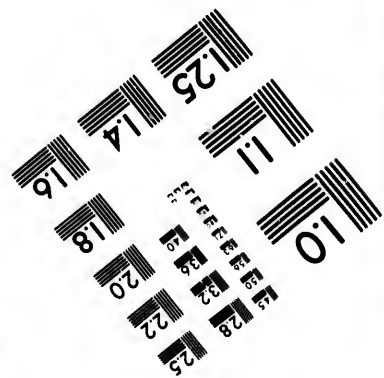
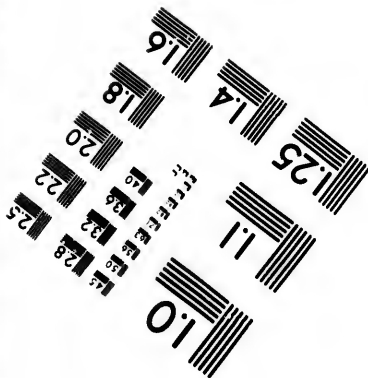
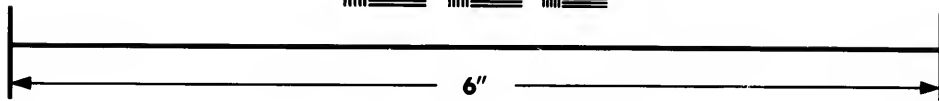
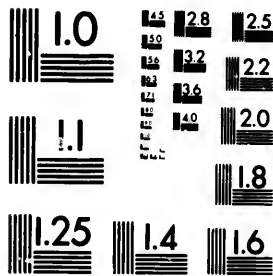


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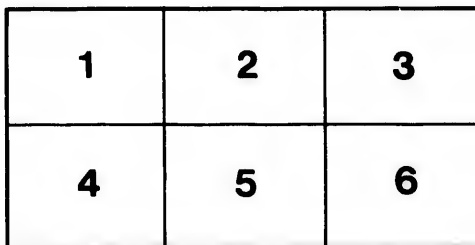
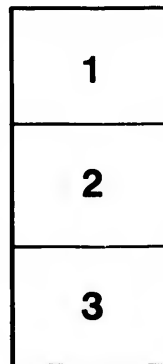
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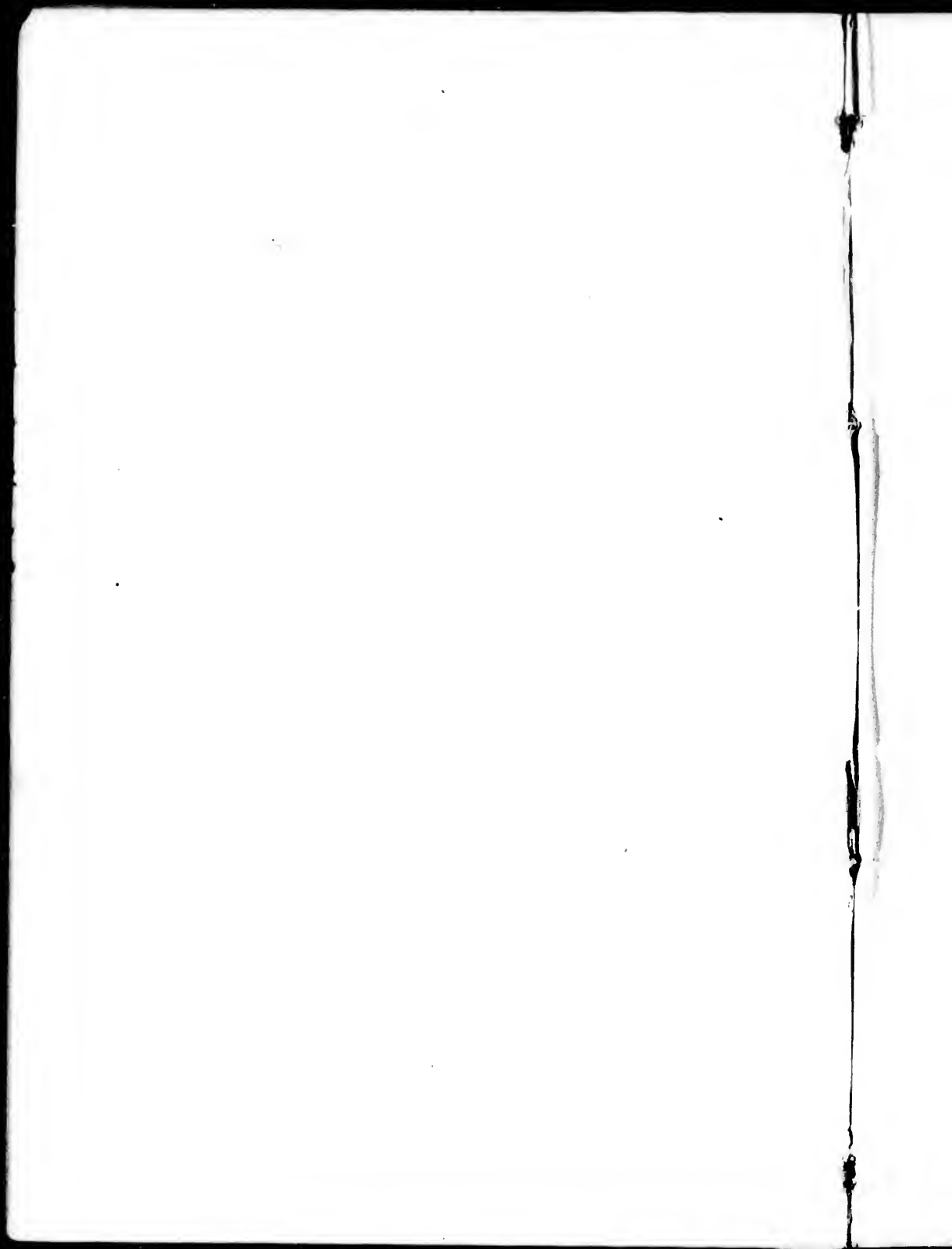
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*Toronto Sep<sup>r</sup> 1875-*

WHAT WILL THE WORLD SAY?



*E. H. White*

WHAT WILL THE WORLD SAY? T

**A** Nobel.

By CHARLES GIBBON,

AUTHOR OF "IN HONOUR BOUND," "ROBIN GRAY," ETC., ETC.



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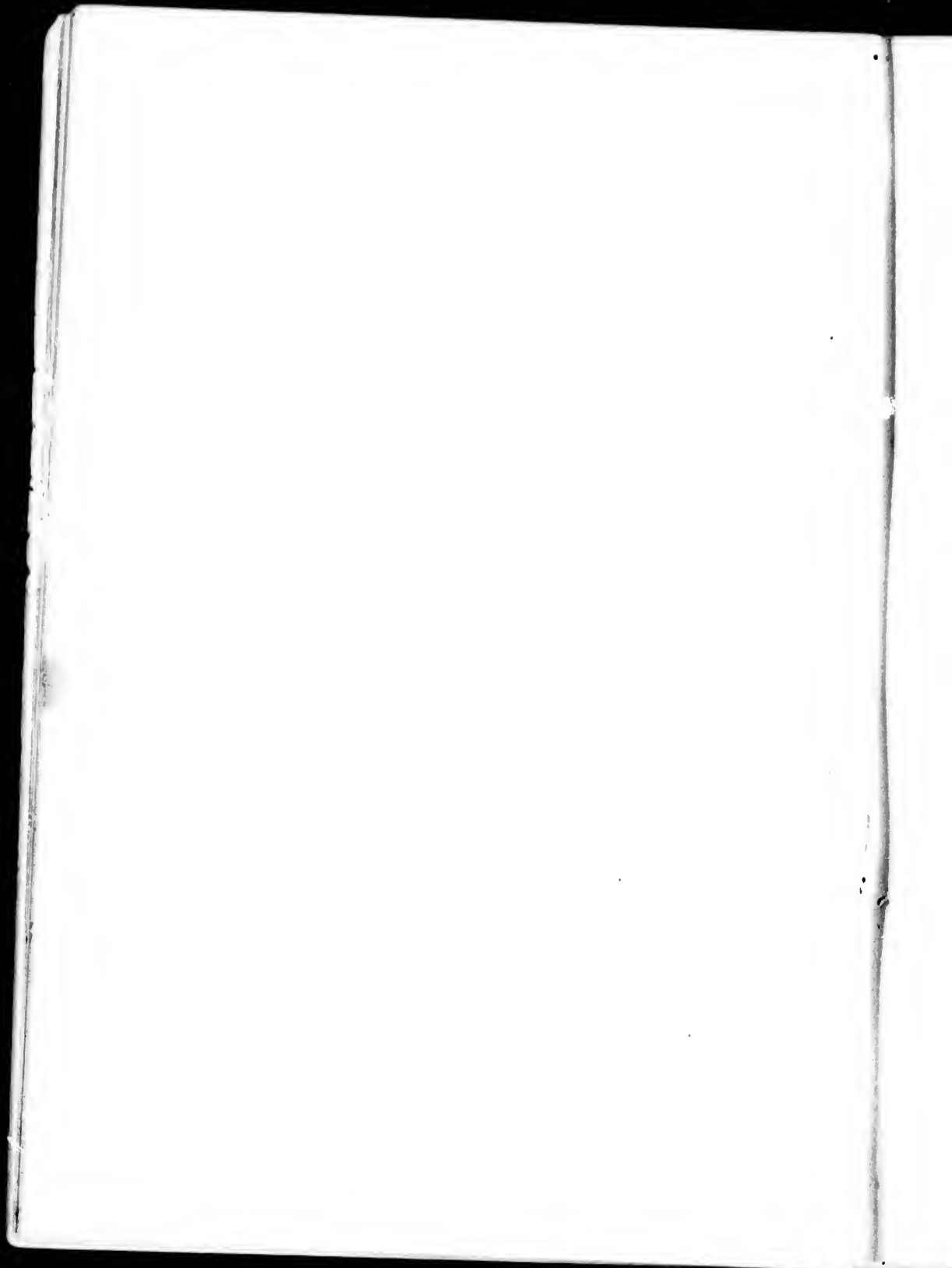
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# WHAT WILL THE WORLD SAY?

## CHAPTER I.

### BLACKBERRIES.

THE blithe laughter of three merry young hearts harmonized grandly with the chorus of birds which filled the bossy glen with sweet sounds. A light wind swept through the trees, and tiny flocks of brown leaves floated waveringly down upon the heads of the merry-makers.

They, unheeding, gambolled through bush and brake, now up to the knees in long grass or huge ferns, again scrambling up some bare scarp towards a group of brambles; now together, again separated, and their clear voices rang through the glen, hallooing to one another. They were gathering blackberries, and whenever one came upon a particularly fine cluster of the bright jet-like fruit, there was such a shout of triumph, and the three united to pluck the prize—eating quite as many of the berries as were transferred to the tin cans which they carried in their hands.

“Bess, Bess—Austin, come here,” called a happy voice; “here’s a bush just black with berries!”

That was followed by a little scream, and then the explanation—

“Oh, I’ve pricked my thumb.”

Austin sprang up a steep bank and was presently beside the girl, holding her hand in his, seriously seeking the cause of her pain. He pressed the thumb between his fingers till she winced, then laughed at her rueful grimaces, and said—

“There’s nothing in it.”

She was offended by his laugh, and briskly withdrew her hand. He snatched it back and kissed the wound.

"You are very impudent," she said, trying to release the hand, but failing.

"Poor thumb," he said, with a half-serious, half-mock sentimental air, "it's better now. 'Who kissed the part to make it well?— my Austin.'"

"You are a fine doctor," she said, laughing.

"First rate," was the frank acceptance of the compliment ; "seeing that you are now all right."

They stood under the shadow of a high beech, on the bole of which the sunlight made a silver shield. She a girl of about sixteen, only very recently elected to the dignity of long dresses ; he a youth of eighteen or nineteen, still a student at the Glasgow University, a boy in experience of the world, and full of all a boy's manly, confident aspirations. She a bonnie lass, with a fresh rosy face, rich brown eyes, thick fair hair, and a lithesome although unformed figure ; he a youth of good proportions, dark-brown hair, and blue eyes.

They were beautiful in the sunrise of youth, and happy in their ignorance of life.

Pleasant visions were in the eyes of both, and the present was a very sweet time to them—they did not know how sweet until years afterwards when they looked back to it and longed for the same feeling of perfect frankness, perfect fearlessness, and perfect faith in the future. Those old days make up so much of the joy and sadness of our lives ! The time always comes when we see how much of the delights of youth we failed to appreciate, because we were so eager for the serious business of the world to begin.

She had no idea of what love was, but she was curious on the subject. She thought Austin—the son of Doctor Murray, of Airbridge—a very nice fellow. She was pleased when he came to Ravelston—her uncle's place—and delighted to have a holiday with him such as the present. She was kind to him a little, and teased him a great deal, for which she was sorry after. But there were times when she felt shy, afraid that he would kiss her—and wished that he would do it, just to know the difference between the formal kiss of an uncle or cousin and a lover's.

She had not at all, however, settled in her own mind that he was the hero (a lover must be a hero, she fancied) who would

be worthy of the entire devotion of which love consisted—that idea of devotion was another of her fancies.

Austin, on the other hand, was quite decided. He was in love. There was never and never could be any living creature at all comparable to Coila Gardyne. But he had fears; she was the niece of Robert Marjoribanks, the wealthy owner of many coal and iron mines, and he might object.

Then he had hopes; she was an orphan, living with her uncle and dependent upon him. She had no money herself. Well, if she should ever learn to care for him enough to permit him to tell Marjoribanks that she was resolved to marry him at all hazards—the uncle would be in a towering passion, and would say: “Do as you please, but you shall not have a penny from me.” Austin, at that, would fling his cap into the air and clasp her in his arms, crying:

“That’s what I wished, my darling. I’ll work for you; I’ll make a home for you—not so grand as Ravelston, but a cosy wee place where we shall be happy because we love each other!”

Sweet dreams! beautiful romances, in which the delicate lights and shades of the glen, the many colours of leaves, bushes, grass, ferns, and wild flowers, seemed to have a part; and the melodies of the birds were like cheery voices inspiring hope.

But the fears broke in again; it would be such a long time—four, five, may be ten years—before he could say: “Coila, I love you; will you be my wife?”

There were so many things to be done before he dared put that question, and meanwhile so many things might happen. Old Marjoribanks might find a husband for her, give her a dowry, and dispose of her before he could step in to stop the proceedings. And then what would there be left for him?

“A blackberry for your thoughts,” said a laughing voice, and he started from his reverie.

“I was thinking about you,” he answered, his eyes brightening, the dreams vanishing, leaving him only conscious of the happy present.

“There’s your blackberry; now what were you thinking of me—anything ill?”

“I’m not sure; it is good or ill just as may please you. I

was thinking that some day you would see me marching up to you with a very meek air and saying, 'Hey, bonnie lassie, will you, will you go to be a doctor's wife?' What would you say?"

"I should say," she answered, continuing the old song he had paraphrased, "'and to feed your father's hens'—no, thank you."

She made a mock curtsey, and looked so bonnie that he was sorely tempted to kiss her. But it seemed as if an ice-drop had fallen upon his brow, and he laughed with her, saying—

"It's just my fun, you know; but let me call you my sweet-heart for to-day—may be I shall never dare to call you so again."

The last words were delivered in rather a serious tone, and she felt vexed with herself at the thought that she had given him pain.

"Call me what you like," she said, with merry bashfulness, "but don't look so glum."

"Did I look glum?—it was the shadow of the tree. Do you think I heed what you say?"

But at the same time he had caught her hands, and was drawing her towards him, maliciously intent upon punishing her with a kiss.

"Where's Bess?" she cried, and was sorry for it the next minute, because a head rose out of the midst of the brambles, and it said, demurely—

"I'm here."

Coila and Austin laughed and blushed; both knew that every word they had spoken had been overheard. But he was a bold fellow, and met every emergency with an honest acknowledgment of the situation.

"What a witch you are, Bess."

"That's because I happen to be where I'm not wanted."

"Wrong this time; I want you here."

"What for?"

"To help me to punish Coila."

"I'll come."

He forced his way through the brambles, and assisted Bess out to the clearing in which Coila stood.

"Thank you," said Bess, quietly, and placing her can of

blackberries on the ground, she slipped behind her cousin, and suddenly pinioned her arms to her sides. "Now punish her."

Coila struggled, but failed to release herself from the strong grasp which held her.

Austin stood confused and hesitating.

"Punish her," repeated Bess, resolutely.

Austin stepped forward, but Coila regarded him with such a look of helpless appeal that he stopped.

"No, Bess, we'll let the culprit off this time; but the next——"

He looked unutterable vengeance; but just as at odd times you see a black bar crossing the clear face of the moon, there appeared to be a black bar across his face; he felt that Coila did not care for him at all.

Bess released her prisoner with the quiet comment—

"What fools you are!"

And they felt that they were fools under the steady, almost scornful gaze of the brilliant black eyes of Bess Marjoribanks.

She had been born in the East, the daughter of an Indian woman, and her maternal parentage was evident in her dusky complexion, piercing black eyes, and jet black hair, but it was still more apparent in the occasional fits of passion, in which she seemed to be capable of any desperate deed—in which she would even set her father at defiance.

Whether Robert Marjoribanks had been married to her mother or not was a question. There were queer stories in the district about Bess's mother; some said that the poor woman finding her husband about to sail for England, taking the child with him but leaving the mother behind, had stolen on board the vessel and only showed herself when they were far at sea. But she had died upon the passage to England, and there were not wanting people to suggest the wild idea that Marjoribanks, ashamed to acknowledge such a wife at home, had poisoned her. This was, of course, no more than ridiculous and spiteful scandal. Robert Marjoribanks had been too successful in life—and was even too good natured to spoil his peace of mind by a crime.

He brought his daughter home, and he presented her everywhere as the legitimate heiress of his wealth, which was growing vast and more vast year by year, and day by day.

When his sister died, a year after her husband, he had given her on her death-bed a willing pledge that he would be a father to her child. He took Coila to his house, and in every respect she had been treated as a child of his own, equal to Bess in everything, and, indeed, Mrs. Forbes, the housekeeper, sometimes fancied that he actually cared more for his niece than for his own daughter.

Bess was about two years older than her cousin ; tall, dark, beautiful, her eyes flashed upon you with a magnetic power which was irresistible ; and yet whilst you yielded to it, there was a something which made the heart tremble with fear, like the seduction of sleep in the snow, which means death. She was full of mirth and brightness ; yet there were depths of passion in her nature which, once aroused, would overwhelm all that opposed it, or she would die. At present these depths had not been sounded ; she was merry and kindly ; angry at times, and had once heaved a Lennie's grammar at the head of her governess because she had upbraided her for a task over which Bess had laboured hard.

She had an unfortunate repute of being cunning—that was why Austin and Coila had at once concluded, upon her sudden appearance, that she had been listening to their conversation. But she was a warm friend, and faithful to the last degree to those who trusted her.

Coila, clapping her hands with delight in being set free, turned to her cousin :

“Now, we'll punish him, Bess. Come, seize him, and we'll paint his face with berries. What shall we paint ?”

“A moustache and beard !” answered Bess, without hesitation.

Austin winced, he had so longed for such appendages that the jest about the absence of them struck closer home than the lady imagined. However, he submitted with a good grace ; sat down on a green knoll, and the two girls, laughing immoderately all the time, painted, with the juice of the berries, a beautiful red moustache, beard, and whiskers on his boyish face.

When they drew back to enjoy the sight of their handiwork, he submitted to the gaze quite calmly. Then—

“Are you done ?” said he.

“Quite done, and you do look so funny,” answered Coila, gleefully.

"Very well," said he, rising gravely, "and now I shall walk arm in arm with you both to Ravelston, just as you have painted me."

The girls laughed, not believing him; quite boldly each took one of his arms, and they descended the side of the glen, the strange perfume of the woods rising around them.

Under the trees there was only a dark red mould, but elsewhere there was the fox-glove rearing tall stalks, slender and straight, with the pink bells drooping like bashful fairies blushing at the intrusion of man upon their sylvan retreat; bluebells struggling to lift their heads above the dense long grass; the rich green floor sparkling with the tiny stars, forget-me-nots, pink lobelias, and purple clover; brown leaves floating about, or collected in heaps in odd corners, whither the wind had drifted them to decay in odorous moisture.

Then they passed through the mysterious light under the trees, like the dim light in a cathedral crypt, emerging into an open space where the sunlight flashed upon the scene, making the shadows of the place darker and more felt. Opposite were dull grey rocks rearing bare faces amidst the profuse and dank vegetation.

For a short cut they wished to cross the wimpling stream, which, with a face bright as a mirror's, traversed the glen. The stepping stones were green and slimy, so Austin stepped into the water, ankle deep or a little more, gave his hand to Bess and she crossed fleetly.

"But you'll never get out of that pool, and you'll have such a cold," said Coila, pausing in her passage; as she paused her foot slipped, and she fell into his arms.

"All right" shouts he, manfully, and unconsciously hugging her more closely than was necessary; "you're safe; I've got you. Place your foot on the stone and with one step, over you go."

She crossed, but she stopped to give him her hand to aid him, and although he did not require it, he accepted the proffered help gratefully.

"Thank you; that's capital," he said, and then bending close to her ear, "that's how I should like things to be always, me to be standing by to catch you in my arms whenever you slipped in crossing the streams of life; you to be at the side



with a sweet smile and a welcoming hand to make my passage pleasant. I suppose that cannot be."

"I don't know," she said, with a shade of doubt and wonder in her tone and manner.

"Come along," called Bess, and the three with their cans of blackberries marched out of the glen and on towards Ravelston.

## CHAPTER II.

ROBERT MARJORIBANKS.

**R**AVELSTON was about five miles distant from Airbridge. The surroundings of the first presented a remarkable contrast to those of the town. Round about Ravelston there were pleasant woods and meadows ; thriving farms showing many acres of arable and pasture land. There were moors on which the Twelfth was annually celebrated by the crack of sportsmen's guns, and the destruction, according to the luck of the season, of twenty or fifty brace of grouse to a single gun ; but there were other seasons when a solitary brace might represent the day's sport. Then there was the glen, famous for its trees, shrubbery, and dense vegetation ; also for its stream, its rocks, and its hermit's cave.

Altogether it was a charming pastoral scene in which the mansion lay. But even there, at nights, the sky reflected the red glare of the distant furnaces which broke through the darkness with the fiery brilliance of the gold they seemed to coin for their owners.

In the Airbridge district you saw during the day rows of dull red brick cones with their tops cut off, from which issued an occasional puff of smoke, and alternately a tongue of flame struggling to show itself in spite of the sun. Then glancing across the flat landscape, there appeared tall chimney stalks emitting clouds of black smoke, at irregular intervals ; skeleton forms, like the ghosts of trees, which represented the scaffolding and machinery at the many pit-mouths ; and round these rose mountains of coal and shale. There were patches of green fields, sickly trees and hedges bearing leaves tinged with a leaden hue. There were cows feeding upon the short grass, and many rows of miners' cottages, crowded with human souls, eager in the struggle for life, making fierce war against its necessities ; quick or dull in their instincts as might be, but for the most part obeying the common desire to "better themselves."

At night, however, the furnaces were masters of the situation. They shed light for miles around ; and in their light strange shadows moved rapidly to and fro, busy with the elements of a nation's wealth. The molten iron came pouring forth in golden streams, with a great roar like that of the sea in a storm ; and the shadows flitted about directing its course—ants guiding a blind giant.

Far and near, the hedges, dwarf trees, and the gaunt scaffoldings of the pits assumed weird forms, and cast strange shapes on the ground. The furnaces were the fiery chieftains of the place. Lovers walked by their light, poor students read by it ; housewives counted the number alight, and the greater the number the more satisfied they felt that the bairns' bread was safe. Truck and tally might do their worst, so long as there was work for the gudeman and he was willing to do it.

All the grimy smoke, all the heat and sweat of arduous labour were shut out from Ravelston by five miles of country. But the carriage, drawn by a pair of high-stepping bays, daily traversed the road between the house and the black-looking office at the works.

No man above ground dared to neglect his duty, for he did not know the moment when Marjoribanks—or "the cork," as he was generally called—might appear on the spot, and, after a good volley of oaths, show what could be done and ought to be done, by applying his own hand to the task. In that way he had more than once put a workman to shame, for he had practical knowledge of every branch of his business, and he was much admired on that account.

Except the reflection on the sky at night, Ravelston knew little of the busy life which supported its grandeur. There was a great hive of miners and puddlers with wives and families, but their troubles and joys were rarely known to the chief inmates of the mansion. The ladies certainly were interested in the annual races which took place on the course near Airbridge ; the coachman, the groom, and the other men about the establishment were much occupied with the frequent dog-fights and cock-fights to which the miners devoted a good deal of their leisure. There were also regular prize-fights, generally between a couple of men of the district, but sometimes between professional pugilists.

These matches were arranged in profound secrecy ; but everybody knew about them, and took part in them, or discreetly held their tongues. It would have been an unpleasant thing for any one who dared to explode these little entertainments. Even constables, who had been despatched by over active provost or inspectors to stop such outrages upon civilisation, had been known to return without having seen anything !

The neighbourhood of Airbridge was of a decidedly sporting character, especially in the way of horses. Almost every thriving tradesman owned a fast trotting pony which had won a match or two. But he was a much respected man who possessed a horse which had gained the Airbridge Cup at the annual races ; and there were several men in the town who were able to display that trophy on their sideboards.

Mr. Marjoribanks entered all classes of society ; merchants welcomed him as one of their chiefs ; many of the oldest and most aristocratic families received him with respect, for his enormous wealth clouded all his errors of manner and nature ; to the most intelligent his honest frankness atoned for every fault ; and indeed it was one of his faults that he was inclined to be a little too frank about the lowness of his origin. So frank, that it became like a boast ; and that was unpleasant to those who were ready to accept the man as he stood, and to acknowledge his great success as proof of a talent which should command their esteem.

There were those, however, who, whilst bowing before him, laughed at him behind his back and told all sorts of queer stories about what they playfully called his eccentricity.

This was one of them. When fitting up the library at Ravelston, a bookseller's assistant attended to learn with what works he desired to fill his shelves.

"Oh, anything from six inches to a foot-and-a-half," was the answer.

The man was astonished, but made a note of the order.

"Will you have them bound in Russia or Morocco, Sir ?"

"Confound you, what should I send my siller from home for ?—get them bound in Glasgow."

He was munificent to charities—which the wicked ones said was his fire-insurance ; he was shrewd and careful in business, every penny of income and expenditure was faithfully set down ;

and it was one of his sayings that he could leave the world to-morrow and the state of his affairs might be definitely settled in an hour.

He accomplished much good ; he conferred many favours, but he had an unfortunate way of letting everybody know what he had done, and that robbed his benevolence of much of its savour. Those who would have been most grateful felt that he had deprived them of the highest privilege of gratitude—that of being the first to acknowledge the debt.

He saw crowds of people flocking around him, becking and bowing to him, and he was proud of his position. He had many enemies, as every successful man has, and he could afford to laugh at them. But, what was a real misfortune, he had few, very few friends who were attached to himself and not to his wealth. He did not know that, and in the height of his glory he would not have cared even if he had known it.

When he was petted and flattered by some great politician who wished to secure for his party the Marjoribank's interest at the next election, he would say with much satisfaction :

"Yes, I know the working classes—I was one of them. I worked in the pit myself : when I was a laddie many a bright summer morning, and many a black winter morning, I've trudged along the road to my work, pick on my shoulder, lamp stuck in my leather cap, a poor half-starved wretch with never a notion of being anything better. But you see luck has been on my side, and now I'm pretty comfortable."

And he gave a broad laugh at that mild way of stating his position. He had a peculiar way of clearing his throat with a gruff, guttural cough at the beginning, middle, and end of a sentence which was at times very discordant to the ears of his listener.

"How the deuce did such a man ever acquire such a fortune," enviously exclaimed Jack Morrison, who was a prominent sporting character, and an independent gentleman in private, but in public was Airbridge's chief grocer, distiller, miller, tobacco manufacturer, and ever so many things besides.

"By having an eye to see opportunity and the resolution to seize it promptly," answered Dr. Murray, a stout, quiet, grey-headed gentleman.

"But where did he find the opportunity—I've never found it."

"He didn't find it so much as he worked for it. When he left the pit he got some knowledge of engineering; then he went abroad, made some money, came home at the right moment, and invested in a mine. The investment turned up a trump, gave him iron as well as coal, and so he went on until he became what you see him—owner of half the coal and iron in the district, and master of Ravelston."

"Wish I hadn't been married," said Morrison, thoughtfully. He was a tall, good-looking man of forty-five or so.

"Why?"

"Because I'd have gone in for old Marjoribanks' daughter or niece."

"Ha, ha, you would have no chance; too many have already 'gone in' for them, as you say." The doctor added "Good day," and proceeded on his round of visits.

Mr. Marjoribanks examined his private letters in the library at Ravelston immediately after breakfast, at which time the post arrived.

"Look here, Hill," he said, a letter in his hand, the sun glinting on his round wrinkled face and large head, "that chap who helped the girls when they were crossing from St. Malo, accepts the invitation, and says he'll be here for the Twelfth. Write and tell him I'm glad to hear it."

George Hill was the secretary; he was supposed to be received as a gentleman, took his meals with the family, occupied the front seat in the carriage occasionally, and he was treated by his master with a degree of discourtesy—not to say contempt—which no kitchen-maid would have endured more than once.

Mr. Marjoribanks did not mean any harm by this brisk way of treating his servants; but he caused a great deal of pain which no amount of ostentatious liberality soothed or atoned for. It was one of his faults that he could not realize the idea that a man who received payment for his labour might be a gentleman. As a consequence, he often blundered unintentionally.

Mr. Hill said "Yes," respectfully, laid the note on the writing-table and made a memorandum of the answer.

Mr. Marjoribanks continued his examination of the letters, most of which he threw aside after reading the first line, with

an impatient "toots." He deigned to answer, through his secretary, about half-a-dozen. When he had finished—

"Tell Forbes to give him the green room; he's a smart-looking fellow, and seems to be used to good quarters."

"You mean, Sir——"

"Kilgour, Major Kilgour—who else?"

"Yes," said Mr. Hill again, and made another note.

Then, after many orders, Mr. Marjoribanks quitted the room without a thank you or good morning.

Mr. Hill quietly sat down to his task; he was too well accustomed to his master's manner to take the slightest notice of it.

In the parlour Mr. Marjoribanks found the ladies. First, his sister, who was always called Miss Janet; age, not under fifty. Second, his daughter, Miss Marjoribanks to ordinary folks and servants; Bess to those who were intimate. Third, his niece, Coila.

It is five years since that day of the expedition to the glen in search of blackberries; Bess and Coila are women; Austin Murray is an army surgeon, and has been out in Ashantee with the Black Watch.

Bess, in her flowing morning gown, is more beautiful than ever; her dark eyes more bright, and her general expression more resolute, but that does not in the least diminish the general attractiveness of her face and manner. She has a quiet, seductive smile for every one who approaches her; a soft purring voice giving welcome; and, although she is indifferent to most people, she is really anxious to give pleasure to all, without any more sinister motive than that she should be thought well of by all.

Coila was not so frank as in the old days; there was a dreamy light in her eyes, and something like sadness in her expression. The two girls had been to school together finishing—in Germany and afterwards at a pensionnat near St. Malo. The experience had been a bitter one to Coila.

From teachers and fellow-pupils she had learned the difference between the daughter of a millionaire and a mere dependant upon his bounty. No one had been consciously unkind to her; no one had intended to show her that there was the least difference between her and Bess. But the difference existed;

they felt it, and in spite of themselves they could not help showing it in the countless little tricks of manner which pass unobserved by all except the unfortunate one who is in the position of a dependant.

Coila was peculiarly sensitive to every shade of word and look. So she came home, instead of the merriest and most coquettish of the two girls, the saddest and the shyest.

In dress, in jewellery, in every item of expenditure, Marjoribanks made her equal with his daughter. But, somehow, she could not accept the position frankly—she was pained by the fancy that there was something false about it: she, a penniless orphan, should not be like the heiress of a wealthy man.

She accepted his gifts with abashed eyes—she was too much afraid of him to remonstrate. She took her allowance with trembling hands, and expended a small portion of it with timidity and regret that she should be obliged to break upon it at all: for she had a sort of nightmare feeling that some day it would be a relief to her to hand back to him all that he had given.

These thoughts, or fancies, were all the more painful because there was no one to whom she dared express them; they seemed to stifle her sometimes; and they gave her always that sad expression of one in a dream.

But there was one who saw and understood her—Miss Janet.

“I thought you lasses would be glad to know,” said Marjoribanks, entering the parlour in his usual abrupt way, “and so I came to tell you that your friend, Major Kilgour, is to be here for the Twelfth.”

“Oh, thank you, papa,” exclaimed Bess, arranging some flowers in a vase; “he will be quite an acquisition to your party.”

Coila looked in amazement at Miss Janet.



## CHAPTER III.

## A SUSPICIOUS CHARACTER.

**M**ISS JANET was the opposite to her brother in every respect. Unmethodical to an exasperating degree, she was always dropping something or losing something ; gloves, handkerchief, and purse could never be found when wanted. Her Berlin wool and knitting needles, which occupied most of her time, were continually disappearing, and half-a-dozen times in an hour there were commotion and bustle hunting for them. Her brother used to say that she would lose her head, if it were not nailed on her shoulders.

Then she was timid ; she never looked any one straight in the face and seemed to be always searching for invisible pins on the carpet ; but all the time she would be furtively watching and noting everything and everybody. She moved in a quick gliding way ; and entering a room to meet any one, her eyes seemed to be glancing under the chairs and tables as if she expected to see her friend there. She gave a great deal of trouble whilst she was always most anxious not to do so.

In person she was little and stout, and in consequence, her mincing ways became the more remarkable. She had a mild, kindly face, and a kind heart, although its best impulses were frequently checked by her timidity. Her eyes—when visible—appeared to be of a dark grey colour, but indefinite almost as her character. She wore a wig, because an illness some years ago had left her bald ; and the wig was perpetually getting out of place, making her look ridiculous, and causing much fussy distress to herself and nieces, until they set it right again.

“Excuse me, Robert, but who is Major Kilgour ?” inquired Miss Janet, searching for the invisible pins, dropping her ball of wool, and, as she stooped to pick it up, dropping her handkerchief.

“Coila or Bess can tell you about him—uh—hum”—(clearing his throat). “He helped them when they were crossing

the Channel, and they were obliged to him. So was I, and told him so when they landed at Southampton. We travelled in the same train to London, and there we happened to meet him several times—said he had heard about me and my place. I couldn't do less than tell him we'd be glad to see him next time he came North. He's a decent sort of chap, and will help to amuse the others. He has seen life."

"Yes, dear, but what kind of life?"

"All kinds, no doubt. He has been abroad most of his time; served with the Federals in the American war, and must have served well or they wouldn't have made him major. They're clever folk, the Yankees, and can determine the stuff a man is made of almost as surely as a Manchester man can tell the quality of a web of cloth."

"But what is he now?"—searching for one of the knitting needles.

"Don't know. I fancy from one or two hints he gave me that he has something to do with the Carlists; but that's no business of ours."

"No, no, of course not—but is he respectable?"

That was Miss Janet's crowning question to every inquiry she made about new acquaintances.

Marjoribanks laughed, and crossed the room, his arms swinging like sledge hammers.

"Well, I don't know; if he wanted to do business with me I would ask for a reference to his banker. As he is not going to do business with me, I must take him for what he appears to be. I'll know how to deal with him if he tries any tricks with me; but there's no fear of that, and you needn't count the spoons. Is that all right?"

"Yes, dear, and very satisfactory."

It was another peculiarity of Miss Janet that she always said things were very satisfactory when she thought them most doubtful. But it did not matter much, for she remembered very little that she was told, and that little, long after the proper moment. Often she made ludicrous—sometimes sad—jumbles of persons and incidents.

"Will you drive with me this morning, Coila?" he said, halting with his hand on the door.

"Thank you, uncle, I think not. Aunt Janet wants me to arrange her work-table for her."

"Arrange her work-table!—uh-hum—not much use in that. But do as you like."

"No, dear, no, don't stay on my account—please don't. I can do it myself, and it will be a nice little distraction for me whilst you are away."

"I would rather stay."

"You might ask me, papa," said Bess, turning from her flower vase.

"Do you want to go?—come."

"Oh, that's another way of putting it—you *ask* Coila, but you command me."

"Toots, you shall have the carriage to yourself and some sweeties at Airbridge."

"What, all that at once? Then I must go. Ta, ta, good folk."

"Don't be an hour getting ready. The carriage will be at the door at ten, and I won't wait."

"There will be no occasion, papa."

And she disappeared. It was a little hard upon Bess that she should fall into the second place, apparently, in everyone's consideration, and Coila, who was so quiet and retiring, should occupy the first. From her father down to the scullery-maid all seemed involuntarily to think of Coila first.

When the door had closed upon father and daughter, Miss Janet said quite impressively :

"You ought to have gone, dear; Robert does not like refusals, and the air would have done you good—where *is* my handkerchief? Now, don't move, dear; I shall be so vexed if you disturb yourself in the least on my account."

But she was making such wild efforts to discover the missing handkerchief that Coila of course got up to assist in the search, and at length it was found under Miss Janet's ample skirts. A few minutes were required to restore her to her composure, and by that time the wheels of the carriage were heard rolling away from the door. Coila had gone to the window and was nodding and smiling farewell to her uncle and cousin. Then she turned back to begin her daily task of arranging Miss Janet's

work-table. She found it difficult to repress an exclamation of horror.

"Oh, dear! aunt, do let me arrange your hair."

The wig was sitting in the most rakish fashion on one side of the lady's head, giving her the appearance of a most reckless Bacchanal.

"Is it wrong again, dear?" exclaimed Miss Janet, in meek distress. "I hope it wasn't so when Robert was here—it always annoys him so much."

"No, it was quite right when he was here."

"Thank you; now we can have a quiet gossip. Did you see the needles and wool, dear?"

Another hunt, and ultimately it was discovered that Miss Janet was sitting upon the missing articles.

"Thank you, dear; so sorry to trouble you—you are so good."

She proceeded with her knitting; Coila began to arrange the table by emptying everything out on the floor, and then quietly replacing them one by one after neatly folding and tying up various little packets.

Miss Janet was busy, and yet was observing her furtively. Suddenly she paused, a loop on her forefinger and the needle thrust through it.

"Did you like that General Gourie, Coila?"

"You mean Major Kilgour, aunt."

"Yes, dear, it's the same thing; did you like him?"

"I saw so little of him that I scarcely know how to answer."

"Then you did not care for him, or you would have found it easy to answer."

"No, he did not please me much."

"Is he handsome?"

"Yes, and he was most kind and obliging. I don't know what we should have done on the passage without his assistance—it was so stormy—and poor Mary was as bad as ourselves. He attended to her, and she thinks he is the finest gentleman she ever saw."

"He gave her a present, very likely, and learned from her all about you both."

"Oh, aunt! Mary would never do that."

"It is often done, dear, without any harm meant. But how did he come to be of so much use to you?"

"Well, we never would have seen him, only Bess thought it was better to stay on deck all night than to go below, and, of course, I stayed with her. The vessel was pitching so awful!"—and she gave a pretty little suggestive shudder—"and everybody was sick! The stewardess and steward could not attend to half of them. We were both sitting on a seat with a little canvas awning over it, and we were not able to ask for help. The sea was coming over the deck, and the wind was fearful. Then this gentleman came up and got rugs for us and brandy—ugh! nasty stuff, it made me worse—and spoke to us, and got coffee for us in the morning. Then he assisted us down stairs when we got into calm water, as we were passing the Isle of Wight."

"Is that all?"

"You would have thought it a good deal, aunt, if you had been as sick as we were."

"And I suppose Bess was taken with him, and coquetted with him?"

"He amused her, and, besides, we were grateful to him, and so he was introduced to uncle when we landed."

The ladies proceeded with their work in silence for a little while. Again Miss Janet.

"I want you to give me a promise, dear."

"Certainly."

"It is this, that you will accept as final whatever judgment your uncle may pronounce upon the character of this gentleman. He is very rarely deceived in men, and I don't believe that he will be hoodwinked by this one, although Bess has made up her mind, I can see, and she has great influence with him."

Coila got up and placed an arm round Miss Janet's neck.

"Dear aunt, I am going to say something very disagreeable."

"Very well, dear."

"I think you are too hard upon Bess; although she teases you sometimes, she does not mean to be wicked; and I am sure that if you would be kinder to her she would be more considerate to you."

"Was she kind to you whilst you were away?"

"In everything, yes?"

"Then I'll do my best to be kinder to her; but she sometimes quite frightens me with those eyes of hers. Now, let us talk of something else, dear. Have you heard anything about young Austin Murray?"

"Nothing, except that he distinguished himself by his services to the troops during the campaign in Ashantee."

"Ah, I can tell you more than that. Dr. Murray, when he was with me yesterday, said that Austin had taken King Coffee—but that can't be right, dear; I've muddled it somehow. Ah, yes, this is it; Austin had taken the fever and was away on sick leave, and was travelling through Spain and France, and was coming home."

"It will be so nice to see him; he was always so brave and generous."

"Better than that, Dr. Murray said he intended to keep him at home, as his own health is so frail, he required an assistant; and, of course, he would prefer Austin who is by and by to have the practice. Are you not glad?"

"Yes," she answered dreamily, and her thoughts travelled back to that day in the glen, to the wounded thumb, to the crossing of the stream, and the words he had whispered in her ear when she slipped and fell into his arms.

Yes, she would be very glad to see him again; and she wondered if he remembered those old incidents as she did. But he had been busy in the affairs of the world and he would not remember such trivial things—he had forgotten them long ago, no doubt. All the same, she would be very glad to renew the old friendship.

## CHAPTER IV.

## AN "ADMIRABLE CRICHTON."

**M**AJOR HECTOR KILGOUR arrived on the eleventh in time for dinner. The carriage was waiting for him at Cragieloup, a small station on the main line about two miles from Ravelston. As only two passengers alighted from the train, Millar, the footman, had no difficulty in identifying the gentleman he had been sent for.

A tall gentleman, with broad shoulders, erect form, lithe limbs and springy step. Age, between thirty-five and forty, but he would have passed for not more than thirty, until his face was closely examined, and the faint shadows of coming wrinkles became visible. Dress, dark brown tweed, and hat of pale brown felt, helmet-shape. Hair, black, cut short in military fashion; bushy short beard and long moustache; no whiskers. Features, long, cleanly cut, and decidedly handsome. Expression, frank, and somewhat self-satisfied, but quite trustful; there was not a line of suspicion on his face.

The general air was undoubtedly "distinguished;" once, at an hotel, he had been mistaken for the Duke of Somewhere by a valet who, like most servants, could form a pretty correct judgment from the manner of a man what position he occupied; the poor valet was ready to shoot himself when he discovered that the major was a plebeian—which he knew must be the case when he saw him helped a second time to soup!

The Major was smoking a cigar, leaning carelessly on a thick Malacca cane, and calmly looking up and down the platform, when Millar advanced and touched his hat.

"Major Kilgour?"

"Yes. You are from Ravelston, I suppose?"

"Yes, Sir. What luggage?"

The Major pointed to a large portmanteau, a new Gladstone bag, a gun-case, and a hat-box.

"That's all."

The luggage was conveyed to the carriage, and the Major took his seat quietly, as one accustomed to luxury, and indifferent to it. It was an open carriage, so he lounged back on the seat, and, instead of regarding the landscape, he occupied himself in meditatively studying the backs of Ross, the coachman, and Millar.

Not an exalting study, but it amused him to imagine the characters of the men from this back point of view. Ross was grim and faithful; Millar was thoughtless and merry of heart as light of head. The square set shoulders of the first, the rigid firmness of his head, never wavering to right or to left, but fixed upon the reins, the horses, and the road before him, were the indications of the solidity of his nature; the quick jerky movements of the second, as if he sat on springs, the head lying a little to one side, and the occasional quiver of the shoulders as if he were suppressing a chuckle at some unseen joke, were the signs which the observer summed up in his conclusion about him. He remembered, too, the good-natured though unmeaning grin with which Millar had saluted him, and that formed an element in his estimate of the man.

"I wonder what they'll turn out to be?" reflected Kilgour; "and I wonder what notion they have formed about me. Poor devils we must often look in the eyes of servants. . . . The liveries are not bad—grey faced with grey velvet is comfortable looking and respectable, if it is a little common. I wonder where Marjoribanks got the idea—he never hit upon it himself, clever as he is. The daughter, I suppose—or, more likely, the niece."

The massive iron gates which gave entrance to Ravelston swung open; the Major observed that they were hung in a high, grey stone arch, which was surmounted by a big eagle with wings spread, and flanked on either side by a lion rampant.

The carriage drove in so swiftly that he had scarcely time to notice the tall, curly white-headed old man who had opened the gates on hearing the carriage wheels; by some instinct he recognised the step of the horses when they were a quarter of a mile distant. The man stood at his post erect and grim as a sentinel charged with some treasure which an enemy was expected every moment to attack. He neither smiled to the stranger nor saluted him.



The Major bent over the side of the carriage to look back, and caught a glimpse of a man, six feet high, of sinewy frame, long fresh face, marked with deep lines and thick white stubble on cheeks, lip, and chin. As he was hatless, his magnificent white curly hair danced in the wind. A hale old man, sixty at least, but with splendid muscles. As he closed the gates, it was apparent that he walked with a limp, and had a wooden leg.

"That old fellow must have been a capital soldier," was the Major's reflection; "but he gave no salute, so he cannot have served."

The Major now took an interest in the road. He was much pleased by the fine avenue, lined with beeches and chestnuts; then there was a little lake with a miniature island in the centre, and a boat lurking under a willow, the branches of which touched the water, and the whole was inverted in its mirror.

Sweeping round the lake he came suddenly into full view of the house. A square building, set in two projecting wings—each large enough to be a comfortable residence for a moderate family—and a short square tower rising in the centre, just above the main entrance. On the southern side were two broad green terraces, then lawn and croquet ground, or bowling green, surrounded by beds of brilliant geraniums and other flowers; trees, shrubbery, and flower-bordered walks, leading to the park where cattle, horses, and sheep were leisurely grazing, as if conscious that they were aristocrats, far removed above their fellows, safe from salesmen and butchers—an idea which must have been comforting to them at the time, but which was destroyed just as the requirements of the house demanded.

"By Jove," mentally exclaimed the new guest as all this flashed upon him, "here are pleasant quarters—and prospects. There's no possibility of looking at that place and doubting that the owner is a millionaire. Lucky fellows who are his friends."

He was met at the door by Baxter the butler, a short, round man with a white fat face, a shining bald head, horns of hair on his temples and brushes on his cheeks—the face suggesting that of a bald poodle.

"Is that all?" said Baxter, when the luggage was placed in the hall, and the emphasis on the second word seemed to indicate that he had some difficulty in making up his mind whether the

guest were careful or poor. Whatever his reflections might be, he was both civil and attentive.

The guest was conducted to the green-room and informed that the dinner hour was half-past six, and that he would find Mr. Marjoribanks in the drawing-room; then he was left to the attention of a smart youth who was busy unstrapping the portmanteau and bag. This attendant asked for his keys, which the Major at once surrendered, and the contents of his bags were deftly transferred to the wardrobe; his evening dress laid out for him; hot water placed ready on the stand in the dressing-room, and he was left to himself.

The Major surveyed his apartment: it was charming, furnished in green, with every convenience and comfort of these degenerately luxurious days. Plenty of space, a large fluffy-looking bed, easy chairs, lounge, writing-table, with all necessary materials placed in one of the two windows; a small dressing-room attached, with hot, cold, and shower-bath at his command.

After he had taken in all the details of his situation, and surveyed the prospect from each of the windows.

"Clover," he muttered, and quietly proceeded to dress.

He was careful; he wished to make an impression; therefore he was particular about his shirt front and his tie. He was a man of decision, yet he hesitated twenty seconds as to which of five sets of studs he should wear. He ultimately decided upon a plain set of Florentine mosaics, very quiet in appearance, but very beautiful in design.

With that quiet self-possession which is one of the fruits of good-breeding, he entered the drawing-room, and immediately the atmosphere became fussy; the other guests examined him curiously; Miss Janet, sitting in a shady corner with her hair all right—thanks to Coila—eyed him critically; the young ladies rose, and Marjoribanks looking flushed and hot, as if his broad white neckerchief were suffocating him, shook hands with the Major warmly.

"Glad to see you at Ravelston, Sir; hope you find your quarters agreeable."

"Perfection, thank you."

Then as he touched Bess's hand, he said in a voice that was low enough to be almost an undertone, only it was the ordinary pitch of his voice in a drawing-room—

"It is worth travelling from the other side of the world to see you again, Miss Marjoribanks."

"Thank you," said Bess, in her frank way—some folk called it bold—"Hope you will not have occasion to change your mind on that score. Do you often change your mind?" (Smiling.)

"I am mortal, and therefore change; but it is not possible to do so in this instance."

"Thank you," again said Bess, inclining her head slightly and somewhat mockingly.

He did not, apparently, observe the shades of her manner, and he turned to Coila, saying simply—

"I am glad to see you, Miss Gardyne."

But he looked at her with a smile which showed that his words conveyed his thought.

Marjoribanks presented him to the guests—Mr. Morrison, Mr. Strongitharm, and Ian M'Killop, Laird of Killievar, a small Highland estate, by the name of which he was generally designated. Then, as if suddenly recollecting himself, the host said in his brisk way:

"Oh, and my sister, Miss Janet. We're a small party to-night, so we may as well all be friends."

Miss Janet bowed stiffly; the Major advanced to her with a smiling expression of his pleasure in making her acquaintance.

"It's very warm," was Miss Janet's reply, looking under the chairs, the couch, and everywhere for her fan, which she ultimately found hanging by a silken loop on her arm.

She did not like the Major, but he certainly was a handsome man, and remarkably civil. He remained beside her, instead of hurrying off to the young ladies, as every body did except the doctor and the minister. She felt no difficulty in talking to him, as she usually did with strangers. He spoke about the avenue, the lake; made inquiries about the surrounding country and people, displaying real interest in his questions, so that she had plenty to say to him, and felt rather pleased with herself in consequence. The young man had been evidently impressed by her conversation, and that was a comfort to a woman who had not for many years experienced the thrill of satisfaction produced by the sense of making a sensation. She saw that Bess and Coila were amazed (they were amused), and that was an additional element of satisfaction. When dinner was announced,

the Major asked leave to renew his conversation afterwards. He bowed, and stood ready to obey the commands of his host.

"We're not particular about forms here, Major; but as you are last come you shall be first served, so you can take my daughter; Killievar, you can have my niece; and Morrison and Stronghitharm can take each other. Come along, Janet—you would rather go with me."

He meant that the others would rather go by themselves than have to attend to Miss Janet.

"Yes, dear, but where is my handkerchief?"

"Hoots, never mind it—I've got a supply for you in the dining-room."

But the Major had quietly stepped over to the lady and presented the handkerchief, which he had seen lying on the couch beside her.

"Oh, thank you," she exclaimed; "so sorry to trouble you!"

Killievar was not pleased with the arrangement. Marjoribanks might be indifferent to the laws of precedence, but the Laird of Killievar ought to have been respected; he ought not to have been put off with the niece, whilst this Major—who knew nobody and was known to none—was privileged to take the daughter of the house. His pride was hurt, and he regarded the new guest with dislike and suspicion.

But when Coila placed her arm in his, and he bent his stiff neck to see her bonnie smiling face, he was much mollified; and he became contented with his fortune when she whispered in his ear:

"I am glad to be with you, laird."

"And I am very glad that you say so, Miss; I knew your father; he was a gentleman and could show his family tree, branching back to the Bruce's time. I am very glad you say so."

Killievar was dressed in complete Highland costume, the kilt of his own clan tartan; magnificent cairngorms glancing in his sporran, dirks, and shoulder belt. But the jacket was of a bright blue velvet, with buff cuffs, and endless rows of diamond-shaped silver buttons—the whole being the result of his own eccentric fancy rather than in accordance with the dress of his clan. It was his humour to dress thus on all occasions;

he expressed unmitigated contempt for the Lowland trousers, and could not be persuaded to wear them on any account.

He was very proud on very small means; he was fond of display, and the consequence was a somewhat theatrical effect in his appearance. He kept a man who served him in the various capacities of valet, footman, coachman, and groom, the man was arrayed in livery of the most flaring character, green, faced with buff, and was the marvel of the Lowland churls who were privileged to see him.

On his breast Killievar wore a number of medals attached to bright ribbons, and looking like so many orders for valiant services in the field. He had a soldier-like bearing, and so when he walked along the streets of Glasgow or Edinburgh he was regarded by the passengers as the hero of many wars; he was frequently followed by a crowd of idle urchins, and he was pleased by this mark of popularity; the medals, however, were of a simple origin: one was for a famous black bull, another for the best flock of sheep at the Highland Society's show; two for best green crop, and others for various agricultural successes. He was as proud of these trophies as he could have been if he had won them by destroying a whole population of human beings.

Killievar was determined to extinguish the Major, and at dinner he talked loudly of landed property, and of land proprietors, their rights, wrongs, and benevolence. At one point, referring to what he had said on some important occasion in regard to the law of hypothec, he sought the corroboration of Miss Janet, as she had been present.

"Yes, I remember," she answered, "for I saw you that day drive into the village with your peacock behind you."

This was an unkind—although unintentionally so—allusion to the livery of Killievar's man. But the laird was not to be suppressed.

"That was just it, Miss Janet; and it was a time too when you would have been, yourself, very proud to have called that peacock livery your own."

There was an inclination to laugh at this retort, which was very severe upon Miss Janet; but the Major came to the rescue.

"I have no doubt, Mr. M'Killop——"

"Killievar, Sir."

"I have no doubt, Sir, that it was entirely due to the lady's bad taste that she did not claim the peacock livery as her own."

The half-suppressed laugh found vent at this sally, and Killievar felt that he could not retort without being still more rude to the lady. He contented himself with a scowl of contempt at the Major, who looked quite innocent of any intention to provoke either laugh or scowl.

At first the Major had been quiet and observant, evidently desirous to gain some knowledge of the peculiarities of each member of the company before he ventured to show himself. Gradually he slipped into the conversation, talked about foreign railways to his host: about horses to Morrison and Strongitharm: about the battles and privations he had passed through, to the ladies; and so he earned the verdict from them all that he was a remarkable man. Even Killievar, despite the faint crossing of swords on the peacock question, succumbed at last when he found the Major thoroughly agreed with him in all his theories about hypothec and the land laws.

"The fellow knows what he is talking about," thought Killievar, and he had not the least idea that all the talking had been done by himself; but he felt happy in the idea that he had worsted an opponent in argument, and converted an unbeliever to his way of thinking.

The gentlemen remained a long time at their wine after the ladies departed. The Major told some capital stories, and proved himself an excellent companion. The stories excited much laughter, and the teller was accepted as a first rate fellow—no one observed that as he passed the bottles he helped himself very sparingly.

An hour in the drawing-room, during which the Major paid much attention to Miss Janet, so that when she was retiring for the night she admitted to Coila that he was "a very superior person, dear—very remarkable."

When the ladies had said good night, Jack Morrison, the gay sporting gentleman, who felt that he had been undone to-night in the matter of horses and stories, proposed a smoke; and they proceeded to the billiard-room.

"Have a cigar," said the Major, presenting a case of large Partagas to Killievar.

"No, Sir, I do not smoke," answered the Highland Chief, drawing himself up stiffly; "but I can endure the smell."

The Major produced a silver snuff-box.

"This was given to me by General Grant—have a pinch?"

"No, Sir, I do not snuff."

"Have some toddy?" suggested Marjoribanks, who had been listening.

"Yes, Sir, I will take some toddy."

Whilst Marjoribanks and his guests were engaged with their toddy or cigars, or both, the Major quietly left the room. But his departure was observed, and Strongitharm coolly presented the problem:

"Is he a gentleman or a snob?"

Killievar, with his wits illumined by the toddy, took it upon himself to answer.

"Sir," he said, "a gentleman is a man of no pretension; a snob is a man who is all pretension."

"That doesn't answer my question. I think he is a snob."

Killievar was busy with his second tumbler of toddy, and he was ready to contradict anybody for the mere sake of contradiction, so, he said—

"Sir, whenever you hear a man calling another a snob, take that as a sign he is himself a snob of the most pronounced kind."

This produced some indignation and a good deal of explanation.

Meanwhile the Major was quietly smoking his cigar on the terrace outside, enjoying the moonlight, and summing up the gains and losses of the evening. As he reached the end of the terrace at the corner of the house, he saw a lady step out from one of the windows which opened to the ground, and advance towards him.

Presently he found himself face to face with Miss Marjoribanks. She laughed upon seeing him.

"Oh, I thought you were busy with your friends in the billiard-room; I see you like moonlight, as I do, and you have come out to enjoy yourself—pray do not put out your cigar; I shall leave you if you do."

He bowed and continued to smoke.

"It was a lucky chance which led me here, since it has procured me the pleasure of seeing you again."

"Glad you're pleased. I'll be bound you would have felt otherwise if I had been one of those squeamish creatures who pretend not to be able to stand smoke."

"Under any circumstances I should be glad of the opportunity to see you."

"Rubbish—and, if you please, give me credit for being able to understand what is rubbish and what is not. I'll be all the better satisfied with you."

The Major laughed in a clear, hearty tone, which would have been infectious to anyone but Bess.

"What is the joke?" she demanded, as abruptly as her father would have done.

"Pardon me," he said; "but you are so droll."

"Why droll?"

"Because you speak your mind. I admire that spirit; I admire it all the more because I have so seldom met with it in man or woman—least of all, in women."

"You'll find it in me, I hope. I'm glad I've met you tonight; because I wish to speak to you."

"You honour me."

"Perhaps," she said, drily.

They walked to the other end of the terrace where a statue of Flora rose in beautiful outline in the moonlight, amidst climbing plants and flowers.

They halted; the Major leaned his back against the statue and surveyed the beautiful face before him—all the more beautiful in the moonlight with its flush of excitement.

"You said that you wished to speak to me?"

A pause; then, as if forcing herself to speak out,—

"Yes; what motive prompted you to come here?"

"I don't think there was any special motive---I am speaking as frankly to you as if talking to myself. Your father invited me; he is rich; I am poor. I like rich people because they can afford me many comforts which I cannot obtain for myself. He asked me to come, and here I am."

"But you knew he had a daughter," and she made a significant pause.

"I am in the confessional: I confess—quite true; vaguely,



the idea did enter into my calculations that the lady was to be won by some lucky fellow, and that I would like to be him."

"I knew it. Well, then, I want to tell you to banish the thought from your mind, for it can never be. I am not for you. But there is my cousin, and, if you are sensible, perhaps I'll help you to win her; and she'll have as much money as me. Is it a bargain?"

The Major smoked in silence; she waited impatiently. At length, coolly knocking the ash from his cigar, he said—

"I'll think about it."

## CHAPTER V.

## THINKING ABOUT IT.

**M**AJOR KILGOUR was as much amused as surprised by the singular interview which accident had brought about with Miss Marjoribanks. He smiled often as he remembered her brisk, resolute manner, and the bold frankness of her words; and he felt much admiration of the bright, dark face, with its flashing eyes, which he had seen in the moonlight under the statue of Flora.

It was altogether a curious incident, and the lady was decidedly beautiful; but what could she mean by her strange proposal to marry him to her cousin. He was puzzled.

"It would be good sport," he thought, "to carry off herself in spite of herself. She is very droll; but she had some reason for speaking to me as she did—what was it?"

He could not solve the problem, and he put it aside, although he did not give it up. He possessed the happy knack of laying down any idea which disturbed him, and which he could not explain; but without any conscious effort on his own part, the idea was ready to spring up whenever there appeared anything which was likely to associate with it and make it clear.

He liked his ease and to enjoy himself. He had spoken quite honestly to Bess. He had come there because her father was rich, and because he thought he would be comfortable. The possibility of a wealthy marriage had occurred to him as it often had done before; but that was only an element in the inducements which had drawn him to Ravelston.

He was a soldier of fortune; he had distinguished himself in battle, and he found that there were half-a-dozen unsettled governments under which he could always obtain employment of more or less importance, with the chance of some day "making a hit," which would give him wealth as well as position. He was not too particular as to the nature of his employment; therefore, he was a useful man. He found his life very pleasant,

but he was never afraid to risk it in any promising enterprise ; he had done so more than once, although he had not yet made the "hit" which was to place him in safe waters. He was in fact a gambler, pure and simple, and his life was the stake which he pitted against fortune.

He found that he could get on very well as a bachelor ; and he saw no reason why he should marry—indeed, he saw a number of salient reasons why he should remain single. But of course it entered into his calculation that marriage with a wealthy woman—maid or widow, he was indifferent on that score—might be the hit he was playing for. Certainly, if he did marry, the lady should clearly understand that he was penniless.

He was in no hurry about it, however ; and he even doubted if he would ever be able to settle down into a hum-drum, respectable husband, after the life of hap-hazard and adventure to which he had become accustomed. He was honest enough to believe that he would try to be a decent sort of a husband to the woman who should surrender her life and fortune to his care.

In the course of his career he had been several times on the verge of matrimony ; once with the daughter of a Southern planter in America, but the war had interfered, the lady and her father were left poorer than himself, and the Major, who happened to be on the winning side, was the means of saving, from the ruin of their affairs, enough to enable them to live. Again, with a Mexican beauty, who possessed untold wealth, but she had been carried off by a French general. Another time with a Spanish countess, but the revolution occurred and the lady disappeared with her mistress, the Queen. In Germany, Austria, France and elsewhere, he had passed through similar experiences without losing his appetite or his temper. But he had never been so near really losing his heart (if he had such a thing, and he doubted it) as when he had seen the sweet, sad face of Coila Gardyne, on board the "Honfleur," crossing from St. Malo to Southampton.

He discovered that she was an orphan, and entirely dependent upon her uncle ; so he had extinguished sentiment with a sigh of regret that he was so poor. Now, he was curiously attracted by the dark face and bright eyes of Bess Marjoribanks ; he was inspired by much the same feeling as that which moves

a soldier who is brought before a fort hitherto impregnable, and he had a sort of vicious desire to attain the glory of conquering it.

This feeling was so strong that he paid little heed to the information that the niece of Marjoribanks was likely to be as wealthy as the daughter. Bess amused and perplexed him; she seemed to put him on his mettle by her very air of defiance—almost of contempt. Human nature is so contrary, that opposition always stirs its most vicious spirit.

He was still more puzzled, when, in the morning, before breakfast, he found Bess apparently waiting for him in the hall.

"Will you take a look at the garden, Major Kilgour?" she said, but tone and manner expressed an appeal.

He went out with her. As soon as they were hid from the house by a dense clump of shrubbery, she turned to him with drooping eyelids and an expression of distress.

"I want to ask your pardon," she said huskily.

"For what?" he exclaimed, curious and amazed.

"I was so rude to you last night—but I was very much excited, thinking about various matters, and——"

"Spare me, Miss Marjoribanks, and spare yourself. I was interested in what you said to me last night, and had not the faintest suspicion of offence. Forget it, and you shall find me, during my brief stay here, act as if it had never occurred."

She raised her eyes, and the long eye-lashes were glistening like the leaves around them with drops of recent rain; then she slowly extended her hand, which he took frankly, and bowed over it.

"Thank you," she said, simply.

The gong sounded for breakfast, and they went into the house together, she plucking flowers on the way, so that she had quite a bouquet to present to her father when they sat down at the table.

The Major was more than ever interested and perplexed. Here was a character which defied all his penetration, upset all his experience of women, and suggested the unpleasant question, "Was she making fun of him?"

That inquiry served to quicken his desire to understand and to subdue her. Only it was a bother to have such an object just then; it threatened so much to interfere with his enjoy-

ment of the flesh-pots of Egypt placed before him, and with the moors.

The sportsman looks with eager eye to the signs of the weather on the morning of the Twelfth. On this occasion there were repeated showers of rain ; and heavy clouds in the west threatening more rain. The Ravelston guests went out, however, determined to brave the elements ; and they trudged manfully over miles of moorland with very little success. Paterson, the gamekeeper, declared at starting that there was not much to be got, even if the weather had been auspicious ; nevertheless, the gentlemen marched on and on, hoping to find sport somewhere, and enduring, as best they could, the frequent heavy showers which fell and drenched them. Through the drizzling mist crack went the guns, a wreath of smoke circled slowly away from the muzzle, dogs yelped and bounded forward to seize the prey. There were jokes and laughter, whatever was the upshot, and congratulations whenever success rewarded the sportsman.

There were few coveys, but the birds were large, strong, and swift of wing. Killievar obtained the greatest success of the day, and bagged twelve and a half brace, which put him in imperturbable good humour the whole of that evening.

"It is very poor sport, Sir," he said, meekly, as Kilgour congratulated him ; "I have done my seventy brace in ten hours more than one time ; and this is very poor sport. But we have been in ill-luck with our birds lately."

"Possibly the birds think it is good luck for them, since you are here," said the Major, suavely.

"It cannot be so, Sir," answered the chief, flattered by the compliment, however, "for it is my opinion that the birds are as proud of good sport as we are ourselves, Sir. They are proud of it, and it is a pleasure to them when a real master of the gun is amongst them."

The Major did not attempt to dispute this theory of the birds' opinions ; but he felt that his new knickerbockers were exceedingly damp, and the sooner they got home the better it would be for all parties, seeing that there was no sport to be had worth the labour and fatigue of tramping over miles of moorland in wet clothes.

He took a very practical, although commonplace, view of

everything ; the great defect of his character was the absence of enthusiasm ; he entered upon business and amusement with an eye to the results ; if the results appeared to be worth the exertion, he was the first in the field, the foremost in the sally. If the results appeared doubtful, he was indifferent, and left the work to others.

On the following day the rain poured down in torrents ; the mist was so thick that there was no chance of sport until it cleared away.

The Major had an extensive correspondence to attend to, and so he decided to remain in the house. The chief, however, went out as usual, and felt himself to be all the more superior to the Major, since he could go out in spite of the elements, whilst the stranger coddled himself indoors.

Kilgour was not coddling himself. He wrote half-a-dozen letters, three of them lengthy and important. Then, as the rain had ceased, he went out on the terrace ; found Bess and Coila there ; the latter busy trying to fasten to the wall of the house a long rose branch, which had been blown down. She looked very charming in her garden hat, underneath which her fair hair was tossed by the wind, and there was the flush of excitement on her cheek, which, touched by the keen wind, had the appearance of a ripe peach. He advanced and saluted the ladies ; and whilst he was doing so, a man, who had been marching up the avenue, and who had been evidently walking in the rain, approached the party.

At a few paces' distance, this man rested on his heavy staff, and with a hopeful smile surveyed the ladies. He seemed neither to heed nor to observe the Major.

Bess and Coila had been laughing at their companion for his unmanly desertion of the moors.

"But don't you think I gained by it," said the Major, joining in the laugh against himself.

"How so?" cried Bess.

"In being privileged to share the forenoon with you."

"What do you say to that piece of sentiment, Coila?" exclaimed Bess, with a quick look passing from the gentleman to her cousin.

"It's clever," said Coila, laughing, "and would be flattering, if I did not know that the Major likes to say to everybody

those things which will please them most—and I must say he has a gift that way. He has said more pretty things to me in an hour than I have ever heard in my whole life.”

“I wonder if you know how much you are flattering me,” cried Kilgour, with a really hearty laugh.

“Coila never flatters,” said Bess, severely.

“I am so much the more honoured,” rejoined the Major, quietly. “But what a curious name that is, Coila, and how pretty. Where did you get it?”

“My father belonged to Ayrshire, and was devoted to Burns. I suppose that is how I came by the name.”

“It is an excellent name, and suggests that your father had something of poetry in his nature.”

Here the new arrival advanced, and, bowing low, with hat in hand, he said—

“I am glad to see you again, Miss Marjoribanks ; I trust you are well, Miss Gardlyne ?”

The Major stood aside, respectful and curious as usual. The ladies stared at the speaker for a moment, and then uttered an exclamation of wonder and pleasure.

“It’s Austin Murray !” they cried together. “Why, how changed you are !”

They seized his hands, and in their delight it seemed as if they would have gladly embraced him, but for the amused smile on the Major’s face.

Austin was their old playmate ; he was a distinct and important part of their childhood, and they were old enough to look back upon their childhood, as a very happy period of life.

Bess had presence of mind enough to introduce their old friend to the Major. The gentlemen shook hands quite heartily, and, whilst they were doing so, their eyes met. The Major saw a rough bearded man with clear, honest eyes ; a resolute expression of countenance, and a contraction of the under lip, indicative of one who was accustomed to work and to command.

Austin saw a cold, handsome face, which seemed to be full of the important question—“Are you a friend or a foe ?”

The Major was quite set aside on the arrival of this gentleman ; and as he had an objection to play second fiddle to any one, he invented an excuse and retired. At the same time he was

curious to know who this Austin Murray was, and what were his special claims to the attention of the ladies. From Baxter he obtained all the information he required.

Bess took one arm and Coila the other of their old friend, and they walked down towards the park; he, full of joy in being so warmly welcomed by those whom he loved most; they, full of pleasure in meeting their old playmate, and full of excited curiosity to know all about the adventures through which he had passed. He was a real hero to them; they had read in the newspapers about his devotion and bravery, and they were anxious to learn from his own lips the details of his career in the jungles of Ashantee.

He told them little of his own doings, although they were considerable, but much of the exploits of others. They listened to him with bated breath, and full of earnest admiration. All that he told them about others they associated with himself, so that, quite without intention on his part, he gained in the hearts of these girls a reputation which a hero of romance might have envied.

"And you are glad to see me home, both of you?"

Coila was silent, but Bess exclaimed, clasping his arm warmly—

"Yes, I am glad! I think of the old times, our wanderings in the glen, our Hallowe'ens, when we burned nuts together—and I am so happy, I don't know what to say, but I would like to greet. Very ridiculous that, isn't it?"

"Bonnie Bess!" murmured Austin, warmly pressing her arm under his; then he looked at Coila, and felt something like chagrin at seeing her face turned away from him, while she spoke no word of comfort or congratulation.



## CHAPTER VI.

## UNDER THE WILLOW.

THESE was something almost too enthusiastic in the exclamation of Bess, and she seemed to be made aware of it by the reserve in Coila's manner. She smarted, and was for an instant inclined to be angry with her cousin.

But she vented the irritation upon herself. That was quite in keeping with her nature—passionate and vindictive even, yet generous and anxious to do right; sensitive to a morbid degree to the opinions of others. As a child she would run away and hide herself when anything vexed her; lock herself up in some out-of-the-way room, and never appear until she had recovered her temper and her smiles; but all the time she would be suffering bitterly in the dark: now fierce and vicious against everybody—then sobbing as if her heart would break in the consciousness of her own wickedness, and the dreadful thought that nobody could care for her.

She acted in the same impulsive spirit now; although she wanted to be with Austin, although she did not want to leave him alone with Coila—she suddenly discovered that it was necessary for her to proceed to the house, having forgotten something that required immediate attention.

“You'll not be long,” said Austin, reluctantly letting her go.

The question and the look made her heart bound with pleasure. Then he did wish to have her with him; he did wish that she should return soon! It was worth inventing a fib for such a discovery.

She darted away with a short, curious laugh.

Austin was quite unconscious of the pleasure he had given. He knew Bess's ways as he said, and was often amused by them in the old times; still more frequently puzzled, she was such a mixture of good and evil impulses. They had been much together in the happy days of childhood.

Marjoribanks had passed through a severe illness, during

which Dr. Murray had been his constant and successful medical adviser. This resulted in a friendship as fervent as the millionaire was capable of; the boy Austin was made welcome to the house as often as he chose to appear, and the girls, being mere children, he was allowed to associate with them in all their amusements and at all times. Marjoribanks was not a suspicious man, and although in business he could look far into the future, he was in social affairs blind to an extraordinary degree. He never saw the slightest danger in the "laddie" Austin being admitted to the house as the equal of his daughter and his niece. He had rather a contempt for social distinctions, and even if the danger had been suggested to him he would have laughed at it.

He had unlimited faith in the power of personal interest—that is, selfishness—and he never doubted that the girls would look out for themselves; in other words, that they would not fall in love except with the right people—men who could provide them with the luxuries to which they had been accustomed. Love was an article of commerce in his eyes, and it was, as it ought to be, given to the highest bidder.

It was somewhat of a misfortune that as Marjoribanks was determined to oppose the old-fashioned prejudices, and was disposed to bring tradesmen into his house at all times, making them as welcome to his hearth and table as the inheritors of the most honoured names and the bluest of blue blood, he could not always command the best company. Although he was much respected, and although his hospitality was of the most hearty and prodigal kind, people hesitated about accepting his invitations. Consequently, although Bess had been sought by several "younger sons," she had been always ready to say "No," and her father had seen nothing sufficiently tempting to induce him to try to force her inclination.

"What a warm-hearted creature Bess is!" exclaimed Austin admiringly, as he watched her gliding away through the trees.

They walked down to the lake together, she resting on his arm and saying little; he too happy to feel the silence; but when the wind shook the branches above them, and heavy drops of rain fell, he tried to protect her by drawing her close to him, and moving quickly to some open space.

"There's the boat, Coila; let us go down and paddle round

the island. What glorious days we have had there, when the lake was a sea to us ; the island a distant country full of strange sights and sounds. Then I wanted so much to be a man, and now I would be very glad to have my boyhood again. I was so enthusiastic, and so sure of victory in my coming fight with the world."

"And are you not so sure now ?"

He shook his head as he stooped to unfasten the boat.

"No, I am not at all sure now ; I sometimes even despair, and it is a most uncomfortable sensation. In boyhood the world was just a big giant to me, and I was Jack the Killer, ready to outwit and conquer him. But having come to close quarters with the giant, I find that he has his wits and eyes remarkably alert, and that opposed to him I am a very poor creature."

"But you *will* conquer the giant," she said, with quite an anxious smile ; and her soft eyes were full of meaning too—full of sympathy and hope for him, suggesting her confidence in him and her readiness to help him.

"I'll try," he answered, stepping into the boat, steadying himself by grasping one of the overhanging branches of the willow whilst he held out the other hand to assist Coila.

She was standing on the bank, one pretty foot advanced, whilst her hand clasped his. There flashed upon him a curious fancy ; the tiny lake was the sea of life ; the little boat was the vessel in which he was to sail over it, and he was taking her as his companion on that voyage which is always so full of mystery, and of sweet and bitter experiences.

