

ruefully.

"Ah, I must show you the way. They won't rise to the stranger," she said, with a sudden little bubble of mirth in her voice. "They are just like the folk of the Glens—fighting shy till they get familiar."

Archie laughed too, for these changing moods of here were like the lure of sunlight and shadow playing on the waters, making havoc of his peace of mind. He suddenly

reached across the table and touched her hand.

"It is true, isn't it, Isla? You have promised, and you won't go back on it?" he said in a low voice, touched with the passion of his soul.

"Yes, I promised, and I won't go back on it," she

answered in a low voice. "But---"

"But what?" he asked anxiously, bending forward to catch the low ton- of her voice.

"But you know I did not promise so very much," she said quickly. "And I left a loophole open for you to escape, if, after a time, you should not find it enough. I'm telling you again that I have no love left to give, that it has been all buried with other things in the grave of hope."

## THE KINDNESS OF THE DENNISONS 245

"But you are still young, and life is made for hope," he said, low and eager. "I mean to win you yet!"

"You are kind, but then you are your father's son! I—I will do my best, I promise you. I will never hurt you or be wilfully unkind, for my heart is full of gratitude."

"I don't want it-none of us do. It is you we want,

your affection, just—just you!"

She kept her eyes down on the plate, for the passionate note in the man's voice troubled her. For, though she liked him and appreciated his many lovable qualities, her heart was dead to him, and something whispered that never would it kindle again with the fire of love.

"I'm afraid I've done a wicked thing," she said, a little mournfully. "You deserve the very best. I would only marry you to help myself, to assure my future, to save Achree! I am making it plain again," she added, with an almost pathetic eagerness, "because I can't pretend. Oh, are you sure it will be enough?"

"It will last till I can get more," he said manfully.

"There is just one thing more. Don't write me letters to Paris. At least," she added, when she saw his face fall—"not love letters, for just yet I could not answer them very well. Will you wait till I write to you?"

"That will depend on how long you keep me waiting," he answered cautiously. "And remember, I have said that, if you stay away too long, I will come and fetch you,

and that without leave!"

She smiled across at him, and shook her finger.

"You are very majorful. I will be good, I promise you. Now, isn't it time we were getting to the train?"

"Not for half an hour yet," he assured her.

But, as she seemed restless, and even eager to be gone, feeling perhaps a little nervous of a prolonged tête-à-tête, he called to the waiter and paid the bill.

Out in the big station he made himself busy for her comfort in every possible way, tipped the guard handsomely to look after her, and otherwise behaved with all a lover's outrageous extravagance.

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she began protesting, but he ineffectually attempted to stop her mouth with the words. "And so you are!"

"Or that I had never travelled before," she continued.

"And a first-class ticket, too, all the way to Paris! It's beyond belief or acceptance!"

"Father saw to that. He is a sight worse than I am where you are concerned You can absolve me from the

ticket, and scold him."

"Oh, I shouldn't date," and Isla. "He is very dear and kind, but sometimes—lan'r you know?—one gets up quite hard and fast again to a hig wall. I can imagine circumstances in which he would se very angry."

"Oh, yes, he can. I've seen hard—once or twice. It isn't nice," admitted Archie. "Fortunately, I haven't come much under the ban of his displeasure since I was a little chap, getting into unheard-of scrapes at school."

Isla smiled and looked at the pile of magazines and books in the compartment, which, apparently, she was to have entirely to herself. As she thought of all the kind gifts she had had bestowed on her, of the men who had been willing to serve her, a sudden sense of the futility of it all smote her. For she had nothing to give in exchange for it all, but a dead self from which the joy of life had fled for ever.

It was this thought which made her give both her hands to Archie Dennison at the moment of parting, and when he

pressed his lips to them she offered him her cheek.

So far he had not dared to ask or take a kiss, and her timid little gesture, of which he was quick enough to take advantage, lifted him to the seventh heaven. He stood bare-headed till the train moved out of sight, and it may be imagined that he was hardly in a mood to be confronted once more with the shadow of the past, which he had tried, for Isla's sake, to wipe clean off the slate.

### CHAPTER XXII.

### MOLLIE'S BREAKDOWN.

But he was. As he began to move down towards the street, Mollie Jeffreys, who appeared to have been waiting and watching somewhere for him, came directly in his path. He felt himself obliged to stop, for quite evidently she had something to say. He had ceased to care for her, but his heart was not hard, and it grieved him to see the change in her which these last few weeks had wrought. All her fresh colour was gone, her eyes were heavy and sad, and there was a listlessness about her which indicated a lack of interest in life.

"Well," he said drily, " and how are you?"

"I am quite well," she answered steadily. "I saw you meeting the Oban train. I was waiting for someone coming off it that my new master sent me to meet. I had to get some information from him between the trains. He is in the London train, too. We were in the Central diningroom at the same time as you."

"What has all this got to do with me?" he asked,

because he did not know what else to say.

"I suppose that was her—the grand lady you are going

to marry, wasn't it?"

Archie Dennison pondered a moment. But realising that perhaps the straightest way out would be the best, if it would end this desperately uncomfortable interview, he answered simply, "Yes it was."

"Then, all I've got to say is that she is a sight too good for you, and that she'll find you out before she's ver much older!"

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He winced and looked annoyed.

"If that is all you have got to say, I'd better bid you good day," he said quietly. "There isn't much use that I can see in standing still to listen to this sort of thing."

"No, there isn't. But I thought I'd just like you to know that you'll never get her," she said quietly. "I saw it in her eyes while she was listening to you in the

dining-room.".

Now, indeed, Archie Dennison's face angrily flushed. He thought the words, coming as they did from Mollie Jeffreys, nothing short of gross impertinence, which he, of all men, would not stand!

"Have you the gift of second-sight, then?" he asked

with a just perceptible sneer.

"Maybe I have and maybe I haven't," she snapped back, "but I know enough for that. And you know it too, and so does she! It's nothing but a bit of play all round, rather amusing for outsiders to watch. They're saying in Glasgow that your father is buying up the county families down in West Perthshire, and that you are the first bidder."

A mirthless laugh followed on this parting shot, and she sped away, leaving a very uncomfortable and desper-

ately angry man behind.

But the moment she was beyond the range of his vision the colour of excitement faded from her thin cheek, and

she pressed her hand to her beating heart.

"Oh, but I am tired! I don't know what's come over me. Perhaps I'm going to die, or something. Well, I shouldn't mind, He wouldn't care—nobody would, not

even my mother! She's angry with me yet."

Her eyes were full of blinding tears, which she dashed aside, and with a touch of her old defiant spirit, she sprang on the nearest car to get back to her employer with her report of the interview with his client. It showed in what high estimation he held her; unable to keep an appointment with his client himself, he had sent her as deputy with full instructions as to what she was to do.

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Dennison had given her perhaps a little more than her due, and she had obtained another post at an increased salary. But the heart having gone clean out of her, she just wondered, as she huddled up in the corner of the southgoing car, how long she would be able to keep it. Perhaps it was because of the heat and the confinement in a much smaller and less healthy office than she had at Fairburn, but certainly Mollie was desperately tired in these days, and completely out of love with life.

That day her head ached intolerably, and, after she had given a full account of her errand to her employer and crept back to her seat at her desk, she suddenly propped her

head on her hands and fainted clean away.

Ann Jeffreys, nearing the end of a successful case in the Pollokshields district, received a message about five o'clock that afternoon that she was needed at home. It was the little servant lass from the flat next door to her own in St. George's Road who brought the message, and she was certainly a little vague about what had happened.

"She cam' hame in a cab. That's a' I ken," she said stolidly. "And she could hardly walk up the stair. Mrs. Paiterson said you were to come at wance."

"An' was there onybody wi' her when you left?"
"Ay—Mrs. Paiterson. She had put her in bed."

"A richt," said Mrs. Jeffreys laconically. "Sit doon there till I get ready. Or, no!—ye had better get back as fast as you like and tell them I'm coming. There's sixpence for your pains, and dinna waste time on the road."

Then, having showed the damsel out across the immaculate doorstep of the double-fronted villa, she lightly ascended the red-carpeted staircase and entered the room where the young mother, now up and dressed, had been receiving early callers.

"That was a message frae St. George's Road, Mrs. Henderson. My daughter is not well. She had to be brocht hame in a cab frae the place where she works. Can I get goin' hame at once?"

Mrs. Henderson was only mildly sympathetic. Also

she was mortally afraid of the bundle of cambric and lace lying at the moment across her knee.

"Of course, I must let you go and see how she is. But

you'll be back in time for baby's bath?"

Mrs. Jeffreys glanced at the gilt carriage-clock on the

mantelpiece and shook her head.

"I couldn't promise that. You see, it's five meenits to five noo, and it'll tak' me twenty meenits to get there. Wad ye no try and bath him yoursel' the nicht again?"

"I'm not equal to it to-night. You see, I've had four

people to tea this afternoon, and I'm feeling tired."

"Well, the hoosemaid, Alice, she's very handy wi' him. I'll put everything ready. After all, I was leavin' the morn, Mrs. Henderson, so it would not mak' much difference."

"Ah, but my nurse," with what pride and conscious importance did the young mother pronounce the word l—"my nurse will be here to-morrow afternoon. If baby cries at all, we shall just take off his robe, give him a bottle, and lay him down till you come back."

Ann Jeffreys shook her head. Privately she had the feeling that it was hardly probable that she would come

back that night.

"Maybe I could call at the new nurse's hoose on my wey, and send her up. As she is comin' to-morrow, she micht jist as weel come the nicht."

"But that's hardly fair, Mrs. Jeffreys. I quite expected that you would stop and show her everything about baby.

Indeed, I insist on it."

"She's had charge o' a bairn frae the month before, I suppose? She's not needin' me to show her onything," said Ann stoutly. "Onywey, I must go to Mollie. The bairn is perfectly weel and guid, and, if a little trouble is ta'en wi' his bottle, onybody could manage him till the morn."

Mrs. Jeffreys believed in giving the young mothers a

piece of her mind, and they seldom took it badly.

She dressed herself hastily, and, once out of doors, went out of her way to interview the incoming nurse, whom she was fortunate enough to find at her address. After a little coaxing, she promised to go to Mrs. Henderson's house that evening.

Then, her duty fully done, Ann Jeffreys hastened home to find out what was the matter with Mollie. She had been ailing for several weeks, she knew, though she would not admit it. But Ann had watched the gradual decline of health, and she laid it at one door only. Until Mollie had taken up with Archibald Dennison she had never been either out of spirits or out of health. Moping and disappointment had done it, and when Ann Jeffreys stood by the bedside and looked down at the wan, but faintly smiling face, her anger burned sore.

"Ye are a puir, jimpy-lookin' thing, my lass," she said shortly. "Ha'e ye a pain onywhere?"

Mollie shook her head.

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went hom "No, no, mother. I'm just a little tired and overdone. I would be all right if I had a little holiday. Perhaps we could get one together at the coast when you are through with your case."

"I am through," the mother answered shortly. "I've been and sent the new nurse to Mrs. Henderson, and I need not go back except for my things. I did not bring them away, for ye ken what they are wi' a first bairn. Yes—we'll get awa to Lochfyne, maybe. But, first, I must see the doctor."



#### AN OLD FRIEND.

"I DON'T need the doctor, mother," said Mollie, flushing a little. "There isn't anything the matter with me, really, except what I say."

"Ye won't be the waur o' seein' him, and this very nicht he shall come. Then we'll ken where we are," she said

sternly.

Then Mollie, too weak to protest, just slipped down on her p llow and closed her eyes. And two tears forced themselves from under the closed lids, and her mother saw them and dashed out of the room lest she should say something that would be better left unsaid.

The best doctor she knew of in the West End of Glasgow did Ann Jeffreys send for to see her daughter, and he turned out after dinner with astonishing willingness and came

to St. George's Road in a cab.

"I can't find much the matter, Mrs. Jeffreys," he said, after he had made a brief examination and passed into the sitting-room with the mother. "Evidently she is run down, as she says. Take her away to the coast and let her have a good restful holiday. It will do you both good."

"Then ye don't think it's serious, doctor?"

"She's in a low state, undoubtedly. Do you happen to know whether she has anything on her mind?"

Mrs. Jeffreys hesitated a moment, then owned up.

"Yes, she has. A sweetheart she was rather fond of has thrown her ower, like. She's never been the same since."

The physician nodded.

"Precisely. I'm not surprised. Get her away. Try and fill her mind with fresh ideas and let her meet new folk. It's a pity. I'm sorry you have this trouble, Mrs. Jeffreys, for you've made a good fight. But this is a question of time—nothing more. She wants nursing and taking out of herself."

All of which was perfectly true. But how was Ann Jeffreys to rouse her and take her out of herself? Her resources and her means were both limited, and she felt a little rebellious as she sat by her lonely fire in the kitchen late that night, after Mollie was supposed to be asleep.

But she was not asleep, nor did she close an eye all that night. Once when her mother woke up she caught the sound of Mollie's sobbing, and shook her fist in the dark, and muttered something under her breath which she would not have cared to say too loud.

For the second time in her life Isla Mackinnon turned a coward's back on her responsibilities. It is easy for the virtuous and the untried to sit in judgment on others for doing this or that at certain crises in their lives, but it is real experience which searches and tests the fibre of which men and women are made.

Isla was not proud of the part she had played in the last week, and when the train steamed slowly out, and Archie Dennison's face faded into nothingness, she sank down, with a little hysterical breath of relief, on the luxurious cushioned seat for which the Dennisons had paid.

"I've sold my birthright for a mess of pottage," she said bitterly to herself, never at a loss for some vivid Scripture phrase to apply to herself or her affairs. "And it shows how low I have sunk that I haven't told a living soul—not even Cattanach. I shall have to write to him from Paris, and tell him about what I've done, and am going to do, before he hears it from the Dennisons. So much at least is due from me to him—but—but, oh——"

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She put her two hands before her eyes and rocked herself a little, for things swept over her in a mighty flood. Ir was perhaps a pity that the very excess of Archie Dennison's anxiety for her comfort on the journey gave her an entire day of solitude, during which she could give herself up without let or hindrance to every mood which visited her.

It was a ghastly journey in spite of all its material comforts—a journey spectre-haunted and filled with mis-

givings.

Somehow all was unreal, and she had no more expectation of marrying Archibald Dennison than of marrying any strange man on whom her eyes might alight at any moment. But through all this distressing masquerade she must march to some destiny of which as yet she knew not

Intending to start from Charing Cross early next day, she drove directly to the hotel at that station. There was another reason why she preferred it to Euston Hotel, where she had slept on a never-to-be-forgotten occasion when she had run away from the Moor of Silence to seek what she imagined to be her independent fortune. She wanted to forget all that, but she did not want to forget the night on which she had dined at the Charing Cross Hotel with Peter Rosmead, and the love-story to which she listened in the hotel sitting-room number eighty-seven.

She even wondered whether she might ask that room to be reserved for her that night, but she put that thought behind her as unnecessary and unworthy, and tried to

banish it from her mind.

