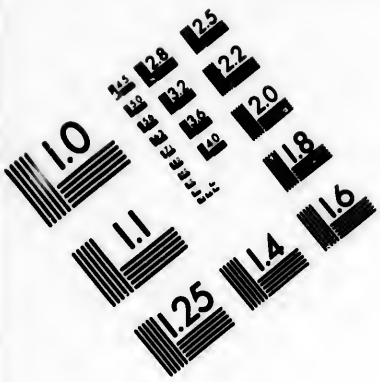

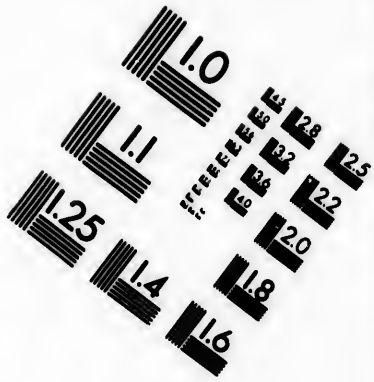

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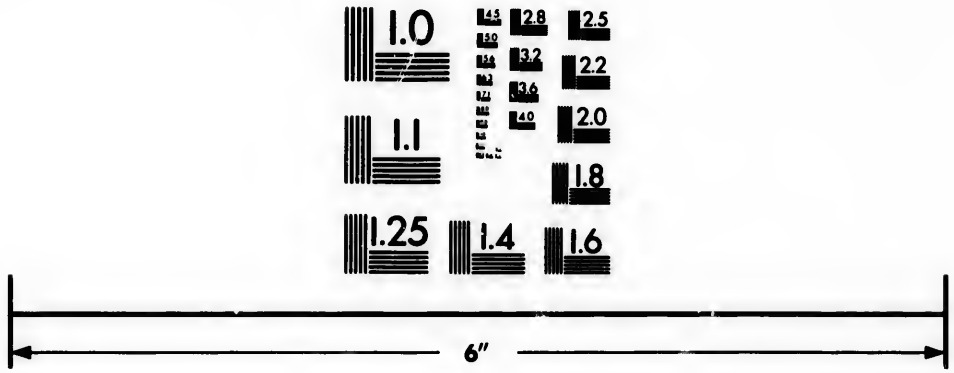

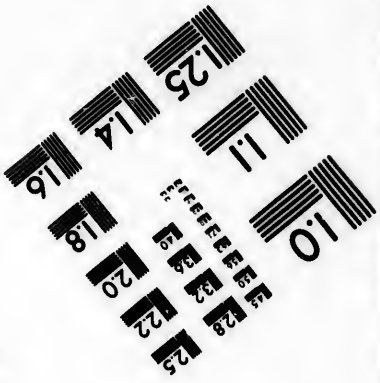

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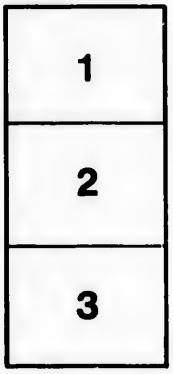
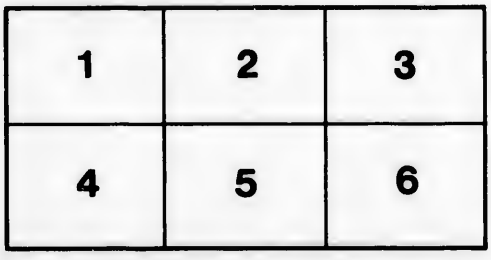
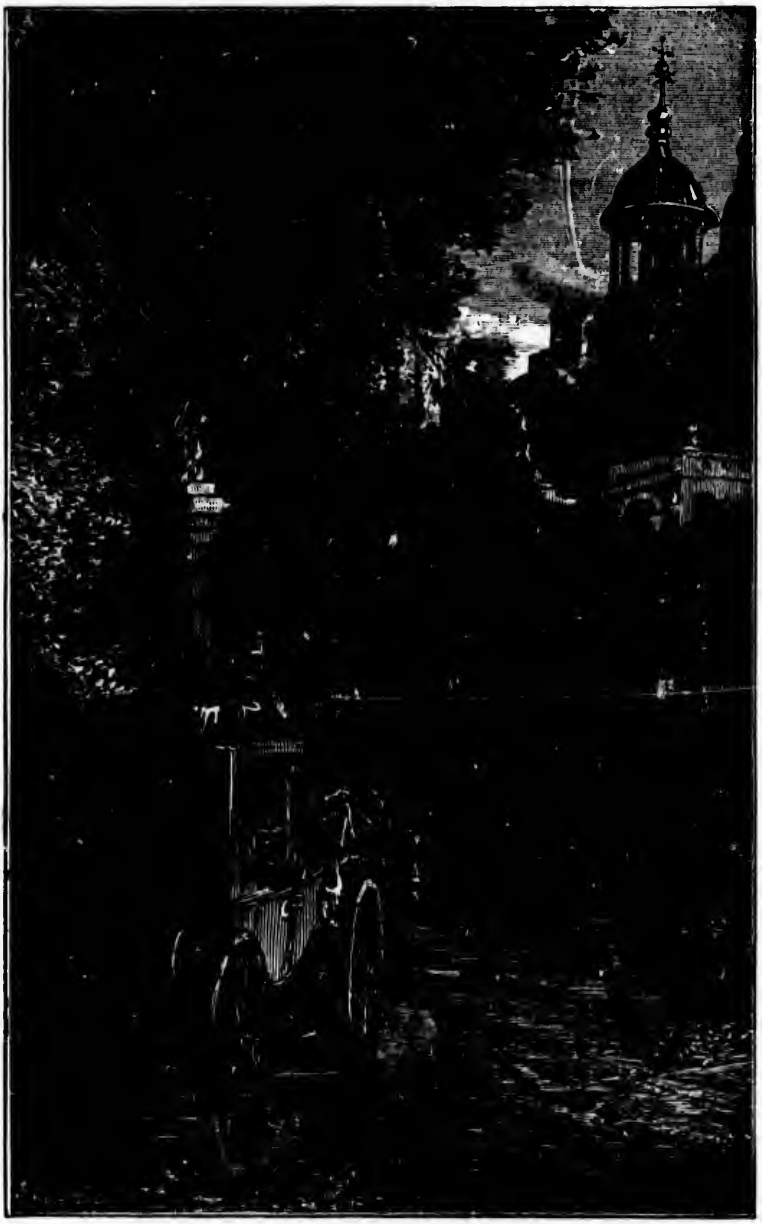




THE SECRET PANEL.



'Looking out, he saw that they had reached the gate.'—*Page* 21.
Frontispiece.

THE SECRET PANEL

BY

ANNIE S. SWAN

AUTHOR OF

'GATES OF EDEN,' 'BRIAR AND PALM,' 'ALDERSYDE,' 'CARLOWRIE,'

ETC. ETC.

New Edition

TORONTO, CANADA

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1889

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THE SECRET PANEL

CHAPTER I.

MISTRESS AND MAID.

'THE mistress's surely no' hersel' the day, Kirsty?'