She stepped into the boat and he pushed off, but he did not go out into the middle of the lake. There was not space to row in the proper sense of the word ; so he only paddled and displayed a curious attraction for the side of the lake which was overhung by trees.

Dark blue clouds were floating overhead and filling the water with moving shadows. The wind swept through the trees with a melancholy whistle, which was at times like the cry of one in pain ; then there were brief pauses, an absolute silence, as if the suffering one had given up hope and become resigned to fate.

Austin, leaning over the side, saw his own and Coila's

shadows in the water, trembling, apparently, in the ripples made by the wind. He reached out his hand as if to touch her; in the reflection the hand seemed to rest on her shoulder, but in reality it was not touching her.

"What are you doing?" she asked, curiously.

"A fancy," he answered smiling. "I wanted to see if the shadows would unite, although the people they belong to might never do so; and see, there we are embracing in the water?"

"It must be rather cold," she suggested, "besides being rather muddy, thanks to the rain."

"Very cold," he said meditatively, whilst the oars swung lazily in the water. "I was thinking of a pretty story I once heard about a Venetian hero of romance. He was desperately in love with the Doge's daughter; but he was a poor chap who had his way to make in the world, and could never hope even to touch her hand. For a long time he watched her wherever she went, feasted his eyes upon her beauty, and maddened his soul with despair. Sometimes she saw him—often she passed without a glance at his pale, yearning face. He would live for days upon one glance of her bright eyes, and the least smile would support him for weeks."

"He was easily satisfied."

"Yes, the hopeless always are. Well, one fine night, when the moon was at its brightest, he was sailing in his gondola, as usual, near her windows, when he saw the lady above him and her shadow far down in the clear water. So he took a good look at the lady, telling over all his love to himself, and then, since he could never hold her in his arms, he dived down to embrace the shadow and was drowned. There was devotion for you; but wasn't he a fool?"

"Yes, I think he was a fool, and not a real lover after all."

"Why so?"

"Because love should inspire courage, not despair. He ought to have gone to the wars, or won position somehow, so that he might have had the right to approach the lady, and to tell her of his love. It was cowardly to die because he could not achieve. You would never act in that way."

Her face was flushed with excitement as she pronounced this verdict, and Austin's was glowing with admiration and hope. Her eyes drooped under his earnest gaze.

"You are right," he exclaimed, enthusiastically ; "and I have proved it. Love does inspire courage, but it must be united with some degree of hope to do that. I am in love like that poor fellow ; and out there in the fever jungle of Ashantee, the thought of my bonnie lady was like a charm to me. It helped me to do my work in spite of danger—it helped me to comfort others—and when the fever seized me, it gave me strength to endure and overcome it. I know that, because my comrades told me that during the fever I kept on repeating her name, and the sound of it seemed to soothe me."

"She will be very happy when you tell her that."

She turned her head away ; her hand dropped into the water, which she scooped up in her palm and allowed to trickle through her fingers.

"Do you think so ? Would you have been happy ?"

"Yes, and proud too."

"Would you like to know the name which was such a blessing to me ?"

She hesitated ; then briskly and even somewhat spitefully said,

"It cannot matter to me ; I do not know the lady."

"But you do know her, and I think you like her. Shall I tell you the name ?"

She was thinking about Bess—it must be her he meant ; and there was a curious fulness about her heart as if it had been visited by some sorrow which demanded tears to give it relief. All that, however, she concealed by keeping her head bowed as if she were profoundly interested in the water trickling through her fingers.

"If I know her, she will be all the dearer to me since she has done you such good service."

He smiled, and bent his head very close to her ear.

"The name was a curious one, about which there was no chance of making a mistake, and they tell me it was—Coila !"

She turned quickly upon him with a blush and a brightening of the eyes as if she half suspected that he was making fun of her ; but she met a frank, honest, loving look, and she could not doubt. He clasped her hand so tenderly that she did not try to withdraw it, for she knew he was in earnest, and she trembled.

The wind soughed around them, the shadows played on the lake, the sky was heavy and lowering with coming rain, and if they had not been too happy to be superstitious they would have seen in the gloom of nature a portent of their own future.

"Why do you look so startled and surprised?" he said, somewhat sadly; "you have not thought of me during those years of separation or you would have known what name was in my heart and first upon my lips."

"I have thought about you," she answered tremulously, because she was half inclined to cry for joy, and also with vexation at the doubt which his words implied; "I have thought, and I have been frightened lest it should be wrong to do so. How could I fancy that you would care for me when Bess was near?"

"Because I told you. Have you forgotten that day in the glen? I was quite in earnest, though I seemed to speak jestingly. . . . Coila, my whole life is in your hands. I can work if I know that you are to be won by it: but I'll never do any good if you turn away from me. I'm poor just now, but if you will say Hope, you shall find that for your sake I can conquer the giant."

She placed her hand in his trustingly.

"Hope, then, Austin; and, more than that, I am ready to share the struggle with you—ready to take my share of whatever suffering you may have to endure; and I shall be happy if you feel that my presence lightens your labour in the least degree."

"My darling," he murmured, pressing her hands warmly, gazing into her clear eyes and seeing in their depths sweet visions of gladness and of a home that would be paradise.

"You won't think that I forgot you now," she said, smiling, and, in his eyes, looking more beautiful than ever.

"Never again, Coila. But you shall not make this sacrifice for me. I did not mean to tell you of this until I had a right to do so; only I couldn't help myself, and it is such a comfort to know that you are mine. You shall not be bound by any promise to me, though; you shall be free as you can be, since you care for me. I'll work like a nigger, or harder; and when I've made a home fit for you I'll come and demand you from old Marjoribanks."

"And if he says 'No,'" she suggested, frightened by that dreadful idea.

Austin looked puzzled, but presently solved the difficulty.

"Then we'll have to hire a carriage with six horses and a special train and run away."

Both laughed at that grand idea. Coila thought an elopement would be delightful; she had read of such things in the newspapers and in novels. To be the heroine of such a romance would be very nice. At the same time she would rather not be driven to such an extremity; she was very much afraid that she had not courage enough to play the part,—that she would fail at the last moment and spoil all the arrangements.

They were very happy. Austin paddled about quietly, full of the glowing pride and joy which a youth experiences when he first feels that he owns the lady who has won his heart. The high wind was a zephyr's breath to him; the dark clouds were bright as an Italian sky to his happy fancy. But many drops of rain began to fall and warned him that he must respect the lady's dress if not herself. So he drew up under the willow, and as he was assisting her on to the bank he drew her head down to him and kissed her.

"Thank you, Coila; it was worth returning for such joy as you have given me. If I should ever be unkind just recall this day to me, and you shall find me meek and contented. But you will be patient?"

"Until death," she said, and then sprang on to the bank.

He fastened the boat, and arm in arm the lovers made their way up towards the terrace; but they were very slow, in spite of the rain. He had to help her so often; and there seemed to be so many occasions when it became necessary for him to put his arm round her to assist her over slight hollows and inequalities of the ground which, under ordinary circumstances, she would have passed without observing.

As they ascended to the terrace they encountered Miss Marjoribanks and Major Kilgour.

"We were just coming to look for you two," said Bess, gaily; "and see, I have brought you an umbrella thinking you might require it if you stayed out much longer. Present it, Major."

The Major, bowing and smiling, presented the umbrella. He began to have a vague notion of the motive which had prompted Miss Marjoribanks' strange proposal to him.

## CHAPTER VII.

## TWO WOMEN.

COILA was both sincere and truthful when she told Miss Janet that Bess had been in all things kind to her during their absence from home. Bess had been faithful, too, and wherever she saw the least inclination to give her precedence she at once withdrew, refusing to do anything or to be anything in which Coila was not made equal with herself. She did not care how many others might be above them, but they must stand side by side in class and out of class.

Madame Renaud, the proprietor of the pensionnat, near St Malo, had spoken to her about this absurd fancy; it was very chivalrous, no doubt, but she pointed out that it would be really hurtful to Miss Coila—would prove to be an injury rather than a kindness; for, of course, Coila would come in time to believe herself entitled to the privileges which were at present granted to her through the affection of her cousin.

Bess in her passionate way asked Madame if she received more money on her account than on Coila's. No: very well then, Bess thought it was unkind as well as invidious of Madame to make a distinction between them. Madame shrugged her shoulders, but from that time forth she did not breathe a word of opposition to the wishes of the millionaire's daughter. She had her own opinion all the same, and Bess obtained credit for Quixotic devotion which was quite incomprehensible to the lady principal.

Bess was really fond of her cousin, and smarted keenly under any indication of a difference of position; she resented it fiercely when Coila would have submitted with a sigh. She could not hide from her that others did recognise a difference; and that made her quite angry. Coila could not fight her own battles; Bess could and would fight them for her, and felt a sort of pride in the idea that she was the protector of this shy, timid companion.



Both affectionate, both anxious to do everything that was kind and generous towards each other, yet they were conscious that for some inexplicable reason there was not perfect confidence between them, and that, strive as they would, they seemed never to be a bit the nearer to it.

Of this unpleasant feeling they were more conscious than ever before when they went up to their dressing room on the afternoon of the day on which Coila had been out in the boat with Austin Murray.

Coila would have liked to tell her all that had happened, all that had been said ; indeed she was yearning for some sympathetic confidant who might have assured her that she had acted rightly in listening to a lover who could not yet speak to her guardian ; but she could not speak to Bess, and she did not know why.

At the same time Bess was burning to learn what had been said and done. She abruptly dismissed the maid, Mary Beith, who was too much accustomed to her whims to be either surprised or curious.

"I'll dress my hair myself," she said, using a brush savagely ; "I hate these prying creatures who don't care a button for you so long as you give them wages and plenty of perquisites. If you want her you can call her back."

"Thanks, Bess, but you know I am accustomed to help myself, and like it."

That was quite true ; for Bess, with all her anxiety to serve her cousin had a knack of monopolising the attentions of every one who approached ; but as soon as she became conscious of the monopoly she was painfully eager to surrender all her own claims to others, which was even worse than a selfish indifference to their claims.

"You had a pleasant time in the boat with Austin," she said, and there seemed to be some danger to her hair, she brushed so vigorously.

"Very pleasant," answered Coila, softly, wishing more and more to tell her what had occurred, and yet restrained in spite of herself.

Bess proceeded with the manipulation of her long black locks, and as she surveyed herself in the glass there was occasionally a flush of satisfaction on her face as if the reflection

pleased her ; and again a scowl as if it had done her some injury.

By and by, she spoke with a whisp of hair in her mouth.

“Do you know, Coila, I think you are very sly as well as unkind.”

Coila started at this terrible accusation, opened her eyes wide, and felt as if the floor were heaving under her—just the motion of the boat, and that made her conscious of guilt in the remembrance of the conversation which had taken place in it, and of her silence about it.

“Why so, Bess ?” she gasped.

“Because you never told me a word of what Austin said to you. He must have told you all about his travels, and about Ashantee. I don’t care for Ashantee, but I would like to know what he has been doing.”

“I wished to tell you, but you have been so irritable ever since he came, that I have been afraid to speak to you, almost.”

“Fiddlesticks—what was he talking about ? Did he tell you anything about King Coffee’s palace, and his umbrella, and all that ?”

“No, he spoke very little about Ashantee.”

“Oh, then, you must have had something still more interesting to keep you so long.”

“Yes,” answered Coila, quietly, and she looked dreamily at her hands lying, listless, on her lap. The memory of his earnest words, of the bright loving looks, was very sweet to her. She could scarcely realize it all ; it was like a pleasant dream from which she would waken presently, and be sorry.

“Well ?” said Bess, impatiently.

Coila wished to tell her, but she had to overcome an instinctive feeling that her confession would obtain little sympathy. She did overcome it, and then :

“He asked me to marry him.”

There was silence. Bess was looking over her shoulders, surveying herself in a cheval-glass, and in that position she remained motionless for a few seconds. At length, without looking around :

“And you ?” she said in a low tone.

“I answered. ‘Yes.’”

“And when is he to speak to papa ?”

"I don't know, perhaps not for a long time ; he has not yet got a home for me, he says."

"Then you are engaged ?"

"I suppose so," and Coila laughed, as if there were something funny in her new position ; "but Austin would not call it an engagement ; he would not bind me in any way, he said, but only asked me to bid him hope: Wasn't that droll ?—but he is so generous."

"Then you are not engaged ?"

"He would say no ; but I say yes ; for I will wait for him—aye, wait all my life."

Bess with her light quick step advanced to Coila and kissed her on the brow.

"I could wait too, for him. I congratulate you—he will be a good husband."

Then she quitted the room. Coila was accustomed to the abrupt impulsive ways of Bess, but she was much puzzled by her present eccentricities of word and act. She "could wait too, for him !" Was that only a compliment to his merits, or did it mean more ? She remembered in the old days how angry Bess would be if Austin failed to give her the largest share of attention ; but then they were children, and now they were grown up. Could it be possible that she loved him ?

The possibility supplied material for very unhappy reflections ; for if Bess loved him, Coila felt that she had been guilty of a cruel injury to those to whom she owed everything ; she felt that to do her duty to them it would be necessary to retract the promise she had given to Austin ; but she could not take back her heart. She was excited and frightened by the suspicion which had risen in her mind ; and she tried to console herself by saying again and again that it was a silly fancy, and that Bess would have told her if it had been anything else. Still her manner had been very strange.

Gentle, and devoted in affection, Coila was capable of much self-sacrifice for those whom she loved ; but it would have been a terrible sacrifice to give up Austin ! The world had seemed so much brighter the moment she knew that his heart was hers ; and for his sake she had been so glad to think that she was poor, because that insured them against any opposition to their marriage ; then again for his sake, she wished that she

had possessed the riches of the Indies, so that she might give them all to him.

Such sweet, bright dreams of a happy future had crowded upon her mind, and suddenly they were crossed by the black shadow Bess had cast. But she could not and she *would* not believe that Bess cared for him until she was told by her own lips that it was so.

She was not encouraged in the belief that she had misunderstood her cousin by the conduct of Bess during the evening.

Marjoribanks had received Austin Murray with that rough and ready hospitality with which he welcomed all comers—he was rather proud of his reputation for ready welcome to everyone who approached him, whether rich or poor, noble or simple. Although it kept some people away from him, he knew that it attracted many more, and he was content.

He knew that Austin was as poor as a church mouse, but he gave him a hearty welcome all the same, only his first question, whispered in his ear, was ;

“Have you made any siller?”

Austin shook his head, smiling.

“Then you might as well have stayed at home, man. What was the use of going out there without finding something on the right side of the ledger at the end of your voyage? Risking your life, and getting a fever for nothing—man, I would have seen Government far enough before I’d have done that. What’s the use of serving Government if you cannot make something out of it?”

He said this with a jovial laugh which concealed much of the selfish sincerity underlying it.

Austin remained to dinner. Throughout the evening Bess was remarkably brilliant, and Coila was quite in the shade. She found herself continually beside Major Kilgour who was quietly attentive, whilst Bess was always beside Austin.

The latter felt that he was under a spell, once or twice he glanced uneasily at Coila, and saw that her eyes, sad and wondering, were fixed upon him, but he could not break away from his charmer, and go to her as he wished to do. Bess had never appeared so beautiful to him as she did to-night; her eyes had never shone with such brilliance, or he had been very blind, the wit and poignancy of her observations upon people

and things had never before struck him as so remarkable. Decidedly Bess enchanted him ; and feeling all the time that he ought to be with Coila, he remained beside her cousin, the heiress.

Going up to the drawing-room, Bess placed her arm affectionately round Coila's waist ; but neither spoke. Miss Janet struggled up the stairs before them without the usual proffers of assistance from either of her nieces.

Bess took up a volume of Byron and amused herself with some stanzas of "Don Juan," until the gentlemen appeared—Coila was engaged on some tating work ; Miss Janet was busy with the newspaper.

The same order of affairs was continued throughout the evening. Killievar tried hard to obtain a few minutes' conversation with Miss Marjoribanks ; but Austin was always beside her, and could not be ousted.

Major Kilgour was at the piano with Coila. Thus far he was indifferent, and could therefore afford to be amused. He understood Bess perfectly now ; but he had not yet made up his mind whether to assist her or to oppose her. The position was interesting ; but he did not care to play a part in it unless it could be made profitable.

Meanwhile, as he was fond of music, he was much entertained by Coila's songs—consisting for the most part of homely old ballads, a few songs of Burns, and the Ettrick Shepherd. The Major sang, too, although he disliked to do so, except to cheer his comrades in some desolate camp, or to amuse himself while he was dressing or meditating ; he yielded, however, to Coila.

Killievar was resolved to spoil Austin's sport, since he could gain nothing himself, and so he remained beside the couple, joining in their conversation at the most inopportune moments, and internally chuckling with satisfaction at the idea that he was marring the success of this young fellow who thought he was to walk rough shod over them all in the glory of his recent campaign.

The Major, as he noted Coila's anxious and distressed glances towards the couple who were, apparently, too deeply involved in their flirtation to observe anything or anybody, felt really sorry for her, and much inclined to join her side.

Unconsciously he was attracted by her beauty and resignation, so that he forgot his own position much more than was usual with him. He found himself throughout the night repeating very often, the observation that Coila's face was the sweetest he had ever seen, and that her nature was the noblest he had ever known.

When he became conscious of this absurdity he laughed loudly, felt his pulse, and lit another cigar.

"No, my boy," he said, talking to himself. "You have passed through too many fires to get scorched by a pretty face. She is beautiful, and she is a splendid girl; if I had been a rich man now, nothing would have been more delightful than to have won her from that booby who is caught by the most open and bold coquetry of Miss Marjoribanks. But I can't afford it."

Bess went to her room that night with her temples throbbing, and her heart beating wildly.

What had she been doing?—exerting every gift of fascination that she possessed to win Austin from Coila! And she had succeeded—even the most modest could not doubt that. And what was to be the end of this mad flirtation?—Coila in tears and despair; and she the triumphant but miserable victor! No, no, that must not be. The feeling of mad jealousy, of envy and spite, tempted her to take the first steps towards revenge for her own disappointment and chagrin; but the good heart which controlled and often overcame the evil spirit of her nature rose up and opposed all further progress. She had loved Austin from childhood; and the blind fool had turned from her, the daughter and heiress of Marjoribanks, the millionaire, to Coila, the beggar and dependent.

She was almost ready to hate him—he was so blind, so stupid.

The next minute she was ready to cry with vexation and pain, for she did love him in spite of herself. Oh, she would punish him—if she could only spare Coila, who was a greater fool than him. But why should she not punish her also? It was her timid dove-like ways which had won him from the strong heart which was devoted to him, and which would have helped him to fame and fortune? Why should she pity her?

Pride whispered in her ear, and her whole form seemed to glow and tremble under its breath ; and this was what pride said :

“ You are Bess Marjoribanks, the heiress of a million ; why should you trouble your head about a man who has neither wealth nor genius ! Let this girl have him ; he will make a decent sort of husband for her. For you, there are the noblest, bravest, highest in the land.”

But the answer was a very simple one—she loved him, even when she was most angry with him.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## WHISPERINGS OF WAR.

FOR about half-an-hour in the morning, Bess was full of remorse. She approached Coila meekly ; purred about her with many trifling signs of affection, and even had some vague desire to ask her forgiveness ; that however, she did not manage to do, although she felt that it would have done her good.

She never continued long in one mood ; and so, when she perceived that Coila was apparently unconscious of any cause for vexation, the spirit of mischief asserted itself again. She began to think that her victory of the previous evening had not been so complete as she had fancied ; and the idea irritated her all the more in consequence of the repentance she had felt.

Standing on the steps in the conservatory to reach some flowers, she paused suddenly, with arm reaching above her head, and looked down at Coila who was arranging a bouquet. A pretty picture—the two girls in their simple morning dresses, surrounded by the glowing and brilliant colours of the flowers ; Bess, dark, imperious, and beautiful, like an Eastern queen towering above a fair haired slave ; Coila, simple and quiet, a sweet smile on her face suggesting happy thoughts.

“ Did you ask Austin if he was to stay with us any time ? ” inquired Bess.

“ No.”

“ Did you ask papa to ask him to stay ? ”

“ Oh, no.”

“ Why not ?—but perhaps you don't wish him to stay here ? ”

This with a quick suspicious look ; she was thinking of the previous night's flirtation.

But Coila was quite innocent of all reproachful thought.

“ I would like very much to keep him here for a few days ; it would do him good. I think he has not quite recovered from the effects of the fever, and he says his father told him that he will have to begin serious work immediately.”



"And yet you never gave a hint of your wish to papa! Well, you are the most easy-going lady-love I ever heard of. I would not like to be your lover."

"Do you think I ought to have spoken to uncle?" said Coila, pausing with a rose dangling between her fingers, and glancing up at Bess with an uneasy feeling that she had done something which would displease Austin.

"I know I would have done it."

Thus far Bess was perfectly honest; various motives inspired much of what followed.

She descended to the floor, her hands full of flowers, and preparatory to arranging them, seated herself on the steps.

"I don't like this arrangement you have made, Coila—I don't care whether you are offended or not, I must speak out. I know your funny notions about a promise; you bind yourself to him and you leave him quite free to do as he likes. I would not; it isn't a fair bargain at all."

"But I wish him to do as he likes!"

"What, to fall in love with the next pretty face he meets and leave you lamenting, as that song of yours says?"

Coila's features formed into a smile of perfect confidence.

"I trust him—I would trust him even with you, Bess, and yours is the bonniest face I have ever seen."

"There's nothing like laying the butter on thick when you are about it," she said, somewhat coarsely, but quite sincerely; for it was a principle she daily acted upon. She had unlimited faith in the capacity of human nature—especially the male nature—to absorb any amount of flattery, provided it was administered judiciously.

"But what would you have had me do?"

Bess snapped the stems of her flowers viciously.

"It is easy to give good advice; it is not easy to follow it. I don't believe that I would have been able to act with the propriety I am counselling. You ought to have compelled him to speak to papa at once, or you ought to have refused to hear him, or you ought to have made him understand that you held yourself as free to change your mind as he is."

"But I cannot change my mind, and he will not."

"Stuff—we are talking sense, not sentiment. You think you cannot change, and that he will not. I like Austin; I

believe in him—as much as you do,”—there was just the least quiver of her lips at that—“but people do change their minds; now if you had insisted upon telling papa, either he would have put a stop to the affair at once, or the engagement would have been openly recognised, and you would have been so much the safer. What-you-may-call-him can quote Scripture on occasion, and you see I can give you good advice—which it is not yet too late to adopt.”

Coila in silence deftly tied the stem of her bouquet, and held it at arm's length to examine it. Then :

“Thank you, Bess; it was kind and good of you to speak to me of this matter. But I would feel myself guilty of doubting Austin, if I insisted upon a regular engagement; and if—if he ever should change his mind, I would hate myself and him if he kept his word to me only because he was obliged to do so.”

“All right—do as you like! I've warned you, and you'll lose him.”

“If he is happy, I shall be content.”

“Oh,” cried Bess, passionately, for she had been really trying to raise up a barrier against herself; “you make me feel ready to fling a flowerpot or something at you when you talk such rubbish. You know that you would not be happy—that you would be miserable, and go off into hysterics, and all that. What would you say if he should take me instead of you?”

Coila looked at her steadily, as if wondering how much of jest and how much of earnest there might be in the words. She answered softly—

“I would try to say—‘God bless you both.’”

Bess jumped up as if she had been stung; her face was flushed, and her eyes were glistening as with tears, suppressed by passion.

“You're too good, Coila, for this world,” she cried; and it would have been difficult to tell whether she was more mocking than sincere; “you're too good; you'll die soon if you go on in this way, and serve you right. If you set up for a saint, you must accept a saint's reward—glory in the next world; I want my glory in this. Suppose the positions reversed, and you took him from me, I would hate you, and I would tell you that I would never forgive you.”

“Bess!—what is the matter?”

"I am telling you what I would do. I would not go snivelling to myself and pretending to forgive you, all the time that there were daggers in my thoughts; I would use the daggers like a man and defeat you if I could."

Her vehemence took Coila's breath away, filled her with a confusion of fears and suspicions, and she almost trembled before the passion of her companion. But she spoke calmly enough—

"Provided you defeated me fairly, I should be satisfied."

The two girls, looking at each other, each uncertain if she quite understood the other's meaning, felt that they had fixed the terms of a duel, which must end in the misery of one of them.

They were both relieved, and yet in different ways sorry that they had been interrupted before they had come to a perfect understanding, when they saw Major Kilgour in the doorway equipped for the moors, gun in hand, dressed in knickerbockers and thick brown socks.

"I beg your pardon, ladies, if I interrupt you; but I am looking for Dr. Austin Murray who was to accompany us this morning, and the laird of Killievar is impatient."

Bess gave vent to a clear musical laugh.

"We were rehearsing a bit of a comedy, Major, which Coila and I mean to play some day soon. You may have a part in the play if you behave well and show any genius that way."

The Major bowed.

"I shall be delighted to do anything that may amuse you; but let me have the fool's part if there is one in your comedy, for that requires no genius in me."

"On the contrary, the fool requires the greatest genius of all."

"I am your debtor," said the Major laughing, and bowing again, "for a compliment and a lesson. Shall I join the rehearsal now?"

"Unnecessary; nature has endowed you with every gift for the part—you can play it without rehearsal."

"Oh, Miss Marjoribanks, you give me credit for much more talent than I possess."

"Impossible, in the present instance."

"It's all the more good natured of you to think so," he replied, suavely.

His good humour was not to be overcome by any amount of banter, even if it did proceed to the verge of rudeness. He had been looking at the two ladies; he saw Bess fierce and powerful in her passion, he saw Coila pale and almost trembling, yet he believed that the latter was the stronger of the two. His own part in the conflict was taken at that moment, and although he was ready to play the fool, he did not mean to be one.

"I've a message for Dr. Austin Murray."

They turned quickly round and saw the tall form of the gate-keeper, Joe Macbeth, with his curly white head thrust forward to examine the conservatory.

"I ask your pardon, mem," he continued, addressing Bess; "but Dr. Murray was driving by a wee while syne, and he asked me to come up mysel' and say to Mr. Austin that his father wanted him this afternoon. I promised that I would do it, and so I'm seeking him."

"Everyone seems to be looking for Austin Murray," exclaimed Bess, scornfully; "he must be a very important personage or a great criminal; ordinary folk are never in so much request. You see he is not here."

But the old gate-keeper did not move; he was looking at the Major with an expression of simple bewilderment. The Major appeared to be quite unconscious of this rude stare. Bess, however, observed it, and immediately set herself to discover the meaning of it.

"You have seen Major Kilgour before, Macbeth?" she said.

The Major looked quickly at the man, and then smiled innocently.

"It is possible," he said, "but not likely."

"Major Kilgour," muttered the man, repeating the name to himself several times; "it's no possible. I ask your pardon, Sir, but I had a son, Hector Macbeth, that was as like you as twa peas. He gaed awa' wi' the sogers years syne, and I've never heard a word about him. He's dead, like enough, or he would have sent some word to his father. It was me that gied him the name Hector, and it was me that put warlike notions intil his head—and now he's dead."

"Why," exclaimed the Major, "my name is Hector ; that is curious. We must have a chat about your son, and perhaps I may be able to help you to discover what has become of him."

"Thank you, Sir, thank you," said Macbeth retiring with a dazed look.

"I believe he thinks you are his lost son," said Bess, smiling.

The Major laughed with an air of amused indifference.

"He seems to be a decent old fellow. I would'nt at all object to him for a parent. Good morning, ladies."

And the Major retired.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE MODERN GENII.

THE ladies took the flowers into the drawing-room and placed them in the vases. Whilst thus engaged, Bess saw Austin crossing the terrace.

"There is the gentleman about whom everybody has been inquiring this morning," she said, carelessly. "And he does not seem to have the least consciousness of his own importance."

"He seems to be in a hurry, though," said Coila, looking over her cousin's shoulder.

"Then we'll stop him," was the mischievous comment.

Bess tapped on the glass, Austin looked up, then quickly advanced to the window.

Bess threw open the casement and leaned out; Coila stood in the background; but he saw her bright, kindly smile, and answered it with a blithe look of recognition and thanks.

"Where have you been all the morning, Sir," observed Bess, with mock sternness; "and what have you been doing that everybody should be seeking you in vain?"

Austin laughed more at her droll manner than at her words, and responded with assumed humility.

"I have been trying to get a gun; but Baxter finds that your guests, Morrison and Strongitharm, have taken the only two Mantons in the house; there were two others, but they are at the gunsmith's; and so I am going over to the gamekeeper's lodge to see if I can get one there. But who has been asking for me?"

"Why, Major Kilgour and his lairdship of Killievar, who has all his Highland pride in arms against you for keeping a descendant of the Celtic Kings of Ossian in waiting, whilst the grouse are waiting for him to go and shoot them. He is in a fine rage, I'll warrant, and ready to dirk you—is that the way to put it? or should I say is ready to stick his skene dhu into you?"

Austin was amused, and Coila laughed merrily at the melodramatic absurdity of Bess's manner.

"You ought to have been an actress, Miss Marjoribanks," he said in admiration; "you have a decided dramatic gift."

"Have I?—*Miss Marjoribanks?*" (with such pretty pouting lips that Austin longed to kiss them; and with such brightly arched eyebrows as would have made a fortune on the stage—the whole expression conveyed so much of mirthful banter and half-pretended, half-serious indignation) "and, if you please, when did you discover that I was *Miss Marjoribanks?*"

"Upon my word, when you look down upon me with that bonnie face, like the sun peeping through a cloud, I can find no title grand enough for you; and it becomes quite impossible for me to call you Bess, as I used to do when we were children."

He spoke frankly, with just a tinge of regret in his tone that the happy days had passed away. But Bess only turned to her cousin with another look of amazement, saying:

"You see, even he knows the value of butter."

"Pardon me, Bess, since I may use that dear name which is associated with my happiest days—let me say that I had no thought of flattering you just now. I only meant to say what I felt—and you do look bonnie, outshining the flowers beneath you and around you."

"What, more butter!—I say, Austin, what a lot of cream you must have looted in Ashantee. Have they many cows—or is it goats or asses they use?"

"Oh, Bess!" exclaimed Coila, pained and shocked, all the more so because she saw Austin was confused and speechless. He had not the Major's knack of giving good-natured replies to the rudest attacks.

"Well, then, we won't be too hard on you, poor dear, since it vexes Coila," said Bess, a little sorry that she had gone so far. Then she added gaily, "but I have not mentioned all the people who have been inquiring for you."

"Indeed, who else?"

"Macbeth came up with a message that Dr. Murray wished to see you."

"My father!—I'll go to him at once."

"And give up your day's sport on the moor?"

"Certainly."

A pretty shrug of her shoulders rather checked his dutiful impulse ; but he had half turned from the window as if to depart, when she arrested him with the words :

"Your father doesn't want you until the afternoon, and as you are not very anxious about the grouse, suppose you give the morning to us—Coila and me?"

"I would like to do so ; but if my father has sent for me it is on account of important business, and——"

"But he said the afternoon, and I would like so much that we three should revisit some of our old haunts—the glen for instance—that you might stay a few hours to please us!"

He felt awkward. The glen was associated with so many tender memories that no more tempting proposal could have been made to him than that they should revisit it together, and in fancy revive for a little while the merry days of childhood.

He looked at Coila, and she said, shyly—

"If Austin believes that he should go at once to Dr. Murray, you ought not to dissuade him, Bess."

That was a little chilling ; it extinguished the impulse of duty and roused the spirit of contrariness. He thought Coila ought to have been the most anxious for him to stay, and, instead, she was the first to say "go."

He stood between two genii, similar and yet distinct ; the one faithful to the call of pleasure ; the other faithful to the call of duty. The first was by far the most attractive of the two, and, naturally, he inclined to it. But he was not blind to the fact that the second directed him into the nobler path. Besides, he remembered that his father had told him there would be, in a few days, very important matters to discuss between them.

"In a few days," the doctor had said, "I shall know whether I am a bankrupt and a disgraced man, or the possessor of a fortune. I shall expect you to come when I send for you ; but I won't trouble your first days at home if I can help it. So we'll say nothing more at present."

He recollected that he had promised to obey the call whenever it came. But the dark eyes of Bess were upon him ; he reflected that it only made a difference of a few hours—what a difference a few minutes may make!—and, further, his father's message referred to the afternoon.



The temptation of St. Anthony was not more severe than that of an ordinary man placed under the battery of a beautiful woman's eyes, inviting him to give his thoughts to pleasure, and to postpone, or neglect, a disagreeable bit of business. The Saint knew that he had everything to gain by resisting the temptation ; had a certain character to maintain ; and was assured of his reward : the man doubts if he has not every thing to lose by his self-denial, and, at best, does not feel confident of any special reward for a stubborn fidelity to a common-place duty.

"I yield," said Austin, at length, "the forenoon is yours."

Bess clapped her hands and laughed gleefully ; Coila smiled, but displayed no enthusiasm, and, in the eyes of the lover, her manner contrasted most unfavourably with that of her cousin.

"Then, for the next three—say four—hours you are under my command. So, attention ! Remain there till we join you."

She pranced away, dragging Coila with her, and refusing to permit a word of remonstrance. Austin was left to his own meditations, and they were not so agreeable as he thought they ought to have been. The silence of Coila suggested that he had not acted wisely in yielding to Bess ; at the same time he could not see any harm in what he had done ; and was decidedly disappointed that Coila should display so little anxiety to detain him.

Men who can act promptly and vigorously in serious emergencies, are often weak and stupid in dealing with matters which appear to be trifles. In the latter case they hesitate, wishful to see both sides of the case, and to realize the future as well as the present results ; but in important affairs, the necessity for immediate action limits the view, compels them to think only of what is best for the moment, and to do that. Necessity has made heroes of many apparently weak men.

In the trifling incidents of daily life, Austin Murray was continually making little sacrifices of his own will to the pleasures or interests of others ; and he was continually discovering that the sacrifice was not appreciated—was often even misunderstood—and that it was only in a small degree useful or agreeable to the person for whom it was made, although it sometimes involved himself in difficulty.

"I'll take care next time," he often declared "to do what is most convenient to myself, as that in the end seems to be best for everybody."

But "next time" he was just as easily as before induced by his kindly impulses to do what he did not want to do. At present he was not comfortable.

The ladies appeared, and every disquieting thought was banished. Bess looked bewitching in her smart walking dress—hat with pheasant feathers, jacket with bright buttons and a blue skirt, coquettishly short, and displaying a pretty foot. Coila was similarly attired, but the colours were quieter, skirt a silver grey and not quite so short as her cousin's; jacket and hat black, the latter adorned with a white feather, which drooped gracefully over the left ear.

They made straight for the glen, intent upon visiting the hermit's cave, and the heights on which they had gathered blackberries. There was no lack of conversation wherever Bess happened to be. She never thought of what she was going to say, and so, bantering or in earnest, she was capable of sustaining a conversation with the cleverest or dullest of mortals. Everything her eyes lighted upon suggested material for talk; trees, shrubs, flowers, roads, dress, and even personal peculiarities. Utterly indifferent as to whom she might offend, and gifted with a rare talent for turning to the utmost account the least scrap of knowledge she had acquired, in discourse, or from book, newspaper, or magazine, she earned the reputation of being a brilliant conversationalist. No man who was privileged to take Miss Marjoribanks in to dinner, ever thought his entertainment dull.

On the way, Coila was reserved, almost silent, Austin seemed to address everything to Bess. She did not heed the fact that Bess was the leader in every subject started, and, therefore, he had no option but to give her his replies.

It was the faint beginning of doubt on both sides; so faint that like the first feeble flash of dawn the observer is for a brief space uncertain whether it is the herald of daylight or only due to the clearness of the sky.

Crossing the road near the toll bar, they saw a big cart, filled with ruddy faced men and women, halt at the toll-house door, the keeper being licensed to retail beer, spirits, and

tobacco. The men had their coats off, and some of these garments were dragging over the sides of the cart, others were slung carelessly over the shoulders of their owners. The women wore white or yellow sun-bonnets of stiff calico, the fronts of which protruded over their brows; short gowns, striped or checked; and rough linsy petticoats. Their blithe brown faces and sturdy limbs showed that they were accustomed to hard work and able to do it.

They were harvesters changing from one field of labour to another, and making merry by the way. They were singing, shouting and exchanging jokes—some of which were coarse enough, and not always harmless, although they were much relished by the company, as was evident by the laughter with which they were greeted.

Beside the cart, seated in a gig, was a broad kindly-faced man, who handled his whip scientifically, flipping the flies off the ears and flanks of his horse. At the same time, with the utmost good-humour and some smartness, he returned the banter which the harvesters indulged in at his expense. He was the farmer, and those in the cart were his workers. He was giving them a treat of small beer and a dram on their way to the field where they were to work, and in honour of the excellent crop they had already gathered for him.

As soon as the refreshment was finished, and the score paid, the farmer started forward in his gig and the cart followed, the people giving lusty cheers to their master as he trotted on before them. Then the driver of the cart, in his enthusiasm, whipped the horse into a gallop, and there was a loud rumbling and jolting of wheels, and a tremendous clatter of heavy harness.

“What a glorious life these folks have?” exclaimed Austin; “fine healthy work, and perfect happiness found in a mug of beer and a dram?”

“Just so, and they would envy your life as much as you admire theirs. You see we all want to be something we are not,” was the observation of Bess.

“I do not care to be anything but what I am at this moment—your escort,” was Austin’s gallant reply.

“Thank you, I am content also, for I have got my woman’s rights.”

“How so?”

"You have yielded to me, and you are here instead of being lost in the smoke of Airbridge."

"Oh!—then you are an advocate of woman's rights?"

"Of course, for every woman of spirit wants to have her own way, and ought to have it!"

"What do you say to that, Coila?—do you want your rights, too?"

"I don't know," answered Coila, laughing; "if we get our rights—the nature of which is somewhat vague, to my mind—we should have to forego our privileges, and I have an idea that we get along best with the privileges. If I were to get my rights, I would feel very much like a person who had got her 'deserts,' which would not agree with me at all, for I would be in momentary expectation of a whipping."

"Ridiculous! you have no spirit, Coila," ejaculated Bess contemptuously; "the world was made for women—and men were made to be their slaves."

"If all women were like you, Bess, the men might be content—for you can do anything; but there are so many women who can do nothing; and I am one of them," was Coila's quiet response—but Bess and Austin were not quite sure that there was not a touch of sarcasm in it.

"You might carry out your theories of doing good to everybody, by becoming a doctor," suggested Bess; "several ladies have adopted the profession and seem to thrive, for they immediately find husbands!"

"The responsibilities would be too much for me. I have a great respect for your profession, Austin. The physician is the true moral teacher; for he can command obedience where the mere preacher can only implore it."

Bess made a pretence of yawning desperately.

"Are you to go on much longer in this vein, Coila? Because, if so, I shall sit down and have a nap. Why, you are as good a sleeping dose as old Dr. Kay is himself when he gives us one of what he calls his most interesting sermons, which is always his longest, and, therefore, the dullest."

They all laughed at this sally, and enjoyed it none the less because they had a sly notion that it was a little wicked.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE HERMIT'S CAVE.

THEY had been ascending the hill and approaching the wood which overhung the glen whilst they chatted. Looking westward there were rolling plains, with a background of blue mountains touching the sky. A little to the east, the view was intercepted by the smoke of the town and of the tall chimney stalks of various works. The smoke rolled lazily up in the atmosphere, forming a local mist through which appeared steeples, chimney tops, and the square tower of the townhouse and prison, with its big white-faced clock.

The busy, smoky life which they recognised in the distance added much, by contrast, to the enjoyment of Austin and his companions in the delightful sylvan quietude in which they found themselves.

They came upon an old, disused quarry in the wood, one side of which rose precipitously to the height on which they stood; sharp boulders jutting out here and there with jagged edges, and, towards the summit, clothed with moss, and fringed with ferns, gorse, firs, and long grass, indicating that the place had been neglected for many years.

The perilous character of the precipice was completely hidden from the adventurers until they were on the verge of it. Then they had to cling to the branches of the trees which completely overshadowed it whilst they peered down into the abyss.

"What fearless vagabonds we must have been to come gathering nuts here," said Austin, casting a stone into the depth, and wondering how it was that fear should be the fruit of knowledge and experience.

"Do you remember clinging out upon that tree which hangs straight over the edge, just to get a cluster of half-a-dozen nuts which Coila happened to fancy?" inquired Bess.

Coila shuddered.

"The nuts were not sweet," she said, smiling; "at any rate, I could not eat them, and I have got four of them in my desk still."

"Have you?" exclaimed Austin; "well I felt no fear, and it was worth the risk to give you such a nice simple keepsake. But it is an ugly place, I doubt if I would have courage to repeat that adventure."

"I would have courage to restrain you, I hope."

The lovers exchanged a bright glance of devotion. Bess suddenly pointed to a gap in the fir trees which fringed the brow of the cliff.

"That's the place where the collier threw his sweetheart into the quarry; the lass was killed; but he declared it was an accident, and the verdict was 'not proven.' Everybody believes that he was guilty, all the same, and he was obliged to leave the country."

"What a pleasant subject for meditation," said Coila, shrinking away from the place.

"Nobody will throw you over, Coila, so you need not be alarmed," observed Bess.

"I am not afraid of that; but I was thinking——"

She paused, blushing, and then growing pale.

"Thinking what?" Austin asked.

"That there are some things in life more painful than being heaved over a precipice."

Bess regarded her with a quick look of curiosity; and then laughed at her sentimentalism, as she called it.

"Come along, and let Austin see the 'look-out' which papa has erected on the top of the hill."

The "look-out" was constructed of four stout fir trees firmly fixed in the ground at equal distances from each other, forming a square. The platform on the top was made of thick deal boards, and was guarded on each side by a pretty railing of wattles. The height of the platform was about fourteen feet, and it was reached by means of a rough looking but strong ladder. Two iron chairs had been placed on the top for the convenience of visitors.

There was much fun in the ascent. Austin went first, and assisted the ladies to land when they attained the upper rungs of the ladder.

The view they obtained was more than a sufficient reward for all their trouble. The country for miles round lay before them, like a grand picture, or series of pictures, touched with divine lights which no painter has ever yet perfectly expressed. Broad fields varying delicately from deep green to a pale shade that was in the distance almost yellow ; ripe wheat glowing into a golden hue under the radiance of the sun ; flocks of sheep and herds of cattle like moving specks on the landscape ; white faced villas of city merchants ; brown thatched, or red tiled cots of the labourers, their chimneys sending up pale wreaths of smoke. On the other side there was a straight glistening line of silver made by the canal ; right and left the skeleton forms which rose above the countless pits ; and far away, the hills, purple and grey, diversified by dark valleys and streaked with brilliant streams.

Close beside Austin and his friends were the deep slopes of the glen in which so many happy days of childhood had been spent ; the sunlight silvering the boles of the trees, and the overhanging branches casting fantastic shadows on the ground. The burn in its many windings glinting here and there through the foliage—like a wood-nymph laughing at a pursuing satyr—and tinkling a merry song as it danced gaily over the white and brown pebbles which lay in its path.

Beneath them lay the village of Craigiellou, chiefly inhabited by weavers, the red tiles of its double row of cottages supplying warmth to the green plain on which it was placed. Austin fancied he could hear the hum of the shuttles.

The three friends descended to the glen, taking the steep path which led, under the branches of odorous firs and flanked by sparkling clusters of blue-bells, forget-me-nots, and fox-gloves, down to the bed of the burn. It was a glorious renewal of youthful experiences ; and by this time, Austin had completely forgotten the message from his father and its import.

Here was the place where they had discovered a lark's nest ; there they had found such a heap of blackberries ; yonder was the rowan tree, the red berries of which had been strung into necklets and bracelets by Bess and Coila ; and farther on, beside the burn, was the stone which marked the spot where Austin had fallen into the water.

They were very happy over these reminiscences. At length they came to the entrance of the Hermit's cave—near which was the Jacob's ladder—a series of cross-bars arranged on the face of the cliff and leading up to the path on the height above, but the ascent was only attempted by adventurous youths endowed with much faith in their immunity from neck-breaking.

Outside, the Hermit's cave showed nothing but a rugged oval shaped hole, leading into the rock. Inside, it was an irregularly formed chamber of red sandstone, water dripping constantly and monotonously down the sides. The length was about six feet, the breadth, about four in the centre, but much narrower towards the extremities.

"Suppose we go in," said Bess; "the old man who used to live here won't harm us; indeed according to tradition he was a decent old fellow, and cured the villagers of every disease that flesh is heir to."

Coila declined. Bess declared that her cousin was afraid of spoiling her gown, or else had a childish dread of bogles. *She* was resolved to enter although she might have to abandon hope in doing so.

She crouched down and made her way through the aperture, with no more damage than a slight ruffling of her pheasant's feather. Austin followed gallantly, and the two stood in a sort of dim twilight.

"How could the poor beggar live here?" ejaculated Austin; "why, with these damp walls, one night would be enough to give me my death of cold."

"And look at the snails!" cried Bess, creeping close to him; "they are nasty things and always make me shudder."

She drew still closer to him, her hand pressing his arm as if to make sure of his protecting presence.

"Perhaps the Hermit made soup of them, and they have got into the habit of coming here. You know that story of the old woman who lived and grew fat on snails in the time of a famine, and in Brittany they are regarded by the peasantry as a delicacy."

"I don't care—I don't like them, and there is such a number here."



"We had better get out, then, since the place is so distasteful to you."

"Yes ; but it is much easier getting in than out. Don't take your arm away—there, I feel more comfortable. Now, let us examine the place."

They moved slowly round the small space, and were vastly amused by the initials of tourists and dates of their visits, which had been industriously carved on the rocks.

"What a dreadful life the poor man must have had here," she exclaimed, "without the least comfort of any kind."

Austin felt that he was bound to be gallant.

"I could live here and be happy," he said laughing.

"Yes !"

"Yes ; if only you happened to be my comrade."

"*Me !*"

She lifted her face with such pretty surprise, that in the twilight of the cave, it was endowed with irresistible charms. He was still laughing, much entertained by her eccentric conduct, and his head was bent towards her. Then the lips of the bonnie face came so near his that, without the slightest premeditation, his head bent a little further and—he kissed her !

There was a curious pause, as if their breath had been taken away by some utterly incomprehensible and alarming event.

Then with a sharp cry of pain, as if she had been struck, she sprang away from him, covering her face with her hands.

"Forgive me, Bess," he cried, conscience stricken, and thinking of Coila waiting outside. "You bewilder—you bewitch me, and you make me do things of which I am ashamed. Try, Bess, try to forgive me."

"You'll never do it again ?" she said, glancing at him through her open fingers.

"Never again."

"You're a fool," she said, dropping her hands and looking at him almost fiercely. She had half expected and yet feared a different answer.

"What on earth do you mean ?"

He was utterly puzzled, being quite innocent of the vanity which would have enlightened him instantly.

"I mean what I say. Oh, have you no eyes, no sense of feeling that you cannot understand how cruel you are to me ?"

"Cruel to you, Bess !"

He caught her hands, and looked straight into her face, and, in the dim light, saw the dark eyes glistening with tears of vexation. He began to catch a glimmer of the truth ; but the glimmer was vague and far away, like the candle in a cottage window seen through a mist.

Her passionate nature had got the better of her. She was innocent of any design on entering the hermit's cave ; but the touch of his lips maddened her, and rendered her good impulses powerless to counteract the influence of her love. She was bitterly conscious of doing wrong. She shrank under the sense of guilt, and yet she was unable to restrain herself. They were there, alone in the cave ; he had, inadvertently enough, applied a torch to a pile of gunpowder, and the explosion followed. She could not hide her love.

Was it love, or the mere vanity of women which seeks to conquer slaves ?

"Yes, cruel to me, for you will not see how much——"

Coila called to them and interrupted the confession which was on her lips.

"Are you not tired of the cave yet ?"

The voice had the effect of electricity upon Bess ; it pulled her senses together, and she saw with horror the abyss on the brink of which she had been standing, ready to precipitate herself into the unknown depths.

"Very tired," she answered hurriedly, in a curious tone, which was half sad, half spiteful. She observed the tone herself and was vexed ; but she could do nothing, save hastily stoop down and make her way out to the fresh air and Coila.

Austin, in his perplexity, stood for a few seconds gazing blankly at the drops of water which sparkled on the rocks. He could give only one interpretation to her words and manner ; and that interpretation made his blood tingle with a sensation that was equally composed of terror and amazement. He dared scarcely acknowledge to himself that the great heiress of Ravelston had suggested that she loved him and was ready to become his wife. Could that be possible ?

He was an honest fellow ; he would have despised himself had he been conscious of any thought of marrying a woman for money. Nevertheless, he could not avoid the speculation that he would have been a decently fair husband to Bess, and

that her wealth would have helped him to a position which he could never hope to attain by his own efforts. If it could have been ! But that was ridiculous.

"Are you going to stay there all day ?" said Bess, and the voice recalled him from dream-land, it was so full of her usual banter and indifference.

He could not understand it at all, when he emerged and saw her so cool, so sarcastic, and so ready to make fun of him. He came to the conclusion that in the hermit's cave either he had been dreaming, or she had been playing a hoax upon him.

Time lapsed so rapidly, and the three were so joyfully absorbed in retreading the steps of childhood, that they did not observe the hour until the deepening gloaming warned them that they would scarcely be able to get home for dinner. There was an instant hurry,

"You may as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb," observed Bess, in her gay way ; "so you had better come home and dine with us. Then you can go to Airbridge, if you like."

Austin yielded again. He went back with them to Ravelston, still in a confused state of mind regarding the scene in the cave. He endeavoured to put the subject away from him altogether and failed. Bess had only to look at him, and he was filled with new and tantalising speculations about her words and conduct.

In the midst of dinner there came a message for Austin Murray ; it was from his mother.

The doctor, his father, had been stricken with apoplexy, and the presence of his son was required immediately.

Austin instantly rose from the table, and, with a scared look at Bess, quitted the room.

## CHAPTER XI.

## TOO LATE.

HE went to Leishman, the groom, and with the assistance of half-a-sovereign got a horse saddled at once. He mounted; and with much less consideration than he ought to have had for the horse-flesh of his host, he galloped to Airbridge.

He was stung to frenzy by the bitterness of his self-reproaches, and he was quite unconscious of the wild way in which he urged the animal forward. He had neglected his duty to his father; and he had been almost disloyal to Coila.

What a mean scoundrel he felt himself to be; at that moment he was ready to accept any punishment as his due.

The sky was black behind him, but in front it was lurid with the reflected glare of the many furnaces of the distance. Trees and hedges assumed forms of deep gloom; the tops of two trees shot up clear against the sky and seemed to his dazed eyes like funereal plumes. There was a grey light on the road, making it clear; and there was a warmth in the atmosphere which in his present mood seemed to stifle him. Shadows, intensely black, crossed his course at frequent intervals, and assumed mocking shapes, taunting him for his weakness in yielding to pleasure when duty alone should have been his guide.

But he realized nothing definitely; all was dark, confused, and painful. His own feelings and the objects which flew past him in his wild gallop, struck only one note in his heart and brain, and that was one of constant self-reproach.

He reached the house—a substantial-looking cottage of grey stone, on the outskirts of the town. It had been erected when the town was a mere village, and still retained some of its rural attributes. There was a patch of ground in front, planted with shrubs and many rose bushes, and behind there was a considerable garden, in a corner of which stood the stable and hen-house.

There were lights in every window, and shadows flitted across the blinds. The rapid movement of the shadows indicated the prevalent excitement. Suddenly there was a pause; the lights flickered on the blinds, but everything else seemed to stand still.

Austin tied the reins to the gate and entered the house. He made his way straight to his father's room.

The door was opened by his mother, who had heard his step on the stair and recognised it. She was a little woman, with a placid, beautiful face; thick hair, which was now perfectly white, and, on that account, seemed to make her the more attractive.

"You are too late, Austin," she said, in a calm, sad voice; "he is quite unconscious; but he was most anxious to see you."

Without replying, Austin entered the room. His brother, Tom, and his sister, Amelia, were there; his father lay on the bed breathing stertorously.

Austin observed no one but the helpless figure on the bed. He advanced and clasped one of the clammy, insensible hands in his own.

"Father, I am come—speak! For God's sake, say that you pardon me. I can never pardon myself."

The heavy painful breathing continued; and there was no sign of recognition.

"When did this happen?" Austin asked, turning to his mother.

"A few hours ago," she replied, with a methodical calmness which seemed to be habitual. "He went out in the morning, much as usual, and came home about noon. Then he received a number of letters which had just arrived, and one of them especially disturbed him; but he would explain nothing. He only said that he wished you would come home."

"Oh, if I had only known," Austin groaned.

"He went out again," the mother continued, "but returned in about half-an-hour, saying that he was upset and could do nothing. He remained in the consulting room, but would not see any one. He told me to be sure to go to him myself when his bell rang. Shortly after six o'clock the bell rang. I went to him and found him lying on the floor. Tom got Dr. Spence

to come and see what was the matter; he told me it was apoplexy, and I sent for you."

She had spoken in a quiet, even tone, but the suppressed anguish which was evident in it was more painful to the son than the wildest outburst of grief could have been. Conscience pricked him the more sharply. He turned again to his father, uttered his name affectionately, and repeated his appeal to him to speak.

Dr. Murray seemed to hear the voice this time, and to comprehend something of the meaning of the words. He turned his face—the veins were swollen and the complexion florid—and the glassy eyes rested for an instant on his son, then wandered to his wife and to the younger children. He appeared to be making a painful effort to speak but no sound issued from his parched lips.

Austin understood the dumb appeal, however, and answered it earnestly.

"I will take care of them; everything that you would wish me to do shall be done. I give up my life to the faithful performance of the work you have left me to do."

In this excited state no responsibility would have appeared too great for him to undertake, if by doing so he could in any way atone for the negligence of which he had been guilty that day.

He was much relieved to see that his father understood; there was a painful movement of the muscles of the face; the eyelids were slightly lifted, and the Doctor drew a long breath as if a burden had been taken off his shoulder. Then his eyes became fixed upon his son, with a lingering beseeching gaze, as if praying him to be faithful to the promise just given. That was the last sign he made.

In the morning a brief intimation of the date and hour of doctor's death was printed and circulated throughout the country. Everybody was surprised and shocked at the suddenness of the event, and everybody was sorry. Many took the incident to heart and formed good resolutions so to order their lives and affairs as to be ready for the messenger, Death, whenever he might come. All, for half-an-hour or so, mourned the loss of a genial friend and a conscientious medical adviser. They discovered qualities of greatness in him to which they

had been singularly blind during his stay amongst them. Then they went on with their own affairs, and only occasionally remembered the Doctor.

"Aye, poor old Dr. Murray's dead," was the general exclamation; "he was an excellent man; but the son seems to be clever and he'll carry on the practice, no doubt."

It was among the poorer folk that the Doctor was most missed. He had given to them a large portion of his time; they did not always pay him; he never pressed them, and never refused to attend them whenever his aid was required.

Medical men in such districts as Airbridge too often find a large class of patients who, as soon as they recover, regard the doctor in much the same light as the tax-gatherer, and have no compunction of conscience in shirking payment of his fees. Dr. Murray had had large experience of this characteristic, but it never made him angry. He would only mutter with his quiet smile:

"When the devil was sick, the devil a saint would be," et cetera. "But perhaps the poor wretch really could not pay."

And so it came about that he was even more loved for his personal kindness than esteemed for his professional skill, although in the latter respect he had long held undisputed sway as the leading practitioner of Airbridge.

Austin, very pale, and with lips often quivering, gave directions for all the necessary arrangements; and in this he was bravely assisted by his mother. She remained calm until all was done; but she broke down at last, and he had to take her to a bedroom and insist upon her lying down to rest.

For himself he could not rest. He sat beside his mother until he thought she had gone to sleep; then he went down to the parlour to speak to Tom and Amelia. The latter had been crying for hours and was now hysterical—she was only fourteen. Her brother Tom, who was the senior only by two years, had been trying to console her, although hot tears were on his own cheeks, and his voice was husky.

Austin succeeded in soothing Amelia, and after she had gone to bed, he took Tom into the consulting room—which was also the library—and kept him so busy addressing envelopes that there was no time to indulge excessive grief.

The most pressing cases on his father's list of patients Austin

attended to in the morning. He was quite calm, although he had a haggard, exhausted look on his face. Resolved to shirk nothing, he entered upon the work at once, as he knew his father would have wished him to do.

It was not until the day after the funeral that he was able to examine his father's papers and to obtain a clear view of the state of his affairs. He found the state to be very bad indeed, and difficult to understand.

Dr. Murray had been much too lenient about the debts due to him, and those which he had scored off as irrecoverable formed a very large item. His own debts, chiefly to friends who had at various times advanced him money to meet his expenses, amounted to a considerable sum—a startling sum in the eyes of Austin.

The secret of it all was that, acting apparently on the suggestions of Strongitharm, he had been speculating in mines. He had taken a large number of shares in the Jenny Mine, Mexico. The attack of apoplexy, which resulted in his death, was evidently caused by the intimation he had received that these shares were worthless, and that there was little likelihood of ever recovering a penny of the money sunk in the Jenny Mine Company.

That was the letter he had received on the day he had been stricken; and it was to this speculation he had referred in the conversation with Austin when he said that in a few days he would know whether he would be a bankrupt and a disgraced man or the possessor of a fortune. The worst of all Austin's discoveries was connected with this speculation; to meet pressing calls his father had borrowed three thousand pounds from Robert Marjoribanks!

Austin groaned; and then in a dazed, mechanical way began to calculate how many years it would take to repay this money; but what he was really thinking about was that he must repay every farthing. It would take years—five, ten years, perhaps; and, meanwhile, he must give up all thought of Coila becoming his wife.

Distant as the prospect of being able to offer her a suitable home had appeared to him that day on which he had spoken to her under the willow, it had seemed near in comparison with the remote future to which the date was removed now. With



his mother, his sister, and brother to provide for, and those debts to pay, it would be cruelty to Coila and madness in himself even to hope for their marriage.

All the same he did hope for it ; and he did continue to think about her, although he knew that she could never be his. The future, in which she did not appear as his companion, and the source of inspiration of his ambition, was a very dismal one.

## CHAPTER XII.

## IN THE GLOOM.

AT Ravelston the news of Dr. Murray's death caused much consternation in various ways.

Miss Janet was sorely afflicted by the loss of the only man who had ever thoroughly understood her constitution and sympathised with her ailments. The tears came to her eyes, and she had lost her handkerchief. She peered about in every direction, and fidgetted in her chair until Coila inquired what was the matter.

"My handkerchief, dear—now, don't move, please don't. It is very remarkable how things disappear; but don't disturb yourself, dear—you will only vex me if you do."

There was the usual hunt; and at length the handkerchief was found, stuffed into a volume of sermons as a mark of the place at which Miss Janet had suspended reading. She displayed wonderful ingenuity in putting things out of sight.

Marjoribanks, as soon as he read the intimation muttered to himself—

"Hope his affairs are straight, and that he has left enough to pay that money he got from me. It's a big sum, and he wouldn't have got it only he looked hale and well-to-do. Maybe his insurances will cover it."

This was rather a callous way in which to think of the man who had rescued him from a dangerous illness. But, with all his wealth, Marjoribanks was very particular about his dues; and he never lost an opportunity of saving a few pounds. The excellent portrait of the proprietor of Ravelston, hanging in the dining-room, was painted by a popular artist whose works were in much demand. When Marjoribanks asked what was to be the price—the question was put before the canvas had been touched—the answer was two hundred and fifty pounds.

"Man, that's a heap of siller for three feet of canvas," grumbled the millionaire; "suppose we say two twenty-five."

The artist was astonished and not pleased by this attempt at barter. He replied with amazing indifference to the fact that he was addressing a man of money—

“ I don't want to paint your portrait ; but if you wish me to do it, I have told you the price.”

After consideration, and taking into account that the provost of Glasgow (who had been knighted by the Queen) had been painted by this man, and that he, Marjoribanks, could not be painted by a less distinguished artist, he said—

“ Very well, then, you shall have the two fifty, but, mind, you're to put on the best of paint.”

So he was very much concerned about the sum he had advanced to Dr. Murray ; and was more concerned about that than about the loss to the district of a man who had done it much good service.

To Coila the news brought dismay and sorrow, thinking of what Austin must be suffering. She did not guess yet how entirely the course of his life was to be altered by this event. She only understood that he had lost his father, and that he would be grieved. She longed to be with him, yearned to offer him all the sympathies which her love inspired, and to try in some way—she did not know how—to help him to bear his present affliction.

But she could not go to him ; she could only write and tell him that her heart was with him, and that she was suffering because he was suffering.

To Bess the news was still more painful, not because she had any special regard for Dr. Murray, but because she thought Austin would blame her for detaining him at Ravelston, when he had been so much wanted at Airbridge. He would look upon her as his evil genius, and would hate her. The fancy was all the more distressing to her because she was conscious of some element of truth in it.

She had been his evil genius ; she had made him forget his father ; she had made him forget Coila ; and now when this calamity had recalled him to his senses he would blame her and despise her.

She thought it would be possible to bear anything but that. She felt very penitent and very humble. That kiss which he had given her in the Hermit's cave, and which had thrilled her

with such an exquisite sense of triumph and delight, now seemed to burn upon her lips and to intensify her feeling of guilt, terribly. She did wish to be true to Coila and to him ; she did wish them to be happy ; and yet her impulsive nature drove her forward into actions which she knew must mar their peace and add to her own misery.

“ I cannot help myself,” she cried wildly, when shut up in her own room.

There was passion and pain in the cry ; and suddenly she was moved by religious impulse, and she prayed fervently for guidance.

During the next few days she was beautifully submissive to everybody. Miss Janet thought that Bess was ill : even Marjoribanks observed the change in his daughter, and feared that she was about to have a fever or something equally bothersome—he did not like bother in his house, and had a horror of all infectious maladies.

But it was to Coila that she was most humble ; at the least hint of a want on Coila's part, Bess would spring up intent upon satisfying it. There seemed to be no service too menial for her to render to her cousin. Coila was at first amazed, and then vaguely suspicious.

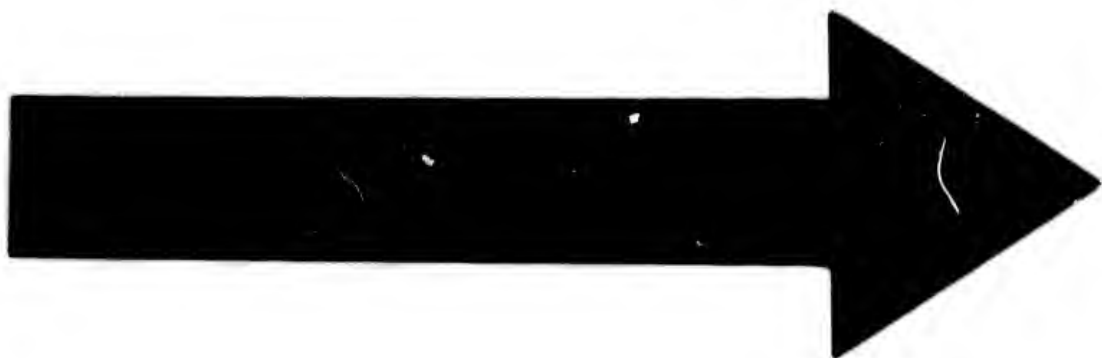
“ What can be the matter with you, Bess ?” she exclaimed one morning when Bess had been too officiously offering her service ; “ you are not like yourself.

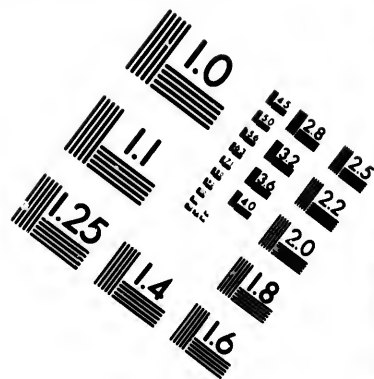
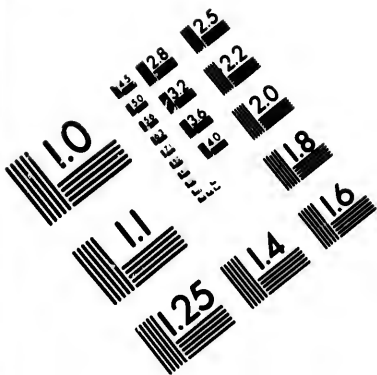
“ Oh, I feel that I could do anything for you, Coila, if I could only forget——”

She had been going to say—“ forget that I tempted Austin to kiss me in the Hermit's cave,” but she checked herself in time, with the wise reflection that what Coila did not know would do her no harm.

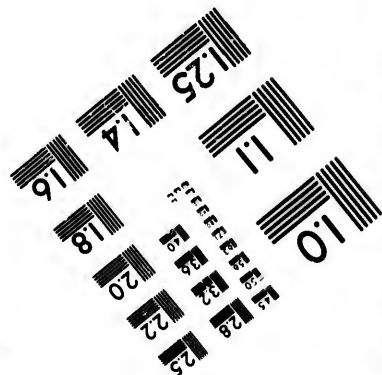
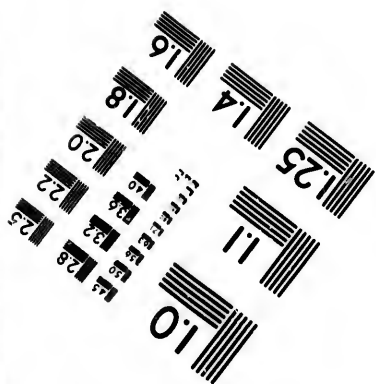
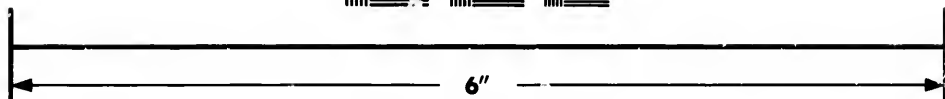
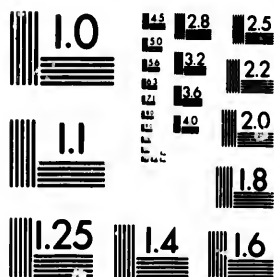
There was a curious mixture of wilfulness and conscientiousness in Bess. When a child she would steal the sugar and then pray for pardon.

At present she was utterly bewildered by herself ; she wanted to avoid Austin, and yet she was anxious to be near him ; she was desirous of seeing Coila happy with him ; and yet she felt spiteful towards her for having won his love. She wished to avoid all thought of him, and yet his image was continually before her.





**IMAGE EVALUATION  
TEST TARGET (MT-3)**



**Photographic  
Sciences  
Corporation**

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On the morning of the day appointed for the funeral, Bess fidgetted about the house with a restless desire, which she at length expressed to her father.

"I wish you would take me with you. I would like so much to see—poor Mrs. Murray!"

He consented, and she put on the darkest clothes she possessed. She borrowed a black bonnet from Coila, and took out the flowers with which it was trimmed, in order to make it look the more like mourning. It had a very shabby appearance when the flowers were laid aside; but Bess did not mind that, so long as it was black.

She suggested, in a timid way, as if half-afraid that the suggestion would be adopted, that Coila should accompany them. But Coila said no; and thought that it would be more considerate to the Murrays, not to disturb them by unexpected visits on this sad day.

If Austin had only hinted that he would like to see her, how willingly she would have gone, even if she had been obliged to walk all the way. But he made no sign, and she felt that his was a grief which should not be intruded upon without his sanction.

So she remained at home sadly arranging Miss Janet's work-table, and Bess went to Airbridge in the carriage.

Austin received them at the gate.

When Bess and Marjoribanks had alighted, he looked into the carriage as if expecting some one else; and was disappointed.

"It does me good to see you," he said, pressing the hand of Bess, and looking gratefully into her eyes.

"I am glad of that,"—and then she became conscious of a guilty joy, and added, hastily—"Coila would have liked to come with us, but she was afraid that we would disturb you."

"I am sorry she did not come," he said, quietly.

He gave his arm to Bess and conducted her into the house.

He was very pale, and his manner grave. He seemed to have grown twenty years older, in the few days which had elapsed since their last meeting. Whether it was due to this remarkable change, or to the deep sorrow of grief which lay upon the house, Bess did not know, but she regarded Austin with a feeling akin to timid respect. She could no more have made a joke



at the expense of this serious person than she could have flown in the air. He was transformed, mysteriously, but completely, and she was amazed at the sensation of awe with which he inspired her.

She was almost afraid of him, and she loved him all the more!

In the parlour she found Mrs. Murray, Amelia, and several gentlemen who had been invited to attend the funeral. Here Bess recovered her tongue at once—and oh! how she wished that she could have spoken to Austin when they were crossing the little patch of garden in front—to have expressed her sympathy and remorse; to have obtained from his own lips pardon for having tempted him to remain at Ravelston when his father had sent for him. But she had been dumb with him although she could chatter like a magpie with others. She was even sorry that she had not forced Coila to accompany them, because she fancied her presence would have comforted him.

At that regret there was a little sting in her heart—because she could not comfort him.

The procession formed, Austin, Tom, and Marjoribanks first, Strongitharm and Morrison, behind them. Killievar was there also, wearing the usual insignia of mourning, but still in kilts. Nothing could tempt or compel him to wear the "trews."

Bess was left alone with Mrs. Murray, for Amelia ran away to her bedroom, as soon as the coffin had been carried down stairs, and cried herself into a state of utter exhaustion.

The widow was charmed beyond measure by the kindly attentions of Bess and her warm sympathy in all the troubles of the family. She wished that Austin could have found such a girl for his wife; and then, by various trifling words and looks, she discovered beyond doubt that the lady was well-disposed towards her son, if not actually in love with him. The widow's grief was almost laid aside in her sweet imagining of the future which lay before Austin if he should become the husband of the great heiress, Miss Marjoribanks. He might—if his talents were backed by her wealth—he might become physician to the Queen, and a member of Parliament!—she saw no incongruity in the two positions.

Her thoughts were entirely taken away from the anguish of

her loss ; and she was busy forming brilliant schemes for the future of her son, when the gentlemen returned from the cemetery.

Bess was pleased, too ; Mrs. Murray took her so completely into her favour and confidence ; and by telling her what she knew of the embarrassed state of her husband's affairs explained the strange gravity of Austin's demeanour.

Just as they were leaving, Bess overheard Austin at the gate, saying to Marjoribanks,

“ Have no fear, Sir, every penny shall be paid to you.”

So, then, Austin was in debt, and to her father !

## CHAPTER XIII.

## ALADDIN'S LAMP

HOW kind Bess had been—and Coila, how cold! But there was her letter, simple, earnest, and full of the sweetest sympathy which pen and ink could convey. The letter was excellent, and would have been quite satisfactory if Bess had not come; for then arose the question—If she could come, why not Coila? The letter was a poor substitute for the presence of the writer.

He was disappointed, and he felt the disappointment more keenly because he was morbidly sensitive to the change in his circumstances. As an independent man he could have worked with reasonable hope of making a home for his betrothed in a few years; but as a man suddenly burdened with heavy responsibilities—a large debt to clear off and a family to provide for—he had no right to think, much less to speak, of love and marriage.

Inconsistently, he felt that it was well she had not come, and yet was vexed by her absence. Then he became impatient with himself for making a mountain of a mole-hill, and turned resolutely to the task he had in hand.

He was still in the period of youth when the gaieties of the world are most attractive; it was necessary to thrust them all aside, and he did so without hesitation, but not without a sigh of regret that in a few days he had become so many years older than he had been when last at Ravelston. However, he buckled on his harness manfully, and accepted the grave duties which had developed on him with an honest determination to do his best.

After the first few days of natural grief he set himself quietly down to his work; and the first thing he had to do was to endeavour to realize the actual position of his affairs. There was a big mountain to be scaled, he knew, and he wished to survey it calmly, to discern the path by which it might be

most easily surmounted, keeping all the time steadfastly in view respect for the memory of his father and for his own honour.

He would not try to blink at difficulties ; he was resolved to look them straight in the face, and, having seen them distinctly, to work with all his might to remove them.

He found that it was not easy to see clearly when his eyes were dimmed by emotions which the thought of Coila inspired. The duty imposed upon him did seem hard ; for he must try to think of her only as a dear friend and a lost love, whatever might be the cost in suffering to himself.

But what might it be to her ?

That question startled him ; there is always this difficulty in life—duty is never quite clear because of the varieties of claims upon it. Then one's own longings assert themselves, making the vision more indistinct, so that the best path to follow is often hidden under such an undergrowth of doubt and cross-purposes as defies the scythe of logic to clear away.

There are men of cold hearts and cunning heads who dispose of the difficulty easily enough by asking the question—"What is best for myself?"—and acting accordingly.

Austin could not do that. He asked—"What is best for the others?" The answer was plain at first—he must give up his life to the redemption of his father's debt, and to the support of his family. Afterwards, the matter became confused by the consciousness that he owed something to Coila. By strict adherence to his first duty he must sacrifice her ; and that consideration rendered the position awkward to resolve, and most painful.

His mother entered the study, where he was sitting with papers and account books on the table before him. She moved very softly, and seated herself opposite to him, the light falling full on his face, her own in shadow. Her thick white hair and pale countenance, contrasted with her deep mourning dress, imparted to her sadness the charm of beauty. She was calm as usual ; and her hands were occupied with a piece of crochet-work. She was a woman who was always doing something.

"Are you not tired, Austin?"

"A little ; but I would like to finish this list to-night."

"Have you no idea of the amount yet?"

He hesitated a minute ; then seeing how self-possessed she was, he answered :

“It is over five thousand altogether—but that is a small sum compared to the thousands which many men owe and seem to prosper, notwithstanding.”

There was a long pause ; she did not start or seem alarmed as he had expected. The crochet-work went on steadily ; it seemed to afford her the same relief which hysterics provide for other women. By-and-by.

“It is a large sum—a very large sum, although you try to make little of it for my sake. Can it ever be paid ?”

“It must be paid.”

“How ?”

“I shall work for it.”

She went over to him and kissed him. He looked up surprised ; for his mother was not prodigal of these signs of affection. He saw that her eyes were wet, whilst there was a quiet smile on her face. She placed her arm round his neck—the crochet-work dangled like the end of a necktie on his breast. With the disengaged hand she smoothed his hair, occasionally twisting it into curls with nimble fingers.

“I do not know how such a debt can have been incurred, Austin ; the thought of it confuses me. I, too, say it must be paid ; and yet it is too heavy a burden for you. Who are the creditors ?”

“Marjoi banks is the principal one. There are over three thousand due to him.”

“Marjoribanks !” her face brightened, for she remembered Bess ; and in the light of that remembrance all difficulty disappeared.