She arrived a lonely enough unit at the great hotel, left her trunk in the charge of the hall-porter, and merely had her dressing-bag carried up to her bedroom. Having washed the dust of her journey from her face, she went down with her hat on to a corner of the hotel dining-room and ate some food. Then she had a cab called, and was driven out to the little street, off the Edgware Road, where Agnes Fraser, an old servant of Achree, was still prosecuting a precarious calling in the boarding-house line.

She arrived opportunely, for all the dinners were over, and Agnes, with her knitting and a good cup of tea by her side, was at rest in her own little sitting-room on the ground floor at the back of the house.

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Her joy and amazement when she saw her dear Miss Isla knew no bounds. She wept and laughed by turns. Seeing this, Isla fancied that Agnes had lost some of her self-control as well as her youth, and most of her looks.

Once a housemaid at Achree, with bright blue eyes, hair of gold, and fresh red cheeks, she was now a pallid weary-looking woman, old before her time, and quite evidently feeling life pretty hard.

"Oh, Miss Isla, it can never be you! Fraser and me was speakin' aboot ye this very efternune. He's awa' to his Club, where there's a tremenjis big dinner on. He's back to the waitin' again, and it peys better than onything. He'll no be hame till the sma' 'oors o' the mornin'. But come in, come in, my dear. We thocht you was at Barras. Where have ye come frae?"

"From Achree. I have been living there all the summer, Agnes," Isla answered, as she followed Mrs. Frasei into the sitting-room and sat down, pleased to see her kind friend again, yet a little afraid at her questioning.

Agnes had not such a searching gift of inquiry as that possessed by her old neighbour and friend, Elspeth Maclure; but, when deeply interested, she was, as she herself might have expressed it, "not blate."

"Ye are looking fine, Miss Isla, much fatter," she said, after having taken full stock of her old mistress's face and figure, "but aulder—ay, aulder. Well, weel, it is the road we maun a' gang! Tell me aboot yoursel'. Tell me every blessed haet! For I've never forgot the auld place, though the holiday Fraser ar' me promised oorsel's at Lochearn is farrer off than ever."

"Oh, nonsense, Agnes; you must try and make it out now. Now that I am at home at Achree, it could easily be managed. When I come back from Paris, I shall see you again, and arrange every detail of it."

"Paris | So it's Paris ye are gaun to wi' Sir Thomas an'

his lady, I suppose? Though it iss not the time the big folk are usually traivellin' about in the shootin' season."

"They are still at Barras. They have not let it since the Ogden Dresslers had it. You know my aunt got some money left her last year, which has made everything easier for them. There is not very much to tell, Agnes. After my tenants left I just came back to Achree as a matter of course, and there I mean to remain."

Agnes Fraser hesitated a moment, for, though she did not now get constant and steady news from Glenogle, one big fact had filtered through to the knowledge of Fraser

and herself.

"Ye are not married, I suppose, Miss Isla? The last news I had frae Elspeth Maclure—an' that's a guid year ago—said ye were goin' to marry the American gentleman that lived on his money in Achree."

"That will not come off, Agnes," said Isla, and, though not a very observant woman, Mrs. Fraser was quite conscious of some subtle change in the quality of Isla's voice. "The Americans have gone back to their own country, and won't probably ever return to Scotland."

"Oh!" said Agnes dejectedly. "I suppose it wass jist Elspeth spyin' ferlies as usual. She wass aye a leein' jaud.

Maybe it will be to Garrion you will go, after all?"

"No, no. Mr. Drummond has found a new sweetheart, Agnes, at Dunmohr. Did Elspeth not tell you that there are new folk in Dunmohr—rich folk from Glasgow with several grown-up children?"

"No. What has become of the Frasers, then, Miss Isla,

the old Colonel and Mrs. Fremantle an' the rest?"

"The Colonel is dead, and none of them would live at Dunmohr, and they wanted the money. But the new folk are an acquisition to the Glens, and the next thing you will hear of is a marriage between Garrion and Dunmohr."

"Cheenges, cheenges—nothing but cheenges!" said Mrs. Fraser mournfully. "I dinna suppose I would ken the place noo wi' so mony new folk aboot. I think me an' Fraser had better be doin' wi' mindin' on the Glen as it used to be. So it's Paris ye are goin' till. What to do there, Miss Isla?"

There was neither impertinence nor curiosity in the question, which Isla well knew was prompted by the most genuine interest in her welfare and future.

"To visit a friend who has a house there. I got a little tired of the loneliness at Achree, so here I am! And I mustn't stay, Agnes, for I have had a long day, and I have to be off again in the morning. But of course I couldn't be in London even for a few hours without looking you up."

"Eh, no! Sure no! An' I'm fell gled to see ye. But I havena heard the half I'm needin' to hear. Maybe you'll gi'e me a little longer as ye come back. When will that be?"

"Within the next fortnight probably, but I will write," said Isla, and forthwith took her leave without mentioning to her old friend either of the items of which her own mind was full, the upstart claimant to the estate of Achree or her own engagement to Archibald Dennison. But on the whole, Agnes was conscious of an odd feeling of insecurity and dissatisfaction after the visit of her old mistress.

"There's something the maitter wi' Miss Isla, Angus," she said to Fraser when he returned in the small hours to be regaled with tea and talk. "She is jist like somebody wi' something to hide. I would like to get to the bottom o' that Paris journey. If she wass anither kind o' wummin frae what she iss, I would say there wass a man in it. But onywey, she's goin' off in looks. She looked thirty an' mair the nicht, and I wass sorry to see it."

Isla's journey to Paris was uneventful, and when the train steamed into the Gare du Nord the first object on which her eyes lighted was the distinguished figure of Vivien Rosmead, in a white frock, with big black hat and black sunshade, looking anxiously out for her.

If Isla's looks had gone off, Vivien's seemed to have improved. She looked not a day more than five-andtwenty, and she wore her simple clothes with such exquisite

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said ken e an' as it distinction, half-French, half-American, that she was an object of much admiration to whoever regarded her.

Her eyes were radiant as she moved forward with quick

eager step to welcome her visitor.

"Oh, you dear woman! I have hardly been able to contain myself all day, and I had to pinch myself to be convinced that you were coming. Though I wrote that letter, Isla, I never believed that you would really come."

"Shall I go back?" asked Isla, smiling archly, her eyes

a little moist with the joy of the meeting.

She was very glad to see Vivien again. Something in her spirit leaped to meet her, and she knew her as the understanding friend of her heart, whose love neither time nor circumstances nor distance could alter or diminish.

That wonderful day on the Moor of Silence when Vivien, braving all chance of misunderstanding or coldness, had come up to her in her anguish, had forged a bond which nothing but death could break.

ISLA IN PARIS.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ISLA found herself at once taken possession of. Her baggage, once through the Customs, disappeared as if by magic, and in Mrs. Rodney Payne's smart electric cab, hired for the season, as Vivien explained with a little twist of her mouth, they were quickly whisked across the sunlit breath of the city to Vivien's house in the Avenue Castellare.

Vivien had called it an apartment. Isla found it to be a house, not very large, but beautiful exceedingly, set in a little courtyard with a smooth strip of velvet grass and a fountain in the midst, and shut in by big gates of wrought iron, which gave one a queer uncanny feeling.

"Why, my dear, this is a mansion! Have you rooms in it, then?" asked Isla, in amazement at the dignity and

remoteness of the place.

"No, it is all mine. It was left to me by my aunt, Mrs. Whitney, of Chicago. She lived here the whole of her widowhood, and she loved the place. I like it, too. I am just wondering whether I shall finally make up my mind to become a Parisian and live here altogether. I shall be able to decide after I have spent the fall in Virginia. Of course, you know, this is not the Paris season," she explained as they ascended the beautiful carved staircase together. "Everybody has gone to the mountains or to the sea. I have had several invitations, but I am very comfortable here, and, for family reasons, I didn't want to be far away from Paris in case I might be wanted quickly. It is not so central as London, of course, but it is easily got at."

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She threw open the white folding-doors on the landing and revealed Isla's beautiful bedroom, furnished in the Empire style, exquisite and complete in every detail.

Isla could not forbear a little cry of admiration.

"Oh, I can't think how you could endure the cold poverty

of Achree after this!"

"We all loved Achree, and my mother hated Paris, and would never live in it," answered Vivien. "This house has been a white elephant to me ever since I inherited it, but perhaps—who knows?—I may find yet that it has its uses. When you are ready we shall have tea in my boudoir. It is on this floor—just across the landing. In the dressing-room you will find hot water and a fitted bath. My Aunt Julia made a hobby of this house, and she spent thousands of francs on it, even indulging in silver fittings in the baths. It is very beautiful, but of what use? At the best, what do any of us get but a roof to cover us? The home is within."

She vanished as she spoke that word, and Isla, with a far-away expression in her eyes, took off her veil, and, after the manner of the well-dressed woman who has to practise small economies, began to roll it up very neatly.

She walked into the beautiful dressing-room, plunged face and hands in water, dried them with a towel which matched satin for fineness, brushed her hair, and then repaired to the next room for the cup of tea for which she was longing.

The boudoir was a small room, sparsely furnished, but in exquisite taste like the rest, the prevailing colour a soft mist-blue, and its outlook was upon the courtyard, from which the tinkle of the fountain ascended with a refreshing

sense of coolness.

Tea was in, and Vivien, in her white gown, with the sunshine on her hair, was sitting behind the urn, smiling

and ready for the guest she was so glad to see.

"I can't believe you are really here," she said, as she pulled a low gilt chair forward for Isla. "That letter of mine was sent just like a bow drawn at venture, but something made me write it. I suppose the time had

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come for us to meet again. How long is it actually, Isla, since you left Glenogle?"

"Sixteen months."

"Is that all? It looks much more. I have been here just a little over three months."

"Four, next week—that is, if you came straight here

from Achree," said Isla quickly.

"No. I lost a week en route. You see, I went to Liver-pool to see them off, and then I drifted back to London. Do you take sugar? I forget, but I don't believe I ever made tea for you. It was always Sadie's job at dear Achree."

"I hope she is quite well," Isla forced herself to say, though she felt—though they both felt—they were skating

on thin ice.

"She is perfectly well, and my mother too. I had a

letter from Virginia this morning."

Isla remained silent, sipping her tea. Her face wore a remote expression, and her lips had a difficult curve, as if she were steeling herself against some force that was drawing too near for her comfort.

"And you are at Achree? Last we heard of you you

were at Barras, and likely to remain there."

"I had no choice when you left Achree so abruptly," said Isla, looking across the table into Vivien's beautiful face a trifle hardly. "It inconvenienced me very much."

"We could not help ourselves," said Vivien. "Peter did the best he could under the circumstances, I am sure."

Isla had no answer ready, nor would she seek for one which would fill the awkward gap. It occurred to her, however, that there was something of the nature of a reproach in Vivien's voice, and that she at least was unconscious of any unfairness on their part towards her.

"I don't understand the business part of it, of course, but I understand that my brother settled all that with Mr. Cattanach. He was at Achree for the greater part of the day before we left. It was all so sudden and dreadful, and poor Peter was so upset—so frightfully upset—that we did not know what to do with him."

Isla remained silent, with her eyes upon her lap. To

discuss Peter Rosmead, even with his sister, was a thing she could not and would not do, and she marvelled that Vivien should so much as dare to mention his name.

She began to wish with all her heart that she had not come to Paris, for, if she were to be subjected to this sort

of talk, she would find the situation intolerable.

"It was quite frightful, and I have wanted to see you, Isla, to talk everything over. Don't you think it unfair that this calamity should have happened to Peter of all men in the world?"

"I don't know," answered Isla faintly. "I haven't

thought about it."

"You haven't thought about it! It doesn't need any thinking. The thing itself was so frightful. Hylton Rosmead before a Court in which his honour and probity were arraigned! I tell you it is the most awful thing that has ever happened to anybody. I've even wondered that he has kept sane over it."

"If he knew himself not to blame, he could be strong,"

murmured Isla fatuously.

"Oh, but that is not enough. A man has to be able to prove his innocence, even to flaunt it in the face of his accusers. Of course the inquiry was a fiasco so far as Peter was concerned. That is, they didn't do anything to him. But, all the same, he left the Court with a blackened reputation, and the rest of his life will be spent in trying to clear it. But don't you know all this? Didn't he tell you in his letters?"

"No," said Isla, and the denial fluttered faintly from her lips, like some spent bird long imprisoned, and scarcely

able to escape.

"Why, I thought you would know everything! Peter has never once written to me, but Sadie, of course, has written. Oh, Isla, I'm in great trouble! I needed you. That is why I sent for you. I was so alone here and so afraid, though I could not tell what made me afraid."

Isla looked up in swift asterishment. The change which swept over Vivien was both rapid and complete. Isla leaned forward with her bare elbows on the shining

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"You know, or perhaps you don't know, that Rodney Payne and my brother were partners, and that Peter believes that Rodney wilfully did this, wickedly scamped the work, so that Peter might be destroyed. He himself," Vivien added with a slight curl of the lip, "had nothing to lose. And Peter has taken an oath, Sadie tells me, to track Rodney, who seems to have disappeared from the Southern States in the meantime. Certainly it looks bad."

"But what good would it do to track Mr. Payne, or even to find him? It would not better a bad situation,"

said Isla practically.

"Oh, but Peter in that mood is desperate, Isla. If he came up with Rodney, he would simply force him to confess everything. Once they were quite good friendsboys together, chums at Harvard, cadets at West Point, and then in the general bridge-building business together. It was an ideal partnership, everybody thought, because Hylton had the solid qualities and Rodney was so charming that he simply won everybody. And now it is the most dreadful tragedy in the whole wide world."

Isla thought it was, and she sat very still while the pages of Vivien's past history were unrolled. She had fancied that here in Paris, the city of light and warmth and sunshine, she should find distraction from her own cares, and lo! she was merely asked to share another's burdento make another bridge, as it were, in somebody else's life !

The bitter irony of it all smote her dumb, and yet, in her deep heart, something told her that this bit of the way was to be momentous, and that she could not escape it.

"And what do you wish?" asked Isla, leaning a little forward, her sweet mouth parted with the breathless interest

Vivien's poignant words had inspired.

"Peter will kill him, I believe. Sadie says so, and in her letter this morning she says he has sailed for Europe, having heard that Rodney has been seen in London."

Isla sat up, suddenly conscious of a wild thrill.

"Personally. I don't believe it," said Vivien, rather

ruefully. "Rodney hated England, and London especially. More probably he has gone to California or Mexico. I'm sorry that Peter should be following up a wild-goose chase."

"When did he sail?" asked Isla, with a little dry note in her voice, determined to get the whole particulars, so that she might safeguard herself from any possible chance of meeting him.

Vivien turned her chair, and, leaning towards the small escritoire behind her, drew her letter-case forth, and

produced her sister's letter.

"When did he sail?—let me see. Here it is in black and white: 'Peter is sailing in the Kaiserin Augusta Victoria on the eighth.' Why, that's to-day!"

Isla breathed freely. For at least a week she would be safe, and she assured herself that before it closed she would be safe back in Glenogle.

Vivien's next words were even more reassuring.

"The people who have taken the house for the winter want to come in the last week in August, and I thought, after we had made our visit together here, I should go back with you to London. But, of course, everything will depend on what I hear from my brother after he lands in England. Would you like to read Sadie's letter, Isla? There is nothing in it I would hide from you, for, in spite of all, everyone of us felt that you were one of us."