'Ay, what like should be the maitter wi' her, lass?' queried Kirsty rather scornfully, and turning her eyes keenly and quickly on the rosy-cheeked damsel who had ventured to express so bold an opinion. 'If ye keepit yer e'en on yer wark, Effie, and glowered less at things and folk ye hae nae business wi', it wud be better for ye. Awa' and scoor yer knives, and dinna fash yer heid wi' Miss Dempster's looks.'

Somewhat abashed, Effie turned meekly away, took the knife-board and the bath-brick from their places, and silently began to her work. Her senior

went on swiftly with her ironing, and there was a long silence in the kitchen at Drumkeillour. As Kirsty Forgan deftly and skilfully plaited the border of her mistress's caps, her face wore an expression of thought and anxiety which betrayed an anxious mind. Little wonder, for in the upper room her mistress whom she had faithfully loved and served for forty years was drawing near death's door. Ay, even though the indomitable will and endurance kept her from succumbing altogether, and though she still rose and dressed at the same hour every day, the iron resolution giving a strange measure of strength to the feeble body, the truth could no longer be hid; and Miss Dempster of Drumkeillour was failing every day.

Kirsty's mournful cogitations were presently interrupted by the loud and hasty ringing of Miss Dempster's bell, and in a minute she was running up-stairs with a speed surprising at her years. The summons came from the dining-room, which was Miss Dempster's favourite resort, and when her faithful servant entered she was sitting languidly by the fire, shivering with cold, though it was one of the mildest and loveliest of September days. A frail, worn woman was Robina Dempster now, old before her time, her keen dark eyes looking out from

shadowy hollows with a strange yearning gleam which indicated a mind ill at ease.

'Are you busy, Kirsty? Can you stay with me for half an hour?' she asked, and her eyes wandered for a moment to some open letters on her lap; then Kirsty knew that her mistress had something of importance to communicate to her. She took off her white apron, rolled it up, and, laying it on a chair at the door, advanced to the fire.

'I'm no' that busy bit that I can bide as long as ye want me, ma'am,' she said, her sharp voice strangely softened, her eye growing even tender in its glance as she gazed on the worn and wasted face of her ailing mistress.

'Very well, Kirsty; sit down. I want to read these letters to you,' said Miss Dempster; and with trembling fingers she put up her heavy gold eye-glass and lifted the open sheets from her lap. 'I did not tell you, Kirsty, that two days ago I sent a letter to my niece in Edinburgh, the daughter of my brother David, you know,' said she, looking over her eye-glass into her faithful servant's face.

'No, ma'am, ye didna tell me,' said Kirsty quietly; but a look of surprise, not unmingled, it seemed, with satisfaction, crossed her face as she spoke.

'In this weakness which has come upon me,

Kirsty, I felt a strange yearning to look upon one of my own kith and kin,' continued Miss Dempster; 'and though I cannot forgive nor forget the wrong my brother David did to me in my youth, I felt no bitterness against his child, so I wrote to her two days ago, and this is her answer. It has given me a great disappointment, Kirsty—very great; but doubtless the girl was influenced by her father. Hear what she says:—

"EDINBURGH, *September 14th.*

"MY DEAR AUNT,—I received your kind letter and invitation to Drumkeillour; the latter I would gladly have accepted but for two reasons, which I had best put down, as you say you like to be told the truth. The love and duty I owe to him who has ever been the best of fathers to me forbids me to go where he could not be made welcome, and I fear I could not be at home nor happy with one who feels so bitterly against him. For these reasons, I feel it better for me to remain at home, although I would gladly be of any comfort to you if I could. I regret to hear of your failing health. Hoping you will soon be better, I am, your dutiful niece,

"MAGGIE DEMPSTER."

'What do you think of that, Kirsty?' queried Miss Dempster, her cheek flushing slightly. 'Is that the sort of epistle, think you, that a young girl should send to an old woman?'

'I couldna wunner at the lassie, Miss Dempster,' said Kirsty candidly. 'I like the spunk o' the crater. She maun be her faither's bairn. Ay, ay, an' yet her e'en never lichtit on Drumkeillour.'

Deeper grew the colour on Miss Dempster's pale cheeks, and her thin lips closed together resolutely, telling of inward annoyance. But that Kirsty was her privileged friend, she had ordered her to hold her peace. 'At the same time, Kirsty, I wrote a letter to my old friend, Gavin Wardrop of Dundee. What, think you, had I to say to him?'

'The deil only kens, ma'am,' quoth Kirsty, with more energy than courtesy. 'Ye had little adae, that's a' I can say aboot it. Drumkeillour was never the better o' a Wardrop, no, nor never will be.'

'Be quiet, Kirsty,' said Miss Dempster quickly and impatiently. 'How often have I told you to speak with more respect of those I hold in esteem? Let me tell you the plan I had in my head, but which this child of David Dempster's has spoiled, little guessing, poor thing, how her prospects in life would have been brilliantly altered by it.'

'Weel, ma'am?' said Kirsty inquiringly, and waited with some anxiety to hear the unfolding of her mistress's plan.

'This Maggie Dempster, my niece, must be a

young woman now, Kirsty,' said Miss Dempster; 'and young Gavin Wardrop, as you know, has grown to manhood. I wanted them both to come to Drumkeillour, in the hope that when they were thrown together they might learn to care for each other. In the event of that happening, it was my intention to leave Drumkeillour to my niece, and the greater part of my means to Gavin Wardrop; on condition, of course, that he married her. A good plan, was it not, Kirsty?'

'Deed, ma'am, I canna say it's guid,' said Kirsty bluntly. 'Sic mairrages, made by ither folk, an' hingin' on money an' gear, never turn oot weel. As for young Wardrop, if he be like his faither'—

Here Kirsty vigorously pulled herself up. The subject was one upon which she and her mistress could never hope to agree; and the less she said about it the better.

'Hear how differently Gavin Wardrop replies to my invitation,' said Miss Dempster, without noticing Kirsty's candid remarks; and, unfolding another letter, she read slowly and complacently:—

"CASTLE STREET, DUNDEE,
September 14th.

"MY DEAR MISS DEMPSTER,—I am honoured to-day in receiving the very kind note in which you ask my son to spend a few days with you at Drum-

keillour. Need I say how very gladly he will accept your invitation so kindly and gracefully given? For myself, the sight of your familiar handwriting stirred up many memories, both painful and sweet, upon which it is not wise to dwell. Gavin will travel as you desire to-morrow afternoon, arriving at Cupar about five o'clock. We are busy just now; but were we ten times more hardly pressed, I would spare the boy to you and Drumkeillour. Hoping you are in good health and spirits, I am, my dear Miss Dempster, unalterably yours,

"GAVIN WARDROP."

'There, Kirsty, that is the letter of a friend and a gentleman,' said Miss Dempster, with a kind of quiet triumph; very different, is it not, from the curt reply sent by David's girl?'

'Maybe, ma'am,' said Kirsty slowly and doubtfully, and with a very sombre expression on her honest face.

'Kirsty, I hope you will not let your old prejudice against the father cause you to judge unjustly of the son,' said Miss Dempster severely. 'Remember, if you fail in courtesy to him while he is at Drumkeillour, I shall be seriously displeased.'