She seated herself on the chair beside him, and the crochet-needle dipped and twirled the cotton into form with much vigour.

“Do you like Miss Marjoribanks ?”

“Very much,” he answered, warmly, although a little puzzled by the question.

“I also like her very much. She seems to be very good-hearted, simple, and unaffected, although she is heiress to such a fortune as her father must leave her. There is not the least pretension in her manner, and it was extremely kind of her to

come to us on the day of the funeral. I shall never forget that, and never cease to be grateful to her."

"It was good of her to come. She is a droll creature ; she says everything that occurs to her whether it be pleasant or disagreeable ; and she acts upon the first fancy she takes without the slightest regard for consequences to herself or others. She vexes me often, and makes fun of me sometimes when I cannot see the joke. But in spite of all that, the sight of her is always a delight to me, and the sound of her voice is very clear and pleasant."

The mother looked at him, and, seeing that his face was glowing with admiration, felt satisfied that her fondest hopes were to be realized—he must be in love with Bess, as much as Bess was with him.

"Do you remember the story of Aladdin ?" she asked.

He smiled at the curious question.

"Yes, but it is a long time since I read it."

"You remember, I daresay, that he was very poor, and that his mother could do little for him."

"And he was something of a scamp, or he might have done much for her."

"So he did, he found a wonderful lamp which gave them everything they could desire—riches, a palace, and to him the hand of a princess."

"But he lost them all again through the ignorance of the princess."

"No matter, he recovered them, lived happy, and became a sultan."

"Well, but what has that to do with our affairs ?"

"Much. I think you have discovered Aladdin's lamp, and may marry a princess."

"You puzzle me," he said, smiling at this strange humour of his mother, which was so unlike her usual quiet, practical ways.

"I am surprised that you do not understand. I believe it is in your power to relieve us all of our troublesome debts at once, and to place yourself in the highest position your ambition may tempt you to seek. You like Miss Marjoribanks—she is in love with you, and ready to give you her hand if you will only ask for it."

She had spoken with unusual vehemence in her anxiety to impress her son with the importance of her discovery ; and the silence which followed made both feel as if the room had suddenly become cold.

The smile left his face ; he was very serious now. He rested his elbow on the table and covered his eyes with his hand. What dazzling, tempting visions were presented to his mind by his mother's words ! He felt that with a wife like Bess he would be urged forward to such a position as he could never hope to attain otherwise. Then Bess was so warm-hearted ; she had been so kind to him always : and she was so shrewd and clever. But it was Coila, the shy, timid maiden, who seemed to shrink from the gaze of the world and found the greatest happiness in solitude—it was Coila whom he loved, and never loved more than now when he was sensible that his loyalty to her was assailed by his own selfish desire to secure ease by being false to her.

He raised his head, with a dazed expression, like that of one awakening from a fantastic dream, the reality of which is still for an instant doubtful even when the eyes are wide open.

"You are mistaken, mother," he said quietly ; "Miss Marjoribanks, I daresay, likes me as an old friend, but not in the way you imagine. And if she did, I could not ask her to be my wife, because I care a great deal more for her cousin, Coila Gardyne, and have already asked her."

"She has nothing."

"I did not think of that."

"I tell you that you have only to speak and Miss Majoribanks will accept you."

"But I cannot speak ; and even if it might be as you say, Marjoribanks would never sanction such an union for his daughter."

"She is strong enough to overcome his objections."

"Possibly ; but it cannot be. No, no, mother ; I must honestly work my way out of our difficulties. I would never be fit for anything if I were to marry merely to escape the work."

The nimble fingers wrought steadily at the crotchet and presently Mrs. Murray began to speak, as if to herself, summing up the items of the account which her dead husband had left them to settle.

"Tom—he has to be provided for whilst he is at college, and he has two years yet to attend before he can get his degree. Or, he might leave at once, and enter an office; but even then he would require assistance at first. Amelia—she must have a little more education; for I don't like to send her out as a housemaid. She is not strong enough for that, if I did like; and so there is nothing for her but to try what she can do as a governess—it is not such a bad position if one happens to fall into a kindly family. Then, there is this debt—it is no use talking, Austin, it cannot be done."

"I'll try."

"Ah, you are in the spring of life and the pulse beats strongly. You have no fear, no doubt—the new spring buds know little of the frosts which kill. What do you think was the amount of your father's income?"

"About five hundred."

"Barely that some years, and he only gained it after a long period of hard work. You cannot hope to obtain all his practice at once; there will be a falling off you may depend. All we obtained was required for our expenses. With less of an income, the same expenses and this debt to pay besides, how can you expect to make ends meet?"

The question was unpleasantly practical, and he pondered a moment before answering it.

"Tom must have the chance of getting his degree; my father wished it. Amelia must have a thorough education; and we must just try our best and hope for satisfactory results."

"Hope is a poor substitute for bread and butter. I am sorry, Austin, that you cannot profit by my experience. You will suffer much in the task you have undertaken; and we will suffer in witnessing your struggle. We will be grateful: but I shall always regret that with Aladdin's lamp within your reach you will not lift your hand to seize it, and so place us all at once in comfort."

It was a matter for serious consideration; it was not only himself he doomed to privation, but his family also; and if his mother had correctly understood Bess there was no need for this sacrifice.

Coila! —he rose instantly from his chair and placed a hand



on his mother's shoulder. Then, kindly, but resolutely, he said :

" You must not speak of this again, mother, for you weaken me when indeed I have need of all my strength. I am sure you are mistaken about Miss Marjoribanks ; but whether or not can make no difference to me. I am going to Ravelston to-morrow to tell her father exactly how we stand, and to ask time for payment. He will grant it, for he is a good-natured man in spite of his roughness and patronising ways. But do you not think it a little absurd to suggest that I, whilst standing, hat in hand, begging this man for time to meet his claims, might in the same breath ask him for the hand of his daughter and heiress ? "

He uttered a short forced laugh, as if the absurdity of the position were painfully clear to himself at any rate, but he did not disturb Mrs. Murray's calm, calculating manner.

" I did not suggest that you should ask *him*, but the lady herself. She would arrange the rest much better than you could do."

He laughed honestly this time.

" I have no doubt of it. But mother— " he took her hand, looking into her eyes with an expression of affection and appeal. " Do not speak of it any more ; you cannot guess how much you pain me."

She was silent, disappointed, and sad, but not disheartened.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## CONFESSION.

IT was the afternoon that Austin had chosen for his visit to Ravelston. He had written to Marjoribanks asking for a quarter of an hour of his valuable time, and his request had been granted in a note from Mr. Hill.

He was approaching the house now, not as a guest, but a humble suitor for time to pay a debt. The position was humiliating, and he felt as if every servant about the place would understand it and grin at him. How the Major would stare as if he had never seen such a strange animal before ; how Killievar would glower ; and how Strongitharn and Morrison would smirk behind their hands ! He wished the interview were over, that he might escape from the place.

As he entered at the gate, Macbeth saluted him with even more than usual respect, hoped that he was very well, and that his folk were not too much upset by what had happened.

" We maun o' gang the same gate whether we like or no," was the sententious conclusion of his condolence.

There was a homely interest and sympathy in the gate-keeper's manner which caused something to rise in Austin's throat, so that he could only answer huskily with a brief " Thank you, Macbeth, all well." But he felt stronger, and able to walk more erect than before he had heard those kindly words.

He wished to think about the manner in which he should explain his position to Marjoribanks ; but in spite of himself his thoughts would wander to Coila and to the question how he should explain to her the change which his father's death had made. He was determined that he should tell her everything and release her from the pledge she had given him, whatever might be the pain to her and to himself. Then the vision of Bess flitted across his mind and disturbed him greatly.

He was haunted by a vague self-question— a ghost which

would take neither form nor character in his mind. Was it only a loyal love for Coila, an honest dread of bringing her from a luxurious home to one of comparative poverty, which constituted the motive power of his resolve to release her? Would he have been so ready to have set her free if that scene had not taken place in the Hermit's Cave, and if the observation he had made there had not been confirmed by his mother?

"Oh, for shame," was his mental cry at his own suspicions of himself; and thereupon he came to another resolution—that he would tell Coila's uncle of his proposal to her, and let him decide what was best to be done for her sake.

There was weakness in this; but it was the weakness resulting from an earnest desire to do right, and a little perhaps from pride.

He was ushered into a parlour and informed that Mr. Marjoribanks was engaged, but would see him presently.

He fretted at that, for in his present mood he was disposed to regard every petty inconvenience as a slight. He could not sit; he walked about the room nervously impatient. What was this man who treated him like a servant seeking a situation? He was rich; that was the answer, and, whatever he might be otherwise, his riches gave him the power to command and to snub the poor. That was a contemptible use to make of riches; but it was remarkable that those who began in poverty were often the most tyrannous when they attained the power of wealth.

He felt ashamed of these reflections when he was at length conducted to the library, and Marjoribanks, apologising for keeping him waiting, explained that he had been obliged to attend to the case of a widow whose husband had been killed in one of his pits, and who had been left with five young children to support.

"I've made her all right with two pound notes just now, and I'll see that she and the bairns are properly cared for in the future," he said in conclusion. "You see, my policy is always to help the deserving and to let the lazy beggars starve. But it's queer that everybody who is in need should come to me."

He spoke with regretful self-complacency.

Austin felt inclined to beg his pardon for the wicked thoughts regarding him, which he had entertained in the next room.

"And now about your own business," continued Marjoribanks, folding his hands across his stomach and leaning back in his chair; "what was it you wanted to see me for so particularly?"

"To tell you that my father lost everything in the Jenny Mine——"

"I know that," interrupted the millionaire, suddenly unclasping his hands and thrusting them into his pockets, as if to suggest their depth. "I lost too, but it does not matter to me. I can afford to lose; and no man should speculate who cannot afford to lose."

In uttering this sententious theory, he forgot the fact that if he had not speculated before he had been able to lose he would have been in a very different position at this moment. But successful men of his calibre find it most difficult to recognise the possibilities of success in others; and failure is in their eyes unpardonable.

"My father lost," Austin proceeded; "but I intend to pay everything."

"So you said."

"I shall require several years to do it, and I come here to ask you for time."

"Take as much time—uh-hum—as you like, man," was the generous response; "the money is of no consequence to me, and you can keep it for ten, or twenty years, or longer if you find it necessary."

Austin's breast swelled with gratitude, and he felt more and more ashamed of himself for the bitter way in which he had recently thought of this noble man.

"I cannot thank you properly, Sir," he said earnestly; "but I shall try to show you how grateful I am by my work and effort to save you from loss."

Marjoribanks was delighted; he twirled his fingers in his pockets—chinking coppers on one side and silver on the other—and felt that he was playing the magnanimous patron to advantage. A few thousands more or less were of no account to him, and he was content to let them stand out at interest, if at the same time they brought him reputation as a benefactor.

"I like to hear you speak that way," he said approvingly; "it's honest and right; and if you need a hundred or two to

keep you going, I have no objection to add that to the rest of the debt."

"I can only say thank you, but I hope we shall manage to get along without increasing our debts," said Austin, overwhelmed with gratitude, and now painfully convinced that he had done wrong in speaking to Coila without the sanction of this generous-hearted man.

Marjoribanks was glowing with self-satisfaction. Although he pretended indifference to all expressions of gratitude, he eagerly coveted them, and Austin's words and manner conveyed to him the sweetest homage. Still, he had some really good impulses which even this inordinate craving for approbation could not altogether spoil.

He rose; Austin took the hint and prepared to go, but he did not go yet. He wished to speak about Coila, but hesitated.

"I suppose it is too soon after the funeral to ask you to dine with us?" said Marjoribanks, holding out his hand to say good-bye.

That decided him; he must either come to the house as her accepted lover, or he must stay away. Gratitude to her uncle, the change in his position, respect as well as love for her, all urged him to speak.

"Yes, it is too soon, thank you; and I—must tell you something, Mr. Marjoribanks, which may cause you to think my visits here objectionable."

"Eh!—what's wrong? You have not been—uh-hum—doing anything irregular?"

The blood rushed to Austin's face, but he encountered the quick suspicious gaze of Marjoribanks fearlessly.

"You shall judge, Sir. I wish to marry your niece, and have told her so. That is my confession, and I feel that it is due to you, who have shown so much consideration for my family and myself."

Austin expected to see him frowning and indignant. He was mistaken; the master of Ravelston again thrust his hands deep into his pockets, this time as if seeking for something, and stared hard at his visitor. The expression on his face was that of one whose mind is concentrated upon the summing up of a row of figures in a ledger. He was privately wondering

why the youth did not fix his fancy on Bess herself when he was about it.

"That's unlucky—for you, and perhaps for her ;" he said, at length, in his usual brusque manner, and with the usual guttural sound in clearing his throat ; but without the least sign of irritation. "When did you tell her ?"

"Before I had the least suspicion of the present state of my affairs—when I thought there would be only her to work for, and I was full of hope."

"How long ago was it ?"

"On my first visit to Ravelston after my return home."

"And, of course, she was agreeable or you would not have spoken about it ?"

"Yes."

"She might—uh-hum—have done better," was the frank, but unpleasant comment.

"I hope, Sir, you will attach all the blame to me. I did not think——"

"Just so ; it is always the same in these love attacks, you don't think."

"I intended to say that poor as my position was when I spoke, I did not think it was to be so very bad as it is now. Therefore, I leave you to decide whether or not I may come to your house."

Marjoribanks ran up another sum on the page of the ledger which Austin's face represented. Then.

"Look here, Murray, I began life without a penny, as you know, and I have worked my way up to what I am now. You might do the same ; but you began with education ; I began with work—work of the hands as well as the brains, and wasn't afraid to turn to anything that served the moment best. I am afraid you could not do that."

"There are possibilities of a decent income in my profession, and there are some things in the world more valuable than money."

"Don't talk that humbug, or I shall think—well, I shall think less of you than I am inclined to do at present. There is nothing in the world to equal money for the power of good or evil. I tell you this that you may understand what I am going to say. I have no fault to find with you, I like you,

and like you all the more because you have come forward like a man and told me about this affair with Coila. She is a first-rate girl, and would make a capital wife to any man, poor or rich. But I don't want her to be the wife of a poor man; I want her to be as comfortable when she leaves Ravelston as she has been in it. And so, for her sake, I think it will be wise for you to keep away from the place until she has got over her romance, or until you have made a fortune. Now, what do you say yourself?—isn't that common sense?"

"It might be common sense," Austin thought, but it was none the less torture to him. However, he bowed his head in submission.

"I shall do whatever may be best for her happiness," he answered, with quivering lips; "but I shall still hope, and work with the vigour which the hope will inspire that I may some day be able to ask you for her."

"All right, hope as much as you like and do as much as you can, provided you don't tie her down by any foolish promise? Come now, I think you are honest, and I'll prove my faith in you—I leave the whole matter in your own hands. I trust to you to do what is best for her."

That was a cunning stroke of policy. He felt sure that Austin would act more strictly under these conditions than under any commands he could impose. He was always ready to show faith when nothing else could serve him better.

"I shall endeavour to prove myself worthy of your confidence. Meanwhile, I ask your leave to see her once more in private."

"Very good; you shall see her, and you can tell her everything I have said."

He rang the bell, and Baxter answered the summons.

"Tell Miss Gardyne that Dr. Murray wishes to see her in the boudoir," said Marjoribanks; and when Baxter had retired, he turned to Austin—"You see I am arranging everything for you. I shall see you in a day or two, and then you can tell me how your meeting went off. Now good-bye. You know your way to the room. I trust you to do what is right under the circumstances."

He shook hands quite warmly; and Austin quitted the library in a very confused state of mind as to what might be right and what might be wrong "under the circumstances."

He was puzzled by the way in which Marjoribanks treated the question. There had been no indignation, no attempt at coercion ; and yet he had been as distinctly forbidden the house and forbidden to speak to her as a lover as if he had been thrust out at the door by the servants.

Marjoribanks had simply used the talent which had won success for him in business—keen perception of the weakness of others, and of the right way and time to strike an effective blow. By showing confidence in him when he was expected to display the greatest distrust he had made Austin the most devoted of adherents to his wishes.

Austin had only to wait a few minutes for Coila ; but the time seemed long to him. She entered the room, face flushed with joy that he had come to see her, and step buoyant. She advanced to him with both hands extended in kindly greeting.

“I am so glad to see you, Austin.”

He grasped the hands—soft, warm little hands, which trembled in his with pleasure. He stood dumbly gazing at her, thinking how beautiful she was, and what a bright home she would have made for him. Poverty !—it could not come where she was. Misfortune !—her smiles would transform it into happiness. Failure !—it would be impossible so long as she was the inspiration of the worker.

And he was to say good-bye to her now ; to tell her that she must not even think of him, except as of some friend gone away in search of fortune with small chance of ever returning.

He could not do it, and yet he dared not be false to the trust which Marjoribanks had placed in him.

She wondered at his silence and attributed it to his grief. She drew him over to the window and made him sit on a chair, where, in the fading light, she could see him most distinctly.

“I have been longing so to see you, Austin, and to tell you how much I have shared in your sorrow and wished that I could have relieved you of a little of it. Bess told me that you were not pleased with me for staying away on the day—the day—” (she stammered, thinking the remembrance would be painful to him ; but she was obliged to use the word)—“on the day of the funeral ; but I fancied that you did not want me to come when you did not send for me.”

“I did not like to ask you, but I was disappointed. Your



presence makes everything look so much brighter and truer to me. . . . I must not talk that way. I have come to tell you something very unpleasant."

"What!" opening her eyes wide with wonder, and clasping his hands tightly.

"I have told Mr. Marjoribanks," he said, huskily and faltering, "that I wanted you to be my wife; and he has made me promise that I will not speak to you again on that subject until I have made a fortune!"

Coila was silent for a few minutes, and her heart fluttered with fright like a newly caged bird.

"My uncle means kindly," she said, with a sort of sad shyness; "but you do not mean to forget me because he says it is necessary?"

"Forget you! I never can do that, Coila. I have told him that I mean to work with the hope of one day being able to claim you."

Her face brightened with joy, and she was satisfied.

"Why, then, what is there unpleasant? We are much the same as before, only so much better since uncle knows all about it. I am glad you have told him, for it vexed me to think of our keeping a secret from him."

"But I am not to come to Ravelston until you have forgotten me."

"Then you will never come again. But I can go to Air-bridge."

He felt inclined to clasp her in his arms and to set Marjoribanks and fortune at defiance. But he checked himself, remembering the conditions on which he had been permitted to see her once more.

"No, Coila, I am pledged to him that we are not to meet, and that you shall be free as if we had never spoken of love. I must keep my promise."

"You can keep your promise, and we can wait and hope."

He forgot all discretion and embraced her fondly.

"Yes, my darling, we can wait and hope."

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## CHAPTER XV.

“PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW.”

VERY beautiful was the faith of the lovers in that moment of exaltation, when he held her in his arms, and she, with head thrown back, lifted to him a flushed face and bright eyes beaming with devotion.

The gloaming deepened slowly and the shadows in the room broadened into darkness, but before them was a soft light which revealed the green lawn, and the outlines of shrubs and trees with singular distinctness. It was the dim sweet light of hope shining upon them—made all the more precious by the shadow in which they stood—and it filled them with confidence in the future.

But Austin was to be true to his promise to Marjoribanks. When she understood the exact conditions on which he had been permitted to see her again, she was the first to say they must submit ; her uncle had been very good and generous to her, and she would suffer any pain rather than cause him annoyance. So they were to part for the present—really part ; they were neither to meet nor to correspond ; they were to be obedient in all things. She was to be at liberty to forget him—how she smiled at that impossibility ; and he was to be free to think of somebody else—how wanly she smiled at that possibility.

He said good-bye many times, and yet lingered ; his pulse throbbed madly ; he felt ready to brave anything, to risk anything for her sake ; ready to ask her to join hands and to walk out of the house with him into the unknown destiny which such a step might involve. Marjoribanks who had appeared to him half-an-hour ago, as the embodiment of generosity, now seemed to be a cruel man, guided only by cunning selfishness, and he groaned bitterly :

“Oh, if that money were only paid !”

Then he would not have hesitated ; he would have said

"Come," and she would have followed him, Ruth-like, wherever he might lead.

It was no weakness but rather strength which made him yield to the more practical view of the position suggested by Marjoribanks. To take her away now was to subject her to a bitter struggle against poverty; her presence would have strengthened him, no doubt; but she would have to suffer, and the sight of her suffering would be more than he could bear. He thought of that, and he sacrificed his own desires to spare her. They could wait and hope, as she had said; he would work besides.

He said good-bye again, and, at length, he went away, with a very doubtful feeling as to whether he had done right or wrong in obeying Marjoribanks. Coila would endure the most pain, for he, in the whirl of work and anxiety to remove the barrier between them, would find a certain degree of relief. Poor Coila!—there were so many things he had wished to say to her and had forgotten, that he was half-disposed to turn back.

Going down the avenue he met a lady and gentleman on horseback.

The lady abruptly drew rein and bending forward said:  
"Doctor Murray."

It was Bess, and her companion was the Major. She was in the habit of riding, or, on rare occasions, driving for an hour before dinner, and no weather was bad enough to prevent her going out, if she did not happen to be otherwise particularly engaged. Kilgour had on several occasions asked permission to be her escort; and, as homage of any kind was always pleasant to Bess, she consented—but she always had Leishman with her.

The Major was suspected by Killievar and others of deserting the moors to enjoy the privilege of these rides; and Bess maliciously led him along the roughest roads and through the most dangerous parts of the country, in the hope of tiring him, or of exhausting his patience.

She was disappointed; the Major was always cool; always indifferent to the stiffest ground, and ready for any leap whether the horse was capable of it or not. At first she was chagrined by his cool superiority; he had a knack of falling on his feet,

no matter where she led him or what traps she laid for him ; bog, hill, hedge, gate, ditch were all alike to him, and she bit her lip with impatience.

She was accounted the most daring rider in the county, and when out with the hounds she would take runs across country, which made men of undoubted courage and experience hesitate to follow her—for follow it always was wherever she happened to be.

But the Major was never daunted, never hesitated ; whithersoever she would go, he was with her neck and neck.

After one severe trial of his skill, she said :

“ You are a good horseman, Major.”

“ I have had a little experience,” he answered, with a laugh : “ You should have seen the work we had to do in the States, or even in Spain, with bullets playing about us like hail, and then you would know what riding was.”

The Major had no intention of being offensive or boastful. Bess thought he was both—as if she did not know what riding was, indeed ! Certainly he did not know how to assist a lady to mount, for he grasped her foot as if he would crush it, and lifted her as if she wanted to jump over the horse, instead of into the saddle. She told him of his awkwardness, and threatened to have the groom’s aid next time.

“ I beg your pardon, a thousand times,” he said, gravely and humbly ; “ but please give me another trial.”

She would not promise ; but on the next occasion of their going out, she again accepted his assistance. Her pretty foot merely touched his hand, and she sprang into the seat as lightly as a butterfly falls on a flower. She was gathering up the reins and he stood still.

“ Why don’t you mount ? ” she said ; “ or are you to remain in the house ? ”

“ Shall you require the groom’s aid, do you think ? ” he answered, smiling.

“ Oh, you are improving, and I dare say in time you will acquire the art passably well.”

“ My anxiety to please you, Miss Marjoribanks, will be the best warrant for my endeavour to become perfect in the art.”

She led him a wilder race that day than ever before ; and it was on their way home that they encountered Austin. She

had observed him at a little distance, but under the trees the light was now too dim for her to be certain of his identity until he answered her salute.

"Yes, and I am fortunate in seeing you," he said, hastily, avoiding any form of address.

"You mean in seeing as little of me as you can just now."

"The darkness is my loss," he replied.

The Major had moved his horse round to where Austin stood, and shook hands with him warmly.

"I am sorry to miss you at Ravelston," he said, cordially: "and still more sorry for the cause of your absence. But you will be amongst us soon again, I hope."

"I am afraid not. There are many things to be attended to, and I shall not be able to—to visit Ravelston for some time."

Bess was struck by the tone in which this was uttered, it was so full of subdued pain; and her quick wit at once guessed that there was some connection between his despondent mood and the debt to her father.

"He intends to become a miser of his time," she said quickly, "and to kill himself with hard work. Go on, Major, I'll follow you. I want to speak to—our friend."

The Major bowed, again shook hands with Austin, and rode slowly towards the house.

Bess turned her horse round.

"I will go down to the gate with you," she said; and then seeing the groom who had halted at a few yards' distance, she directed him to proceed home, as she was not going out of the avenue, and did not require his attendance.

The man touched his hat and followed the Major.

The horse which Bess rode was young and thoroughbred; it was not usually content to move at a quiet walking pace; but the severe gallop she had given it this afternoon, rendered it patient enough at present, although it would occasionally curvet a little to one side, or shy at a gleam of light passing through the opening of the trees.

Her action surprised Austin, but not so much as it would have done had not his mother suggested that Bess regarded him with no ordinary feelings of esteem. He was gratified too; human nature is very ductile, and yields at once to the touch of kindness. We cannot help liking those who like us.

He made a feeble effort to dissuade her from going to the gate with him ; but she answered him sharply—

“ I go to please myself, not you.”

He was silenced ; and when she had dismissed Leishman, she spoke again—

“ There is something wrong, Austin. . What is it ? Tell me.”

He kept pace with the horse, and did not answer immediately ; real sympathy was always precious to him, and her's was apparent in voice and action.

“ What is it ? ” she repeated, impatiently.

He looked up to her with a sad smile, and she could see it as she bent towards him.

“ I am not to visit Ravelston again until I have made a fortune.”

“ What rubbish !—who says so ? ”

“ Your father.”

“ Why ? ”

He hesitated ; the horse curvetted, but his mistress soothed him and brought him back to Austin's side. He rested his hand on the arched neck of the animal and they walked on.

“ I can tell you, Bess ; it is painful to speak of the matter to others, but not to you. My father owed yours a large sum of money, and I have undertaken to repay it.”

“ He will not press you ; he can do without it, and you need not bother to pay him.”

“ He was most generous and said all that—but there is another matter . . . You know—about Coila ? ”

“ Ah ! ”—the horse made another curvet, and his hand dropped from the neck. She came back to him as before, and he continued—

“ Mr. Marjoribanks thinks that for her sake I ought to keep away until my circumstances are altered ; and I agree with him.”

The voices were silent, the trees whispered noisily, and the wind shook brown leaves down upon the man and woman.

“ And are you to hold her in bondage until you have made this fortune ? ”

There was a note of contempt in her voice, but he did not observe it.

"No," he answered steadily, "she is to be free—*is* free to forget me."

"And, of course, she extends the same wise privilege to you?"

"Yes, and we have said good-bye."

"Then you are both free?"

"Quite—as if nothing had passed between us. . . . We are at the gate."

"But you shall not pass yet. Turn back a little way with me; if you really mean that this is your last visit until that unpleasant period arrives when you will be bald and rich, you cannot grudge me a few minutes more of your time."

"I hope to have gained enough to enable me to come back long before I am bald," he said with a slight laugh, turning as she desired.

She did not speak for a little while; the information she had just received inspired many contradictory emotions—pleasure, regret, hope for herself, and fear for herself. He was free—that was the first and dominant thought in her mind: then she would not be false to Coila if he should turn to her; she might think of him now without shame, without self-reproach. She was too much excited to imagine the possibility of an understanding between the two—as sacred as any promise—that they would be faithful to each other.

What she saw clearly was that he was in difficulty—in difficulty which would weigh upon his young life and make him old before his time. Surely Coila, if she loved him as she professed to do, must be glad of any means, must be ready to make any sacrifice, which could rescue him from that miserable fate—the necessity to work, work, work, without any higher aim than to gain money.

And she could save him! One tender word from him and all his difficulties would disappear. He was blind to the fortune which lay within his reach at that moment, and he would not accept it?

She felt angry with herself that she should care so much for one who was so stupid as not to see the tide which was flowing past him. But she spoke earnestly—

"How do you hope to make this fortune?"

"I see nothing for it but hard work and time."

"Hard work and time," she repeated slowly, stroking the mane of the horse and apparently trying to grasp the meaning of the words ; "they are two severe masters."

"Ay, that is the worst of it ; hard work and time as servants will enable a man to accomplish anything ; but as masters, they keep him down too often until he drops into the grave, having suffered much and done nothing."

"Then why be the slave of such tyrants ? Why not command them, rather than obey them ?"

"You are always joking," he answered sadly ; "I obey because there is no other course open to me."

"I think you are wrong."

"May be, but I cannot see how."

"You could if you would," and at that the blood tingled in her cheeks as much with vexation at herself as at him. She darted away from the subject and took up another more akin to it than she fancied.

"I suppose the edict which has gone forth does not exclude me from calling upon your mother ?"

"I hope not. She is very fond of you, and a visit from you will do her good."

"It is pleasing to know that ; so I shall call, and perhaps, at odd times, I may happen to see you ?"

"Of course. . . . But, Bess, do you not think your father will object to your visits ?"

"He never objects to anything I wish. Do you ?—are you afraid of me ?"

"How could I be afraid of you who always bring sunshine with you !"

"Very well, then, we shall see each other sometimes, and you shall not be allowed to forget me, at any rate."

"Thank you ; it gives me relief to feel that I shall not be altogether cut off from my oldest and dearest friends. But we are at the gate again."

"We can turn."

They retraced the path, he close beside her, and feeling more and more grateful for her sympathy and eager desire to comfort him. She did comfort him very much, and her strong will seemed to instil new courage into his heart.



In the deep gloaming his hand touched hers ; he pressed it tenderly in his own.

" You have made me feel ever so much stronger, Bess, since we have been chatting together. I do not know how, but I thank you fervently. You are so brave and true that you would enable one to bear the worst that fate might have in store. But I must not be selfish and detain you longer. Good-bye."

" Good-bye, and, Austin, think of this—for you there are other ways to fortune than by a weary service to hard work and time."

She galloped away, and he stood striving to solve the problem she had pouped.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE MAJOR'S TACTICS.

**U**P the avenue at full gallop rode Bess. Had she said too much? She wished him to understand her feelings, certainly: but she also wished him to *desire* to understand them. He was free now; as she comprehended the arrangement between Coila and him, each had agreed to allow the other to marry any one else if so disposed. No blame, no shame would be or could be attached to either if new ties were formed and the old bonds cast aside.

Bess was glad of that, and the swift motion of the horse did not at all keep pace with her pulses, quickened by hope. Nothing less than wings could have afforded her content in that moment of exultation; and even wings might have failed to satisfy her, for the oasis in the sky she wanted to reach was still far away.

He had often talked about the affections inspired by old associations, by the sweet memories of childhood, and so on. She wanted something more—much more than that. Would she ever be satisfied with anything less than the entire love for which she craved? She was like a child whose nursery is full of toys, and who yet hungers for one toy belonging to a playmate, as more precious than all the rest.

The question perplexed her, and was a bitter drop in the cup of pleasure which she drank on learning that Coila's engagement had been broken off.

The Major was waiting at the door, and assisted her to the ground. He was looking at her with much curiosity. She stared him straight in the face, and there was an attempt to display the usual expressions of pretty sauciness; but there was behind her eyes something of shyness or timidity—quite unusual with her. So with a hasty "thank you," she tripped into the house—the skirt of her robe caught up in neat folds by one hand, the other grasping her dainty gold-headed riding

whip tightly, as if she would like to thrash something or somebody.

The fireflash had been caused by the Major's evident comprehension of the motives which had caused her to linger with Austin Murray in the avenue. Why could he not leave her alone? Why should he stand there to note the period of her absence, and to show her that his eyes were wide open, however close or mystified Austin might be. She felt that she hated the man.

Kilgour watched her till she turned up the broad staircase, and disappeared. He looked at his watch.

"Over half-an-hour," he said with a smile. "You need not keep the door open, Baxter, thank you, I have ten minutes or so before dressing, so I shall take a smoke."

Baxter bowed, the Major lit a cigarette, and took a stroll along the darkest paths of the shrubbery.

The croo of the wood pigeon settling down for the night, the waking yawn of an owl; the twitter of birds trying to arrange about their nests; and an occasional lowing of cattle were the chief sounds which reached his ears in the mellow light of the evening. He was indifferent alike to sights and sounds. He was rarely subject to impressions of surrounding nature, and less so at present than usual.

"By Jove! she is fond of him," was his mental exclamation as he drew a long whiff of his cigarette, and its point shone like a glow-worm before him. "And what a duffer he is not to take advantage of such a golden opportunity!"

*He* would not have failed to take advantage of it!

He walked and smoked, meditating.

"My time here is nearly out. Shall I give it up? I have made no impression. Coila is too weak or too soft to stand against the will of Bess—but Marjoribanks can, and that is my chance. . . . My chance, to be tied to a tiger!"

A few paces forward, the glow-worm at his mouth shining brilliantly, and indicating the vigour of his whiffs; his feet touching the ground sharp and quick.

"The game is not worth the candle—yet she is a stunning girl; capable of anything and with money enough to enable a fellow to do anything. But she is as stubborn as old Harry himself.

. . . I wonder what Murray is made of—will he be true

to Coila or yield to Bess? I'll find out. On my soul the witch seems to be getting the upper hand of me in spite of her sauciness and chaff. Poor Coila--tush, Bess is the heiress."

He had entered into the game in pure sport, being a man ready for any fun, and ready for any adventure which might yield to him the settled position of a steady income for which he had been so long on the look-out; but he began to find the game becoming serious; and the chances against him were so many that he became the more anxious to win. He had often entered similar lists, and failed; but he had never entered the lists so much in earnest as now.

"I won't give it up yet," he said, throwing away the end of his cigarette; "it is wonderful what results may be obtained by sheer persistence, even under the most unlikely conditions. We shall see what trumps the hidden cards turn up."

He sauntered back to the house; dressed, and at the door of the drawing-room he encountered Bess.

He bowed low: she answered with a graceful inclination (in which there was still that singular shadow of timidity), and passed into the room, the door of which he held open for her.

The Major looked decidedly handsome in evening dress; the cut of his coat was perfect, and the broad shoulders, erect, martial bearing and cool manner set it off to the best advantage. As Bess glanced at him from under her long dark lashes she admitted that he was really a presentable person.

As he looked at her, he felt more satisfied than ever that with a wife of such sparkling beauty and dashing character, supplemented by a million of money, a man might do or be anything, and he coveted his host's daughter accordingly.

It was his privilege to take her down to dinner, and Bess took his arm at once, with that sort of desperate boldness which often tempted her to do the very things she most desired to avoid. Any one looking at her would have fancied that she was even too well pleased to be under Kilgour's escort; but she was mentally scoring ever so many black marks against him for the accident which had thrown them together.

He was complacent and devoted.

"It is such happiness to me to be beside you," he said, in the same tone in which he might have remarked that two and two make four, but with a serious twinkle in his eyes which she understood.

She was angry with him, and felt spiteful ; but she answered in her sweetest tones—

“ I am so glad, thank you.”

Her thought was : “ He is making fun of me ; but I'll punish him somehow.”

He was so quiet, and spoke in such a simple matter-of-fact way that she could not catch him up, although in her present irritable mood his whole manner was extremely impertinent to her. She felt as if he were gaining power over her in some mysterious way ; and she resented the idea with violent indignation.

They entered the dining-room ; there was warmth, the glitter of crystal, silver and lights. Comfort and elegance were united, and it was impossible not to feel in some measure impressed by these pleasant surroundings. Bess was not impressed ; she was too much excited by her own feelings, and too much annoyed with the Major to enjoy anything, although he, poor man, was guiltless of any disagreeable action.

He understood her feelings, however, and was careful. He made earnest endeavours to maintain a conversation during dinner, but found it difficult.

“ May I tell you what I am thinking, Miss Marjoribanks ?” he said, leaning over his soup.

“ Of course.”

“ You are looking more beautiful than ever this evening. That red rose in your hair and the white camelia in your breast are perfect contrasts of colour, and are most becoming. Nothing could be better than—”

“ Fish, sir ?” and the attendant whipped away the soup and replaced it with fish.

Kilgour proceeded—

“ I have been often, and from the first, profoundly affected by your beauty—pardon me, Miss Marjoribanks, if I speak too plainly—but never have you appeared so brilliant as this evening.”

“ Do you want anything, Major ?” she said, sarcastically.

“ Yes,” he replied, quite gravely ; “ but what I want can never be granted.”

“ Ah, I thought you wanted something.”

“ How so ?”

"Because people never speak so prettily as you do except when they have an object to gain. It is very nice to be told that one is beautiful and all that; and it is natural that in a little while one should become so eager to maintain the reputation for beauty and goodness that flattery has given, that the flattered person should be afraid to deny a request."

"You are severe, Miss Marjoribanks. When I am impressed pleasantly by anything, whether by beauty or courtesy, I feel that it is right and honest for me to express my gratitude for the pleasure which has been afforded me, even unintentionally—and I have so much pleasure to thank you for."

"Champagne, sir."

The Major's devotion was not affected by this interruption. He would not have observed it, had not Bess, with the camelia which she had taken from her breast, touched the side of her glass as if wickedly suggesting some association between her companion's words and the froth of the champagne.

Killievar had been loudly reporting his exploits of the day on the moors, and complaining about the poor sport, which led to an animated discussion, as to the source and probable consequence of the disease amongst the grouse. The subject was an important one; the gentlemen were interested; Coila and Miss Janet listened as if they were interested too, and so Bess and the Major were left pretty much to themselves.

The movement, warmth, and sound of voices imparted a pleasant excitement to the atmosphere of the room; and although love and dinner do not sound well together in sentimental ears, Kilgour never in his life before felt so much inclined to make love. He was amused and provoked by Bess; the strength of a fortress and the length of its resistance, renders the capture of it the more glorious. He knew that she was utterly opposed to him, and he was—foolishly, he thought sometimes—the more anxious to win her.

"Do you really mean all that you say, Major?" she observed, continuing the interrupted conversation.

"Certainly—why, do you doubt it?"

Her bright eyes shone full upon him, and he felt a thrill somewhere in his breast as he owned to himself that she was at times startlingly beautiful.

"Frankly then," she replied, "you give such profuse thanks

for the merest courtesies that I wonder how you would be able to acknowledge a real kindness."

"You mean by a real kindness, I presume, a service rendered in an emergency of great difficulty or sorrow."

"Yes."

"I would acknowledge that with the gratitude of my whole life. However unkind or wicked my benefactor might appear to others, I would always believe in his goodness and serve him faithfully."

"That is a soldier's idea of fidelity, I suppose; and you would serve this imaginary benefactor just as devotedly if he proved to be a great scoundrel, as you would if he happened to be a worthy man?"

"I would. The soldier's first duty is to obey, without questioning the sense of the command; and the first duty of one who has been helped in a moment of peril is to be grateful, without questioning the motive which secured the necessary and important assistance."

"You take an exalted view of gratitude."

"No, I think it is a very common-place one, and a practical one. Let me tell you an incident. You know that I was at Metz when Bazaine was shut up there. Well, although I had no command, I took some part in what work there was to do. In one of the sallies I was knocked down and had almost given myself up, when a fellow, who was making good his own retreat, picked me up and carried me safely within the lines. Whatever that man may turn out, villain or gentleman, I shall always be ready to give him my last shilling; and I would feel ashamed of myself if it ever occurred to me to calculate how much he had been moved to save me by the idea of the reward he might earn."

"That is interesting."

"I am glad you think so."

"And what became of the brave fellow who rescued you?"

"I have never seen him since and have lost all trace of him, for he did not even give me his name. Now we will go back to the point from which we started. The occasions on which we may render vital service to another are rare; but the opportunities for paying what you call mere courtesies are frequent; they make up a large portion of the pleasures of life,

and therefore I am always grateful for them. I regard these trifles of daily intercourse as of much more importance than they usually obtain credit for."

"Brandy or chartreuse, Sir?"

"You had better take something strong, Major?" she whispered; "it will do you good after your exertions in telling me all these nice stories."

Bess was never afraid of being thought vulgar; and she was quite indifferent as to whether she said pleasant things or disagreeable ones. The Major could endure; but he was disappointed, for he saw that he had not made the impression which he had thought he was making.

"I suppose there is no chance of my being permitted to speak seriously to you about anything?"

"Upon my word, Major, I do not like serious conversation unless there is real occasion for it."

"I cannot say there is real occasion for serious conversation at present, except to myself."

"Indeed."

The word was pronounced quite calmly, and without the least indication of curiosity or interest.

"Do you know that in three days I shall be leaving Ravelston; probably for ever?"

"Oh, not so bad as that, Major. You will come back next August, and, at any rate, you will stay with us till the races are over."

"I would stay—for ever if you wished me to do so."

"Whatever papa wishes is always agreeable to me."

"Ice-pudding, Sir?"

The Major took his ice-pudding with admirable composure.

She fences marvellously, he thought. He had tried every point and trick in the art of flirtation and he found her guard perfect. He was unable to penetrate the superficial manner in which she was encased; he would have liked to pinch her just to discover if she would utter a sincere scream when hurt.

He was aware, however, that it was not want of sensibility on her part, but rather her cleverness which rendered futile all his attempts to utter the tender things which he wished to say. She was conscious of her triumph—that was indicated by the quick side glance with which she regarded him; and she was



proud of the triumph. She had baffled him just at the time when she had become conscious of something like fear of him—a fear that his quiet resolution would force her into the very actions she wished to avoid. She had acknowledged to herself that he was handsome; from the first she had been satisfied that he was a cunning man of the world. But she did not give him credit for the real independence of his nature.

She thought his devotion to her was due entirely to the fact that she was the daughter and heiress of Marjoribanks; but in fact the Major was as much attracted by her bold, eccentric, self as by her fortune. He had too much confidence in himself to seek a woman merely because she was rich. That was the one important element in his character which Bess did not yet understand.

She was still playing with the camelia, and it suddenly dropped from her hand. The Major stooped to pick it up.

"Oh, please don't trouble."

"It is a joy to touch anything which belongs to you."

"But that is worthless."

"I shall regard it as more precious than rubies if you will permit me to keep it."

"Ridiculous."

"Not at all, to me."

"Well, if I thought you sincere I would say no, you are not to keep it; but knowing you speak only in fun I say, do what you like with it."

"Thank you; then I shall retain it as one of my most precious keepsakes."

"You must take it as treasure trove, then, for it is not a gift."

"That robs the flower of half its value. Still I shall keep it, as you have worn it, and it will always be precious to me."

At that moment Bess thought proper to give the signal for the ladies to retire. Killievar, with the alertness of youth, sprang to the door and made a pretty speech to each lady as she passed. The door closed and instantly there was a clatter of voices as if the valve of an engine had been moved and the steam was permitted to fly out unchecked.

The one topic of conversation was the approaching Airbridge races. Mr. Marjoribanks despised races and cards, but as a bit

of amusement, and especially where he was likely to be talked about, he had no objection to risk a hundred or two.

Morrison had a horse entered for the handicap race, and was very anxious about it ; Strongitharm had two horses entered, the one under the name of his foreman, the other under that of his stableman. He pretended to be very impartial, but he was in truth playing a double game, and ready to bet for or against his own horses according to the prospect of making anything out of it.

“ Are you making a book, Major ? ” he asked, as he passed the claret.

“ Unfortunately, I shall not be here for the races.”

“ What do you mean—you are not to run away from us before the races come off ? ” cried Marjoribanks.

“ I would like to stay, but my time is up in three days.”

“ Nonsense, man, you must stay with us for another month at any rate.”

“ You are very kind. Will you give me till the day after tomorrow to decide ? ”

“ To be sure ; but you must decide to stay.”

The Major had already more than half decided to stay.

“ You’ll find the races worth your while,” Majoribanks continued, “ although they are not so grand maybe as the French races. I suppose you have been at them ? I was there when the Emperor was in his glory, and the fine madams were flaunting in their gay fallals ; but there’s more fun at our races, and you can understand everything that is said and done.”

“ That’s more than the lassie did in the hotel we were at in Paris when you spoke to her,” observed Morrison.

“ Yes, but that was not my fault. You see, Major, we went to an English hotel in Paris, and in the morning I could not get any soap. I looked out at the door and there was a smart quean passing, so I just cried in a homely way—‘ Hey, lassie, fetch a bit of sape.’ She glowered at me for a minute, and then she says, civil enough, ‘ We don’t speak French here, Sir ; ’ and I have never yet made out what she meant ; but I suppose she was fresh from some Cockney boarding-house.”

He enjoyed the laugh at himself as much as any one

## CHAPTER XVII.

BESS MANŒUVRES.

“**W**ILL there be room in the carriage for me this morning, papa?” said Bess, during breakfast, as she carelessly chopped off the top of an egg.

“Room enough for you; where do you want to go to?”

“Nowhere particular. I just thought I would like to go out as it is such a fine morning.”

“I generally find that folk mean somewhere very particular when they say nowhere, and that is often an inconvenience to me. Where do you want to go?”

“Well, I thought about calling upon Mrs. Murray.”

“Anything new in the paper this morning?” he said, turning abruptly to Killievar.

“There was a gale down at Greenock, and about twenty lives lost. That’s all.”

Marjoribanks took Bess with him into the library after breakfast. She was a little irritated by his inattention to her request, and much puzzled by his manner. When he had shut the door, he took her by the arm and led her over to the window.

“What is the meaning of your sudden interest in Mrs. Murray?” he said, scrutinising her, as if he would search out the most hidden secret of her thoughts.

“I like her and I like Austin,” was the bold answer of the daughter; “and just now when they are in trouble I want to show them that they may count upon us as real friends.”

“That is very sensible of you, and kind, I suppose; but I don’t want you to go there any more.”

“Why not?”

“Because I say so, and I say it because young Austin has taken a fancy to Coila. That is bad for both of them, and so I want the acquaintanceship to drop as quietly and speedily as possible. You are not to go there.”

Bess was inclined to exclaim against this command ; but she knew that opposition only rendered her father more determined. So she bit her lip and repressed the words which she most desired to utter.

"Very well, papa, if you think it best that I should keep away from Mrs. Murray, I shall do so. But I am a little afraid that people will talk about our unkindness in deserting them in their distress, when everybody knows that nothing but the devotion of Austin's father saved your life."

That was very cleverly put, without absolutely realizing that her father was a man who was keenly sensitive to the opinions of others, she had used the argument which was most likely to influence him.

He was put out for a minute ; cleared his throat with much vigour several times ; and she looked dutifully submissive.

"Ah—well, he did do his work like a man ; but did I not pay him, and lend him over three thousand besides ?"

"Quite true, papa ; but people forget these things, and I am sure there would be some very unpleasant talk about us if it became known that we turned our backs upon the Murrays as soon as the doctor died."

This was a kind of selfish common sense which Marjoribanks appreciated. The whole joy of his life was found in listening to the loud expressions of admiration which his free handed bounty elicited. "What a generous man !" "How good !" "He is kind to everybody !" "He deserves his fortune—nobody ever did so much for those who were in need as he !"

The vision of the possibility of all this being changed to cries of indignation and scorn was extremely disagreeable. After picking up half-a-dozen letters and impatiently pitching them aside, he answered her.

"I never intended that we should turn our backs upon them. I told Austin that whenever he wanted help he might count upon me. What more would you have ?"

"That's very good of you, papa, and I am very glad. But why may not I see Mrs. Murray since you mean to be friends with them still ?"

"I have told you, because of this foolish affair with Coila."

"But I am not Coila."

"There, there, I have no time to argue with you, we'll see

about it another day: but at present you are to do what I say."

"Very well, papa; good morning."

She kissed him and quitted the room as composedly as if the subject had been one of indifference to her. But the door was scarcely closed behind her when she set her wits to work to find some expedient by which matters should be arranged agreeably to her own wishes. She had no idea of failure. On one point, however, she had some doubt; would it ever be possible to reconcile her father to the idea of accepting Austin as his son-in-law?

She put the question aside; it could be answered by and by. Meanwhile, as her conscience did not disturb her in regard to Coila, she found interest and excitement in her attempts to manage everything and everybody so that they might serve her ends without knowing it.

Coila surprised her. Although Austin was banished from the house, and the engagement entirely broken off, she was apparently quite happy. There were no tears, no sighs, not the least show of the regulation signs of a broken heart. Coila proceeded about her usual tasks in the same contented way as formerly.

Miss Janet was a little different; there was often a contraction of the brow as she watched Bess moving about the room, and she knitted with remarkable vigour whenever Bess was near her.

"You don't seem to be much upset by the loss of Austin," said Bess suddenly one day when they were walking near the lake.

"Have I lost him?" answered Coila, glancing at the willow tree under which he had spoken.

"How should I know that? But if you do not keep up a correspondence you are the coolest pair of lovers I ever heard of."

"Uncle said we were not to correspond."

"Your submission is too lovely, Coila. Have you found another beau?"

"Why do you say such cruel things?"

"I did not know it was cruel, but seeing you so often with Major Kilgour I thought he might have consoled you for the absence of the other."

Coila walked on in silence, and feeling much annoyed.

"Now you are in a huff," Bess went on in her reckless way ;  
"why not say the angry things you are thinking about me ?"

Coila's clear quiet eyes were turned upon her cousin.

"Why do you speak so much about Austin ?"

"Because I—like him."

The spirit of mischief had almost tempted her to say,  
"because I love him."

"I am glad of that, but it is no reason why you should teaze me. I owe so much to uncle that I shall obey him no matter what it may cause me to suffer ; but nothing can alter my feelings towards Austin."

"And you have never seen him since he was last here ?"

"No."

"Never written to him ?"

"Certainly not."

"Most extraordinary ! I wonder if this is virtue or coldness. I begin to doubt if you ever cared for him."

"I begin to think, Bess, that you care a great deal for him."

Bess did not speak for a few minutes ; then, swinging her parasol round her finger, she said slowly :

"Yes, I do care for him."

"Coila's head drooped a little ; but she made no reply. Bess watched her with quick, suspicious eyes. They returned to the house.

Bess had gained all the information she desired ; there was no communication between the lovers ; and so long as that state of matters continued, she could wait for a fitting opportunity to meet him. She had not again hinted to her father that she wished to call upon Mrs. Murray, but in various accidental ways she had suggested the advisability of his calling, until he was beginning to think that he ought to do so.

Austin, like Coila, was faithful to his promise ; he never approached the house or attempted in any way to communicate with her. He was frequently at the works in the course of his professional duties ; at the colliers' cottages, and at the pits his services were often required ; and he sometimes encountered Marjoribanks. They met as friends ; Marjoribanks was always frank and almost demonstrative in his cordiality, but neither spoke of the circumstances which banished the young doctor from Ravelston.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## COCKIE-LEERIE.

**M**ACBETH, the gatekeeper, was surprised to see his young mistress walk into the lodge one morning. She had on a pretty garden hat which was jauntily set on the side of the head; and in her hand she carried a little basket. Coila often called to see him, and to ask if she could help to make him more comfortable; but Bess scarcely ever did more than speak a hasty "hope you are well," as she rode through the gate. Therefore, it was a surprise to see that she had walked down from the house to visit him.

"Good morning, Macbeth," said Bess, with one of her most gracious smiles.

"A very good morning to you, Miss, and I'm proud to see you looking so fresh," he replied, standing up erect as a poplar and saluting her respectfully.

"Thank you for the compliment. What a pity you did not go into the army, Macbeth; you would have been a famous general by this time."

"I canna say for that, Miss, but I daresay the enemy wouldna have thought me the least forward of our sodgers."

He spoke with modest self-doubt, but the gratified smirk on his face showed that she had offered the flattery which was most pleasant to her hearer.

"I am sure of it; for I have heard something of the countless victories you have won at home."

"Deed and they were not a few, Miss. I was aye ready to stand up to any man for a bad bawbee, and I was not often second best. I kept my ground for seven rounds with Jock Gowdie himsel', and he was one of the cleverest hands in the ring at the time. I'll tell you about it if you sit down."

"Not just now, thank you. But when I want a defender I will come to you."

"And I'll be the proud man to do my endeavour, Miss—

but it's owre late," he added, glancing down at his wooden leg ; " though may be folk would find me a tough customer yet, in spite of that."

" Not a doubt of it ; and I am delighted to find you in such good spirits. I was told that you were ill, and so came down to see how you were to-day, and to bring you some little things you might like."

She produced a roast chicken from her basket, at which he said, " I'm obliged to you ;" then a bottle of whisky, at sight of which his eyes sparkled, and he said, " I'm *rale* obliged to you." A few other dainties were placed on the table, but nothing appeared to give more satisfaction than the whisky.

" I feel a heap better now," he observed, looking at the bottle.

" That is good news," she said, prettily swinging the empty basket on her fingers ; " but I think you ought to see the doctor, and I came here to advise you to do so."

" Me see a doctor !—no, thank you, none of thae corbies shall pick my bones. I have just got a cold and a touch of lumbago, and they will wear awa' themsel's as they have done afore."

" But there is young Dr. Murray. You are not afraid of him."

" I am feart for no white man, or black either, for that matter ; but he can do no good."

" You don't know ; and at any rate it would do no harm to let him call. You ought to consent if it were only to oblige me."

" Oh, if it's to pleasure you, Miss, I would see the deevil himsel', begging your pardon."

" Very well, I'll send for him this afternoon, and I will come down again to make sure that you attend to his instructions."

So, with a blithe nod she went away, entirely contented with the result of her mission.

She entered the library where Mr. Hill was busy with his correspondence.

" I beg your pardon for interrupting you, Mr. Hill ; but would you kindly send a note to Dr. Murray to call this afternoon, if possible about three o'clock, at the lodge, and see what he can do for poor Macbeth ? I am afraid he is very ill, although he will not admit it."



Mr. Hill was a mild young man and a little obtuse, so he answered—

“Certainly, Miss Marjoribanks ; but I am very sorry to hear that there is anything the matter with Macbeth. I saw him this morning, and he appeared to me very much as usual.”

“That’s his queer way you know ; he never will own that there is anything wrong with him ; so I hope you will oblige me and get the doctor to call.”

“I shall write instantly.”

“Oh, thank you, Mr. Hill, you are always so kind.”

A bright grateful smile accompanied the words ; he bowed—almost blushed (compliments and smiles were somewhat rare in his experience at Ravelston), and she retired. He wrote on the moment a few lines requesting Dr. Murray to call at the lodge about three ; and further he despatched the groom to deliver the note.

Bess was ready to dance with delight, she was so pleased by her own cleverness in arranging to see Austin without giving any one the least cause to suspect the real motive of her interest in Macbeth’s lumbago.

She was not quite correct in believing that she had accomplished her little plan without arousing suspicions. Macbeth put his hand up through his bushy white hair, and scratched vigorously for a minute as he watched the lady tripping along the path towards the house. Then he muttered :

“I wonder what plisky she’s gaur to play now ? Mischief in the bairn means deevilment in the woman, and she was just about as big a wee mischief as ever I kent. Ony way, it’s no me she’s after.”

That reflection afforded him some satisfaction, so he went indoors again. With much deliberation he opened the bottle of whisky and tried its contents. The smacking of his lips sufficiently indicated his approval, even without the additional sign of a second and third application to the bottle.

“That’s rale guid, and I’m thankful to her ; twa glass of that, and I’d be ready for Mendoza himself, stump leg and a’.”

Macbeth had been a cooper in Airbridge, and at one time had a fair chance of making a good business. But he had two manias—whisky and fighting ; and it would be impossible to say which was the strongest, for he indulged in both equally.

He was ready at any time for a match at fisticuffs, and he never yielded until he had licked his man. The miners of the district were ready enough to meet his views until it became clear that he was really the master of the noble art of self-defence. On this account he called himself and was called by others the "Cock-of-the-Walk." The boys of Airbridge transferred the cognomen into "Cockie-leerie;" by that name they hailed him whenever he was seen in the streets, and by that name he became known for miles round the town.

He was told that there was a soutar (shoemaker) in a village twelve miles off who would prove his match. Cockie-leerie at once marched to the village, challenged the soutar and beat him. But the soutar's comrades very unfairly united to revenge the defeat of their champion, and in a body set upon the victor.

The cooper was nothing daunted; he shouted his usual battle cry, "Mendoza by ——," rushed into the midst of his assailants and speedily scattered them right and left, so that he marched off the field triumphant, with another tall feather in his cap.

Mendoza was understood to be the name of a famous pugilist, so that Cockie-leerie's shout, given with each decisive blow straight from the shoulder merely indicated his belief that it was such a blow as his master might have given.

This combat with the soutar settled his position so decisively, that for some time the Cock-of-the-Walk was rather out of practice, except for an occasional round in the boxing tents at fairs or at the races. He employed his spare time, however, in teaching his sons the skill which he had acquired by practice; not only during the day, but at night he would lie in bed with one of the little fellows straddle-legs across his chest diligently boxing with him. He allowed the boy to hammer away at him with all his might, and would halloo with joy whenever a sharp blow was delivered; would pat the loon and promise him a penny—which he often forgot to pay. Sometimes he would give himself a severe blow in order to illustrate the manner in which his pupil should strike.

He had an intense admiration of martial heroes; and his devotion was pretty equally divided between Wellington and Napoleon. He counted the battles and gave his award to the

one who had won the greatest number. The army was his vocation, he felt, and he also felt that if he had entered it he would have become a great general; but as he frequently lamented with great bitterness:

"I have just thrown myself awa by marryin' that plaiden merchant's dochter, and I can do naething wi' a wife and weans."

It was the wife, however, who managed the whole business, saw that orders were executed, and kept things going when Cockie-leerie was incapacitated by whisky or some pending sport from attending to work. He never was in the least conscious of this important service which she rendered him. Responsibilities weighed lightly upon his shoulders, and whenever he got a "peeser" (a glass of whisky) he was ready for anything in the way of fighting, jumping, or dancing; he had become famous in each of these exercises.

He was an inventor, too, and his chief invention was a flying machine. It had been suggested probably by his leaping proclivities.

At the alum works he had frequently, for a wager, leaped across a vat of boiling liquid, about nine feet in diameter, with only about half a foot of ground for a landing stage on the other side. But when he had completed his flying machine—which was composed of leather stretched across sundry hoops and staves constructed to form wings—he took a wager with some of his cronies that he would descend from the top to the bottom of a considerable hill in two bounds.

He performed the descent with one bound; the leathern wings failed him, he fell, and hopelessly fractured his right leg. The leg was amputated above the knee, and Cockie-leerie was condemned to the use of a wooden stump for the rest of his days; but even then he would boast of his dancing abilities, and, leaning on the back of a chair, balancing himself on his "pin," he would display his skill in "high cutting," as the step was called, with the sound limb, whilst he assured his audience that the absent member had been equally expert in its day.

"Ay, billies, you should hae seen me when it was whole; then you would hae ken'd what dancing was; never a chap in the country could beat me at high cutting or the back stap. Let's hae another dram."

He swaggered about waging and swearing, and was as seldom as possible sober ; but on the Sunday morning as regular as the day came, he was up and dressed in his blue coat with brass buttons, and always with a yellow lily in his button-hole, ready to attend the kirk. For forty years he had never once failed to be in his seat in the loft of the church, except during the time that he was confined to bed on account of the accident to his leg.

Hard times came. He had two sons ; one when quite a boy had run away to sea ; the last that was heard of him was that he had enlisted ; but he never came home ; the other somehow scrambled through the classes at the Glasgow University and became a "doctor" But he had contracted a large share of his father's worst habits without having the constitution or the exercise which rendered their indulgence possible ; he died shortly after obtaining his degree.

The mother, bitterly disappointed and despondent, soon followed him, and Cockie-Leerie was left alone. He was inconsolable for a week and drunk for a fortnight. Then his buoyant spirit reasserted itself, and he married again. But the second wife had neither the skill nor the patience to manage the cooperage business, which in consequence speedily failed and Cockie-leerie found himself at last a cripple and a beggar.

Despite his frailties— or perhaps on account of them—he was generally liked ; and his misfortune was widely commiserated. Marjoribanks heard of him, and he was installed as gate-keeper at Ravelston, where he had a comfortable house to live in, and could occasionally indulge his wild humours by a visit to the little inn at Craigheloup. He was, however, very much tamed now ; he was still a tall handsome-looking old man ; but the fire of youth had been quenched and he performed the duties required of him with surprising punctuality. He read everything he could find in newspapers or books about war and warriors, always imagining himself to be the heroic leader of any successful battle. He had lived in a state of painful excitement throughout the whole course of the Ashantee war, and had often tramped to Airbridge of a night just to learn the very latest news. He felt a personal interest in every soldier of the Black Watch ; it was his pet regiment and he had traced its history with affectionate eagerness over a hundred glorious fields.

He had one remarkable peculiarity ; notwithstanding his courage, his readiness for a fight, and his admiration of war, he had an intense dread of small animals, and especially of mice. He would lie awake for a whole night quivering with fear at the scratching of a mouse. His wife had only to imitate that sound, or cry "mouse, mouse," in his ear, and she would rouse him from the profoundest slumber when all other means had failed.

Austin Murray had been surgeon to the Black Watch in Ashantee ; and therefore Macbeth admired him and believed in him.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## COQUETTING.

“**S**O, Macbeth, I am sorry to find that you are to become a patient of mine,” said Austin, entering the lodge about half-past three o’clock ; he had been detained by his mother, who was, as he thought, far too much elated by this summons to the lodge.

“Your father often said that once a doctor gets his foot into the kitchen, he has only to be sufficiently attentive and he will soon enter the drawing-room. Be careful how you act ; you do not know how much may depend upon this visit.”

“It is pleasant that you are so sanguine, mother ; but,” and here he spoke gravely—“the dream you cherish can never be realized.”

She thought he spoke a little regretfully, and that was a gratification to her—a proof that he was coming slowly round to the position in which he would grasp the Aladdin’s lamp which hung within his reach. But the real source of his regret was that his mother should still hope he might wed Miss Marjoribanks (he even thought of the lady in that formal way now, as *Miss Marjoribanks*).

The mother was satisfied with her own view of the future. She never pressed him on the subject ; rarely put her thought in plain words before him ; but she suggested much—the difficulties into which they had sunk on the one side, the beautiful wife and the brilliant fortune on the other.

“I can sympathize with your romance, Austin,” she would say, with a sigh ; “but you will understand my prose when you are as old as me.”

He left her, sprang into the gig, paid several promised visits, and then proceeded to the Ravelston lodge.

“You’re sorry, are you ?” exclaimed Cockie-leerie in reply to Austin’s salute ; “then on my saul, you are the first doctor that ever was sorry to find work.”

"I don't believe that, Macbeth, nor would you if you knew us better," replied Austin, laughing. He knew the old man's way, and never took offence at anything he said.

Macbeth presented his wooden stump as if it were a gun and he was taking aim at the visitor.

"Do you mean to tell me a man who has *ihat*, doesna ken what doctors are? You're young, you're young. I mind you when you was in long claites; but I understand your craft, and there's my diplomy for all the world to see."

"Well, I'll admit your knowledge; but you are looking hale enough. What is the matter with you?"

"I thought you was to tell me that, and I wouldna like to take the job out of your hands."

"Why, I was afraid there was something seriously wrong with you when I received the note to-day."

"Oh, you got a note, did you? And wha might the note be frae?"

"From Mr. Marjoribanks' secretary—Mr. Hill."

"Oh, ay—Mr. Hill," and Cockie-leerie eyed his wooden limb inquisitively as he drew the straps tighter in order to assist his meditations. "Od, man, I was thinking that it was a sort of hoast I had, and whiles there was a prickling at the point of the pin as though somebody was making a pin-cushion of the taes that are awa'; but now I begin to jalouse that it's something the matter wi' the heart."

"The heart! I hope not, for that is always a serious business to a man of your years."

"Or your's either—true enough, doctor; but I'm dcubting that's the fact."

Cockie-leerie's eyes twinkled with fun as he watched the young doctor instantly take a stethoscope from the inside of his hat and proceed to sound him.

Austin used the instrument with all his skill, and thoroughly sounded the patient wherever danger might lurk; tapped the chest with his fingers, and used every available method to discover the disease. But every time he moved the instrument the patient observed with the utmost composure—

"It's no there—it's no there."

When he had completed the examination, Austin replaced the stethoscope in his hat.

"There is nothing seriously the matter with you—a slight cold, which, if you will be careful, you may get rid of in a few days. Put your feet in hot water and take a stiff tumbler of toddy when you are going to bed, and you will be all right in the morning."

"That's fine medicine, I'll take it. But, man, you're young, you're young; the trouble is far deeper nor that."

"Not at all; I assure you, there is nothing to fear."

"I wouldna say; but here's somebody that can tell you about it a hantle better nor me."

Cockie-leerie made one of his grandest dancing-room bows—such as he had been accustomed to make when he stood up at a harvest home before a partner who was worthy of his best "high-cutting" step.

Austin wheeled round and saw Bess in the doorway.

She was dressed in her dark blue riding habit, the breast a little open, showing a white front, corresponding with the turned down tips of her collar, which was a slight modification of that worn by men; a black tie was fastened at the neck in a sailor's knot. The hat was placed jauntily on her head, and her veil formed a wisp round it.

Austin could not help being struck by her beauty, for her dark eyes were flashing mirthfully upon him, and the smile which lit up the face declared her pleasure in seeing him with sufficient distinctness.

"How do, Doctor," she said, carelessly; "very glad you've seen my patient; he is a stubborn old fellow, I must tell you, and won't admit he is ill at all."

"Just that—just that," muttered Cockie-leerie, regarding her with wondering admiration, and then taking a sly glance at the Doctor.

They shook hands; it was not his fault, it was not hers, that the hands remained clasped a little longer than was necessary. He was thinking about Coila; that this was one closely allied to her and in constant communication with her. Certainly, the presence of Bess did rise like a mist between him and the lady to whom he felt himself betrothed just as much as if there had been no breach in the engagement. Yet, through that curious mist the form of Coila appeared vague and impalpable, whilst



that of Bess, whose hand he held in his, was warm, tangible, and entrancing.

Partly because of Coila, mostly because of herself he felt drawn towards Bess by more tender ties than he had ever suspected to exist between them.

"There is very little the matter with Macbeth," he said, "but I am glad you thought his case worse than it is, since that fancy secured me the opportunity of seeing you again."

"I won't allow you to make light of my judgment," she cried, with playful indignation; "I tell you he requires your most careful attention, and has been deceiving you if he has made you think otherwise. He is an artful old humbug."

"Just that—just that," observed the patient, nursing his wooden leg, and apparently addressing it.

"I shall see him again if you wish me to do so; but there really is no necessity as far as I can judge."

"Oh, but you don't see far enough—you should hear him cough—he takes fits of it and promises to go off in one of the fits some day. His wife has told me all about it, and for her sake I must insist that you take him entirely under your care."

"Just that—it's the heart that's wrang, I tell you, Doctor," continued the gatekeeper, still affectionately nursing his peg.

Bess cast a sharp glance at him, and then, decisively:

"So much the more need of the Doctor, Macbeth."

"Just that."

"And so you must pay particular attention to what he says, and follow his instructions implicitly."

"Whatever is your will, Miss, I'll carry out."

"Good day, then; I shall be down soon again, and hope to find you improving."

"Whenever the Doctor comes, I'll aye be at home."

"Which way are you driving, Doctor?" said Bess, pretending not to hear the observation of the old cooper.

"To Craigeloup."

"I am riding that way; so we can have a chat about your patient."

She marched out; and Austin followed, after saying "good-bye," to Cockie-leerie, who repeated his exclamation:

"It's the heart that's wrang, Doctor. Mind that and never say I didna ken."

The groom was waiting outside with her horse. She had peremptorily refused the Major's escort for that afternoon, and she willingly accepted Austin's assistance to mount. Her foot rested in his hand. What a pretty foot. Strange that he had never observed it before. Only a second, and she was in the saddle ; he held the stirrup and the dainty foot slipped into it. He was sorry that the movement was so rapid and his services so speedily dispensed with.

He climbed into his gig, and somehow the mere action suggested the difference in their positions. He felt sad, and in a feeble way a little vexed with himself that he had been forgetful of the difference. There is a pride in poverty as well as in wealth ; and he was very proud occasionally.

She rode quietly beside the gig ; the groom fell behind ; and so they were enabled to talk freely. He was wondering how he should broach the subject which was uppermost in his thoughts—why she never called as she had promised to do ; but she saved him all trouble on that score.

"I count myself lucky in meeting you this afternoon, Austin ; I wanted so much to hear about your mother—is she keeping strong and bearing up like a man ?"

"She takes her sorrow like a sensible woman, and I think that implies much more strength than a man usually displays. She has often wished to see you."

"That is the very thing I wanted to explain—in spite of all my endeavours the arrangements here rendered it impossible for me to call. But you can tell her that she will see me soon, and that I often think about her."

"She will be delighted."

"Oh, we get on first rate together. I wish you lived nearer to us so that we might meet oftener."

"You forget that Ravelston is forbidden ground to me at present, except in a professional way ; and I have had doubts even on that point."

"Nonsense, man, my father is no tyrant, and he likes you, no matter what he may have said to you. Do you ever see him now ?"

"Yes, when I am at the works."

"Are you often there ?"

"Twice a day just now. I have a patient who lives in the

row at the gates. He is a puddler, and got severely burnt a few days ago. I have little hope of his recovery ; and he has a wife and ten children."

"I must see them—what is the name?"

"Jones ; he is a Welshman, who came here a year ago during the strike in Wales. They will need help, I think."

"They shall have it."

He regarded her with a grateful smile as if she had rendered him some personal service, and she was pleased.

"I shall tell the man, and it will be a piece of rare comfort to him to know that you have promised to help his bairns. I generally visit him the last thing at night about ten o'clock.

But we are getting near Craigeloup, and all the time we have been talking, I wanted to ask you about Coila."

He mentioned the name awkwardly, as if more than half conscious of the decided neglect which he displayed in delaying the question so long. He was not relieved by Bess, who laughed merrily as she touched the hind quarters of the horse with her whip and made it prance along the side of the gig as if it too were laughing.

"You certainly have been a little dilatory. However, fond lover, be content. I never saw her looking so well or so cheery in my life before."

"That is good news, and I thank you."

But in his heart he was not quite satisfied with the news ; Coila's contentment suggested indifference, and there are few lovers who can endure the suspicion of that state of feeling and be quite happy.

They entered Craigeloup : there was a hum of shuttles in the air, for the village was one of the few in which the home weaver had taken refuge. The weaving shops were on the ground floors, and most of the houses had a second flat (or first floor) which was approached by an out-side stair. From one of these, as Austin and Bess passed, issued the sound of voices singing the Old Hundredth Psalm. It was the house of the precentor of the Craigeloup Kirk, and he was teaching his children to join efficiently in the parts of the pathetic and simple air.

The sounds reached their ears distinctly, and despite the absurdity of the frequent repetition of the same line, the incident deeply impressed Bess. She caught a new meaning from the

words of the psalm, and she felt dismayed by a sense of guilt. The simple earnestness of the singers inspired the words and music with a sentiment which she had never before perceived in them.

"I have to make a call here," said Austin, pulling up before a humble looking cot : "I suppose we are not likely to meet soon again ?"

"That will depend upon you and circumstances."

"If it depended upon me we should meet again to-day," he answered, smiling.

"There is no saying what may happen. Have you any message for Coila ?"

Taken so suddenly, he did not exactly know whether he had a message or not ; it had never occurred to him that he might send a message, and least of all by the lips of Bess.

"Shall I say that you are dying ; or that you are happy and can forget ?"

Something in her tone irritated him.

"No," he answered, "if you say anything, say that I love her."

The horse bounded forward, and cantered down the village street, Bess neither saying good-bye nor looking back.

CHAPTER XX.

"JUDGE ME."

IT was not a pleasant afternoon to Bess. She had been elated throughout the day seeing her little plans succeed one after another. Everything had happened just as she wished; the doctor's visit to Macbeth, the meeting, and the opportunity for a tête-à-tête.

But there was the end of her triumph; half-a-dozen words had transformed her apparent victory into an undoubted defeat. All her pleasure for that day was destroyed; she felt as if she had suddenly dropped from the clouds and found herself very uncomfortably situated on the ground.

Her exercise that afternoon was as fierce as if the Major had been her companion.

When the horses were led into the stable yard old Ross, the coachman, who had a general charge of the stables, stared at them in horror; the poor animals were speckled with foam, pie-bald with mud, and their flanks quivering.

"Again!" he growled as he hastened to cover them with warm rugs; "have you been steeplechasing, or what the deil's in it that you bring the beasts home in such a like state."

"The deil is in it, I think," answered Leishman, "for we have been scouring across the country as though it was for a wager, and the deil haudin' the stakes."

"What bee's in her bonnet now?"

"Wha kens? She has just been neither to haud nor to bind this while back. She'll kill the horses and break her neck, and maybe mine too. Folk glower at us when we are fleeing by them as though she was daft, and I'm thinking they're no far wrang; she maun be a wee crakt to go on as she does."

"You had better keep such blethers to yoursel', my man."

"There's plenty others to say it without me."

"More reason you should keep your tongue in your head."

Although Ross gave this sage counsel he was not too abso-

lute in his rejection of gossip ; he said little, but he listened a great deal. He was really attached to the horses and anxious about them. He had even some idea of speaking to his master ; he knew it was not the slightest use speaking to his mistress, for as Leishman had said on another occasion :

“ She'll please hersel', and doesna care a button for beast or body.”

Bess proceeded straight to Coila's room, threw open the door and marched in as if to encounter an enemy.

The enemy was sitting at a pretty little escritoire—a birthday gift from Bess—writing. Her back was towards the intruder, but without looking up or turning, she said quietly—

“ Come in, Bess.”

“ How did you know it was me ? ”

“ By the way the door opened.”

“ Very much obliged to you, I'm sure.”

Coila proceeded with her task. Bess waited an instant and then :

“ You are writing to *him*, I suppose ? ”

“ You mean Dr. Murray ? ”

“ No, I mean Austin.”

“ That is the same—yes, I am writing to him.”

“ I thought so, and I am glad to have found you out. So you could not write, and you could not speak to him because uncle forbade it. Oh, how pretty that submission was, how grand the virtue. Poor me, who would have held to my lover in spite of everybody else, and everything, was looked upon as quite wicked. Bah ! I always find that the people who assume to be better than their neighbours are much the same, if not worse. Please do not allow me to interrupt you. Shall I leave ? ”

“ No thank you ; I shall be finished in a moment.”

Bess was somewhat taken aback by the calmness of the reply from Coila, who was always ready to shrink and tremble at the least angry word or sarcasm. Her better nature warned her to forbear ; but she was in a rage with herself and all her surroundings ; she could not be silent.

“ On my word, Coila, you would puzzle a magician. I find you writing to Austin just after you had absolutely declared that you could never do so without your uncle's leave, and you

are as cool as if there could be nothing more reasonable and honest."

"It is the first time and—the last time."