Isla shook her head, and a mist swam before her eyes.

Vivien's attitude astonished her, and might have filled her with indignation had it not been so completely unconscious. She could not but imagine that she was under some strange misapprehension regarding the actual facts of the case.

"Sadie writes a good letter. It has been a very hot summer in Virginia, and mother has felt the change after lovely Glenogle. Oh, Isla, don't you think life is cruelly hard to women? So many I know seem to suffer all the more because their capacity for suffering is greater than it is with men."

"I think that is because women make a mistake," said Isla, sitting up suddenly and speaking in a hard clear voice. "They begin by sacrificing themselves and being doormats. That's the grand initial mistake. It ends in their being expected to bear all the sorrows of the world."

Vivien was a little puzzled by these words, embodying a philosophy so much less winning than that she had

associated with Isla's outlook upon life.

"Perhaps some few do, but not all," she said, looking rather steadily into Isla's face. "Tell me about the dear Glen and all the people. Do you know your new neighbours at the other side of the loch? Everybody was interested in them just when we were leaving, and Sadie said there was a very handsome son that she was dying to know."

Then indeed did the red blood mount to Isla's cheek, and her embarrassment was so evident that Vivien laughed

gently.

Then she leaned forward and, fixing Isla's conscious eyes with her own clear rather reproachful orbs, she asked in a low, quiet, deliberate voice, "Isla, why did you throw Peter over? It was not what we had the right to expect from you of all women. I could have sworn that Isla Mackinnon would have stood by a man in the day of his adversity, when his enemy was wrestling with him at the gate."

Isla sprang up, and the slow fire in her eyes leaped into

flame.

"How dare you say that to me, Vivien Rosmead? You must know that your brother himself threw me over, that he wrote me a letter casting me off like an old boot, and left me a jilted woman to be the mock and sport of all my little world!"

Vivien, too, sprang to her feet, for the concentrated bitterness of these words, the passion of the cry, the glimpse into

the depths rather appalled her.

"Isla, you must be mad to say that! Peter give you up? He never would! It's unthinkable. He worshipped you. I never saw or heard of a man who felt about a woman as he did about you. You must have made some terrible mistake."

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"I have made no mistake. Will you wait there just a moment, Vivien? We had better have this thing out here and now. Indeed, it is necessary, if the same roof is to cover us."

She sped from the room, rummaged desperately in the inner flap of her dressing bag, which, all its straps undone, had been taken up to her dressing-room; and presently she returned with what looked like a poor, crushed, dis-

coloured scrap of paper.

"It ought to have been destroyed," she said drearily, as she offered it to Peter Rosmead's sister. "It very nearly was destroyed in the sea at Barras; only I went to rescue it in the coble, running the risk of drowning in the attempt. I tried to burn it one night at Achree, but it would not burn. So all that explains the disreputable appearance of the letter. Pray read it, and then perhaps you will direct your reproaches to the proper quarter."

Vivien, now pale and a little agitated, took the discoloured sheet, and began to read. But long before she reached the bottom of the first page she had flung it from her.

"Oh, my poor Isla!" she cried, and would have clasped her close; "forgive me—forgive us all! I never was ashamed of Peter Rosmead till this moment. I could not have believed he could have done this thing."

But Isla, as if afraid to let softer influences come near

her, drew back.

"It cannot be spoken about. It never would have been by me, but you had to hear what happened, Vivien. So

now let us bury it, and talk of something else."

"How can we until we get this thing threshed out? I tell you I can't get the truth made clear to my own mind. Peter must have taken leave of his senses at the moment! Indeed, he looked as if he had."

"It is the letter of a perfectly sane man," said Isla quickly, as she picked it up and put it back in its folds. "Every sentence is measured and well thought out. Your brother has no use for a woman in his life. She would never be more to him than a mere detail or an episode. I have not been brought up like that. My father and

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mother were one. When the one suffered the other also suffered, and their happiness was equally shared. I am glad it happened in time, because I know now that we could not have been happy together."

"But—but—Isla, you can't play with real love like that, neither you nor Peter," said Vivien, almost solemnly. "Nobody can. It's the strongest thing there is in the world, and it can make sport and puppets of us all."

Isla drew herself up with a magnificent scorn.

"It will not make sport nor yet a puppet of me," she said. "I will have naught to do with it. I will keep it for ever outside my life, for, except in a very few cases like that of my father and mother—who perhaps deserved happiness more than most—the thing men call love is nothing but evil, and makes for misery."

"Once I said the same," answered Vivien pathetically.

"But it is, as I say, stronger than we."

"I will show you that I am stronger than it!" cried Isla, with the same high courage. "I'm going to marry another man, Vivien—yes—soon, before Christmas—a man who is straight and young and honest, and one who will be content with the fealty and respect I can give him. He asks for nothing more."

Vivien looked incredulous, and then laughed a little

shrilly.

"You can't do it, Isla Mackinnon. You think you can, but you will never go to any man like that. It's not in you. And, if you did, it would be to the nethermost hell you would go, for I know the kind of woman you are, and what would be the outcome. Now, let us bury this ghastly unendurable thing, and try to comfort each other for a space in a world where there are no men."

Isla laughed drearily, and thrust her letter inside the

bosom of her gown.

"Let us go for a drive in the Bois to have these horrible cobwebs blown away. All Paris will be out of doors on an evening like this, and we need not come back to dinner till nine."

So they began their life of make-believe.

### CHAPTER XXV.

#### ROSMEAD APPEARS.

It had elements of sweetness in it while it lasted, for the intimacy of two women who really understood and love each other is a very dear and sacred thing. But beneath there were raging fires, and in the middle of morning visits to the picture galleries and museums, and evening visits to theatres and the Opera House, spectres stalked by their side, and quite suddenly in the midst of the gayest and most brilliant throng a mist would sweep before Isla's eyes, and she would shut them and be back in Glenogle again under sunny or misty skies. And always it was Peter Rosmead's eyes that were looking into hers and his impassioned voice was saying that she belonged to him both in this world and the next.

At last she could stand it no longer. It was the afternoon of the sixth day, and she had just received a lover's letter from Archie Dennison, complaining bitterly of her treatment of him in sending only a few lines acquainting him with her safe arrival. She stopped reading it in the middle, and looked across at Vivien, who was lying on the couch, with a book of American poetry she had purchased that very morning from Galignani's library.

"I say, Vivien, I want to go home," said Isla suddenly. Vivien put down her book, over the top of which she had been surreptitiously watching Isla's face for the last five minutes.

"Well, you can't," she answered laconically. "Not until I say you may."

"But I must," repeated Isla. "This sort of life is not

good for me. It is too luxurious. Your kindness is perfect, and I shall never forget it. But I am going home to-morrow."

"Is there anything in that man's letter which has made

you want to go?"

Isla reddened a little, but shook her head.

"No—if anything, it would make me stay. Oh. Vivien, he is so young! I might be his mother!"

Vivien did not even smile. She was far too understanding for that, and she could apprehend the heart sickness

of the woman whose life had got into such a tangle.

"But going back won't put years on to him, Isla," she said quietly. "I think it will be far better for you to stop here a little longer. You don't give yourself a chance. No sooner do you alight in a place than, like a bird, you are ready for the wing again. It's bad, Isla, and very exhausting. You'll find yourself an old woman before your time if you don't take a little more rest of body and spirit."

"I never have been young," said Isla quickly. "I was born both old and tired, I think. But, really, am I any good to you, Vivien? And what use is this sort of life to either of us? I am often wondering how long you are going to stand it. If I were in your shoes, and had all your money, I would found a hostel or an orphanage or something, and live in it, and work like a Trojan. It's impossible that any sane woman can be satisfied with this kind of life. It has no meaning, it does no good to anybody, and it is ruining you."

Vivien closed her eyes.

"I've been crushed under a big wheel, Isla—bigger than you or anybody can imagine. You have always managed to keep clear of the wheel, and to preserve your own entity. It takes time for a woman to recover from such an experience, that's all! But I'm beginning to think just as you do about this life. After I get rid of this house I must think of a way out. A hostel for American girls in Paris—how would that do?"

"I should if I were you, and when you have established it send for me, and I will show you how to run it on the most

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economical lines. There isn't a small economy know to the heart of woman that I haven't had to practise in m time—even to the turning of a petticoat and the running of a seam up the middle of a worn sheet to get the thin b to the outside. Well, I'll go on Monday at the very latest.

"You can't, for we are dining with the Marquise o Monday night, and you know you daren't shirk that, and she a Gordon and as Highland as you are! And Tuesda there is the Ramboillets' party at Fontainebleau. You know you egged them on by saying you wanted to see the inside of a fifteenth-century chateau."

"But engagements like these are mere froth, and, if I

have a call from home, they must go to the wall."

"Not this time, Isla. I mean to hold you to them. It will be quite good for you to be under tutelage for a few more days."

Isla thought a moment, then spoke desperately.

"But don't you see, Vivien, that I live in a mortal terror lest your brother should arrive here unexpectedly. What more natural than that he should want to see you at

once whenever he arrives in England?"

"He hasn't arrived yet. When he has it will be time enough to face this sort of problem. Besides, I think what you suggest most unlikely. Peter is a methodical person and leaves very little to chance. He would most certainly wire first to find out whether I was actually on the spot."

Isla shook her head.

"I am afraid, for I could not answer for myself, if I saw him. Probably I should run out of the house and find the quickest road to the Seine. I could not bear to feel myself a scorned thing before the man who had had the

presumption to scorn me."

"I will take care of your pride, and Peter shall know from me at the earliest and most effective moment just how little you regard him. I will pile it on about your handsome young lover, and do him as much good as I can. I'll be loyal to you, Isla, whatever it costs me, or is likely to cost Peter."

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"Well, I will let you go next Wednesday, by which time you will have been with me exactly nine days. It's a poor niggardly dole, Isla, but I don't see that I have the right to insist. Yes, Babette, what now?"

The very smart French parlourmaid, with her piquant face, and rolling eyes—and her much befrilled apron, appeared in the doorway, looking rather scared.

"Madame," she said in rapid French, "some one has come from the Hospital of the Sacré Coeur, wishing to see you immediately. They cannot wait—they are desperate. Shall I bring her up?"

Vivien sprang to her feet. "Who is it, Babette?"

"A little Sister of the People, Madame, and she wring her hands and look very troubled."

"I will see her," said Vivien, and ran down the stair with foot as fleet as a bird's wing.

The nun, with her blue cloak and immense white cap, stood in the middle of the Persian rug on the hall floor, counting her beads and waiting with obvious impatience for the coming of Madame.

"Madame Rodney Payne?" she said inquiringly.

" Yes."

"You are to come with me, Madame. There is one in our hospital who needs you. This is his message."

She drew from the voluminous folds of her cloak a small folded scrap of paper, which Vivien perused with a lightning glance, her face visibly paling.

"How have you come, Sister?" she asked simply.

"Madame, the fiacre is at the door. There is no time to lose. I implore you to make haste!"

"How did this happen? Was it an accident?" asked Vivien, trying to steady her voice.

"Oui, Madame, a street accident. One of these horrible motor omnibuses, that decimate Paris, knocked Monsieur down, and he has not long to live."

"Sit down, Sister, and I will come with you directly said Vivien, and sped up the stairs.

"Isla, are you there? Come quickly. The strange

thing has happened."

Isla was at the door of the boudoir in an instant. "What has happened? I don't understand."

"That is one of the Sisters of the Poor from the Hospit of the Sacré Coeur. She brings a message written by n husband, Rodney Payne. He is there, hurt, injured dying, they say—and asks me to go to him."

"And will you?" asked Isla breathlessly, but she kne

the answer before it came.

"Yes, of course. I have no choice, but it will be frightful ordeal. Oh, Isla, how is it that the hearts women get so little peace? They are rent from the crad to the grave!"

"You will like me to come with you?" said Isla eagerly

"No, I think not. Wait here. It is only a sma facre she has brought, and, anyhow, I shall have to so him alone. If I need you, I will send."

"But you look so white! I am afraid to let you go or

alone."

Vivien smiled faintly as she passed into her own room

to get her hat and gloves.

"I am very strong. When there is an emergency like that I can go right through with it. Oh, I wonder what shall hear! Poor, poor Rodney! and he was so in low with life!"

Isla thought of the phrase afterwards, and when she hear the rumble of the carriage as it left the gates she wondere

what she should do to pass the time.

It was a still and very drowsy afternoon, and for a few moments she watched the play of the fountain and the pretty motions of the gold fish in the sparkling basin be neath. The cool plash of the water stirred her to dream reverie, and, somehow, carried her in spirit away to Loc Earn, which, she knew, would be lying like a sheet of glast under the summer sky, mirroring all the hills on its place breast.

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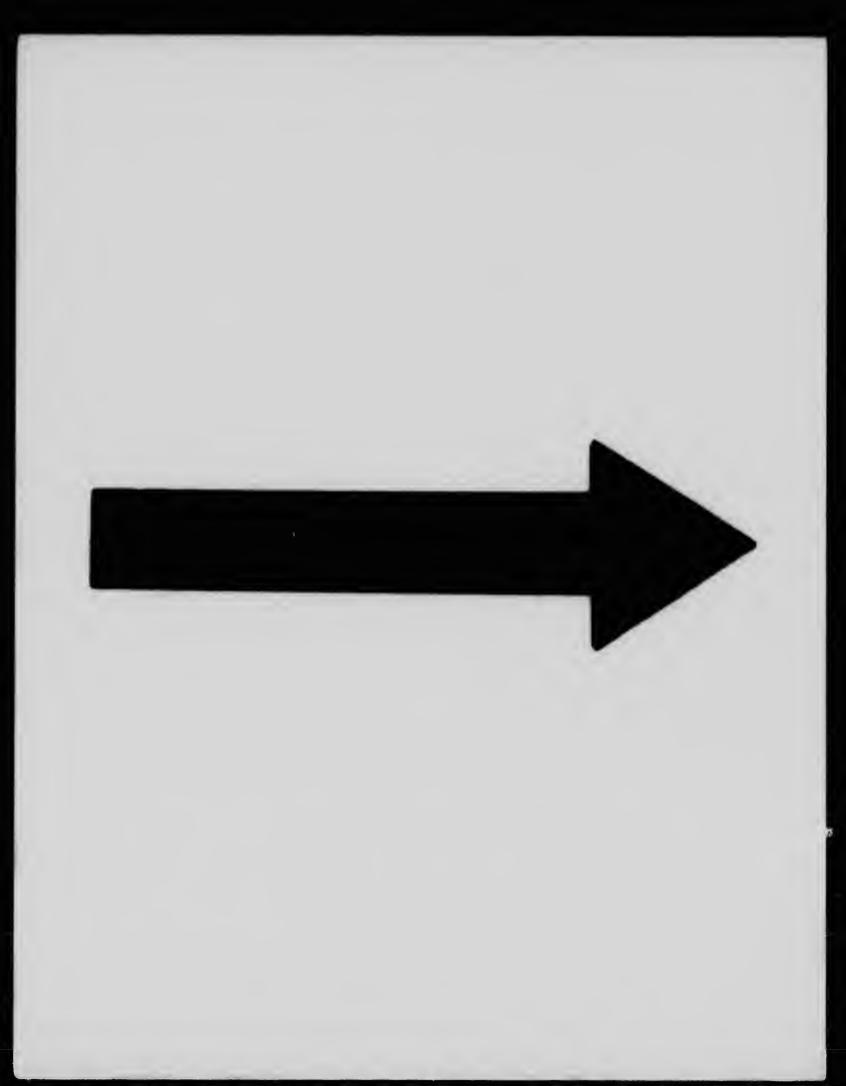
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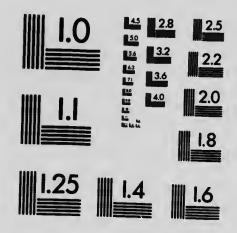
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Her reverie was disturbed by the appearance of Babette, bearing letters on a little salver—Scotch letters, the sight of which made her heart beat. There were no fewer than three—one from Cattanach which, in no haste to open it, she laid aside; one in Margaret Maclaren's weird uncouth handwriting; and the third in the fine flowing hand of Mr. Dennison.