'I houp he'll no' be like his faither, that's a',' said Kirsty. 'Oh, ma'am, it gars me grue to see ye so easily deceived. Ye ken weel eneuch what character Gavin Wardrop has. Div they no' ca' him the

black writer o' Dundee, an' is he no' kent far and near for leein' and dishonesty? Gif he gets his finger on Drumkeillour, he'll draw it a' into his net. I maun say'd, though ye should scold me for it. Maister Dauvit saw further than you, an' kent it was yer siller an' yer gear he was efter lang syne. Better like, ye sent for yer brither, ma'am, than for Guy Wardrop. Wull ye no' tak' my advice?'

'You can go, Kirsty, you have quite forgotten your place,' said Miss Dempster haughtily, waving her hand in dismissal; but though Kirsty rose to depart, she did not look at all disconcerted. Such tiffs between her mistress and herself were of too frequent occurrence to occasion Kirsty Forgan the slightest concern. Her place at Drumkeillour was assured.

'An' what for the man should sign himsel' "unalterably yours" an' him wi' a wife o' his ain, I dinna ken,' said Kirsty, as she tied on her apron at the door. 'Miss Dempster, if auld Guy himsel' should come to Drumkeillour, I'll no promise tae keep a ceevil tongue in my heid. He's a chip o' the deil's block, if ever there was ane in Fife.'

'If you say another word, Kirsty, or speak in such a manner of my friends and guests, I shall be obliged to forget your long service and dispense with you' said Miss Dempster angrily.

'Dispense wi' me, ma'am!' echoed Kirsty. 'That wud be a bonnie tapsalteerie. Na, na, I ken whan I'm weel aff, if ye dinna; a bonnie kittle o' fish you an' Drumkeillour wud be withoot Kirsty Forgan.'

So saying Kirsty retired; but after she shut the door, she had to wipe her eyes with her apron, for they were wet with honest tears. Her heart was heavy for her mistress, whom she loved with all the true love of her faithful heart. Robina Dempster and Drumkeillour were all Kirsty Forgan had to live and care for on earth.

Left alone, Miss Dempster read and re-read the smooth, flatteringly-expressed letter written by Gavin Wardrop. Perhaps she may be excused for pondering and lingering over its perusal, for its writer had been the lover of her youth, the hero of her girlhood, about whom had centred romantic hopes and fond dreams destined all to be destroyed. But in age the resolute old woman cherished these long gone dreams, lived again those bright days, recalling their bitter-sweet memories one by one. And in the kitchen faithful Kirsty, very short-tempered to her young handmaiden, thought gloomily of the coming guest, with a fear in her heart that he would bring with him sorrow and trouble to Drumkeillour.

CHAPTER II.

FATHER AND SON.

IN the private room of a solicitor's office in Castle Street, Dundee, sat two gentlemen, deeply engrossed in conversation. That they were father and son was at once evidenced by the close resemblance between them. Both were handsome men in the ordinary acceptation of the term, yet a close observer would detect in the shifting, deep-set eyes, and in the peculiar curve of the lips, certain traits of character which would make him wary of trusting either. An exceptionally clever man was Gavin Wardrop the elder, though certain whom he had wronged called him by less dignified and more forcible terms. But Gavin Wardrop could afford to laugh at those who called him a cunning rogue and such-like—he was a rich man, and his position in Dundee was assured. He had his finger

Gavin Wardrop.—*Page* 16.

on too many household skeletons, and knew too many family secrets to be openly defied. He had played his professional cards with absolute skill, and was now master of the situation. As he sat there in his morocco-covered easy-chair, one leg crossed over the other, and his fingers meeting at the tips, he looked the picture of ease and indifference. Young Gavin, they said, was a chip of the old block. After passing the necessary examinations at the University of Edinburgh, he had entered the office to be instructed in the practical chicanery of the law, as practised by his father. He had been an apt pupil, and it was his father's boast that Guy could almost see through a dead wall. He was a handsome young fellow, foppishly dressed, and looking immeasurably satisfied with himself. This calm self-confidence carried Guy Wardrop well through life. No matter what he tried—from billiard-playing to laying siege to a lady's heart—he had been accustomed to win.

'The question is,' he said, carefully paring his dainty nails as he spoke, 'Is the game worth the candle? In the first place, has the old lady anything to leave?'

'Drumkeillour and fifteen thousand, lad,' said old Guy quietly. 'That would make a very fair little nest-egg for you, Guy, eh?'

'Pretty decent,' assented Guy. 'But how long am I supposed to make a sacrifice of myself before the old girl will make up her mind to make me her heir?'

'Not very long, if you take her properly in hand. She's almost in her dotage, you know, and if you can only fan the flame of her ire against that brother of hers, the thing's done. You needn't stick at a trifle, you know. You can put words in his mouth. Tell her you knew of him in Edinburgh, and how he speaks disrespectfully of her. You understand?'

Guy nodded.

'It'll be rather dreich work; but I'll do my best. There is no will already made, I suppose?'

'Ah, you must find that out. There's no accounting for old women's whims, you know, and if you stay, say, a week, at Drumkeillour without becoming master of the situation, you are not what I take you for. You deserve to be disappointed, that's all.'

Guy the younger laughed, and it was rather an unpleasant sound.

'Ah, well, I suppose I'll need to be off shortly,' he said, yawning, and rising from his chair.

'Will you be across while I am at Drumkeillour?'

'Not unless the old lady expresses a desire to see me. We mustn't overdo the thing,' said the father shrewdly. 'I haven't been within the gates of

Drumkeillour for twenty years; but the Cupar folk don't know how much of its revenue finds its way into my pockets every year. Ha! ha! But if once Robina Dempster were off, and Drumkeillour mine or yours, which would be the same thing, I'd snap my fingers at them. I have one or two old scores to wipe off with them, and I will some day, too.'

'If Drumkeillour ever *is* mine, I'll take precious good care it isn't quite the same thing,' muttered Guy to himself. 'I'm going to do a little business now on my own account, and there'll be no sharing of profit, you bet, there won't.' With this dutiful resolution, Guy Wardrop took up his portmanteau, and, giving his father a careless nod, turned to go.

'Well, you'll drop a line occasionally, and let me know how the thing goes on,' said the old man. 'And I almost forgot, there's an old dragon of a servant woman, of the privileged domestic order, you know. You'll need to keep an eye on her. Unless she's in her dotage too, she'll prove the lion in the path. She hates me, too; and you will probably come in for a share of her ill-will.'

'Oh, I'll manage her,' said Guy confidently, little dreaming what was the nature of the task. 'If she's troublesome, I'll get the old lady to dismiss her.'