The pen halted in her hand a moment, and there was just the least perceptible indication of a suppressed sob; then she resumed her writing as if resolved to complete it, despite every interruption.

"Oh, yes, I know what firsts and lasts are in these cases—one of a series. The sweet soul says just this once, and it goes on being just this once till the climax. Let me assist you in your first and last—I have seen Austin to-day."

The head was lifted suddenly; the pen poised, and the breath seemed to be quickened.

"You have?"

"Yes, and he sent a message to you."

"What?"

"Oh, my lady is brisk enough now—I thought that would move you. What on earth tempts you to pretend to be so indifferent I cannot imagine, for it pleases nobody."

Coila bent over the desk again, added a line and her name, then covered it with the blotting paper.

"My letter is finished now," she said, laying down the pen and rising. "You misunderstand me, Bess, I am not indifferent; only I become nervous at times and quite unable to say the things I would like to say. So I am silent, and you call that indifference. But we need not talk about that. What was the message?"

"Such a ridiculous one to give a third person to carry that I can scarcely tell you for laughing."

And Bess laughed as merrily as if she had never known such a funny incident in her life before.

"I am sorry to hear that, for he is not often ridiculous."

"To you, I daresay; but he certainly was to me on this occasion. Fancy, the only message he had to send you was"—(lowering her voice, head drooping to one side, and a general expression of mock sentimentality)—"Tell her that I—love her! ha, ha, ha."

She gave no hint of the suspicion that he spoke the words as much for her own benefit as for Coila's. Yet that suspicion had embittered her whole nature this afternoon. It was bad

enough to feel that she wished to win him and could not ; but to think that he understood her thoughts—that was beyond endurance.

Coila walked close up to her cousin, face flushed and lips trembling. Her voice was low and unsteady.

“ I never thought you could be deliberately cruel, Bess, until now.”

“ Dear me !—and, if you please, what’s the special exhibition which has convinced you of my wickedness ? ”

“ You laugh at Austin because he spoke to you as to a dear, true friend—you know that he would not, and could not send such a message by any other lips than yours, and you scoff at him for trusting you ! Does not your own heart cry shame ? ”

Bess felt that it did—much more than Coila could imagine—but she had no intention of admitting such a charge.

“ Don’t look so indignant, Coila—you quite take my breath away, and, besides, the look does not become your style of face. I shall be very good and sweet, henceforth, and carry your messages to him and his to you as the faithful go-between of both. It will be so nice for me ; and I shall look so charmingly melancholy that you will never again think I am making fun of either. Your next message will be to him in this vein—‘ Thanks, dear love. I am yours devotedly until death and for ever after.’ Will not that be the fitting answer ? ”

“ No, the answer is not at all like that.”

Bess quite broke through her mask of raillery.

“ You are both fools,” she cried passionately ; “ I wish you would get married and have done with it. You would be sufficiently miserable in a couple of months to gratify your dearest friends.”

Much to the amazement of Bess, she felt Coila’s hands placed softly on her shoulders ; she saw Coila’s eyes looking with sad tenderness into her own.

“ Yes, I am afraid we would be miserable in a few months. I have been thinking about it all, Bess, and although it was difficult to come to a decision so much opposed to my own wishes as the one which will be best for him, I have decided.”



" I am not in a humour to seek answers to riddles—what do you mean?"

" *You love him.*"

Bess sprang back with a little sharp cry of pain or anger.

" How dare you say that?" and she stamped her foot on the floor.

" Because I know it. Do not be angry with me, Bess, for I cannot answer you in anger. I owe so much to your father and to you, that I dare not even defend myself if you choose to blame me. There is nothing in the world I can do which can ever repay your kindness to me. But I am ready to give up anything which may help you to happiness."

Bess, although her amazement increased at every word, had somewhat recovered her temper. Patting the floor with her foot all the time, she replied coldly—

" I do not understand this stuff."

" I am to tell Austin, that for his sake and my own, it will be better to put an end at once to all thoughts of each other; that no matter how circumstances may alter, I can never be his wife."

" You have not dared to say that you thought I———oh the folly of it makes me wild."

" I have said nothing about you."

Bess laughed somewhat nervously.

" And do you imagine I can swallow this humbug? That I do not know you are saying this only because you see me put out."

Coila shook her head and took Bess's hand between her own affectionately; but Bess snatched the hand away. The indignant flush became again visible on Coila's brow; but her voice was quiet and almost cold. The girl's nature rebelled against these petty indignities, when she was conscious of having done much more for her cousin's sake than could have been expected from her. She found it difficult to keep her eyes fixed only upon the kindness for which she had to be grateful, and so repress the words of retaliation which rose to her lips.

" You are wrong again, Bess, I said all this before you came in, and, therefore, without knowing that you had been particularly annoyed by anything to-day."

" Said it—to whom?"

"To Austin himself."

"Impossible !"

"Judge me."

She went to the desk, took up the letter she had been writing when Bess entered, and gave it to her ; but she was crimson with pain at the thought of submitting such a letter to other eyes than those for which it was written.

Bess took the letter, and balancing it on her riding-whip as a reading-desk, she said—

"What new absurdity is this ?"

"Read the letter and see."

Bess glanced at the lines, indifferently at first, then the riding-whip trembled so that she was obliged to hold the paper with both hands.

This was what she read :—

"Ravelston, Wednesday.

"Dear Austin,

"Forgive me. I say that first, because I think this letter will pain you, and, although I can say nothing which might win your pity, I would like—oh, so much !—that you should pity me and not quite hate me. I am selfish—may be worldly ; and I want to say that it is best for me that we should now and at once cast away from us that hope of a future union which promised to be our strength in present difficulties. I want to say, think of me what you will, but you must not think of me as you said you would. Be quite satisfied that I am thinking of my own happiness in saying I cannot be your wife at any time, no matter what changes may occur. You will make me most happy if you will forget me ; but in any case do not attempt to alter my decision—for you will fail and give me the—(a blot)—annoyance of having to repeat this letter. Good-bye ; think of me what you will, I shall always be your friend. I cannot say more.

"Yours sincerely,

"COILA GARDYNE."

Bess saw all the faults of this letter—its awkwardness, its vagueness where it was intended to be most explicit, its re-

petition of words, and even of phrases ; but underneath all she recognised the simple earnestness of the heart which dictated it, the devotion and self-sacrifice which inspired it.

She read it again, and then again, feeling each time more and more distressed, more and more ashamed of herself that she was incapable of such noble generosity.

She sat down on the couch glaring at the letter, but not reading it now ; she seemed to understand it all and yet felt bewildered. She had often laughed at women for crying ; she would have been glad if tears would only come at this moment to relieve her parched eyelids. This girl who had seemed to be always so weak was so much stronger than her whenever any serious difficulty had to be met.

She was conquered ; neither wiles nor coquetry could overcome the power which was exercised by a pure earnest nature.

Coila was standing near, quiet and patient. At length she said softly—

" You see, Bess, I wish you to be happy. . . . I will take the letter and send it off."

Bess started up fiercely.

" You shall do nothing of the kind. I will tear——" she stopped, the letter held up in her hands as if doomed to instant destruction. Then : " No, I will keep the letter as a token of your folly."

" You call it folly ?"

" Yes, the wildest folly. I tell you, you shall marry him, and that immediately. Macbeth's directions for a murder hold equally good for a marriage or a beefsteak—' if it were done, 'twere well it were done quickly ;' and so we shall have a wedding, and I shall play bridesmaid, and you will look beautiful in white satin and Valenciennes—real Valenciennes, mind you, for I have a lot of it upstairs, and it shall be yours. Oh, we'll be merry, I can tell you ; and maybe my turn will come next."

Coila suffered agony at this wild mixture of pain and attempted raillery. She was not deceived by it, and she said with a resolution that staggered even Bess—

" Give me the letter."

" No."

“What do you want with it? I know you would not use it to my annoyance, whatever you say to myself.”

“I am to take it to my father, to show him how good, how true and brave you are, and how bad I am.”

Bess quitted the room without giving Coila a chance to stay her.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## MARJORIBANKS PUZZLED.

"VERY well, show it to him if you will," was Coila's exclamation as Bess darted away; "he will only see that I have obeyed him, and followed his counsel more promptly than he expected. But he will never guess why."

She was angry with Bess, but she was also sorry for her, and that feeling overcame the other. She had discovered the madcap's secret, and she was quite decided how to act.

Bess, too, was quite decided how to act, and, moved by some sense of her own capricious moods, as well as by the irritation which Austin had caused, she hastened to execute her resolve.

Her father was not in the library. She went to his dressing-room and tapped at the door.

"What is it?" cried Marjoribanks.

"It's me, papa."

"Oh, it's you. Wait till I'm done shaving; you would make me cut my nose or my chin off if you were to get in just now—there, you have made me cut myself."

Presently the door opened, and Marjoribanks appeared in his dressing-gown, busy dabbing a red silk handkerchief on his chin to stop the bleeding of a slight cut.

"What do you want? You might have come at a more reasonable time—it only wants half-an-hour to dinner, and I'm hungry."

"And of course a hungry man is an angry man. You threaten to prove the truth of the old proverb, papa."

"I won't prove the truth of anything but the benefit of a good dinner to a man who has been working hard all day. Now then, what is it?"

"Read this."

She handed him Coila's letter. He took it carelessly, put on his glasses, and with chin in air he read the letter. There was no expression of pleasure or astonishment on his face.

"I'm very glad of that; it shows more sense on her part than I gave her credit for, and it is what I expected would happen, although may be not so soon. She's a very sensible lass. Here, give her the letter and tell her to send it off at once."

"She must not send that letter."

"What should prevent her?"

"You."

"Me! have you lost your wits? Why, it's the very thing I want—it's what I bargained for, although it is queer that she should be the first to speak, and so soon. I'm puzzled by that. But women are kittle cattle to shoe abint or to understand. However, there is more sense in Coila than I thought. I'm proud of her. She takes the plain sense of the position, and gives him no chance of arguing the matter with her."

"She does *not* take the plain sense of the position," cried Bess, impatiently, and almost ready to cry with vexation; "she does not mean what she says. She writes that letter just because—because she has a ridiculous fancy that it would please you and—me."

"But it will serve the same purpose as if she wrote in earnest," rejoined Marjoribanks, practically.

"She will cry her heart out and be sick."

"Hoots, no, she'll get over it, she'll get over it as many another woman has done. We'll take her about and keep her merry, and you'll see that in six months she'll be as blithe as ever, and on the look out for another Jo—with this difference, that she will think of his income first, and of the man second."

Marjoribanks chuckled with intense self-satisfaction; he understood woman's nature perfectly.

"Some women might do that, but not Coila—or I. . . . Sit down, papa, I want this affair settled now."

"It is settled, and it's close upon dinner time," he grumbled; but all the same, he sat down in the big easy chair by the fire.

"It is not settled yet," she said, bending over him coaxingly; "and you are the last man who should condemn another because he has little to begin with."

"I never objected to him because he had little, but because he had no stuff in him to make the little much."

"He is honest."

"No doubt."

"He is sincere."

"I daresay."

"He will be a good husband to Coila."

"That's very likely; but what does it all matter if he cannot make the pot boil? There is no objection to the man. I just want to save them from folly."

"But suppose you give them the chance of making the pot boil? Suppose you give her a few thousands to start them in life? He would make good use of the money; he would at once take a position in the county and gain a big practice, for he has much more in him than you think; he is brave and good and earnest, and he is clever, too. She will never find a better man."

She became enthusiastic in her pleading, and felt a kind of vicious pride in thus trampling upon her own hopes.

Her father kept his quick shrewd eyes fixed on her face whilst she spoke. Then he stood up, his back to the fire, hands thrust into the pockets of his gown, and the fingers working as if he were clinking guineas. He cleared his throat, uttering the guttural "uh-hum" several times before he replied.

"I never heard you say so much for anybody before. How's that? To hear you going on that way, anybody would think that it was you who wanted Murray, and not Coila."

"I would be glad if he would take me," she answered boldly and without hesitation.

"Aye, would you though? Suppose you were in her place, what would you do?"

"Marry him, and let you say or do what you liked."

"Wonderful!—you are the fool and Coila is the sensible woman. I thought you were far too cute, Bess, for any such folly. Now, away with you, and get yourself tidied."

"But you have given me no answer."

"There is none to give. If Coila sends that letter, I'll think it sensible on her part; if she does not, and hankers

after Murray as you say, they can keep the bargain made with me."

"You mean to wait a year?"

"Yes, a year soon passes; it will give them time to repent before the marriage instead of after it; and it will allow him time to see how he stands."

"It would be better, papa, to let them marry now."

She was standing as still as a statue with a face as cold."

"I almost think it would," he muttered looking at her steadily. "Hearken, Bess, I have plans for you, and take care you don't do anything to interfere with them, or—it will be bad for you."

"Then why don't you make Austin and Coila happy at once?" she demanded.

"Because I like my own way, and think it is best."

He rang the bell, and when the servant appeared he said—

"Tell Baxter to put the dinner off for half-an-hour."

The man bowed and retired.

"Now," he went on, turning to his daughter, "there are some things to say to you which we may as well get rid of at once. Sit down. I have got a notion that you would like to have Austin yourself."

She rested her elbow on the arm of the chair and then her brow on the hand so that her face was concealed as she replied—

"It is true."

"Oh, is it? Well, what the deuce you women see in the fellow, I can't make out. To me he appears to be a very ordinary sort of chap. I am glad you have told me; but if that is the case, why are you so anxious to see him settled with Coila?"

"He does not care for me, and I want to get him out of the way, so that I may not think of him any more."

The hands now completely covered the face, and she was breathing quickly, as if in pain.

"A good idea, and shows that you are not altogether an idiot. We'll have Austin here to-morrow and settle the business. But, mind, there is to be no more of this sentimental rubbish. Do you think I would have been what I am if I had given way to silly faucies, as you are doing? I took



the practical—and that means the successful—view of life. I turned everything to account for my own benefit, and you must do the same. You must agree to whatever plans I have made for you. I have made money, you must make position, and you can only do that by following my instructions."

"You can do with me what you please when they are married."

"A bargain be it."

"Thank you."

She retired, with a feeling of deep humiliation in having confessed the folly of her affection; and with just a shade of self-satisfaction in the thought that she had made a greater sacrifice than Coila.

She proceeded straight to her cousin's room.

"Here is your letter, Coila."

"I do not require it now," and she tore the paper into fragments.

"You have changed your mind?"

"No, but I have re-written the letter and sent it to the post."

"Was it the same as that?"

"As nearly as I could remember it?"

"Why did you not wait till I returned? I told you I was going to my father—he has consented, and you may be married as soon as you like."

Coila was startled, her heart seemed to pause a moment and then to beat against her ribs violently. She understood that Bess must have pleaded very hard for her; that she must have stifled all her own feelings to do this, and she felt more and more ashamed of the bitter thoughts with which she had lately regarded her cousin.

Presently all emotion disappeared and she answered quietly—

"Thank you, Bess, but it does not matter now."

## CHAPTER XXII.

"STUBBORN FOOLS."

AUSTIN was bewildered when he read Coila's letter. It was placed in his hands amongst others shortly before breakfast ; he recognised her penmanship at once, and eagerly opened the envelope.

He opened it with pleasant expectations of some kind words of encouragement and hope, and with a guilty feeling of delight that she had broken through the strict rule of silence which they had imposed on themselves.

He found that the letter contained the doom of hope ; she was never to be his wife under any circumstances.

Mrs. Murray, on entering the room, perceived that her son was much disturbed ; and his blundering efforts to conceal his confusion by nervously rummaging amongst books and papers, whilst three or four unopened letters lay before him, only rendered his perturbation the more apparent.

She concluded that some of her late husband's creditors had sent in claims for payment which Austin was unable to meet. Her vision was very much limited to the four walls of her house. She saw little beyond, and sympathised still less with anything which did not immediately affect her household. She could toil day and night for her own brood ; and she was disposed to have her neighbours do likewise. At the same time, she was always ready at any serious crisis to give her assistance to others, and it was always of the utmost value, because she never lost her presence of mind, and never failed to direct or to do the thing which was practically most useful and necessary.

"Has anything gone wrong, Austin?" she asked, in her quiet voice. "You are agitated."

"Yes, I am agitated," he answered irritably ; "but there is no use bothering you about it."

"I might help you."

"You cannot in this case. There."

He laid Coila's letter on the table. Whilst she proceeded to read it, he walked to the window, and looked out gloomily on a dull atmosphere, darkened by drizzling rain—a condition of nature most depressing even to a happy mind, but suggestive of despair to the miserable—and Austin was most miserable at this moment.

Mrs. Murray read the letter, carefully refolded it, and placed it on the desk.

"She is an excellent girl," was her comment.

"Excellent, when she has deceived me and broken her promise! Excellent, when she has — ah, but, of course, she has done what you wished her to do."

"I do not say that, Austin. I say excellent, because here is evidence that she cares so much for you that she is willing to save you from your own folly at the sacrifice of her own wishes."

"What do you mean?"

Mrs. Murray prevaricated. She was not going to tell him the truth which she suspected, and so make him more than ever devoted to Coila.

"All I mean is that she has sense enough to see how very awkward for you and how inconvenient for herself is the indefinite arrangement which you have made together; and so, to save all further annoyance to both, she makes an end of it in this way. She is a good girl to think of your position, and to endeavour to relieve you from such an unpleasant engagement."

"Oh, most kind. . . . Ay, annoyance is the word, she uses it herself. You see, she tells me that to make any attempt to reason with her will only subject her to the *annoyance* of having to repeat this rejection. She shall not be annoyed by me. She never can have cared for me; and I have been a fool."

His disappointment and vexation were almost intolerable, and he paced the room in bitter agitation with quick, nervous steps.

"You are right, Austin; it would be foolish and stupid of you not to accept this letter as the satisfactory solution of an unpleasant difficulty. You are now quite free to think of yourself, and you must do so."

"I understand quite well to what you allude, mother ; but I tell you it is ridiculous—a lady's humour is easily influenced by what you call convenience, and here is the proof."

He touched Coila's letter, and not the least doubt rose in his angry mind that the words were the result of merely prudential considerations ; not the least idea occurred to him of the anguish with which these words were written, or of the sacrifice of which they were the consummation. We are so quick to see the worst, and so slow to give credit for the best motives even to those whom we love.

"You have not opened the other letters," said the mother, desirous of changing the subject, for she was satisfied this was not the moment to urge her own designs, and to counsel him to transfer his regards to Bess. But she was well pleased to think that Coila had broken faith with Austin ; and yet a woman's inconsistency inspired a feeling of anger against the girl because she refused her son.

"It's a lucky escape for him," was her bitter and proud reflection.

"This is curious," muttered he, with an open letter in his hand ; "Marjoribanks wishes me to be at Ravelston before ten o'clock. He orders me to come as if I were a dog to follow humbly at his heels whenever he chooses to whistle. By heaven ! he takes large interest for his money."

Austin was in very bad humour, and ready to quarrel with his shadow ; but this was the most unamiable trait of his character which he displayed just now ; he had a keen, one might almost call it an exaggerated, sense of responsibility, and the fact that he was owing any man what he could not pay was a source of bitter humiliation to him, and Coila's letter rendered the feeling more bitter at this moment.

"You must go and see what he wants, Austin," said Mrs. Murray ; "and it is wrong of you to speak so angrily about him. Everybody has faults, and whatever his may be, his generosity outweighs them. He has been a good friend to us."

Austin felt the full force of the reprimand. He, too, was generous, and ready to acknowledge an error, even when in his most impatient mood.

"You are right, mother, he has been a good friend to us,

and I am ashamed of myself for thinking an angry thought about him. I shall obey him."

Breakfast was a very light meal to him that morning in spite of his mother's wise precepts that he should begin work with a good meal, that an empty stomach was a bad companion, and so on. He started for Ravelston soon after nine, and was there a little before the appointed time.

He was conducted to the library, where he was, in a few moments, joined by Marjoribanks. The reception was of the most cordial kind—so cordial that Austin wondered if the Jenny Mine had turned up trumps after all.

"Glad to see you, my man, glad to see you—uh-hum—suppose you wonder what it's about."

"Yes, I hope there is no one ill."

"Ha, ha! You hope no one ill—on my word you're a character. You, a doctor, to hope there's nobody ill. But there is somebody very ill, and you are the only man who can cure her."

"Her?"

"Ay, it's a her, and you'll guess ready enough who it is."

"Miss Marjoribanks?"

"No, she is quite well—better than ever. She is never ill."

There was something sharp and uneasy in the tone of the reply, and he rang the bell vigorously.

Coila and Bess entered the room together.

"What do you want?" exclaimed Marjoribanks to his daughter.

"Coila refused to come unless I accompanied her," was the quick reply; "and so, knowing that you were particular about having her here, I came with her."

There was such a sweet air of utter ignorance of what was about to happen in her manner, that no one could have imagined her a party to the comedy on foot.

She went over to Austin and shook hands with him in the most friendly way, asked for his mother, his sister and brother, and in the most sympathetic tone hoped that they were recovering from the pain of their recent loss.

Coila was decidedly sour, or sulky, or shy—it was impossible to say which. She remained near the door, bowed very coldly to Austin, and made no offer of her hand.

He felt the warm-hearted kindness of Bess, and he was the more indignant at the apparent indifference of Coila. She carried out exactly the terms of her letter—and the bitterness of the thought which she, poor girl, had suggested, in order to help him—that she rejected him as a matter of convenience, that her love was bounded by the most worldly considerations—rankled in his mind and rendered him impatient and irritable. He was utterly blind and stupid in his vexation and could not see the sacrifice she was making.

Coila, as she glanced at him with drooping eyelids and sad anxiety, guessed much of what was passing in his mind—he was angry; he was accusing her of faithlessness—he would, perhaps, despise her. Well, there was nothing for her to do except bear, with as much patience as she could command, all the wrath which might be vented upon her. She still thought that she had acted wisely for his sake and her own. That thought strengthened her.

Marjoribanks cleared his throat, thrust his hands deep into his pockets (an action which he performed when he was pleased or when displeased, as if to restrain himself from too violent expression of his humour), and spoke—

“There’s your patient, Doctor; see you make a good job of her.”

He nodded towards Coila. Austin did not understand; he looked inquiringly at the speaker and then at the two ladies. He learned nothing.

“You don’t see the fun. I thought that, and so I’ll tell you. Look here, I was meaning to keep you young folk apart for a twelvemonth at anyrate, just to see if you really wanted one another; but I’ve changed my mind. There, Murray, there’s Coila, a fine-hearted creature, and she will make as good a wife as man can wish for. You can take her as soon as you like, and on the day that you are married she shall have two thousand, and you shall have a full receipt for that siller your father owed me, and which you took on yourself to pay. That’s a good bargain for you, man, and there is no saying what more I may do.”

Marjoribanks stood upright, chuckling with self-satisfaction, and prepared to receive their expressions of gratitude and joy.

But there were no exclamations—no wild rushing into each

other's arms, as he had seen a couple do in play at Glasgow, blessing their stars and their benefactor. There was silence in the room.

He had no idea of how coarsely he had offered the girl in marriage. He intended to act handsomely ; he thought he had done so, and he was astounded by the cold reception of his munificence.

Coila stood with head bowed, face and neck crimson, and hands tightly clasped.

Bess had turned her face partly to the wall ; her elbow resting on a bookcase, and a hand shaded her face ; but through the open fingers she could see Coila, and by a slight movement she could also see Austin. Her lips were very close and thin.

Austin, as soon as he heard the announcement, which a day before would have elicited from him all the expressions of delight which Marjoribanks could have desired, turned his eyes to Coila with a dazed look in them. Had she been aware of this change in her uncle's designs, and had she written the letter to break with him before he could know that the obstacle to their marriage was removed ? Or had she been tempted by her cousin to play a cruel joke on him, in order that his astonishment might be the greater.

"What's wrong now ?" said Marjoribanks, frowning ; "you were ready enough to loup at one another not so long since, when you had neither gear nor sense on your side, and now you have both, you stand gaping as though you wanted to be off with the bargain. I don't understand such fiddle-faddling—what's the meaning of it ?"

"I beg your pardon, Sir, I am as ignorant as yourself ; but in any case I ought to thank you for the great kindness which you are ready to do."

"Then show yourself ready to profit by it."

Austin took Coila's letter from his pocket, and went over to her.

"I want you to explain, Coila," he said quietly, and there was something of the lover's tone in the voice which made her heart tremble. "Did you write this before you knew what your uncle had resolved to do ?"

"Yes," without raising her head.

There was a bright gleam of hope in his eyes, he thought he understood it all now.

"Forgive me, Coila, that I did not see at once the brave, generous motive which tempted you to be so cruel. It was to release me from our promise, which you fancied might hamper me, and so you tried to frighten me away from you by pretending that you wished to be free. Oh, you wicked girl, not to remember that you were taking away the prize I was working for."

The words cut deep into her heart; resolution was failing her to carry out the sacrifice she had determined upon. The idea that she was bound to make the sacrifice had grown upon her during the sad hours of the night, when she lay awake, thinking, thinking until her head ached: and remembering all that she owed to her uncle and to Bess, until it seemed as if this crisis were a heaven-sent opportunity to prove her gratitude and devotion. The same spirit which has enabled men to walk calmly to the stake and to endure the flames unflinchingly actuated her.

Of course we who are worldly and common-place may very honestly think her a fool for her pains. But there are no stakes now, and yet in the ordinary affairs of daily life there are possibilities of devotion and self-sacrifice the beauty and value of which the too practical are apt to miss.

She lifted her eyes, saw Bess, and the brief hesitation passed away.

"You heard what your uncle said—he removes every difficulty from our path. Come, tell me to burn this letter and forget it; and then let us thank him with all our hearts for making us so happy."

"I cannot."

"Why?"

"Because—because I mean what that letter says. . . My uncle is very good and kind, but he cannot change what I have decided upon doing. Please, forgive me, Austin—oh, try."

He gazed at her, earnestly trying to discover the motive for this strange conduct, since his first surmise had proved a mistake.

"What d——nonsense are you two talking now? Be off with you both, and don't show your faces to me until you have fixed the day for the wedding. I'm ready to implement my part of the bargain."



"I am sorry, Sir, that you have so much trouble in this matter ; for it seems all is at an end between us. Coila refuses me, and will not even give me the poor satisfaction of explaining why."

He spoke somewhat hotly ; but one piteous look from her and he regretted his haste. At the same time he felt that there was some hidden reason for her conduct, which, if he could only fathom, he might remove.

"She shall do nothing of the kind, or I will know the reason why," exclaimed Marjoribanks. "You have been a good child so far, Coila ; don't compel me to change my opinion of you. I am not going to be bothered this way for nothing. Make up your mind at once, for marry him you shall, or—I'll see about it."

His anger and threats calmed her. She held up her head, the flush still on her face, but quite resolute and collected.

"I owe you so much, uncle, that I dare to disobey you in this, for you would yourself be sorry for it after."

"That is my business."

"I shall not marry him, Sir, and you cannot force me."

Marjoribanks would not have been more astounded if an earthquake had swallowed up Ravelston and all his riches, than he was by this quiet and unconquerable resolution of Coila. The girl who had been always so docile, so eager to obey his slightest nod, suddenly proved herself capable of disobedience, and even of defiance, which Bess—from whom such conduct might have been expected—would never have attempted.

He could not tie her up with ropes and carry her before the minister. She was right enough—he could not actually force her into the marriage ; and, with all his wealth, he felt himself helpless to overcome the obstinacy of a girl. He fretted, but he was not going to admit his weakness.

"Ay, ay, this is a fine stour, when I want to do what you were greeting for. And what should hinder me forcing you to keep the troth you gave without asking my leave ?"

"Dr. Murray would never take me against my will."

That was the final blow to Austin ; it was an indirect appeal to his best nature, and he answered it.

"She is right, Sir ; and I beg of you to look upon me as the cause of all your annoyance. Whatever anger you may feel,

let it fall upon me, for I refuse to marry Miss Gardyne under any circumstances otherwise than with her own free will and because *she* wishes it."

Marjoribanks felt his breath taken away, for here was the other one turning upon him as if the whole scheme had been got up by himself against the wishes of the persons most concerned.

"On my sincerity, you are a pair of stubborn fools. What the devil is the matter with you both? I give up trying to guess. You go to your room, Coila, and stay there till I send for you, and by that time may be I shall have settled what to do with you. Go you, too, Bess."

Coila walked out in silence. Bess said "Good morning," and followed her.

"I believe it's the Major that has got into her head," muttered Marjoribanks. "I'm mortal sorry that I asked him to stay till after the races. You have lost a chance, Murray, that would have set you on your feet, and it's your own fault."

"I must bow, Sir, to the lady's decision."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## ROMEO AND JULIET.

THE two ladies proceeded to Coila's room. As soon as they were inside, Bess closed the door with a bang. Coila opened the window, and began to crumble bread on the ledge outside for the benefit of the birds. There was a musical crowd of sparrows, robins, blackbirds and starlings hopping about the trees and grass opposite the window—for it was her custom to collect the broken bread from the breakfast table in order to supply her feathered friends. The birds expected the feast, and about half-past nine collected near her window with a punctuality which would have done credit to a man of business.

This morning, however, in her agitation, at the prospect of the scene which had taken place in the library, she had forgotten to feed her tribe, and now she hastened to remedy the neglect. When she closed the window the birds fluttered up to the ledge with eager chirps. An epicure of a robin sat with head on one side coolly seeking a tit-bit, whilst the sparrows seized whatever came first and made off. One sly blackbird darted up by the corner and captured the largest piece he could see. Two starlings, who were shy of approaching the window themselves, cunningly watched the sparrows and robins, pursued them and snatched the bread from them. They were just like many other bipeds.

Bess laid her hands on Coila's shoulder.

"Do you think you have gained anything for yourself or him by what you have done?"

"I cannot tell that; I only know that I have done my best to help you and him to happiness—if you miss it now, it will be your own fault."

"Oh, sweet martyr!—but you have no right to be playing this grand rôle at my expense. You have made him miserable, and you have driven me out of all patience. Do you imagine

I would accept him when he came to me only because you had rejected him? You insult me by such an idea."

"I am sorry to have annoyed you when I wished to please you."

"You should have been sorry sooner. Did I not tell you you were blundering?—did I not get everything arranged for you, and you had nothing to do but to go and be married? You shall find that he has lost by your conduct, for I will never speak to him again."

"Will you leave me to myself for a little while, Bess? I shall be ready to talk it all over with you in the afternoon."

"You need not be alarmed—I have no intention of staying with you. But you make a mighty mistake when you fancy that I cannot live without Austin Murray. I'll show you that you are mistaken."

She quitted the room; angry, and yet not quite sure of her own feelings. Although vexed with Coila, she was conscious of a secret, trembling pleasure in the knowledge that Austin had rejected her. But she tried to hide that pleasure from herself; tried to convince herself that she was indifferent, and that she was really vexed at the misunderstanding between the lovers.

She was angry with Austin, too; she would have liked to punish him. Whether it was distorted love or wicked vanity, she felt that it would be a satisfaction to make him care for her and then to dismiss him, so that she might prove her power, and that she was in heart as in position far beyond the country doctor. She was half disposed to rush out and meet him as he left the house and explain the real reason why Coila had refused him. But that would have exposed herself too much; she had occasional glimpses of discretion, and was guided by them.

Good and bad seemed to be so equally poised in her impulsive nature that it was impossible to say how she would act under any given circumstances.

Meanwhile she suffered torture at the idea that her regard for Austin should have been apparent to Coila, whilst he remained, if not blind, at any rate indifferent to all her attractions. It was a bitter humiliation; and she was ready to perpetrate any wild act to prove that she, too, was indifferent—to suggest that in thinking of him she had been only amusing herself.

Half an-hour after luncheon she was at the drawing-room window, which overlooked a green terrace, arranging some flowers in their vases. Coila was still in her room; Miss Janet was upstairs taking a nap, and Bess was well pleased to be alone.

She had opened the window and was looking out, seeing nothing, for her mind was occupied with uneasy recollections of the day on which, from that spot she had tempted Austin to disobey the last command his father had been able to give him. It was only a little while since then, and yet she felt as if she had grown years older in the brief time.

She was roused by the sound of a voice from the terrace—

“‘Oh that I were a glove upon that hand, that I might kiss that cheek.’ Is the quotation correct? The wish is sincere.”

It was the Major, returned thus early from the moors. He was standing near where Austin had stood, leaning on his gun and smiling as he quoted Romeo’s wish.

Bess might be gloomy enough when alone—although that was rare, for she had little of despondency in her character—but the moment there was anyone near her, and especially if that one happened to be a man, she must coquette, cajole, banter, or scold. Something that exercised her quick faculties she could not help doing.

“The glove would be very soon thrown aside, Major.”

“So you had worn it the glove would be happy, even in its discarded state.”

“Then the glove would be a spiritless thing, deserving its fate. I wonder Juliet did not see what a poor creature Romeo was to stand sighing and wishing and spouting poetry instead of jumping up and taking the kiss when they both wanted it.”

“Shall I play Romeo with your new reading of the part?” he said, stepping close to the window and resting his hand on the ledge so that he could touch her if he chose.

“You!—and die of poison?”

“No, of love.”

She laughed merrily, and almost a little too much.

“You are amusing. I can imagine you in any position, Major, except that of dying for love.”

“Thanks—you give me credit for more sense.”

“Not for sense, but indifference.”

“Are they not often the same—one the result of the other.”

"Maybe, but I would rather have a friend who was capable of the wildest act than one who would submit tamely to circumstances under the plea of common sense, which is indifference."

"I do not quite understand you."

"I shall put you to the proof. What is the worst extremity you would endure for your lady?"

"I would live for her."

"Oh, that would be too much."

"The penalty would be equal on both sides."

"But she might succumb to such devotion."

"That would be a misfortune; but such a lady as I imagine would bear up against the worst of calamities. I imagine such a lady as—as—suppose we say yourself, Miss Marjoribanks."

"Too much honour," with an air of self-depreciation in which pride was most prominent.

"The honour is entirely on my side. I have often imagined a lady strong of will, inventive in purpose, and bold to execute, with beauty combined to make all these qualities charming. This lady would endure even my existence and be always bright and complaisant, no matter what she might think of her yoke. With such a lady by my side there is no saying what heights I might scale—for I am ambitious, although the ambition lacks purpose at present. She would be a spur to goad me on to new enterprise, and she would never succumb to failure; on the contrary, she would by her genius, make even failure look like success."

"You speak with as much enthusiasm as if you had seen this paragon of women."

"I have seen her."

"Where?—do tell me that, for the subject is most interesting."

The Major removed his hat, bowing low, he answered—

"Here."

"You are too funny, Major," she said laughing, but with a note of irritation in the laugh, although she had been quite expecting what he was to say. "Your politeness passes all bounds—I might say all belief."

"I am sorry for that, because I would like you to believe in something."

"But not in your protestations. Be advised in time, Major, give up the chase—it is a wild goose one."

"I am fond of wild geese."

"What, when you can never catch them?"

"I have a very hopeful disposition. For instance I came back to-day in the hope that you would permit me to be your escort this afternoon."

"Agreed, if you are not afraid of your neck."

"It is at your service, as everything else is that belongs to me."

"I shall be ready in ten minutes."

She retired from the window, and the Major quietly proceeded to prepare for the ride, feeling that he had gained one step.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## ONE STEP FARTHER.

HE rarely took long to dress, although she always managed to dress prettily and attractively. On the present occasion she was unusually particular—when Coila happened to enter the room.

From the moment her cousin appeared, Bess moved with a quicker step, her fingers were more nimble, and yet she had never taken such a long time in making her toilette. Mary Beith lost patience with the many re-arrangements of her young mistress's hair.

Coila having found what she came to seek would have gone away, but Bess would not allow her. Apparently quite regardless of what had occurred in the forenoon, she gossiped to Coila with more volubility than usual ; and at every attempt of the latter to escape, Coila's opinion of this plait of hair falling to the right or left, Coila's taste as to this collar or the other became invaluable.

"You are not sulky, dear ?—as aunt would say. Now you will tell me whether the blue habit or the grey is most becoming to me to-day."

"I think you should wear the grey to-day, the roads are so dusty."

"Thanks—but what about the hat ? Shall I take that ugly bit of chimney pot which makes me look as much a fool as if I were a man ? or shall it be the broad Dorothy, with the big feather ?—I like it, for under its shade one can be so sly and yet look so prim. You like it, too, don't you ?"

"Yes."

"Ah, then, I shall have it. . . . Don't go yet, Coila—I do so much wish you would help me to choose a bow. That's a good soul ; I knew you would help me."

"You have a light heart, Bess," and there was a faint indication of a sigh behind Coila's words.



"A light head, you would say, only you don't like to be uncomplimentary. Well, it's the same thing, for even the doctors have not agreed whereabouts feeling lies. But of course they never agree. . . . Mary, where have you left the nail-brush? In the other room, of course—anywhere but in its place."

Mary departed in search of the brush, which Bess instantly held up in her hand whilst she made a laughing grimace at Mary's back.

"I just wanted to whisper to you, Coila, that if you had any gumption you would dress and come with us instead of sitting moping at home—and you would see such fun!"

"Where are you going?"

"With the Major—he is so droll, and thinks he carries everything off so cleverly with his compliments and his courtesies when there is no need for them; and when there is no need for them they are just humbug. He is courteous, though, I must admit that, and I am not sure but he is rather handsome. Besides, there is no denying that he has a fine figure, and quite a distinguished air about him. He always attracts attention—that's a good deal, for it would spite other women; and then his adventures have been so romantic—oh, he would make a fortune as a novelist!"

Bess looked pensively at the nail-brush, and Coila was utterly bewildered. The bewilderment was only for an instant, however.

"You are jesting as usual, Bess, you cannot mean that in a few hours you should have any serious thoughts about Major Kilgour?"

"Who said I had any serious thoughts about him?—only you who would see a tragedy in a—in a—a nailbrush! Of course I am jesting, and I am going to kill him to-day—it will be such fun."

"Then you were jesting with Austin, too! Impossible."

"You shall please yourself about that, Miss," and Bess tucked up her petticoats and made a profound curtsy.

"I cannot find it in there," interrupted Mary, returning.

"Why, here it is all the time. I am sorry to have troubled you. Never mind, you shall have the green dress to go courting in."

Bess proceeded vigorously with her toilette.

Coila's face was white and then gloomy ; either she had been cruelly deceived by her cousin or the jest was being carried much too far. She had given up for her sake the most precious hopes of her life, and now she was told that it was only a joke—heard the whole subject treated with ridicule, and learned that with all her pain only a few hours old, the coquette had given up all the mind she possessed to the project of deceiving another.

Coila felt sick and horrified, for her cousin's heart appeared to be wicked or callous beyond all measure. She could not speak in the presence of the maid ; and it was well ; for the sense that she had foolishly driven Austin from her almost maddened her. She had hoped by her sacrifice to pay the deep debt of gratitude she owed to Marjoribanks and his daughter ; she had hoped to help Austin forward in the world, and now it was proved to her by the conduct of Bess that she had been a fool—that she had suffered herself and made him suffer needlessly.

It could not be true.

She went away, silent, paying no heed to the urgent call of Bess that she would return and decide between the merits of a blue bow and a red one.

"I think that will do now, Mary," said the lady, surveying herself in the cheval-glass, coolly ; "go down and see if Leishman has brought the horses round."

She was still inspecting herself over the right shoulder and then over the left when the maid quitted the room. As the door closed, Bess wheeled round and looked at her face in the mirror.

The change was startling even to herself ; it was an unpleasant face, with scarcely a suggestion of the charms which it possessed when the owner was disposed to please, or desired to attract. Colourless cheeks all the more remarkable on account of her dark complexion—eyes starting forward and seeming to gleam with fire, lips drawn tight and thin, yet slightly protruding, giving to the whole expression the cast of sullen fierceness.

She examined the reflection with a strange curiosity, as if it had belonged to some one else. Then she turned away with a kind of shiver, muttering bitterly—

"The thought of him can do that, and she calls it all a cruel jest !"

She sobbed—Bess, the butterfly, with as many humours as

a chameleon has colours, sobbed. More, her head drooped, and she sat down with hands hanging listlessly by her sides, looking so pitiable a picture of despair as painter could have wished to find for a model of Niobe in tears.

A footstep outside, and she sprang up with a light laugh, snatched a handkerchief from the dressing-table and brushed her eyes.

"What stuff this is—it will spoil my face for the evening—and what does he care? And what should I care? Hat all awry, too—what nonsense!"

She was re-arranging the hat as if her whole mind were concerned about it, when Mary returned with the information that the horses were at the door and Major Kilgour waiting.

"That's all right—stick that hair-pin in so that the braid may fall over it. Thanks; now tell Miss Gardyne to look from the window and see what a capital escort I have in the Major."

She seemed resolved to use every means in her power to puzzle Coila, and to make her believe that all the signs which she had interpreted too acutely for her own happiness, as indicating affection for Austin, meant nothing more than a little sport; and only indulged in to pass the time, because there did not happen to be any other gentleman at hand, with whom she could coquette.

Only a jest! And Bess felt as if there were a stone in her breast instead of a heart—and such a heavy one! The comedy was not so amusing to her to-day as it had been, consequently she became in herself the gayer and the more reckless.

Coila did go to the window with that angry gloom on her face which quite frightened poor Miss Janet, and caused her to lose knitting needles, wool, handkerchief, and glasses, all at once. The result was much confusion, and the turning of her wig almost round, so that the curls dangled over her face and distressed her very much, as her efforts to place them right only made matters worse.

"You really are not yourself, dear, these few days, and it would be a great comfort if you could———but don't move on my account, dear—please don't."

Coila saw Bess trip down the steps, slip on the last but one, and then fall into the Major's arms, but gaining her feet immediately. The Major looks anxious ; Bess laughs ; he smiles and assists her to mount. Then away they go, Bess looking back and kissing the golden head of her riding-whip to Coila. What stronger proof than this could she have that Bess cared nothing for Austin—unless it were all a piece of acting.

"Has she any heart at all ? She tortures us both," was Coila's reflection as she turned to relieve Miss Janet from the helpless state of muddle into which she had fallen.

"It was very clever of you to catch me so quickly," said Bess ; "one step farther and I might have hurt myself."

"Then there would have been wailing in the land," answered the Major, "but just that missing or taking the one little step farther makes or mars our fortune. When you are older you will, like most people, look back with regret to the omission of some trifling act, to some stupid hesitation or faint-heartedness, at a critical juncture, to which you will attribute the loss of what you most wished to gain. Or, as I trust, you will be amongst the lucky few who can remember how their fondest hopes were realized by a bold word, or a prompt step taken at the right moment."

"Oh what an awful period that must be when one can 'look back.' Don't you feel very sad, Major ?"

There was an arch twinkle in her eyes as she spoke with pretended commiseration for his old age.

"I shall only be sad when I can no longer see you. I regret none of my past years except those in which I did not know you ; and the future years represent to me only the possibilities of being near you."

"But I shall get married."

"Then I shall marry, too."

"Neither your wife nor my husband will permit you to go galavanting with me."

"I hope they will both like it."

She was about to scold him again, for she perfectly understood his suggestion, when she perceived a gentleman in a gig driving towards them from the village of Craigeloup. On the instant her face beamed with smiles ; she permitted the horses to draw closer to each other than usual, and occasionally she

would turn her head and look at him with an expression of sweet confidence and even something of admiration.

The Major smiled quietly ; he was not beguiled into the idea that she had suddenly changed the nature of her regard for him ; she thought him amusing, useful as a companion and as a butt for her jokes ; at present she thought him especially useful as a foil to play against Austin Murray, who was the gentleman approaching.

The Major appeared to see nothing ; he accepted her tokens of increased friendliness with grateful delight. Who could tell but that her pretended interest in him might develop into real interest.

Bess was laughing merrily at nothing in particular, and was so much occupied in speaking to her companion, or so deeply engaged in listening to him that she did not see Austin until he was quite close. Then she gave him a look of cold surprise as if he were the last person she expected or wished to meet—a nod of distant recognition, and passed, resuming her animated conversation with the Major.

Austin had half pulled up to speak to her—they had never passed each other before without some words of kindly greeting ; but he allowed the horse to go on slowly when he saw that she did not mean to stop.

He felt her coldness keenly. In the morning she had been friendly as usual when Marjoribanks and even Coila turned from him ; and now she too forsook him.

“There is no mistaking her intentions after that—she means to forget that we have ever been friends. Well, it’s a big world ; there are other friends to be found—aye, and a truer woman than Coila to love. Why on earth should I feel so lonely because she pleases to change her mind, and Bess pleases to drop me out of her friendship ? What a fool I am.”

The whip came sharply down on the horse, and as it started forward he glanced back.

“The Major will win her, and I wish him luck,” was his exclamation.

The Major had a very similar idea, and if Bess had known it, she would have said that they were never more mistaken in their lives.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## NECK OR NOTHING.

“**N**OW, Sir, we may start,” she said, putting her horse into a trot. “I mean to give you a run over the hills, and if you beat me you shall have this bow—which I selected with great care on purpose—for your pains.”

“I shall do my best to win it.”

“Ah, but remember a lady’s favour is not to be won as easily as you can buy a commission.”

“But I did not buy my commission.”

“Then—pardon the impertinence on account of my interest—what did you give for it ?”

“The endurance of a dozen bayonet wounds, a few bullets, and a little mother-wit, which helped our regiment at a pinch.”

“Oh, horrible ! but you do not mean to say that you rose from the ranks. You see how very curious I am.”

For the first time in the course of their acquaintance, the Major was slow to reply—his slowness was even akin to hesitation. Then frankly :

“I thank you for your curiosity—it is more frequently a sign of interest than we imagine. Yes, I rose from the ranks, without any influence, and without any friends, save those whom I made for myself. Although I do not speak about it, I am very proud of it.”

“And you have good reason to be so,” she said, with unfeigned admiration this time ; “I wish I might ask for more information about yourself—hitherto you have only told us of your wonderful adventures and escapes, and I am not quite sure that I always believed them.”

“I am sorry for that, but anything you ask I shall answer. There is really nothing to tell : at ten or twelve I was a wild healthy boy whose wildness was mistaken for wickedness. At twenty finding myself a soldier I became serious and applied myself to reading. Before twenty five I had earned my com-

mission, by thirty-five I had taken part in various important military events in America, Mexico, Germany, France and Spain. I am still interested in the affairs of the latter country. There is my biography in brief. Now for our ride and your favour."

He seemed to close the conversation with these words, and something like that feeling of fear with which he had once or twice inspired her, affected her again. But she was in a reckless mood, and so she thanked him for his confidence, declared him quite a hero, and set off at a gallop.

They ascended the hill to the "look-out" above the quarry, crossed the head of the glen, and then came to a grand slope down to the broad plains which stretched out towards the iron works and the pits. The slope was only broken by several squares of stone walls forming sheep-pens; and on one side was a long wall which formed the march between two farms. A small plantation at the foot concealed the farm-house, and a stream separated the base of the hill from the road.

"We can have a capital run down here," she cried; "now give me a fair start and win the bow if you can."

"I shall catch the wild goose."

But she was off; he followed, both going at a mad pace. The frolic seemed to be most enjoyable to both; their breath came quickly, the keen air hit their cheeks, and the ground seemed to fly from beneath the horses' hoofs. Bess was in her element in this mad run; the sense of pursuit and the half-implied favour which in her jest she had promised Kilgour, and which she never intended to give, imparted zest to the chase. She was gaining ground upon him, for she had much the better horse of the two, and she knew it when she had challenged him. She was going straight down the hill, and would have to turn at a right angle to reach the road. He saw that by taking the wall he could intercept her at the plantation.

He turned a little to the right to execute this stratagem. Leishman, who was now a long way behind guessed his intention and yelled at the pitch of his voice:

"Not that way, Sir, for the Lord's sake, not that way. You'll be killed."

But the Major did not hear, and if he had heard would

not have heeded. He kept straight on for the point at which he had decided to leap the wall.

At that point there was on the other side a descent of twelve feet into a ditch.

Kilgour was ignorant of that, and Bess did not see the detour he was making. It was a maxim with him that stratagem was more potent in love or war than mere physical advantages, and he was congratulating himself upon the certain success of his present movement.

Her pulses were bounding with the excitement and enjoyment of the glorious fun; she was already laughing at the prospect of the Major's defeat, and wondering how he could possibly meet the sneer with which she intended to salute him.

The horses entered into the excitement of the race and stretched to their work bravely; they seemed to throb with the ambition of their riders.

Bess was near the foot of the hill, the Major was within twenty yards of the leap which was to give him victory, Leishman was still hallooing and still unheard.

She turned—uttered a wild scream as she saw Kilgour take the leap, and then with the strength of frenzy reined in her horse.

The Major cleared the wall, the horse's head struck against the opposite side of the ditch, horse and man rolled over and lay as if dead.

Bess covered her eyes and shrank from the sight, moaning—  
“God forgive me—I have killed him.”

But the hand was instantly withdrawn from the face and she rode up to where he lay. Leishman was also on the spot by that time, having dismounted and clambered over the wall.

“I ken'd fine that somebody's neck would be broken,” muttered the groom, going first to the horse, which lay on its side, head up the embankment and hind quarters in the bed of the ditch, gasping, and the whole flesh quivering with agony; “and there's as fine a bit of horse-flesh as one need seek, just murdered. Poor brute, there's naething can be done for you but to put you out of pain as soon as may be.”

Then he went to the man, who lay on his back, one leg doubled under him, and his arms thrown out as if to clasp something, the hands clenched. He did not seem to breathe.



Bess had slipped from the saddle and was bending over the Major, face pallid, and lips moving nervously.

"Is he dead?"

Her voice was so quiet that the question might have appeared one of the most common-place.

"I could not just say; but he'll maybe do yet if we had the doctor for him. He has had a bad fall."

Instantly she was down in the ditch, unfastened the Major's necktie, placed her hand above his heart—no sign at first, and then a feeble beat which thrilled her arm. She caught on her handkerchief water which was trickling from a drain pipe and bathed his face. Whilst doing so she gave directions with singular calmness.

"Go down to the farm, tell them to bring a feather-bed and a hurdle here to carry him, and then ride on to Airbridge for the doctor. Do not spare the horse."

"What doctor?"

"Any one you can find—Dr. Murray, and ask him to bring Dr. Spence with him. Look sharp."

The groom scrambled up the bank and then over the wall, mounted and hurried away on his mission.

She continued her efforts to restore the Major to consciousness, but except that the respiration began to be apparent again, she had no success. She worked steadily and with the method of a practised nurse.

The farmer and four of his men soon joined her. Kilgour was insensible to any pain in being lifted on to the litter.

"I'm doubting it's a bad case, yon, Miss Marjoribanks," said the farmer as he assisted her out of the ditch; "he's more than half dead already."

"I have heard of men meeting with accidents as bad and yet recovering."

But there was a sickness at her heart which contradicted the hope she expressed.

"Let's hope he'll get ower't, but what could have put it in his head to loup the march at that point?"

"He did not know the ground. I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Bruce, for coming so promptly to our assistance. Will you see to the horse, please?"

"Ay, poor brute; the groom told me about it, I hae a gun with me. You just go on."

She followed the men who were carrying the litter with all possible care ; she walked, leading her own horse. As they turned at the plantation to enter the farm-house she heard the report of a gun.

Mrs. Bruce had hastily prepared a large bed-room on the ground floor, and into it the invalid was conveyed. The guide-wife had also got hot water ready, and tubs for bathing, lint and linen for bandages—all these her experience of accidents had taught her might be required. She exerted all her skill to place the Major in the easiest position, and tied a bandage round his leg to stop the bleeding until the doctor came.

Bess looked on in silence, rendering what trifling services she saw Mrs. Bruce needed. Then she would hasten to the window to look for the doctor coming, and would turn back with certain symptoms of the revival of her impatient spirit.

At length she saw Austin galloping up the road. She went to the door and met him as he dismounted. He was surprised to find his arm gripped tightly and still more to see her face, with the dark eyes full of fright and appeal, actually glaring at him.

“Austin—I have done it—save him.”

He entirely forgot her coldness to him a little while ago and became anxious on her account.

“You must not blame yourself unnecessarily.”

“I shall wait here to learn what hope there is,” was the answer.

He went into the house. She went round to the garden where she would be less observed. She walked up and down with apparent composure.

“Not blame myself!” was the mental cry, and then she shuddered, remembering the Major in buoyant health jesting with her, and the glimpse of him flying over the wall, followed by what she had seen in the ditch.

She halted to listen for any sound which might help her to guess how matters were progressing ; but there was none, the place was painfully quiet.

Austin rejoined her.

“He may recover,” was his disheartening report ; “but it would be folly not to tell you at once his condition is a very dangerous one.”

Quite dry-eyed she looked at him as if he were at a great distance, and she was straining her vision to see him.

"Will he die?"

"I hope not—but I cannot say more yet; when he recovers consciousness I shall be better able to judge."

"What are his injuries?"

"There is concussion of the brain, and his leg is broken."

"Make him well, Austin, make him well—make him what he was this morning and I will give my life to bring about the fulfilment of any wish of yours. I am crazy and miserable; it is awful to know that if he dies it will be my fault. I laughed at him, mocked him, and dared him to the wildest folly; and now I would be glad if I was lying there instead of him."

"You will be my patient very soon if you cannot control this frenzy. I will do my best for him,"

"You must do more than that, you must save him—and you shall have Coila yet in spite of all that has passed."

A cloud seemed to drop on Austin's face; it became suddenly dark and cold.

"I will do what I can for him as I would for any patient; whatever extra care I can give him will be for your sake. But if you wish me to do that you must not mention her name again. We have parted; let us endeavour to forget our broken promise as quickly as possible."

"Oh, you are blind, blind," cried Bess, passionately, and it was on her tongue to reveal the motive which had actuated Coila, but pride or shame or both checked her. So she only said: "She loves you—restore him to health and I will prove to you that she has acted thus because she loves you and is grateful, and that she is suffering cruelly."

"And should there be no allowance made for my suffering," he answered bitterly; then suddenly commanding himself; "but there, we are not to talk of this. I ask you as my friend not to uncover my wounds by referring to her again."

"And I answer that your request is refused—I would not be your friend or hers to grant it. I shall talk of her as often as it may seem proper to me to do so."

"Then let me speak professionally; you should go home now, rest and endeavour to allay the agitation which this accident has caused you."

"I shall return in the evening, and I will expect a good report from you. Where is Leishman?"

"He went on to seek Dr. Spence."

"I shall not wait for him."

Austin accompanied her to the front of the house where her horse was being walked up and down in charge of one of the men who had helped to carry the Major from the scene of the disaster. Bess hurriedly drew out her purse, in which there were a number of notes.

"Here, my man, take that for yourself, and give one of these to each of your comrades."

"What's that for, Miss Marjotibanks?" asked the man, amazed at the wealth which was thrust into his hand.

"For helping the gentleman who was hurt up yonder."

"Hoots, we dinna want that."

"Perhaps I wouldn't have given it to you if I had thought you wanted it. Good-day."

Austin would have assisted her to mount, but there was a "louping on" stone by the door—it was an old-fashioned house—she sprang nimbly upon it, was in the saddle and off before the man had recovered from his amazement at the liberality with which such a trifling service had been rewarded.

"Od, she's a queer quean yon," he muttered, stalking away in search of his comrades.

As Cockie-leerie was opening the gate to his mistress, he observed with astonishment that she was alone.

"Begging pardon, Miss, what have you done with that birkie, the Major?"

"Major Kilgour has met with an accident."

"Has he though?—and how was that, if it's no fashin' you ower muckle?"

"He leaped the march wall of the Glen farm, not knowing the ground, and is almost killed. Good day, Macbeth."

"Loupit the march wall of the Glen farm," repeated Cockie-leerie, closing the gates; "aye, aye, woman, I wouldna thought anybody would hae tried that but mysel'. It wasna far off that where I tried my wings, and here's a' that I hae gotten for my pains. Aye, aye, and he loupit the march wall—he's a braw billie, and jist like mysel' in his deevil-may-careness at a loup. He's a fine fallow."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"WILD GOOSE."

**B**ESS went straight to her father. As soon as he had learned what had happened he uttered a good round oath, and in much dismay exclaimed—

"Broken his leg and broken his head!—he has done it on purpose. He knew that I wanted to get quit of him, and here he has fastened himself upon us for there's no saying how long. But he's mistaken, he shall stay at the farm and be off as soon as he is able."

"No, papa, he is not to remain at the farm," said Bess quietly; "he is to be brought here as soon as the doctors permit him to be removed."

"Aye? So you have settled it all to your own satisfaction?"

"Quite."

"Then you have just to unsettle it. I won't have him here."

"Then you will have everybody far and near talking of your meanness and cruelty in turning your guest out of doors at the time when he most needed the comforts which your home could supply?"

"I'll pay the doctors and all expenses."

Marjoribanks thought that everything could be settled by "paying the expenses."

"That will not make matters any better, for then it will appear as if you were afraid to have him in the house."

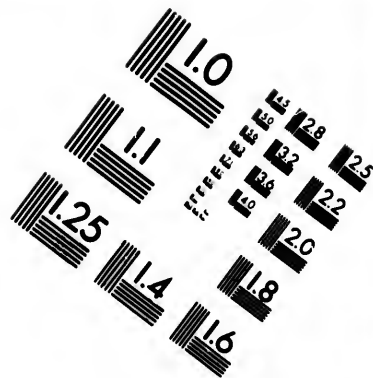
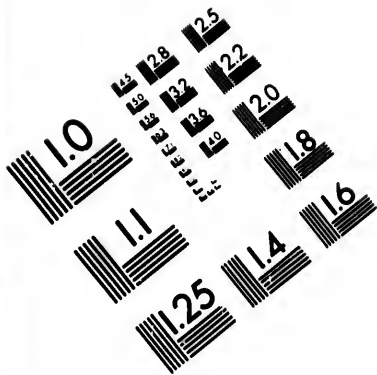
"What should I be afraid of?"

"That he might marry your heiress."

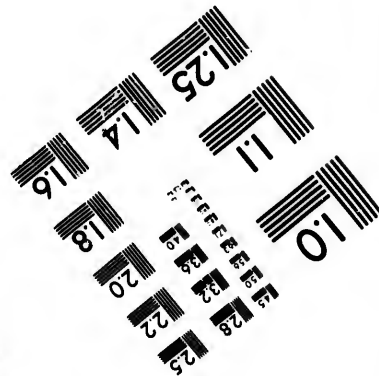
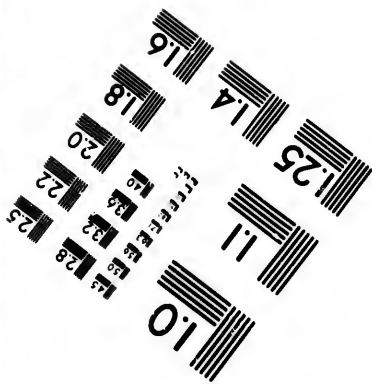
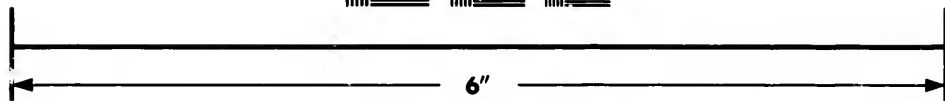
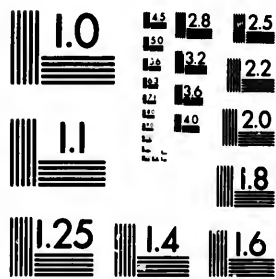
"There's no danger of that I suppose?"

"Not the slightest; but it is annoying to have people saying such things, and there will be scandal enough when it is known that he met this accident in running a race with me. Folks will point at me as the lady who ran a race with the Major and almost killed him."





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" You were running a race!—confound it, Bess, you must be cracked. You kill one of my best horses—it cost me a hundred and forty—you nearly kill the Major and for what ? "

" For fun. "

Calm outside, she was suffering acute pain.

" It is rather costly fun. "

" I know that, but I could not help it. Don't make matters worse than they are, papa ; you must consider your own credit and mine a little. "

" Quite true, and you must learn to think of it, too ; we must have no more vagaries such as this. Let the Major be brought here ; he shall have attention, but Coila must be kept out of his way. I can put two and two together as well as other folk ; he has been talking some confounded nonsense to her, and that is why she refuses Murray so stubbornly when I consent, to say nothing of the handsome offer I made them. "

At another time Bess would have smiled at the blunder her father was making in regard to Coila—it *was* strange that a man so shrewd in business should be so often mistaken in his judgment of the humours and motives of his household.

" Coila will not refuse to obey you. Will you go with me this afternoon to see him ? "

" Yes, but I shall not be able to stay as I have to attend a meeting of the Working Men's Conservative Association. They wanted a thoroughly impartial politician to preside, and so they have asked me. There is no saying what may come of it. "

About six o'clock the carriage took Marjoribanks and his daughter to the Glen farm. The lamps were lit in the house, although it was only " 'twixt the gloaming and the mirk," a time which people like to enjoy without the intrusion of candles or gas.

Mrs. Bruce received the millionaire in just the same homely fashion as if he had been a neighbouring farmer, and not the great man of the district, whose name filled the throat of charitable institutions with admiration, wonder, and gratitude.

Drs. Spence and Austin were both with the patient, but as soon as the arrivals were announced, the former hurried out of the bedroom. He was a somewhat fussy but good-natured old gentleman ; he had fully expected the whole medical superin-

tendence of Ravelston on the death of his friend, Dr. Murray ; but he bore no grudge towards Austin for having caused him a disappointment thus far. He still had hopes.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Marjoribanks—very sorry for your friend ; but he is beginning to come to his senses again, and we'll pull him through, never fear."

"Is he able to speak?" inquired Bess.

"Yes, he speaks, but not connectedly. His thoughts are wandering, and he only raves about a flock of wild geese. But we expect such aberrations in these cases."

"Can we see him?" said Marjoribanks.

"Not yet, I think," said Austin, appearing from the bedroom, and looking at Bess with such an expression of mingled curiosity and wonder, that she knew he understood the invalid's ravings ; "he is speaking strangely, and might be sorry when he regains consciousness to know that you had overheard him."

"Very well, very well, I have little time to spare at any rate. You will get him moved to Ravelston as soon as you can. I shall see that you don't have all your trouble for nothing, Mrs. Bruce. Good evening. Come Bess."

"If you please, papa, you might send the carriage back for me, and I will wait here till then to learn how Major Kilgour progresses. You know that I have reason to be anxious."

Marjoribanks hesitated a moment ; he did not like the idea of his daughter watching so anxiously over the fate of a mere chance acquaintance—for the Major was nothing more, although he was a guest at Ravelston. However, her anxiety would redeem her fault in the eyes of those who might happen to learn the details of the accident, and that would be an advantage.

"As you like ; the carriage will be back in about an hour."

Dr. Spence went out with him, and Bess immediately whispered to Austin :

"It was very good of you not to let my father hear him—that stupid old chap Spence would have admitted him at once. But you will admit me ? I know all about his fancies—very absurd ones of course, but as I know them from himself, he would not object to me hearing him."

Austin regarded her with the same strange expression as be-

fore, but this time she met it with a cold, haughty stare, as if she would say: "Who shall dare to think that I, the heiress of Ravelston, have any thoughts save those of friendship and pity for such a person as Major Kilgour?"

Without saying a word, he bowed, opened the door of the room, and she passed in. He dismissed the attendant.

The Major lay on the bed, his hands over the counterpane, apparently an inert mass from the feet to the neck. But his eyes were open, and there were frequent nervous movements of the muscles of the face. He was white, and at times the jaw would drop as it does in death. Then the wandering faculties would be quickened again, and he would speak in a low mumbling tone.

The sight was appalling to Bess—it seemed worse even than that of the accident. She felt her whole frame quiver, and it was worse still when his eyes suddenly seemed to become fixed upon her. Then, as Austin moved towards the bed, the eyes left her for him, waveringly, as if there were some painful effort being made in the brain to recall vanished memories.

"Does he know me, do you think?" she asked tremblingly.

"Speak to him," said Austin, and he placed his finger on the patient's pulse.

She approached.

"Major Kilgour, I hope you are better."

The eyes continued to waver like the expiring flame of the end of a candle.

"He does not hear you," said Austin, noting the pulse.

She bent down and repeated the words close to his ear.

"He has heard."

The eyes suddenly moved towards her and again became fixed on her face. Then there was a curious expression on his countenance—the slow growth of intelligence. Next a distortion of the features, the lines about the mouth wrinkling into what was the ghastly suggestion of a smile. He mumbled, but the words were unintelligible. He appeared to know that, and repeated them—

"Wild goose."

No reproach could have been more keen than that look and those words. She was dumb and sick.

"Speak again," commanded Austin, after a few seconds silence, in which the eyes of the patient began to waver as before.

"I am very, very sorry for this mishap, it was all my fault, and I hope you will. . . . I hope you will forgive me."

"Forgive me," echoed the man, as if he were trying to realize the meaning of the words. He lifted one hand a little way, but it fell limply by his side. Austin sponged his head with cold water, which appeared to afford much relief, and then resumed his position with fingers on the pulse. Austin was interested in his patient, and he was filled with much amazement at the contrast between the saucy, reckless Bess, and the sad, agitated lady, who stood by the bedside obedient to every word of authority which he spoke.

"Yes, forgive me," she said again, and there was humility as well as appeal in the tone.

He laughed, it seemed in mockery ; but his eyes had left her face, and he did not see her.

"What a fool I have been. . . . to bother myself. . . . there are plenty others. Only she's pretty. . . . and so tantalising."

Another pause and Austin :

"His strength comes and goes ? if we could rouse him from this stupor it would be a great advantage. Your voice seems to have an influence upon him. Will you try again."

She took his hand.

"Do you know me ?"

"Eh ?—yes, yes, yes—it was a fair battle and a fair chase, but I got knocked down just in the moment of victory. The fortune of war. Take it like a soldier—defy hunger and fatigue—march on and conquer. She would make a rare wife—but she would require taming. They take such a deuce of a time to bring up the waggons that the men will never get supplies before daybreak. Then we may throw up our hands. . . . Carlos is our man—but it is not a man, it is a woman, and she is worth winning. . . . Wild goose—folly to pursue !"

Throughout these ejaculations she could trace the leading idea of herself, and the blood tingled in her cheeks ; but she

became white again, when she perceived that he had dropped back into a state of stupor.

"We need not try further to-night," observed Austin with professional calmness ; "it would exhaust him too much."

"You will let me know when there is any change."

She hastily quitted the room without even saying good night.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

## IN THE MOONLIGHT.

**V**EXED and sore at heart as Austin was, he applied himself vigorously to work. The more he had to do the better he was satisfied, for he found relief from his own thoughts in attending to his patients. The moment he paused, the bitterness of his disappointment in Coila overwhelmed him and made all the world hateful.

His constant cry was "Forget her, forget her." But he could not forget the hopes which belief in her love had inspired, and the sweet dream of future happiness, of which she had been the pervading spirit, and which she had ruthlessly destroyed. At times he felt almost as if he hated her, but in calmer mood, she appeared to him surrounded by a halo of the bright memories associated with her, and he owned with reluctance that he could not forget her; he was afraid it would take a long time to extinguish his love for her.

He was put to a severe test when the Major was removed to Ravelston—after lying about a week at the farm. He wished to surrender the principal charge of the patient to Dr. Spence, and that gentleman was quite ready to undertake the responsibility.

But Kilgour perversely insisted upon seeing Dr. Murray, and his wishes were backed by Bess's commands, so that Austin was obliged to go to the place he desired most to avoid.

On his first visit he was nervous and uncomfortable. Passing through the hall and up the staircase he was startled by every footstep, thinking it might be Coila's. The next day he was calmer, and had settled with himself that if by any ill chance he should encounter her; he would bow respectfully and pass on. He was there simply as a medical adviser, and he would not allow his private feelings to interfere with his professional duty. He was very resolute and very discreet—in theory, like so many others.

Poor Coila was as anxious to keep out of his way as he was to escape seeing her. The moment she learned that he was in the house she would shut herself up in her room, and never stir until from the window where she sat she had seen him quit the house. Or, she would run out whilst he was in the sick room, and wander about the least frequented part of the grounds; hiding amongst the shrubbery whenever she heard or saw the door open.

So he came and went for a week, and although she saw him often, he had never set eyes on her. Then he began to understand that she was avoiding him, and he became more at ease. Drolly enough, he also became somewhat dissatisfied—she need not have been afraid of him; he would not have spoken to her or troubled her. But this was another proof of how little she cared for him. What a lucky escape he had made? A wife without affection or sympathy would have been a fatal encumbrance. He ought to be grateful for his escape? yet he was discontented and unhappy.

Bess, too, was peculiar in her ways at present. She was most attentive in her inquiries about the Major; but she was even more brusque than usual, and rarely spoke of anything except the condition of the patient. She never mentioned Coila.

He was at Ravelston always twice in the day, sometimes he paid a third visit late in the evening, for the feverish symptoms which became manifest in the case caused him some anxiety. He met Marjoribanks occasionally, who always saluted him with a disagreeable display of patronage, and bade him spare no pains, as he would be well paid for his trouble.

Just after one of these unpleasant encounters, he quitted the house, determining for the hundredth time that he would never go back again. The Major was comparatively safe, and there was not the slightest necessity for him enduring so much vexation when Spence was ready to step into his place.

The fresh air, the soft moonlight, strewing before him broad lines of silver, crossed by patches of pitchy darkness, soothed him. He had walked out from Airbridge, and now, to enjoy the relief of perfect stillness which the grounds afforded, he took a turn around by the terrace, instead of making direct for the avenue.

He had to pass the little lake, with its willows drooping over it, and making fantastic shapes in the clear bosom of the water. How tenderly he remembered that rainy day on which he had paddled around the margin with Coila, telling her of his love and hope.

She had made shipwreck of all ; he had nothing to work for now, but the miserable ambition to get money to pay his father's debts, to provide for the family, and quit the place for ever. Every step of the way, every tree and burn reminded him of Coila, and he knew that there would be no happiness for him until he could turn his back upon these painful associations, and begin a new life somewhere far removed from them.

He saw the water gleaming like silver cobwebs through the branches of the willows. The stillness of the place was most comforting to him, he paused to observe the scene, and to seek for the tree under which he had first kissed Coila, promising to her the devotion of his life.

There was a faint plashing sound in the water, and peering in the direction of the sound he saw the boat gliding slowly towards the willows, a long black shadow behind it. There was only one figure in it and that was a woman's. Boat and woman both looked like shadows in a dream as they quietly approached the landing-place.

The boat dropped into its place ; the occupant stepped nimbly ashore, secured the rope to the iron ring and ascended the embankment. Austin met her as she emerged from under the shadow of the trees.

It was Coila.

Both drew back ; he bowed as if wishing to pass on.

She did not move. The meeting which she had endeavoured to avoid had come upon her so suddenly that she was stupefied. The place, too helped to make her situation more painful, for she instantly recalled all that had passed between them a few steps from the spot on which they now stood.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Gardyne, I am afraid I have spoiled a pleasant evening. An unlucky accident brought me this way," he said, at length

She looked at him with such piteous eyes that he was moved to take her in his arms, and to forget her refusal of him rather than to forget her.

She neither moved nor spoke.



"Good night," he said, and was about to pass, for her silence conveyed to him only the impression that she was sorry to have met him there.

"Austin—Dr. Murray !"

He turned back ; although he hesitated, and felt that he was doing wrong, he could not resist that appealing cry.

They stood face to face with the rays of moonlight passing through the branches of the trees and forming black bars between them.

He was surprised by the calmness with which she spoke.

"I am sorry to detain you, but I thought that since we have met it would be a satisfaction to me and, perhaps, to you if I told you that I am very sorry for having caused you annoyance a few days ago."

"The explanation is quite unnecessary," he answered, coldly ; "I could not doubt that you had good reasons for your decision, and I have too much respect for you to attempt to thwart any desire which you may entertain."

"You are angry with me still, and I cannot blame you."

"Pardon, I cannot be angry with a lady in whose life I take no interest."

"I am glad to hear that, for it relieves me from the agony of thinking that you still cared for me, and that I had caused you pain—which, I fear now, was without service to you ; but, indeed, I did think of serving you and others when I gave up—that is, when I broke my promise to you. I have been deceived, forgive me ; I thought to help you, and find that I have wronged you."

The heart was on her tongue ; the earnest voice penetrated his breast, and again his inclination was to clasp her in his arms, to implore her to forget the past days of misery, and to think only of the future with hope. Pride interfered ; he had been too deeply injured to surrender at the first penitent word she spoke.

"Tell me," he said, bitterly, "how could you expect to serve me by overthrowing all my hopes, by denying me the one blessing which I most craved for—yourself."

"I cannot explain yet. I would have to speak of others in telling you why I have acted with such apparent cruelty. But don't think that I am asking you to give me the same place in

your heart which I once held. I only wish you to understand that I am very, *very* sorry for having grieved you. . . I shall always pray for your prosperity. I shall always——”

“Love you,” he fancied were the concluding words, but they seemed to die away with the soft breeze as she glided from him through the shrubbery.

A moment's indecision on his part and the opportunity for explanation was lost. He could not be sure of the words, and yet he made a few steps in her track. He saw her flitting across several open spaces, the moonlight and the shadows falling upon her slight form, her dress fluttering in the wind.

She seemed to be running to the house and never once looking behind. Suddenly a cloud darkened the moon and he did not see her again.

“She is too eager to escape me—I must have been mistaken,” Austin muttered.

Then he wheeled about with an exclamation of impatience that he should ever think of a woman who had jilted him so deliberately. He was angry with her, and he felt something like contempt for himself that he should be so subject to her influence. She had only to speak a few words in the old gentle tones, she had only to look a little sad, and his love asserted itself strongly as ever, making him eager to take her in his arms, to shelter her from every unkind wind that blew.

“I must work and drive her from my thoughts. Oh, I shall soon forget. Or I might adopt my mother's counsel and try for Bess. There would be excitement in setting up as a rival to the Major . . . I wonder if he ever did think of Coila?—tut, what matter to me?”

He was mocking himself in remembering his mother's suggestion about Aladdin's Lamp, for he believed that he had lost the chance of securing it; and it is chagrining to a man to discover that he has lost the woman he loved, and also the woman who might have loved him.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## THE TEST.

COILA was much agitated by that brief interview with Austin. She had hastened from him because—standing there alone with him on the spot where she had been made so very happy, and about which it was a sad pleasure to linger, dreaming of him and what might have been—she knew that with tears already in her eyes, she would presently break down altogether. The words, “always love you,” had escaped in spite of herself, and then ashamed and frightened, she fled.

She entered the house and endeavoured to reach her room unobserved ; but at the foot of the staircase she met Baxter.