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#### CHAPTER XXVI.

#### FACING ROSMEAD.

ISLA dropped on one of the red wicker chairs under a spreing palm, and, after a moment's deliberation, she ope Margaret's letter first. It was written from the Moor Creagh, and ran thus:—

"DEAR MISS ISLA,—This comes hoppin you are q well, as it leaves me and Donald. We come up last n to Creagh in the gig from the hotel, Donald driving him and going back two rakes for the stuff we had bring away afore the folk came in. It wuss the Miss Macdougall could do for us. The folk arrived nicht, very civil-spoken, and wi' more boxes than I ever seen in my life all at wan time. They were very pleased wi' the house, and praised it for being so cle She askit me could I not stop, for they had been dis pointed of a cook. But I explained that I had Don and the house at Creagh to look efter. Besides, they not the kind o' folk me or Donald would like to serve. wass gled to hear that you got to Paris safely, and fo Mrs. Rodney Payne at the station. Diarmid, he could sleep for fear she would not be there, but I laughed at for his silly nonsense, and askit him did he not know Miss Isla wass fit to speak French to ony Frenchie that lived?

"Mr. Dennison hass been over a heap at Achree, he and Donald Maclure ha'e lang palavers at Achnacle I'm telling you this private like, for I only had it f Elspet, who likes to mak' her man look big and gra

But he will jist bide plain Donald Maclure to the end o'

the chapter.

"The hens were layin' fine when I left, and I'm very sorry to be away from them at the meenit when we should be pickling them for the winter. Elspet, she's been tryin' a new thing ca'd water-gless that kind o' gums the eggs a' ower. But give me good butter and plenty dry saut every time. Diarmid says I am havering now, and that I had better stop. It's very beautiful up here the noo, Miss Isla, and the heather's fair blazin' purple everywhere. Come back soon to your faith'ul servants.

"DIARMID AND MARGARET."

This letter, expressed exactly as Margaret was accustomed to open her mouth, brought Scotland back with extraordinary vividness to Isla in the courtyard of that Parisian house, and before she opened the other letters she closed her eyes for a moment with a little smile.

Mr. Dennison's letter began differently.

"My dear Miss Mackinnon." he wrote, and Isla had no idea how the old man had hesitated over the use of her name, "I thought you might be glad of a few lines from me, though I have no doubt your faithful henchwoman Margaret, to say nothing of Archie, will keep you posted up.

"We are sorry yo" are away just now, for certainly the place is glorious. Never has there been such a Twelfth. Hugh and Archie and two friends from Glasgow shot two hundred brace on Dunmohr before lunch, and lost count after. I hear your tenant at Achree is very well pleased. He seems a decent man. I had some talk with him yesterday.

"The chief object of my writing is to tell you that I heard to-day from Miss Macdougall that she had sent away her London folk from the hotel—I mean, the man Tomlinson and the nurse and the little lad. Her rooms were all trysted for the Twelfth, of course, and so she had a good excuse. He was very angry, and vent off to

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Strathyre, but I heard he had no luck there, and he has gone back to Glasgow or somewhere else. Miss Macdougall mentioned that the little lad had not been very well for the last two days he was at the hotel, and that his uncle—if he really be his uncle, which I take leave to doubt—was anxious about him. Anyhow, you will be relieved to hear that in the meantime they are not anywhere near Achree or Creagh.

"We shall be glad to see you when you come back, and my wife bids me say that she will never let you stop by yourself up at the Moor of Silence. She took a drive up there yesterday, and she said it was very lonesome. All the rest are well, and the Rev. Mr. Whitehead comes to us to-morrow for a fortnight's holiday. The other fortnight he is to take with Janet, I suppose, later in the year.

"Take care of yourself, my dear, and come back quickly

to the place where you belong.—Yours faithfully,

" JAMES DENNISON."

"The place we re you belong." Isla rolled the little catching phrase liberal a sweet morsel under her tongue, and with considerably lightened heart turned to the

lawver's letter.

It was a purely business communication, merely intimating that the shooting tenants had taken possession of Achree, and, according to custom, had paid the half of the rent in advance. He wished to know whether he would send her any money or bank it till her return. The letter closed by expressing the hope that she would enjoy her holiday, and come back the better for it. He said nothing about the claimant to Achree, nor did he mention the Dennisons, though rumours of the engagement had already reached his ears. He, however, did not believe it.

Isla thought she would put her letters together, and after sitting for a moment or two, passed into the beautiful drawing-room, which had folding doors on to the black and white terrace at one side of the courtyard. It was the handsomest room in the house, had some rare and price less tapestries on the walls, some fine examples of Empire

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er, and, eautiful e black was the d price-Empire furniture, and a magnificent inlaid grand pianoforte. It was a room which Vivien never sat in, though in her aunt's lifetime it had been the Sunday resort of half the distinguished Americans in Paris. Isla, all alone in its vast fragrant spaces, felt very remote, and when she sat down at the piano and ran her fingers over the velvet keys she almost started at the sound.

But presently another sound interrupted. It was the quick clang of the bell at the big gate, and through the folding doors she saw the liveried portier hastening to open

She moved towards the door, wondering whether it might be a fresh message from the hospital. Then her heart stood still, for the tones of a remembered, but not welcome, voice fell on her ears—sharp, incisive, imperative as of yore.

The porter answered something, held the gate wide, and Peter Rosmead stepped within, and saw Isla Mackinnon

at the terrace door.

Isla would have run, but the sharp smiling eyes of the French maid were upon her. She called all her forces together for a supreme effort, and, stepping forward, she held out her hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Rosmead?" she said in a high full voic "You are unexpected, and I am sorry that your sister is not here to receive you."

Rosmead was not master of himself, but he tried to take her cue.

Babette glided away, satisfied that the unexpected guest would be cared for. Then Peter spoke.

"My God, Isla, to find you here!" he said, and his voice had a hollow sound, as if it came from cavernous depths where anguish had stolen away its timbre.

"That is quite easily explained," said Isla airily. "Mrs. Rodney Payne was so kind as to invite me on a little visit. It was convenient for me to accept her invitation, but I intended to have gone to-morrow or next day. Had I known of your coming, you would not have found me here."

He had no answer ready, for the sight of the woman whom he had won, and also lost, drove everything from his mind. Never had she appeared more beautiful or more dear. Her simple frock of black and white suited he slenderness, she had even a colour in her cheeks, her eye were bright, the sun was in the brown of her hair, apparently she had not suffered at all through his renunciation. An he had lost her !

Those months which had been kind to Isla, because s much love had been her portion, and the gaps had bee filled wherever it was possible, had been cruel to Pete Rosmead. The darker passions which ravage the souls of men—hate, fear, anger, and revenge—had done the deadly work in him. Isla was surprised and a little horrified to behold how his hair had whitened, how haggar was his face, how altered the whole gallant bearing of the man.

So strangely is the heart of woman constituted, so swift and true are all its instincts of love and mercy, that the bitterness died out of Isla Mackinnon's that moment, never to come back. A strange peace, which she afterward likened to waiting on the will of God, descended upon her giving an indescribable beauty to her face.

Peter Rosmead saw it before him—starry, remote shining as the face of an angel, and a vast wonder held

him in its thrall.

"Won't you come in here and sit down? Or perhap you are tire and need refreshment after your journey Do you know this house and how to get about in it?" she asked simply and courteously.

"I know the house, of course. I have often stayed here with my aunt," he said, and followed her into the great cool spaces of the magnificent room where, two

small units, they seemed almost lost.

There he stood as one dazed, and the months that had been so hideous were suddenly robbed of their appalling sting.

"You were with Vivien! It is unthinkable. And yet

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"Of course—why not?" repeated Isla, with a little faint smile, beginning to pick some fading leaves from the rose tree in full bloom in a magnificent jardinière by her side.

"Where is she, do you know? It is important that I see

her soon."

Isla hesitated for a moment. She could easily follow the workings of his mind after what Vivien had told her, and she grasped the fact that probably he had tracked Rodney Payne to Paris, was even now in search of him. But someone else had been before him.

"I don't know quite what to do or what to say, but I think the best plan is to tell you exactly what has happened. About an hour ago as we were sitting together, having early tea upstairs, someone came from the Hospital of

the Sacré Coeur asking for her."

"Vivien was always great on good works," he said casually, as if the thing he heard was of little moment.

"She went down," continued Isla clearly, "and in less than a minute she came tearing up again in a state of great agitation. A Sister of Mercy had brought a message from Mr. Rodney Payne, who had been knocked down in the street by a motor omnibus, and carried to the hospital. They said that he was seriously injured, probably dying."

Rosmead's face went suddenly rigid.

"The Hospital of the Sacré Coeur-where is that?" he asked hoarsely.

Isla shook her head.

"I don't know. Any cabdriver will take you." But even as she spoke the words Rosmead was gone !

Then Isla dropped down on one of the satin-covered lounges, trembling violently, and was for the moment overwhelmed by the strange march of destiny, the slow

grinding of the mills of God.

But neither fear nor anguish came to disturb that new great peace which was ners. The God who holds the life of man in the hollow or Ais hand would not fail her. mistake she had made was in being so quick and impatient to tie all the loose threads together herself without regard to fitness or proportion.

She, Isla Mackinnon, had in a measure vowed that not but Isla Mackinnon should order her destiny. She wou show herself stronger than Fate! And, lo! the ne house of cards, frail shelter for her happiness and her hear had toppled down, and she sat among the ruins! SI knew in that supreme moment just gone that she st belonged to Peter Rosmead, and that the thing he had done on the rash and ignoble impulse of the moment wa in her eyes, of less account than dust.

It was already forgiven, and would be thrust for even

more into the limbo of forgotten things.

Glenogle, Achree, the glory of loch and hillside, the splendour of the heather, and the whirr of the wild bird wings over the vast moorland spaces—these things, a whose shrine she had worshipped, were dear, but they ha naught to do with the life of the soul, which is the only

life worth living.

She realised in these hours of heavenly solitude on the sunny summer day in the heart of old Paris that she had been brought thither for a set purpose, and that its accomplishment had already begun. She knew not what tragedy was even then being enacted in the bare hospital ward, where the white-hooded Sisters drifted about of their work of love and mercy. With the final act of the strange drama of love and hate and jealousy she had a concern whatsoever. Her portion was to wait.

She went back to the boudoir, wrote some letters answer to those she had received—wonderful, cheerful letters, with the lilt of a bird in their tone—took then herself out to the post, had a walk down the great Avenu of the Champs Elysées, where all Paris was sunning itsel in the golden evening splendour, and about the usua dinner-hour went back to the house. But as yet no message

or sign had come from the great hospital.

Babette, now full of wonder and some alarm, came to question Isla as to what should be done with the waiting meal.

"I will wait another hour, and then, if there is no message, you can bring me something here," she said

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e is no he said. "It is no use to send to the hospital. The case is urgent and desperate. It is someone they know and love," she added as an afterthought. "We can do nothing but wait."

Babette looked sympathetic, but mystified, and left

Isla to her meditations while the night wore on.

At half-past eight Isla dined off the liver-wing of a chicken and a morsel of sole, and the last hour of waiting was the longest. At twenty minutes past ten she heard the clang of the gate bell, and sprang up, not sure how to act, and not knowing what might be expected of her.

She heard the sound of voices and steps, and in a minute more Rosmead appeared, helping his sister into the room. She seemed exhausted, her face was deathly white, and the purple shadows under her eyes were terrible to behold.

She sank into a chair, and Isla knelt by her, chafing her chill hands, and trying to infuse some of her own strength

into Vivien's exhausted frame.

"It's all over, Isla. He is dead," said Vivien at last.
"I will go to bed, I think, and Peter will tell you what is necessary. No dear, you must not come to me. For this one night I must be quite alone."

Isla understood, and she forbore to press the attentions which could do no possible good. Yet there was a wistful

look in Vivien's eyes.

"Let me come just as your maid, dear. I promise not to speak a single word. You ought not to have hired hands about you to-night. Let me come."

Vivien gave way, and Isla was an hour gone.

### CHAPTER XXVII.

### THE STORY OF RODNEY PAYNE.

WHEN she returned to the boudoir it was empty, but sh found a scribbled message for her standing on an ivor tablet close by the clock.

"If you are able, please come down to the library.

s. ould like to tell you what has happened. We had bette

be done with it to-night."

She rubbed off the pencilled sentences, pulled hersel together, and sped softly do n the richly carpeted stair. The lights were already out in the hall, but the library door, ajar, sent out a little shaft across the polished floot to guide her feet.

She tapped lightly and walked in. Rosmead sprangfrom the chair, in which he had been half-buried, and waited

courteously for her to be seated.

"How is she now?" he asked.

Isla shook her head.

"I can hardly say. She does not speak. She is lying there almost like one dead. She must have passed through

a terrible experience surely."

"She has. I must try to tell you. It is very good of you to be as you are with us. It is hardly what we deserve but sometimes when human beings have got to the end of their tether they get help from the other side. It is the only possible explanation."

The gravity and remoteness of his manner gave Isla al the strength she needed, and she felt no strain at being alone with Peter Rosmead there, in the midnight here

with a whole household asleep or far away.

"Before you can understand everything I shall have to go back a long way-to the time when Rodney Payne

married my sister in Virginia.

"It was supposed to be a marriage as nearly perfect as could be planned by human beings. Both were young and beautiful. He was the handsomest man I have ever seen. Rich, well- orn, as birth counts out there, their prospects of happiness seemed far beyond the common. Payne was then just twenty-nine, and, though his record had a few flaws in it, they were such as a man like him could hardly escape. He had been flattered, sought after, spoiled from his birth up. But he loved Vivien, and she loved him-there is no getting away from that fact.

"You must understand that Rodney and I had been brought up practically together, and we became partners in the big engineering business which his father had founded. Rodney had gifts of a kind. He was, in some directions, a most brilliant fellow, but it was I who built up and kept together the business. It was my line of things, that's all.

"Rodney had a passionate temper and a jealous disposition, and he resented from the beginning the fact that most of our clients preferred to do business with me, and that no contract could be carried through without every detail of it being submitted to me. He had not the sense to accept the inevitable and to confine himself to his own

rt in the business—a part as important, in its way, as

mine.