So saying, he departed, full of hope and anticipa-

tion, to put his amiable resolutions into execution. He travelled to Cupar by the train arriving at five o'clock; and as it was a dreary, wet afternoon, he was glad to see a carriage on the Station Bridge, and to hear the fat, lazy-looking coachman in shabby brown livery inquire for Mr. Wardrop. Guy stepped forward, gave the man a condescending nod, tossed up his portmanteau to the box, and jumped into the comfortable interior of the vehicle as if it were verily his own. In huge disgust, Dunlop, who was a cousin of Kirsty Forgan's, and not unlike her in nature, gave the fat, well-fed greys an unusual pull, and caused them to trot off at a pace quite surprising for animals not accustomed to exert themselves. Leaning back in his corner, Guy Wardrop gave himself up to pleasing visions of the future. In the near distance he beheld himself laird of Drumkeillour, freed from the drudgery of professional labour, and at liberty to enjoy life, as one of his tastes could so fully enjoy it when time and opportunity offered. He pictured himself the head of the sporting gentry in the neighbourhood, on equal terms with those who now regarded him in somewhat the same light as he regarded the coachman driving him at that minute. Probably he would marry into one of the county families, and then it would be con-

venient to drop his own relatives; for his mother, poor creature, was the very essence of vulgarity, her large fortune, made in the spirit vaults in the Back Row of Kirkcaldy, alone having made her palatable to Mr. Gavin Wardrop. He had married her, and having secured her thousands, had carefully kept her out of sight, and poor Mrs. Wardrop found herself a mere nobody, and, what was much worse, speedily discovered what had been her husband's motives in making her his wife. As may be imagined, it proved a most unhappy alliance, and there was neither peace nor comfort in the house of Wardrop. Guy's pleasurable meditations were interrupted by the sudden stoppage of the carriage, and, looking out, he saw that they had reached the gates, and that the man waited for the lodge-keeper to throw them open, As they swept into the grounds, Guy looked about him with the liveliest interest. It seemed to be a fine old place, and the lawyer's keen eyes took in at a glance the wealth of valuable timber which studded the park, magnificent old trees such as he had very rarely seen before. The autumn leaves were upon them still, but their brighter tints had flown, and they were whirling to the ground in the chill autumn wind, and being beaten and sodden by the drenching rain. In a few minutes, a sudden curve in the

avenue brought the house before his view, a solid square pile of masonry, its gables clothed with ivy as old as the trees in the park. A flight of broad steps gave entrance to the hall, and as the door stood wide open, Gavin Wardrop could see the plain, substantial elegance of the interior even before he entered. Jumping from the carriage, he offered John a shilling, which that gentleman rather contemptuously declined. Guy reddened a little, and turning away, ascended the steps to the door. A red-cheeked country lass met him there, and asked him to step upstairs to his rooms, and her mistress would see him shortly. Kirsty Forgan had not thought fit to set any of the guest-chambers in order for the lawyer's son, consequently Guy was rather taken aback at the exceeding plainness and simplicity of the apartment into which the damsel showed him. It was scrupulously clean, certainly, but was not possessed of any luxuries whatsoever, its furnishings being of the most meagre description.

Having showed him his rooms, Effie hastily disappeared, as if glad to be relieved of any attendance upon him. About fifteen minutes after, however, when Guy was staring rather gloomily out of the window, she knocked at the door, and requested him to step downstairs to the drawing-room. By the

hearth sat Miss Dempster, attired in state to receive her guest, though, poor lady, she looked ill enough to be in bed. When the drawing-room door opened she essayed to rise to greet the son of her old lover; but with consummate tact and skill, Guy sprang forward, and very gently placed her in her chair.

'Dear Miss Dempster,' he said, in the gentlest tones, 'pray do not rise. I am deeply grieved to see you look so ill.'

Miss Dempster looked gratified, and, motioning him to a chair on the opposite side of the hearth, fixed her eyes with keenest interest on his face. Gavin Wardrop bore the scrutiny well. 'So you are Gavin Wardrop's boy,' she said at length, in her feeble, tremulous voice. 'You are very like your father. It was very good of you to come so far to humour an old woman's whim. You are welcome to Drumkeillour.'

'I thank you, Miss Dempster. So old and dear a friend of my father's is entitled to whatever duty or respect I can pay,' he said kindly.

'You have your father's voice as well as his smile, boy,' said Miss Dempster dreamily. 'Do you think you could bear to spend a few days here beside a desolate old woman, eh?'

'It will be a pleasure, Miss Dempster,' said Guy

promptly. 'What a fine old place you have here! I have often heard my father speak of Drumkeillour, and of the happy days he spent here long ago.'

'Ay, ay, he has not quite forgotten then,' said Miss Dempster, with a pitiful smile. 'Yes, your father and I are very old friends, estranged by circumstances in our youth. Now talk to me about yourself. You have entered your father's business, I am told. Is the work to your liking?'

'It is one's duty, Miss Dempster, to do one's work faithfully and uncomplainingly, even against inclination,' said Guy, with assumed earnestness. 'I will confess the drudgery of a lawyer's office is not the path of life I would have cut out for myself; but I am glad to be able to help my father, who is, as you know, getting up in years.'

'I like the respectful way in which you speak of your father. The fifth commandment is too little heeded by the youth of the present day,' said Miss Dempster, in well-satisfied tones. 'Tell me, then, what life would you choose if you were permitted? Talk to me freely. I have been your father's friend for many years, and I am deeply interested in you.'

'I should like a quiet country life, Miss Dempster,' said Guy cautiously. 'When I was a lad my heart was set on farming, but my father wouldn't hear of it.'

'A quiet country life, and yet you look as if you would shine in town society,' said Miss Dempster musingly. 'Ah, well, things might have been different. If that headstrong girl would only be reasonable and considerate, all might be well. But then I am talking an old woman's foolish nonsense. Of course, you have not dined. Dinner will be served at six; ah, there is the gong. Mr. Guy, will you give me your arm to the dining-room?'

In a moment Guy was at her side adjusting the white wrap about the poor bent shoulders, and, offering his arm, carefully guided her steps downstairs. Her gait was uncertain and feeble, and the pale, worn face gave indications of weariness and pain, yet even in her great weakness she struggled through the regular routine of her days as if determined to die in harness, if the expression might be applied to one whose only labour consisted in attending to the trifling formalities of life.

As they entered the dining-room, Gavin Wardrop was quick to note the elegant appointments of the table—the plate alone, he told himself, was worth a small fortune. Behind Miss Dempster's chair stood Effie Gourlay, looking somewhat confused and disconcerted, as if unaccustomed to the place.

'What are you doing here, Effie?' asked Miss

Dempster sharply. 'Why is Kirsty not in her place?'

'She wouldna come, ma'am,' explained Effie nervously. 'I said ye wud be vext, but she wouldna come.'

Up rose the flush of wrath in Miss Dempster's pale cheek.

'Go down, Effie, and tell her I desire her attendance instantly. How dare she do such a thing?'

Very thankfully did Effie Gourlay escape; and when they were left alone, Miss Dempster turned to her guest with a faint smile.

'You have not seen Kirsty yet, but your father knows her very well. She is an eccentric creature. I have indulged her too much, and she presumes a little at times; but she is a faithful creature—yes, very faithful,' she repeated with a sigh, her heart misgiving her already for sending such a sharp message to her old friend.

After the lapse of several minutes the door was pushed open, and in marched Kirsty, very red in the face, and took up her place behind her mistress's chair.

'A helping of soup for Mr. Wardrop, Kirsty,' said Miss Dempster rather meekly, for she perceived that Kirsty's 'birse' was fairly roused, and she regretted

not having allowed Effie to wait upon them without remark.

Kirsty, with the utmost scorn and as ungraciously as possible, filled the plate and placed it before the stranger. She was a proud woman in her way, and it didn't suit her to wait upon this young upstart, whose grandfather had worked at the loom in *her* father's weaver's shop in Freuchie. There were other reasons, too, which made her dislike and distrust the Wardrops; she could never forget that terrible time long ago when Gavin Wardrop the elder had so nearly had Drumkeillour in his clutches, had not David Dempster come home just in time from foreign parts, and spoiled the cunning lawyer's little game.