“I have been seeking for you Miss, to tell you that Mr. Marjoribanks wants to see you in the library.”

“Please say that I shall be with him in five minutes. I hope you have not been long searching for me.”

“Maybe ten minutes.”

Instead of going upstairs she went to the library, for she knew her uncle’s impatience if kept waiting for any one.

He was very impatient just now, but quite as much on account of his irritation at Coila’s obstinacy as because of the delay in her appearance. He was pacing to and fro like a fretful lion in its cage. Killievar was with him, and finding that he could not tempt his host into conversation even upon the interesting topics of the price of iron and the probabilities of a strike, he turned for amusements to the study of the backs of the elegantly bound books, which symmetrically filled the shelves in due accordance with the owner’s instructions to the bookseller.

“I observe, Sir,” said Killievar, “that you have got the works of Burke here. I approve of Burke.”

Marjoribanks’ mind was rarely alive to any reference to other books than those of the counting house, and it was not

capable at present of guessing at the meaning of any allusion to an author. He answered quickly :

“ Burke!—Burke!—I saw the villain hanged ! ”

He was thinking of the notorious Burke and Hare. Before Killievar could express his amazement at the answer, Coila entered. The presence of the laird in his resplendent costume made her pause, fancying that she was either too late or too soon.

“ I see that you are engaged, uncle—shall I come back by and by ? ”

“ Shut the door and stay where you are. I want Killievar to hear what I have to say, so that if you force me to be disagreeable there may be one sensible man in the world to bear witness that I wished with all my heart to be generous.”

He jingled the money in his pockets as if his heart lay somewhere thereabout.

“ You have been very generous,” she said, and submitted, although at the first instant she was inclined to oppose, if not to resent, the exposure to Killievar of her quarrel with Austin.

The former advanced gallantly and placed a chair for her. She did not sit down.

Even Marjoribanks was touched by that pathetic acknowledgment of her dependent position, and he spoke a little less sharply.

“ I was not meaning to hurt you, and I only want you to do what you were eager enough about not long ago. Look here, now, Coila, I am asking nothing unreasonable ; you have had time to think over the matter—tell me why you changed your mind all of a sudden, or else say you will have him.”

“ But I cannot marry a man who refuses to take me, uncle.”

“ But he shall take you—I say it. He shall take you or—I’ll make him pay up the three thousand he owes me.

“ You know he cannot do that.”

“ Then he’ll suffer for it, if he refuses to do what I tell him.”

“ I cannot prevent you from carrying out your cruel threat, Sir ; but if Austin could yield to such influence I would regard him with contempt—I would hate him, and I would not marry him.”

Her eyes were bright, lips trembling, the whole form drawn up to resist the attack, and there was dignity as well as passion in her look.

"What do you think of that, Killievar ? Here is your gentle Coila, who could not speak an angry word."

"I must say, if you put me to it, Sir," was the cautious reply, "that looking at the business this way and then that way, I am not sure but I agree with her ; she has just nothing to do but refuse the man outright."

She was so grateful to him for these words.

"And I'm not sure but the lad has nothing to do but to refuse her. I know what's what, and it is the Major has done this."

"The Major !" was her astounded ejaculation.

"Just him—he has got into your head and has turned the other chap out."

"Oh, uncle !"

She covered her face, shrinking with shame at the suspicion.

"Is it not true ?"

"No."

"Come with me—you come, too, Killievar, and we'll see about it."

He led the way to the door of the invalid's chamber, opened it and beckoned the nurse to come out. He sent her down stairs

"Now, you go in, speak to him, and we'll listen here."

She shrank from this coarse test.

"Are you frightened ?"

Hesitation, a sharp struggle between repugnance to the task laid down for her, and fear of not being able otherwise than by obedience to convince her uncle that he was wrong ; and then, boldly—

"No, I'm not afraid."

She went into the room. The subdued light, the heavy breathing of the invalid, and the mysterious sense of a power above and beyond the reach of all our strength, skill—love, even—which is always felt in a sick room, caused her to approach the bed on tip-toe, and to speak under her breath. In the position she took up the light was behind her, so that her face was completely veiled in shadow.

The Major was not aware of her presence. He was laying in a half-waking state, dozing and then rousing up for an instant only to fall back into a heavy, painless state which was neither waking nor sleeping.

His leg had progressed most satisfactorily, and the doctors agreed that he would, most likely, be able to walk without a limp, if he should ever be able to walk again. Dr. Spence was most hopeful; but Austin was not so well satisfied, for the effects of the concussion on the brain lingered with disagreeable obstinacy. At times he would be quite sensible, and by and by he would relapse into a wandering state, confusing time, place, and persons. Then came sleeplessness, and that rendered the use of strong soporifics necessary.

"I hope you feel better, Major Kilgour," said Coila, timidly, and finding difficulty in saying anything at all.

There was no response, no movement to indicate that he had heard. One hand was lying near her; she touched it and repeated the words. Presently he moved, as if the sound having travelled a long way had reached him at last.

He opened his eyes wearily and gazed at her; he only made out the delicate form of a lady, and he thought it was that of Bess. It seemed a pain to keep his eyes open, so he closed them, smiling.

"I am glad you have come yourself this time. That is a sign I am getting better—it is very good of you. I know you have been here before, although I could not speak to you."

"You are wrong, Major, I have not been here before."

"All right. . . . I understand. I am glad to have you come. . . . It does me good."

"I do not think you know who is speaking to you—it is Coila."

He smiled feebly, ready to agree to anything in order to avoid the effort to contradict.

"Another of your jokes! Very well, Coila, I begin to love you."

She was startled and bewildered; the test was decidedly turning to her disadvantage, and she did not know how to set matters right.

"I tell you, Major, that you are wrong."

"Haughty now! I admire you most in that mood; how the

eyes flash and the foot stamps, and you look so pretty. Thank you . . . thank—”

She turned up the gas, and placed herself so that the light shone on her face.

“I beseech you look up and see your mistake.”

But he had fallen back into his state of semi-stupor, and she could not rouse him. She was dumb with dismay, and stood looking at the placid visage, feeling bitterly her own powerlessness to quicken it into life.

She suspected his thoughts about Bess, but she had no idea the latter had visited him until now. She understood that Bess would flirt with a ploughman or her groom, rather than not flirt at all; and here by a singular mischance she had again to bear the penalty of her cousin's dangerous pastime.

It seemed as if in the attempt she made to repay her debt of gratitude, in the only way she could hope to repay it—by sacrificing her own desires to the happiness of her uncle and Bess—she had become involved in a maze of the most distressing combination of events. Worst of all she saw no way out of it.

After lowering the light she rejoined the listeners, and in silence they returned to the library.

“I believe you will not attempt to say we have not heard enough to satisfy me that I am right in picking out the Major as the cause of your strange treatment of Murray?”

“He is not the cause, and he mistook me for another.”

“What other?”

She could not answer that without betraying the Major. So she remained silent, and in her efforts to suppress tears her features assumed a dour expression.

“I have a right to expect better of you, Coila—more consideration, more obedience. I like you; I made you equal with Bess in every way; gave you the same education, the same allowance, and I wanted to find a match for you as good as the one I expect for her. But you do all sorts of silly things, and you won't give me an explanation. Confound it, how is a man to keep his temper with such an obstinate creature?”

The tears stole down her cheeks very quietly, but she could not speak.

“Suppose it was your father—and I took the place of your father—do you think he would allow you to treat him in this way?”

A sob ; she swayed a little as if about to fall, but resting her hands on the back of a chair she recovered herself.

"He is meaning kindly, my child, I will testify to that. But you will go with me to Killievar ; my sister will be proud to see you. We will fish in the loch, and we will sail, and you will get very well, and strong as a stirk, and then all will be right."

"Are you stricken dumb ; you might thank him for his invitation."

"I do thank him—I am glad. I want to go away from Ravelston."

"That's a fine way to speak to me—that's a fine payment to make, to say you want to go away, when you know that I liked to have you about me."

"I did not mean that I liked to go away from you, uncle ; but—just now—when—Dr. Murray is constantly coming and going, I want to avoid meeting him for the present."

Marjoribanks looked at her as if he thought she must be cracked. He had arranged his plans on the theory that it was the Major who was in the way ; and now he learned that she was ready to leave him at a moment's notice only to escape from Austin. He ran up a double row of figures in his imaginary ledger, but he could not attain a satisfactory result—unless he had made a mistake, and that could not be.

"Very well, you shall go."

"When ?"

"After the races ; Killievar wishes to see them."

"Thank you. May I go ?"

He nodded, and she retired much confused in mind, and with such an empty feeling in her breast. Her pain was the more acute because she felt that she had blundered terribly ; that the act which had cost her so much was not desired by Bess, and had made Austin wretched. Yet, no, he was not wretched, for he had told her that he had no interest in her life. That was why her breast was empty, and the world seemed so desolate.

There had been moments when her heart had throbbed with hatred of her cousin ; that was when she first suspected the mistake she had made in believing that Bess really cared for Austin, but now she thought that she could neither love nor hate.



"I can't make that hussey out," ejaculated Marjoribanks ; "here is an hour of valuable time wasted upon her, and I am not much wiser than I was. She has told me nothing ; and yet I tried her every way."

"I was thinking, Sir," answered Killievar, "that you made her afraid to speak."

"Not a bit of it ; she knows well enough that my bark is worse than my bite, and she ought to know also that I don't care whether she marries Murray or not."

"Then I would like to know, Sir, why you insist upon it ?"

"Because I said it was to be, and because she had no business to make me say that, and then refuse to have the fellow."

"Perhaps you will let me speak to her ; and she will, perhaps, tell me what she would not tell you."

"Speak away, I'll be glad if you can bring her to reason. But mind, keep an eye on her when you have her at Killievar ; for Kilgour is a devil of a chap, and will be after her like a shot. He'll find out his mistake, though if he does wheedle her off—she shall not have one penny from me."


"The Major is a very good shot," said Killievar ; "and one or two times he almost beat me on the moors. I approve of a good shot."

"Who cares for that if there's not a shot in the locker, eh ? —ha, ha."

Marjoribanks was pleased by his own joke ; and Killievar was pleased that he had shown his pre-eminence with his gun, not dreaming, good man, that the Major never allowed himself to surpass any one, who prided himself upon his ability in any particular sport.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## THE MAJOR'S LEVEE.

NE of the most interested in the Major's fate was Cockie-leerie. Every morning he stumped up to the house, demanded to see Baxter, and put the query :

"How is my frien', the Major, the-day?"

"Much the same, but something better."

"Thank you. He's a deevil at a loup, like mysel'."

Every evening he was there again.

"How is my frien', the Major, the night?"

"No worse."

"Thank you. Od, man, there never was the marrows o' him at a loup, barrin' mysel', maybe. But that's neither here nor there. I would back him against Mendoza at loupin'. My compliments to the Major—and see that you tell him."

He seemed to find peculiar relish in the repetition of the words—"the Major," and used them as often as possible. After making his usual comment upon the answer, which for a long time varied very little, he would march off with his head more erect than ever, elated with the idea that he had shown the flunkeys, as he contemptuously called all the male servants of the household, his friendship with "the Major."

He diligently watched the coming and going of Austin in order to learn from him the progress the patient was making. He even pretended to feel a serious development of the symptoms which had moved Miss Marjoribanks to send for Dr. Murray on his account.

Austin, however, feeling assured that there was nothing the matter with Macbeth, was sometimes impatient of the delay he caused, and answered him curtly enough, for his own troubles pressed upon him bitterly. Still he tried to give a judicious answer to the inquiries for the patient.

By and by the answers from doctor and hutler came to be more satisfactory; he was progressing; the signs of improve-

ment were distinct, and at length the doctor announced that he felt satisfied of complete recovery, if the invalid could only be prevailed upon to keep quiet.

"Then you'll no hae to gie him a pin-leg after a'," exclaimed Macbeth, as if he were almost disappointed.

A few days after Kilgour had been able to move from his bedroom into the little parlour adjoining, he desired to see Cockie-leerie, and that personage was accordingly shown upstairs. He was not at all abashed by the honour conferred on him. He stumped up the broad staircase as if he had been lord of many acres, and secretly much delighted by the amazement of the flunkeys—he never thought of their amusement at his expense.

He found the invalid seated in a large arm-chair comfortably surrounded with cushions, and the wounded leg being supported by a stool.

"Come in, Macbeth, sit down ; I am nearly all right again, although a cripple."

There was a chair drawn close to the Major for the convenience of visitors, and the present one seated himself on it. The two men surveyed each other from head to foot, and the eyes of each rested on the lame leg of the other. Kilgour burst into a laugh.

"I see you are thinking like myself of the similarity in our positions. But I have got my own leg yet, and the doctors promise me that in a little while it will be as good as ever."

"I am proud to hear it, and I'm glad to see you looking that weel. A' the same there is nae denying the advantages of a timmer leg. There's nae rheumatics in it, and there's nae pain of any kind, and once you get used to it, you can do nearly as muckle as wi' your ain leg. Man, I can loup yet, and I would stand against you ony day, though you are a guid ane at a loup on horseback. But I'm rale glad to see you."

"I have been delighted by your interest in me ; I received your messages every day, and was rouch gratified."

"Oh, you ken, my laddie was a sodger, and that makes me think more of a red-coat than ordinary folk. He wasna so nimble as me or he might have been a general—I would have been a general mysel' if it hadna been that I was young and foolish and spoilt mysel' by marrying the plaiden merchant's

daughter. You should have seen me in thae days: there wasna a living soul that could beat me at high-cutting. Look here."

He got up quite gravely, rested his hands on the back of the chair, and balanced himself on his "pin." Then he screwed his face into an expression which suggested a sudden colic, but he began to whistle a tune, half strathspey and half reel, whilst his sound leg performed wild antics, up and down, and round about the wooden one, pausing a second at intervals to cry—"did you ever see the like o' that?"—"Hooch! lassie, kilt your coaties."—"At it, billies, beat me if you can!"

The Major retained his gravity for some time, uttering an occasional ejaculation of approval, but the absurdity of the tall figure with the curly white head, whistling, gasping, and flourishing one leg, overcame him at last, and he laughed outright.

Cockie-leerie stopped as suddenly as the witches when Tam o'Shanter shouted "weel done, Cutty Sark."

"Admirable, admirable! and most entertaining. How you must have danced into the hearts of the lasses in your young days, Macbeth."

"I had some fun in my day and there was twa, or three maybe, laid the weight of their misshanters at my door, and I'll no say that it wasna fair. But be that as it may if my laddie could have done the high-cutting like me, there's no saying what he might have come to."

"You say you have not seen or heard of him for many years."

"Never a sight or a cheep for more than twenty years."

"You tried the War Office."

"Aye, but I learned nothing."

"Perhaps he enlisted under another name."

"Like enough, though there was nothing in his own name to be ashamed of."

"He must have been a heartless young rascal."

"I wouldna say that. You see he was feared at first that he might be forced to come home; and then folk put off writing and put off till they get ashamed to write."

"You do not blame him then."

"No; for it was me that put the sodgering into his head,

and I would be satisfied if I could ken that he had come to ony guid."

"If he is like you I have no doubt he has made his way in the world. I shall make inquiries when I return to London and let you know the result. Now, I must say good day—I can't stand much conversation yet."

"Good day, and I am real glad to see you."

The Major leaned back on the cushions and closed his eyes. He was apparently wearied, but he was not to be allowed to rest yet. A tap at the door and a footman entered.

"Miss Gardyne bade me inform you, Sir, that she would like to see you when you are disengaged."

"Miss Gardyne!—I am at her service whenever she pleases."

He noted two things when Coila entered—that she was as pale as if she were suffering from some severe malady, and that there was a nervous movement about the lips.

"It is most kind of you, Miss Gardyne, to visit such a helpless and dull friend as myself. I am grateful."

"Do you feel strong?"

She spoke abruptly, as if the words were forced from her.

"Thank you, I am gaining strength and have felt little pain to-day."

"May I speak to you on a subject which will perhaps annoy you?"

"Whatever subject you choose I am sure will not hurt me. But will you not be seated?"

"Excuse me I would rather stand. I have been waiting in daily hope of an opportunity to see you. I have watched for Dr. Spence in order to learn when you would be well enough to listen, but I have not seen him."

"Dr. Murray is here every day."

She did not appear to have heard him, and went on—

"Now that I have obtained the interview I find it difficult to explain what I want."

"You may be assured that whatever it is, if in my power, it shall be done."

"Do you, can you remember one evening that I went into your room, touched your hand, and spoke to you?"

"I cannot recollect that you ever came to me during my ill-

ness until now. But you know that the worst of my accident was the effect on the brain."

"Oh, try and recall the evening I mean. You had been much better that day, and during our interview you seemed to know quite well what you were saying, although you fell asleep before I left you."

"Was I talking any nonsense? Can you tell me anything I said?"

"You spoke as if to some one you were very fond of. I told you that you were mistaken as to who was beside you—that it was Coila, and you would not believe me."

An anxious expression passed over the Major's face as he endeavoured to seize the hazy recollections which eluded his memory.

"You said that—oh, Sir, I have been suffering so much that I am very weak. From what you said, my uncle, who was listening, declares that I have been encouraging your addresses, and he is very angry with me."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed the Major, with evident uneasiness; "it was not a nice thing for Mr. Marjoribanks to lay such a trap for us both. I have some dim idea of the incident now."

"But you did not think it was me."

"No, I thought it was—not you."

He altered the phrase just in time; but Coila understood whose name had been on his lips.

"And you know that I have done nothing to give rise to such a suspicion."

"I should have been too vain of the honour to have failed to observe it, if you had encouraged me to hope in any way."

"Then you will tell my uncle he was mistaken." (This with painful eagerness.)

The Major hesitated; tell Marjoribanks that he was mistaken, and his suspicions would be directed into the right channel; and if he were so full of wrath at the idea of him paying addresses to his niece, what would he do when he learned that Bess was the object of pursuit! The Major had good reason to hesitate.

"I beseech you, Sir, do this for me, and relieve me from much annoyance."

No answer ; he was busily speculating upon the consequences of compliance.

She had pleaded to him, and her sweet face was very piteous ; she became firm and indignant, when she thought that he was to refuse.

“Major Kilgour, I demand that you shall inform my uncle of the mistake he has made regarding me.”

“Very well,” he answered quietly ; “I will do as you wish ; but send Mr. Marjoribanks to me at once ; for my good resolutions are apt to fail altogether if they are allowed to cool.”

She bowed her head.

“Thank you, and forgive me the wrong I did you in suspecting for a moment that you would refuse.”

“No thanks, Miss Gardyne ; you had a right to ask, and I could not refuse.”

She hastened away to seek her uncle ; she had been driven to desperation, indeed, when she had sought this means of satisfying him.

The Major surveyed his wounded leg, glanced round the room, and then settled himself comfortably among the cushions.

“I shall have to take up my quarters at the nearest hotel presently ; and I don't care to leave these cosy rooms. They certainly have paid me every attention, and I ought to thank them and go. . . . But I am not going to have my brains knocked about and my leg broken for nothing. No, I'll fight it out—only the siege must be carried on more vigorously.”

He took another survey of the room, and relished the idea of giving up the chase still less than before.

“I wonder whereaway my wild goose is flying now. She's avoiding me ; three days and I have not seen her. That's a good sign. But what is the use of it all if Marjoribanks should play the unforgiving father ? Hum ! that is something to think about ; and yet why think ? The game has gone so far now that I must take the risk, and trust to her wits to help herself and me.”

Marjoribanks interrupted his reflections.

“You are getting all right again, Major—uh-hum—glad of it. We have spared no expense to patch you up, and you'll be as good as ever in two or three weeks.”

“I am deeply obliged to you, Mr. Marjoribanks, for the

trouble *and* expense you have been put to on my account. I hope the patching up process will turn out to your entire satisfaction."

"No doubt of it. What did you want me for?"

"Miss Gardyne has not explained then?"

Marjoribanks frowned at the mention of that name.

"Baxter told me that you wished to see me on particular business. Here I am."

"The business relates to her, and—"

"Don't trouble to go any farther. I am pleased enough to see you as my guest, Major; and you are welcome. I am a straightforward man, and speak my mind; so, to save you any bother, I tell you at once I will not consent, and never a farthing of mine shall go to Coila if she marries—"

"My dear Sir—my dear Sir, you talk as if you thought I was going to propose for the lady."

"And weren't you?"

"Never thought of it."

The Major laughed, and Marjoribanks looked a little foolish as well as surprised. Then he joined in the laugh, but not with much grace.

"What were you going to say then?"

"Well, it is rather a curious position; but the lady has asked me to assure you that she has never given me the least encouragement to address her otherwise than as a pleasant acquaintance and my host's niece; and I beg you to accept that assurance now. On my own part, I may tell you a secret which should satisfy you at once—my affections are engaged elsewhere."

The frown disappeared from Marjoribanks' face, and though he felt annoyed at the blunder he had made he was also relieved.

"I'm doubting that I have been hard upon the poor bairn; but why did she refuse—ah, well, we'll see about that. In the meanwhile, let me congratulate you, Major, and you may stay at Ravelston as long as you like. But I suppose you'll be for running off to your deary as soon as you can stand on your legs. You're a sly chap never to say anything about that before."

"I don't care to talk of these things."

"Is it a good match?"

"I think so."

"Has she the siller, man, the siller—that's what to seek?"




" I believe she will be pretty well provided for in that respect ; I am not sure yet."

" Make sure before you tie the noose, then ; make sure of the siller. I congratulate you again."

He shook hands with him in much glee ; and when he went away the Major congratulated himself warmly. The position was better than ever.

## CHAPTER XXX.

## KIN, BUT NOT KIND.

NDoubtedly Bess was keeping out of the way ; and the Major, flushed with the unexpected relief which Marjoribanks' misapprehension afforded him, was exceedingly chagrined that he could not find an opportunity to speak to her. Coila had rendered him an important service at the moment when he feared that submission to her demand was to prove the ruin of his prospects. He had the satisfaction of seeing his host effectually hood-winked.

The satisfaction was not honourable ; but the Major, if his conscience had pricked him at all, would have contented himself with the old aphorism which has been made the excuse for endless wrong-doings—"All's fair in love as in war."

Unless, however, he could see her, and see her often, he could not profit by the luck which had befallen him. Marjoribanks had made him welcome to stay at Ravelston as long as he pleased ; but he accepted that as a mere phrase, and knew that he might soon out-stay his welcome, especially in the capacity of an invalid.

He could not send for her, because that might betray too great an anxiety to see her, and she would resent it. He could not go out to seek her ; and he very heartily cursed his lame leg for that inability. So there seemed to be no resource for him but to wait patiently until the impulsive lady should please to show herself.

He tried one ruse ; every morning Baxter presented the compliments of Miss Marjoribanks, and hoped that his progress continued to be favourable ; he pretended to be much worse, sent his thanks to Miss Marjoribanks, and regretted that he was such an incumbrance to the household.

Miss Marjoribanks was not moved to any further action than to send the messenger back with an expression of her regret at the relapse, and of her assurance that the household was

willing and eager to do anything which might assist his recovery.

He changed his tactics with admirable promptitude. He got well with surprising rapidity ; he threatened the doctors every day that next morning they would have to seek him on the moors, as he had his gun ready, and felt so spry that he was not going to be held a prisoner any longer, even by a broken leg. He required company and amusement more than nursing.

Dr. Spence wondered if this could be a return of the delirium, for the condition of the leg rendered the mere idea of walking upon it absurd to the verge of insanity. Austin went to Killievar and begged him to see the Major as often as possible.

Killievar complied ; he spent an hour or two in the invalid's sitting-room daily, playing *écarté* for penny points. Killievar was always the winner by two out of three games.

"I cannot play cards," said the Major, at length, "you always beat me."

"That is my good fortune, Sir, and not your fault. But you make up for your loss by the equanimity with which you bear it, and that indicates the possibility of future success. I approve of your play, Sir, it is very honest and direct. You will learn in course of time."

"Do you know chess ?"

"I cannot say that I am cognisant of the game, Sir, but Miss Marjoribanks has been giving me some lessons, and in a few days I shall be able to play with you."

"Ah, then, she understands it—it is my favourite game. I must ask her some day to try a bout with me."

Killievar duly reported this conversation to Miss Marjoribanks, and urged her to relieve the monotony of the invalid's life by matching him in his favourite game.

"Impossible for me to match him," said Bess, shaking her head and smiling.

"But it is not so," was the grave response, without the remotest suspicion of a double meaning in her words ; "he plays very well, but he is not good at games, and you would win, I am prepared to say. Moreover, it would be a nice thing of you to amuse him in his exile."

Bess thought that perhaps it would be wise on her part as well

as kindly to help to make the invalid's imprisonment less irksome. At first she had been excited and alarmed by the consequences of her own folly. She feared that his life might be the penalty of his devotion to her whims. She had watched his progress towards convalescence with much anxiety ; but the moment she had been informed that he was safe, she had withdrawn from all direct personal inquiry as to his condition, and contented herself by merely sending to ask for him, lest he should fancy that her anxiety indicated more than her regret that she had been, inadvertently, the cause of his suffering.

Now, she began to fear that persistent avoidance of him might have an equally unpleasant result ; and so she determined to visit him soon.

She had been very quiet during the Major's illness ; except that she went often to inquire for him, that she bribed the nurse with many presents to be faithful to him and careful of him, she had been more calm and less impetuous than usual. She did not appear at breakfast ; at luncheon and at dinner she was complaisant to everyone, but evidently always conscious that there was one in the house whose imminent danger was not to be forgotten.

She avoided Coila. She dressed in her bed-room, and would not enter a chamber where there was a possibility of being left alone with her. There was something almost of horror in the eagerness with which she would fly from contact with her cousin.

There was in truth bitterness in her heart towards Coila. In the quiet hours of night, pacing her chamber, or tossing restlessly on her bed, she would cry, mentally :

" If he dies she is to blame, but all will fall upon me. She drove me to it—she maddened me and made me wicked. Oh, I hate her—she would give Austin up for me ! For me !—as if I would accept the man she rejected ! And then to satisfy her I made a fool of myself, and, maybe, I have killed this man. . . . God forgive me ! "

But this passionate despair was never shown outside the walls of her own room ; she was quiet, playful, satirical, and disagreeable as ever in the presence of others, except Coila. When the latter was near, Bess could only conceal her ex-

citement by an enforced reticence, which was most painful to her. She really had tried to be kind and faithful to her cousin, even when she saw her win the affections of the man she loved ; but the unhappy incidents of the last few days seemed to have effected a revolution in her nature.

All the while she was saying to herself that she cared nothing for Major Kilgour, and was only anxious that she might not be responsible for his death or for any serious effects of the accident into which she had decoyed him.

She pitied him, she sharply blamed herself for all his suffering, although by a twist of thought she transferred the absolute blame to her cousin. She was eager for his recovery and ready to make any sacrifice on her own part that might help him. At the same time, she did not forget the danger of compromising herself by too much kindness. Therefore, as soon as she learned that he was safe, she in a great measure ceased her attentions to him.

There was bitterness in Coila's heart too ; she felt that Bess had driven her to make a sacrifice of her dearest hopes out of mere wantonness. Bess had thought of Austin until he was free, and then she had turned from him in something like contempt. At any rate she had made her sacrifice a folly, and she had wrecked both their lives.

Coila's gentle nature developed a singular degree of sullenness under this impression. She had been willing to surrender all that she cared for most ; but when she found that in doing so, she only caused him suffering, that Bess laughed at her, and that she was herself misunderstood on every hand, she was thrown back upon the bitter thought that Bess had been heartlessly coquetting with Austin, and that she had been a fool.

The most irritating of all the ills of life is that of knowing we have blundered with our eyes open. Coila felt that, but she still shrank from the one course open to her to redeem the past—namely, an honest confession to Austin of the motives which had actuated her in refusing him. It was Bess who should make that confession, and Bess would never do it.

Besides, there was the painful recollection of his own assertion, that he cared nothing for her, to check any impulse which she might feel to tell him all and beg his forgiveness. She could not blame him ; she had been cruel to him ; he had much to do

and much to think about ; it was right and natural that having endured the first shock of her apparent falsehood, he should turn away from her for ever. That had been a hope to her when she had first thought of serving her benefactors by rejecting him ; now it was the main source of her despair.

So she became sullen, resolved to endure no more unmerited blame (it was this resolution which had driven her to the Major to ask his help), and she avoided Bess with that sense of wrong which inspires repugnance.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## "QUEEN TO MOVE."

"**H**E is recovering rapidly. He has a remarkably fine constitution, and consequently suffers less than most men would have done from the effects of such an accident. He says he is determined to be at the races ; and I believe he would be well enough to attend them if he could only curb his impatience of confinement meanwhile."

Austin was the speaker and Bess was the listener. She had sent for him with the request that he would see her for a few minutes in the drawing-room after he had paid his afternoon visit to his patient.

When he entered, she had been standing at a window, hands clasped at her back, face calm and expressionless. She merely wheeled round without unclasping her hands and put the question which he answered so satisfactorily. She bowed and said :

"Thank you, I hope you will forgive me for delaying you."

He could not see her face well ; although the light from a side window crossed it, the brow and the mouth were in shadow.

"I am glad to do anything which may please you," he answered with some awkwardness, for her manner was so entirely changed towards him that he was "put out," puzzled, and unable to decide how he should conduct himself in speaking to her—whether to speak like an old friend, or simply as the medical attendant of Major Kilgour.

There was a long pause—a most uncomfortable one for him ; she standing immovable and apparently forgetful of his presence ; he, uncertain whether to go or to wait for her permission.

He advanced to her and she started slightly when he stood close beside her.

"I only wish to say good-bye. I have not seen you often

lately, and as I cannot hope that you will permit me to see you soon again, I would like to shake hands with you.”

She gave him her hand ; he held it in his own longer than appeared to be necessary, whilst he was earnestly examining her face. They bowed, said “good-bye,” and he went to the door.

He turned back. She did not move or express the least surprise.

“Pardon me, Miss Marjoribanks, I wish to speak to you as I know my father would have done had he seen you just now. You are not well ; your pulse is feverish, and unless you are careful to avoid excitement you will certainly break down.”

“That is all you doctors know. Why I never was better in my life.”

She pretended to laugh at him in the old spirit of wicked mirthfulness.

“I am glad you think so. Good-bye again.”

She became serious, and was evidently struggling to overcome emotion.

“Stop ; we made a bargain—you were to save him, and I was to secure for you the realisation of your dearest wish. Tell me what I can do for you.”

“Nothing. Major Kilgour is saved by his own strength, and not by our skill. Your father will pay our fees, and there is an end of my attendance at Ravelston.”

There was a shade of bitterness in the tone of his answer.

“Nonsense ; there is something to follow—you still wish to marry Coila.”

“No.”

Unalterable resolution was expressed in that simple negative. She hesitated, trembled, and then :

“Not if I show you that her rejection was owing to a mistaken idea on her part that in doing so she would serve you and others best ?”

“I asked you not to speak on this subject again. I am quite satisfied—I will not have a woman for my wife who can be influenced by any consideration that is not agreeable to me.”

“Can I do nothing for you ?”



"Get well, be bright and brisk as you were before this accident occurred, and I shall be contented."

"You seem to think of me sometimes ?"

"Very often."

"You would be sorry if any great calamity befell me—marriage for instance."

"I hope when that event occurs you will not think it a calamity, and if you are happy I shall be glad with you."

"Good-bye," she said, abruptly, and turned away from him.

She wished to protect herself, and had no intention of being rude to him. He retired, a little surprised by this sudden termination of the interview, and much distressed by the idea that he had in some way offended her.

The pride of conquest had been rapidly asserting itself in her breast ; Austin had resolved to forget Coila ; she had only to show him a little sympathy and two degrees of esteem and he would be at her feet. The temptation to punish him for his persistent blindness to her affection was so great that she could only escape it by avoiding his presence.

If he should speak to her—if he should say that all the past had been stupid blundering, that his real love was hers—what would happen ?

She would detest and despise him was the reply of her passion ; but her heart trembled and she shrank away from any decisive answer.

She rang the bell.

"Say to Major Kilgour that I will see him if he is at leisure."

The footman to whom this message had been given, returned immediately.

"The Major thanks you, and he will be happy to see you."

She proceeded at once to the invalid's sitting room. The footman announced "Miss Marjoribanks," closed the door and retired.

The passage from the drawing-room sufficed for Bess to collect herself. She went up to the Major with the utmost frankness, and expressed her pleasure in being assured of his recovery. They shook hands, he beckoned to the chair which was near him, and then :

"I thought you would never come, Miss Marjoribanks."

"You must have a very bad opinion of me, then; I have asked for you every day."

"Yes, but that did not do me any good. I wanted to see yourself."

"You are very much better."

Her tone and manner gave emphasis to the commonplace remark.

"I am glad you think so."

"I am sure of it, for you are back again to those unmeaning compliments which are always on your lips."

"And you scold me for them with as much fervour as ever," said the Major, laughing quietly. "Well, I could check my tongue, but how can I help trying to be complimentary when you are near me?"

"I shall leave you, then."

She rose; Kilgour made a movement as if he would rise to stay her, but a severe twinge of pain checked him, and reminded him of his helpless condition. The sting of pain was only indicated by the sudden pallor of his face. She saw it, she knew that he had hurt himself, and she stopped.

"I am sorry to have annoyed you," he said, seriously; "but I have been longing to see you, and when you came, so many pleasant recollections entered the room with you that I forgot my own state, and that we were not exchanging badinage as we were a few weeks ago. Be merciful; you see what a helpless creature I am, but if you can only endure to stay with me for a few minutes you will help me more than all the drugs in all the chemists' shops in the world."

"You mean that I will not poison you," she said, laughing, and resuming her seat; "you are quite right, I am most anxious to see you well."

"And your wish will make me well. If you would only—but there, I was nearly committing myself again to what you repudiate as hollow flattery. I shall be careful, but please permit me to say that your presence makes even a sick room bright to me."

His sincerity could not be doubted; but it seemed to render her the more restless, although she replied with merely conventional civility:

"I am glad to have it in my power to render your durance

tolerable. You have a right to command anything I can do to serve you, Major Kilgour, for it has been a bitter thought to me that I am principally to blame for your misfortune."

"You must not say that—it was an accident which you could not possibly have anticipated; and, to speak truth, I do not feel much regret for it since it has won your interest and sympathy. I could suffer a good deal for that."

Somehow the conversation seemed to come back always to the dangerous boundary between friendship and love-making. She had tried several times to turn the course of the chat into common channels, but it defied her, and defied him too; for he was too discreet to force his wooing.

She thought: he is decidedly good-looking; he has courage; he is devoted to me; he is poor; I am rich—could there be a better match?

He thought: she is charming; she is impulsive, and bows to every wind of feeling which touches her; she is shrewd; she is rich, and these elements combined would make a first-rate wife if it might be salted with a little love. He was *not* sorry for the accident, because it had drawn her nearer to him than anything else could have done.

They were looking at each other; each quite sensible of the other's thoughts—or guessing them so nearly that an absolute confession would not have afforded much enlightenment to either.

She felt as if an unseen chain made her a fast prisoner to the room. She wished to leave, yet dreaded the silence of her own chamber, and the thoughts of Austin which would be sure to disturb her; so, like the gambler, who goes on gambling to escape the memory of his previous losses in the excitement of striving to retrieve them, she remained.

The Major drew forward a daintily inlaid chess-table which he had kept ready in expectation of her visit.

"Killievar tells me you are a chess-player—shall we try a game?"

"As you please. What shall we play for?"

"Hearts."

"Impossible—I have none."

"Alas, that is my condition, too," said the Major, with one of those sighs which appear to be all in jest, and yet may indicate a serious thought behind; "you stole mine long ago."

"That was very wicked of me; but I am innocent of all guilty intention. I restore the article with compliments."

"But you restore it in such a maimed condition, it will be a cripple for life."

"I am not afraid of that; the heart is happily the most enduring part of our body; and, provided you keep it safe from cold, it will heal more readily than a broken leg."

"Aye, but, unfortunately, it cannot escape cold on its way back from you."

"It must be very tender."

"You have made it so. It has been tough enough hitherto; but even iron melts if the furnace is hot enough. Shall you begin?"

He had arranged the pieces on the table, placing white for her, black for himself.

"The stakes must be light," she said, moving a pawn; "and I don't know but hearts would be the lightest we could find—they are so like shuttlecocks, answering to the stroke of every bat which strikes them."

"Yes, but they frequently fly off in quite unexpected directions."

"They are easily tossed back."

"Do you not think they suffer in the tossing about?—black takes white; first blood to me."

Did she not know how a heart might suffer? She was apparently studying the game whilst bitter thoughts were flitting through her mind. She cast them all away and replied decisively as she moved a bishop into position:

"No; I have no belief in them at all."

"That will not be pleasant for your future husband."

"On the contrary, it will be the best thing possible for him, because then I shall not interfere with his amusement. . . . Your move."

"Thanks. . . . I wonder how you will get married."

"By the help of the minister, like other folk."

"I mean, what sort of a husband you will find to submit to your ideas, which, if you really hold them, suggest the probability of perpetual maidenhood."

"Not at all, I shall marry, and become with the help of my

husband's position, and my father's money, what people call 'an ornament to society.'"

"And the man?"

"Must have position, and a long roll of ancestors to make up for our lack of them. He must be handsome; and a title of some sort, which will make me countess this or lady that, is a decided requisite in all applicants for my favour. You see, I am ambitious."

"I am promised a title by—this between ourselves—by Don Carlos. . . . Check."

"I Castle. . . . You fail in the other requirements even if I could be content with a sham patent of nobility. There must be no Brummagem in my title. But why do you always return to this theme?"

"I can scarcely tell, except that I am hopeful always, however impossible the course before me may seem."

"That is folly."

"No, hope is the most helpful blessing of our lives. We would all stick in the bogs of the most contemptible worries if hope—Will-o'-the-Wisp as he may be—did not enable us to scramble out and forward."

"Better to sink at once than wear out life in yearning after what we can never attain."

"Not a bit of it; I cling to life and enjoy it. . . . You are gaining on me; that was a bad move of mine, and gives you the chance of the game."

"It kills your Queen."

"So it does, and my poor King is desolate. We are the chessmen in the world, moved by influences which we neither see nor understand, but all tending towards a victory on one side or the other. That is a fancy which gives zest to the game in my eyes. . . . You play admirably, but I mean to win. Here, my sturdy infantry, advance and clear the way."

"Death to your Soldier."

"I bargained for it, and so my Knight, my gallant Free Lance leaps forward and threatens the Queen."

"And my Castle checks your King."

"Excellent, but the game is not finished yet, my second Free Lance leaps into the breach and guards his Majesty."

Both, whilst affecting merely playful interest in the game,

had become as earnest in their watchfulness of it as if fate depended upon it. The turn which the conversation had taken inspired the pieces of ivory with the power of destiny, and they felt as if the future were involved in the winning or the losing of the game.

So she paused, and with careful eye surveyed the field ; then, with breathless haste she hurried the Queen through the enemy's ranks and cried :

"Check."

"By the Queen, too, I am afraid you will win ; but I do not despair even now."

"There is the gong, I must leave you. We shall finish the game another day."

"Another day—good. My King steps into safety, so ; and now there is the Queen to move, another day. . . Thank you, Miss Marjoribanks, time which has been so slow to me of late, has grown cruel in going so fast this afternoon."

She went away utterly puzzled as to her own feelings, regarding this man. She liked him, there was no doubt ; he was always amusing and devoted ; he accepted rebuffs with the utmost equanimity ; and never distressed her by complaints, or too serious love-making. It was an agreeable relaxation to spend an hour with him, and it was certainly pleasant to coquette without danger of becoming seriously involved. Austin with his anxious face and earnest devotion to the work on which he depended to relieve him from the responsibilities he had generously undertaken, contrasted most unfavourably with the placid face and easy manners of Kilgour.

But it was Austin who still held possession of her heart ; it was he who caused it to ache, and it was round him that she saw the halo of love and romance, although she owned that placing him beside the Major he was much the more commonplace figure of the two. Yet in spite of herself it was of him she thought, remembering the sweet days of childhood and the bright hopes which she had centred in him ; all this, perhaps, because she had so fiercely determined not to think of him at all !

At dinner Marjoribanks was unusually gay. He made jokes in his own way upon everything and everybody ; and he laughed at them heartily, whether the others saw the point of his fun or not. He even ventured upon an allusion to the

peacock uniform of Killievar, which although somewhat rude was excused by the joviality of the occasion.

"I am very proud of my plumage, Sir," said the chief gravely ; "for there is no other person you can see in it ; and it is very much admired ; for all the boys in Glasgow, or Edinburgh either, come after me, and say what a fine thing it is to be a chief and to wear such a brow kilt."

After dinner, Marjoribanks told Bess that he wished to speak to her ; and when she joined him in his room he was as frisky as if he had been taking a little too much and found it agreeable.

"Good news for you, Bess," he said, blithely. "I've done a fine stroke of business for you. Luck's in the family, and you are to share it."

"In what way, papa ?"

"I've married you, lass—that is, as good as married you, to a real lord ; and the only son of an earl, so that he will be earl himself by and by, and you will be the countess."

Bess grew pale, then flushed at the information of the settlement which had been made without consulting her. She replied quite coolly however :

"Who is the gentleman ?"

"Lord Connoughmore—he is a real lord, mind, and the son of Earl Ennisfawn. They are a fine Irish family, and you will be the queen of the county. He is to be here next week."

"It is quite a stroke of business, as you say," she replied bowing her head, which concealed the vicious biting of her lip she indulged in.

"We'll have the best room ready for him ; we'll take him to the races and let him see we know what life is. Then there's no saying what may happen to me through the influence of his family ; for although they are poor they have influence ; and maybe I shall be—but that is neither here nor there. You will get everything ready to receive his lordship."

"I shall speak to Mrs. Forbes and Baxter at once. But is it not a little funny, papa, that his lordship should make this arrangement without having seen me ?"

"It's the siller, lass, the siller that does everything."

She had no further objection to offer, indeed, at that moment she was ready to agree to anything—even to accepting for a husband a man whom she had never seen before.

But the queen was to move, and what might be the result ?

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## A SPLENDID MATCH.

THE arrangement for the marriage of Miss Marjoribanks to Lord Connoughmore became known far and wide with singular rapidity. The telegraph could scarcely have made the news known with greater celerity than did that mysterious whisper which seems to pass on the wind to maids and matrons whenever marriage or scandal is the topic current.

Marjoribanks found frequent occasion to mention to every one he met, from his butler upwards and downwards, what "my future son-in-law, Lord Connoughmore," might wish, or think, or direct; and "his lordship" was often repeated.

"I am proud of the match," he said frankly, to Killievar; "and I am not the man to bottle up my feelings. It's a great thing for Bess, and a great thing for me. I am proud of it. I was a penniless lad—now, you see what I am. Some people would pretend not to care about it; but I do care about it and I am not going to hide it."

Then in the local papers of that week appeared a paragraph announcing a "Marriage in High Life.—We understand that a marriage has been arranged between the only daughter of one of the largest iron-masters of our district, and the only son of an Irish peer, whose family has been long distinguished in the political world."

Nobody could misunderstand that. Congratulations poured in from every direction, and many people who had continued to be shy of visiting Ravelston, notwithstanding the acknowledged hospitality of its master, left their cards. Several young ladies even discovered that they had always entertained the most affectionate feelings for Miss Marjoribanks and wondered they had so rarely met!

Marjoribanks was delighted; he glowed with all the pride of a conqueror—the barrier which had kept his more aristocratic neighbours aloof from him was at length levelled to the ground.



Bess looked on with apparently perfect calmness, only there was an occasional flash of contempt in her eyes as she listened to the flattery with which some visitors added sweetness to their congratulations. She never had cared for the society of women: she cared less for it now than ever; and she wished as she had often wished before, that she had been born a man or a monkey—anything rather than a woman.

She displayed none of the vain elation which many people expected to see in her; then they blamed her for hypocrisy—“pretending to take the affair as if she had been born to it and as cool as if she was not bursting with pride.”

“She has nothing but money,” observed the ladies who were not well dowered, and who philosophically consoled themselves with the reflection that beauty, worth, and ancestry could not be purchased. “She is almost a nigger in complexion.”

“She is very lucky, though,” said others who would have been willing to change places with her, complexion included.

“I would never marry a man who took me only for my money.”

“There is no danger of that,” said a disagreeable young person of forty or thereabout.

“What do you think I heard?” said Miss Johnstone, of Craighead, in a mysterious whisper to her intimates; “although the marriage is actually arranged, the engaged couple have never yet set eyes on each other! There!”

“Awful!” was the general exclamation of horrified young ladies. All young ladies surround marriage with a halo of romance—in the abstract.

There were many of Marjoribanks’ acquaintances who, whilst acknowledging that he was making a great social stride in effecting this match, thought he made far too much fuss over it.

“He would have acted with perfect discretion if his daughter had only been pig-iron,” was the comment of one friend.

Meanwhile Marjoribanks was quite satisfied with himself, and chuckled a good deal at the thought of the envious jealousy of his neighbours as well as at the submission of the greater number of the county families.

“The siller does it—siller can do anything,” was his constant reflection.

Major Kilgour heard the report first from Mary Beith. Then the fact was announced by his host himself, and so he was left no peg on which to hang a doubt. And yet he did not despair! He relieved himself by a good grumble at his lame leg, and then he conducted himself as if nothing had occurred to disappoint or annoy him.

He had progressed so far that he was now enabled to take the fresh air every forenoon seated in a Bath chair which an attendant drew round the grounds. The chair had been specially provided for the invalid at the doctor's request, and he took his first outing with rare enjoyment of the fresh air.

Bess came up to him with a blithe "good-day;" he replied and turned to the attendant:

"Will you bring me the book which is lying on my dressing-table, please?"

The man departed.

"So we have got rid of him," said the Major, smiling; "and now, am I to congratulate you?"

"Upon what?" (as if she did not know!)

"Your marriage."

"Oh, that?—I suppose so; it is the usual thing, isn't it? Wish me all the joy in the world, that I may live long, and never regret my choice—and so on; and then go away grumbling to yourself about the expense of the marriage present you will have to give me."

"I will give you none."

"All right; I will be the better pleased, for I shall know you have no grudge against me—unless you grudge me those congratulations we were speaking about."

He was watching her face with eager eyes; it was calm, healthful; no sign of trembling or regret; only she looked not at him, but over his shoulder, as if at somebody who was standing far away down the avenue.

"I am afraid I shall grudge you the congratulations more than the gift—I cannot offer them to you honestly."

"Never mind, do it the other way; it comes to the same thing in the end, and I am content."

"Or rather say you are indifferent."

The dark eyes flashed upon him an instant, and then resumed that uncomfortable gaze over his shoulder.

"Possibly."

"You are not satisfied."

"Why should you think that? The gentleman has everything I require—position, title, family. I ought to be satisfied."

"But you are not, and you will repent."

"Very well, suppose I do? I have read somewhere that is much more comfortable to repent in a coach and six than in a garret. I entirely agree with that theory of repentance."

"I am sorry."

"For whom?"

"Your intended husband."

She bowed as if acknowledging a compliment, and, with a short laugh:

"Thank you; none of my friends appreciate me half so much as you do. You think I shall make him miserable?"

"Yes, and yourself as well."

"But you are not sorry for me?"

"No."

"And why am I excluded from your sympathy, please?"

"Because I am vexed with you; and yet it is not right to say that you are excluded from my sympathy. On the contrary, it is all with you; but I am vexed, because you are entering upon this marriage as you might enter a ball-room full of rivals—determined to carry everything your own way at any cost. The cost will be your happiness and your husband's."

"I never saw you so earnest before, Major; you entertain me very much; pray go on."

She mocked him so plainly that he leaned back with the dry answer:

"I have nothing more to say."

"That is why you make so much of the little you have said."

He leaned forward on the arm of chair.

"Do you see that statue yonder?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember what passed between us whilst we stood beside it on the first evening I spent here?"

Her gaze passed over his shoulder again, and towards the avenue, as if she were still seeking some one there.

"I believe I was very rude to you, but I apologised and expected to hear nothing more about it."

A blackbird whistled among the shrubbery, and a troop of sparrows flitted by in the direction of the window-ledge of Coila's room for their forenoon feast of crumbs.

"Pardon me; I wanted to tell you that very soon afterwards I guessed *why* you had spoken to me so strangely," the Major went on, "and then I thought you capable of—shall I say love?—it is the handiest word. Well, then, I thought you capable of a love which could dare anything, even a garret and repentance. Now—"

He paused; at first there was a startled expression on her face which immediately changed to one of amused curiosity.

"Now you think me heartless," she said, completing his sentence.

"No, I am only puzzled."

"Then give up trying to find the solution of the puzzle, Major; it is not worth your while to strive after it longer. Good morning."

"One moment—is the day fixed?"

"Not yet."

"When does your affianced arrive?"

"On Monday—the day before the races."

"Three days. Shall I see you in the meanwhile?—our game at chess is still unfinished."

"If you are good, and promise not to moralise I may see you. But you have been very disagreeable to-day, and, after all, I prefer your compliments to your scolding."

"I shall promise anything you like, and do anything you like."

"That is much more like yourself. Couldn't you say something pretty to console me for the dreadful fate which you predict for me?"

"There is nothing half so pretty in my head as yourself."

"I have searched everywhere for the book, Sir, and cannot find it," said the attendant returning.

The Major thought the man had been in a disagreeably active mood; Bess nodded and went away; and he was slowly

wheeled round the lawn. He did not stay out so long as usual that day, although the sun was shining and the atmosphere was clear and invigorating. The chances were all against him at present, and Bess perplexed him beyond measure.

"Is she merely vain and wilful, or are there depths in her nature which I cannot fathom?" was the question he repeated to himself often. "There are occasional glimpses of seriousness which give me hope, and then she laughs in my face as if she had been making fun of me all the time. She takes my scolding as if I had a right to challenge her doings; and yet she treats it all as a jest."

He remained very quiet in the room all that day seeking an answer to his question.

"She tantalises me. . . . But she is worth a struggle, even without a fortune."

That was the only result of his cogitations.

And Bess herself?

She was quite composed, and began to like the sound of the universal exclamation—"What a splendid match!" Her father gave her half-a-dozen blank cheques so that she might obtain whatever she required, his only condition being that everything should be of the best quality, and that she should appear in the very finest feathers money could obtain when his lordship arrived.

"It's a first rate match, Bess, and I'll give him your weight in gold for your marriage trip."

"He might change his mind yet, papa," she answered, wearily.

"What!" cried Marjoribanks, startled by the bare suggestion of such a possibility.

"You know he has not seen me; and I think it would have been better if you had not made the—the affair known so soon."

"Hoots—the thing is settled and all down in black and white; the money is paid, and he can no more draw back than you can. It's just as good a thing for him as for you."

"Do you mean that you have already paid the purchase money of—your son-in-law?"

"Not just that; but on the day you are married a hundred

thousand will be placed to his credit at the bank. So you need not be afraid, no man would be fool enough to throw up such a prize as that. It's a splendid match for you both."

"Aye, no man would give up *that!*" muttered Bess, when she was alone; and there was an aching sense of something else requisite for happiness than *that*.

She turned her thoughts immediately to the prospect of the pleasant life she would lead—the season in London, the park, the dinners, the balls, the opera (not that she cared for it, only she had learned from other girls at school, and she had read in novels, that a "box" was one of the necessaries of fashionable life); then the castle in Ireland, filled with distinguished guests; the pleasure of being called "my lady," and, by-and-by, Countess—oh, it was delightful, charming! what would make the world more enjoyable?

She had a vague notion that people are never really happy when they have to strive to make themselves believe that they are so.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## UNDER THE SURFACE.

**A** VISITOR was announced—Mrs. Murray.

Bess was startled by the name, and thoughts of the days of blackberry gathering, of the glen, of the Hermit's Cave, and of the changes which had taken place meanwhile flashed through her mind even whilst she was telling the servant to conduct the lady to the boudoir.

Mrs. Murray was standing with eyes fixed on the door when Bess entered. The deep mourning of the widow appeared the more sad in contrast with the bright colours of the young betrothed's dress—the one at the end of the hazardous journey of wifehood, the other just about to begin it.

Quiet and methodical as ever, Mrs. Murray exchanged the usual greetings, and accepted the seat on the couch which was offered her. But when Bess sat down beside her she changed to a chair opposite.

"Forgive my rudeness ; I wish to see your face. I like it and I am anxious to discover if it is as bright and happy as it used to be."

She drew up her thick black veil as she spoke ; then added, "No, it is changed."

"It is sometime since you saw me last, and we all change."

"True, and you should have changed to more brightness, not to less."

"You don't think I am looking well, then ?"

"Far from it ; you look distressed when you should be most joyous."

"Everybody else says I never looked better. But opinions do differ so on these subjects."

This was artificial ; they both knew that their meeting was not intended to pass in the ordinary way of a commonplace call, to exchange commonplace courtesies. Mrs. Murray took her hand.

"I am told you are going to be married. Do you remember our conversation on the day of my husband's funeral? It gives me some claim to ask—are you happy?"

Despite the coldness of her manner there was genuine kindness in her earnest voice and look. Bess shaded her eyes with the disengaged hand. So few spoke to her with anything like real sympathy that her heart at once responded to the widow's kindly interest. She felt ready to speak out, to declare all that was passing in her mind; but somehow the thought of Austin interfered; and she replied hesitatingly:

"I ought to be happy."

"That does not answer me; there are so many ought-to-be's, which we are not."

"I have no doubt I shall be perfectly happy. What prospect could be more attractive to a woman than the one which lies before me?"

Evasive, artificial again. Mrs. Murray dropped her hand and rose, as if longer stay were quite unnecessary.

"I do not know what could be more attractive, but I will tell you what *should* be—a home in which your heart found its completest pleasure; a home in which affection should be the guiding spirit and the source of every thought and action."

"My dear Mrs. Murray, I am going to live in a world where one's whole duty is concentrated in the observance of certain recognised forms and where affection is an intruder."

"There is no such world, Miss Marjoribanks, and it would be bad for us if there could be such a state of existence. Love enters and commands in every place where there is happiness."

"I do not understand that—yet. Everybody says it is 'a splendid match,' and I must accept the position."

"You are content?"

"Yes."

"Good-bye, then. I will pray that you may not discover when too late that you have made a mistake. I misunderstood you when we last spoke together. I thought then that you knew what love was, and that it was one very dear to me who had inspired the knowledge."

She moved towards the door. Two swift steps and Bess grasped her arm.

"Stop, Mrs. Murray," she said, desperately, her eyes un-



naturally bright and the lips trembling. "You shall not go away thinking me heartless and selfish as everybody seems to do. Sit down."

The widow obeyed, for the passion with which Bess spoke commanded obedience. Bess remained standing, hands clasped behind her back, the fingers twisting and entwining nervously, and clutching each other with spasmodic energy at intervals as she proceeded.

"I know quite well to whom you have been alluding, and you did not misunderstand me. I do know what love is, and it was your son who taught me. All my heart has been his since we were children. I used to dream of the day when I should be his wife, but even then he turned to Coila, not to me. I was jealous, and yet too proud to stand between them. I helped them towards each other, while my whole soul trembled with despair."

"Did he never see how much you liked him?"

"I don't know; he might have done if he had not been blind; it was not concealed. He went away; and then I thought—hoped—prayed that when he returned, with more experience of the world, he would see my devotion and value it—for it was devotion; I could have done anything, I could have suffered anything for him. He came back, and he asked Coila to be his wife. I felt that I hated them both; she seemed to have robbed me of all that I cared for in the world, and he seemed to be pitiless. But I clung to the hope of winning him in spite of myself. I was deceitful; I tried to win him even when I knew of his engagement to her. She discovered my madness, and with some silly notion of sacrificing herself for my sake she refused him."

"And then?"

"I would not have him under such conditions. Had he broken from her, it might have been different; but to accept him as a charity gift!—oh, it drove me wild with shame and vexation. To cheat them into the belief that they were mistaken, that I had been only jesting, and perhaps, with some faint hope of cheating myself, I was ready to perpetrate any absurdity. I acted foolishly, and gave people reason to hint that Major Kilgour was my destined husband. To show them

that they were wrong, and to satisfy my father, I accepted at once this 'splendid match,' and I am miserable."

She turned her back upon Mrs. Murray, pressing feverish hands on her eyes. She wheeled round in a moment, and as she did so something seemed to catch her breath, but although the eyes were moist, the face was calm, showing little trace of her recent emotion.

Mrs. Murray was standing close beside her now, with an expression of sincere sympathy and pity.

"I am glad you have told me this ; I wish Austin could have heard it."

Bess lifted her hands quickly as if to protect herself from some danger.

"He must never know anything about it. I have trusted you because you are his mother, and you will keep faith with me. But sometimes when you hear people talking of me as wilful and heartless, speak a kind word in my defence."

"I could not help doing that after what I have learned ; but my heart is wae for you, poor child, just at the beginning of a woman's life, and knowing that your path is so dark and loveless. Is it too late to turn back ? If he spoke to you even yet ?"

"Hush, do not suggest impossibilitties—I don't know what mad folly I might commit if he could say that he—cared for me. But there, I have promised to see Major Kilgour, and you have made me a fright to be seen."

She looked at herself in the mirror, smiling, and smoothing her hair.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## ANOTHER CHANCE.

**M**ARJORIBANKS stood at the drawing-room window which commanded a view of the park and the avenue. He crossed to the fireplace, and returned to the window after he had shaken his coat-tails at the fire. There was little to be seen from the window at present, for the twilight was rapidly deepening into darkness.

He was listening, however, as much as looking ; but he found no satisfaction for either sense. He took out his watch.

“ Half-past six ; the train was due at six ; they ought to be here. Train late, perhaps.”

He went downstairs, and on pretence of seeing what kind of an evening it was he went out to the doorstep. He listened and looked again ; his face brightened as he heard a faint sound of wheels in the distance ; but the sound died away ; and he, muttering something to himself, went back to the drawing-room.

No one there yet. He rang the bell, and directed the servant to inform Miss Marjoribanks he desired to see her. He occupied himself for ten minutes trotting between the fireplace and the front window, frequently muttering to himself and jingling the money in his trousers' pocket.

A lady appeared, arrayed in flowing robes of lavender silk, richly trimmed with white lace ; a cloak of some delicate fur on her shoulders.

“ Well papa, will this please you ? ”

He turned up the tails of his coat and examined her as critically as if she had been something he was going to buy. His only comment was given with his usual guttural—

“ Uh-hum. Stunning. You'll do.”

“ I thought you would like to see me before the arrival of our guest, so I dressed early.”

“ Train's late—his lordship will be annoyed.”

“ A good dinner will restore his humour.”

"Killievar hasn't come back yet. He'll keep us waiting although the hour is eight o'clock."

"Killievar will be here in good time ; he is the most punctual of men."

"There's the carriage at last."

Marjoribanks hastened down to the door, opened it himself, and passed out with the most hospitable of greetings on his lips as the carriage drew up at the steps.

The carriage was empty.

"What the devil is wrong ? was there an accident, or have you missed his lordship ?"

"The train was half an hour late, Sir," answered Millar, the footman," but we cannot have missed my lord, for nobody got at Craigeloup except auld Mistress Graham, of the Burnfoot, and three others that we knew."

The master of Ravelston was for an instant dumbfounded by this intelligence, then recovering himself, he cried :—

"Away as fast as you can gallop to the Airbridge station ; his lordship has made a mistake and gone on there."

The horses were turned, and although Ross was too careful of them to obey his instructions literally to go at a gallop, he drove at a good pace.

Baxter and his assistants were behind their master in the hall, ready in obedience to his orders to transport the expected distinguished visitor's luggage to the chambers prepared for him.

"Be ready to receive his lordship ; he may get a machine at the inn and be here before the carriage. Confounded mistake Hill must have made in the directions," said Marjoribanks, as he passed the butler and proceeded to the drawing-room. He was busy recounting the blunder— for which he entirely blamed his unlucky secretary—to Bess when Baxter entered with a silver salver in his hand.

A telegram from his lordship ! Very sorry : unexpectedly detained by urgent private affairs, and could not be at Ravelston that week.

Marjoribanks read it again to make sure of the words and then he muttered as before, but with much more vehemence.

"What is it, papa ?"

He gave her the telegram, and she read it without displaying the least surprise or chagrin.

"I suppose we must wait till next week," she said coolly enough, but there was a note of relief in her voice.

"Everybody expects to see him at the races to-morrow, they will laugh at us and fancy it's a humbug altogether."

"We can laugh at everybody next week, if we please."

"So we can, so we can ; but if he should mean—never mind. There are not many who can manage to make a gowk of me without paying for it. I am going to send a message back—no doubt it is something very particular that keeps him, but he might have let us know sooner. Hallo !"

The exclamation was uttered as the door opened and Major Kilgour, leaning upon a heavy stick, limped into the room.

"A pleasant surprise for you, Marjoribanks," said the Major, and bowing to Bess ; "to you also, I hope."

"Good heavens, man, you'll be laid up for another month."

"Not at all. I have been trying my strength for the last three days and am quite able to endure the pleasure of an evening with your distinguished guest."

Marjoribanks winced ; he cleared his throat, and his "uh-hums" were more guttural and frequent than usual.

"Sorry you should have taken so much trouble. You see, his lordship is so deeply involved in the affairs of the nation that he cannot command his own time. He gives up everything to serve his country—he sacrifices leisure and pleasure alike, and so we are all disappointed, for I have just learned by telegraph that he cannot be with us to-night."

He felt better after that ; he seemed to have made out a good case for his lordship, and began almost to fancy that the delay of his arrival would add importance to it.

"What a pity !" observed the Major, with a quick side glance at Bess.

"A great pity ; but you know such men as his lordship are really slaves to their position. It's a terrible thing to be one of the most eminent men of the day."

"I sympathise with his lordship ; he must feel keenly the disappointment to himself and to you."

"No doubt of it. I am just going to send a message to him."

They were left alone. The Major limped over to a chair near Bess and seated himself with much less awkwardness

than would have been expected, seeing that he could not yet easily bend his wounded leg.

She, as if indifferent to his presence, took up a book from a side table and began to turn over the leaves listlessly. It was a volume of Longfellow containing the "Courtship of Miles Standish."

"You do not seem to be much disturbed by the postponement of your friend's visit."

"Whatever his lordship may find most convenient for his own comfort will always be satisfactory to me. I shall never complain of his absence."

She yawned prettily behind her fan, read two lines of the poem, and turned over another leaf.

"Suppose he should not come at all?"

She lifted her head quickly—that was exactly the thought which occurred to herself whilst she was reading these lines, with only a faint comprehension of their meaning:—

" . . . There are moments in life when the heart is so full of emotion,  
That if by chance it be shaken, or into its depths like a pebble  
Drops some careless word, it overflows, and its secret,  
Spilt on the ground like water, can never be gathered together."

"Suppose he does not—I shall not break my heart," she answered, drily.

"I was not afraid of that; but I was thinking ——"

He paused and swung his staff like a pendulum over the arm of the chair.

"Thinking!—dear me, how you must have suffered in the effort!"

"I did suffer a little, for I was thinking about you."

She pretended to shudder.

"What a dreadful subject for reflection."

"Yes, and you will find it sufficiently disagreeable, too, when you realize the position. You are brave, and will face any danger or any vexation; but you will not endure mockery, laughter, and contemptuous pity without some pain."

"What are you talking about?"

Her breath came quickly, and she could not fix her eyes on the book. He seemed to be echoing the fears which had passed through her mind.

"I am referring to Lord Connoughmore. I have no doubt he is an honourable gentleman, but if he should find it most convenient for himself to break off the match, it will not be pleasant for you. I don't believe that you will relish the position of the jilted maiden."

"I would enjoy it ; you would see me looking so sweetly melancholy as the martyr to vile man's inconstancy that your heart would overflow with pity, and then you would be startled to learn next week that I had eloped with—say old Ross, the coachman. Would it not be good fun ?"

"Not to me—nor to you either."

"I am so sorry—I would be so glad to provide you with a little amusement in order to lift you out of your present morbid condition."

He rose slowly and advanced to her, leaning heavily upon his staff.

"You do not deceive me ; you are suffering even now, when you pretend to be most indifferent," he said, in a low earnest voice : "let me save you."

"You—how ?"

He held out his hand without speaking, his eyes fixed on her face, and either her fancy or the power of his will gave them a mesmeric influence over her. She could not laugh as she had intended to do at his earnestness.

Very awkwardly she drew back avoiding his hand and eyes.

"You are becoming too serious, Major, and in consequence very uninteresting."

"You will be the gossip of the whole county, and there will be many whose spite will be gratified when they learn that the great heiress has been made a fool of. What will they say ? Envy is malignant : You are rich, beautiful, and gifted with high spirit ; therefore you are envied. Whatever may be the motive of his lordship's conduct, there will be scandal and you will suffer most from it ; he can laugh at it. As you ride or drive along the road, you will be greeted by faces on which you will see smiles of amused curiosity, or looks of supercilious amazement that you are able to show yourself in public again ; or looks of triumph at your discomfiture, or of pity for it. When you enter a drawing-room you will feel that every one is

talking of you and staring at you. The world will have its say, and in the present instance it will say much that will be unpleasant to you. Can you bear that?"

"No," she cried, starting up, and unable longer to hide her emotion, "I would do—I would do anything rather than endure that."

"Then take my hand, and let the world say that you have made a fool of his lordship."

The door opened and Killievar entered in full costume.



## CHAPTER XXXV.

## CROSS-FIRING.

THE Major heard the door open, but he could not see who entered. Without changing his position, except to stretch his hand farther in order to touch the book Bess held, he proceeded as if continuing a conversation :

“ I am very much interested in this work,” (he had no idea what the book was) “ and as soon as you have read it carefully, and considered its merits, I shall be delighted to learn your opinion of it—especially if you should happen to agree with me.”

There was nothing very particular in the observation—a mere chat about a favourite book, and Killievar would have thought nothing more about it if on his entrance he had not observed a strange startled expression flash across Bess’s face, and a slight movement backwards, instantly checked though it was. She was generally so indifferent to the coming or going of any one, that the look and the movement set him thinking. He felt that he had arrived most inopportunately.

To her the Major’s words were full of significance ; she understood him perfectly ; she was angry with him, and yet the anger was mellowed by a kind of gratified vanity, by the satisfaction of feeling that he placed it in her power to turn the laugh against Lord Connoughmore, and to make him regret his dilatoriness in coming to woo. He had shown positive indifference ; it was little short of an insult—it *was* an insult.

She was out of temper, vexed with herself, and most vexed with Killievar, who prevented her giving the Major a decisive answer at once. As it was, she could only bow, and address herself to the chief.

“ You have just come in time to save us from a quarrel.”

“ I am very glad ; but it is a pity likewise that you should think of quarrelling with Major Kilgour when he is for the first time once more among us. I am very glad to see you, Major.”

"Thank you ; but you must not think our feud was to be a deadly one."

"I hope not ; and what was it all about ?"

"We were discussing the merits of certain characters," answered Bess, quickly ; "the Major's arguments threatened to get the better of me, and so I was going to be angry with him when you came in."

"You see from what eminent peril you have rescued me."

And the three smiled as if there had been a joke somewhere, although they had not quite clearly comprehended it.

The entrance of Marjoribanks, Miss Janet, and Coila formed an agreeable interruption. Miss Janet glided over to Kilgour, her eyes fixed upon his boots, and dropping a glove and her handkerchief on the way. Coila patiently picked them up, and held them ready to be presented as soon as they should be missed.

"So charmed to see you again dear—that is, Major. So delighted that you have not been amputated, which would have been very unpleasant to you. I don't think you would ever get used to it."

"I am afraid not," answered the Major, gravely ; "but thanks to the generosity of your brother, and to the untiring attention of everybody, I shall be as well as ever in a short time."

"Very grateful we ought to be, dear, for such mercy—bless me, it is very surprising—oh, thanks, dear, thanks ; so sorry to trouble you."

She had been searching for the missing glove which Coila handed to her.

Dinner announced, Bess instantly took Killievar's arm, much to that gentleman's satisfaction.

"What a horrible thing it would be to have a lame cavalier," she said, in a kind of whisper to her companion, but in such tones that the Major could hear, whilst she glanced at him with a jerk of the head as much as to say, "You will find yourself very much mistaken if you think you have conquered *me*."

He replied to the glance with a slight bend of the head, which was only perceived by herself. She felt less satisfaction after that, and more inclined to prove that she was quite happy and self-satisfied by a display of excessive gaiety. There seemed to be no crushing this man, he never would acknow-

ledge defeat ; after each repulse—any one of which would have been enough for an ordinary man—he quietly returned to his position, watchful, cunning, clever, ready to take advantage of every slip she made, and interesting by his very determination. Or, was it devotion ?

She felt at one moment that she positively detested him and would never speak to him again ; at the next she owned that it was something to be the object of such a steady siege, and was disposed to acknowledge some merit in him because he took so much trouble on her account.

Marjoribanks suggested that Baxter should assist the Major downstairs ; but the latter answered :

“ My dear Sir, I am much stronger than you fancy ; my staff is all that I require, and if Miss Marjoribanks will permit me, you shall see that I do not join you as an invalid.”

He offered his arm to Miss Janet, who was pleased, and very much concerned about his comfort in descending the staircase, and she contrived to reach the dining-room without dropping anything on the way.

Bess was in much glee at the idea of the Major's disappointment in not being beside her ; he would feel that he was doomed to penance, for his boldness in the drawing-room, in being obliged to pay attention to Miss Janet, for whom he would have to find something every three minutes. She talked to Killievar with charming vivacity, and she laughed at his little jokes, or looked at him with an expression of sympathetic interest until he thought himself a born wit, and her the most perfect of women.

But she was watching Kilgour ; and as dinner progressed, she became aware that instead of appearing distressed by his banishment from her side, he seemed to be very comfortable and happy seated between Miss Janet and Coila ; and she could not catch him once looking at her. His whole attention was given to the ladies beside him.

Miss Janet was on her very best behaviour ; her wig remained in position, she lost fewer things than usual, and although her eyes never seemed to be lifted from the tablecloth, she furtively examined the faces of every one present, often and acutely ; at the same time listened to the Major with an appreciative ear, and was really grateful for the respect he paid her.

Coila was not nearly such good company as Miss Janet, for she only heard half of what was said, and frequently gave very stupid answers to questions which were put to her. Her soft, sad eyes, opened wide in wonder, were fixed on Bess; she was bewildered by the exhibition of so much gaiety, so much happiness on the part of her cousin, considering all the circumstances of her position.

Coila was herself sad enough still; but much of the bitterness had departed since the Major had helped her out of the difficulty with her uncle. She might have been even contented if in her inmost thoughts she could have believed that the separation from Austin was final; but the conduct of Bess suggested possibilities of reconciliation, which disturbed resignation by hopes and fears in spite of every effort to abandon them.

It is well for us all that our hearts are flexible; although they do not rebound from the agony of great losses, they rise slowly into the normal condition; bearing just one speck, like a notch in a block of wood, which, at lengthening intervals, reminds us of the past suffering, and sweetens present joy with the memory of past sorrow. Besides, that notch in our heart teaches us the comfortable philosophy that no pain endures. God and time are merciful—only joy is eternal.

Marjoribanks ate well, drank well, and said nothing about his disappointment. By some instinct everybody understood that no reference to the expected guest was to be made. The host did not once speak of "his lordship" during dinner.

When the ladies proceeded to the drawing-room, Miss Janet, having seated herself in a cosy chair by the fire, and arranged the *Times*, which had just arrived, as if she intended to read it straight through, went off in a sound sleep.

Bess was standing at a pretty Japanese table examining cards and photographs, whilst she considered whether or not she should go to her room at once. Coila was at the piano, playing very softly and almost unconsciously the pathetic air of "The Flowers of the Forest." The chords touched a spring of sympathy in her breast, and her own sorrow seemed to find expression in the lament for the losses on Flodden field.

Bess, too, felt the melancholy influence of the air, and after enduring it for a little while, she said impatiently:

"I wish you would stop that dismal scream—I would rather listen to half-a-dozen cats in concert."

Coila stopped ; turned round and sat for a little while in meditation. Then rising, she advanced to her cousin. Bess pretended not to see her.

"We have not had many opportunities of speaking together lately," Coila said, calmly.

"You have not made much effort to render our conversations agreeable. I suppose that explains everything?"

"Is it true that you are ready to marry this lord whom you have never seen?"

"Here is his photograph ; you cannot deny that he is good-looking ; he has position, and if I like him as well in person as I like his portrait, I shall be satisfied."

"Then you really do not care for him?"

"Who do you mean by *him*?"

"Austin."

"I shall be delighted to call him my friend when he is your husband."

"He can never be that."

"Very well ; I shall call him my friend without the relationship. I like him, and if I were in your place I would marry him."

"Then tell him *why* I refused him."

Bess drew back, startled as much by the passion in Coila's tone as by the demand which was made upon her. She recovered composure instantly, yawned, and began to fan herself lazily.

"Upon my word, Coila, you try my patience too much. You do a stupid thing which causes you and others infinite annoyance, and then you ask me to relieve you from the consequences of your own folly by humiliating myself before him and saying—'if you please, Sir, Miss Coila thought I was in love with you, and being so good, she thought it would be nice of her to give you up to me!' Oh, it is ridiculous, and most irritating besides."

"Then I was altogether mistaken ; I misunderstood your looks, your words, your actions—you never cared for him?"

The clear sad eyes were fixed so earnestly upon her that she could not speak falsely.

"I could not help your fancies, and you know that you were always good at playing on the fiddle of sentimentality."

Coila took her hand, gently.

"You are trying to deceive yourself, Bess, but you do not deceive me. It is Austin you love, and you do not wish to marry any one else."

Driven into a corner, Bess always rose to the occasion ; and so she looked at Coila, boldly laughing at her.

"You are *too* funny. Suppose you take advice from me ? Well, you tell Austin all the silly notions which have made you act so contradictorily ; tell him that you have discovered your error, and are repentant. He will forgive you, marry you, and you will live happy ever after, as the story books say. You really must not expect me to tell him."

If she had spoken these words with the least note of sympathy in her voice, Coila would have been content ; but there were haughtiness, spitefulness and suppressed pain in the tone ; so Coila was more distressed than satisfied. She could not win her cousin's confidence, and the selfish feeling which had been growing upon her of late asserted itself.

"Very well, I shall tell him of my blunder, and how I came to make it," she said, resolutely.

Bess neither liked the words nor the look with which they were accompanied. She was anxious to impose conditions upon Coila's too unvarnished explanation, but the gentlemen entered, Miss Janet wakened up in much distress about the condition of her wig, and the opportunity was gone.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## THE RACES.