"From the first there was friction. It became a great deal worse after he married Vivien. When a man of a certain temperament begins to nurse feelings of resentment and dislike he is very apt to become obsessed by them, and to lose his sense of proportion. That was precisely what happened to Rodney. You are following me?"

"Perfectly," said Isla, with her chin on her hands, her grea eyes glowing like stars under the soft light of the electrolier that swung mistily from the carved ceiling.

"There v as a strain of madness in the family, and, though the mental twist had never showed itself among his more immediate relatives, their paroxysms of temper were

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Isla all it being it hour. notorious. It was when these fits of anger and jealous were upon Rodney that the trouble began with Vivien."

He paused a moment, and his far-sunken eyes seemed t

burn with a strange fire.

"My sister had been reared in a sheltered home. No such things as violence or evil had ever come near her though our own family were not entirely immune from them You would have to know the South, Isla—all its passion and its fire, its poetry and its delight—before perhaps you could fully understand those who are born under its skies.

"I begin to understand," Isla answered, and her voice

had a tender cadence.

For nothing mattered to her at the moment except that she was alone with Peter Rosmead, receiving the sacre confidence of his inmost heart and life. Supposing lift held no other hour than that, it was enough!

"She was very beautiful," he began.

"She is," corrected Isla quickly.

"Ah, but you should have seen her in her bloom, Isla
No fairer thing ever trad the court.

No fairer thing ever trod the earth. Men went mad about her, and Rodney's jealousy never slept. You know Vivien's high fine spirit. So much fretted, it began to hedge itself about with pride and aloofness and reticence So the tragedy grew. Then, finally, he took part reveng by trying to make her jealous. In the end he broke he heart. It is a horrible and sordid story, and I will not tell it to you now. Finally, after years of misery and shame she left him."

"Divorced him?" said Isla quickly. "I have often

wondered why she kept his name."

"She did not divorce him. At that time she believed that a woman had the right, if so minded, to punish a man! nfaithfulness by refusing him his freedom."

"But afterwards? When Vivien would have married

my brother-" said Isla, in a low perplexed voice.

"She would have had to seek relief in the ordinary way through a Court of law," said Rosmead. "But that marriage never would have come off, Isla, and none knew it better than you!" icalousy ivien." emed to

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"It filled me with astonishment. But Vivien never spoke of it to me, and since I came here she has not so much as mentioned Malcolm's name."

"It was her divine pity-nothing more. Women like

Vivien care only once. She will never marry again." "It seems a long "She is young," said Isla wistfully.

condemnation to the solitary life."

"She will be happier so, believe me," said Rosmead. "But let me get on. Although their home was broken up, Rodney and I continued in partnership, because we were both essential to the firm, and it was not necessar" that we should see much of each other. But when '.e obtained the contract for the big bridge we had to me. of course. We preserved a civil distance from each other, discussed only business matters, and the thing went on.

"Then, after a while, and quite suddenly, Rodney came to me and said he wanted Vivien back, and demanded that I should help him to make another home. I refused. I don't suppose I picked my words at the moment. I have forgotten what I did say, but before I knew where I was

he was at my throat.

"You have no idea of the hot passion of the man when roused like that ! It was a wild frenzy, and nothing less. No great harm was done, however. I think I gave him enough to remember the occasion by and again time went on. He swore revenge, of course, by the words that fell from Rodney Payne's mouth no man took seriously, and the woman who did take them seriously had to pay.

"Then I went to Scotland, and the trouble began. When I returned the first time there were things I could not understand. I need not go into technical details now. You would find them difficult to understand, but, if you remember, I had to stay double the time I expected, and

then I left with a heavy uneasy mind."

He hesitated a moment, about to add that but for her he never would have returned to Scotland then. But something caused him to forbear.

"When the bridge fell, and even before I had received more than the cable, I had a sickening certainty of what had happened. I was sure that Rodney had a hand in it that he chose this diabolical method of destroying himse and me. He had little to lose—his name stank in the nostrils of all decent men at that time—but he could bring about a disaster that would crush me. And he succeeded I don't know whether you know that, though I was a quitted by the Court of Inquiry, chiefly, I suppose, through powerful influence exerted on my behalf, though not he myself, I was fully aware of what was thought, and, indeed openly said, concerning me and my work.

"Isla, can you imagine what it meant to a man like me to be accused of murdering my fellow-creatures for me gain, simply to add a thousand or two to a year's profit?

"I can. I went through it with you," she answere

quietly.

"When I got back to Virginia and made inquiries found things as I expected. Rodney had disappeared leaving a trail of suspicion and evil behind him as usua I suppose there are times when the devil enters into a ma and takes possession of his soul. That moment came to me! I lived for one object alone—to come up wit Rodney Payne, choke the life out of him, and then kit myself.

"For more than three months I have been driven of by that frightful phantom, yet here I am safe and free-

and he is dead."

He strode to and fro the floor, and the veins stood ou on his temples like knotted cords, and his breath wa laboured and hard.

"I tracked him from one place to another. I heard of him being in New Orleans, then in Valparaiso. To both these places I followed him, and finally to London. Ir London I learned that he had gone to Paris, and to-day we met face to face.

"He was dying when they took me to his bed, yet able to see me and to speak. He made full confession of all he had done, described the method in which the work had been scamped, named two others involved, but absolved them from actual blame, and signed the document before nd in it—
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able to f all he ork had bsolved before a priest and the Consul, brought to his bedside at his own request. At ten minutes past nine he signed the confession, and at twenty minutes past he breathed his last."

"How truly terrible!" murmured Isla. "But you—you

both forgave him at the last?"

"Vivien had forgiven him long ago. It is not hard for women to forgive, Isla. God has made them so for the redemption of the world. But with men it is different. Even at the last my heart was hard to Rodney as the nether millstone, and I grudged the accident that had taken him out of my hands."

"It is better to fall into the hands of the living God," murmured Isla involuntarily. "Then what happens

now?"

"I go back to make the case clear in the quarter that matters. No—there will be no publicity, for that would be cruel to Vivien, and we cannot pursue the dead vindictively, whatever they may have done."

"It will mean reinstatement for you," said Isla eagerly.

He bowed his head.

"In course of time I shall be able to begin again. Meantime it will enable me to lift my head among my fellowmen instead of stealing about like a thief in the night— —an Ishmael whom every man's hand is rightly

against."

"It was very awful. It is a terrible story altogether," said Isla, with a little shiver as she rose to her feet, conscious, for the first time in that strange hour, of an overpowering weakness and weariness. We cannot go through such tremendous strain without feeling the effects, and Isla's boasted strength was perhaps less than of yore.

"I think I will go to bed," she said, making a move

towards the door.

But Rosmead was before her, and placed his back against

"Just five minutes more, for these yawning depths must be closed to-night for ever. Tell me, will it be possible ever to blot these months of black darkness out of our calendar—yours and mine?"

"Not altogether, I am afraid," she answered, strive to steady her voice.

"But at least you understand? You saw that I had

alternative but to leave you?" he said thickly.

"You had to leave me—yes, but not as you did! Sor thing snapped in me that day at Barras when Cattana brought your letter."

"Oh, but you must understand I had no alternative I could not ask you to share shame, difficulty, disgrace.

thought I made that clear."

"Why couldn't you?" she asked, her voice clear a bell.

"Because a man does not, he cannot ask a woman loves to share these things. He has not the right."

"That is where you made the supreme mistake, a because of it you have not the right to a woman's hear she answered. "No—I am not angry! I am only fil with an unutterable sadness. You misunderstood a belittled me. It was as a plaything—a bright compan for your idle hours you wanted me! And perhaps it is good that I learned in time. For I am not built like the My mother was a soldier's daughter and a soldier's we She was at home in the smoke of the battle as well as the sunshine of peace. I am like that too. That is a only you did not know."

"But, Isla, I can be taught!" he cried, and the long in his voice was so mighty that it almost broke her do "For God's sake, don't thrust me out into the ou

darkness I"

"It is where you thrust me, Peter Rosmead!" she sawith a passion on her face almost corresponding to his or

And so, without another word spoken, she sped p him, stole up the stairs with trembling limbs to the herself on the bed and weep her heart out to the ni and the silence.

Next morning without a word to any, leaving only written message for Vivien, she left the house and dreate to the Gare du Nord in time to catch the Calais express.

When Rosmead was granted access to his sister's ro

about ten o'clock she handed him Isla's written message with a little wan smile.

"We have lost her again, Peter, and I fear that this time the loss is final."

He perused the few broken, rather inscrutable words in which Isla explained that it was necessary that she should leave Paris at once without seeing either of them again.

Vivien leaned out of her bed, and tried to draw him a little nearer.

"Come and sit down here. Peter, and tell me how you ever came to make such a tremendous unthinkable mistake about Isla Mackinnon."

He stared at her dumbly.

"I thought I was doing the right thing. I think it

"The right thing! God forgive you, Peter Rosmead! The thing you ought to have done was to have married Isla by special licence and taken her to America with you! She would have gloried in it. Lost causes are as dear to Isla Mackinnon's heart as vain show and triumph to the hearts of other women."

"How could I know?" he repeated stupidly. "Some-

body should have told me."

"You gave nobody a chance. Let me explain the full extent of your folly. The night Isla came here I asked her why she had thrown you over, saying that it was the last thing we should have expected of her to throw over a man in the day of his downfall."

"You said that to her, Vivien?" said Rosmead between

his teeth.

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" And what did she say?"

"I shall not tell you—you can imagine it——"

"But when I am clear again-when I have been to America-" he began.

But Vivien let him go no farther.

"Peter, you make me tired! You're certainly the biggest fool in God's world! It's too late, I tell you!

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to turn her this time. You will not be able to win her evagain, Peter. You have dallied too long, taken too man Atlantic trips, tried her mettle too often and too keen! Isla Mackinnon will never be for you in this world!"

"That idiot at Garrion I suppose-"

"No, no. He is not the only one who knows who Isla Mackinnon is. It's the new man at Dunmohr—som one whose riches will keep her in comfort to the end of he days. And I'm glad! I'm glad!"

But she expressed her gladness strangely by droppinher head on her hand and incontinently weeping over t

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

TWO SIDES.

MRS. ANN JEFFREYS alighted from the train at Balquhidder station about three o'clock on an August Saturday afternoon, and having inquired what direction she must take for Dunmohr, set out to walk thither.

It was a still drowsy afternoon, and, after she got clear of the station and the few passengers, there was little to disturb the silence and the solitude by which she was surrounded. Now and again a succession of sharp shots would beat on the air, indicating that the guns were abroad. The Twelfth had dawned splendidly, and the continued fine weather kept all the shooting lodges full.

Everywhere there was joy over the successful opening of the season. None except those familiar with these great areas given up to sport know how important a part the few weeks of the shooting season play in the lives of the people. This season is the true harvest of their year, the time when hill and glen alike awaken to life.

Ann Jeffreys, however, had small acquaintance either with country life or ways of great folks. She was Glasgow born and bred, and her life of toil and sorrow and anxiety had been entirely spent in the city. But never in all the years that lay behind had she been the prey of a keen more corroding anxiety than at the moment when sutrudged the beautiful stretch of country road which lay between Balquhidder station and the mansion house of Dunmohr.

The burden of the unequal division of things lay on her heart like an overshadowing cloud. Mrs. Dennison, once

Lisbeth Morrison, and she had started life together, so on one bench at school, played the same games, shared a the interests of girlhood, and married within a few weel of each other two young men in the same station of life

working even in the same yard.

James Dennison and Alexander Jeffreys had had a equal chance at the beginning, but there equality has stopped. Jeffreys had a more dashing and brilliant way but Dennison possessed staying qualities, and was inspired by an indomitable desire and determination to get of the neither smoked nor drank, and, instead of spending he entire leisure, as Jeffreys did, in sport and play, he stroy to improve his meagre education, attended evening classe and left unturned no stone that would give him an upware help. The result was such as we see in the industrial workevery day. James Dennison rose to the very top of the tree, while Jeffreys, the shiftless ne'er-do-weel, sank quick to the bottom, and finally in disgrace left the country, for his country's good.

Ann Jeffreys was too sensible a woman to blame the Dennisons for any part of the misfortunes that could only in justice be laid at her husband's door. But she did fee that since a son of Elizabeth Morrison's had wrough sorrow and distress to her one ewe lamb, the family should be told of it. [Hence her Saturday journey to

Lochearn.

She had not come very far, for she and Mollie had move to a small lodging at Doune to try whether the chang would do the girl any good. Presently she came to the biron gate and the trim, well-built, stone lodge of Dunmoh and, passing through without the smallest hesitation proceeded to walk up the finely kept avenue. It was noble park that stretched on either side of her, only requiring a few deer to complete the picture of a typical Highlandemesne. Ann was surprised and a little awed at the extendand magnificence of the place, and when the great stone fronted house, with its curtained windows and flag waving from the battlements, appeared suddenly before her visions she almost stood still. But reflecting that, after all,

ther, sat hared all w weeks n of life,

had an lity had ant way, inspired of cet on. Inding his he strove g classes, in upward ial world op of the k quickly intry, for

lame the ould only e did feel wrought e family urney to

d moved e change to the big dunmohr, esitation, It was a ly requir-Highland he extent at stoneg waving er vision, er all, it was only Lisbeth Morrison that was mistress within, she pressed forward and valiantly approached the door.

Her by no means timid ring was answered by one of the grey-garbed much-befrilled damsels, who, at sight of Ann Jeffreys' homely figure, proceeded to give herself airs.

"I want to see Mrs. Dennison, if you please," said Ann

civilly. "I hope she's at home."

"She's at home, but of course I can't say whether she will see you. What name?"

"Go and tell her Mrs. Jeffreys frae Glesca would like a

word wi' her."

"You had better give me some kind of message. My

mistress only sees people like you by appointment."

"An' that's a big lee, if ever there was wan. You seem new to your job. Jist gang up the stair, or whaurever Mrs. Dennison happens to be, an' tell her I'm here. Be sure you dinna hurry yourself, my wummin. It micht no be very guid for ye."

The young woman, now openly angry, yet fully aware that she dared not refuse to carry the message, vanished up the great staircase while Ann took a seat and gazed upon the magnificence by which she was surrounded. In about five minutes time another servant appeared, and,

in a civil pleasant voice, asked her to walk upstairs.

Ann followed her with the greatest alacrity, and was presently ushered into Mrs. Dennison's own sit regroom, where she was just going to have a cup of tea after her afternoon nap. She was standing in the middle of the room, her comely face wearing a welcome smile, and she immediately extended the friendliest possible hand.

"Weel, Ann, you are a sicht for sair een! I am very

gled to see you.'

"Thenk ye kindly, Mrs. Dennison," answered Mrs. Jeffreys, rather grimly. "I'm bidin' in Doune the noo,

an' it was very easy to come along."

"Of course, and so it was. I'm very gled to see you," she repeated, as she drew forward a comfortable chair for her guest. "But, if ye had only dropped a postcaird last

nicht some o' them would ha'e come to the station for It's a lang walk on a warm efternune."

"It was a very bonnie road, and I didna mind the wa Ye are terribly graund here, Lisbeth. If I had ke question if I would ha'e had the face to come."