And now they had turned up again, doubtless to try and impose upon poor Miss Dempster in her weak old age! It was more than Kirsty Forgan was able to stand.

Miss Dempster was rendered so uncomfortable by her domestic's ominous demeanour, that she never volunteered a remark, and only replied to her guest in monosyllables; but when Kirsty at length retired, she turned to him with a word of apology on her lips. Guy passed it off with his usual ready tact; but he registered a vow to pay with interest the contempt he saw so plainly expressed in Kirsty Forgan's eyes.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE NIGHT.

'DOCTOR BONTHRON, I'll speak a meenit wi' ye, if ye please.'

So said Kirsty Forgan one October morning, coming into the hall just as Effie was letting the doctor out after his daily visit to her mistress.

'Well, Kirsty, what is it?' asked the old man kindly; for he saw that Kirsty was much put about.

'Come in here, sir, jist a meenit, if ye please,' said Kirsty nervously; and opening the library door, she motioned the doctor to enter. When they were together in the room, greatly to Doctor Bonthron's surprise, Kirsty burst into tears.

'Why, Kirsty, what on earth is wrong? If it is grief for your poor mistress, try and bear up. It will be a real release for her. Neither you nor I, Kirsty, know how great a sufferer she has been.'

'It's no' that, Doctor Bonthron, though I'll miss her sair!' said Kirsty brokenly. 'It's thae Wardrops, sir; could ye no' help me to get them oot o' Drumkeillour? As sure's I'm a livin' wummin, they're tryin' to get her to wull the place to them. They're never awa' frae her, an' she'll no' let me say a word against them.'

'Where's David Dempster?' asked the Doctor gravely. 'The best thing you can do is to send for him. In his own interests and those of his daughter, he ought to be here at a time like this. Miss Dempster cannot last above a couple of days now; and it is quite possible she may slip away before that.'

'I gar'd Effie write to Mr. Dauvit oot o' Miss Dempster's knowledge. I daurna tell her, ye ken, she's that ill at him,' said Kirsty. 'That was eight days past on Monday; but he's never answered it; an' I'm at my wits' end.'

'Has your mistress made no will, Kirsty?'

'No' that I ken o'. I spiered at Mr. Wilson, the writer in the Bonnygate, yesterday, if she had ever said onything to him, but he said no. But guid only kens what thae Wardrops hae gar'd her dae. It'll be nae surprise to me though they should get Drumkeillour and a' she has.'

'It is a bad case, Kirsty. Gavin Wardrop is certainly not a man of principle, but Miss Dempster's is an old infatuation. I'll speak to Mr. Wilson, and see what he would advise. In the meantime try and reason with your mistress. Point out to her what a sin it will be to will her possessions past her own kin. Should there be no will, of course it will all pass to David Dempster, as next of kin.'

'There's nae will yet, I believe, or the scoondrels wadna be sae desperate attentive to her,' said Kirsty irefully. 'It very near gars me throw to see them makin' theirsel's sae muckle at hame in Drumkeillour. Young Guy's aye here, ye ken, an' the auld loon comes an' gangs. Effie attends on them. I'se warrant they dinna get muckle o' my countenance.'

Doctor Bonthron could not but smile at the energy with which Kirsty spoke. He felt sorry for her distress; but he was not a man who interfered in other people's business, and it was a great deal for him to offer to speak to the writer concerning Miss Dempster's affairs. He seldom gave or invited confidences, and had Kirsty not been sorely driven, Doctor Bonthron would have been the last person to whom she would have applied. Not much comforted, though a trifle relieved by her outburst, Kirsty showed the doctor out, and went away upstairs to her mistress.

She was lying in the best bedroom—a large beautiful chamber on the drawing-room floor—whither she had been moved at her own desire, having taken a strange dislike to her own room.

Kirsty stepped lightly across the floor, and, observing that her mistress had fallen into a sleep, sat noiselessly down by the bedside, and, folding her hands on her lap, gave herself up to the sorrowful and foreboding thoughts which crowded in upon her mind. Tears of compassion stood in her honest eyes as they looked on the worn face of the sufferer, who was without doubt approaching her end. She had served her faithfully and well, for love and not for gain, and had borne with her perverse and eccentric ways as none other could or would have done. What was to become of her after Miss Dempster was gone? she asked herself; for should her fear prove too well grounded, and Drumkeillour pass into strange and unworthy hands, it would be no home for her. Nay, she knew that she would be sent about her business without delay.

'Kirsty,' said her mistress, in a feeble whisper; and in a moment the faithful soul was bending anxiously over the bed.

'Yes, ma'am, what is't? Are ye ony easier?'

The sufferer shook her head.

'Is Gavin Wardrop in the house?'

'Yes, ma'am; at least, the son is lying at his ease on the dinner-room sofa,' said Kirsty, striving, but in vain, to soften her voice.

'When will his father be back? He left last night, didn't he? When did he say he would be back?'

''Deed I didna spier, but I'se warrant ye he'll no' be long. He comes an' gangs to Drumkeillour as it comes up his back, mair's the peety,' said Kirsty, with a strange, indignant sob. 'Oh, ma'am, I maun speak. I dinna ken what thae ill men hae been sayin' to ye, but weel I ken it's nae guid, exceptin for themsel's. Miss Dempster, oh, dinna pit Drumkeillour by the Dempsters a'thegither, whatever ye dae! It wad be an unco sin.'

'Who said I had put Drumkeillour by the Dempsters?' asked Miss Dempster querulously. 'You jump too quickly to conclusions. It rests altogether with Maggie Dempster. She has the keeping or losing of Drumkeillour in her own hands.'

'Eh, I wish the entail had never been broken,' muttered Kirsty fervently. 'Then thae scoondrels couldna hae dune muckle herm. The bawbees they micht hae gotten, but no' Drumkeillour.'

'What are you saying, Kirsty?' asked her mistress

fretfully. 'I am much displeased at your lack of courtesy to my guests. I expected differently from you.'

'I canna help it, ma'am. Guests, did ye say? Bonnie guests. They're jist like corbies waitin' till the breath's oot to devour what's left,' said Kirsty, unable to control herself. 'Oh, ma'am, I wunner that ye are sae blind! What wad I no' gie to see Maister David cross the door-stane o' Drumkeillour this very day?'

'Never in my lifetime, Kirsty; never in my lifetime!' said Miss Dempster with feverish eagerness. 'When he blighted my life in the summer of my days, I swore that I should never look upon his face again, and that he should never again, while I lived, cross the threshold of Drumkeillour. I have kept my vow, in the spirit and in the letter, and will till death.'

Kirsty was silent, only sorrowfully and hopelessly shook her head. 'Oh, ma'am, that's no' a speerit in which I wad like to meet death,' she said at length. 'Are we no' telt to forgi'e oor enemies. If we dinna, hoo can we expect to be forgiven?'

Miss Dempster impatiently shook her head.

'No more, Kirsty; I am not afraid to die. I have lived a consistent, upright life. At least, I have never played the hypocrite.

'Weel, ma'am, I think ye shouldna speak nae mair,' said Kirsty warningly. 'I doot I hae letten ye say ower muckle as it is.'