**T**HE great event of the year for many miles around the district of Airbridge was the races. Miners, iron-workers, navvies, shopkeepers, and "the gentry" all met on the course, equal in the one interest of the day. Zest was given to the sport by the fact that the horses were for the most part owned by local celebrities ; and for weeks before the trial of pace took place the interest in horse and owner gradually increased to the full degree of enthusiastic devotion, which found vent when the horses were on the ground in loud salutations and encouragements offered to the favourites of each party.

Bets from a "gill" (of whisky) and upwards had been made on the principal events of the day, and therefore a personal interest was felt in the results. For the two or three Sundays preceding, groups of colliers were seen haunting the stables which contained horses entered for the various races, and others loitered about the course, studying the ground as if that would help them to success in their speculations.

In the "boxes" of taverns, the results of last year, and the capabilities of each horse were earnestly discussed, and the discussion very often issued in an offer to settle the argument by a bout at fisticuffs in the nearest field, or even in a fight on the spot.

When a jockey appeared he became the hero of the evening ; everybody was anxious to treat him, and everybody was anxious to learn what he thought about the fortunes of the day. But his predictions were not always received with faith ; for these colliers were a hard-headed race, and would not yield to any authority which contradicted their own special views—not even to that of their wives.

Strongitharm, the flesher, and Jack Morrison, the grocer, miller, distiller, and general merchant, were at the height of

their notoriety. Although they made a pretence of concealing the fact, everybody knew that they had staked heavily on the forthcoming "event;" there was no concealment in regard to the ownership of certain horses which were entered for the races. They were too proud of the position to hide that. The interest which they created became intensified as the day drew near, until Strongitharm and Morrison were lifted up on the foam of the general excitement to the belief that they were the most popular men in the world.

Accordingly they swaggered very much and bragged a great deal; and the higher the bets rose on their horses the more elevated they felt themselves.

"To see them gang up the causeway," an old weaver said, "you would think that the flesher was Lord John o' the Highlands, and that the whole toon belonged to Jock Morrison."

Strongitharm was quieter in his ways than his comrade; he boasted less loudly, and probably did more mischief in consequence; but they were equal in their desire to win a race, or lose it, to get the better of any one in a bargain, including each other. If Morrison happened by any chance to outwit Strongitharm, he was happy for a week or a month afterwards, according to the extent of the transaction; he was proud of it, and would tell his dupe so in the midst of a group of sporting companions. The flesher would listen without any show of resentment; but he waited for the opportunity of revenge, and seized it remorselessly. At the end of the year, Strongitharm was generally able to count himself the winner in the contest of wits, which seemed to form the bond of fellowship between them.

The morning was misty and damp; but about nine o'clock the sunlight dispelled the mist and cheered the hearts of the various tent-owners, who had spent the night in their canvas houses, and were up early arranging the rows of narrow tables and forms, which they hoped to see filled during the day, cutting sandwiches of ham and beef, and making glasses and pewter shine as attractively as possible.

Flags of various devices waved above most of the tents; and beneath the flags, just over the entrance, was a sign, painted in large letters, setting forth the name of the owner, and the tavern in Airbridge or Glasgow from which he or she



had come to supply refreshments to the merry-makers. There were "J. M'Whirter, from the Young Recruit;" "Kate Forsyth, from Katie's Howf"—a place in the Goosedubs, famous for tripe suppers; "Willie Hamilton, of the Nag's Head"—who was held in high esteem on account of the quality of his twopenny mutton pies; "Donald M'Pherson, from the Salt-market," and others. Each had a number of patrons, who sought out the booth belonging to the proprietor of his favourite resort, and who was bound to bring his friends to the same place.

There was a general interchange of civilities throughout the day, so that there was little eating compared to the drinking feats of the assemblage.

The course lay at the head of the town about a mile from the Cross; it was only a mile in circumference, so that in many of the races the horses had to go round it several times. On one side there was a hollow which tried the animals severely, and beyond it a thickset thorn hedge, just at the bend, which had been the scene of many accidents.

"That was where bow-legged Jock lost the race," said a big-boned, sallow-faced miner to a comrade as they brushed by the hedge. "Man, he was a rare jockey, and was winning like anything. It was the third round, and just as he came down the haugh the horse—it was Morrison's Rob Roy—just stopped still, and Jock gaed ower the head like an arrow shot into the hedge. We lifted him out, and he got the better of the skear, but he never got the better of losing that race."

"What for?"

"Because he was that sure of winning he put a' he had on it, and lost. He was meaning to open a tavern and give up riding that very year."

The grey roads which from all points of the compass concentrated upon Airbridge, and which had witnessed many a trotting match of the ponies of fleshers and farmers of the district, were studded from an early hour with groups of miners, the gigs of farmers, and others making their way towards the race-course.

There was little diversion on the route to the course; everybody was too intent upon the business of the day to waste their energies until they were on the actual scene of contest. It was

a serious affair to many of them, and it required the stimulus of several drams to relax the strings of their anxiety. The younger spirits were in blither mood, determined to make the most of the holiday, in the chief events of which there was a suspicion of wickedness to add zest to the fun. Ministers and Sabbath-school teachers had been warning those who came under their care to avoid the sink of perdition represented by the race-course; but a considerable proportion of those who had listened to the warnings attended the races; and it was known that one or two rather advanced clergymen were present—no doubt to realize with their own eyes the character of the sin which they condemned.

Rows of barrows, piled with nuts, apples, and pears, brilliant stands for the manufacture of some fizzing compound which was known as lemonade or pine-apple cider at a half-penny a glass. "American shooting alleys," and the usual motley concourse of tramps and cadgers who came as to a fair to earn a penny by supplying the crowd with refreshments, sweetmeats, fruit, glass jewellery, sheets of ballads, cards of the races, or to tell them their height, weight, and strength for a penny—these continued the line of tents round the course.

One sturdy young labourer marched up to a lemonade stand with a companion, and throwing down a penny with all the air of a reckless spendthrift, cried:

"Gie me a hawbee glass and gie this chap another—I hae quarrelled wi' my mother, and I dinna care how muckle I spend."

Then there were the booths in which the "noble art of self-defence" was practically illustrated with "the gloves" on. Jem Dawlish the "Lancashire Pup" challenged all comers to a bout, and for the delight of the admirers of boxing the Lancashire Pup and Scotch Jamie—another prize-fighter—performed frequently during the day.

The Grand Stand stood on the high ground above the hollow, and commanded a view of the whole course. The front rows of seats were select, being expensive, but the back rows were filled by a miscellaneous company. Seats in the front and centre had been reserved for the Ravelston family, as Marjoribanks had contributed largely to the funds for the management of the races.

He arrived somewhat late. The stand was like a flower bed of brilliant geraniums, and as Marjoribanks and his party passed to their places there was a general movement of the flowers as if a gust of wind had shaken them. He took his seat, after nodding and exchanging salutations with a number of acquaintances, including the Sheriff and the Provost. On his right sat Bess and Killievar, and on his left Coila and the Major.

There was a sixth seat vacant, and all eyes were directed to it, then to Bess, passing on to her father. Eyes were opened, brows arched; there was a general exchange of significant looks and supercilious smiles as everybody asked everybody else :

“ Where is his lordship ? ”

Whispering; an arrangement of dresses which involved much rustling of silks; looks of regret, disappointment, and little laughs, with glances which were not consolatory, at the deserted betrothed. Wonder and curiosity were equally in the ascendant.

Bess bowed and smiled to those who had lately visited her with their congratulations; but she *felt* what was going on in the minds of most of them; and she fancied that there was in several cases a return to the stiff civility with which they had been accustomed to greet her before the “ splendid match ” became known. She would have liked to shake some of those young ladies who presently pretended not to see her; and as to their mothers, she wondered why old women were permitted to live. They certainly should not be allowed to appear in public.

She was humiliated and vicious in consequence towards everybody. She took no account of the many who were only surprised and were really sorry for her disappointment. As usual the most disagreeable natures made their presence felt the most keenly.

She pretended to take the deepest interest in the various scenes which were passing beneath them. Here an old woman selling flowers and nuts; another with a basket piled up with ginger-bread and apples; farther on “ Paddy Bridget ” (her name was Bridget Ryan, but she would scarcely have recognised herself, and nobody else would have known her by that title) with her lemonade stand. Paddy Bridget was a favourite

with men and boys ; and in some secret place beneath her stall she kept a brown jar from which she could supply the customers who were known to her, with something stronger than the harmless liquid in which she ostensibly trafficked.

Bridget's dress was made up of that of both sexes—a man's wide-awake hat, and rough pilot jacket over a dark-brown petticoat. She was a brawny woman, well able to take care of herself. On more than one occasion she had stepped from behind her stall, thrown off her jacket, tucked up her sleeves, and proved her skill as a pugilist by giving some half-drunken navvy, who had offended her, a sound drubbing. Then she would step back to her place, saying :

“ Be Jabers, boys, ye needn't be after thyring to bother me. I'll fight yez all round for a shilling a piece. Come on, now, and buy the dacent drink—it'll give ye luck for the next race.”

There would be a crowd round her by that time, cheering and chaffing her ; but she could always hold her own ground.

A little way beyond Bridget's stand was a cart, the bare-boned pony of which was grazing hard by. The cart belonged to Jamie Saunders, who was one of the most notable characters of every race, fair and market throughout the country. He was from the “ Lang toon o' Kirkealdy,” and he sold gingerbread and “ parlies ”—a kind of hard gingerbread, made in thin cakes about five inches long by two. But he was a man of genius. He would stand up in his cart and talk straight on from morning till night.

He had many stories to tell, most of them of a very coarse character ; but they attracted a crowd and amused them. He had also many expedients for helping his sales ; he would, when he found business slow, take up an armful of his wares and heave it over the heads of the crowd, shouting :

“ If you'll no buy, I'll gie it you for naething. Here ye are, noo ; here's Chambers's ‘ Information for the People,’ and when ye hae done reading the fine things that's printed in gold letters on the parlies, ye can eat it, and that's more than Chambers say for his stuff.”

A laugh, and more sales.

“ Come on, lads ; here's sweeties to catch the maidens wi' ;

just take a pock (bag) and, wow, but there will be fine fun atween you and your lass."

To the boys who gathered about him in crowds, hoping to catch some of his showers of parlies, he offered prizes for the first who should grip the ankle of some girl whom he pointed out at a distance.

One, two, three, and away went the urchins, the swiftest sprawling on the ground and seizing the girl, much to her dismay and to the amusement of the observers.

Another device of Saunders was to fill a woman's apron with his gingerbread for sixpence, and then pretend to give her back the money—in some cases he really did so. All these tricks combined, with his rude jokes, to make him popular and to enable him to gain some profit.

Meanwhile, the races were proceeding, and much to his amazement, Morrison found himself beaten in the chief contest by a horse which Strongitharm had bought from him on the pretence that it was not worth entering.

Sweepstakes, handicap, hurdle race, and others followed, provoking much excitement amongst those who had staked upon them; and by the time the last race—a donkey race—came to be run, the crowd had become very uproarious, and disposed to take part in the affairs of the course, from which they were only partially restrained by a strong body of police.

In this donkey contest the order of things was reversed, and the last was to be first. There was a goodly number of cuddies entered for the race, and as the owner of each rode his opponent's donkey, there was no lack of effort to reach the winning-post, it being the interest of the rider to attain that point in order to give his own animal the chance of winning. There was plenty of shouting at and belabouring of the poor donkeys.

An old woman, known as Cuddy Kate—she sold candy, hearthstone, sand for strewing over kitchen floors, and bought old rags—had entered her donkey. She had never been able to get it to move faster than a slow walk; often it would not even walk, but stood stubbornly still. She entered it. The start was made, but Kate's cuddy would not move; it was thrashed and pricked with pins to no purpose. At length a rope was passed round it, under the tail, and it was dragged

by main force of half a dozen men to the front of the grand stand. It won the race.

Bess had watched all the proceedings with apparently the utmost interest, and as if she were quite unconscious of the looks of spiteful triumph or of pity—which was hardest to bear—cast upon her during the day.

But she knew that if this were to continue, it would drive her mad.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## NETTLES.

THE races over, there was a continuous din of voices talking, disputing, hallooing for lost companions; then a confused movement in the crowd, as if half a dozen sets in the lancers had got mingled together and could not separate themselves or reach their partners.

"Haw, Jock!" was a frequent cry, and as Jock did not appear, the cry was repeated from one side of the course to the other.

There was much drinking in the booths, and good deal of free-hand fighting outside and inside on the most trivial provocation. But there were loud shouts of hilarity, too, indicating that there was plenty of fun going on. Lads walked with arms round their lasses' waists, quite indifferent to the public gaze; and as they skipped along, jokes—rough enough in general—provoked loud laughter. Snatches of songs were sung, always with a jovial chorus, which carried the singers through the crowd. Lads made love boldly, and lasses screamed with pretended affright at some rude advance of their sweethearts. Saunders, with his gingerbread and sweeties, thrived exceedingly at this time; and the ballad-singer, who celebrated the doings of a famous horse, was also much patronised. A verse of the song:

"Come all you sporting heroes bold,  
Wherever you may be;  
One moment pay attention,  
And listen unto me.  
It is in praise of Voltigeur,  
Now, mark what I do say,  
That's won the great St. Leger,  
And bore the prize away."

And so on, with the utmost indifference to rhyme or measure, but with a charming respect for detail.



There was a movement on the grand stand as soon as the result of the last race had been made known. The Ravelston party had remained till the end—probably Marjoribanks and his daughter had some notion of showing their friends that the absence of the much talked-of guest did not in any degree affect their capacities of enjoyment. The former certainly had been much bothered throughout the day by inquiries for “his Lordship ;” but he had one pompous answer for all :

“His lordship—tied to the wheels of the State—affairs of government detained him in London—would be here next week,” &c., &c.

Some were duly impressed by this statement ; others smiled, expressed regret and went away, wondering how Marjoribanks could think of “taking *them* in.”

“I believe it is all broken off,” whispered Miss Johnstone of Craighead to her bosom friend, Lizzie Bethune ; “I have been speaking to her, and she pretends not to know anything about the doings of her betrothed. You may guess what that means ; but don’t say anything about it, as it would be a million pities to vex the poor thing with reports of idle gossip, and you know it *may* come all right in the end.”

Miss Johnstone was not spiteful ; she was only sentimental, and ecstatic at the idea of the romance which she wove round the forlorn maid of Ravelston, half wishing that she might have been in her place, so that she might let down her back hair and sing songs in the moonlight like the heroines of fiction she most delighted in. She wondered if Bess would commit suicide—that would be *so* beautiful !

“She does not seem to be much disturbed by her disappointment,” observed Miss Bethune.

“That is her way—she is very clever in managing to look her best when she is most desperate—but don’t tell anybody.”

Miss Bethune pledged herself to silence, and presently told another friend in strictest confidence all that she had heard ; and so the gossip went the round of sympathising friends.

“I believe his lordship has heard of her shameless goings on with *that* Major,” commented Miss Susan Auldjo, spinster, aged twenty-five, or fifteen years thereabouts, more or less ; “it has been shameful, and the poor man has had a lucky escape.”

Mrs. Carstairs, of Cairndhu, the daughter of a baronet, and



reputed to be the descendant of one of the most ancient Scottish families, carefully avoided any contact with the Ravelston folk. Mrs. Carstairs associated little with her neighbours ; on that account, whilst she was much condemned, she became a sort of thermometer of fashion ; the people she shunned were instantly shown the cold shoulder by all the ladies, maids, and matrons who desired her good-will. She had paid her respects to the future countess ; she now turned her back upon the deserted betrothed. The thermometer was observed, and its indications regulated the conduct of many who affected to have no regard for the opinions of the "upsetting" lady of Cairndhu.

It is curious to observe with what facility people drop into their places in the game of "follow the leader." For good or evil, one man or woman, bolder than the rest, has only to step forward and the mass follows. We are constantly doing things, good and bad, because somebody else has done them. Ambition and weakness often run in similar grooves ; and it is a comfort to feel that if one is doing wrong, the sin is shared with others.

Bess was instinctively conscious of all that the whispers and looks of the ladies meant, and she held her head up more haughtily than ever.

She was the first to reach the carriage ; her father had been seized by Strongitharm, who, flushed with his victory over Morrison—and inclined to rate it the more highly because of the cheating element in it, which he called 'cuteness—was personally disappointed by the absence of Lord Connoughmore.

"You should have made him come, man," he was saying ; "he never saw such sport in his life as we've had to-day ; and we might have had a rare night."

Marjoribanks repeated his explanations, and inwardly confounded Strongitharm, who proceeded to cross-examine him about his lordship, and promised to get up a trotting match on the Falkirk road when he did come.

The Major was giving Coila a peep into some of the tents as they passed.

Bess was about to step into the carriage, when a brawny fellow, with high cheek bones, and hollow, sallow cheeks, stumbled against a terrier and nearly fell. He gave the dog a kick ; the

animal howled, then snapped at the man ; he kicked it again, and it rolled over on the ground, screaming with pain.

At the first howl, Bess turned ; at the first kick, she cried :

“ You brute ! ”

At the second kick, she snatched the whip out of Ross's hand, seized “ the brute ” by the collar, and broke the whip over his shoulders.

The man was for the instant too much taken by surprise to attempt resistance ; but when the broken weapon was thrown on the ground, he uttered a furious oath and lifted his clenched fist.

“ Dare you,” said Bess, looking him straight in the face, and not moving a step out of his way.

He was cowed—it was such an extraordinary thing to meet a woman who was not afraid of his fist ; then her dress, her courage, and the advancing crowd combined to make him cautious. He dropped his hand, growling to himself, and was slinking away.

“ Stop,” she commanded ; “ get that dog and bring it to me.

“ I'll see you——”

“ What ? ”

He rushed off and tried to burrow into the crowd ; he was assailed with hooting and laughter, and ran a risk of being roughly handled by a group of miners who had been delighted spectators of the scene, although too much amazed to interfere during the minute which it occupied.

“ Leave the man alone,” she said, and the merciful command was speedily passed along. “ You, Miller, give him this half-crown to salve his shoulders, and bring the dog home with you.”

There was a great cheer, followed by another and another ; and she saw faces glowing with wonder and admiration all round her.

She turned ; the Major was standing beside her, smiling and holding out his hand to conduct her to the carriage.

“ You are an advocate of dog's rights,” he whispered ; “ your courage is remarkable. I am proud of you—but that man would not like to have you for a wife.”

She made no reply.

“ I was frightened to see you,” said Coila, “ although the

Major ran forward as soon as he saw your danger. The man might have struck you."

"No fear of that—he had more consideration for his own safety than I had for mine."

Marjoribanks joined them, much disturbed by the reports of the incident which had reached him and inclined to be angry with his daughter. The day had been altogether an unpleasant one to him, although he had pretended to enjoy it, and he would have been glad of any object on which to vent his irritation. He was keenly sensitive to the opinions of society, eager to catch every breath of approval, and strangely anxious to avoid giving offence.

The signs of popularity with which he was hailed mollified him—Bess had really done a deed which would redound to his credit. He became silent, but looked impatiently from the window for Ravelston. He was eager to get home to see his letters.

The Major chatted with Coila, occasionally asking the opinion of Bess about something, as if he did not perceive that she was as impatient as her father to reach home.

Coila listening, amused and interested by the racing experiences of her companion, and replying with that pleased curiosity which is most gratifying to a talker.

Killievar riding alongside, now and then coming close to the carriage to make some observation on the weather or the events of the day; then trotting forward or dropping behind as seemed most convenient.

"What's that?" he cried, suddenly, as a black iron bullet, little bigger than a billiard ball, came whizzing along the road and almost maimed his horse.

Marjoribanks looked out.

"Only the moulders having a game at bullets. They cast these things at the foundry, and try who shall roll them farthest along the road. Capital exercise; but they ought to be more careful. I must see about that."

Half-a-dozen men who had quitted the race course to try a match at "bullets" for gills round, divided as the carriage advanced and allowed it to pass; but although they all recognised the owner of Ravelston, there was no salutation given; they rather turned aside as if to avoid being recognised—

really because they were not accustomed to touch hats, or exchange courtesies.

The carriage rolled by them ; they stared for an instant at Killievar, and then resumed their game.

"It has been a day of unmitigated pleasure," said the Major, with certain indications of a suppressed yawn ; "these holidays are really the greatest events in one's life. One looks back to them for relief and comfort when one is most wearied and sad and often the fondest attachments—and the happiest—are formed by the chance encounters which these days bring about."

"And one feels them to be an exceeding bore at the time," said Bess, yawning behind her hand ; "but we can remember even pain with pleasure—because we are so glad to have survived it."

Thought the Major :

"If they find a letter from his Lordship, explaining his absence and promising an early appearance, I may throw up my cards at once. But if there is none——?"

Thought Bess :

"It has been the most unpleasant day I have ever spent. I hate these people ; and would like to punish Connoughmore somehow. If I could trust that man !" (looking at Kilgour over the handkerchief which she held to her mouth.)

At home ; no letters yet, and the party separated, each going to his or her room.

Dinner was over when the letters were delivered. Marjoribanks excused himself and retired to the library. Thither Bess followed soon afterwards.

She found him busy writing, an angry frown on his face. She waited whilst he finished a somewhat long sentence—he seldom wrote himself, and the effort was vexatious to him as well as indicative of his anxiety regarding the subject on which he wrote.

"Who are you writing to, papa?"

"That—I mean, his lordship."

"You have heard from him, then?"

He thrust the letter before her, and resumed writing.

She read a very polite epistle in which his lordship gracefully expressed his regrets for any disappointment he might have caused ; he thought that it would be only fair to the lady

to give her more time to consider the step which she was about to take, and the character in which she was to receive him. He felt bound to say that the affair had been arranged so suddenly, and so entirely without his knowledge, that he required a little time on his own part to make up his mind, in order to do justice to the lady and to himself. In every respect, although the lady and himself were unknown to each other, he felt that he had much to gain by the proposed arrangement; and he could not be sufficiently grateful for such munificence as Mr. Marjoribanks displayed; but——

Bess read no farther. She placed the letter quietly on the table.

Marjoribanks raised his head.

“Isn't he a scoundrel? But I'll make him pay for it. Why didn't he speak out at once when his father told him what had been settled between us?”

“I presume you are writing to tell his lordship that he is at liberty to do as he pleases?” she answered, coldly.

“Do as *he* pleases!—no; I'm writing to say that he is to do as I please, or by the Lord he shall pay for it—I'll have an action for breach of promise—I'll——”

“Papa!” she cried, shuddering, and placing her hand on the letter he had been writing; “you shall *not* do this.”

“I'll do as I like; I am not going to be humbugged by all the lords in the country.”

“Are you going to kill me with shame?”

“Don't talk d—d nonsense.”

“Don't answer; show that you can do without him; say nothing; spare me—you must spare me.”

She tore the letter into fragments, and flung them into the fire. It was the first act of open defiance of which she had been guilty.

Marjoribanks got up furious.

“I mean to do as I like, and you shall not be allowed to tell me what I am to do. You are going a great deal too far for my patience, and I won't stand it. You'll do just as I tell you, or I'll know for what.”

For an instant there was absolute terror in her eyes; then a gleam of wild passion as without another word, she turned and left the room.

The bitter degradation which was involved in the course her father threatened to take, even in anticipation, wrung every nerve in her body with agony.

Marjoribanks looked frowningly at the black films which were all that remained of his letter to Connoughmore.

"Uh-hum! I daresay it was as well he did not get that letter—it would have spoiled the whole affair. I'll make a bargain with him."

The notion of making a bargain enabled him to sit down with some composure.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

## THE BELL PIT.

**B**XTER entered, and with very much the same manner as that in which he might have announced a visitor, said :

“There has been an explosion at the Bell pit, Sir, and twenty men are supposed to be killed. The overseer has sent a man out to tell you.”

Everything seemed to be going wrong at once. But Marjoribanks was cool and practical now ; he locked up his unfinished letter.

“Send the man here, and tell Leishman to get the gig ready.”

A wiry fellow, with contracted shoulders, grimy face, out of which two dark eyes shone like lights, was ushered into the library. He held his leathern cap in his hand, but he paid no further respect to “the Cork” than was expressed in a nod of greeting. “Clay Tam” he was called by everybody, the nickname being suggested by the magnetic power he seemed to possess of attracting “coom”—that is, dirt of every kind ; in his work-clothes he was like a nigger dressed for a funeral ; in his best array he was piebald with mud. He was a first-class workman when sober, and not a bad one when “fou.” He had passed unscathed through more accidents than any miner in the district.

“Providence is aye kind to drunk men and bairns,” he would say often, and he was certainly a capable witness to the truth of the proverb.

“How did it happen ?” asked Marjoribanks.

“We dinna right ken yet ; but I’m doubting it’s a bad case.”

“When was it ?”

“Maybe an hour or two after the men on the night-shift gaed down. I was going down mysel’, when we heard the explosion, and Joek Wilson and Edd Murray came fleeing up the shaft to

tell us that the walls had fallen in, and they were feared there was a fire as weel."

"It's bad news ; we must do what we can to help them."

The gig was ready ; Marjoribanks hurried to the door, but halted a minute in the hall for Baxter to help him on with his heavy overcoat.

The news had spread through the house ; Coila and Bess, the Major and Killievar, all with anxious faces, met Marjoribanks.

"Is it as bad as we are told ?" said the Major.

"I am afraid it is."

"I shall go with you."

There was no time for objection ; the Major put on his hat and coat, and was at the gig as soon as his host.

They took their places, Marjoribanks driving, the Major beside him, and Clay Tam behind. The gig disappeared in the darkness of the avenue.

Bess turned to Killievar.

"The carriage will be ready in a few minutes ; I am going to the pit—will you accompany me ? We might be able to render some assistance."

"I shall be very glad to go."

Bess went for a cloak and hat ; Killievar was waiting for her at the door of the carriage, and Coila was already seated in it, when she returned.

"Oh !—you are going, too ?"

"Yes."

Bess took her seat, Killievar followed, and in silence they were driven rapidly towards the scene of the accident.

They seemed to be passing into a region of bright flames, which at intervals lit up their faces with a red glow, flitting away as they passed under the shadow of a wall, and leaving them in intense darkness for a minute or so. A ring of utter darkness encircled the many flaring furnaces, in the glare of which even the stars grew pale and feeble. Great clouds of smoke occasionally swept across the light, and then the flames, white and red, shot out again with more brilliance than ever, dancing, flickering, and mingling like a quadrille party on fire.

The windows of neighbouring houses, with their white blinds, seemed like pallid faces looking on in suspense at the fiery scene of work and danger. The trees between them and the



light were shown in clear relief like dark spectres, assuming the wildest and most fantastic forms. Then there were many burning mounds, like miniature mountains of fire ; and as they came nearer to the furnaces, they saw beneath the caps of flame white fierce eyes glaring out upon them through the thin iron railings of the galleries which encircled the fiery pyramids and linked them together. Occasionally a dark figure would pass along the gallery, suggesting the idea of an attendant demon of the flames.

The Bell pit stood between two groups of furnaces, and the pithead was a glare of light. Crowds of men and women were moving restlessly about, eagerly watching the mouth of the shaft as the cage went down and came up, anxious to give aid, and bitterly conscious of their impotency.

Wives sought husbands ; mothers sought sons. There were few sounds of grief ; but there was a white anguish on the faces of the women, a sullen gloom upon the men's more terrible to witness than the most clamorous sorrow could have been.

A woman, nearly six feet in height, with body and limbs in proportion, forced her way through the crowd.

"Did my man go doon?" she demanded of the overseer.

"I canna tell—I did not see him go down," muttered the overseer, who was watching the "pirns" as they twirled, coiling and uncoiling the ropes on which the cages depended.

"There's nothing wrong with your man, Kirsty," said a bystander ; "he was at the races, and he's lying up at Matthey Brown's, the pieman's, as drunk as a lord."

"Providence is guid to us!" exclaimed the wife ; and then, her fears being relieved—"I'll learn him better nor to get fou, and gie me a scare like this."

She marched off with wrathful intentions to seek her husband. She forgot in her own relief the pain of the others who were around her.

Drs. Murray and Spence had been early on the spot. Ten men had been rescued from the jaws of death. One of the numerous sheds which surrounded the place had been turned into a temporary hospital, and there the doctors were doing all that lay in their power to restore to life the inanimate forms brought to them by the brave fellows who had risked their own lives to save those of their comrades.

But there came a point at which no one would volunteer to descend the shaft, and there were still eight men known to be lying insensible below.

Marjoribanks stepped forward.

"Fifty pounds to the man who will go down and help the lads up," he cried excitedly.

No one moved.

"It's clean madness to think of it," said Clay Tam, "we would be choked before we got half down."

"Then I'll go myself."

He took his place ready to descend. The Major stepped into the cage beside him.

"What, are you to risk it?"

"It's an experiment, and I am curious to see what comes of it?"

"That's plucky. All right."

There was a murmur of astonishment, and some hesitation on the part of the overseer to obey his master's commands; but the command was repeated more peremptorily than before, and the descent began.

The Major presently felt a loud singing in his ears, and it seemed to him as if they were going upwards instead of down.

"Keep a firm hold," said Marjoribanks; "we'll get back safe enough."

The excitement of the crowd found vent in ejaculations of wonder, fear, hope, and in the hasty repetition of anecdotes of marvellous rescues performed by one courageous man when everybody else thought all human aid of no avail.

"The Cork kens the pit better than any of us," observed Clay Tam, not in the least disturbed by any thought of cowardice on his own part; "and if anything can be done for the lads, he'll do it."

Bess and Coila made their way amongst the groups of men and women, now standing in a broad glare of light, and presently under deep shadow, as they attempted to speak words of comfort to those who seemed to be in most distress.

"The Cork's dochter is here wi' his niece," passed from mouth to mouth, and a strange silence fell upon the place.

Those whom the ladies were trying to console looked upon them with pitying eyes, making awkward responses, and some

moving away from them—for none liked to tell the daughter of her father's danger.

Killievar soon learned all; he took a hand of each of the ladies, and said quietly:

“Keep very calm—you may hear bad news in a minute. My dear friends, keep very calm.”

The overseer was standing at the pit head, grimly waiting for some sign of the result of his master's adventure. Near him crouched a woman, hugging her knees, misery on her haggard face, but uttering no sound.

The signal to hoist was given, and instantly obeyed.

A man and a youth of about sixteen were brought up insensible. The crouching woman sprang up and clasped the youth in her arms.

“God's blessing be on the gentlemen—they have saved my bairn,” she cried, with passionate tenderness.

“Hush!” said the overseer, putting her aside firmly but kindly. “Wait till the doctors have seen him.”

Bess and Coila knew now why the people regarded them so strangely.

There was a sudden cry of consternation—the wooden lining of the upcast had caught fire. Smoke, increasing in density every minute, rushed up into the faces of those who were standing near, and streaks of flame told the rest. Every hand was employed in pouring water down the shaft in the hope of subduing the flames.

Clay Tam broke a pipe which had been used for conducting water to the condenser of the pit engine, and by that stroke of cunning helped more to subdue the flames than any dozen of the men, who looked upon him as a lazy villain, because they did not see him rushing about with pailsful of water.

The cage was now worked entirely in the down shaft.

Four men were brought up, one biting his cap, another with the sleeve of his coat in his mouth, in order to save themselves from the effects of the stifling atmosphere through which they had to pass.

Down went the cage again.

It returned—empty.

“D—— it, the Cork man come up,” exclaimed Clay Tam, springing into the cage as it began to descend once more,

although the ropes had been touched with fire in several places.

A tongue of flame shot through the partition which divided the shafts ; and many eyes were turned in anxiety to the wooden framework overhanging the pit—if that caught fire the iron wheels and other gear would fall down and block up the shaft.

“ It’s up again ! ”

“ He’s safe—Lord be praised ! ”

Twenty men and women rushed forward to assist Marjoribanks out of the cage.

As soon as it was known that he was safe, there was a low murmur of satisfaction, which swelled into something like a muffled cheer.

“ It’s all right,” said Marjoribanks, gasping, “ I’ve come through ; but there are four or five poor chaps down there yet. I tried to get them, and I would not have been here myself but for this friend.”

He gripped the Major’s hand with hearty good will.

“ Tut, tut, Marjoribanks, you did the work ; I only looked on.”

“ Aye, but you came to me when help was needed. By my faith, if you had not carried me to the foot of the shaft that time when I was falling down, trying to find the others, it would have been a bad case for me—look there.”

The rope had been burned, and the cage fell into the burning gulf of the pit ; there was no more hope for those below.

“ I’ll never forget it, man—do what you like.”

“ Here is one of your men who had as much to do in helping you as I had.”

Clay Tam made a salute, and instantly lounged away amongst his comrades. He would have been considered quite a hero if Marjoribanks had not absorbed all attention at the moment.

Bess said, coolly :

“ I am glad you are safe, papa ; you ran a fearful risk.”

But Coila took his hand, and with the light of enthusiasm in her eyes, whispered :

“ It was very brave, and noble, and good of you, uncle ; and I shall always be proud of this night.”

Clay Tam,  
nec more,

Marjoribanks liked that ; it made him feel that he had done something to earn the admiration of the people about him.

“ And have you no word of welcome for me ? ” whispered the Major to Bess, as she moved slowly towards the shed where the injured men were being attended to by the doctors. “ I went with your father because I was thinking of you.”

“ That was remarkably kind of you, and I am grateful accordingly.”

Silence ; a hum of voices ; a low moan of pain at intervals as they approached the sufferers, the Major limping by the side of Bess.

“ You still speak as if you would only use me for the amusement of an idle hour ; but have you thought about to-morrow ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ And are you satisfied ? ”

“ No.”

“ Then why hesitate. We will be happy together ; at any rate you will have the immediate satisfaction of showing that you cared nothing for Connoughmore ; and with me you shall have the chance of winning the highest position our united wits can accomplish. Trust me, it is not your fortune which attracts me now.”

He had recalled bitter thoughts, and she reflected for a moment.

“ You gave me an answer once which I shall repeat—‘ I shall think about it.’ ”

“ Very good ; there is a train at half-past ten to-morrow to London. I shall be in the conservatory at nine.”

She bowed coldly, but she did not altogether repulse him.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

## LIGHT AND SHADOW.

THE wounded men were carried home on litters ; three men were able to walk with the assistance of friends ; then a cart made several journeys between the shed and the rows of miners' cots. The people looked with sad faces at the cart as it passed, knowing well what lay beneath the horse-rug which had been spread over its contents.

"Our turn next, maybe," said one man to another, under his breath.

"What will Jean Boyd do wi' her five bairns now?" whispered the women.

Marjoribanks was moving about, giving what comfort he could in promises of assistance, and earning many blessings from distressed widows and mothers.

The doctors attended the patients to their houses ; and after visiting the last of those under his care, Austin turned back to the pit to see if his assistance were needed there.

The glare of furnaces cast a warm glow upon his face ; but presently a tall engine-house stood between him and the light ; he had to pass under the black shadow which it made. The darkness was the more intense to him as he stepped so suddenly out of the light.

A soft, trembling hand grasped his arm.

He could just distinguish the outline of a lady's form, and his heart bounded at the thought that it was Coila who stopped him—for he knew that she had come to the scene of the accident. The voice made him aware of his mistake.

"Austin, stay one minute."

"Miss Marjoribanks!—is anything the matter?—you are trembling."

"Am I? Never mind that. I want ——"

She paused—agitated to a degree quite beyond control ; her voice was like that of one half suffocated ; she hesitated in

what she was going to say, and her hand shook nervously in his. This was a mood in which she had never appeared to him before ; and her effort to assume the old reckless way of talking rendered it the more painful. She retained his hand to prevent him leading her out of the shadow—she wished to hide her face.

He spoke in the frank boyish tone of the happy blackberrying days.

“Tell me what you want, Bess.”

“Ah!—I am glad to hear that name on your lips again ;” and her hesitation seemed to vanish as she spoke, although the nervous hesitation remained. “I want you to forgive me, Austin, for troubling you just now, and at such a time—when we are surrounded by so much misery.”

“If you are in sorrow or misery of any kind, Bess, that is the time to speak to the friend you think worthy of your confidence : and it will make me very happy to know that you can trust me.”

“You do not know yet the test to which I am to put *your* confidence in me.”

There was red, flaring light around them—but they stood in darkness. The position was symbolic of their lives ; only one little step to right or left and they might have passed into the day of happiness.

“Put me to the test. At this moment I feel as if we were boy and girl again, with no secrets to hide from each other. I forget that you are the heiress of Ravelston, and that I am a poor country doctor, heavily weighted with debts, which must seem small to you, but which are mountains to me. I forget all that, and I could forget it oftener, if I knew that you, too, could think only of the old days, and be as we were then, like brother and sister.”

“Brother and sister!—I hate the words. Answer me—answer as if to your own conscience—have you ceased to think of Coila ?”

He drew back a little, and did not speak. The earnestness and passion of her voice rendered a perfectly faithful reply necessary.

“Answer me truly, or not at all. Do you not hope, do you not wish still that she might be your wife ?”

Another pause ; and then, as if the words were drawn from him against his will.

"I do—in spite of myself I find my thoughts and hopes turning towards her ; in every act of my life I find myself asking would this have pleased *her* if she had been with me as I once expected she would be. Then I try to turn away from the thought, to assure myself that I care nothing for her, but it is to no purpose. I work and work, hoping to forget her, and I cannot."

"Thank you. I knew that you would speak honestly, and that you would not blame me too much for what may seem an impertinent curiosity."

"But why go back to this subject, which is such a painful one to me ?"

"Because I wanted to tell you that Coila is faithful to you, and to advise you to wait patiently for what time may do. You will be very happy with her by-and-by."

"Impossible ; you are mistaken in regard to her feelings."

"It is you who are mistaken. Now, let us look for my father and Killievar. We can be of no further service here."

Her agitation was under control again, and she spoke with very much of her ordinary quick, imperative manner. She stepped out to the light ; her face was pale, but that was partly hidden by the glow which the furnaces cast upon it.

"You have not told me yet why you put the question to me. I would be glad to believe that Coila had asked you——"

"Coila had nothing to *do with it*," she interrupted. "I wished to test your confidence *in me* ; prove your faith still further, and ask me no questions. In a few days you will find Coila willing enough to explain *everything* to you. I hope you will be happy."

The last words were uttered in a kind of whisper, and they seemed to come from one who had given up all hopes of happiness for herself.

Austin halted and confronted her. They were near the carriage, and Killievar was in sight.

"There is something behind all this, Bess, which you have not explained to me. You would not have acted so strangely without a very strong motive."



“What of that? *You* cannot help me.”

“How do you know?”

“One conundrum for another, that’s fair. Why isn’t the moon made of green cheese? There, don’t bother your wits to find an answer, for there is none; and that is just my position. There is no answer to your anxiety on my account—but I am grateful all the same.”

“I am sorry you will not let me help you.”

“And I am sorry to have to tell you that you cannot.”

“At least, count upon my willingness to serve you whenever and for whatever you may command me.”

“I will count upon that. . . . Good-bye.”

The word lingered on her lips as if she were bidding him a final farewell, and he fancied that there was an unusually warm pressure of her hand just before she stepped into the carriage. He would have liked to speak again, but Killievar was standing close by, making some observations about the sad events of the night, which Austin did not hear.

He lifted his hat to Coila, and then, as he saw, or fancied he saw, a slight movement of her right arm, he instantly offered to shake hands with her.

She would have been vexed if he had not done so; and yet she was vexed that he did offer his hand, for it seemed to indicate that although all was at an end between them, he would not permit others to observe any particular difference in his conduct towards her.

She could be proud, too; if he did not care to know the real motive of her strange conduct to him, why should she trouble to inform him? It would have been a very difficult task to tell him—although she had said to Bess that she would do so, that was when she was feeling keenly the vexation of having caused him and herself useless pain. But when she came to think quietly about it afterwards, it seemed impossible to repeat to him the many words and acts of Bess—often trifling enough—which had convinced her that Bess loved him, that she would marry him, bringing him wealth to make his future success certain, and that he would make her happy.

It would have been impossible to explain all that without feeling mean and contemptible in her own eyes. So now she pretended to herself that she was pleased to see how unneces-

sary it was even to think of such a matter; he was evidently quite contented to leave the affair as it stood. Very likely he was glad to escape—no doubt of it, indeed, since he could speak to her so coolly.

So she shook hands quite formally, not the least warmth in the touch, not the faintest sign of a desire to clasp his hand in the old friendly way. Her hand touched his—that was all; she hoped he was well, that Mrs. Murray was well, and expressed her regret that he should have had such sad work to perform that night.

His heart seemed to drop lower in his chest. He answered her in the same key—foolish as the girl in his pride, and in the vanity which made him dread even the suspicion of seeking her again because of the fortune which Marjoribanks had promised with her.

The carriage drove away; he saluted the ladies and turned homewards, repeating to himself all the satirical comments upon the fickleness of woman he could remember or invent. A verse of Burns's took his fancy most :

“Wha e'er ye be that woman love,  
To this be never blind,  
Nae ferlie 'tis if fickle she prove,  
A woman has't by kind.”

He repeated this often, but did not derive much consolation from it.

The gig, with Marjoribanks and the Major, had arrived at Ravelston a few minutes before the carriage. As Bess stepped into the hall, Kilgour touched her arm :

“Well?”

“I shall be in the conservatory at nine to-morrow.”

A whisper—but Killievar heard it.

## CHAPTER XL.

## MISS JANET'S WIG

**A** MESSAGE from Bess to her father in the morning excused her from attendance at the family breakfast table ; she was fatigued by the events of the previous night, and wished to rest. The Major was still indulged with breakfast in his own room.

Killievar was at the side-table helping himself to a cutlet when he heard the message delivered by Mary Beith. "No man ever thought so wisely as Killievar looked." He preserved a dignified look throughout the meal, but Marjoribanks talked much with his mouth full. He was in a hurry to be off to learn the fate of the men who had been rescued from the Bell Pit.

The chief saw his host depart, nearly an hour earlier than usual, and then stalked into the conservatory. He had taken a sudden fancy to study flowers apparently, for he examined those at the entrance with particular care. He advanced a little farther, and seemed to be looking for some favourite which he could not find.

He was alone in the place. There was a white mist outside, which the sun and a strong wind were combining to disperse.

"It was a mistake ; and a very good thing, too, that I did not speak to her without making sure."

He made half-a-dozen stately paces across the floor and halted again, with his eyes fixed suspiciously on a flower-pot.

"And it was a very strange thing, too, what I have seen—it was, indeed. I hope she is wise enough not to be a fool."

He felt relieved, but still dissatisfied. By-and-by, he sent Baxter to ask Miss Marjoribanks if she would see him for a few minutes. The man returned with the information that the lady had gone out for a walk.

Killievar went up to the Major's apartments ; knocked ; no reply. He knocked again, then opened the door and entered.

The Major was not there; his portmanteau and gun-case were lying packed, as if for a journey.

The chief hurried out; ordered the gig to be got ready immediately, and went to seek Miss Janet. He found her engaged at her usual morning's work, and Coila with her.

"I want you to go with me this moment, Miss Janet, to give your authority to what I mean to do," he said, abruptly.

Miss Janet dropped everything that was in her hands, and, peering under the chairs and tables as usual, exclaimed:

"You quite alarm me—my handkerchief, dear? So sorry to trouble—I hope there is not another accident. I could not be of any use—the needles, dear; but please don't disturb yourself on my account."

"Will you go like a very good child and get your aunt's bonnet and shawl, and say nothing at all to nobody?" he said, adding, as soon as Coila quitted the room: "there has been another accident, Miss Janet. I am very much afraid that Miss Bess is going to make a very big fool of herself by running away with Kilgour. We'll try to stop them without saying one word to your brother."

Miss Janet was dismayed and astounded; she never could have believed Bess capable of such folly.

"Bless me! dear, dear, this is dreadful—but it is not possible."

"There is no harm in making certain whether it is possible or not."

"I wish Robert had been here—I wish anybody else could go but me—she will never do anything for me."

Poor Miss Janet was in a terrible flutter, and only half comprehended the situation of affairs.

Her shawl was flung round her shoulders, her bonnet was thrust on her head, and she would not stand still to permit one or the other to be properly arranged.

Killievar took her down to the gig, assisted her in, and, grasping the reins, stepped in beside her.

The wind blew boisterously around them, and as they drove along, Miss Janet had neither breath nor time to speak, so busily was she occupied now in clutching the flying ends of her shawl, again making desperate grabs at her bonnet, which

threatened every moment to fly off. Then she fumbled with the ribbons, and in her agitation tied many useless knots.

Killievar had no desire for conversation ; he was hopeful of arranging matters so that nobody should know of the wild escapade of Bess except himself and Miss Janet.

They were entering the village of Craigielloup, where the hum of many shuttles sounded like a chorus to the wind. As they were passing the parish school, the door was flung open, and the boys and girls rushed out for their forenoon "piece" and play. They came scrambling out in gleeful tumult, the first half-dozen instantly starting a game of leap-frog.

Killievar had to pull up short to save the life of one of the urchins, and at the same moment a great gust of wind swept round the school-house and carried away Miss Janet's bonnet. In the desperate attempt she made to recover the bonnet, she displaced her wig, which the wicked wind seized with avidity, and whirled aloft, and then rolled straight along the road.

The school boys recognised Miss Janet, and, although they had the deepest respect for her in memory and anticipation of "cookie" feasts and strawberries and cream, they shrieked with delight at the mishap which had befallen her.

"Here's Miss Janet's wig rinnin' awa' wi' the wind!" they shouted ; "wha'll catch Miss Janet's wig?"

And they careered after the flying wig with all the heedless fun of childhood, laughing, whooping, and knocking each other about in the eagerness to win the prize.

The poor lady was horrified, and every laughing cry of the children made her shiver with shame and confusion. She had just presence of mind enough to cover her head, and face, too, with her shawl.

Killievar behaved nobly—he did mutter something in Gaelic, for the trial to his dignity was a severe one ; but he endeavoured to reassure her :

"It is a very bad thing, Miss Janet, to have wigs on a windy day ; but do not you discompose yourself, we shall catch it again, and I will take you away from these bairns."

He made the horse gallop after the run-away headgear, shouting with his loud voice :

"Out of the way, bairns, or you will be killed altogether."

Many of the children halted, half in terror as they heard the

whip cracking over their heads, and the clatter of the horse's hoofs. About two-thirds gave up the chase; the others were ahead, close upon the game.

The wig was suddenly swept to one side, and stuck fast in the rustic porch of a weaver's cottage. A crowd of urchins rushed upon it, and at the same moment the gig stopped. Killievar descended with as much dignity as if there was nothing at all ridiculous in his position as cavalier of a lady in pursuit of her hair.

"Here you, Sir" (to the biggest boy), "hold the horse; and now, you bairns, give me *that*."

A boy held it up to him by one of the dishevelled curls—and the wig looked like a dead octopus suspended by one of its limbs.

"If I give you a whole shilling, will you go and buy sweeties and divide them fair?"

"A skillin' ? We'll divide fair," they cried, amazed and in ecstasies at the prospect of such wealth.

"Off you go, then, directly, or I will take it back from you."

The boys gave a shout and rushed back to their companions and to the sweetie-wife's without once looking at Miss Janet.

"For heaven's sake, Killievar, let me get into that house."

He assisted her to the ground gallantly, placing the cause of the commotion in her hand at the same time, and she bundled it under her shawl precipitately as if she wished to put it out of sight for ever. Her hand shook violently as she lifted the latch of the weaver's door, without knocking.

The door was fast inside—a most unusual thing in the village—but she was too much confused to observe the singularity of the circumstance. Killievar did observe it, and walked to the window to see if the house were inhabited.

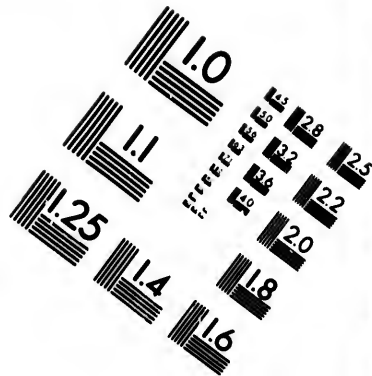
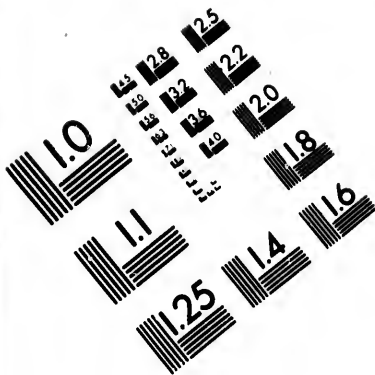
His head rose an inch higher, and again he uttered an exclamation in Gaelic, but this time with evident satisfaction. Then he bowed to some one within.

The door was instantly opened.

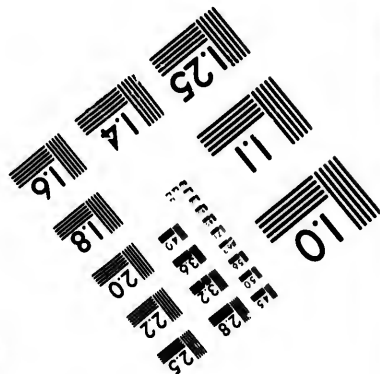
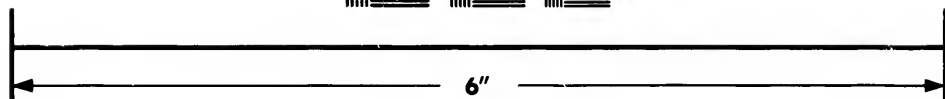
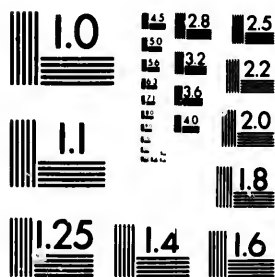
"A glass of water and a chair," gasped Miss Janet, staggering in; and then she uttered a cry of wonder—"Bess!"

There was Bess, laughing in her old fearless way, having apparently seen something of her aunt's misfortune; and there was the Major, standing as composedly as ever, and looking





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serious enough to satisfy Miss Janet that he had no inclination to ridicule her.

Behind them were two weaving machines, at one of which a little, white-faced, bald-headed man, with stooping shoulders, was busily working the shuttle, in entire indifference to all that was going on.

"What in the world tempted you out in a gig, auntie?" cried Bess, still laughing merrily, as she placed her in a big wooden chair, which the weaver's wife had drawn forward to the fire.

Miss Janet looked helplessly at Bess and then at Killievar, who was standing in the doorway; if what he had said was true, she was utterly unable to comprehend her niece's manner.

"Let me compose myself, dear; I am out of breath, and I must arrange myself before I can speak—would you ask the gentlemen to retire, dear? So sorry to trouble."

Killievar wheeled round, but looked back at the Major, as if inviting him to follow. Kilgour accepted the invitation, and the two passed out to the road.

"This is quite dreadful, dear; I shall never survive it. What with you and the boys, and the Major, and—and—my hair, I am distracted. I wonder I didn't faint. Killievar is an excellent man, dear, so good-natured, and so thoughtful; if it had been Robert—!"

She could find no words sufficiently strong to express her horror at the bare idea of such an accident happening in the presence of her brother.

"You should not have ventured out on such a day as this—we will never get the curls right without the tongs."

"We can tie a handkerchief over them, dear. I was obliged to come out after you; it would have been such a terrible thing; so much talk; so much scandal, you know, dear."

"Yes, it would have been an awful scandal; no fools like old fools, people would say. Besides, it was unnecessary; I am sure papa would not have refused his consent."

"I am sure he would, dear."

"You surprise me—and they are such good friends. I hope nobody guessed why you left home?"

"We did not breathe a word to a living creature. You

know, dear, we hoped to get it all quietly settled without anyone being the wiser or the worse."

"How sly you two must have been. I never even suspected it. But you cannot go any farther to-day with your head in this condition."

"Go farther!—go where?"

"With Killievar, of course—wasn't it an elopement?"

Miss Janet absolutely lifted her eyes from the ground and stared at her niece. The eyes went down again, and she fumbled in her pocket for a handkerchief.

"You understand quite well, dear, what I mean. We came after you in the hope of saving you from a great folly."

"What folly?"

"You know, dear, it is silly to disguise the truth from me. We do not wish even your father to know that you were going—"

"To Edinburgh," interrupted Bess, quickly; "why should I disguise it? As I was to walk to the station, the Major escorted me. I missed the train, and then came in here to see Mrs. Greig's sick child."

Miss Janet nodded, and smiled approvingly.

"That explanation will do admirably, dear, if anybody should say anything. But don't say Edinburgh—because the train you have missed does not go there. You are very clever."

"Here's your bonnet, Miss Janet," said Mrs. Greig, entering; "it's a wee soiled, but it'll serve till you get hame."

That stopped further conversation; and presently Killievar looked in:

"We are quite ready to start for home, ladies, as soon as Miss Janet feels able."

"*We* are ready," thought Miss Janet; "he means that the Major is to go too. Surely he has not been persuaded that they were not running away."

The Major was going back with them; and he sat in front beside Killievar, who was driving.

## CHAPTER XLI.

## WHITE MICE.

**T**HIS was the passage-at-arms between the Major and Killevar when they stood outside the weaver's cottage :—  
“ I think, Sir, we know the position of affairs.”

The Major bowed.

“ I think also, Sir, that it would be a very good thing if there was to come a message to you by telegraph or letter which rendered your immediate departure from Ravelston necessary.”

“ Do you mean to-day ? ”

“ Yes, Sir, I mean this very day, and before Mr. Marjoribanks comes home to dinner ; then he need not know anything at all about anything that we know. I observed that your portmanteau was ready packed.”

“ Would it not look better to remain till to-morrow.”

“ You must go this very day, Sir, or you must explain to Mr. Marjoribanks in my presence everything. I would advise you to do that if I thought there was the least chance of anything but a very unpleasant row. Therefore, Sir, as his friend, and her friend, and your friend, I say, go at once ; it will be the very best way for everybody, and it will spare her some words. Her father has views for her, and very proper views, and it is not very good of you to interfere.”

The Major reflected, and then, quietly :

“ I believe you are right. I shall go to-day.”

“ I am very glad to hear you say so, Sir. You are a good shot, and I will be missing you often. I approve of you as a sportsman, but I do not approve of what you have attempted to-day.”

“ You will at least approve of my not attempting to alter your opinion.”

The gentlemen bowed formally to each other, and the terms of peace were thus settled.

On arriving at Ravelston, the ladies proceeded to their rooms at once.

"How long do you give me to remain here?" asked the Major, in a low voice.

"You will take luncheon, that no suspicion may be roused. Then, in half-an-hour after we leave the table, I suppose you will be ready to start."

The Major sat down in his private room and considered the position; he did not regard it as one of defeat yet. Everything depended upon the humour Bess might be in, and that could not be counted upon for five consecutive minutes. He was chagrined: to have been so near victory and then to fail by being two minutes late for a train was decidedly irritating.

His difficulty now was to communicate with Bess. He might employ Mary Beith; but he would only use her as his medium as a last resource. His theory was that in the intrigue of love, as in the intrigue of war, a service upon which everything depended should be performed by one's self.

He wrote two letters—one to Marjoribanks, expressing gratitude for all his kindness, and regret for the necessity which compelled him to leave Ravelston so abruptly; the other to Bess.

At luncheon Miss Janet appeared with her wig carefully arranged; but she had less than usual to say, and there seemed to be more than ever to search for under the tables and chairs. She did not once lift her eyes. Coila, who was not in the secret of the morning's doings, was yet conscious of something very unusual being wrong, and felt awkward. Bess, the Major, and Killievar were perfectly composed.

"I am sorry to have to tell you," said Kilgour, addressing the company generally, between the service of cheese and fruit, "that I shall have to leave you in half-an-hour. My stay here has been delightful to me in every way, and I go away much against my will."

Everybody was sorry; everybody wished that he could stay a few days longer, or at least until Marjoribanks came home. He said it was impossible, and by and by he formally took his leave of the ladies as they passed from the room. Shaking

hands with Bess last, he adroitly placed in her palm the letter he had written.

The door closed.

"Are you satisfied?" he said, turning to Killievar.

"I shall answer you when we meet next, Sir."

"That will not be for a very long time, I am afraid. However, good-bye: I have had a pleasant time of it here. Tell Marjoribanks I shall write to him from London."

He tipped the servants liberally, and went away with their good opinion, at any rate; half-a-dozen of them were in the hall to see him depart; they would have given him many smiling well-wishes but for the presence of the chief, who was so grim that he damped their ardour, and kept them on their good behaviour.

At the gate the Major bade the driver halt.

"Good-bye, Macbeth, I shall not see you soon again; but you will hear from me. I shall not forget my promise to inquire about your son."

"What, are you going for good?"

"For good or bad, I really don't know which."

The carriage drove on, and Cockie-leerie stood dumbly gazing after it, like one who felt that he had lost a golden opportunity of doing or saying something.

That afternoon Marjoribanks was altogether out of humour, and the express cause was this sudden departure of the Major, to whom he had taken a strong fancy since the adventures at the Bell Pit. He declared that he would not have had him go away in such a hurried fashion, not for any consideration.

"It just looks as though he had been ill-treated, or that he had been turned out of the house. I'm glad he gives me his address here—the Oracle Club. I'll have him back next season."

Miss Janet and Killievar consulted together; the result was that Cockie-leerie was engaged upon secret service. They thought it necessary to keep Bess under guard, but they would not entrust the post to any of the house servants, for fear of scandal in the first place, and the potency of bribery in the second.

Midnight; the domestics had all retired. Cockie-leerie was seated in a big chair in the hall to which the door of the lady's

room opened. He had his dram and a lantern, and instructions to rouse Killievar and Miss Janet if his young mistress attempted to leave her room.

The house was quiet ; he was comfortable, and he settled himself in the big chair for the night ; silence and loneliness had few terrors for him.

Stealthily Bess opened the door of her room. Cockie-leerie was instantly on the alert.

She saw the warder, and guessed easily why he was there. She was going to draw back, altered her mind, and advanced to him boldly :

“ Why, Macbeth ; what are you doing here to-night ? ”

“ To keep you in your room, Miss, and to say nothing to nobody.”

“ Oh, is that all ; well, you are not a cruel jailer ; I wish to speak to my cousin ; you will not object to that.”

“ I dinna ken—it’s against orders, but——”

Before he could say more she had passed into Coila’s room. Coila was sleeping. Bess halted an instant to make sure of that, and then went into a small chamber, in the window of which was a miniature aviary. There Coila kept her favourite birds, and among other pets, a pair of white mice in a pretty gilded cage. The latter Bess took down, and covering it with a shawl, carried it to her own room, bidding her jailer a pleasant “ good-night ” as she passed him.

Silence again, and Cockie-leerie began to feel drowsy.

Scratch, scratch, scratch—very gently something on the wainscoting.

He startled, rubbed his eyes ; the one thing which had power to terrify him had been discovered—mice.

A squeak, and he jumped to his feet looking about him in alarm. Scratch, scratch, scratch again, and in the stillness of the house the sound was loud and horrible to him.

Bess’s door opened a very little way, and immediately a tiny white thing scampered across the floor.

Cockie-leerie jumped on to his chair, and shivering watched the animal dart hither and thither in uncertainty where to go.

The scratching sound was repeated, and a second monster darted into the hall.

Cockie-leerie uttered a stifled cry of fear, sprang from the

chair, upsetting and extinguishing the lantern as he did so, and made what haste he could down the staircase. Big, strong, courageous fellow, as he was, these two tiny animals had fairly frightened him from his post.

He did not hear the half-suppressed, merry laughter which hailed his flight.

Darkness and silence were disagreeable to Cockie-leerie. He stood in the hall listening for the least sound which might announce the approach of his enemy. He heard a door creak above him, and wondered what it could mean, at the same time wishing that he had been snug in his bed at the lodge. However, mice did not open doors, and since he heard nothing of them, he determined to do his duty and return to his post.

He searched in his pocket and found a box of matches. lit one, and, with slow caution, ascended the stairs, striking lights all the way, and anxiously observing every step, lest the enemy should be lying anywhere in wait for him. He was not conscious of the absurdity of his fears, but he did feel that they were cowardly, and he would have liked to overcome them. He had often tried, and always failed. He had a physical repugnance to mice, which proved unconquerable.

He found his lantern, lighted it, and looked round. The animals had disappeared, and he breathed freely.

Then he observed that the door which gave access to the servants' staircase stood ajar. He was certain that it had been quite closed when he first sat down in the big chair, which was to serve as his sentry-box for the night. He looked down the staircase and listened ; he could neither see nor hear anything. He shut the door, and seated himself again, with a feeling of much satisfaction that he had so far been able to prove faithful to his trust by returning to his duty in spite of the fright he had got.

He began to feel comfortable ; and, under the impression that he was keeping strict watch all the time, he went to sleep.

A figure glided noiselessly down the servants' staircase, and waited patiently at the foot. By and by, the figure passed into the hall and straight to the door. Quick fingers undid the bolts, the chain, and sought the lock for the key which was not there. Killievar had removed it.

Bess was baffled at the last barrier through which she had to



make her way. But she had much of her father's dogged nature, and opposition only rendered her the more resolute.

She stood still a little while, speculating how she might overcome the obstacle. She would have passed out through one of the windows, but the warning-bell (there was one attached to each window) would be sure to ring, the sentinel would discover her, and the household would be roused.

She deliberately replaced the bolts and chain. Cockie-leerie was fast asleep, so she easily regained her chamber unobserved. An hour before any of the domestics were afoot, Killievar released his man from duty, and Cockie-leerie went home after assuring him that, except to speak to Miss Coila for a minute or two, Miss Marjoribanks had not stirred from the room during the night.

About the same time, a solitary man in a dog-cart drove away from one of the side gates of Ravelston, towards Airbridge.

## CHAPTER XLII.

## "O'ER THE BORDERS AND AWA' "

**M**ARJORIBANKS had stepped into the carriage, to proceed as usual to the works, when Bess suddenly joined him.

"I want to go with you this morning, papa" she said, taking her seat beside him; "I would like to see how the poor men are getting on."

"You won't do them much good—but all right."

The carriage drove away. This was a movement upon which Killievar had not calculated; and he was at that moment solemnly assuring Miss Janet that she need not disturb herself about her niece, as the young lady had discretion enough to be grateful for having been rescued from the false step she had been about to take, and sense enough not to repeat the error.

Bess visited half-a-dozen of the invalid miners' cottages, spoke hopefully to all, and left each of the wives with some token of her goodwill. She made sure before entering any of the houses that the doctor was not there, and she cast many glances up and down the row in fear of meeting him. She was smiling and pleasant to every one; the signs of anxiety which she could not conceal were regarded as symptoms of her sympathy with the sufferers.

"I had nae notion that the Cork's daughter was such a kind creatur'," said one woman to another.

There was a chorus in praise of Bess, which she never heard, or she would have understood how easy it is for the rich and fortunate to win the kindest feelings of the poor.

She passed out of the Miners' Row, and walked on to the station. The distance was about half a mile, and she looked at her watch frequently on the way. If Austin had met her that morning, he might have altered her course.

She was in good time; there was only one man in the booking-office when she entered it. He was seated opposite the

door, and muffled up to the neck in a heavy grey Ulster overcoat ; a sealskin travelling cap was drawn well over his brow, so that it would have been difficult for even friends to identify him.

He half rose when she appeared ; she partly turned as if to retreat, but, controlling herself, she passed on to the platform. The man followed leisurely, but did not attempt to address her. The train came up. She moved one step forward, and two back. In that moment of hesitation a porter flung open the door of an unoccupied compartment.

"Quick, if you are going on, Miss."

This trifling circumstance was like the breath of wind which directs the course of a feather poised in air. She entered the carriage ; the gentleman in the Ulster took his place in the next compartment, the doors were banged to, and fastened.

"Right behind," shouts the guard.

"Right here," shouts the porter.

The guard whistles, the engine whistles, and away goes the train.

It was done—the step was taken ; and in one little moment an impregnable barrier had sprung up between her and her home. She remembered that wonderful scene of enchantment in the story of the "Sleeping Beauty," where the forest suddenly encloses the palace ; and she felt as if Ravelston were now surrounded by a wood through which she could never pass. The day seemed to become very dark, although the sun was shining.

The whirl, noise, and oscillation of the train stupified and distracted her ; it helped the fancy which had occurred to her that she had been cast into space, and she sickened with a sensation of falling, falling to be dashed at last against some invisible object, and to die.

She started up several times, with some wild idea of getting out and going back ; then she sat down, with lips tightly clenched, recognising the first horrors of the terrible position in which she had placed herself.

To escape the stings to her vanity, which the gossip about Connoughmore would cause, she had wilfully done an act which would create endless scandal. She had left home, friends, and fortune, to link her fate with that of one whom

everybody regarded as a mere adventurer, and towards whom her own feelings were certainly doubtful. At one moment she liked him for his devotion ; at the next, she hated him for the temptation he had put in her way to flee from home.

During the night she had been at first amused by the discovery that she was watched ; next came the desire to outwit her guardians, and to make fun of Macbeth by frightening him with the mice. Then came the disappointment at the door, the irritation, and the dogged resolve to carry out her scheme in spite of every obstacle.

Now ?—she wished they had kept her under lock and key until the Major had left the district altogether. The poor vanity which had caused her to think with some pleasure of the excitement her elopement would cause, was quite extinguished, and she wished that she could cry.

The train stopped at another station, and the Major came to the window. He had taken off his travelling cap, and put down the collar of his coat.

She thought he was to enter the compartment, and shrank to the farthest corner. But he was not coming in, and he pretended not to observe her movement of repugnance.

“ We had better not travel together,” he said, “ they are sure to telegraph after us. Here is a rug and a hood which I bought in Glasgow yesterday afternoon. Try to make yourself comfortable. Can I get anything for you ? ”

“ Yes,” she answered suddenly, springing to the door, “ the first train back.”

He was taken by surprise, but he was cool as ever in an instant. Turning to a porter, he asked :

“ When is there a train for Airbridge ? ”

“ Two-thirty is the first, Sir.”

The man passed on, shouting the name of the station unintelligibly.

“ You hear ? By the time you got back everything would be known, and you would endure all the annoyance which an adventure like this is sure to entail—whether you succeed or fail in it. You will do better to go on—what do you fear ? ”

“ You.”

“ What !—already ? That is not kind. I waited for you all last night at the gate where I said you would find me ; I was

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at the station this morning an hour before you arrived, and I have tried to show you in every way possible that I wish to do whatever may be best for your happiness. Be a little merciful ; give me one kind word, one kind look at least."

"Seats, going on," shouted the guard.

"Come in."

He opened the door, and took a seat opposite to her, as the train began to move.

She remained silent for a little while her eyes fixed on the floor, hands clasped, and a troubled expression on her face. He watched her closely, but made no attempt to influence her reflections.

"This is madness, Major Kilgour, and we will both be sorry for it before many days have passed," she said, at length, without lifting her eyes.

"I shall not be sorry except when I see you vexed."

"I am vexed now—with myself and with you. I shall be a burden upon you, and the thought of that will make me hate you."

"Surely you have left all your courage at Ravelston ; I wish I knew how to charm it back to your breast. Take the position in its worst light : you cannot go home now ; the attempt we made yesterday and our journey to-day are sure to become known, and these circumstances, with the gossip which Con-noughmore's withdrawal will create, would render life at Ravelston unendurable for some time, at any rate. Suppose you go on : the sympathy of your friends will be with you—whatever they may say about me—and they will admire your spirit and your generosity—folly, they will call it, probably—in trusting your future to the care of a penniless soldier. Which position is the best ?"

"I am too far compromised to go back," she said, bitterly, and looked out of the window, as if she took an interest in the landscape of broad fields, deep dells, glittering streams, and blue mountains in the background, which they were flying past. To all the beauty spread out before her she was as one blind : she saw nothing.

There was silence ; and the Major was the first to break it.

"We are in an awkward predicament ; I have gained what I most desired, and am not satisfied because you seem to be

resolved not to make the best of your bargain, but the worst. There is one way by which you may save yourself yet from the future you now dread so much."

"What is that?"

"I have taken tickets only for Carlisle, counting upon having time enough there to obtain others for London. We shall stop there and telegraph for your father; he will come and take you away to some friend's place, where you can remain until this escapade is forgotten. Then you can go home, and—you will have no lack of lovers."

"Do you wish me to do that?" she asked, turning sharply to him.

He took her hand; she made an impulsive movement as if to withdraw it, and then remained passive.

"You are a strange creature, Bess" (the first time he had addressed her by that name, and yet it sounded as if familiar to his lips), "and you often puzzle me. What I wish is that you should become my wife. I shall not be a very bad husband, if you will only trust me—a little."

She looked at him steadily, and then:

"I will trust you."

His arm slipped round her waist; he kissed her, and she made no resistance.

"You have made me happy; I shall try to deserve your trust."

"We shall be miserable."

"Do you hate me so much?"

"No, there are times when I even fancy it would be possible to like you."

"Live in the fancy, and some day you may discover it is a reality."

He returned to the next compartment when the train stopped at the next station.

Bess was beginning to feel a kind of pleasure in the wild adventure she had entered upon. She discovered that she really admired the Major, and then she detected one of the first impulses towards affection; she found herself summing up all his good qualities, and forgetting the bad ones. He was courageous, he had talent—both assertions being sufficiently proved by his success in America, in Mexico, and in Spain. Then his

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devotion to her was beyond doubt, and it was the most powerful element in her favourable judgment of him.

After all, she had not made such a great mistake ; and for the first time in her life admitted that genius—the Major had become a genius by this time—was much greater than mere wealth. This was a most consolatory view of the case, a view which has comforted many a poor struggler in life, when without it he would have sunk in despair.

Then there was the fun of imagining the chagrin of Killievar, the distraction of Aunt Janet, the bewildered amazement of Coila, to say nothing of the excitement which her elopement would cause throughout the county. Everybody would make the event the special topic of conversation for the next month or more. What would they say ? The Carstairs would talk of her with pretended scorn ; the mother would shrug her shoulders and ask—"what could you expect ?" The Johnstones would be all astonishment, and would post round the county to spread the news. Miss Bethune would be in ecstasies of romantic admiration ; and Miss Susan Auldjo would grimly reprehend any conversation on such a dreadful subject as that of a run-away young lady, whilst she would be continually leading the way to it herself. It was such fun to imagine what the world would say of her conduct. But the fun somehow disappeared when she came to think of her father and Austin. The former would be very angry, and he would not forgive her for—say a year ; but Austin, what would he think ? He would regret his own stupidity, and vainly wish that he could redeem lost opportunities, or perhaps he would pity her and forget.

No, he could not forget ; he must know that he had some share in goading her on to this desperate step. She would not have his pity or any one's ; she would show them all that she did not require it, and that she had chosen well, if rashly.

The excitement, the novelty of her situation, the mingled hopes and fears which beset her, combined to sustain her throughout the day, in a constant whirl of thoughts, which excluded all sense of weariness.

The Major was attentive without being troublesome ; but

she required little service ; a cup of coffee was the only refreshment he could persuade her to take.

At Rugby he asked her to alight.

“I thought we were to go on to London ?”

“Not by this train ; we would find some of your friends at the station ready to receive us. We stay here to-night. I will engage rooms for you at the station hotel, and I will take up my quarters somewhere in the town.”

She yielded, but there was a strange chill at her heart as he assisted her out of the train. That old feeling of fear with which she had once or twice regarded this man affected her now more strangely than ever.



## CHAPTER XLIII.

## THE SURPRISE.

"I WON'T believe it. She is not an idiot—I won't believe it," cried Marjoribanks, excitedly.

He was in his private room at the works, and Killievar was his interlocutor.

"I have been at the station, Sir, and the porter tells me that Miss Marjoribanks got into the train for the South this forenoon. I have searched everywhere for her, and I am obliged to believe that the man is quite right, especially after yesterday."

"Why the devil did you not tell me sooner?" was the angry exclamation; "I would have stopped her. I would have tied her up with ropes; I would have—good Lord, can it be true?"

Killievar accepted the blame which was cast upon him for his silence with the calmest philosophy.

"I did not tell you sooner, because I hoped the affair would pass without harm to any person, Sir: but we need not talk about that; we must think what is to be done to save her."

Marjoribanks sat down, wiping the perspiration from his brow. He was bewildered and angry; he could have understood Coila doing such a foolish thing as running away with a man; but he could not understand Bess doing it; Bess, who was so shrewd and practical. Here was an end to all his schemes for her, and here was an end to all his indignation against Lord Connoughmore and the Earl. They would laugh at him, everybody would laugh at him, and all the success of his life would never redeem this fatal blunder of his daughter.

But he was a man of action. The first shock of surprise over, he applied himself instantly to the task of discovering and of saving Bess. He telegraphed to his London agent, Mr. Horrocks, who having been at Ravelston, knew Bess, and desired him to be at Euston Square in good time for the North train, and to take her by force, if necessary, to his house.

Then he arranged for a special train, which was ready for him in three hours. He started for London, Killievar accompanying him.

Telegraph and special train served him little ; the Major's cunning was more powerful than the millionaire's gold. Mr. Horrocks was at Euston Square with a couple of detectives ; but the lady did not appear, and they were unable to move another step without instructions.

Marjoribanks and the chief arrived at Horrock's house about two in the morning, and found that the pursuit was so far a failure. Nothing more could be done that night.

In the morning, Marjoribanks telegraphed to every station along the line, and learned that a young lady, answering to the description given, had lodged at the Station Hotel at Rugby, having arrived by the Northern express ; but she had left in the morning for London, the manager believed. To London, therefore, the search was confined.

The fugitives had really taken the train for Leicester ; there the Major purchased a cloak and a hat for Bess, and so, changed her appearance to some extent. The descriptions of her dress, given by her pursuers, became useless. Next they took train for London, and still travelling in different compartments, they arrived at St. Pancras about three in the afternoon. As had been arranged between them on the way, she walked from the station alone, and turned westward in Euston Road.

The Major followed, hailed a passing cab, and when it overtook Bess he bade the driver stop. She got in, the cabman had his instructions, and as soon as the door closed, he drove off at his horse's best pace.

For three days Marjoribanks used every means which money could command to trace the fugitives, and failed. On the fourth day he received a telegram from Ravelston ; it was a copy of one which had been addressed to him there by Mrs. Hector Kilgour.

" We were married to-day at Hammersmith. I will write and give particulars. I am sorry for the annoyance you have had. Forgive me."

" Uh-hum—she's cool enough about it, at any rate," he muttered, as he handed the paper to Killievar.

"She is your daughter, Sir, and she has in her the same spirit which made you a successful man. But then you had discretion as well as spirit. Steam is a very good thing; but it can explode and kill, as well as drive engines for the use of man."

With that sententious comment, Killievar returned the paper, and was not aware that his companion had been deaf to his remark.