"Havers, Ann! Fine ye kent ye would never find cheenged. Weel, an' hoo are ye gettin' on? Is it a c

you are at in Doune?"

"No. Mollie an' me ha'e come oot for a cheen She's been ill for the last week or twa, and the doc said naething would do but a cheenge o' air."

"I'm very sorry to hear that, Ann. What's been

trouble, like?"

"She hasna been weel for a long time," said Mrs. Jeffre

drawing a long breath as the ordeal approached.

"What did she leave Fairburn for, Ann? Jimse, says he never got to the bottom o' that, and be dinna lit. I suppose she telt you?"

"No, she did not. I faund oot for mysel'. I may weel tell ye, Lisbeth, that it's aboot Mollie I ha'e come tday, and I don't like my job. But I think it richt that

should ken the truth about it."

Mrs. Jeffreys untied her bonnet-strings, as if she felt to pressure of the ribbon on her throat, threw them back of her shoulders, and met her old friend's kindly anxious ga

with a slight touch of defiance.

"I'll ha'e to go back a while—a matter o' three or formonths. It was in Aprile, I believe, I was nursin' Capter Scrymgeour's wife, wi' her third. I had to gang hame wo night for some o' my things, as I was goin' to the coast them for a week. Weel, when I got to the hoose and mysel' in—we ha'e a key apiece, so that we never hony bother aboot gettin' in—wha do ye think I fau sittin' cheek by jowl wi' Mollie?"

Mrs. Dennison shook her head, and a look of anxiodawned in her eyes.

"Your son Archie."

Mrs. Dennison put out her hand with a sudden gests of distress.

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"No, no, Ann; don't say it l"

"But I must, Lisbeth. I can tell ye it gie'd me a turn and made me feel queer a' ower. He rose and left immediately, and when I cam' back frae seein' him oot I put it to her straight."

"And what did she say?" demanded Mrs. Dennison,

now apparently in the very throes of apprehension.

"She was quite open and abune-board aboot it. She admitted that it was not the first time he had been in the hoose, and said she didna expect it to be the last. Of course I took one meanin oot o't a'-that she expected him to mairry her. She said as much, but she forbade me to do or say onything, and shut me up by sayin' she was perfectly weel able to look efter hersel' and to manage her ain affairs. That I believed, because she's been a steady yin a' her days, and never gi'en me a haet o' anxiety. At the same time I wairned her, Lisbeth, for both you ane me ha'e seen trouble to a lassie for less."

"Tell me the rest, then, Ann, as quick as you can," said poor Mrs. Dennison, making no attempt to hide her

concern.

Any thought of discrediting the story to which she was listening never occurred to her. She knew her old friend too well, and respected her too much, to feel the smallest

inclination to doubt her word.

"Well, the next thing I hears is that she has left Fairburn. But she wadna tell me onything about it. I could see for mysel', hooever, that something had happened, and that her hert was sair. But she has never been a lassie ye could question much, and, as I ha'e said, she has aye managed her ain affairs since ever she began to work, and I've never had a meenit's anxiety about her. I kent of course, that whatever there had been between him and her was at an end. She took on anither job and seemed to like it a' richt, but I could see that the hert had gane clean ooten the lassie, and that she was gaun doon the hill every day. She gied up her music and her French lessons, and she even stopped readin' books. She seemed to ha'e nae further use for ony o' the things that used to interest her. I tell ye, Lisbeth, I've ha'en my share o' trouble in warld, but naething has gane to my hert like this! I lassie is the very aipple o' my e'e. I could never tel what a guid lassie she is, though I were to try for a we

Mrs. Dennison inclined her head, and her kind eyes a soft and sympathetic enough. But it was not of Jeffreys's girl she was thinking at the moment. It was another gallant creature, for whom evidently some findisappointment was brewing.

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# CHAPTER XXIX.

# ARCHIE'S WRONGDOING.

"ABOOT ten days ago," continued Mrs. Jeffreys, "when I was gettin' to the end o' a case at Pollokshields, and thinkin' that Mollie and me would get doon the watter thegither, I gets a message to gang hame, because she was ill. I gaed hame, and she looked bad. She had fented at her desk. I sent for the doctor, and he said twa things, baith o' which I kent afore he opened his mooth. Wan was that she was run doon, and the other that she had

something on her mind.

"It was twa three days afore her and me got fairly thegither, like. You've never had to gang oot and leave your bairns to ither folk, and so ye micht find it hard to understand that the wummin that has to dae that finds a strange bairn every time she comes back. For a year or twa back Mollie and me had been gaun oor ain weys, like, and there were whiles when I felt that I kent very little aboot my ain bairn. It may seem a gey queer thing to you to hear me say that I was gled o' a chance to nurse and mother her and to get near her again. I am a guid nurse, as ye ken, Lisbeth, and I did my best for my ain. But isn't there some writin' body that has said, 'Wha can minister to a mind diseased?' Weel, that was what was the maitter wi' my lassie.

"Wan nicht, hooever, when she couldna sleep, and I was standin' ower her, she suddenly threw her airms roond my neck and began to greet as if she wad break her hert. It was aboot twa o'clock in the mornin', but we was speakin' there till daylicht cam' in. She telt me the whole story

frae beginnin' to end—hoo he first began to notice her the office, tellin' her aboot her bonnie face, and syne ask her to walk oot wi' him. Ye ken as weel as me, Lispe hoo that kind o' a story gangs on. There never was wrang word frae him to her, because my lassie wasna th kind. And he led her to believe that he wad mairry has soon as things were in a mair settled state at hame.

"She believed every word he said, and while she waitin' his convenient time she was doin' her best to herself to be wife to a Dennison. She took music lesso and French lessons, and read the books he telt her abo and gied up some o' her freens, and showed the ither so' her face to a decent chap that was just crazy aboot her

"Syne your son began to cool aff, and, finally, to ma a lang story short, it was a' broken aff. He telt her qu plainly that he had met somebody doon here he liked bett And that's the whole story, except that the day she gi in, like, and had to be ta'en hame in a cab, she had seen yo Airchie at the Central seein' some leddy aff on the Load train. That's a', Lisbeth," concluded Ann Jeffreys, she rose to her feet. "But I made up my mind that t first chance I got I would tell you ot your precious so I ha'e nae grudge against you, for I will say that ye ha never shown me the wrang side o' your face in a' the year I've kent ye. But, though your Airchie may mairry rich and graund wife, he'll no prosper, for the Almich has a wey o' evenin' up things in the lang run, and bai you and me ha'e seen it !"

Mrs. Dennison, too, rose to her feet, and for a mome the two old friends faced each other in a kind of melanche silence.

"Ann," said Mrs. Dennison, in a shaking voice, " if the a' true, you've easy gi'en me the warst day in my life. Ann Jeffreys miled in a kind of faint derision.

"I ha'e aye said ye didna ken what trouble is, Lisber but I thocht ye should ken aboot my lassie. I'm no seek onything aff ye, mind, nor is Mollie. She disna ken I here the day. I'm deid sure she would not ha'e let me con But puir folk ha'e feelin's as weel as rich anes."

At the moment the boudoir door opened, and Janet syne askin' appeared in the doorway, her kind thoughtful face wearing a most contented expression. There was certainly no need to ask whether she was happy in the prospect of the marriage which a good many of her Glasgow friends, including her sister-in-law, characterised as suicidal.

"I beg your pardon, mother. I didn't know there was anybody with you. Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Jeffreys? I hope you are quite well."

"Yes, thank you, Miss Dennison," said Ann, a little

ankwardly, as she shook hands.

There was no more pride about Janet than about her mother, and, on the whole, Mrs. Jeffreys had been agreeably surprised by her reception.

"Tell them to bring up some fresh tea, Jinnat, and, if your father is back frae the hill, tell him Mrs. Jeffreys is here, and ask him to come up."

Janet nodded and disappeared.

"I'm not wantin' to see Mr. Dennison, Lisbeth. You can tell him yoursel', if ye think fit. I'll no wait for my tea, thenk ye kindly. And again I want to say that we're seekin' naething aff either you or your son. Nane o' ye need be feared for a breach, or onything o' that kind. We may be puir folk, but we are not without oor ain pride. We'll dae naething to stop his graund mairriage."

"It's not that, Ann," cried Mrs. Dernison. "D'ye no see that, if a' this is true, Archie is not fit to mairry the splendid woman that has promised to be his wife? If she kent about this, she would never look at him again. And it wad be just what he deserves—nae mair and nae less."

Ann Jeffreys shrugged her shoulders.

"You and me kens fine, Lisbeth—at least I ken—that menfolk seldom get their deserts in this warld. They tak' the best o' every mortal haet, and we get what's left! Ye'll better leave him to Them that dispenses justice. We micht easy mak' a mistake."

The woman entered with the teatray at the moment, and Mrs. Jeffreys, rather against her will, was persuaded to drink a cup. She had some crude idea of the fitness

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Lisbeth, no seekin' ken I'm me come. of things, and she felt that it was hardly fair to br bread in the house whose peace she had come to distur

She consumed her little meal hurriedly, and then t a rather abrupt departure, absolutely declining the of of a drive to the station.

"The walk will do me good, and I'm mair at hame my feet than in a coach. My Doune address—oh, Bons Cottage, Dunblane Road, but I'm no sure whether we be much longer there. Mollie was speakin' aboot Hunt Quay this very mornin'. She seems to be hankerin' exthe sea."

They shook hands a little stiffly, and Ann, considera relieved now that her unpleasant task was accomplish

stepped out briskly towards the station.

Not very far from the lodge gates she met the which was bringing the sportsmen back from the ot side of Glenardle Moor. The three Dennisons were in and two Glasgow friends; and as Ann, in order to ave the high-spirited horses, stepped on to the bank skirt the narrow road, they had all a perfectly good view of his

Hugh, however, was the only one who recognised

by touching his cap.

"Who's that, Hugh?" his father asked in a puzz

voice. "I seem to ken her face."

"It's Mrs. Jeffreys, the monthly nurse," answer Hugh carelessly, at the same time noting the dark cold mounting to his brother's face.

His father, still looking after the retreating figure, notice

nothing.

"I wonder whether she has been up at the hoose? I a pity she did not get a drive to the station, puir body."

Directly he reached the house James Dennison, according to his invariable custom, sought his wife's room. He found her in a state of profound distress.

"What road did ye come, Jimse? Did ye meet A

Jeffreys?"

He replied that they had not long passed her on the roa Then she poured out the story which Mrs. Jeffreys h come to tell. She had been so overwhelmed by it at t r to break disturb. then took the offer

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He found meet Ann

the road. ffreys had it at the moment that she had been able to say very little indeed to Mrs. Jeffreys. But now the flood gates were opened, and her husband was nearly overpowered by the speed and vehemence with which she spoke.

"What are we to do, Jimse? Do you think Isla Mackinnon would ever look at him if she kent? Is it not oor duty to tell her? I'm seein' that puir lassie wastin' awa a' through Archie. Oh, father, surely we havena brocht him up richt!"

James Dennison's face was very stern.

"Some truth there must be in the story, Lisbeth, for Mrs. Jeffreys is a very decent well-livin' woman. And, besides, it was never cleared up about the lassie leavin' Fairburn. I put it very straight to Archie afore he proposed to Isla, and he lookit me in the face and lee'd for a' he was worth. When a man does that you may be sure there's mair at the back. Ann didna say there was onything wrang between them, did she?"

A look of horror at the suggestion crossed Mrs. Denni-

son's face.

"I never speired. But if there had been she surely would ha'e told me. No, no: it's only that the lassie is breakin' her heart aboot Archie, and it's a hard thing baith for her and for her mother. But the question is: What can we do? Can we meddle wi' it at a'? And what aboot Isla?"

James Dennison pondered a moment.

"Ye had better leave this to me, Lisbeth. I'll speak to Archie. Did Mrs. Jeffreys come a' the way from Glasgow to see ye the day?"

"No. They're stoppin' at Doune."

"At Doune !- she and her daughter?" "Ay," answered Mrs. Dennison, and she added the

address.

"I'll jist tak' oot the car and rin doon and see the lassie," he said, with his accustomed promptness. "Care to come, my dear?"

But she seemed to shrink from the ordeal.

"Weel, I'll tak' Archie, and face him wi' the lassie.

We had better get to the bottom o' the thing afore Is comes back. He'll hardly lee to me afore the lassie."

Lisbeth Dennison shivered. She knew that long ste line about her husband's mouth, and what it portended an invincible determination that right should be done any price. She was torn betwixt two emotions—anxie that all should have their due and grief for her boy, wi must now pay part of the price of his folly.

"It winna be a nice thing to do, Jimse," she said faintl

"Nice! There's naething nice about the wrang turning Lisbeth, and the man that tak's it has to pay."

"But ye'll no' be hard on the laddie, Jimse?" pleade

the mother anxiously.

"Hard? I'll do my duty. Maybe we've been own saft wi' him, lass. But I'll certainly be at the bottom o' this afore I sleep."

"Will ye tell Archie whaur ye are gaun, and what for?"

"I'll tell him jist what I think fit. And go he shall Gie me a cup o' tea, Lisbeth, and dinna you bother yoursel

I'll get the thing sorted oot somehoo."

He spoke these consoling words, because he saw that tears were perilously near her eyes. He drank his teap patted her shoulder, and told her to keep her heart up. Then he went off to telephone to the stables for the car and to find Archie.

Mrs. Dennison, the prey of sad and anxious thoughts began to wonder whether they had enjoyed too long a spell of prosperity, and whether, as a family, they had

lately begun to wax fat and to kick.

Presently she heard the hoot of the motor, and a very few moments later saw it drive off with Archie and his father in the seat behind. She could not, however, see Archie's face, and so had no means of knowing in what mood he set out on this strange journey. She felt very uneasy in her mind, wandered out to the landing, through her bedroom and dressing-room, and back again, following in spirit the car and its occupants, and even trying to picture in imagination what might take place in the cottage on Dunblane Road.

Janet, fancying her mother still closeted with her old friend, had not sought to disturb her again, but was busy with her own numerous concerns upstairs. Mabel was spending a few days at Garrion, and the chances were that she would return engaged to its laird. So there was no one to break in on poor Mrs. Dennison's solitude.

But about half an hour after the departure of the car a great surprise befell her. The maid knocked at the door and, with a smiling face, announced that Miss Mackinnon had arrived, and asked if she would bring her up.

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### CHAPTER XXX.

#### THE NAKED TRUTH.

"EH, my bonnie dear!" cried Lisbeth Dennison, as ran to welcome Isla Mackinnon, who had never seen more dear than now, when there was a chance of losing! "Where have ye come from, and what for did ye not me ken ye was on the way home?"

She held her at arm's length, searching her sweet f

with real motherly concern.

Isla smiled a little tremulously.

"I left in a hurry, Mrs. Dennison—the sort of thing I Mackinnon is always doing since her life has lost its me ing and symmetry. I arrived by the mail train last nig Diarmid met me, and we drove the sheltie, getting Creagh about two o'clock in the morning."

"Eh, mercy me! And horses and motors and I men sleepin' by the half-dizzen here! What did ye me by it, lass, and what de ye think Archie will say about it

Isla merely smiled a little distantly, as if the name cal

up some remote memory.