'No, no! I feel a strange measure of strength to-day, Kirsty. It may be that my sickness is not yet unto death. When Mr. Wardrop returns to Drumkeillour, I will see him at once.'

'Wull I no' send for Mr. Wulson, the writer, ma'am?' asked Kirsty almost pleadingly. 'He's an honest lawyer, wha wadna wrang either deid or livin'.'

'What do I want with Mr. Wilson? No, no. Gavin Wardrop has always managed my affairs, and will do to the end. I have ever found him the soul of integrity and honour. Those who say otherwise, Kirsty, lie against a good man.'

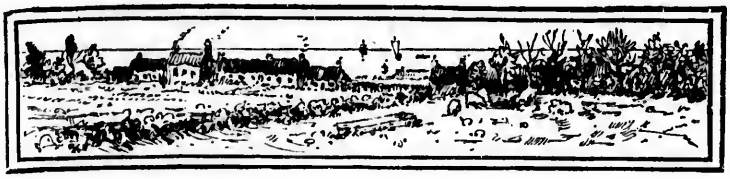
In spite of her sad anxiety, Kirsty Forgan could have laughed aloud. And yet it was a cup of deep bitterness to her to hear her mistress speak in such terms of the black writer of Dundee. It showed too plainly that the old wild love which had poisoned her girlhood, and, because disappointed, had embittered all her life, reigned paramount still. A sad and heavy day was that for Kirsty Forgan; never had Effie Gourlay found her such an indulgent, careless judge. In general, the two were at constant

war, Effie rebelling at times against the housekeeper's old-fashioned notions and rigid ways of working, so different from the slip-shod rule of modern domestics. Miss Dempster continued easier throughout the day, and seemed so much improved in every way, that in the afternoon Gavin Wardrop, crossing the ferry, walked from Tayport into Cupar, and telegraphed in cipher to his father, that in the meantime he need not hurry back to Drumkeillour, as Miss Dempster was talking of getting out of bed. Gavin Wardrop had been a fortnight now at Drumkeillour, and he was getting very tired of his task. Miss Dempster did not give them much satisfaction either, for, though apparently much pleased to have them with her, she absolutely declined to talk about her decease, or about the disposal of Drumkeillour. If she died in the same frame of mind, their game would be lost, and Drumkeillour would pass to David Dempster. They were at rest, however, on one point, and firmly believed that as yet there existed no scrap of writing to indicate how she desired her possessions to be disposed of. She had led them to believe it by urging, in reply to their pleadings, that there was time enough to make her will when she felt convinced that she was about to die. She had also given young Gavin some satisfaction, by telling

him his unwearied care and attention to her would not go unrewarded. Seeing her mistress so much better that night, Kirsty consented to rest for a few hours, and allowed Effie to take her place. So at eleven o'clock, Effie was installed in the nurse's chair, with due instructions to keep awake, and to call Kirsty immediately if she thought there was any need for her presence. Worn out with anxiety and want of sleep, Kirsty was no sooner in bed than she fell into a heavy, dreamless slumber, all unconscious of how very poorly Effie was attending to her duties. The poor girl, unaccustomed to late hours or night nursing, in spite of her vigorous efforts to keep her eyes open, speedily fell sound asleep also; and even when her mistress stirred and asked for water, she did not hear. Unaccustomed to being thus neglected, Miss Dempster raised herself on her elbow, and seeing Effie in her chair fast asleep, lay down again, and fell a-thinking. Whatever the train of thought, it seemed to move her greatly, for tears were coursing down her cheeks, and she had much ado to still the sobs which would certainly have awakened her careless attendant. After a little, the eight-day clock on the stairs rang one, and then a strange thing happened. Very noiselessly and swiftly Miss Dempster slipped out of the opposite side of the bed,

put on her slippers, and taking her dressing-gown, and a shawl from behind the door, stole out of the room, Effie sleeping and snoring loudly all the while. Oh, if Kirsty could but have seen with what soft footfall Miss Dempster stole downstairs, walking with speed and ease marvellous in one thought to be so near death! Her step never faltered, her hand on the rail of the stair did not tremble. She had never appeared stronger or more self-possessed in her life. Swiftly the weird figure glided across the hall, entered the library, and closed the door. In another minute one of the candles on the escritoire was lit, and Miss Dempster, hastily, yet quietly and methodically, got out writing materials, and, seating herself, began to write. Words flowed easily and quickly from her pen, and the statement was endorsed with her name in full, the date, and very hour at which she wrote it. That done, Miss Dempster returned the writing materials to their places, folded up the sheet of paper, and, crossing over to the fire-place, tapped with her finger on the oak panels of the wall. Her eyes were beginning to see unsteadily now, and her ears could scarcely detect the hollow sound which indicated the sliding panel—a secret known only to herself. At length, however, the spring, obedient to her touch, flew back, the folded

paper was hastily pushed in, back it slid to its place, and Miss Dempster staggered blindly from the room, leaving the candle burning on the escritoire. Not so swift or so steady were her steps as she slowly ascended the wide stair. She groped her way slowly and painfully, for there was a film gathering about her eyes; a strange sense of suffocation and languor oppressed her whole being. Strength only lasted till she had thrown off her dressing-gown, then she fell upon the bed, and feebly gathered the clothes up to her throat with a low moan of pain. And still Effie slept on. In the grey, cheerless dawn, Kirsty Forgan, having in her fatigue slept longer than she intended, came hurrying into her mistress's room, only to find Effie asleep, and Miss Dempster lying very white and very still upon her bed. Too white and still to be in life; alas! in the silent watches of the night, Robina Dempster had laid down the burden of earth, and the poor suffering, wasted frame had at last found peace.



CHAPTER IV.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

'ARE you more wearied than usual to-night, papa?'

'Perhaps I am, Maggie. The hot weather is trying, and our office, as you know, is not the most airy place in existence. I found it very close to-day.'

A quick, impatient sigh broke from Maggie Dempster's lips, and she hastily walked over to the window, not caring that her father should see the rebellious tears welling in her eyes. Just at that moment Maggie Dempster found life to be very hard, and her usual sunny serenity was marred by a feeling of discontent. It is not an easy thing for us to see those we love suffer, and be unable to help.

There was a long silence in the quiet little room,

and at length Maggie returned to the side of her father's chair, and laid her firm young hand lightly on his grey head.

'Father, I wish I could do something,' she said, with a quick catch in her voice. 'When I watched you coming up the street to-night, and saw how old and grey and feeble you looked, I felt my heart just like to break.'

'You do a great deal, Maggie, my dear,' said the old man gently. 'When you work about the house all day, and teach that weary music at night, what more could you do, my girl? It often grieves me to think of what you do, and you a Dempster too. Ay, ay, lassie, the old stock has fallen low.'

'Yes, but we are the old stock still, father,' said Maggie proudly. 'Nothing can rob us of our birthright. We may be poor enough in the world's goods, but we are Dempsters of Drumkeillour yet.'

'Ay, lassie, but that will do little enough for us,' said the old man mournfully. 'What do the sordid wealth-seekers in this dreary city know or care for the Dempsters of Drumkeillour? The name to them is only an empty sound.'