Marjoribanks showed no grief, but much irritation; he seemed to regard the elopement of Bess in much the same light as if he had found himself overreached in some large transaction of business. He attended to his affairs as methodically as ever, and, being in London, he found many matters requiring his attention, as well as the pursuit of his daughter.

Killievar in his pompous way, but inspired as usual by thorough good nature, made several attempts to discover what his friend proposed to do when Bess was found; but he could not get the least idea of his intentions. On that head Marjoribanks would reveal nothing, although he was communicative on every other subject.

"I have been seeing the Earl," he said one afternoon, when he appeared to be in much better humour than he had shown since they had left Ravelston; "and find that he was mistaken about his son. The young fellow has somebody else in his eye, and that's how he came to break off with Bess. The old gentleman is a first-rate fellow; and do you think it would be worth my while to accept a knighthood?"

He asked the question, but it was clear that his mind was made up, and that he was inflated with joy at the mere prospect of such an honour being conferred upon him.

"*Sir* Robert Marjoribanks has a capital ring about it," he went on, "and it would look well in print. If that hussey had only been sensible enough she might have been one of the first ladies in the land—the mother of a race of noblemen, and I would have got some of them to bear my name. But that's neither here nor there, you know. I don't care for these empty dignities—it's the siller and the power to get it that shows the man. Still it's a thing to take into serious consideration."

But with all his affected indifference, he repeated to himself with much satisfaction the name with its prefix—*Sir* Robert

Marjoribanks. It did sound well, and he had done as much as most men to earn it. Besides, this honour would compensate him for the disappointment which Bess had caused. Then, how his neighbours at Ravelston would be spited; they would look upon him as the leading man of the district beyond dispute, as he was already in fact, although there were a few who had dared to keep aloof from him, and to whisper that he was "vulgar." That was a sore hair in his neck.

The letter came at last.

"MY DEAR PAPA,

"You cannot help being very angry with me at first, but I hope you will be able to pardon me by-and-by. If you only knew how unhappy I have been for some months past, you would not blame me too much. I did try—indeed I did try hard to do exactly as you wished, and if Lord Connoughmore had come to us as you had arranged, this would not have happened. But when he did not come, and when you talked about forcing him to come, I was frightened. I felt that I could never lift my head again for shame—the thing had been talked about and boasted about so much! I felt as if everybody knew of the slight cast on us, and as if everybody was looking at me and laughing at me. That day at the races was awful! Then the Major proposed. I liked him; I had nearly killed him, and owed him some reparation for that injury, and for all the sickness and pain he had suffered. By accepting him, I thought I could escape all the vexations I would have to endure as the jilted lady; I knew that you would be vexed, and that you would not consent to my marriage with the Major. Then I agreed to run away.

"I don't understand myself; I don't understand how things came about. I only remember feeling great delight in the idea of making fun of Aunt Janet and Killievar, who had discovered my purpose—just as I used to take a wicked pleasure in cheating my nurse into the belief that I had swallowed the medicine which I had thrown under the bed. I must be very wicked. I am very bad; but I did not mean to hurt anybody, and yet I have hurt you, dear papa. I was just selfish and blind in my wounded vanity, and in something else, which I may be able to explain some day. I feel as if all that has happened was a

dream, and I almost wish to wake in my bed at dear old Ravelston, and find that it really was a dream. But, of course, that is nonsense.

"We are married. Please don't blame the Major. The fault is all mine, and he is most kind and considerate. We are going to be very happy in this small place; we would be quite happy if you could only forgive us. I would like so much to see you—but that is impossible.

"Good-bye, my dear papa; I pray that you may never know the frenzy which has driven me to cause you so much distress. Whatever you say or do

"I shall be always,

"Your loving daughter,

"BESS."

He read the letter with a frown on his brow all the time, and Killievar, who was watching him, augured ill for the run-aways; but his voice was a little husky as he said:

"Come, we'll go and see the fools."

In half-an-hour the two men drove into a dingy street in Pimlico. The dark grey walls were speckled with windows, which were dim with dust, and behind them were blinds, which had not been cleaned for ages. Here and there the corner of a blind had broken from its fastening, and flopped to one side, where it remained, indicating the indifference or laziness of the inhabitants. The street was melancholy in its appearance of dead gentility, upon which dust and rust had accumulated.

Bess had given the address in her letter, not dreaming that Marjoribanks had followed her to London; and so the cab stopped at the door.

At a sign from his companion, who seemed disinclined to speak, Killievar inquired for Major Kilgour. Yes, he was at home; what names?

There was a long wait in the hall, and then the visitors were taken up to the drawing-room floor. Marjoribanks cast a quick look round the room. He saw threadbare furniture which had once been respectable; a poor attempt had been made to conceal the defects of a shaky-looking couch by spreading a shepherd's tartan plaid over it. A couple of Moorish swords

ornamented the wall above the couch, and folding doors communicated with another room. Dust everywhere, everything worn and faded ; the place was a fitting adjunct to the street in which it was situated ; and yet it was surrounded by many brilliant mansions.

The folding doors opened—the Major and Bess entered together. Both held themselves erect, and, although they were pale, there was a spirit of defiance in their eyes, as if they were prepared for the fiercest assault of passionate upbraiding. They halted, apparently waiting to learn on what terms they were to approach the enemy.

Marjoribanks regarded his son-in-law with a fierce scowl, and yet he was inwardly much agitated. He nodded to his daughter, and she instantly made a step forward, as if to embrace him, but he lifted his hand, warning her back, and she stood still.

Killievar gave his jacket a jerk downward, and looked fiercely at the Major, who smiled, as if welcoming him.

"I don't come here to make any fuss," said Marjoribanks, huskily ; "it's too late to do anything now, except to tell you that you are both d——d fools. If you, Sir, think that you are to get a fortune with my daughter, you are mistaken. As for you, Bess, I gave you credit for more sense than to do this. Look at the place you are in ; think of what you have lost."

"I shall try to be content, papa," she said mildly.

"You will have to try longer and harder than you have ever tried anything before, then. Where are the cheques I gave you when I expected a different match for you ?"

"They are here."

Although alarmed and surprised by his unexpected visit, she he had been so far composed as to guess that he would ask for the cheques. But she was not prepared for the manner in which he would deal with them. He filled up each for a hundred pounds.

"Now," he said, "I want to speak to my daughter a few minutes alone, and for the last time."

## CHAPTER XLIV.

## HARD TERMS.

WITH the air of a prince, conducting a distinguished guest into his palace, the Major opened the folding doors, and bowed to Killievar. The chief bent his head stiffly, and passed into the inner room. The Major followed, closing the doors after him.

It was a small room, rather dark, for the window looked out upon a dull grey wall. The space was limited, and a bed occupied the greater part of it, leaving barely a passage of four feet between the door and the window. In this apartment there was the same dingy appearance of faded gentility as in the other.

"You will excuse our accommodation," said the Major, carelessly, as he placed a chair for his guest; "London lodgings are very poor places, unless you can afford to pay liberally, or to live in the suburbs. We are a young couple, you see, and we cannot afford to do either."

Killievar walked to the window, turned his back deliberately on the Major, and looked out sternly at the grey wall, giving no attention to the remarks addressed to him, or to the seat offered him.

The Major yawned, rested his elbow on the top of a chest of drawers, and pretended to read a newspaper.

Bold and daring as Bess was, she trembled when left alone with her father. She had prepared herself to meet his wrath; she was not at all prepared to hear him speak and find him act with a kind of calm indifference, as if the business between them was one of no account to him. This conduct made her feel more keenly than any experience she had yet had, the blunder she had committed in leaving home. She seemed to be utterly abandoned by father and friends; she had regarded them lightly enough when she possessed them—now that they were lost, their value appeared to be inestimable.

He saw her tremble, he observed her frightened look, which was the more apparent on account of the effort she made to appear quite cool and satisfied. She was handsome, she was brave; what a success she might have attained in the world if she had been only a little less passionate, and a little more cautious!

He did not feel quite so resolute in the pursuance of the course he had marked down for himself as when he entered the house. That was only for an instant, however, and a slight modulation of his voice was all that indicated his brief hesitation.

"I am not going to scold you, Bess," he said; "that is no use now. You have vexed me, and disappointed me—but it's done. I am sorry, and you will be sorry before long, or I am much mistaken. You have made your bed, and you'll have to lie on it. I'm doubting you will find thorns enough in it to make you wish you were back at Ravelston."

"I have no wish to be in a place where everybody is laughing at me," she answered, but although she tried to look determined, there was a choking sensation in her throat.

"You would have got over that. However, you have decided not to try, and we need not argue which would have been best for you. Where are your marriage papers?"

She showed him the certificate, and he examined it as carefully as if it had been a doubtful bill of exchange.

"That's all right; and now that you are married to this—well, I'll say man, what has he got to support you with?"

"I do not know—I suppose he has an income of some sort."

"Uh-hum—you have bought a fine pig in a pock, on my soul, you have. . . . Here are those cheques, five hundred for you to begin upon. Besides that, I shall allow you two hundred a year——"

"Oh, papa."

She did feel sorry, and she would have liked so much to clasp his hand in token of her regret for the past, and of her gratitude for his consideration. Again he motioned her back, and she stood still, affection and penitence struggling for the mastery with wounded pride and that reckless spirit of resistance which had been one of the chief causes of her present predicament.



"It is more than you have any right to expect, and a heap more than you deserve. You think it will make you all right; it will keep you from starvation, that's all. The allowance will be paid into your own hand quarterly by my agent, Horrocks; but I will make no settlement on you, for I mean to keep the power of withdrawing from the arrangement whenever it may please me to do so. Besides, I desire to render it impossible for your husband to touch the money. He will not be satisfied with the arrangement, but you must be."

"I am satisfied."

Her head was drooping, and her hands were clasped; she thought that she was taking part in a dream—everything happened in such a different way from what she had expected.

"Your clothes will be sent to you as soon as I go home; and then all communication between us is closed. I shall neither see you nor receive messages from you as long as this man lives."

She lifted up her hands imploringly, but could not speak. The sentence of banishment had been pronounced so calmly that she knew no appeal could alter it, and she felt as one suddenly dropped in a desert—desolate, forsaken, and hopeless.

"If this man should die before us, then you may write to me. In any case, I shall see that you are preserved from absolute want, but that is all I will do. Now we can say good-bye."

Her body had been bent—she felt as if she had been crouching on the floor—and now she rose up, proud and self-reliant as pain and vanity could make her. The pain stung her so that she was inclined to think her father would have been kinder if he had turned his back upon her altogether, rather than come to her with this cold offer of charity. The vanity prompted her to make-believe that she was contented with the Major, and to stand by him to the last.

"I hope you will find that my husband is not so unworthy of respect as you think, and that you will—some day—alter your determination not to see us."

Marjoribanks knocked at the folding doors and said, loudly:  
"We are finished."

The Major and Killievar presently appeared.

"I have told my—your wife, Sir, what arrangements I have made for her benefit. It is unnecessary to tell you what I think of your conduct after all I have done for you. So there is nothing to say, except to wish you joy and good-day."

"Give me leave to tell you something, Mr. Marjoribanks, before you go," said Kilgour, quietly.

Marjoribanks and the chief halted.

"I once had an opportunity of acquainting you with my ambitious hopes," the Major proceeded, "and you counselled me to make sure of the 'siller.' I confess that you did not know I referred to your daughter; I confess, also, that I have been fool enough not to make sure of the siller. But I do not regret the blunder, and I shall do my utmost to make your daughter happy. That is all."

Marjoribanks was puzzled by this man, who spoke with as much assurance as if he had been the possessor of millions, and seemed to be asserting his superiority to the master of Ravelston, even in that poor lodging.

"I never doubted that you were a plucky fellow, Sir. I owed you something for what you did at the Bell Pit. I have paid you" (pointing to the cheques which lay on the table), "but you would have found it more to your advantage if you had left Bess alone. I am glad you are both so well pleased with your bargain."

He walked out of the room, and whilst the Major rang for the servant to see the visitors out, Killievar said to Bess:

"You can tell me if you ever need a friend."

He followed Marjoribanks, and as the two stepped into the cab which was waiting, he observed:

"They are a very well-matched couple, Sir; and if he had only been a man of family, he would have been a very good son-in-law without a penny. They stood their ground like one man, and it was a brave sight."

This commendation of the chief was not without effect upon Marjoribanks, for he was as readily influenced by anything in the guise of admiration as the former was by any sign of courage.

The Major had gone to the window to observe the departure of the visitors, and now he turned to his wife. She was

standing, with eyes fixed vacantly on the door, in the same position as when her father had gone out.

There was a brief expression of uneasiness on the husband's face, and then, gaily :

"The meeting passed off much more quietly than I expected. That is the way with all the ills of life ; the reality is much less troublesome than our anticipations of it."

She did not move or reply.

"I am afraid it has upset you, though," he said, taking her hand.

She gave him a quick, distressed glance, shuddered, and seemed to shrink away from him.

"Bess ! . . . You are not to turn away from me, surely. You are no longer the heiress of a millionaire ; you no longer have all the male world to coquette with if you please. You are the wife of a poor soldier of fortune. Without him, you stand quite alone and friendless, as it seems. With him you shall have friends—brave, though they be poor, and one devoted lover as long as he lives."

There was a frank manliness in words and bearing which redeemed much of whatever wrong he had done in tempting her to leave home.

She was quite cowed now, and she looked at him with strangely frightened eyes as she spoke :

"Did you hear ?"

"Yes, almost every word. He has said good-bye, and we must say good-bye to your fortune."

She placed her hands almost timidly on his shoulders.

"And will you pity me ?—will you protect me ?—will you be true to me ? I have nobody in the world now to care for me but you ; and I gave up all for you."

He drew her close to his breast, and kissed her. The wild, reckless lady of Ravelston was trembling like a snared bird in the hands of its captor.

"I love you," was all he said.

## CHAPTER XLV.

"THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY SEEM."

THE elopement of Bess was more startling to Coila than to any one else. Whilst others were gloating over the report of the "romantic event," as it was called, many unconsciously adding details evolved from their own imaginations, which speedily became part of the facts of the story, Coila was busy trying to discover *why* Bess had acted so strangely.

She could not believe that she had misinterpreted the feelings of her cousin towards Austin, in spite of the assurance of indifference Bess had given to her in words, and proved by her conduct. Then came the sickening dread that she had been the cause of the misfortune; and yet, mingled with the dread there was a tremulous sense of joy, which she felt to be wrong and wicked—for it was like rejoicing in the death of a friend because it brought her nearer to a fortune. The source of this mixed sentiment was the suspicion that the desperate step Bess had taken was to be explained by the fact that she had found it impossible to win Austin.

All the anger Coila had experienced was now extinguished; she was only conscious of sincere pity for the runaway, and of bitter remorse for any share she might have had in driving her to this last resource. That was why she felt guilty in finding anything like pleasure to herself in the proof which the event afforded, either of Bess's disregard for Austin, or of his fidelity to some one else.

She was restless and unhappy during the few days of uncertainty before the telegram arrived. Miss Janet was in utter dismay, losing everything, arranging her wig in every position except the right one, and exclaiming against her own weakness in yielding to the persuasion of Killievar not to tell her brother what they had discovered.

When definite tidings at length reached them, Coila visited Mrs. Murray. She was going to the Miners' Row, at any rate,

to convey to the invalids various little comforts, prepared for them by her own hand. It was not much out of the way to go round by Mrs. Murray's house.

She would have liked to cheat herself into the idea that she was only desirous of paying her respects to the lady; but she knew quite well that her real object was to learn in what manner Austin took the news of the elopement and the marriage of Bess.

Mrs. Murray received her in the usual quiet manner, but there was a faint sign of stiffness, which the mother could not overcome, feeling that this girl had deprived her son of a fortune and a wife, who would have made his life a success.

"I hope we have heard the worst of it," she said, when Coila had given her the latest news; "but a man like this Major is more likely to guide her into shipwreck of her life than into any safe harbour. Let us hope for the best—only, she would have been wise to have settled at home."

She was thinking of her son, and sighed, remembering how easily he might have gained the prize. She never doubted that it was his obstinacy which had driven the lady into the arms of another.

"Where is my hat?" said a voice in the hall, which Coila recognised as Austin's.

The door opened, and he was about to enter the room when he observed the visitor and paused. Recovering himself, he advanced and shook hands.

"How do you do, Miss Gardyne? It is an unexpected pleasure to see you here."

"I was just going over to—to the works," she stammered, "and thought I would call."

"I am sure my mother is pleased to see you."

He spoke with no more politeness or feeling than he would have shown to any ordinary visitor. Mrs. Murray was pleased.

"I am going now. Good-bye. I am glad to have seen you."

She was fluttered, and found refuge in the most conventional phrases.

"Going? You are driving, I suppose," he said, looking at his watch. "My time is up, and I would be glad if you would take me with you."

"Certainly."

Mrs. Murray was dissatisfied.

As for him, he only wished to show how entirely he had mastered all sentiment in regard to Coila. She was nothing more to him than any other lady who happened to call; not nearly so interesting as if she had been a patient, suffering from chilblains or toothache, or any other inconsiderable malady.

He would drive with her to the Miners' Row, and let her see how entirely he was changed towards her. He would tell her of his improving prospects, and of the probability that some day—after he had settled accounts with Marjoribanks—he would either marry and settle down there, or sell the practice, and be off to some more genial country. Oh, he was quite safe, because he was so indifferent. The old folly had been thrust aside, because it was folly, and it affected him no more. He was now a plain, practical man, putting his shoulder steadily to the wheel of fortune to discharge what he regarded as a duty to his father first, and, next, to earn a decent competence for his mother and himself. Love and all that sort of nonsense had nothing to do with his busy life—indeed, he had not time for it, even if he had retained the inclination, which, of course he had not. He had given up such frivolities from the moment he found himself deceived by Coila.

He handed her into the carriage, and took his seat opposite with as much ease as if there had never been anything between them. He nodded to his mother, who was watching from the window, as they drove away. The nod and the accompanying smile reassured her, although that discreet lady began to speculate upon the possibility of Coila's fortune being materially increased by the mistake Bess had made, and to wonder whether or not it would be well for her son to renew his attentions to the millionaire's niece, now that the daughter was out of the question.

When the carriage was fairly off, and the two were alone in the small space of the vehicle, Coila discovered unusual interest in the opposite side of the street, her hand resting carelessly in one of the loops beside the window.

Austin assumed all the gravity of a family physician, and, affecting to think himself alone, began to study his visiting note-book.

But his eyes wandered over the top of the book to her pro-

file, and rested there, until some movement on her part made them drop to the page, as if his whole mind were devoted to its contents.

She looked hard at the passing objects ; she was pained by his busy indifference ; ready to cry on account of it, and yet eager to show that she, too, was indifferent.

The silence became torture to both. He made an effort to break the spell.

"The weather is very changeable at present," was his brilliant observation.

"Most disagreeable," was the no less brilliant reply, which bore more than one interpretation ; but she was innocent of any intention to be satirical.

She continued her observations from the window ; he resumed the study of his note-book, making pencil marks here and there, to show that he really knew what he was about.

"It must be a great relief to you to know where your cousin is settled," he said, by and by.

"Yes, we were very anxious about her."

Repetition of the former occupations. Then, as if a brilliant idea had struck him :

"I hope you are quite well, Miss Gardyne."

"Quite well, thank you."

Silence again. Conversation seemed to be impossible, and yet they could not reconcile themselves to silence. Each felt that it was necessary to speak, and yet was unable to discover any topic of mutual interest. He felt worried, and she felt worried by the sense of incapacity to say anything interesting, whilst the breast of each was full of tender and loving words, that would have made the other happy.

"I hope your patients are getting on satisfactorily," she said, without looking at him.

"The poor fellows are doing as well as could be expected ; but I am afraid we will lose three of them,"

"That is awful !—and you speak of it quite calmly."

"We are obliged to get used to calamity in our profession," he said, quietly, but there was the suggestion of personal suffering in what followed. "If we were to allow our feelings to overcome us in every trouble we have to witness, we would be incapable of giving any real assistance. We get used to the sight

of suffering, and, whilst we gain nerve to do the best that can be done to relieve it, we do not lose our appreciation of the agony our patients bear, although for the sake of others we control our sentiments."

"And *can* people control their sentiments ?"

"Oh, yes; habit—practice—necessity—these are wonderful schoolmasters, and imbue us with more enduring lessons than all the books in the world. I was frightened nearly out of my wits at sight of the first patient who died under my hands; yet here I am, accepting the conditions of nature humbly, and owning myself a poor servant, willing enough to do my best to assist nature, but knowing that I cannot alter its course. I thought that love was the first necessity of life; yet here I am, finding in useful work, contentment and happiness. I have even advanced so far as to believe that the humour, or passion, which we call love, is a humbug—a will-o'-the-wisp, which misleads and tantalises unformed or idle minds. We get on much better without it."

"How you must have suffered!" she said, softly, still without looking round.

"Say, rather, how I must have learned. You are not to think me a cynic, or that the world is all bitterness to me. On the contrary the world is very beautiful; I find new blessings every day; I believe in friendship, which supplies us with the most helpful sympathy. But the love which concentrates all its happiness in one frail human creature, I do not believe in, because it is folly, and productive of nothing but misery in the end. We risk too much when we place all our hopes in one basket."

He had become earnest, and there was an undercurrent of pain and bitterness flashing through the film of philosophic coolness with which he spoke.

She knew that he was upbraiding her, and felt that she deserved it. Somehow she experienced a kind of pleasure in discovering this curious indication of how much he cared for her. What a future he had sacrificed for her sake. How she wished that she could turn to him and explain everything; but although she had resolved in a moment of vexation to do so she found herself, now that the opportunity offered, utterly unequal to the task.



"It must be very agreeable to regulate one's life so philosophically as you do," she said, lifting up a little basket containing flowers she was taking to the invalids.

"Oh, exceedingly agreeable," he answered, wondering how it could be that in such a short time she could become so changed in heart and manner.

But her heart was aching and trembling—aching because he seemed determined to expel love from his breast; trembling because there were so many signs that he had not yet succeeded. He would forgive her cruelty if he could only know why she had been cruel to him and to herself; but then she *could* not tell him, and nobody else would.

Another painful silence, during which she buried herself unnecessarily in re-arranging the bouquets in the basket, and he sat watching her. They were equally conscious of stupidity, and yet neither could overcome the foolish pride which kept them apart.

"Are you fond of flowers?" she asked, evidently out of the mere desire to say something.

"At times, very fond of them. I have a blue-bell which was given to me years ago in the glen up there by a very dear friend; and whenever I look at it the bright sunshine of the happy days we spent together seems to penetrate my room, although mist and smoke may be dark outside."

"It must be withered now."

"Everything withers—hopes as well as flowers."

"Will you put this beside it for old times' sake?"

She handed him a tiny chrysanthemum.

"A winter flower—thank you; it will remind me that the summer in which the blue-bell was plucked is gone for ever."

They were on the brink of pleasant memories, which might have led to an explanation. The carriage stopped; half-a-dozen miners' wives were staring in to see who had arrived.

He placed the flower in his pocket-book carelessly—as if to oblige her rather than to please himself. Then he assisted her out, and offered to escort her to his various patients. That was just the favour she would have liked to ask.

They passed on together, the footman following with parcels of jellies, wines, and other comforts.

They entered the cots of the invalids, and of the sorrowing

widows. She admired his skill in re-assuring the patients, and was delighted by their manifestation of confidence in him. He admired the tact and gentleness with which she spoke to the men and women, and was delighted by the happy influence which her sympathy seemed to exercise.

When it was over they said good-bye, and they pretended to themselves to be quite proud of the calmness and simple friendliness with which they had been able to meet.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

## MAKING THE BEST OF IT.

**M**RS. HECTOR KILGOUR was not fit to be the wife of a struggling man. As the partner of one in position, and with sufficient wealth at her command, she would have done credit to her husband, and helped him forward to new honours.

But as the wife of one who had everything to win, and only wit and courage to gain his object with, she was wanting in the chief qualities which would have rendered her helpful to him and happy in herself—namely, hope and faith in the man.

Bess was too changeable in mind and heart to be the fitting companion for one who required steady sympathy to support him in his fight with the world. She took her humour too much from surrounding circumstances—if the world doubted, she would doubt. She could not believe in the man unless others believed in him; and that was just what he needed most—that she should show confidence in him and in his future, when every body else regarded his career as hopeless.

She made an honest effort to do her best, and the Major accepted the little she could do with generous exaggeration of its value. He knew that it was a sad drop for her from the opulence of Ravelston to the poverty of a shabby-genteel lodging in Pimlico; from entire ignorance of the importance of money in the conduct of life, to the bitter dread that every knock at the door brought a bill which could not be paid.

They were blithe enough whilst the sum given by her father lasted. The Major took her about to all the gaieties of the town; then to Cheltenham, to Brighton, and to every fashionable resort. The excitement of her situation, and the novelty of all she saw contented her for the time.

He presented her to many friends; ladies in faded finery; gentlemen with all the airs of princes, and with very hungry faces. Counts and countesses, generals, colonels, and majors

seemed to be very numerous in the circle of his acquaintances. All spoke of a good time coming, when the "Restoration" should take place; but all seemed to suffer much privation in the meanwhile, although they bore it with much gaiety of heart. One set belonged to Spain, the other to France, and the latter seemed to be much the more prosperous of her husband's friends.

She was interested, amused, and sometimes puzzled; for there were frequent mysterious meetings, and once or twice the Major hinted that it might be necessary to leave her suddenly. He awaited instructions from Don Carlos, and they might arrive at any moment. The novelty had not quite worn off when she began to realize that she was moving in a society of theatrical nobility—the decorations and jewels appeared to her like those of the players in daylight—mere tinsel and paste. She felt as if she had become the associate of smugglers, or worse.

She held her tongue, and tried to shut her eyes to the equivocal character of the society to which she was introduced.

Then came the first difficulties about money; a butcher demanded payment of his account, and the Major owned his inability to satisfy the demand.

Bess, in agony, gave the landlady a diamond ring, and the butcher was pacified; but she was as one roused from a dream of peace to the full horrors of a position of degrading shifts, and the pitiful humiliations of the necessities of daily life. It was a revelation to her, so strange and bewildering, that at first she did not know how to act.

The Major was always cheerful, always hopeful. He saw her distress and tried to comfort her.

"We shall be all right by-and-by; only be patient," he said.

She did her best to be patient.

She had no fault to find with him, except his poverty, and she saw that he was doing his best to make her life a merry one.

Occasionally he received invitations into more established society than that to which he had at first conducted her. At an evening reception of the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, a quiet looking-gentleman was pointed out to her as Lord

Connoughmore. Crowded as the place was, and uncomfortable as the arrangements appeared to be she was able to see that much attention was paid to his lordship ; that he was a man with a pleasant, kindly face, and with a distinguished bearing. Anywhere he would have been recognised as one superior to the mass of men.

There was something bitter in her heart as she reflected upon the future which she might have enjoyed with this man, and upon the future which, in her wilful passion, she had prepared for herself.

She shut her eyes, trying to exclude all speculations of what might have been. Her lips closed tightly, and she pledged herself to think only of her position as it was. She would strive to make the best of it ; she would strive to help her husband to fame and fortune.

It was a generous resolution ; and when she formed it, Bess really believed that she was capable of carrying it out. Many men had won high position and fortune by the exercise of courage and wit. Why should not the Major do likewise ? He had accomplished a great deal already ; and, with her to spur him forward, what might he not achieve in the future ?

It was her duty to help him, and her triumph would be equal to his when success crowned their efforts. Then, too, vanity whispered, those who condemn you now will recant, and, to hide their own confusion, they will sing your praises all the more loudly. They will admire your courage in daring poverty ; they will delight in your romantic marriage, and will extol the disinterested affection of the millionaire's daughter !

That last suggestion was like a drop of acid in the imaginary cup of triumph ; for she knew that it was not affection which tempted her to run away from home. She liked the Major ; she felt that she owed him reparation for the mischief she had wrought him ; but she would never have eloped with him if she had not been stung to frenzy by the thoughtless words of county gossip, and by her horror of the sneers and laughter which would assail her when it became known that "his lordship" had forsaken her.

She did not blame her father very much, but sometimes she could not help thinking that if he had not been so eager to

announce the "splendid match," she would have been still at Ravelston. However, there *was* some satisfaction in imagining that the people now would regard her flight as a protest against a marriage with a man for whom she cared nothing, in spite of his title.

Then came the remembrance of Connoughmore as she had seen him—a noble, handsome man, to whom every one paid the respect due to talent as well as to birth ; then she glanced round the dingy room in which she was doomed to live, and shuddered.

She had built such a brilliant palace in air whenever she had thought of marriage, and the palace was transformed into a hovel, the princely husband into a needy adventurer !

It was hard to bear, all the harder since she believed that the palace and the prince had been almost within her reach ; a little patience and they would have been attained.

She found no comfort whatever in knowing that it was all her own fault ; the knowledge only made her feel the more bitter when these thoughts occurred to her. She did strive to hold fast to her good resolutions ; and she held to them longer than she had ever done to any previous resolutions.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

## REPENTING AT LEISURE.

**B**UT to one brought up as Bess had been it was not easy to adopt the habits of an entirely new world and a new system. The people were strange, and their ways were strange; they talked so grandly of Empires, Republics, and Communes, that every man seemed to hold the fate of a nation in his hand, and every lady seemed to be conscious of the power of directing what that fate was to be. All this contrasted so oddly with the present condition of the people that, after the first bewilderment of novelty, she began to wonder whether or not they were sane. The men were all heroes; the women all heroines. Bess was unfortunate in this:—she could not recognise a hero in a threadbare coat, or a heroine in faded silk.

“Your friends weary me,” she said at length, in one of the slight bursts of impatience which began to mark the failure of her good resolutions. “I know nothing about politics, and they talk of nothing else. What are they?”

“Gamblers like myself,” answered the Major, looking up from his newspaper.

They had advanced so far in the amenities of married life that he studied the papers and she read a novel when they were alone.

“Gamblers?”

“Yes, all dependent on the turn of the political wheel of fortune. Some stake their future upon red, others upon black, and it is surprising how often each has just missed success. But their turn may come, and although they weary you, at least you can admire the enthusiasm which enables them to endure defeat and exile hopefully.”

“It seems a waste of talent to be waiting instead of working.”

“Ah, but our friends imagine they are working, and indeed

they do serve a purpose, sometimes a high one. Devotion of any kind is always admirable, however misdirected."

"And what are your friends devoted to ?"

"Ideas."

"They do not seem to turn them to much practical account. Papa used to say that ideas which could not be worked were like the shaft of a barren pit—useless holes, in which people may break their necks, but never can find any profit."

"You are a merciless critic," he rejoined laughing; "but I am afraid our friends are too enthusiastic to learn wisdom even from such a charming sage as my wife."

From that day, however, he contrived to reduce the number of his acquaintances' visits.

He took her to the Park, and they sauntered along by the side of the Lady's Mile. She watched the carriages, discovered several friends—or, rather, people who had enjoyed the hospitalities of Ravelston—and was surprised that none of them recognised her. She paid particular attention to the lady equestrians. At length :

"I would so like to be in there, with a good horse; and I might have been if—"

She did not finish the sentence, and the Major pretended not to have heard the words.

On the following afternoon, the Major entered the room, dressed with special care, and a flower in his buttonhole.

"Come, get ready, Bess, we are going for a ride to-day. It will do you good."

He was as gay as if he had recently become heir to a fortune.

"Going to ride! where are the horses?"

"At the door."

She looked out, and saw two passable hacks waiting, in charge of a groom. The idea was so delightful to her that she did not even pause to inquire how he had managed to hire the horses. She pranced into the bed room—her clothes had been sent to her from Ravelston soon after her father's visit—and she had her riding habit on in a few minutes. She had learned to dispense with the assistance of a lady's maid, and prided herself upon the sacrifice.

She became as gay as her husband under the influence of the unexpected pleasure. He conducted her down the stairs,



assisted her to mount, and they were off to the Row. She rode gracefully, and was conscious of being observed; the pretty face, flushed by the exercise, the dark bright eyes sparkling with pleasure, and the erect, perfect form were worthy of observation. Several people who had not seen or known her the day before recognised her now; and she was full of triumph.

What joy there was in the world for her; although the atmosphere was cold and dull, sunshine could not have made her content greater. The carriage of the Princess of Wales drove by, and the calm, intellectual beauty of the noble lady added new charms to the scene in the eyes of Bess. She felt herself part of the distinguished pageant which the groups of promenaders watched so attentively, and was happy.

"What o'clock is it?" she asked, like a child anticipating and dreading the end of a holiday.

"About six," replied the Major, promptly.

"I suppose we will have to go soon."

"We can take twenty minutes yet."

They rode from one end to the other of the course, and as the carriages were rapidly disappearing, they had more space for a gallop than in the earlier part of the afternoon.

The Major kept by her side, quiet and anxious that she should derive every possible enjoyment from the ride. He left it to her to say when they should leave; and at length, seeing that the Row was about to be deserted, she signified her desire to move homeward. The buoyancy which had distinguished her manner during the ride became subdued as she turned her back upon the Park. She was sorry to leave the place, but she said to him gratefully:

"Thank you, Hector, I have been very happy during the last hour."

"I am glad of that."

There was a strange note in his voice, but it did not strike her then. He had half hoped that she would find how very small was the gratification to be found in parading up and down a course for the amusement of a crowd, and he was disappointed.

Home, the horses taken away, and they were in their own rooms. She felt chilled; the contrast was too great between the brilliance of the scene in which she had been taking part, between all the signs of luxury, and the present proofs of what

was to her poverty. She again asked the time to know how long she had to change her dress before dinner.

He looked at the gilt clock on the mantel-piece, above which was a cherub, marked with black lines and patches. The hands had stopped.

"Look at your watch," she said ; "I forgot to wind up mine to-day."

"I—have left mine to be cleaned."

She detected something like hesitation in his manner, and for the first time discovered that his chain was not hanging on his vest as usual. She understood it all ; his watch had paid for the indulgence of that day.

It was horrible and degrading in the extreme. She felt as if choking with shame and vexation that he should have been driven to this extremity to gratify her whim. Then she recognised his generosity, and, with the quick change of humour which characterised her, she went over to him, placing her hand on his arm affectionately.

"Poor Hector!—you have made a bad bargain after all."

"I thought you were going to scold me," he answered, pretending to recover from a great fright ; "and you are such a tremendous creature when in a passion!"

"You have vexed me."

"And I intended to please you!"

"So, you have done that, too, but do not attempt it in the same way again."

"I can promise that easily enough. But there, Bess, only think of the pleasure I have felt to-day in seeing the colour return to your cheeks, in seeing your eyes sparkle as they used to do in the excitement of a gallop, and in hearing you laugh in the untroubled way which made music at Ravelston. We shall be in luck soon. I have heard to-day that I am likely to be called for within a few weeks ; and then, my only regret will be that I must part from you.

"I begin to think I am falling in love with you."

"Time to begin, Bess ; we have been married about three months, and it is now or never."

"Will you really be sorry to go away from me ?"

"Yes, and proud, too, because I shall go in the hope of re-

turning with laurels to share with you. Or, I may render you the highest service in my power by making you a widow."

"That would be *so* kind of you."

A heavy-eyed, slattern of a girl entered to lay the cloth for dinner.

The Major whistled and looked at the evening paper. Bess retired. She wrote a letter to her father that evening asking for help; it was after a bitter struggle with her pride that she accomplished the task. When it was done she felt more at ease, and hopeful that in a few days she would be able to surprise her husband with agreeable tidings. The incident of the watch more than anything else had made her feel their poverty.

The letter remained unanswered.

Then she began to fret, to note the absolute silence which had been preserved towards her by all the Ravelston people, and to murmur to herself complaints of the unkindness of Coila and of Miss Janet. She would have been glad to have had a few lines even from Mary Beith to tell her what was being said and done "at home"—for she still thought of Ravelston as home.

Her patience was soon exhausted, the more readily so because the Major found it necessary to absent himself for hours during the day, and sometimes for hours at night. She wrote to Mary Beith, and received no answer.

That was the most humiliating blow of all; she had been really kind to the girl in many ways, and fancied she had some claim to her gratitude; her silence at such a time as this appeared to be not only ungrateful but impertinent beyond endurance.

Bess was in a rage, and was all the more wrathful because she knew that her rage was vain and ridiculous, being powerless.

She called upon her father's agent. He could give her no information as to what was passing "at home;" except mere business communications from her father's secretary, he knew nothing of the family proceedings. She did not ask for assistance, but he as gently as possible indicated to her that he could give her none except from his own pocket, and that of course she could not receive.

All this forced upon her the cruel feeling of desolation. The

associations to which we have been accustomed from childhood are never so precious to us as when we feel that we have lost them; their importance to our existence then springs into prominence, and we regret the many neglected opportunities of acknowledging it by fitting returns of kindness.

She was miserable under this feeling of desertion; the busy atmosphere of the great town intensified her sense of desolation; and yet throughout this period she appeared to her husband more contented with her fate than she had been before.

At length came two letters from Ravelston, and she snatched them up eagerly. Both were addressed in Coila's handwriting; on the flap of one of them was written in large text hand—

“No. 1.”

She opened it and read:

“MY DEAR BESS,

“I do pray that you will open this letter first. The few lines in the other envelope were written in uncle's presence and to his dictation. He would not allow me to say one kind word to soften the blow, which I am afraid this will be to you; he compelled me to write just what he said; and so I hurried up here to write something which might prepare you for the unpleasant news, and show you that my silence is not a sign of unkindness.

“Uncle is very angry, and told us that if we would write to you he would withdraw from you the small income he has allowed you. So we dare not write for fear of harming you, and we have been very much distressed about you not knowing how you were living. But I cannot help taking the risk of whatever may happen because of sending you this note. Oh, my dear Bess, I pray God to bless you and make you happy, and to help you to bear this sorrow bravely and nobly. I wish I could say something that would help you or comfort you; but I am bewildered and stupid, and scarcely know what I am writing. My loving sympathy is yours.

“I must close now, for there is Miller for the letters, and I must not let the other go without this. Good-bye, and trust me, ever your affectionate

“COILA.”

Bess was at first startled and then amused by the excitement in which the letter was evidently written; presently its earnestness became impressive as she read it a third time.

Her eyes rested on the other letter which was still lying on the table unopened. She picked it up, held it between finger and thumb, wondering dreamily what great terror this tiny envelope contained; what new misfortune could it bring? Coila's warning made her hesitate to open it, although she was curious to learn its contents.

The Major entered with a light step, and smiling as if he had good news to communicate. He halted when he saw the letters and the expression of her face.

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## CHAPTER XLVIII.

## THE GATEKEEPER'S SON.

“**Y**OU are back sooner than you expected,” she said, abstractedly.

“Yes ; I shall not require to start my grand company for the discovery of diamonds in the Sahara Desert, although I am not sure but it would have been the more profitable business. However —”

She was not listening to him, and he paused.

“Any letters for me ?”

“No, but here is such a funny one from Coila.”

She flung it to him and he read it hastily.

“Well, why do you not open the other letter ; it will explain her anxiety.”

“I don't know. She tells me it is very disagreeable ; why should I open it at all ? Why not burn it ?—that would delay the evil tidings, whatever they may be.”

“And keep you in a fever of curiosity until you had discovered in some other way what it was all about.”

“I think not ; since we know it is something to vex us, I would congratulate myself upon having escaped the calamity. I will burn it.”

She stepped to the fire.

“You will make a mistake, Bess, if you do ; it is a thousand times better to know the worst at once than to live in the torture of anticipation. I suppose Marjoribanks has for some reason decided to stop your allowance ; and that is a misfortune at present ; a year hence, I do not think it would have mattered.”

She slowly opened the envelope, as if still undecided ; slowly unfolded the paper and read :—

“The name of the man you have married is not Kilgour, but Macbeth. He is the son of my gatekeeper.

“ROBERT MARJORIBANKS.”

The words seemed to dance a reel before her eyes, and became transposed in the most extraordinary fashion. But whilst her eyes were thus dazed she seemed to hear her father's voice, harsh and deliberate, announcing the strange discovery that she had married his gatekeeper's son. The contempt and merciless repudiation of all possibility of reconciliation which the brief message conveyed seemed to fill the atmosphere with bewildering sounds. She was stunned by the blow, and, shrank downward as if she would hide herself in the earth from the humiliation of her position.

"What is it, Bess,"

That was a voice sounding from afar off, but coming nearer and growing louder with every repetition of the question, until at length it was like thunder in her ear as it said—

"Let me see the letter."

"No, no," she cried, springing back, and crushing the paper in her hand; "why should you see it? It is a foolish calumny, a cruel effort to vex me, and make me unhappy; it is a falsehood, a base, wicked falsehood, and you ought to have allowed me to burn this hateful paper without looking at it?"

Her eyes were still dazed; she saw him standing near as if he were a shadow, and the room seemed to be filled with mist. The din of those wild sounds inside her head still stupified her; it was like a peal of cracked bells, and yet they seemed to shriek out notes which formed themselves into the words—"my gatekeeper's son"—"my gatekeeper's son."

"Can I help you to prove the truth or falsehood of what has upset you so much?"

A sudden calm, the fearful clang of bells ceased. She was able to see his face clearly. He was quite unsuspecting of any fault on his part and was only anxious on her account.

"Perhaps it is not true—then you can help me; and it is as well that you should know the shame which we have left at Ravelston. There—read."

His hands trembled a little and the paper rustled as he read; his cheek became white, and his brow darkened. He lifted his eyes and met hers glaring upon him in such wild agony of suspense—as if life or death depended upon his answer—that he started like one discovered in the perpetration of a crime.

"Well, what about this?" he said.

His features and voice seemed to become hard and unsympathetic as he spoke.

"Is it—is it true?"

A pause; they were facing each other, and despite the continual rattle of cabs outside, and the hum of busy life in the atmosphere, there appeared to be a breathless stillness in the room. At length, very quietly came the answer:

"Yes, it is true."

"True?—then you deceived me?"

"No, I told you that my parents were poor, that I rose from the ranks, and even gave you some idea of my history."

"You made me believe that you were—a gentleman."

"I still lay claim to that title, which belongs to every man who is honest, neither lies to his fellows nor tries to swindle them."

"Lies?—is not your whole conduct a lie? Did you not come amongst us as a man of position—as our equal?"

"I have earned some sort of a position, and am proud of it. As to equality, that entirely depends upon what you mean by it. If you mean that I led you to believe that I was as rich as your father, then I have wronged you; but I never pretended to such equality as that."

"Is not your name a lie?"

He winced; that shaft struck deep.

"Yes, if you choose to think so; but I have worked long enough and hard enough as Hector Kilgour to think that I have a right to that name."

"Oh, man, can you answer me so flippantly and forget the degradation you have brought upon me? You know that you promised me position, that you held out the prospect of a glorious future; honour, respect, distinction were to be mine if I became your wife; and now it all descends into my being the wife of the son of my father's gatekeeper. Did you never think of what that discovery would be to me? Did you never imagine the shame and humiliation which I would suffer when I learned the truth? You have been cruel, false, and base,"

She spoke fiercely, wildly; he listened with a pitying calmness, which distracted her.

"I thought of all that, and yet I dared to hope that you might be happy with me."



"Happy!—oh, I needed Coila's prayer more than I fancied God help me!"

She passed into the bedroom, closing the folding doors behind her.

The Major sat down by the fire, took up the poker, and swung it like a pendulum between his legs, whilst his eyes were fixed upon the red embers, seeing strange shapes and fancies in the changing films.

Hours passed; at first he heard her moving about the room agitatedly. What was she doing? was she going to leave him? What a pity the bubble had burst at this moment, just as she was beginning to like him. Droll thing that a man is never loved for his own self. But always for some outside quality, in the creation of which he has no merit.

By and by the rapid movement of her feet ceased. Then he heard smothered sobs, and he knew that she was lying across the bed, her face buried in the coverings, crying her heart out.

"Poor thing, poor thing!" he muttered, keeping time to the swinging of the poker; "what a d--d rascal as well as fool I was to tempt her away from home. Poor thing, poor thing!"

The place was darkening, but a narrow golden bar shot across the room, dropping at the foot of the folding doors which separated the husband and wife.

"A fairy's wand," said the Major to the sunbeam, "and it would work a miracle, indeed, if it could unite us."

He put out his hand, crossing the golden bar, but the beams stole through his fingers.

Absolute silence in the other room; the sunbeam slowly fading away. By and by a step on the floor, which creaked the intimation that Bess was moving. Then, a hand on the door, and it opened stealthily; a dim twilight in the room; the fire flickering, and the Major's eyes fixed upon it in deep abstraction; the poker still dangling between his fingers, but scarcely moving now.

A light hand rested on his shoulder, he started from his waking dream and looked up.

Bess was standing beside him, her face white and cold, eyes swollen, and the lids red.

"I beg your pardon."

She uttered the words like a child repeating a phrase which

has been diligently drummed into its head ; she had evidently been trying hard to school her tongue into the expression of this apology.

But, mechanically, as the words were spoken, they thrilled him with a mingled sensation of pleasure and pain. He got up, taking her hands in his, and turning her face towards the window, so that what light there was might fall upon it. She half turned her head, as if she could not bear the light.

“ You have no need to say that, Bess ; I am the offender.”

“ I am sorry for having said such—such things to you. Forgive me.”

“ You make me feel as if I deserved all your reproaches ; but you also bring back hope to me. When you left me, I thought there was no future for us ; now I feel that there may be one of which even you shall be proud.”

“ I am ready to accept the condition which I have chosen. You shall hear no more complaints from me. I will do my best to be a true wife to you. I only beg that you will take me abroad somewhere, so that in a new place I may forget all those vain dreams, the remembrance of which made me feel so mad just now.”

“ I have something to tell you,” he replied, and there was earnestness as well as regret in his tone. “ You have been struggling with yourself, and for the time you have conquered. I am to blame for having rendered such a struggle necessary, but you shall have no need to repeat it.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ I leave you to-night——”

“ You do not forgive me, then,” she interrupted.

“ I have nothing to forgive ; I have your love to win. The work I had to do here for Don Carlos is completed, and I am commanded to join his Majesty with the least possible delay. I start to-night, and when I come to you again it shall be as a man whom you will be proud to call your husband, and whom your father will not be ashamed to own as his son-in-law.”

“ Have I done this ?—have I driven you away ? ”

“ No, Bess, no ; and when you speak to me that way, you fill me with joy and courage ; for the hope that you may learn to love me, in spite of all that is past, will nerve me to over-

come danger and will help me to bear whatever misfortune may befall me."

"I am sorry you are going—and so suddenly."

"You will be blither when I return."

"You will never return."

"That is an ill prophecy."

"I don't mean that you will die; but you will remember how vicious I have been to-day, and be glad to escape from me."

"You cannot trust me yet! Well, you shall prove me, and you shall find that old Macbeth's son can be loyal, however unfortunate he may be, or however lucky."

"And what am I to do whilst you are away?"

"That was the one thing which troubled me; you must wait here—you must endure solitude for a little while; but I have made arrangements to secure your comforts as far as possible. Mary Beith is coming to stay with you as your maid; and if you can only be patient we shall have bright days in the future."

"I will try."

"And you will succeed. There, I have faith in you, Bess, although you have none in me. What sins I have committed have been done with no thought of harming others, and least of all, you. If I was silent about my parentage, it was because it did not seem necessary to go about proclaiming my pedigree as the bellman announces the description of a lost child; and at any rate you will own that I did not hide from you the truth, although I did not give you my father's name."

"But you were unkind to him in not owning him."

"There I am guilty; I wanted to win you and I knew it would be impossible if I presented your gatekeeper as my father. But I have told him since, and that is, no doubt, how the fact has come to be known at Ravelston. Forgive me; I shall win fame and fortune for you yet—dear Bess."

He clasped her in his arms, and for the first time *she* kissed him. Now, when she knew the worst she turned to him more than ever; she was full of the spirit of a soldier's wife. She wished him "God speed," although she was to be left lonely and friendless; and when he said "Good-bye," she whispered

"I *think*, I love you."

## CHAPTER XLIX.

## ALONE.

**W**EARINESS, self reproach, and poverty in the present, and a future in which, try as she would, she could see little hope. These were the conditions under which Bess found herself placed.

She did not cry when the Major went away ; but she lay awake all night listening and wondering if he would return, although she knew quite well that he had started in time enough to catch the night express from Victoria to Paris. Still he *might* have missed the train, and in those melancholy hours of darkness and nervous excitement she remembered so many things that she would have liked to say to him, that she prayed for his return.

Then she assured herself that it was absurd to think of his return, and her thoughts reverted to the many little acts of tenderness which he had displayed during the few months they had been together. How he had studied her every wish, and how he had tried to gratify it. How faithfully he stood beside her when her father repudiated her, and told him that he had made a mistake if he had been seeking a fortune with her.

“It was false ; he loves me, and he has proved it,” she cried, in imagination answering her father’s charge. “He did not turn from me when he found me poor. He was true to his promise, and he has gone to earn wealth and honour for me.”

She had no idea that she was trying to convince herself of the purity of his attachment. She recalled only his kindness, and she was full of remorse for the petty tyranny she had practised towards him from their first meeting till the last. She was glad she had been able to ask his pardon ; and then she shuddered, covering her eyes with the blankets, as if to shut out the remembrance that he was the son of the gatekeeper at Ravelston.

What did that signify ? It signified his genius in being able

to win the position he held, and that was a matter to be proud of. She became a Communist on the instant, and felt satisfied that one man was as good as another. She did not care what the world might say; he was brave, and noble and good.

The morning was dull as her own weary eyes. The day brought no feeling of relief, only the keener sense of her desolate position. Her husband was by this time in Paris, probably starting forward on his journey to Spain; her father's doors were closed against her; and she had not one friend in London who would help to dispel the dreary monotony of the solitary life she saw before her. There would have been friends enough and to spare, if she had been still the heiress of the millionaire. That was a bitter thought.

She never knew how she passed that first day of solitude; she remembered it always as one remembers a landscape seen through a mist—here and there a dark branch of a tree reaching forth like a giant's arm, and yonder a black something which might be a mountain or a cottage.

She did not cross the threshold of her rooms; but, looking dreamily from the windows, she saw the hurrying stream of passengers, bright faces and sad; heard the ceaseless rattle of vehicles, and an occasional sound of laughter. The activity of the great hive in which she had been left made her solitude the more dismal.

She hated London, a big, unsociable wilderness of bricks, it appeared to her, without one heart in it to sympathise with the forlorn, or one tongue to speak a kind, helpful word.

On the second day after the Major's departure Mary Beith arrived in a cab, full of importance in being in London, distressed by anxiety to protect her two boxes from the ruthless brigands who, as everybody is aware, infest the most populous thoroughfares, and boldly rob the new arrivals in broad daylight. She was also shrewdly ready with the exact fare for her driver, having taken precaution to learn the amount at Euston Square.

Angry as Bess was with Mary on account of the unanswered letter, she gave her a hearty welcome, for she was so lonely that any known face was welcome. The same feeling often makes bosom friends of two fellow countrymen, who meet for the first time in a foreign land.

Mary brought with her a flood of sunshine, and Bess, thinking about Ravelston, yearned for the old home ; she would have been happy to go there and live a hermit within the boundary of the grounds. The place had never been so dear to her, had never appeared so beautiful as in memory she saw it now. Associations which formerly possessed no interest in her eyes, assumed importance, and became most precious in exile.

Mary turned up her nose at the rooms, was very brisk in addressing the landlady, and altogether showed that she regarded the whole establishment as a poor affair. But to her mistress she was different ; she really intended to be kind, although she could not help occasionally displaying her independence and her knowledge that the lady had fallen many steps down the social ladder.

Bess was indifferent to all that, she was so glad to have any one near her whom she knew.

"I am very much obliged to you for coming, Mary. You will not find the situation so comfortable as at home ; but when my husband returns, things will be different—I hope. Till then you must try not to grow weary."

"It is not possible to weary in London, Miss—ma'am, I ought to say."

"I hope you will always be able to think so," said Bess, sadly, wishing that she could have shared the girl's faith in the gaiety of the metropolis. "How did you manage to leave Ravelston so promptly ?"

"Major Kilgour wrote to me, and I would do anything for him and for you, ma'am. So I just gave up my place, and Miss Coila allowed me to start at once."

"Then my father did not know you were coming to me."

"No, for he gave me such a scare when he found the letter that was written after I got yours, that I was feared to tell him."

"You did answer my letter ?"

"I did that ; but it was burnt."

"I am glad to hear it, for it vexed me to think you could have forgotten me so soon. My father is very angry with me, and I have given him cause. I mean to try to avoid doing any-

thing which may give him more annoyance ; but I would have liked some token of remembrance from my old friends."

"Miss Coila minds you ; she has been sorely troubled about you ; and I never saw her so joyful as when I told her where I was going. She gave me this parcel and told me not to let it out of my hand till I put it into yours. There it is, and I'm glad to be quit of it—she's a kind-hearted lady."

She gave Bess a small brown paper parcel carefully tied and covered with seals.

Mary went to her room up-stairs to "tidy herself a bit," as she said, whilst breakfast was being prepared for her ; and Bess sat down to examine Coila's packet.

It contained a leather case, and in the case were five ten pound notes and a letter.

"MY DEAR, DEAR BESS,—

"You know that my allowance was always too much for me, and I am very, very glad now that I saved it up, for it may be of service to you. Do please accept these notes from me and make me happy. I do not require them, and it will be such a delight to me to think that I may have been able to procure you some little extra pleasure, that you must not deny me. Uncle will not allow us to speak of you yet ; but we are hoping and praying for the day when he will change his mind. He has locked up your room, and he has ordered Leishman to give your horse regular exercise, but not to permit anyone to ride it. He is very busy, and talks of some honour which is to be conferred on him, and which will take him to London. I think it is because he is so much occupied about this that he did not answer your letter again and in a kindlier way than at first.

"I believe he would have forgiven you before now if it had not been for the discovery he made about the Major. He was going to dismiss poor Macbeth, but Killievar spoke to him, and he has not done so. He is trying to show that he will not be influenced by anything you do or people say. Killievar is here again now (he left us two days after uncle and he returned from seeing you. I was to have gone with him for a few months, but uncle said as you and the Major were out of the house, I was not to go).

"I believe the chief is to go with uncle to London, and I am

hoping that he will see you and bring you some comfort. I am very lonely without you, and am wearying to see you. Aunt Janet is in low spirits ever since you went away and never knows where to find anything. She is a little brighter now that Killievar is here to entertain her with his grand descriptions of the Highlands, and to amuse her with his grand dress—the peacock dress, you remember. I wish I could laugh, or better still, I wish I could make you laugh. I am so full of sorrow to think of you alone in London that I am more likely to cry.

“ Good bye, my dear cousin, and I am ever your affectionate

“ COILA.

“ P.S.—Aunt Janet has got a *new wig!* ”

Bess experienced a choking sensation several times whilst she was reading these affectionate words. She was grateful for them—most grateful; and the gift which accompanied them was of the greatest value, for it relieved her of many petty fears, whilst the manner in which it was conveyed enabled her to accept it without any qualms of vain pride.

She was less desolate after reading that letter, and she was full of joy in learning how much more kindly a friend could think of her than she gave the friend credit for, or than she could think of herself. Disappointment and misfortune afflict the eyes of most people with some degree of jaundice, so that they lose faith in friendship, and too often misinterpret actions which are intended to be kindly.

She did her best to endure the monotony of her days; she never could become reconciled to it; but she displayed much more patience than any one who had known her in former times would have expected.

Mary with marvelled how it could be that the wild madcap Bess of Kavelston had subsided into the demure lady of the poor London lodgings. The fire was not extinguished, however, only a damper had been placed upon it.

There were two brief letters from the Major, one from Paris, and the other from the frontier of France and Spain. He was full of hope as ever, and told her to wait, to take courage and



trust in the future. He made no protestations of affection, used few endearing terms; he only said, "I live or die for you."

She was pleased, and looked at the letters often; she became impatient for others, and sometimes she discovered herself pensively brooding over the image of the Major as he was, and imagining what he might have been if he had been born in happier circumstances. She could not help being touched by the many proofs of his devotion to her; and she actually cried a little when she discovered that he had carried away her photograph from the little stand on the side table. She wished again and again that she had been kinder to him.

By-and-by she began to imagine him engaged in all the horrors of war, and she shuddered at the fancy of the stray bullet which might lay him low. He was so brave, so daring, and, thinking of her, he would be ready for any desperate adventure—he was a man to love!

No more letters. The absolute silence became painful. She watched the newspapers for every scrap of information about the progress of affairs in Spain. Her sympathies were all with the Carlists. She knew nothing about the cause of the struggle; she wished her husband's party to be victorious; that was all her care. The contradictory telegrams caused her cruel variations of emotion; now she was in misery on account of the defeat of the Carlists; an hour later she was in ecstasies at the report of their triumph.

But it was a pitiful life for one so young to lead—one so capable of enjoying the mirth of youth. She was like a butterfly shivering on a withered rose tree in late autumn winds.

"I wish he had not gone; I wish I had known how much I cared for him. He would have stayed for me."

That was her mental cry, and she felt as if she had with her own hand put away the one possibility of happiness which remained to her.

Mary Beith grew tired. Instead of the round of theatres, concerts, and shopping which had made her regard London as a paradise, there was a dull morning in a dull room, a mistress who spoke little, and whom she had expected to speak a great deal. There were no lovers, and no prospect of one, which was the worst of the position. There was a dull walk in the park, and an evening of solitary confinement, only relieved by the

view from the window, and the occasional diversion of a barrel organ or a German band, with the happy children dancing blithely to the discordant strains.

Mary did her best, however, to hide the yawns which would attack her. She was a good girl in the main, and wished to be faithful to her old mistress, so she took as much enjoyment as she could from an occasional chat with the tradespeople, and from the hope that the Major would return in a few weeks as King of Spain, or something great, and with a boxful of Indian shawls. She was not at all clear as to what he was doing or whither he had gone ; but he *must* bring back Indian shawls and lace.

One day she rushed into her mistress with a beaming countenance.

"Good news, ma'am—who has come to see you, do you think ?"

"Come to see me ?"

"Yes—the Chief of Killievar, and oh, but it's a pleasure to see a ken't face in this weary town."

## CHAPTER I.

## SACKCLOTH AND ASHES.

**K**ILLIEVAR embraced her with paternal kindness. She was somewhat taken aback by this unusual demonstration of regard, and all her efforts to appear self-possessed and satisfied failed. The stiff dignity of the chief made his embrace the more remarkable proof of his interest in her.

"You have been unhappy, my child ; you have been deserted by the man who was to take care of you, and you did not tell me. That was not very good."

"I cannot pretend to have been happy," she answered, her eyes drooping, then suddenly rising to his with a flash of the old pride ; "but you must not blame Kilgour ; he has been kind to me, and he has only gone away to fulfil his engagement with Don Carlos."

"Ah, well, my child, I am very glad that you can speak generously of him, and I hope he will prove worthy of your esteem. It is very good of you to speak so, and I approve of it. But we will not speak of that any more. I want you to dress yourself very quickly and come away with me this moment."

"Go with you—where ?"

"To see your father."

"Did he send for me ?" she cried excitedly.

Killievar paused before replying, his pale grey eyes full of compassion.

"No, my child, he did not send for you."

The brief gleam of hope was extinguished, and she answered sadly :

"Then I must not go."

"But you must go. It is a very fine plan of Miss Janet's, and Coila's, and myself, and you will disappoint me a very good

deal if you go to make us all three together unhappy as well as yourself."

"Does he know that you have come to me?"

"He does not; but you will think of us, and of yourself, and you will be a good child and do as you are bid."

"I will do whatever you say is right."

He took her hand, patting it approvingly.

"A good child, a very good child. Then you will do as I bid you. Your father is happy at this very moment, because he is assured of an honour being conferred upon him which he wants. When a man is happy he is merciful, and so you shall come with me to him this moment—it is not far, and here are your things."

Mary, having received instructions from the chief, had brought hat, polonnaise, and all walking gear for her, so that in a few seconds Bess was ready to descend to the cab.

She submitted rather than agreed, although she was yearning to see her father, and eager to obtain the faintest sign of reconciliation.

"I would be glad if he would only say that he forgave me. I would endure anything for that," she said as they were driving along.

They had not far to go, only across St. James's Park, and on to one of those quiet-looking, fashionable, semi-private hotels, where double first-class price is charged for second-class accommodation. Marjoribanks made it a rule always to go to those places which were reported to be "the thing." As he said, very sensibly, "I can rough it, and I can afford it." But he often looked with contempt at the young swells who came there only because it was "the thing," and not because they could afford it.

A couple of neatly dressed footmen were at the door of the cab the moment it stopped. Killievar assisted the lady out, and up the steps into the hall. There he spoke to a very stiff-necked personage in a stiff white necktie, which he seemed to be afraid to crease. They were conducted up one flight of stairs, and halted at the central door of the landing.

"Be honest with him—be natural, I will be near to help you," said the chief, as he opened the door and thrust her into the room.

"Come in, come in," said Marjoribanks, without lifting his head from the letter he was writing.

She stood with bowed head, trembling in the presence of her father.

When he had finished the sentence upon which he was so laboriously engaged, he looked up.

"Eh!—you?"

"Yes, papa."

"Oh!—what is it folk say when they mean you are a nuisance?—I remember: this is an unexpected pleasure, Mrs. Kilgour. But I am a plain man, and I will save you and myself some trouble by asking you at once, what do you want?"

"Only to see you, papa."

"Here I am; you are welcome to look at me. How long will it take you to examine me to your satisfaction?"

He took out his watch, and waited with the air of enforced patience, which a busy man assumes in the presence of a bore whom he does not like to dismiss by force.

There was a quick catching of her breath, and a sound like a suppressed sob.

"I see I disturb you too much, Sir; I will go away at once; I am sorry to have intruded upon you; I will not do it again . . . but will you only permit me to touch your hand before I go?"

He placed his hand on the table, but it was not quite steady, although he pretended to be perfectly calm.

She advanced slowly, touched the hard knotted hand tenderly, and then, with another uncontrollable sob, she suddenly stooped and kissed it.

The hand was drawn back as if it had been stung.

She was acutely pained by the movement.

"Forgive me, papa; it may be the last time I shall see you, the last time I shall touch your hand—and I could not help myself. God bless you, Sir, I am very sorry for all the trouble I have caused you."

She turned to go away.

He had been half stupified by her singular action: demonstrations of affection were quite outside his experience, and the fact of even his own daughter kissing his hand startled

and confused him ; and, curiously, whilst he was touched by this token of her broken spirit he was abstractedly wondering where she had learned this "high faluting" courtesy, which did not belong to, and ought not to belong to the ordinary life of busy mortals.

But when he saw her back, and saw that she was close to the door, he shouted after her :

"Stop a minute, Bess ; since you are here, we may as well have a chat. Sit down."

He pointed to a chair opposite—he would have thought it undignified to have yielded so far as to place the chair for her.

Submissively she sat down as directed.

He cleared his throat with many severe "uh-hums," and the sound was repeated with unusual persistence between each word.

"Look here, you make me feel as if I was cruel to you——"

"No, no ; you have not been cruel."

"You make me feel it, and that's the same thing. I don't want to be cruel, but I think it is right for you, right for me and for everybody, that you should pay the piper you have chosen to dance to. You took your own way without asking my leave, and much to my annoyance ; it is right and just that you should bear the consequences."

"I am trying to bear them as quietly as I can. I have not attempted to alter your determination more than once, and that was in a moment of sore trial ; but oh, papa, it is a bitter thing to feel so desolate in this big city as I have done, without a friend to speak to, without a friend to comfort me or help me. And in the dreary time which has passed I have thought of all your kindness, of all your indulgence to me, and I wanted so much just to see you, just to be near you for one minute again, that I came here, although I knew that you had not sent for me, and feared that you would be annoyed, as you are, by my coming. Indeed, indeed, I have suffered very much before I would risk meeting your displeasure again."

He had to clear his throat, as if he were suffering from a severe cold before he spoke next.

"Do you want money ?"

"No."

"Does that—that man want money?"

"No."

There was a brief pause; and Marjoribanks again:

"I understand he has left you."

"He was obliged to go for a little time—he had an honourable engagement and he was bound to fulfil it. He may return successful and rich."

"Of course, that is the usual explanation of these—well, I'll say these kind of people. Did he make any provision for you meanwhile?"

"He could make none except leave me entire control of the allowance you gave me."

"Most generous."

"What else could he do?"

"Evidently nothing else; but suppose it had pleased me, or that the fancy had taken me to withdraw the allowance—what would have become of you then?"

"I do not know—I would have tried to work."

"Humbug—you know that you could not work at anything for five minutes together. And this is the man you left Ravelston and all its prospects for? You *are* a fool, Bess, after all, and I was a fool to think you were shrewder than other women."

She rose from her seat.

"Kilgour has been kind to me, he is my husband; his poverty is not a disgrace; his humble birth is a sign of his genius in lifting himself above it, and we should not be the first to complain of that. He has been honest to me; I will be true to him, and I will go back to our poor lodging to wait for him."

She seemed to be ready to endure any blame cast upon herself, and yet she would not listen to the slightest slur cast upon her husband.

"Stop yet," said Marjoribanks, authoritatively, and she halted. "I admire your spirit, Bess, but answer one question before you leave me—will you go home?"

"Will you go home?"—the words were like sweet bells ringing in her ears, sweet as marriage bells to the waiting bride. Presently the bells seemed to be muffled, and to toll

as if for a funeral rather than to give the merry peal for a wedding.

She *could* not answer.

"Now, look here, Bess, let us put the case in a plain, practical way. You have disappointed me, very seriously disappointed me; but you are the chief loser in doing so. I do not want to be too hard upon you; I would like to be kind to you, but I can only be so under certain conditions."

"What are the conditions, Sir?"

"Take your actual position first. The man you left your home for has left you; you are miserable, and I say 'Come home.' Then come the conditions. You must come home as if you were a widow, and you must resolve to have nothing more to do with that—man."

She staggered and almost groaned, so deep was the breath she drew. Then respectfully, but resolutely:

"I am sorry, Sir, but I cannot go with you on these conditions."

"Now, don't be a fool again; I shall not repeat the offer. Look at it from a practical point of view. The man induced you to run away with him because he expected me to give you a fortune, no matter what you did or who you married. He found out his mistake, and he left you."

"He was obliged to go," she cried, in agony, but wavering between her yearning for home and the fidelity she felt to be due to her husband.

"Tut, tut, listen to me. He has left you; I say, come home. He sought you only for the money he expected you to bring him. Very well, come home, and I shall settle upon him the full allowance I have given to you. I have been fortunate; I would like to save you from grief, and so I am ready to do this if you are willing to turn your back upon the scamp who has ruined you. He will be glad enough of the exchange, and I will add fifty a year to the amount for your sake. Come, that is a fair offer."

"He will never consent to such a bargain as that."

"Try him."

"He would despise me for yielding."

"Give him the chance of deciding between an expensive



wife and a free income, which would be a good thing for any man in his position."

Her mind swayed to and fro, all the desolation and misery of her position, and the feverish home-sickness which had afflicted her of late swaying her one way, the remembrance of the Major's devotion and hopefulness swaying her another.

She lacked faith, and mistaking her own inclination for a desire to prove his truth, she said, deliberately:

"I will try him. You shall write and offer him in exchange for his wife an unburdened income. If he consents, I agree."

"No, it is not to be done that way. You must go home with me to-night, and when he returns to seek you—which I do not suppose he ever means to do—then the offer can be made to him. I know how to arrange a bargain."

"But if he does return—and he will—and if he refuses your offer, you will not prevent me going to him?"

"Certainly not."

"Then I shall go with you, for I hate this place, it is so desolate."

"You had better go and get ready."

He sat down, as if he had closed a bargain, and was at liberty to proceed with his other affairs; no sign of affection or of joy; and she left the room, in sad doubt as to whether or not she should have yielded to his plan; but she was too deeply humiliated to make any effort to win him from the stern policy he had adopted.

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## CHAPTER LI.

"HOME, SWEET HOME."

SHE went home. The trial in meeting Miss Janet and Coila was severe, and their exceeding desire to make her comfortable and happy only made her the more miserable, because it reminded her of the equivocal position she occupied in the household, where she had been so recently the first to be considered and the first to move.

She was demure and patient. For the first few days she kept her room ; by-and-by she began to move about the grounds, but shrank and shuddered at the approach of any of the servants. She felt like a guilty creature doing penance for her sin.

But it was such a joy to be home again, even under these conditions, such a joy to move hither and thither in familiar scenes. She had never known how beautiful the place was until now, when she had returned from what had threatened to be an eternal banishment.

Although Marjoribanks made no attempt to conceal the return of his daughter, he did not talk about it, and it had so happened that the arrival took place late in the evening. The carriage passed even Cockie-leerie without him observing who was in it. In consequence, the return of the prodigal daughter was unknown beyond the household for almost twenty-four hours.

But afterwards, the news spread rapidly enough to make up for lost time. A few shrugged their shoulders in pitying contempt ; but by far the greater number of the ladies spoke of Bess with sincere commiseration and sympathy. They only refrained from seeking her because they knew that in present circumstances the kindest service they could render was to respect her privacy.

She was thankful to be left alone ; but she could not live un-

der a cloud, and with all the means of enjoyment within her reach came speedily the desire to use them.

She saw her horse taken out regularly by Leishman for exercise. She would have liked to exercise him herself, and began to weary for the afternoon gallop, which had been formerly the great delight of her day, and would be now if she only dared to suggest it.

Mrs. Carstairs, of Cairndhu, invited some friends to dinner, the young people to have a dance afterwards. Marjoribanks and Coila went, Bess was not asked—could not have gone if she had been; and yet she was dreary in being left at home.

Everybody knew that she was there, and yet everybody pretended not to know it.

The position became daily more irksome; she tried to take a "plain, practical view of the case," as her father would say, and she did so, but it did not make the endurance of it a bit the more easy. Her pulses throbbed with life and with the capacity of enjoyment—she wanted to ride, to dance, to laugh like others, and yet she was condemned to comfort herself with an air of formal gravity which she did not feel, and with an air of staid submission which was intolerable to her in sight of so many opportunities to be merry. The brief period of her married life—viewed from the midst of all the old associations—was like a misty dream to her. She knew that it did make a difference, but could not clearly understand what difference, or how; she was sensible of being in herself just the same creature who had run away from home.

After the first awkwardness of coming home had passed she would have liked to resume her old place, her old ways; but there was a mysterious load fastened upon her which rendered it impossible for her to resume the old ways. There was some restraint; and she began to think that, after all, it would have been better to have remained in the humble lodging in Pimlico than to have come back to such a changed state of affairs.

Freedom from the petty anxieties of how to make both ends meet, good living, and native air, brought back the colour to her cheeks, and roused the spirit of impatience of control. Still she so far mastered her moods that she displayed neither impatience nor discontent to others. She kept to her room; she appeared when she was called; and, much as she wished it, she

never expressed a desire to pass beyond the boundary of the grounds.

But the blithe, mischievous spirit which predominated, showed itself furtively at intervals. She would still, in a sly way, make fun of poor Miss Janet ; wickedly suggest that there was a curious change in the colour of her hair, and wonder if it could be due to her disappointment on account of being stayed in her mad career towards Edinburgh with Killievar.

"You know, dear, it is nonsense," Miss Janet would say, in real distress. "We were looking for you, dear, and—where can the needles have gone to ? Now, please do not disturb yourself on my account ? it will annoy me very much if you do. Oh, thank you, dear, so very much—but, please, do not speak in that ridiculous way about Killievar and me again. Don't, dear."

Miss Janet, looking anxiously under the table, smiled as if the subject were not unendurable.

Then with Coila :

"When did you see Austin ?"

"Yesterday evening. He has been most faithful in his attendance upon the sufferers from the Bell Pit accident ; he has been most devoted, and has saved the lives of three men, who were given up by every other doctor."

"Oh, he has been faithful in his attendance !—and I presume you have not been remiss either."

"I have gone often to see the men, and have been very glad to watch their improvement. I have done all I could to help the widows, for I thought I had to do your share of the work as well as my own."

"That was a good soul ; thank you for my share. Of course you saw *him* often ?"

"Very frequently."

"Then you have got it all settled between you ?"

"All what ?"

"Your misunderstanding. You have explained to him the foolish idea which made you so cruel to him ; you have kissed and made it up, and you are going to live happy ever after, as the story books say."

"No, Bess, we have not settled it in that way," was the

sighing answer ; " we are friends, it is a pleasure to meet him, and that is all."

" What, have you not told him, as you threatened to do, that I was the cause of your refusal ? "

" No."

" What a silly girl you are !—with so many opportunities for an explanation, and not to take advantage of one of them. I would have been married to him by this time."

" I never can explain to him."

" Now, Coila, you are naturally stupid, but don't try to be a humbug, for you will fail. Look at me—a staid matron, and half a widow ; trust me, confess the truth—you would like to make it up with him."

" I would indeed."

" Then why on earth did you not speak out to him ? I gave you leave to say what you pleased about me, and if you had cared for him, as you make me think you do, you would have made short work of the matter."

" But how could I speak to him when he seemed to be indifferent ? "

" That was his pride—the very best sign that he wanted you to speak."

" But it was no use, unless I had told him what I had fancied about you, and I had determined never to do that. Forgive me, Bess, for saying that even now I think you would have been happy if Austin had loved you."

She gave a short unpleasant laugh.

" That is your folly, Coila, we have both known for some time that he did not care for me ; and if you are wise you will remember that I bolted—that is the word, although you may think it coarse—with the Major, and women do not as a rule run away with penniless men about whom they do not care."

" Do you really love Kilgour ? "

" Do you really love Austin Murray ? "

Bess was pert and sharp as ever. Coila was taken aback by the retort which her earnest question called forth. She answered honestly :

" I do love him, Bess, and it has cost me more suffering than you can believe to turn from him. But the worst of all was

when you told me that I had been wrong, that you cared nothing for him, and that all my sacrifice only meant so much vexation to him, and—oh, so much agony to me.”

The simple earnestness of the girl, and the entire absence of anything like a reproachful feeling, had far more effect upon Bess than the most unanswerable accusations would have had.

“Tell him now, then, and I will bear witness to what you say.”

“I cannot,” was Coila’s reply ; “besides, it would be useless ; he does not care for me now.”

She left the room, feeling that if she remained longer she would either cry or become angry, for it was impossible to forget altogether that Bess had been the cause of much unnecessary suffering to her and to Austin.

Bess sent for Leishman ; she knew that the man would obey her implicitly without being inquisitive. She sent him for Austin Murray.

The message was a mysterious one, and it puzzled Austin considerably when he received it.