"It was perfectly beautiful. There was a moon on loch, and the peace of it was like a benediction. I am very glad to find you at home and alone. Can we be alo do you think, for an hour or so? I have so much—oh much to say to you!"

"We can be by oorsel's, of course, naething easier. I but to tell Maggie Hastie, my maid, and naebody gets

here."

"Tell her, then, if you please. May I ring?"

"She's jist across the passage," said Mrs. Dennis

as she opened the door, never having quite abandoned the habit of "crying" to the servants.

That satisfactorily accomplished, she came back

anxiously into the middle of the room.

"So ye left Pairis in a hurry? I hope there was naething

wrang wi' you or your freen?"

"Nothing exactly wrong. Only a great many things have happened, that is all-big things, that make a difference in people's lives."

Mrs. Dennison, a simple soul, who had never had occasion to be vexed with the problems of existence, looked only puzzled and anxious as she sat in front of Isla, and observed that her mind seemed to be in a tumult.

"Ay. And ye hae been awa only ten days!"

"Thirteen-to be quite accurate," smiled Isla. did explain about the lady I went to visit, didn't I?"

"Ye told me she was the sister of the man that had had

your place."

Isla nodded. The task she had in front of her was not easy, inasmuch as the woman with whom she had to deal had very little knowledge of the world, though in know-

ledge of the heart she excelled.

"I am so tired talking about myself," she said wearily; "and yet I seem unable ever to stop. I wonder that I have even a single friend left! If I did not tell you I had been engaged to Mr. Rosmead, at least, you knew it," she added suddenly.

"Ye telt me yoursel', my dear." said Mrs. Dennison, and a sort of chill of apprehension gathered about her heart. "I suppose you have come to tell me that you saw him there at his sister's hoose, and that you are goin' to marry

him, after all?"

"I saw him, indeed, and that is why I left in a hurry. But I shall never marry him in this world, Mrs. Dennison, and I have told him so. He came there, not knowing I was in Paris, but in pursuit of a strange, almost unnatural vendetta."

"A what?" asked Mrs. Dennison, in a puzzled voice. "He travelled all the way from America to Paris, seeking

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Dennison,

a man who had wronged him. It was his sister's band, Rodney Payne. It is such a long sad story, Dennison, I don't know that I ought to inflict it on you

"The only bit that concerns me is the bit that conc you," said Mrs. Dennison quaintly. "Tell me jist as n

or as little as ye think fit."

"I must tell you a certain amount," said Isla qui before you will be able to understand. It is surely strangest saddest story in the world. Mr. Rosmead Mr. Rodney Payne were not only brothers-in-law, but were partners in business—engineers and bridge-bui in America."

"Jimse kens the work of the firm," put in Mrs. Denr proudly, "and he says it is good; and he could not ur stand what happened about that particular bridge. It not like the Tay Bridge, he said. It should not ha'e faunless there had been some scampin' o' the wark."

"There was," answered Isla clearly. "Mr. Rosi came to Scotland, leaving the work in the hof Mr. Payne. Though they had quarrelled bit over Mrs. Payne, and she had left her husband and retute to her family, they never for a moment suspected business integrity or honour. But, you see, Mr. Rosi ought not to have left America until the bridge was finite blames himself, and must continue to blame himself for that."

"Well, and what happened?" inquired Mrs. Denr now most intensely interested in the story for its own rather than for any bearing it might have on the happ

or the future of her own family.

"I am coming to it. Mr. Payne wanted his wife He repeatedly tried to induce her to return to him, by would not. Then he determined to be revenged on all, but particularly on his brother-in-law, who, he images stood chiefly in the way of his reconciliation with wife."

"Eh, mercy me! I see what ye are comin' to!' Mrs. Dennison, as she rocked herself a little in her low 'Ye are goin' to tell me that he tampered wi' the

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n' to!" said her low chair. wi' the wark at the brig ooten spite, like, and to bring doon Mr. Rosm . 1, if he could."

Isla nodded drearily.

"That is exactly what happened. Of course, he must have had accomplices, for it was not possible for him to do it unaided or single-handed. But he is a rich man, and, unfortunately, a great many people in this world have their price."

"Oh, puir Mr. Rosmead! But was there naebody to see justice done, to bring the thing hame to the proper quarter?"

"Apparently not. Nothing could be done to him by the Court of Inquiry, because the thing might have been an accident or a visitation of God. They had no proof. But Mr. Rosmead himself knew, and the men who conducted the inquiry plainly gave their opinion. He left the court a ruined, because a suspected, man, with no means of clearing his character. For that reason he gave me back my freedom."

"Weel, and he was within his rights," said Mrs. Dennison

musingly, "and I admire him for it."

But Isla's eyes flashed fire.

"You admire him for that—you, a woman, who knows how much love means to a woman, Mrs. Dennison! Then, I say you are wrong! He had not the right. He ought to have left the choice to me. I was no child, but a woman, who had suffered so much that surely she was able to judge what would be the best for her own happiness and peace. I was no stranger to trouble. It had been my daily bread for years. I would have gone with him to his Court of Inquiry, and stood by his side, and been to him "" woman was meant to be to a man; only he cast me off. And I say he was wrong—wickedly, selfishly wrong—and I have told him so!"

"Then you have seen him?" said Mrs. Dennison.

"Yes, I have—in Paris. I believe that was why I was led to go there. Life is so strange a thing, Mrs. Dennison, that I have come to the conclusion that we have no more power over our destiny than dust which is driven before the wind. It was written in the book of Fate."

"The book of Fate—what's that? If it's the Billye are speakin' aboot, I can tell ye that a' things wo

together for good to them that love Him."

"Ah, to them that love Him!" repeated Isla, with far-away note in her voice. "It is easy for the shelter women to quote Scripture, dear friend, and to find chap and verse for all the happenings of life. I think God I long since forgotten Isla Mackinnon, or else she is expiate in her own person some of the sins of another generation

"My puir bairn!—but tell me mair? Hoo did ye conto meet him in Paris when ye thocht he was in America

"He came on his implacable hunt after his brother-law, whom he had vowed to kill. Now listen, Mrs. Den son, and know how relentless is the march of destin Rodney Payne, whom I never saw, and who, by all account must have been a thoroughly bad man, loved his with all the strength of which he was capable. Have wreaked his poor vengeance on those who, he thought, he parted him from her, he came to Europe in search of he In the Paris streets he was run over by a motor omnib and taken to one of the hospitals, and she was sent for

"The very day she was gone her brother arrived. was alone in the house when he came, and I had to him what had happened. Rodney Payne died the sa

night."

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay," murmured M

Dennison, under her breath.

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### CHAPTER XXXI.

# "I WILL NOT MARRY."

"Before Rodney died he made full confession of his part in the destruction of the bridge," said Isla. "This confession will put Mr. Rosmead right in the eyes of those who were forced to believe him guilty of an almost diabolical disregard of the safety of human life."

"And you?" said Mrs. Dennison wonderingly, her attention immediately diverted to Isla's part in this tragic

history. "What happened after that?"

Isla seemed to hesitate a moment, for the most difficult

part of her story remained to tell.

"We had a long interview. Things were cleared up between us, as far as they are ever likely to be in this world. He thought, Mrs. Dennison, that now the mystery of the bridge was cleared up, and the obstacle between us in a sense removed, nothing remained but for us to join hands and be as we once had been. It filled me with such indignation that I just rose up and left him. Not so will Isla Mackinnon take her place in any man's life. If she is to be useful only as a side wind, ready when the sails are trimmed and other conditions favourable—why then, she will keep her poor battered little boat on the safe waters of Lochearn! And so I told him, and here I am!"

Mrs. Dennison sat very still, pondering things, watching with deep, kind, motherly eyes the pale face of the gallant creature who had been so greatly the sport of an evil fortune, and whose heart was so torn and wearied by it.

"And is that all?" she asked, in a low voice.

"No-not all. The bitterest of all has to be to Though I have said goodbye to him for ever, and thou he is as much out of my life as though I had never met h I shall never be able to put him out of my heart. G for some strange purpose of His own, has ordained t Isla Mackinnon shall care only for one man, and give h of her best. I have tried to give counterfeit presentme of love to others, but it is no use. My eyes are clearer the ever they were, and I am more afraid of marriage now the at any period of my life. I see how terrible it can unless it is built on the only possible foundation. I have come to you, dear woman, to ask you to tell y son. I tried, because of all your sweet kindness, to del myself into the belief that I had found a sure and abid refuge. Perhaps I might have found that refuge, but n the less it would have involved the doing of a great wro For marriage is a terrible thing, unless men and wor bring to it all that they have to give. I have nothing the husks to offer your son, or to any man. Peter Rosm has had all, and so, for right's sake, Isla Mackinnon go unmarried to her grave."

There was a moment's dread silence, and Isla wonder that her news, which she had believed would give general grief to the heart of her kind friend, should be received

quietly.

She had not dared to look at her while she was utter the last sentences; but now, casting a swift glance at I she suddenly knelt by her side and hid her face on her And the kind motherly hand touched the bright h but no word passed Lisbeth Dennison's lips for a long ti

At last she spoke.

"It is the Lord's will, my dear. We maun leave He is leadin' ye by His ain wey, and it will be to peac dinna doot. We maun leave it."

Isla gave a little shuddering sigh, and dried her tear

eyes.

"Then you don't hate no? You will not put me of your heart altogether? I have behaved badly. I tempted by the flesh-pots of Egypt, and I am filled v

shame. You would do right and well to put me out of the house."

"That I will never dae, my dear—God forbid that I should!" said Mrs. Dennison, and kissed her cheek.

Then Isla rose to her feet and began to draw on her gloves.

"Then will you tell your son, or shall I? Don't think I shirk the task. Only, it might be easier for him not to meet me."

"I will tell him mysel'," said Lisbeth, and her voice dropped to a soundless whisper.

For a moment the temptation was strong upon her to tell Isla of the just cause and impediment with which even at the moment Archie's father was dealing, but she refrained. No mother worthy of the name likes to cheapen her son in the eyes of the world, or even of the individual. So Lisbeth Dennison held her peace.

But after Isla had slipped away, declining all offers of refreshment or of swift conveyance back to Achree, she sat for a long time pondering on the strange weaving of the web of destiny and the searching issues of that day. Never in all her peaceful ordered life had such a fateful day rent the inner recesses of her quiet soul, but in the midst of her sharp anxiety she could yet stay her soul on God, believing that He was working behind the cloud.

While this momentous interview was taking place at Dunmohr another, equally momentous, was in progress in the little rose-covered cottage on the Dunblane Road.

Archie gathered from his father's face that something had occurred to upset him, but not a word was spoken as the swift motor covered the miles between Glenardle and the pretty little town. Of the actual state of affairs Archie had not the smallest conception, for his father spoke no word to enlighten him. He supposed it was some business concern that troubled him, and, observing his father's mood, he forebore to question him. There were certain moods in James Dennison, as in many another big-hearted man, which those about him did not question.

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When the motor glided up before the cottage Archie looked the surprise he felt.

"Who lives here, and why have we stopped?" he as But as the words left his lips they seemed to freeze u them, for there suddenly appeared round the gable of the house a slight figure in a white frock with a knitted coat over it-Mollie Jeffreys!

She went all white at sight of the two men at the g and Archie reddened furiously, and looked at his fa

with a sudden fire of hostility in his eyes.

"I don't call this fair!" he said thickly. "In f it's rottenly unfair! I won't go in."

His father laid a firm hand on his arm.

"Ay, you'll go in, my man," said the stern old Puri "It's only one question I have to ask Miss Jeffreys. there's naething to be ashamed o' ye needna be feared.'

The door was open. Mollie had already disappear Her mother was not yet back from Balquhidder, wh she had had to wait an hour for her train. A moment la the trio were facing one another in the little sitting-roo where the evening meal was spread.

"Good evening, Miss Jeffreys," said Mr. Denni quietly. "We have had a visit from your mother afternoon. I suppose she is not back yet? This is son ye ken, I suppose. I have brought him, against will, as ye can see, jist to ask for my ain satisfaction w

question."

Mollie stood still, fingering the tablecloth, her eyes little wild and troubled. For a moment not a word she speak.

"I had no idea my mother had gone to Dunmohr," said at last. "If she had let me know she had it in l mind, I would have prevented her, Mr. Dennison. I seeking nothing off you or your son."

"I understand that, my lass. But ye will answer wan question-indeed, I demand it. Was it on my so

account you left Fairburn?"

After a moment's hesitation she answered. "Well, partly."

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ohr," she l it in her son. I'm

nswer me my son's "He has promised ye marriage, I suppose?"

"Well," she repeated steadily, "supposing he had?" It was a curious answer, that had in it a touch of defiance. It was noticeable that she made it after a swift clear glance at Archie Dennison's face, which gave her an insight into the misery of his soul.

"He has broken that promise and thereby hurt you?"

pursued the old man in his most judicial voice.

"Oh, no," she answered clearly. "It was a kind of mutual agreement, Mr. Dennison. We met to talk it over—do you remember that night, Archie?—and we agreed that we never would have suited each other. If you mind, I said, I think, I would not marry you if you were the last man in the world."

Archie Dennison suddenly lifted his head, realising in a flash what kind of a woman Mollie Jeffreys was, and the magnitude of the treasure he had cast aside. For both her words and her attitude, but particularly the latter, indicated that she meant to stand by and snield him from his father's righteous wrath. It was a thing without precedent in his experience, and it raised and exalted all women for him forthwith. For, though she belonged to the world of working-women, she was a nobler creature, in her way, even than Isla Mackinnon, whose sacrifice had been thrust upon her, while Moilie deliberately chose the better way.

Mr. Dennison, greatly puzzled, looked from the one to the other, not knowing what to make of this unexpected development of an affair which, in his inmost soul, he had loathed, and which he had vowed to see to its righteous conclusion, whatever it cost himself or his son. But though he was a master of men, James Dennison had to learn, in that very moment, that he could not in any way be the arbiter of destiny. That is, and will ever be, reserved for the highest, who steps in at the very moment when the creatures He has made are at their wits' end. Their extremity is His opportunity.

"I know the kind of story my mother has carried to Dunmohr," said Mollie, and a faint smile crept to her

proud lips. "But you've got to remember that I'm all has, and that, if my wee finger aches, she's in a ferm It worried me for a while, Mr. Dennison—that much I n admit—but it's what a woman has to look for when she when she—lets a man interfere with her life. I've had lesson; so please don't look angry any more. An hope Mr. Arc hie will be very happy with his bride. We been hearing a lot about her since we came to Doune."

I'm all she a ferment. such I must when she—'ve had my re. And I de. We've Doune."

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## NEIL DRUMMOND'S LOVE AFFAIR.

MR. DENNISON turned rather helplessly to his son.

"What have you to say for yourself, Archie. Miss Jeffreys does not appear to blame you. Ye have heard what she says, as I have. I confess that it's beyond me,

and she has left me without a word to say."

"It's permissible for folk to change their minds," said Mollie, with a slight affectation of gaiety, "and surely it is better to change beforehand. The biggest trouble is when folk find out when it's too late that they've married the wrong man or woman."