A shadow crossed again the fair face of the young girl, and, turning away, she began to roll up some sheets of music preparatory to going forth to

her evening labours. It was a pathetic thing to look at these two—the old man and the maiden—who bore so unmistakeably in their appearance and surroundings the marks of higher birth and nobler fortunes. The maiden especially, in her proud young beauty, was one at whom even a casual observer would look twice. She was verily fair to see. Tall and lithe, her figure was yet a dream of grace; her face, if a trifle too grave and sad to attract at first, possessed that rarer charm of exquisite feature and expression. The brown hair was worn like a crown above the broad white brow, and there was pride and dignity as well as womanliness in every gesture and movement. But her dress was poor and shabby. The little hands which nature had made perfect were red and rough with the work they had never been intended to perform. The old man was bent and feeble-looking, his hair as white almost as the driven snow. His face was worn and thin, its expression that of a man to whom life is all care, unrelieved by any gleam of joy; yet it was not quite so with David Dempster, so long as his daughter, his Maggie, his one treasured ewe lamb, was with him in his home.

'I dreamed of Aunt Robina last night, father,' said Maggie more cheerfully. 'Such an absurd and

foolish dream! Do you know I saw her quite plainly standing by me exactly as you have described her to me, only she seemed very old, and bent, and withered, and her eyes were so black and bright they seemed to read into my very heart.'

'She had very piercing eyes, child, when I saw them last. They glared upon me in anger terrible to see,' said the old man musingly. 'And yet what I did was for the best, and out of my disinterested love for her, only she could not see it. But for me, Drumkeillour would have been the prize of as unscrupulous an adventurer as ever lived, and probably your aunt would have been in her grave.'

'Yes, father. I have often heard you tell the story,' said Maggie, smiling a little. 'Perhaps some day Aunt Robina will give you the credit for a generous motive. Poor old thing, in spite of all her money and her great possessions, I wouldn't change places with her; though I *do* wish sometimes when I see you needing little comforts very badly—yes, I do wish I could put my hand deep down into her money bags, and pilfer some of her gold. There now, I must run. Good-bye, my dearest of fathers. I shall be back just as quickly as ever I can.'

'As quickly as Frank will let you, eh, my dear?' said the old man, with a pleasant little nod, at

which Maggie blushed and ran out of the room. Left alone, the passing brightness faded from David Dempster's face, and a bitter sigh escaped his lips.

'I feel myself breaking up. The struggle cannot last much longer,' he said, in his absorption speaking half aloud. 'And what is to become of my poor girl? God only knows! But for that old Dempster pride, I would sue to Robina on her behalf, and yet why should I be proud? I'll do it, ay, this very night, this very moment, lest if I dwell upon the thought I rue it.'

So saying, and with forced energy, the old man rose, opened the little desk which stood upon the side table, and took out writing materials. At the bottom of the desk lay a small account-book into which he peeped carelessly, and then, seeing that it was Maggie's housekeeping book, he turned over the pages, the shadow of grief and care deepening on his face. It was a sad and touching record, each meagre item neatly entered with a precision and daintiness which would have honoured a more pretentious cause.

It required no little scheming and planning to make twenty shillings per week cover even the simple expenses of the little household, and as the old man read, his eyes grew dim with tears, and

something like a groan escaped his lips. Twenty shillings per week — scarcely the wages of the commonest labourer. Such was the meagre pittance David Dempster could call his so long as he was able to sit on his stool in the office of Messrs. Macdowall & West. Yet he was a Dempster of Drumkeillour, and in the old home his hard-visaged, close-fisted sister lived among her heaps of gold, keeping up an old grudge in her heart against the sole kin she had surviving upon the face of the earth. David Dempster tossed aside Maggie's account book, took up the pen, and began :—

'Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh,
October 186–

'My dear Robina'—

And there he paused, for memories crowded thick and fast upon him—the phantoms of other days, the ghosts of joys and sorrows which in youth brother and sister had shared together, gathered about his heart, shutting out all the burden and care of the present. He felt himself a boy again, light of heart and fleet of limb, hunting for birds' nests in the bonnie woods of Drumkeillour, or wading barefoot in the silver waters of the Keillour burn, or trotting proudly on his little pony beside his father's Bonnie Jean when he rode her into

Cupar market. Ay, these were happy days, 'the auld laird's time,' of which Cupar folk often regretfully spoke, the time when Drumkeillour had been a name held in honour and love in the country-side.

While her father was thus communing with the far-off past, Maggie was rapidly threading her way through the busy streets to the quieter thoroughfares on the north side of the New Town. Her young face wore an expression of deep thoughtfulness, yet it was not sad. In Maggie Dempster's heart was a deep well-spring of happiness which took the sting from all the carking care of her daily life. 'If Frank were only finished with his college course, and had begun practice, how happy we would be!' she said to herself as she turned into Abercromby Place, where abode the two pupils to whom she gave nightly lessons in music and singing. Her employers were rich people, but not conspicuously generous or benevolent, consequently Maggie Dempster wrought very hard indeed for her slender salary. The mother was an accomplished lady herself, and exacted the utmost precision and closest attention from the young person employed to teach her girls. Maggie, however, was so faithful and conscientious by nature, and discharged so scrupulously every duty she had undertaken, that Mrs. Sinclair could

not be otherwise than satisfied. But it was sad drudgery for poor Maggie, and her work was irksome to her; whether because it must be always a trial to a musician to teach those who are *not* musical, or whether because something of the old Dempster pride made her rebel, I cannot tell. But no one ever heard her complain, and her sighs of weariness and discontent were hidden from the world. A strange restlessness possessed Maggie Dempster that night, and she could not concentrate her attention on her work. Even Flora's frequent discords passed unheeded, a circumstance which considerably astonished the child, accustomed as she was to her teacher's gentle but firm corrections. It was an unspeakable relief when the hour of drudgery was over, and she could bid her pupils good night. Dusk had been closing in when she entered the house, and when she again stepped into the quiet street it was dark, except where the faint exquisite radiance of the harvest moon brightened the gloom. It *was* a harvest moon yet, for the summer had been late and cold, and it was a common saying that Yule would be upon farmer folk before they got the corn on the high lands safe under thack and rope. How quiet it was, thought Maggie, as she turned away from the door, looking first up

and then down the street with a pretty gesture of expectancy which somebody watching from under the shade of the trees in the gardens saw very well, and loved to see. Next minute a tall figure strode across the street, and kissed Maggie—yes, without the slightest hesitation, under the very gas-lamp, too; but then nobody saw, and if they did what matter? had he not a perfect right to do so?

'Oh, Frank, you really shouldn't!' said Maggie in very mild reproof. 'Think if Mrs. Sinclair saw, she would be quite sure to dismiss me, as not being a proper preceptress for her daughters.'

'That wouldn't be a very great calamity, Maggie,' said the offender calmly, as he took her hand on his arm 'Never mind, my darling, the day is coming when we'll astonish Mrs. Sinclair and a few others of her order; and how are you to-night?'

'Quite well, Frank, only a little restless,' said Maggie; and it was exquisite to see with what utter confidence and love her beautiful eyes travelled to the dear face bent upon her in tenderest interest. 'I believe it's a dream I had last night about Aunt Robina. You have heard me speak of Aunt Robina, Frank?'