“The mistress bade me give this to you, Sir, and to say that she would count upon seeing you,” was all Leishman said when he delivered the note. He rode off immediately.

The note said :

“Come to Ravelston this evening at half-past eight. If you are seen, make some excuse for the visit. You will find me standing by the statue on the terrace, in front of the dining-room window. Do not fail, your own and the happiness of another depends on your obedience.”

A lady’s handwriting, and no signature. Was it Coila ?—the penmanship did appear to be written with some attempt at disguise, but he thought he would have known Coila’s hand no matter how she had tried to hide it. So it could not be hers.

Was it Bess ? He had heard of her return, and that she was living in strict seclusion. But what had his happiness to do with meeting her.

He performed his work that afternoon as rapidly as possible, and at the appointed hour was on the terrace at Ravelston. Cockie-leerie was the only one who had seen him.

## CHAPTER LII.

## THE BATTLE OF LACAR.

THE curtains of the dining-room window were drawn close, but the light shone through them, and illuminated the path, reaching the pedestal of the statue, the upper portion of which was in deep shadow. Pleasant sounds of merriment within indicated that Marjoribanks was entertaining guests that evening.

An upper window was quietly closed, and in a few minutes Austin's shoulder was lightly touched by a fan.

"It was very good of you to come so punctually," said Bess. "Papa has some friends with him to-night, and I have not yet mustered courage enough to appear at a company dinner. How are you?"

They shook hands. He was astonished to find her so little altered in manner; there was the same quick, decisive way of speaking as of old; and only a somewhat softer tone in the voice suggested that there had been any change in her condition.

Without giving him time to speak, she put her arm through his, and led him along the path out of the light, rapidly asking him about himself, his mother, and his brother and sister.

"You see I have not forgotten any of you. But no doubt the time I have been away seems short to you who have been happy—it seems very long to me."

"Then you have not been happy, Bess—or must I say Mrs. Kilgour?"

"Whatever you like, but I would rather you said Bess—it helps me to forget."

"The story I have heard is true, then; the scoundrel has deserted you as soon as he found that your father would not give his fortune to him?"

"No, Sir, it is not true; and you will offend me very much

if you ever hint at such a thing again, or ever hear the statement repeated without contradicting it."

"You love him?"

"What a ridiculous question for you to ask!"

"Pardon me; I would like to serve you, and will do everything you direct to set the gossips straight. At present everybody believes that you have been forsaken by that—your husband."

"It is false; he will come back covered with honours, which will make the folk who sneer at him now bow down before him as to a hero. He will place Don Carlos on the throne of Spain, he will be made a duke, he will—but that is not what I wanted to talk about."

She had been speaking passionately, as she always did whenever the Major's good faith was doubted—it seemed almost as if she were trying by the vehemence of her defence to convince herself that he was faithful to her. But at present she checked her passionate utterance, and returned calmly to the subject on account of which she had sought this interview.

"Can I serve you?" he said; "if you had been my sister in reality, as you are in my esteem, I could not be more anxious to secure your happiness than I am."

"Yes, you can serve me. Tell all who say a word against my husband that they are liars. You understand that; now let me tell you another way in which you can serve me."

"I am ready."

"You ought to be, for it concerns yourself more than me."

"What is it?"

"You will keep in mind that I am married, and so I can speak to you like a mother."

"I shall remember."

He could not help being amused by the way in which this was said, and by her attempt to draw up her slight girlish figure to its full height to add dignity to her words.

"Very well, then, I am going to tell you that you have been extremely stupid."

"In what way?"

"You love Coila."

He was silent.

"And she loves you."



"Impossible! She could not have acted as she has done if she had ever cared for me," he exclaimed, impatiently. "She fancied for a little while that she did like me, but she discovered her mistake in time, and very sensibly told me of it. I respect and admire her frankness."

"I am very sure that she never said she did not care for you."

"She acted as if she did not, and that is the same thing."

"Not quite; half-a-dozen different motives may inspire the same action."

"I wish you would not talk of this matter; she has decided, and so have I. We are both satisfied, and you only renew old pains when you recall the hopes I once had of calling her my wife. You are my friend; I am just beginning to feel well; please do not re-open the old wounds."

"Oh, but I must speak about it, and you must endure as best you can. I sent for you on purpose."

"You almost make me sorry that I came."

"You will be glad that you came when I have explained. I am going to make a confession which is very awkward for me."

"Then spare yourself and spare me, if it regards Coila."

"I shall spare neither," and there was a resolution in the tone with which this was said, leaving him no option but to listen or pusillanimously to run away. "She cannot or will not speak for herself, and so I must do it. . . . When she refused to marry you it was because she believed that I—that I loved you, and she made the sacrifice of her own dearest hopes in order to secure, as she fancied, happiness for me and fortune for you. That is the plain truth of the case, and she must have suffered terribly when she found that all her efforts were thrown away."

He did not speak for a little while. They walked along the shadowy path, feeling as if they were on the opposite sides of a rapidly widening stream which would presently become a broad river, and they would never again join hands. At length he said:

"Had Coila any reason for the belief which urged her to act so strangely?"

"That is a cruel question, but I will answer it. She had

reason for the belief, and her exaggerated notion of the gratitude she owed to my father and to his daughter induced her to give you up for my sake."

"Poor Coila!—if I could only have guessed this, how much pain might have been spared to us both."

"Blame me as much as you like. I deserve it, and I shall not resist it. But follow my advice now, speak to Coila, and I will pray that a long future of joy may redeem the past misery."

"I am confused by what you have told me, and scarcely know how to act ; but to-morrow I shall ask her pardon."

"No, you must speak to her to-night, and instead of asking her pardon, ask her to be your wife."

"How can I see her ?"

"Wait here, and I will send her to you."

"If she comes I shall know that she still cares for me. I wish it were possible to tell you how grateful I am to you, Bess ; you have acted bravely and nobly. I thank you with all my heart."

She moved away, but returned instantly and laid a trembling hand on his arm. She displayed to him almost for the first time the graver and more emotional element of her impulsive nature.

"I have been a marplot to you and Coila, Austin ; but I could not help myself. I know you both forgive me ; I hope you will both try to think kindly of me sometimes. What my future may be, God knows. Yours will be happy and prosperous, and my best thoughts will be always with you."

She darted away before he could say a word in reply, and in deep agitation he paced up and down waiting for Coila ; watching the doorway for her appearance, now full of hope, and again full of despair. The minutes seemed so long that he forgot the hours ; yet she did not come. He upbraided himself for his want of faith ; after what his mother had told him he ought to have understood the whole position. He had been blind, stupid, and cruel ; he prayed that he might yet have a chance to atone for all.

Midnight, and Coila had not come to him. Clearly she could not forgive him, or she had learned to be indifferent to him.

But poor Coila did not know he was waiting.

As Bess was ascending the staircase to tell her cousin that Austin knew everything and was waiting, she encountered her father. He looked flushed and excited, and held a newspaper in his hand.

"I have been seeking you, Bess. The London papers have just arrived, and I have news for you. Come with me."

He proceeded to the library, shut the door, bade her sit down, and gave her the paper, pointing to a column with the headline—

"THE BATTLE OF LACAR."

"Read it quietly, you will find matter of much interest to you in it."

He sat down and watched her whilst she read.

A special correspondent, dating from Estella, province of Navarre, gave a vivid account of the Carlist victory obtained in spite of many blunders over a considerably superior force. The rush of the assaulting columns up to the heights of the village, the surprise of the Alfonsists, then the defence, the retreat which soon became a helter-skelter flight towards Lorca and the heights beyond—all was vigorously told.

But the portion which was of most interest to Bess was contained in these few lines:

"One of the assaulting companies was led by Major Kilgour, an officer who gained some distinction in the American war. He was the first to enter the village, and the first to lead the pursuit of the panic-stricken Alfonsists. The latter portion of the engagement was fought in the gloom of the evening, and when 'cease firing' was sounded, the handful of men who had followed the gallant Major returned with the sad tidings that their leader had fallen. In the darkness he had rushed into the midst of a strong body of the enemy, and was slain. His small body of followers attempted a rescue, but were beaten back by overwhelming numbers. The death of this brave officer is a serious loss to the Carlists, for besides his experience and tact as a leader, he has rendered important service to the cause during his recent sojourn in London."

She looked up from the paper with a white face and staring eyes. She spoke as if she had heard news which she could not understand.

"He is dead."

“ Yes, and we must not make any sham mourning about it. I am glad it is so ; you are luckier than you had any right to expect. You may do anything yet as the widow of a romantic adventurer ; you would have been miserable as his wife. I am glad this has happened—he has done you the best turn he could.”

“ He is dead,” she repeated, as if trying by the mere iteration of the sound to realize its meaning.

“ There, take the papers and go up to your room ; have a good sleep and we will talk about it in the morning. I think you are in luck, for he never intended to return to you.”

She looked at him vacantly, then gathered up the papers and went to her own room. She was not stunned, but bewildered ; a little while ago she had been a wife, and now she was a widow—that is, she would never see her husband again. It was queer, and resulted in dull stupefaction, but no tears or hysterics.

Austin and Coila were utterly forgotten.

## CHAPTER LIII.

## AN INTERESTING WIDOW.

**M**ARJORIBANKS being still suspicious that the departure of the Major had been due to the discovery that Bess would not bring him the expected fortune, rather than to any necessary engagement, made every inquiry as to his fate by letters and telegrams. The news was confirmed as far as it could be by the statements of the mountaineers whom Kilgour had led through such brilliant exploits as those which gained the victory of Lacar.

There was even a message from Don Carlos himself, condoling with the widow of his lamented friend. That removed all doubt, and Marjoribanks was satisfied and glad. Now there was a hope for Bess; she might make a brilliant match yet, and the romantic story of her escapade with Major Kilgour would give additional attraction and interest to her charms.

His calculation proved correct; the whole county was excited to the utmost degree by the series of strange events which had afflicted the family of Ravelston; letters and cards of condolence poured in upon Marjoribanks and his daughter; each card representing the burning curiosity of some friendly neighbour to see the widow, and to learn how she was bearing her loss.

She was bearing it wonderfully well. At first there was a period of bitter disappointment that he could not return as the conquering hero her imagination had pictured, when she would have been so graciously condescending to those who had condemned her choice, and, leaning on his arm, she would have walked in bridal wreaths, smiling through the midst of admiring crowds.

That was a disappointment. But then there came all the excitement of selecting her mourning gear, of arranging it in the most becoming fashion, and of choosing the best and most expensive material, in accordance with her father's instruc-

tion. She almost forgot her melancholy condition in her busy consultations with dressmakers and milliners.

But when she surveyed herself for the first time in the large mirror, dressed in complete widow's weeds, looking decidedly pretty, and, as she fancied, all the more interesting on account of the signs of mourning in which she was arrayed, there did come to her a sad thought of the man, and she cried. Hitherto she had thought most of the circumstances as they affected herself.

The tears did not endure long, and if she had spoken quite honestly she would have owned that her sorrow was mingled with a shadowy sense of relief, which she scarcely dared to acknowledge to herself, but which was there all the same, that she had escaped from the troublous uncertainties which a future with a husband like Kilgour would have involved.

It was a wicked feeling and she turned away from it, despising herself. But it was agreeable to know that all the world was talking about her, sympathising with her, and full of curiosity to see her. Kilgour's death seemed to have atoned for all his faults and hers.

Then he had died so gallantly ; the newspaper correspondents mentioned his bravery in such glowing terms that she was proud of his memory.

She took the pleasure of a girl who puts on her first long skirt in examining herself in the glass, and in trying the different effects of the dresses appropriate to her new character as a widow. There was almost a sly twinkle of fun flashing from beneath the widow's cap, the face was so young, the figure so girlish, that she seemed to be dressed up for private theatricals rather than to be wearing the tokens of loss and sorrow.

"Now, Bess," said Marjoribanks to her a few weeks after the battle of Lacar, "I have given you time enough to get over whatever grief you thought it desirable to show for your husband, as we must call him ; but I want you to understand me. You are not going to be a widow all your days ; and I expect that next time you marry you will try to please me, seeing that the first time you have pleased yourself only—and I think you have found it a failure."

"I shall do just as you want me, papa," she answered, demurely ; "I shall marry a nigger if you say that you wish me to do so."

"I shall not ask you to do anything so absurd. I want you to marry somebody who will be able to make you happy in the only way you ever will be happy, by giving you position, and by surrounding you with luxuries. Come, tell the truth and shame the devil—you were not happy in those miserable lodgings Kilgour took you to!"

"I was not."

"That's honest; I like to hear people speak out the truth. Well, there's no hope of Connoughmore now; but there is a young fellow who saw you driving with me last week, and has asked my leave to make up to you. He is one of the largest shipowners in Glasgow, and it's my opinion the affair with the Major has done you some service in his eyes. Suppose I ask him to spend a few days here, there will be no nonsense with him, you will treat him kindly?"

"I shall obey you, papa, in everything."

"You said that once before, and you made a fool of me."

"It was not altogether my fault."

"We shall not discuss the question. But look here, Bess, think of yourself, and try to remember that I am thinking of you. It does not matter to me whom you marry, except that it would be so much pleasanter if you got somebody who would be agreeable to me, and who would make you comfortable."

"I hope you will have no reason to complain of my conduct again."

"You are lucky; you have a splendid opportunity, and I shall expect you to prove yourself my daughter by making the most of it."

"I shall try."

After that conversation she went out to the grounds to walk. She did not feel quite satisfied with herself, although she was quite determined to obey her father this time, no matter what she might suffer in consequence. But there were certain little signs of devotion on the Major's part which recurred to her, and stung her sharply with the thought that she was cruel as well as ungracious to his memory in thinking so soon about a second marriage. The fact that the subject was thrust upon her did not in the least soothe the prickings of her conscience.

She was quite conscious of the sympathy and admiration which her appearance excited; and she was gratified by it.

But when the subject of a second union was brought so close to her as it had been by her father just now, she was stirred with compunction, roused to the knowledge that she was not behaving rightly, and she was troubled. Her brief widowhood had been agreeable ; it was something to be the object of universal condolence, and something to be the object of sympathy, which is always the handmaid to love. She would like to remain a widow a little longer.

She had wandered down to the foot of the park near the lodge, and she was suddenly confronted by Cockie-leerie.

"My father-in-law," was her first horrified thought ; but then, as she looked at the tall, erect form, with the white curly hair, now matted as if it had not been combed for weeks, and the sallow, careworn face, she felt sorry for him, and held out her hand. He did not take it.

"I have been trying to get a word with you, Mrs. Kilgour, ever since you came home ; but they wouldna let me."

"I am vexed at that, Macbeth, for I would have been glad to see you."

"It's kind of you to say it ; thank you. But I'm no going to fash you, and I mean to leave this place, so that I may be no hindrance to onybody ; only, afore I go I would like to speir at you, mistress, just ae question."

"What is it ?"

"I kent fine that your man was my Hector the first minute I seed him ; he was just what I might have been mysel, if I hadna married the plaiden merchant's daughter. But I wasna going to own to him when he wouldna own to me ; and, afterwards, I didna want to spoil sport. Odd, if I had jaloused that you was wanting to meet him yon night I was watching you, fient a bit of me would have hindered you."

"But the question."

"I'm coming to that. They say he is dead—do you really think it's true, or is it that you only wish it to be true, and so believe it ? I dinna believe it."

The question and the comment almost stunned her.

Cockie-leerie was the first to suggest a doubt of the Major's death ; and his quiet air of thorough conviction, combined with the suddenness of the assertion to startle and bewilder her.

"No, no, Macbeth," she said recovering ; "there is no hope."



You cannot know all that has been done to ascertain his fate, or you would be satisfied, as we all are, that there is no hope."

"What has been done?"

She told him, repeating as closely as she could remember the actual words of the letters and telegrams, and she promised to show him the message of Don Carlos.

He listened with grave attention, breathing occasionally a half suppressed exclamation of surprise, disappointment, or doubt. When she had finished, he said coolly :

"I'm greatly obliged to you, mistress ; but that doesna alter my opinion. I have heard tell many a time of brave soldiers being counted as dead, and turning up again after all was done. I'll wait for him ; he's a brave fellow, and he'll make his way wherever he goes. But I'm obliged to you all the same."

"You still think he is alive?"

"I have no doubt about it ; for you see in what you have been telling me there is never a word about finding the corpse and burying it with the military honours that belonged to him. I will wait."

She looked at the ground, reading riddles in the gravel. Was it possible that they had been too willing to believe in his death ? Was it possible that her father's cruel suspicion could be correct, and that the Major had left her only when he discovered that she was to have no fortune ? If that could be true, then all this report of his death might be a trick of his invention to escape from her !

"I will not believe it," she exclaimed suddenly, casting from her every doubt of the Major's honesty so far as she was concerned.

"I daresay it's more comforting no to believe," remarked Cockie-leerie, misunderstanding her. "I'll be saying fareweel, mistress, I'm no likely to see you again."

"Stop, Macbeth ; you must not think of going away from the place. Why, what would become of you ?"

"The Lord kens. I'm no fit for muckle now, and I wouldna like to waste my time in the poor's house—but I'm better awa'."

"No, you are better here ; and you must stay, to please me, Macbeth, at any rate, until we have more news about—about Hector."

"If it's your pleasure, I'll bide," he answered after much hesitation.

So that was settled. She had determined to see to the comfort of her husband's father, whatever might happen to herself, although she still shrank from an open acknowledgment of the relationship in which she stood to him. But it was a kind of penance she was paying for her folly, and that idea helped materially to sustain her self-respect.

## CHAPTER LIV.

## PERPLEXITY.

BESS was in anything but a contented frame of mind when she turned again to the house. The suggestion of Macbeth still seethed in her mind, and spoiled all the beautiful resignation she had begun to find in her interesting widowhood? Life had so many pleasures for her that it was irritating to have it crossed by such an awkward possibility as that of a husband who was supposed to be dead turning up again at any unexpected moment.

Would she be sorry?

She did not know; she could not answer the question even to herself. If he would only appear as the hero she had imagined coming to claim her, then she would be proud; if otherwise!—she would rather not think of the matter.

It was much more agreeable to her to put unpleasant thoughts aside than to face them before the necessity arose. She was philosophical in that respect. However, she examined again all the documents referring to the Major, and felt assured that there was no hope. Then she lamented him, not exactly as he was, but rather as what she fancied he might have been.

“No message from Austin yet?” she had said several times to Coila.

“None.”

“Never mind,” she would say, patting her cousin’s cheeks, “it was my fault that in the confusion of that night he was forgotten, and I will see you through it, don’t fear.”

“He will think—he must think, it was another slight I put upon him, and he will not speak to me again.”

“Give him credit for a little common sense; if you can’t, why on earth should you bother about him? He was suddenly carried away to London in attendance upon one of his wealthiest patients. But for that he would have seen me, and

everything would have been explained. Being away, he does not like to write, knowing what has happened to me."

"I wish it may be so."

"It is so ; and, poor fellow, I hope he did not catch his death of cold waiting for you that night. I would never forgive myself."

"It was such a pity you forgot, Bess ; but how could you remember at such a terrible time ?"

"I don't know ; anyhow I did not ; but it will be all right by and by."

Coila shook her head and smiled, dreamily—hope and sorrowful doubt had equal shares in the smile.

Austin had been indeed bitterly disappointed. He had turned away from Ravelston on the night Bess had told him to wait, with the sad conviction that Coila, by declining to meet him, gave a too unmistakable repetition of her refusal to marry him. Bess was mistaken in her good-natured surmise of the cause of Coila's refusal ; it was something else than gratitude to her cousin which had moved her to act so strangely.

What else ? Was it not possible that Marjoribanks, the shrewd man of business, had detected the real cause—that she had been attracted by Kilgour ?

The thought stung him, and he quitted the place with hasty steps. He returned several times, however, taking himself severely to task for his nonsense, and still hoping against hope that, late as the hour was, she might yet appear.

She did not appear. On the following morning he was told of the death of Kilgour at Lacar, and, sensibly enough, he at once associated the news of this event with the absence of Coila and the silence of Bess.

Mrs. Murray saw that her son was much disturbed, but on such occasions she discreetly left him to his own devices. She answered him when he spoke, but never attempted to force conversation upon him, knowing that when he was able he would explain everything.

His intention was to see Bess after a decent interval, and learn from her why Coila had not met him. Then came the summons to attend his patient to London—a rich old gentleman, who had taken a great fancy to him. He was only to be

away for a few days ; but his absence continued for weeks ; and so there had been no opportunity of coming to an understanding with Coila. He would not write to her, and he could not write to Bess at present.

He told his mother something of the position of affairs, and she being a sensible woman, thought that now Bess was unattainable, Coila would be a good bargain, and encouraged him to hope. But when it became known that Bess was a widow, Mrs. Murray changed her tactics, and threw cold water on the ardent fire which would have prompted Austin to communicate with one of the two ladies direct.

Mrs. Murray really intended no harm ; only she was selfish on her son's account. She wanted him to obtain the best and richest wife within his reach, and she had an honest belief that Bess would be the best wife, even apart from the wealth she might bring, although that was certainly a heavy weight in the scale in her favour.

So she contrived, without compromising her son, that he should hold his tongue in the meanwhile, until she could understand the position of affairs, and decide what he ought to do. She had no idea of directing him, but she was quite sure of being able to influence him, and probably to marry him to the wife she thought most suitable. She was a very quiet woman, but very persistent ; and quiet persistence is most potent in the direction of human affairs.

Bess began to drive out daily for the benefit of her health, as formerly she had been in the habit of riding. The demure prettiness of her face, charmingly set in the widow's bonnet, full of the suggestiveness of the capacity for mirth or pity, laughter or tears, rendered her most attractive, and contrasted strikingly with the pale sweetness of her companion, Coila.

The former caught the eyes of people as a magnet catches a needle ; the latter was always too absorbed, too earnest to flash upon the mind. It was in the quiet nooks of suffering, where the gentle hand and the sympathetic nature were needed, that Coila was pre-eminent. She was nothing beside her brilliant cousin driving along in the glare of day.

"We can't go in, we have so many things to do," said Bess, as Mrs. Murray came to the gate and exchanged greetings. "Have you heard from your son, lately ?"

“This morning. He is very well, but anxious to be home.”

“When is he likely to be home ?”

“It is impossible to say. The gentleman he has gone with is very ill, and he has such confidence in my son that he will not part with him on any account.”

“He ought to leave him a handsome legacy. Please tell Austin to call at Ravelston as soon as he comes home.”

And they drove away.

## CHAPTER LV.

## THE STRANGER AT THE GATE.

THE end of March. A keen east wind sweeping along the road and biting the buds of trees and flowers viciously. The people of Craighieloup had sad stories to tell of the devastation made in the village during the winter by bronchitis, rheumatism, and other ailments attendant upon an unusually cold season. The miners of Airbridge had good pay, and could eat well and drink well—the latter the most enviable circumstance of all! But the poor weavers of the village had a severe struggle to make ends meet anyhow, and they would have failed altogether during the past winter but for the coals which Marjoribanks supplied with a liberal hand, and the comforts which the ladies of Ravelston distributed.

A dull, cold day; a heavy, leaden sky, which gave people an oppressive sense of its being about to fall and crush them to the earth. The busy shuttles were flying to and fro, humming as they flew as if they enjoyed their work. Pale faces glanced occasionally through the windows to note who passed; wives stepped to the door, and enjoyed a brief gossip with neighbours, and the bairns careered about everywhere in happy indifference to the weather.

But they all paused suddenly to glare in wonder at a tall man who was walking quietly through the village. He was encased from the neck almost to the heel in a heavy grey Ulster coat, belted and buttoned tightly round him; a black Alpine hat on his head, a cigar in his mouth, and a heavy staff in his hand.

He glanced curiously at the cottagers as he passed, and smiled to the children.

“Whatna kind o’ creature will yon be?” said a sturdy wife to her neighbour.

“Oh, he’ll be ane o’ the show folk. There’s to be a grand show o’ wild beasts at Airbridge the morn.”

"Heth, he's weel cleided (clothed) onyway, wi' a' thae blankets aboot him."

The stranger walked on at a steady marching pace. There was nothing for him to admire in the scenery, for the dull atmosphere made everything look miserable; the very trees shivered in that bitter east wind, and the branches creaked and groaned.

The man was nearing the gates of Ravelston, and he slackened his pace. He threw away his cigar, took a firmer grasp of staff, and advanced steadily, but slowly, and more slowly as he approached the entrance to the millionaire's home.

The gates swung open, the carriage swept out—almost running over the stranger—and passed on down the road swiftly.

The man stood looking after it; he had only caught a glimpse of the two ladies who sat in the carriage, but he had noted that both were dressed in black. The ladies had been so deeply engaged in conversation that they had not observed him at all.

"Who's dead?" he muttered to himself, still watching the receding carriage.

The gates clanged as Cockie-leerie shut them.

The stranger drew his hat lower on his brow, and the broad collar of his coat higher.

"A cold day, friend," he said, turning to the gatekeeper.

"It is that."

"Would you mind letting me warm my hands at your fire?"

"Come in, and welcome."

Cockie-leerie's was a hospitable disposition, and he was always eager for a "crack;" indeed, his fondness for society had more to do with the failure of his career, than his marriage with the plaiden merchant's daughter, although he had never discovered that fact.

He opened the side gate, and the stranger followed him into the lodge. The room was small, and the heavy eaves of the window made it almost dark this afternoon. Coals had been recently placed on the fire, so that whilst there was a red glow beneath the grate, there was blackness above.

"I'll rouse the fire in a minute—sit you down," said the host, seating himself, and beginning to poke the fire.

"Thank you."

"You'll be a stranger hereabouts?"

"Yes, in a manner, but I have been here before. Is there



any of the Ravelston family dead?—I saw the ladies were in mourning.”

Cockie-leerie paused in his assault on the fire, and balanced the poker in his hand; but he did not lift his head; he spoke as if he were slowly reading the words in the red embers between the bars of the grate.

“No, there’s naeboddy dead at the house, exactly; but, you see, the young mistress made a moonlight marriage, and her man is said to be dead, and they are all very weel pleased.”

“Oh! and is the lady pleased?”

“Who can tell? She’s a queer creature; whiles I think she’s no right in her head, and whiles I think she is the best and bonniest woman that ever was born. She has been aye good to me, and I must speak the best word I have for her; but, onyway, she has put on her mournings with right good will, and there’s nae prospect of her breaking her heart for the loss of her man.”

“I suppose she will soon throw aside her widow’s cap, and make a better match next time,”

“No a doubt about it. Baxter—he’s the butler, ye ken—whiles comes down to me now, thinking maybe that I’m of some consequence owing to the relationship—but that’s neither here nor there. Baxter comes down and has a crack with me late at even, and maybe a tumbler; and he kens a heap more nor folk think, or he let’s on. Weel, he says that there’s a speak out already about a new man for the young mistress. She’s bright and clever, ye ken, and she will have a heap of siller if she marries wi’ her father’s will.”

The stranger sat for a few seconds in silence, his hands spread before the fire to warm them, and serving at the same time to shade the small portion of face which was visible.

“I presume from what you tell me,” he said, *carelessly*, “that her late husband was some scamp, whom they were *gud* to get rid of on any terms.”

“He was nae scamp, Sir,” cried Cockie-leerie, with fierce energy, and thrusting the poker into the fire so that it flamed up, “he was a brave man and he was—Lord be here, it’s himsel’!”

The two men gazed at each other; the Major put out his hand, the bright flame which had betrayed him still playing on his face. The face was much browner than it had been before

his departure for Spain, but the eyes were keen, and the smile as quietly self-possessed as ever, only there was a line of sadness in it now.

Cockie-leerie gulped down something which might have been a sob, and gripped the offered hand with both his own, looking at the long absent son with wonder and intense admiration.

"Man, and you're no dead!" was his first exclamation.

Another long pause; then he rose, and with simple dignity placing his hands on the shoulders of his son, he said:

"I am proud to see you, Hector, and I am proud that you should come to me first. It's like the prodigal coming home, and though I have no fatted calf to kill for you, my heart is proud and glad to see you. I have thought about you many's the time, and wished that I might see you eace before I gang to the long home. That's granted; I'm satisfied. Eh, lad, but it was hard to thole when you were here a while syne that you wouldna own me; but I was real proud of you all the same."

The son pressed the old man's hand again.

"Thank Heaven for this hour, at any rate," he said, "it will do me good to think that I made you happy even for a minute, father. But for that I would wish that my steps had wandered anywhere except to Ravelston."

"And what for should you have such an unnatural wish, when both your wife and father are here?"

"Because my wife does not want me, as it seems from your account."

"I never said that."

"No matter, what you have told me amounts to the same thing. The whole affair was a mistake on my part as well on hers."

"De'il a bit o't—carry her off to Spain and she has spirit enough to lead a regiment on to victory or death. She's just the very wife for a soldier, take my word for it."

"I, daresay, when he is fortunate."

That was said with some bitterness.

"Hoot', man, but there is aye the chance of luck next time in a soldier's life."

"Yes, the luck of a grave. But that is stuff; I had a hope—which was ridiculous, so we shall say no more about it. I

have been accustomed to take life contentedly as it came to me, but I have found it a little difficult within the last hour to reconcile myself to the knowledge that she was glad I was dead."

"I never said that," exclaimed Cockie-leerie, more energetically than before.

"No, no, you did not."

"I am glad you own it, for I would be vexed to miscall her, especially to you."

"And I would not like to hear it. But it is a toss up with me at this moment whether to set off again and leave her to the pleasant belief that she is a widow, or to make myself known. The first would be the kindest act to her."

"But you cannot do it."

"Why?"

"Because I would let the truth be known before you could get to the station. Na, na, Hector, my man, you will just sit down again and bide or she comes hame. There's to be no more runnings awa'; she's your wife and you will both make the best of your bargain."

"I believe you are right."

"I am sure as death of it. So whilst you are waiting you will tell me all about what you have seen, and what you have been doing. Man, I'm that anxious to ken that I'm fear't to hear the carriage."

Kilgour was in anything but a mood for the retailing of his adventures. However, he forced himself to begin the story, and the enthusiastic interest of the old man speedily inspired him with forgetfulness of the present in the excitement of his recollections of the past.

## CHAPTER LVI.

## THE "LOOK OUT."

THE carriage did not return that afternoon until a later hour than usual.

The reason was that Bess had been seized by one of her inexplicable whims, and declared her resolution to pay a visit to the "look-out" at the top of the glen. This was immediately after they had passed through the Ravelston gates.

Coila thought it was too late and too dull for such an excursion ; but Bess was in a blithe mood.

"We shall see the springbuds in the glen, at least, if we look close enough ; and we shall warm ourselves with the remembrance of the pleasant day we spent there with Austin—how many thousand years ago was it ? The event is so distant that I am almost afraid to think of it lest I should see grey hairs in the glass to-morrow. But it cannot be so many months after all, if one measured time by the mechanical hands of a clock."

"It was the day Austin's father died."

"You are the most comforting remembrancer it is possible to conceive. I believe you will fix the day of your marriage on your memory by associating it with some railway accident."

The carriage stopped at the foot of the hill, and they ascended the footpath with quick light steps in spite of the cold and dull atmosphere. Bess was continually referring to something to the right or left, never to anything ahead. She had not been so thoroughly joyous for many a day—not since the Major's accident.

They reached the foot of the ladder, and Bess immediately began to climb to the platform.

"I shall play the gentleman," she cried merrily, "and be ready to assist you to land."

"I would like you always to be my cavalier," said Coila,

laughing, and springing up the ladder, eyes sparkling and cheeks flushed.

Then, as she stepped on to the platform, she cried "Oh!" in amazement and confusion, for her hand was grasped, not by that of Bess, but by a man's; and the man was Austin Murray.

A merry peal of laughter from Bess, as she said:

"You will find me in the carriage when you are tired of each other."

She bowed, laughed wickedly again, and tripped nimbly down the ladder, then scampered down the path towards the road as blithely as a school girl just escaped from thralldom.

The lovers stood dumbly under a leaden sky, in a dull, grey atmosphere; and perched on that rustic eyrie they might have fancied themselves shipwrecked and alone on a raft. The surroundings were on this afternoon the most uncongenial for love-making; and the unfortunate lovers were conscious of the absurdity of their position.

"I beg your pardon," said Austin, stupidly, but retaining her hand. "I did not know—that is, I did not understand—in fact, it was Mrs. Kilgour I came to meet."

"I am very sorry," she answered tremulously, "I was puzzled by the strange whim of Bess in persisting to come here to-day; but believe me, I did not imagine for a moment that——"

Austin laughed pleasantly.

"I see; it is a trick of hers, and she is making fun of us both to herself just now. Come, let us be grateful to her, and profit by the opportunity she has given us."

"In what way?"

"By learning to understand each other."

Coila nervously withdrew her hand from his, pulled off her glove, and began to put it on again. The action saved her from the inclination to cry, which afflicted her as she listened to his frank, earnest words.

"I would be glad if we could understand each other, Austin; but there seems to be nothing to understand. Only we made a mistake, and we were getting on very well; and you would have found somebody soon who would have been proud to be your wife, and to try to make you happy."

"Only you could do that."

"It is kind of you to say so, and I know you believe it. But I have no explanation to offer you——"

"I require none. Bess has explained everything, and I am content, except that I blame myself for not being able to see without her guidance the brave sacrifice you were making. Can you risk your happiness to such a blundering fellow as I have been? You may trust me, Coila, my love has never altered, and the darkest day in my life was the one on which you turned from me."

"It was very painful to me."

"I know it, and I love you all the more for it. Then your action seemed to be cruel and weak; now I know it was noble and brave. Can you forgive me for not divining all that at the time?"

"It was my fault, Austin, and I am sorry, because it was all a mistake of mine, and did no good to anybody, whilst it cost me—ah, so much more than I can ever tell."

"Then you are not sorry to have met me here?"

She looked at him with such sweet, dreamy eyes, wondering how he could ask such a question after what she had confessed. Then he boldly slipped his arm round her waist, and drew her to his breast with all the confidence of proprietorship. They were happy, and those few moments of entire bliss made amends for all the past sadness and vexation.

"I think it was almost worth making the blunder we did for such delight as this," he said, his heart overflowing with joy; "but we shall not blunder again; and if we do, we shall mend matters all the sooner by remembering this day."

"It almost seems as if the sun were shining," she said, laughing, and blushing as he kissed her again and again.

The force of fancy could no farther go, for the keen wind was hissing around them, and nothing less than the fire of love could have enabled them to endure it.

"We shall soon be able to laugh at our folly, Coila, though it was no laughing matter at the time to either of us. I had quite determined that I should never think of you again, except as a friend or an acquaintance, whom I was obliged to speak to on meeting, but nothing more. Then I became vicious in a way, and took a savage pleasure in seeing you, and in trying to show you how indifferent I was to you, and all the time my

heart was yearning for you. Those meetings at the Miners' Row almost drove me crazy, for they proved how dear you were to me, although pride would not permit me to speak."

"And I thought you really had ceased to care for me, and I was very sad. I used to go home and cry; the coming years showed me only a dreary waste-land, in which no flower of hope could grow. But all is changed now, and it seems a pleasant garden filled with fruits and beautiful flowers, through which we are to walk hand in hand."

"I shall try to make it so for you," he said, with glowing enthusiasm; "and fortune seems inclined to help me, for Mr. Oliphant—the gentleman I went to London with, and who is rapidly recovering—has given me the money to pay my father's debt to your uncle in full."

"I am glad of that, but uncle did not mean to ask for it, I am sure."

"But I prefer to pay it; and being able to do so makes me all the more thankful to Bess for having arranged this meeting. It was like her bright wit to bring us together again when we were such fools as not to manage it ourselves."

"We are keeping her waiting all this time, and on such a day!" exclaimed Coila, making a feeble effort to disengage herself from his arms.

The "look-out" was so pleasant to both of them—a future of bright prosperity—that they had forgotten their friend. They hastened to rejoin her; and on the way down the hill he had many pleasant things to say of the past gloom and of the happiness in store; and she was very happy sympathising with him in all that he had suffered, and in all that he expected to enjoy.

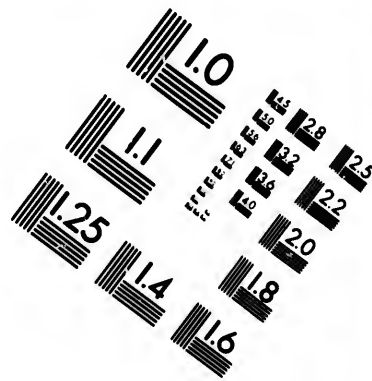
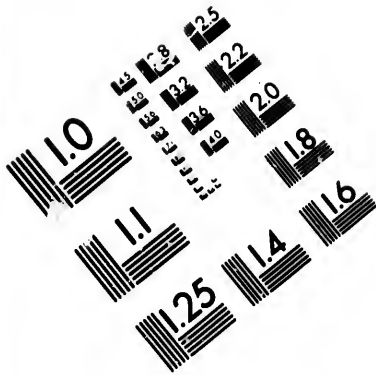
Bess, instead of sitting and shivering in the carriage, was pacing up and down beside it, keeping herself healthfully warm by exercise. She ran forward to meet the lovers as soon as they appeared from out the mist.

"So it's all settled," she cried eagerly. "You have been sensible people, and we are going to be happy for ever and ever—that is the state of affairs, isn't it? Don't say anything to the contrary, or I shall faint."

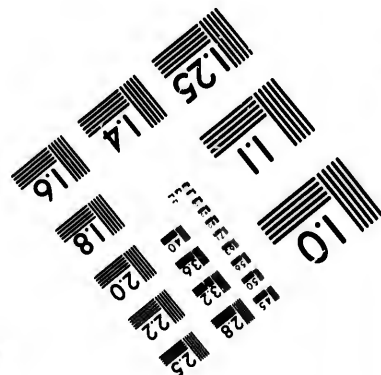
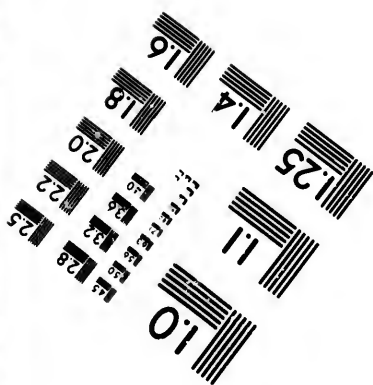
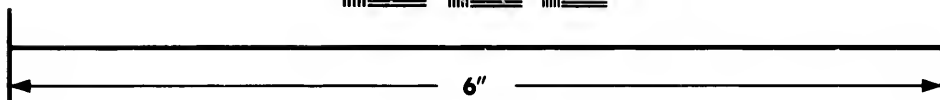
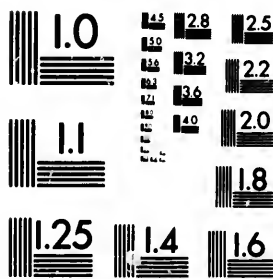
"We have been exceedingly sensible," answered Austin, laughing, "and grateful to you."







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"That's enough. Jump in and let us be off. The train is due in a quarter of an hour, and Killievar will be mightily offended, I can tell you, if nobody is there to receive him."

They got in, and the three were very merry on their way to the station. They were in good time to receive the chief; and on their way back Austin reluctantly left the carriage at the Miners' Row.

"You are looking very well, Miss Coila, and I am very glad," said Killievar, observing her flushed cheeks, and she blushed more than ever.

At the entrance to Ravelston an unusual occurrence happened—the gates were not opened, and Ross had to shout "gate" twice.

Cockie-leerie hurried out of the lodge and opened the gates.

Another man passed round to the side of the carriage where Bess sat, and made a sign to her. She glared at him, then stifled a scream. The horses made a few steps up the avenue, and Bess called :

"Stop, Ross, I want to speak to Macbeth."

The carriage stopped, and she sprang out, without waiting for assistance. Killievar offered to attend her.

"No, thank you, I shall walk home. Drive on."

The carriage passed on, leaving her standing alone in the avenue.

## CHAPTER LVII.

## THE BATTLE OF THE HEART.

THE man whose appearance had caused Bess so much agitation, had withdrawn into the shadow of the trees immediately after making the signal to her. When the carriage had passed on, he stepped forth and she met him.

There was a kind of hesitation on his part; there was none on hers, but her face was white, lips compressed, and eyes wide with wonder as she peered at him through the dim light. He grasped both her hands, pressing them in his own, as if to convince her that he was mortal.

"Is it really you!" she exclaimed, looking at him in bewilderment, and with a shade of fear in her eyes.

"I am afraid it is myself—the bad shilling, you know, always turns up again."

She was dumb, and the smile with which he had spoken faded from his face.

"You are sorry," he said, in a low voice.

Still she did not speak. Her emotions were most perplexing; she had been—for such a long time, it seemed, although it was really only a few weeks—eight or nine at most—thinking of this man as one dead; she had come to regard herself as at liberty to make a fresh start in life, to feel herself free again, and she had begun to appreciate the privileges of her position, and to forget its attendant grief. Suddenly, all the notions of her new life which she had been forming and had formed were upset. She had to return to the old conditions and to the old strife with her father.

She was glad to see her husband again; she was glad that he had escaped; and she had a dim idea that she ought to fling herself into his arms and receive him with a grand demonstration of hysterical joy. But she could not do it.

"Let us go into the lodge, we can talk there," he said, leading her towards the door, and she obeyed him mechanically.

Inside they were alone ; Macbeth had disappeared. Their hands were still clasped ; he was quiet, and apparently waiting for some more marked sign of the humour in which she was to receive him than she had yet given.

She roused herself from the state of stupefaction she had been in since he had first spoken. She put her arms impulsively round his neck, saying :

“ I am glad.”

“ My wife—God bless you for these words. I hesitated to come to you, but I am grateful for the impulse which drove me here in spite of myself since you are not vexed to see me. Thank you, Bess, for the happiest moment in my life.”

“ I don't exactly understand myself. I am glad—really glad—you are safe, and yet this seems a mockery of my gladness.”

She made a hasty movement with her hand, indicating the mourning which she wore.

“ That can be easily changed,” he said, smiling again.

“ But how is it ? I do not understand it. How did you escape ? ”

“ It was simple enough. I was knocked down and taken prisoner by the Alfonsists. I must own they behaved very decently to me ; sent me into hospital, and as soon as I got well they liberated me on parole.”

“ But even Don Carlos thought you were killed.”

“ Very likely. I thought so myself for some days ; and each side does its best to make out the greatest imaginable number of killed on the other side.”

“ How stupid we have all been—and how wicked I have been not to have hoped more ! Your father was the only one who refused to believe in your death. Now you have come back to shame us all, and Don Carlos will make you a duke or a general at least.”

He shook his head.

“ I have no chance of being either, Bess ; I cannot serve in this war again, and I am poorer than when I left you.”

“ Then why did you come back ? ” she cried, in the momentary bitterness of utter disappointment.

She had dreamed of him returning as a hero, whom everybody would count it a privilege to know, and whose glory would shed lustre upon herself, justifying her elopement, and

rendering her choice of a husband an enviable one. Then to learn that he came back without distinction of any kind was very disagreeable. Everybody would ridicule her.

"I came back, Bess, because I was thinking about you," he said. "In all the heat of the fight, in all the monotony of the hospital and the fortress, I was thinking of you, and yearning to see you again. I hesitated to return, for I knew that my promise was unaccomplished. I had neither position nor fortune to offer you. I was anxious about you, too, thinking of you alone in London. I thought it would cheer you to see me, poor as I was, and disappointed as you must be by my return."

"You had no business to think I would be disappointed," she interrupted, sharply.

He went on without seeming to have observed the interruption.

"When I learned at our lodgings that you had returned to Ravelston, I was relieved, for then I knew that you had been spared many petty annoyances; but I was vexed, too, for your return here seemed to be a sign that you had abandoned me. You were right—I was a failure; there was no hope of any future with me that could satisfy you. . . . You don't know what a hard thing it is for a man to look calmly at his life and to own that it is a failure."

"But you can begin again," she said, looking at the floor, and feeling that somehow she was wanting in all kindness—that his utter frankness lifted him above her.

"I might if—but I want to tell you how I came here. At first, it seemed to me that it would be kindest not to show myself at all; then it seemed cruel to keep you in doubt, and I felt that it was due to you to come and tell you the truth. I would confess more, only you would laugh at it as foolish sentiment—I am inclined to laugh at it myself occasionally. But I had an unconquerable desire to see you once more, and to discover how you would treat me when you learned that all my grand hopes were not to be realized, that all my big promises ended, as bunkum always does, in nothing."

"It is a misfortune."

She was still looking at the floor, trying to understand herself, and quite innocent of any intention to give pain.

"A great misfortune for you. On coming here I learned for the first time that you believed me dead. I would have gone away and left you to that pleasant belief, but Macbeth—my father, I ought to say—discovered me, and threatened to proclaim me if I dared to move without speaking to you. So I remained, and I am sorry for having vexed you."

She looked up quickly, as if to say something sharp—checked herself, and sat down on one of the wooden chairs.

"What do you mean to do now?" she asked after a pause, and with forced calmness.

"To say good-bye; to go away and to leave you as free as if you had really been the widow you wished to be."

There was a curious quivering about her lip, and a nervous clutching of the hands; but she answered calmly:

"I cannot be free, since I know that you are alive."

"Then I shall arrange to be killed at as early a date as may be convenient. It can be easily done—I have only to break my parole and to appear in the Carlist ranks again; then there will not be the slightest chance of my escape, for even my nationality will not shield me a second time."

"Are you in earnest?"

"Perfectly; why should you think otherwise?"

She got up and gripped his arm, gazing fixedly in his face.

"Because you are cruel—because you are mocking me. You believe me incapable of one kindly feeling or of one unselfish thought—be fair to me; remember that in an hour of thoughtlessness I hazarded and lost fortune and ease on your account. Now, when they are restored to me, when I am calm, and have the past experience to guide me and to show me the folly of my conduct as well as yours, it is not wonderful that I should be stupid and bewildered, not knowing which way I ought to turn for your sake as much as my own."

"Turn your back upon me, Bess; go home and be silent. I shall not trouble you again."

"Do you care for me?"

There had been bitterness as well as regret in his manner, yet he did not fail to admire the honesty with which she spoke; but at that question he regarded her earnestly, and his eyes kindled with the question "Is it possible that she can love me?"

"Yes," he answered, quietly; "I care so much that I would be glad to relieve you of my presence."

A pause, she gazing steadily in his face as if trying to realize how much of his assertion was true, how much mere words.

"Give me your arm and come with me."

He obeyed, wondering what she meant.

She led him straight up the avenue to the house, never speaking a word to indicate her purpose. There was a kind of haughty authority in her manner, mingled with "dourness," which forbade any attempt at conversation. He was interested and curious.

They entered the house. Paying no heed to the wondering looks of the domestics, she passed up to the drawing-room, still leaning on Kilgour's arm.

She rang the bell, and Baxter, who had followed them, instantly answered it.

"Will you ask my father to speak to me for a few moments?"

Baxter bowed and retired.

The Major was observing her closely, and his expression had suddenly become very cold. His customary self-possession returned to him, for he fancied that Bess, in her resolute way, had determined to have an immediate settlement of their position. Clearly, she did not care for him, although she had demanded an assertion of his regard for her. He did not like the position she had placed him in, and it seemed to be another proof of her eagerness to get rid of him that she stood gloomily silent, offering him no explanation of what she intended to do.

He shrugged his shoulders: he had no right to expect any other reception than this—if she had only cared for him, how differently he would have borne his failure!

Enter Marjoribanks.

As the door closed behind him, Bess advanced.

"Here is my husband, Sir; the report of his death was a mistake."

"I am so sorry," said the Major, bowing.

Marjoribanks looked at him sharply, cleared his throat, and:

"Uh-hum—I am not surprised. I thought he would soon turn up when he discovered you were settled here again; he can't humbug me, although he managed to make a fool of you."

"Make your proposal to him, papa, and let us have done as



soon as we can ; but please do not forget I am to blame as well as he."

She seemed to be struggling with some emotion whilst she spoke, although the words were uttered deliberately enough. The position was hateful to her ; there was not the least bit of romance about it, not the faintest glow of the halo of heroism touched her husband's head ; and the whole business now was reduced to the vulgar calculation—for how much would he sell the right he had obtained to compel her to follow him ? And this was the man whom she had imagined returning as the conquering hero, making a triumphal progress through admiring crowds, and she proudly leaning on his arm !

"You had better leave us to settle the bargain between ourselves. I will call you when we have done."

"If you will allow me, papa, I wish to remain."

"Very well. Now, Sir, we need not have many words. I hoped you had been shot, as you deserved to be ; but as you are here again, I expect you will not refuse to make some reparation to my daughter for having spoiled her prospects in life."

"I shall be glad to discover any means by which I can make amends to her."

Bess drew breath quickly ; her father was right, then ; the man thought only of her money, and was ready to sell her !

"Glad to hear it. This is what I expected of you, and we can easily come to terms. I need not tell you what I think of you——"

"Quite unnecessary, you have shown it in so many ways."

"Glad to hear that, too ; so we can proceed at once to make our bargain. I allowed my daughter two hundred a-year when she was with you, and when I never expected to see her again. How much will you take to quit the country, and to bind yourself never to see my daughter again, or to communicate with her in any way ?"

"Is it her wish that I should make this arrangement ?" said the Major quietly, and glancing at his wife.

"Of course it is her wish."

"Then we can easily agree about terms."

Her flesh seemed to creep as she heard these words—how blindly foolish she had been—how wise her father.

"I thought so," continued Marjoribanks, briskly. "Well, I propose to give you the two hundred with fifty added on her account, provided you agree to the conditions I have named."

The Major went up to Bess.

"You desire this?"

"It is best for us both," she answered, coldly.

A steady look into her eyes, and then his shoulders lifted as if he were taking a long breath. He turned to the father.

"You have been most considerate, Mr. Marjoribanks, and I thank you. I will take the train to-night for London, and I promise you shall not again be troubled by my presence. We made a mistake, Bess and I; she suffers most in consequence, and I am sorry. I shall arrange for you to have the earliest intimation of my death, so that she may be free to try her luck again, and I hope with more success than she obtained in her first marriage."

"I hope so, too," rejoined Majoribanks, but he was puzzled by, and somewhat indignant at, the coolness of the fellow's speech.

"But as for the money you offer me, I do not require it. I managed to get along very well without it before I knew her; I can scramble along without it still. Keep it, or give it to some charity, if you please; I cannot take it."

Marjoribanks was astounded; this announcement upset all his calculations as to the character of the Major; but he quickly recovered himself.

"I see your drift—you expect by this show of indifference to the money to make us believe that it was not your object in cajoling her; but you are mistaken."

"You can believe what you please, Sir; that can make no difference to me. I leave my wife because she wishes me to go; and I own it is better for her that I should go; but at least she shall not remember me as one who was paid to give up his claims upon her. I hope, in spite of the wrong I have done her, she will some day come to think of me with pity, if she cannot remember me with regret or respect. Good-bye, Bess, God bless you—I hope you will be happy and learn to forgive me."

He kissed her on the brow, pressed her hand tenderly, bowed to the father and stepped hurriedly to the door.

She wakened from a kind of stupor and sprang after him, gripping his arm, and crying with passionate earnestness :

"Stop, you shall not go alone. Father, you have made your proposal, and he has refused it. You promised that I should be free to act as I thought best in that event. I have decided, and I go with him."

The Major's eyes brightened, and he eagerly clasped the hand she placed in his; but his brow darkened again.

"Do not be rash, Bess," he said, sadly, "I shall remember this moment gratefully, but it is better for you to remain here."

"You are my husband, and I go with you. Poor or rich, I can be happy with no one else; you shall work for me—we shall both work, and I will be content for—I love you."

The Major clasped her in his arms and kissed her, to the utter confusion and astonishment of Marjoribanks.

"I will work," he cried, "and succeed too; this is more than fortune—it is courage and strength. But be sure of what you are doing; do not blunder a second time. Think of the struggle we had before; it may be worse—it will be worse this time. Be sure of what you are doing."

"I have decided; I go with you."

The Major turned, smiling, to Marjoribanks.

"You see, Sir, money is not everything after all."

"It is easy to say that just now, but wait; mind what you are about, Bess, and don't mistake me. I have yielded once to save you from a beggarly life—I will not yield a second time."

"I go with my husband."

"Take care; if you go with him you shall not have one penny from me, and I withdraw the allowance I made to you before."

"I go with my husband," she repeated, resolutely.

Marjoribanks was angry.

"Very well; you have been warned both by him and by me. Take time to think of what you are doing—you are choosing between a life of comfort and a life of poverty."

"I have chosen—I go with my husband."

"Uh-hum—very well. I can be dour as well as you; but don't blame me when you come begging to me for help and I refuse it."

The Major's shoulders seemed to broaden, and his head was lifted higher as his wife iterated her determination to cleave to him.

"We shall manage somehow, Mr. Marjoribanks, without bothering you. I am sorry that she is compelled to break off all her old associations for my sake, but I am proud of it also—prouder even than I would have been if you had given her to me with all your fortune. I am not afraid of the future now. We will succeed."

"I wish you luck for her sake. As for yourself, I wish I had throttled you that night I had you down the Bell Pit with me."

"That might have been awkward for yourself, Sir," returned the Major, coolly, "if you remember the circumstances rightly."

"I don't—I never remember anything disagreeable; and I hope soon to forget that I ever saw you or that I ever had a daughter. It will be a good thing for you if you can so readily forget the harm you have done her. But least said, soonest mended; since you are to go, Bess, go at once. Shall I order the carriage for you?"

"No, thank you, papa, we can walk. Good-bye, Sir, and . . . I shall remember you, papa, although you say that you are to forget me. You have been very good to me, I shall remember that always, and I will only forget that—that . . . Good-bye."

She kissed him, and took her husband's hand again. Her breast was full of grief, words seemed to fill her throat and yet she could not utter them; he had said they were not to meet again, and it seemed as if the farewell was taken at a death-bed—and it was the death of many fond associations. She would have liked to tell him how much she regretted all the annoyance she had caused; that she quite understood his harshness at this moment was due to his anxiety for her welfare, and that she would forget that he had ever spoken an unkind word. But she could not utter the words somehow, and she clung to her husband for support.

Marjoribanks felt something sticking in his own throat; but he was very angry and he was stubborn; he was always most indignant when he saw people perpetrating an act of folly for

which they must suffer afterwards, although by a little calculation they might avoid it all. He had warned her, he had given her a fair chance to save herself, and she had refused it. He could do no more—he would not try to do any more.

Without another word he saw the husband and wife, hand in hand, walk from the room. She glanced back once, but he made no sign, and they passed on.

Out of the house and down the avenue, she with head bowed and heart bursting with suppressed sobs; he with head erect, proud, and confident. He drew her arm through his own, patting her dainty little hand as if trying to inspire her with courage and hope such as he felt himself. Neither spoke. He was conscious of the struggle in her heart; he appreciated the sacrifice she had made for him, and the difficulty she must have felt in deciding how to act when her father, friends, and fortune stood on one side, and only him and his poverty on the other. But he was all the more elated by her decision, all the more resolved to win distinction for her sake.

She had a lingering fancy that at the last moment her father might relent and, seeing that he could not have his own way, that he might send after them. But no hurrying footsteps announced the approach of a messenger of peace, and the black shadows which now crossed the avenue seemed to be symbolical of her fate. She clung the more closely to her husband as she realized that he was to take the place of all whom she left behind. She was sad, but she would have acted precisely in the same way if she had had to do it over again.

So they passed on under the shadows, but with love in their hearts, and therefore bright possibilities before them. The battle of the heart had been fought out, and the wife's duty and love had conquered all selfishness and vanity.

## CHAPTER LVIII.

## LOVE IS LORD OF ALL.

**M**ARJORIBANKS was unhappy. The Major had behaved in quite a different manner from what he had expected ; Bess had behaved differently also. He had been ready to make a bargain which would have secured the comparative comfort of both ; and they had both refused to be comfortable except in their own way. For the first time in his career he had found money fail to remove all difficulties. His calculations were upset ; his predictions as to the character of the man Bess had chosen were shown to be altogether wrong, and he was unhappy.

He would have liked to call them back and let them take their own way ; but he was disappointed and annoyed, and he could not bring himself to own that he had been wrong. Secretly he acknowledged that perhaps, seeing things were as they were, it would have been the wisest thing to give Bess his blessing and a comfortable income. But his suspiciousness interfered and said "that is just what the man is bargaining for," and so he held his tongue, and would not call them back.

He explained everything to Killievar ; and the chief disappointed him, too, for, after mature deliberation, he spoke like an oracle :

"You are wrong, Sir, that is my opinion ; by doing wrong yourself you cannot make the fault of your daughter right. It is a very great pity that man was not shot as we thought he was, and as he ought to be. But since he is alive and is her husband, there is no getting over the difficulty, and you should have given them, any way, the income you promised at first."

"I can punish the scoundrel by withholding the money."

"Well, I am not precisely sure that he is just altogether a scoundrel ; for it was very decent and manly of him to offer to go away without anything at all. But whether that is so or is

not so, in trying to punish him, you make her suffer a very great deal more indeed. I do not approve of that."

"I can forget all about them. Coila shall be my daughter; I'll give her half a million, and if that doesn't get her a good match, nothing will."

But he was doomed to another disappointment on this score. Austin Murray sent him a note, saying that he purposed calling upon him next day on a matter of much importance to them both. He came, and he presented a cheque for the full amount of his father's debt, with interest. Marjoribanks was honestly pleased by this proof of Austin's success, and heartily congratulated him.

"You are the right sort, Murray, and you will get on. You will have my help whenever you need it."

"I need it now, Sir."

"What for?"

"Well, it is not so much your help as your good will I want in order to marry Coila."

"Eh?—but she won't have you."

"We have had an explanation, and we only wait for your consent to fix the date of our marriage. We have both been stupid and mistaken in each other, and we are sorry. Now, we hope that you will pardon the annoyance we have given you, and allow us to have the wedding soon."

Marjoribanks was disappointed again; everything seemed to be going wrong in his home arrangements.

"That's annoying; I had just lit upon other plans for her; but it seems to me that you young folk settle things in your own way, and your way is never the one which common sense would show you. Are you quite sure she means to have you this time?"

"Quite sure."

"Very well, I won't interfere, but it is not what I would have liked."

His guttural "uh-hum" was almost a sigh as he gave up the last hope of being able to carry out his pet scheme of uniting his heiress to some man of distinction. He would not allow Austin to utter a word of thanks, said "good-day" very brusquely, and settled himself down in his chair to review the whole position.

The review was unsatisfactory. Here was he, a hard working man, who, by his own ability, had attained enormous wealth, had won the esteem of the world and the envy of many—(he felt somewhat more comfortable as he continued his reflections)—and yet a parcel of women upset his plans, put him out in all his calculations, and left him no alternative but to play the part of an unforgiving and heartless tyrant, or to yield to their whims—whims which made them lose all the grand things he had intended for them. A mere sentiment had overthrown all the astute speculations which his riches would have enabled him to realize.

“But there’s no doing with a parcel of silly women; they never know what they want, and they will never be content till they get it. I’ve a notion that it might be a good thing to make Janet my heiress, and marry her to the first man who offers.”

The afternoon post brought him an important letter from Lord Connoughmore. It informed him that one of his ambitions—the greatest of them—was to be achieved. In consideration of his services to the Government, of the good work he had done for education and religion in founding schools and building churches, it was Her Gracious Majesty’s pleasure that the honour of Knighthood should be conferred upon him.

His vexation vanished, his breast swelled with pleasure and pride. He went in search of Killievar to communicate the good news, and to take his advice about the necessary arrangements for the forthcoming ceremony. He found the chief walking round the lawn with Miss Janet—they had considerably stepped out in order to leave the drawing room free to Austin and Coila.

“It is very good news, indeed,” said the chief, gravely.

“It is enchanting, dear—but did you see my shade?—please do not move on my account, dear; you will —”

“Why don’t you go into the house and fasten all your things about you with ropes?” said the knight-to-be, laughing.

“Thank you, dear—it is so awkward to lose things.” (This to the chief who had found the shade on the seat they had just quitted, and presented it to her.) “I congratulate you, brother; I feel as proud as if the honour had been conferred



upon myself. It is so charming to think of you as *Sir Robert Marjoribanks* ! ”

“ Sounds well, doesn't it ? Then I am to be presented to the Queen—she is a noble lady, and I say long live the Queen. Wish we could only get more women like her. What are you looking so glum about, Killievar ? ”

“ I was thinking, Sir, that when you are about to go before her Majesty it is rather an unpleasant thing that people should be saying ill words about you. ”

“ What are they saying now ? ”

“ They are saying, Sir, that you have turned your daughter out of the house without a penny, and that you have left her at the mercy of a man who has nothing to support her. That is very awkward indeed, Sir, at this moment. ”

Marjoribanks frowned.

“ It was her own choice. ”

“ Yes, Sir, but she was too young to choose wisely, and the mischief being done, it should be your endeavour to spare her as much as possible. That is my opinion, Sir, and people have raised a very great scandal indeed. ”

“ What should I do ? ”

“ Send for Bess, and give her a chance of being happy. ”

## CHAPTER LIX.

## THE EXILES.

“**Y**OU are not losing courage, are you?” the Major said one morning to Bess in that same poor lodging in Pimlico they had formerly occupied.

She was making the tea for breakfast. She had been happy in a quiet way since they had been banished from Ravelston, contented with her fate, and had set herself to make everything as neat and comfortable as willing hands could make it. She had even attempted washing on a small scale, and that was an act of self-abnegation which no one who had known the proud impulsive heiress of Ravelston would have believed possible. But she enjoyed the fun of it, and the Major declared that if everything else failed they would start a laundry; he would get a wheelbarrow and collect and deliver the linen of their clients. They laughed at this absurdity, and were altogether merry.

In fact, they had not known a sad day since they arrived in London, although their only amusement outside the house had been a walk in the park, or a visit to the pit of a theatre, walking there and back, but occasionally venturing upon the extravagance of a shilling ride in a hansom—Bess preferred a hansom to the lumbering and dingy “four-wheelers,” and she enjoyed it all the more because there was a suggestion of fastness in using it.

“On my soul, Bess, I never could have given you credit for so much common sense.”

“Delighted that you are so agreeably disappointed, Sir,” she said, with a curtsy.

She was transformed. The practical element of her nature, which at home—for she still called Ravelston “home”—had often appeared to be selfishness, now shone out as an invaluable quality in the management of their limited funds and of their apartments.

It was love which had effected the transformation—love, inspired by admiration of her husband, and by the remorse she felt in the knowledge of how much she had wronged him by her doubts. He had returned to her in a very different character from that of the conqueror her imagination had pictured. There was no triumphal march, no bending of the knees of those who had ridiculed her choice, and that was a cruel disappointment. But he was still a hero to her, although he had failed—for are not many of those who fail in the struggle of life as worthy of the title of hero as the few who win the laurel ? She believed that many were, and he was one of them. So in her new born enthusiasm she loved him all the more because he was unfortunate and poor.

Therefore, she was contented, and held her tongue whenever she felt vexed by their impecunious condition. But this morning he thought she looked troubled, and hence his question.

“No, I am not losing courage,” she answered, measuring out the tea with a teaspoon, “but I was wondering what you are to do next.”

“Make the toast.”

He stuck the fork into a round of bread, and held it before the fire.

“Do be serious.”

“I’ll try—look at this.”

He screwed his face into such a lugubrious expression that she could not help laughing.

“You are either very thoughtless or very hopeful.”

“Hopeful it is, and thank Heaven for it. I would have died of despair long ago, but hope sustained me. Then you came in to back up hope, and so I have no fear. To-day we shall learn whether or not my grand scheme for securing that mine at Linares is to be carried out ; if it is we shall make a fortune.”

“But I am to go with you this time.”

“Of course ; my next visit to Spain will be entirely in a civil capacity, and, luckily, Linares is comparatively undisturbed by the war. The mines are being steadily worked in spite of the row which is going on all round them, so you can accompany me with safety.”

Rat-tat, on the outer door.

The Major flung the toast and fork on the table as he sprang up.

"By Jove!—there's the message—a telegram, it must be, for there is no post at this hour."

A telegram it was, but not the one he had expected; it was from Ian M'Killop, of Killievar, and dated from Ravelston.

"You are both to come here by first train. Your future depends on instant obedience. Horrocks will supply all necessary."

They were amazed, and unable to guess what good fairy had worked this miracle in their favour just when they were about at the end of their resources.

"Horrocks is papa's London agent, we'll go to him and see what it means."

It meant that they were to be supplied with whatever money they demanded, and that they were to be urged to obey the telegram at once.

"Is papa ill?" inquired Mrs. Kilgour, anxiously.

"I don't think it, but he is eager to see you."

Afternoon at Ravelston; the sun tipping the trees with gold, and making the western windows ablaze with fire. The breast of the tiny lake glistening like a mirror, and reflecting surrounding objects with softened outlines; two shadows, hand in hand, under the willow near the boat. The mavis, the sparrow, the blackbird, and the starling singing gaily as they flitted about on business or pleasure intent; the yellow primrose—first of the season—glimmering shyly on the banks and in mossy nooks, and everywhere a sweet sense of spring merging into summer.

The two shadows under the willow talked in undertones—twittering like the birds—utterly happy in the sunshine which had entered their lives, and which they believed was to abide with them in spite of the coldest blasts of winter. Here they had first understood each other; here the first kiss had been taken; and the spot was hallowed by those blissful memories. Coila and Austin were arranging the date of their marriage; what brighter moment is there in the course of true love?

They were wholly unconscious of the neighbourhood of two

gentleman who were pacing to and fro along the outer path by the side of the park.

"I'll make it all right with them," said Marjoribanks, glancing at the telegram he held in his hand ; " but they have you to thank for it—lucky you were here to put in a word for them."

"And a very good thing for you too, Sir," answered Killievar.

"Maybe, but it's a weak sort of thing to give in a second time, and you know the whole affair is a disappointment to me."

"It is never a weak thing, Sir, to own that we have been wrong ; for the admission shows that we see more clearly. It is a disappointment ; but when there is no remedy, a wise man makes the best of his position."

"Right enough, and it would be nonsense, as you say, to try to punish him when she must suffer with him. We'll make the best of a bad bargain. He is not a bad sort either, and, maybe, we can manage to make something of him yet."

"It is my opinion, Sir, he will make something of himself if he gets the opportunity. You can give him the opportunity,"

"We'll see ; but why didn't they come straight here instead of going to Glasgow ?"

"The message says he has business to transact there. If they do not come by the next train you can telegraph to the Imperial Hotel, and say you are waiting for them."

The gentlemen looked towards the avenue ; there was a sound of wheels, and presently they saw the carriage drive up to the door of the house.

The Major sprang out, assisted his wife to descend, and learning from Baxter that Marjoribanks was walking in the grounds, they passed across the lawn in search of him.

Bess caught sight of her father through the trees and scampered off to meet him. The Major followed with a light, springing step, and head erect as if he were leading a charge upon an enemy's entrenchment.

"Oh, papa, I am so glad you sent for us ; because we are just going away to Spain and we may never see you again."

She put her arms round his neck and kissed him again and again, utterly indifferent to the fact that they were exposed to the view of Killievar, of the servants at the door, of Miss Janet sidling towards them, and of Coila and Austin coming up from the lake.

"What," he said, "are you going out to fight for Don Carlos too?"

"No, no, but Hector has started a company to buy up a mine in Linares, and he is going out to settle the business."

"So he has been taking a leaf out of my book and going into trade. Glad to hear it, Major, for there is a chance for you in that way."

"Thank you, Sir, I have no doubt of brilliant results, for I have been lucky in finding a capitalist to back me to any extent, and I have been equally lucky in discovering a safe speculation."

"I'll join you in it, if you like—a thousand or two is neither here nor there to me."

"Our shares are all taken up, and it would not be worth your while to buy at a premium."

"Anyhow, I will be pleased to know what your prospect is, and to give you my advice. Meanwhile, you are welcome to Ravelston. I never thought I would say that to you again, but Killievar and common sense have overcome my anger; and what you tell me now proves that Killievar was right. Good luck to you, and God bless you—I feel more comfortable than I have felt for a long while."

He grasped the Major's hand cordially, whilst Bess retained possession of the other hand and arm.

"Look here, you know," he went on, "I did not mean to be cruel to any of you; but if I pay the piper it is rather hard that I can't get him to play my tunes. I had plans for Bess and for Coila, and they have both rendered them impracticable. You cannot blame me for being angry. I might have been a great deal more severe than I have been, and no man of common sense would have said I was wrong—would he?"

The Major answered, laughing:

"I entirely sympathise with you, Mr. Marjoribanks, and I believe that I would have been a great deal harder than you upon my daughter if she had run away with a rascal like myself. But, you see, Sir, there are so many incidents in life for which we cannot prepare ourselves, and accidents will happen. *et cetera*—and this is one of them. Bess ought to have married a prince, and she chose me instead. Money is only the second power, Sir, for in the young heart there is a ridiculous senti-

ment—some people call it love—I call it the law of natural selection—which supersedes even the dictates of selfish consideration. We are grateful to you for your forgiveness ; we are glad to be with you again, for it gives us more heart to go on our way, and I hope to prosper.”

“ You must prosper, Kilgour, and I will help you. There, don’t let us talk any more about it. I cannot alter things, and, maybe, they are better as they are. You are a witch, Bess, and you have made me yield in spite of myself. As for Coila, I gave her up long ago.”

“ Thank you,” said Austin ; “ I am glad you gave her up to me.”

“ This is very beautiful, indeed, Sir,” said Killievar, gravely ; “ and I will be a proud man, too, when I dance at Coila’s wedding. It would not take a very great deal to make me ask Miss Janet if it is not too late to offer myself and the peacock livery also.”

He peered into her face with a half smile, which was plainly indicative of his readiness to turn the jest into earnest if the lady would give him the least encouragement to do so.

For once in a way Miss Janet looked up, and there was a mild sadness in her eyes as she rested a hand on the chief’s arm.

“ Yes, dear, it is too late. People would just laugh at us and say we were old enough to know better. But it might have been so different to us both if you had spoken in the old days. Dear, dear, what a long time it seems since you first scolded me, and I knew by that how kindly you were thinking of me ! We will be happy in watching the happiness of the young folk, and we will be good friends always, dear ; but it is too late.”

He did not speak ; he took her hand and in silence they passed on up the path under the shadow of the trees, feeling that the time had passed for marriage, but that it was never too late to love.

“ It would not have been a bad thing if they had made up their minds to it,” commented Marjoribanks, “ only that would have forced me to marry the cook so that we might have had weddings all round.”

There was a blithe party at Ravelston—the blithest it had ever witnessed yet. Even Mrs. Murray was satisfied when she heard how generous Marjoribanks had been to Coila. She received the girl with sincere respect and a degree of affection which was sure to increase as days passed.

Cockie-leerie was invited up to the house, but he refused to go, so the Major and Bess went down to him.

“I’m proud to see you both,” said Macbeth, “but never you be feared that I will interfere with you. I ken that we are far apart, but I’m awful happy just to ken that you twa are all right. I’m perfectly content to bide here, and when you hae gotten a fortune, I’ll come and bide with you. But I’m no going to mar your prospects by coming to you the now. God bless you, my bairns, and I’m proud of you. Hector is just what I might have been if I hadna married the plaiden merchant’s daughter.”



## CHAPTER LX.

## KNIGHTHOOD.

**M**ARJORIBANKS was in high glee ; for everybody was admiring the forbearance he had exercised towards his daughter and her husband, and praising his generosity to Coila. In a vague way he began to comprehend that the world was capable of appreciating kindness as well as riches. The people who had covertly laughed at him when he had been boasting about the "splendid match" he had arranged for Bess, now cordially congratulated him upon the restoration of the lady to his favour. Some of them even went as far as to suggest that he might not be so much disappointed in his son-in-law as he had feared.

All this was delightful to Marjoribanks ; by recalling the Kilgours he had risen ever so many degrees higher in the estimation of his neighbours, than the point he had occupied before. They lauded his practical sense in this, as in so many other matters, but they praised his kind heart most of all. It was unexpected and the more welcome accordingly ; Bess and the Major had turned out a success.

Then there came the journey to London to be knighted—at Buckingham Palace, too, and by Her Majesty's own hand. The height of glory was attained.

But the approach was uncomfortable in some respects, He was extremely nervous as to how he should conduct himself ; indeed he was secretly miserable on that score, although in the presence of Killievar and the Major he looked as cheerful as possible under the circumstances, without concealing his anxiety. He would have to enter the Audience Chamber, to bow (and how he did practise that bow !) to approach, to kneel, to retire gracefully, and disappear.

He wished it were all over, and yet the sensation of joyous trepidation was exquisite—such as a bride feels on the morning of her marriage-day.

From Lord Connoughmore he obtained a few useful hints as to how he was to conduct himself, and he treasured them. The important event which occupied the entire attention of the world at present, was to take place at the first levée.

There was much ado about procuring the proper costume.

"You can hire a court suit for three guineas, sword and all," suggested the Major.

But Marjoribanks would not hear of such a thing as a borrowed suit; he would have one made of the very best material. He was not going to be knighted every day, and he would have everything done in first-class style.

When the dress was delivered to him he tried it on; and there was great fun to everyone, except Marjoribanks himself, in the rehearsal which ensued. A chair placed on the sofa was supposed to represent where Her Majesty would stand, Bess and the Major, Coila and her husband—who were passing through London on their honeymoon trip—Miss Janet and Killievar represented the attendant ladies and courtiers.

Marjoribanks went through the performance with painful gravity, and found much difficulty in managing the sword and his hands. Here the Major was invaluable to him; and was so diligent in his attentions that by the appointed day the Master of Ravelston was respectably perfect in his walk and general deportment.

Three o'clock was the hour fixed for the levée; but at half-past two, in obedience to commands, the gentlemen who were to receive the honour of knighthood were in the palace, and they were ushered into the presence chamber as soon as those who had the *entrée* had passed before the Queen.

Marjoribanks was among the first. He felt profoundly uncomfortable, dazed, stupid, and yet happy in his misery. The august presence made him feel a terribly poor creature.

Her Majesty was radiant, calm, and gracious. She touched him with a sword, first on the left shoulder and then on the right. She uttered only two words:

"Sir Robert."

And he was a knight!

He got out somehow; he never remembered exactly how. But in the corridor he paused, plucked up courage, lifted his head, and marched out to the carriage feeling that he was ten

feet higher at least. The small fees he had to pay to the Heralds of England and Scotland seemed to be too small for the joy he experienced.

Sir Robert Marjoribanks, still in his court suit, graciously received the congratulations of his daughter, of Coila, Miss Janet, and the others. In the fulness of his heart he said :

“Siller is a good thing, bairns, but honour and love are better.”

THE END.

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