"There's something at the back of this, my woman," said Mr. Dennison, with a shrug of his shoulders. "And we've come on a fool's errand seemingly. Have ye nothing

to say, Archie?"

"I have this to say," said Archie, in a full voice, and his eyes had an odd look in them as they swept Mollie Jeffreys's pale brave face; "I've behaved like a cad. I own it, and, though there is a grain of truth in what she says, it's only a grain. I feel as cheap and mean as I am, but from the bottom of my heart I respect and honour you."

He bowed low to her and, without a glance at his father,

passed out of the house.

Then James Dennison turned with a sort of eager humility to the girl, who stood, slight and pale, but ap-

parently composed, beside the table.

"My dear, you have got the better of us, I confess. After what you have said, I haven't a word. But you have shamed my son. May it make him a better man. May I put one more question to you?"

She inclined her head, but did not speak. Alread strain of the brief interview was telling, and she inv

prayed for his swift departure.
"Was there ever on whing bets

"Was there ever onything between you that we that would—vex the heart o' the woman my son ho marry? She is above the cammon, and I would not

her vexed after-you understand?"

"There was nothing but a bit of foolish fun, Mr. Den What has happened to me is as common as the risin the setting of the sun, and will be as long as men are they are. I'm not even sorry that it happened. dreamed a foolish dream, maybe, and it's over, but all. It's not going to break or even bend me! So your mind easy, Mr. Dennison, and do nothing to sto marriage or vex the lady's heart. And leave Archie as the has had his lesson, and I want no unhappiness to to him through me."

Mr. Dennison was deeply moved by this appeal.

"My dear," he said, and he took both her hands clasped them warmly in his grasp, "I canna tell ye w feel. I won't forget it, nor will his mother when she is of it. Ye are fine! I wish there were mony mair lik for it's you and such as you that keep men in the wey. Goodbye the noo. But we'll meet againmust! I was fell pleased wi' the daughter my son we give me, my dear, but—but at this moment I could it had been you!"

Mollie answered not at all save by the starting She walked with him to the door, still smiling bravely,

stood while he got into the waiting car.

"Mr. Archie has walkit on, sir," said the chauft and Mr. Dennison nodded, took off his hat, and wa bare-headed till the car had swept round the corner and cottage was out of sight.

When they made up with Archie, swinging along road like one in hot pursuit, they drew up silently, and

jumped into his seat.

But no word, good, bad, or indifferent, did father and speak to each other as they sped towards Dunmohr.

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The whole affair had not occupied more than an hour and a half, and as they turned sharply in at the loch side to make for home, Isla Mackinnon, driving in the little cart with the shaggy sheltie between the shafts, passed them with a slight bow and smile.

There was something about her remote, inaccessible, distant as the stars. And both felt, though they had no knowledge of how it had come about, that, so far as the dear and intimate relations of life are concerned, she had passed wholly beyond their touch or ken.

Drummond of Garrion, with the lover's light in his eye, rode over the steep ascent of Glenogle on a September afternoon.

The little lodge on the Moor of Silence was his goal, and it was Isla Mackinnon he had come to see. But the love-light was not for her, nor did she occupy much, of his thought. An odd idea of chivalry—of something owing to the friend of his youth, to the woman who had first show im the reality of life, had inspired the ride which we are ing him to her side.

It was the second week of the shooting, so far as Achree was concerned, and Neil had a fanciful idea that he would like to speak to Isla up there in the silence, where he had once bidden her so bitter a goodbye.

It was a day of autumn's heavenliest, most benignant mood. The glow had gone off the heather in places, though here and there a great purple patch would shine like an amethyst in the sun. The clear crispness of the air was as rare wine, and the beauty of the scenes in which his life had been passed struck with a fresh note of joyfulness upon Neil Drum, and's soul. He, too, had had his dark days, but, so far a human vision could foresee, they were over, and happiness was within his grasp.

He made a gallant figure on horseback, and when Isla, busy tying up the spare rose tree which grew about the door, preparatory to leaving it for the winter, saw him come, she smiled kindly and with a real welcome in eyes.

When he rode up the stony path she was ready w

hands outstretched.

"Now, this is good, Neil!" she said, "for it is alm teatime, and somehow the heart of a woman seems fail her when she has to drink tea by herself. I beli that is at the bottom of most of the tea-drinkings wh from time immemorial, have been hurled in reproach our heads!"

She spoke gaily, as if care and she had par

company.

"I will walk with you to the stable, for I am with Diarmid and Margaret to-day. I will give you a hunc guesses to tell me where they are, sure that you will not come up with the right one."

He cast the reins over his arm, and, glancing at smooth cheek and serene expression, he decided that

had never seen her look so well.

"I've never guessed anything in my life," he answe flatly. "It comes of being born without imagination

"Nobody born in Balquhidder is without imagination The trouble with all the Glens is that there is imaginate working under every heather bank and every bir bush. But surely you'll have a try at the Diarmid Margaret problem? It would be quite worth while.'

"Well, perhaps they've gone to get married," he s

speeding a bow at a venture.

She stood still, and looked at him, astonished.

"Somebody has let the cat out of the bag, Neil! you needn't pretend to the second sight."

He stood still.

"Isla, you don't mean that these old fossils have actu

been and gone and done it!"

"They're doing it now, at this very moment, I believe in Mr. Macfadyen's study," she said with a glance at watch bracelet; "and afterwards they are to catch four o'clock train for Glasgow, and off to London to-mor to pay a honeymoon visit to Agnes Fraser!"

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"Ha, ha!" laughed Neil so loud and long that Isla

at last was obliged to join in.

"I don't see what there is to laugh at, Neil, though your laughter i nfectious," she said at last. "I'm sure it's an excellent arrangement, and it may at least put an end to their bickering. It got so terrible after we came up here that I had to have them in and threaten them with expulsion."

"Suggesting matrimony as the final remedy," said Neil, still choking with laughter. "This will do for Aunt Betty's supper. She sometimes says there's nothing left to laugh at in the world, and that laughter is the

medicine we need."

They entered the open stable door, and Isla herself went into the stall to see whether there was a tasty bite for the horse. Neil stopped a moment to rub him down, washed his hands thereafter in a half bucket of water, and then they turned together once more to the sun.

In the open space before the stable door Neil stood and

looked at her a moment with an odd wistfulness.

"Isla, let us go on the Moor. I want to speak to you,

and this is a day when there is no room in houses."

She nodded, and they stopped behind a little wooden shed. The next moment their feet were on the heather, and the Moor of Silence, vast and deep and brooding, lay before their eyes.

When Neil spoke again it was just to blurt out—for he was a man of no embroideries of speech or thought—the

whole errand on which he had come.

"Isla, I wanted to tell you myself that I am going to

marry Mabel Dennison."

"Yes, Neil," answered Isla, and he was unable to guess from the tone of her voice how the news affected her, if at all.

"It was only settled yesterday, and I didn't want you to hear it from any chance person. We are to be married in the spring."

"I am glad, Neil—very glad," said Isla at last, and he saw her struggling with her tears. "God bless you and

her. She's a dear thing, and you will be very happy. am very, very glad!"

But she offered him no hand, and her cheek was for the

moment turned away.

"I thought I would like to tell you here, Isla, where we stood together that ghastly day when I thought the wor was falling to pieces, and I want to tell you, too, that though Mabel has given me back what I thought I had lost I shall never, never forget you! Mabel knows. I to her every single thing about you, for no man has the rig to take a young creature like that into his life and ke any closed door with her. God bless her, there has never been any other man, and I am not worthy the whot treasure of her young heart!"

"Oh, yes, yes! You are, Neil! You are the bethe very best! I want to tell you, only I can't find right words, that it is men like you who keep the woright. In all the years I have known you—and someting it seems very long—I have never known you do a men unkind action or speak a word that was not right and go That is a great record for a man, Neil Drummond, a Mabel will be a happy woman. She is a creature born happiness, and I am glad that the sun has arisen or

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## A WEDDING IN PROSPECT.

A WEEK or two more, and Isla was settled for the winter in Achree with Diarmid and Margaret—whose bickerings were now at least legalised by the marriage service—and, keeping herself fully occupied, was apparently happy and contented.

On the seventeenth of November, at the earnest request of the Dennisons, she attended the marriage of Janet and her minister at the West End church in Glasgow, where an immense congregation assembled to witness the ceremony. Mrs. Hugh was in her element that day, as the reception took place at Highfield, and her two beautiful children, in picturesque suits, were Janet's train-bearers.

Something much quieter and less ostentatious would have been more in keeping with the taste of both bride and groom; but, reflecting that they would have plenty of obscurity by and by, they endured the fierce light of that exhausting day with a courage and a cheerfulness which left people in no doubt as to their happiness.

Isla arrived a little late, attired in a sweeping gown of black velvet and an ermine stole that had been her mother's, and which her own clever fingers had modelled in keeping with the prevailing fashion, thrown about her shoulders to give a touch of relief. She was far and away the most distinguished-looking woman in the church, and many inquired who she was. It gave Lisbeth Dennison a distinct pang that she could not answer proudly that it was the future Mrs. Archibald.

Yet she, too, was in church, though not as an invited guest, and nobody saw her or asked who she was.

At the close of the ceremony, while they were waiting for the bridal party to come out of the vestry, Archie rose valiantly from his seat and stepped back to the pew where Isla sat alone.

"How do you do?" he said quietly, and Isla, with a

beautiful frank smile, gave him a warm, kind hand.

"I am so glad you got back from America in time. Your

mother was afraid you wouldn't."

"I arrived yesterday. I had to see the last of old Jen," he answered steadily. "You are quite well, hope?"

"Oh, very! Do you know that this is absolutely the first wedding I've ever been at in my life, and I am thirty

one years of age? Incredible, isn't it?"

"Pretty slow functions, as a rule, aren't they?" h suggested, as he thrust one hand in his pocket and assume an easier attitude.

He had rather dreaded meeting Isla, and now it was a so easy and so much more pleasant than he had anticipated

By tacit consent, as it were, neither referred in the smallest degree to that brief midsummer madness whe for the space of three weeks, they had been apparent on the highway to matrimony.

"Here they come!" said Archie, as the organ struck u "Looks well, doesn't 't? Poor old Whitehead has got

grip of himself again! Nice kids, aren't they?"

"Angels," said Isla, and a strange hungry look leap in her eyes as the beautiful little satin-robed figures sp past her, wonder and importance visible in their b shining, childish eyes.

"May I have the honour of taking you out for a lang syne?" he asked, and Isla, with a nod and a sm

laid her fingers on his arm.

And at the door Archie saw Mollie Jeffreys in her corn and his eyes met hers in a quiet steady look. After had placed Isla in one of the carriages he murmured so thing about seeing to some of the other guests, and he w back to the church porch and waited till Mollie had co out of the crowd.

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After he ured somend he went had come Then, at her approach, he lifted his hat, shook hands with her quietly, and spoke.

"Can I come and see you to-night at your mother's

house?"

"If you wish," she answered faintly, being a little startled. "I would not have come to-day only I heard you were in America, and so didn't expect to see you."

"It's just as well. I'll be there about eight. No—there's no dinner after the wedding. They're all going down to Dunmohr by the seven train. Goodbye just now."

He pressed her fingers, and she sped away with her heart beating strangely. She felt that her pride ought to have helped her more, that she ought to have said she would not be at home to Archie Dennison that night, or any other night. Only her woman's heart pleaded for him, and her natural curiosity made her eager to know what he had to say to her.

Many people were pleased with Archibald Dennison at the wedding reception that afternoon, and exchanged remarks as to how he had improved, how handsome he was, and how proud his father and mother must be of him.

About four o'clock Isla excused herself and said goodbye. She wanted to see Cattanach before leaving Glasgow, and she had no great desire to travel in company with the Dennisons, though she would not shirk doing so, if it could not be avoided. She felt, however, that that was a family day, and that even an intimate friend must keep on the outside.

Her heart was a little empty and sad, however, as she alighted from the Kelvinside car at St. Vincent Place, and began to walk towards the lawyer's office. The sight of happiness had chilled her a little by contrast, and Neil Drummond's devotion to his own sweetheart had left her entirely out in the cold.

She was walking, looking straight before her, when some one stepped from the middle of the road to the kerb, and stopped right in front of her—and she beheld Peter Rosmead. She went white, and then red, and stretched

out a piteous hand. For it was of him she was thinking at the moment, and it seemed uncanny that he should materialise before her in such strange fashion.

"You!" she said faintly. "What are you doing here? He drew her back from the throng, and they stood ju

for a moment in the shelter of a friendly doorway.

"I am sailing for America in a few days. I felt couldn't go without coming back to Scotland. I dor

know what brought me. I suppose it was you."

She had no answer ready, and he touched her velve sleeve and looked straight under the brim of the brim velvet hat which crowned her noble head like the diade

of a queen.

"You are in gala attire, surely?"

"Yes. I have been at a wedding—one of the Denniso of Dunmohr, don't you know?"

"And where are you going now?"

"I was at the present moment on my way to Mr. Catanach's office, and I am going down to Balquhidder the seven o'clock train."

He stood silent a moment, and something burned in leyes—a steady fire, which she felt beginning to infuitself into her own veins.

"May I come?" he asked.

"I can't prevent your going to Balquhidder, if y wish," she said faintly. "But is it wise? It is very coand bleak down there just now."

"Will you let me take you somewhere to tea?—enga

a car, and drive you all the way?"

"In a motor, you mean?" she asked.

"Yes. Do—do you remember? Give me anothe memory to carry back to America. I haven't had mu happiness in my life. Probably in future I shall have excless. It is the last thing I shall ask of you probable Grant it?"

"I'm mad, but I can't say no," she answered, and a lit

sigh that was pure joy fluttered from her lips.

He signed to a passing cab, put her in, and drove to nearest hotel, where he ordered a sumptuous tea, a

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made arrangements for a car of high power and complete luxury to be ready for them within the hour.

At seven o'clock, just as the Glasgow folk were getting into the train at the Central and looking out rather anxioulsy for her, they alighted at the door of Achree. Then Isla thought of how silent they had been all the way. The words that had passed between them could have been counted on the fingers of one hand.

When Diarmid opened the door to them he nearly dropped with sheer fright and amazement; but Rosmead reassured him with a friendly shake of the hand.

Together Isla and he passed into the library, and the door was shut, and they faced each other. Then Rosmead spoke in a voice which vibrated with all the passion of his soul.

"Isla, I am at your feet! My deepest heart, my best self, has been there since the first moment I saw you here in this very place. Are we to be parted because I made a mistake, because I was so wickedly cruel and wrong? No, no, no! A thousand times no! You belong to me yet; I felt when we met to-day that something in your eyes leaped to mine. My darling, don't let anything part us. Forgive me and come to me!—let me take you away with me, home to my mother, and—let us make our life together!"

She looked at him—a long look of piteous appeal, then went to him blindly, and was gathered to his heart.

A week later all the little world that was interested in Isla Mackinnon was startled by this brief announcement in the daily papers:—

"In London, on the twenty-seventh inst., by special licence, Hylton P. Rosmead, of Carleton, Virginia, U.S.A., to Isla Moncrieff, only daughter of the late General Mackinnon, C.B., V.C., of Achree and Creagh in Glenogle."