'That old dragon at Drumkeillour, you mean. I beg your pardon, Maggie, but I'm right enough;

laughed Frank. 'Yes, what did you dream about her? Nothing pleasant, of course.'

'Not very. I thought she was standing by me in the night reproaching me for not coming to Drumkeillour, and she did look so awful! But you know, dear, I couldn't after such a letter, could I?'

'Not likely. Your aunt is another we will be even with when we set up our brougham, Maggie,' said Frank teasingly; but he drew himself up to his tall height, as if he quite meant what he said. 'How is your father to-night? feeling better, I hope.'

'I don't think so, Frank. I sometimes think papa has a yearning after the old place. When one comes to think of it, it is no wonder he cannot quite forget it, and this is no life for him.'

'What was the history of the estrangement, Maggie? I have never heard it yet.'

'Oh, it is a long story. Papa could tell it better than I; but you know grandpapa was so angry over his marriage with mamma that he disinherited him; and everything was left to Aunt Robina. Not long after grandpapa's death, a Dundee lawyer with whom he had done some business began to come a great deal about Drumkeillour, and Aunt Robina got quite infatuated with him. It was quite the talk of the country-side, and when papa heard of it

he was very angry, and went to Drumkeillour to inquire into the matter. He found this Gavin Wardrop almost in possession—in fact, Aunt Robina was on the very eve of marrying him. I can't go through the story rightly, Frank; but it seems that papa had some hold on Wardrop, whom he had known abroad, and he threatened that unless he went clear away from Drumkeillour, and relinquished all claim on Aunt Robina, he would expose him to the world. It must have been a serious thing, for Wardrop went away quite meekly, and never came near Drumkeillour again. But Aunt Robina never forgave papa, nor did she ever see or speak to him again. She said he had broken her heart and spoiled her life; but I have often heard papa say she did not know from what he had saved her. That is the story, Frank, so far as I know it; but you must get it from papa some night. I am sure he will tell it to you, he is so fond of you, and trusts you so implicitly. Why, are we so near home already?'

'Yes, indeed!' said Frank ruefully. 'I say, Maggie, do you care for me as much as I care for you?'

'Look at the Castle lights, Frank, aren't they beautiful?' asked Maggie innocently. 'Drumkeillour

may be bonnie, but it cannot be so grand as dear Edinburgh.'

'Maggie, do you know what you deserve?'

'Yes; something very good for allowing you to escort me home, Mr. Macleod.'

'You shall have it presently, when we get into the delightful quietness of Buccleuch Place,' said Frank mischievously. 'Do you know where we shall live when we are married, Maggie?'

'No. Where?'

'In Charlotte Square. I was looking at the house to-day.'

Maggie laughed.

'And you will be Professor Macleod. So learned and great that I shall be afraid to open my mouth, eh?'

So they laughed and chatted, and built their lovely hopes and dreams as lovers have done and will do till this old world is done. Ah, well, let them be; it may be their happiest time!

They parted on the doorstep, for Frank, anxious as he was to prolong these sweet and rare moments, had three hours' work waiting him at home; for he had begun in earnest his winter studies—when summer came again, he hoped to close with highest honours his college life.

There was a very sweet and tender smile on Maggie's lips when she ran lightly up the stair and entered her quiet home. There was no light there, but directly she opened the door she heard her father rise.

'Is that you, Maggie, my dear little girl?' he said, his voice shaking with excitement. 'Come here, my dearie, and let me hold you in my arms. Then we will get a light and read together that it is true.'

'That what is true? What are you talking about, daddy dear?' asked Maggie, with a certain tender alarm in her voice. 'Why are you sitting all alone in the dark? And, see, the fire has quite gone out.'

'Never mind, my dearie, never mind,' said the old man, in the same nervous, excited way. 'I have had a great shock of surprise to-night, Maggie. Your Aunt Robina is dead.'

CHAPTER V.

UNLOOKED-FOR NEWS.

'AUNT ROBINA dead!' repeated Maggie, as she laid down her music. 'Then that is the meaning of my dream. Who sent the message, daddy?'

'Get the gas lighted, Maggie, and we will read the letter,' said the old man; and Maggie obeyed him quickly, anxious to hear all about her aunt's apparently sudden death, although never dreaming what consequences it involved for her.

'Why, papa, the signature is that of Gavin Wardrop!' exclaimed Maggie, when she returned to the table, and looked over her father's shoulder at the blue document he held in his trembling hand. 'It is dated from Drumkeillour, too. Is that not strange?'

'Ay, strange enough. I can guess how it has

been. Gavin Wardrop has pushed himself into Drumkeillour again, hoping to make capital out of my poor sister's weakness. He does not seem to have succeeded. He says here there is no will, and that I, as next of kin, must be her sole heir. Is not that strange, unlooked-for news, Maggie?'

'Sole heir!' repeated Maggie slowly. 'Does that mean that Aunt Robina's money, and Drumkeillour too, are yours.'

'Ay, lassie, and more than that. It means an end to all drudgery for you and me, and rest and comfort in bonnie Drumkeillour. May God forgive me, Maggie, if my thoughts dwell more upon that than upon my poor sister's death. But I have been weary so long.'

Quick tears started to Maggie's bright eyes at the pathetic humility with which her father spoke. She neither blamed nor wondered that he should feel so, for had not Robina Dempster, with her own hand, severed the tie of kinship, and forfeited all claim upon her brother's love?

'Oh, daddy, I am so glad, so very, very glad for your sake!' she exclaimed, laying one fair arm in tenderest love about the drooping shoulders. 'Please God, you will grow strong and well again, and live in peace and comfort in Drumkeillour for many, many years.'

'And you, Maggie?' said the old man a little wistfully, 'will you not be happy in the old home? I am sure you will love it.'

'Yes, for a little time, father,' said Maggie, with a bright, sweet blush. 'Then if Frank ever gets any holidays when he is a great professor,' she added, with a happy laugh, 'we will come sometimes and see you, and plague your life out, just as we have always done in this little dingy house.'

'Yes, of course, there's Frank,' said the old man with a sigh; for somehow the match he had considered so desirable for Maggie did not seem quite so desirable now. Not that there was any pride or worldly-mindedness in David Dempster's heart, only now when he could give to his darling all she could wish for, he grudged the thought of giving her into other keeping. But he knew her heart was true, and he would not seek, by word or deed, to make her repent her troth.

They sat far into the night discussing this wonderful change coming to them, and Maggie learned now, what she had not known before, how deep and quenchless was her father's love for Drumkeillour. When it was beyond his reach, when circumstances had ruthlessly torn him from his boyhood's home apparently for ever, he had buried deep that strong

love and deep yearning, wearing an assumption of indifference which had deceived the whole world. But that inward pain, the agony of feeling himself a nameless, homeless wanderer on the face of the earth, had eaten into his heart, making him old before his time. Evil fortune seemed to have dogged David Dempster's footsteps all his days. The sweet young wife for whom he had incurred his proud father's relentless displeasure, for whom he had cheerfully born exile and estrangement from his kindred, had died after a too brief married life, leaving Maggie, a little toddling bairnie, to fill her place. For years David Dempster had wandered about the New World seeking rest for an aching heart, his little child the only solace of his desolate life, until he heard from home that his sister's infatuation was about to surrender Drumkeillour into the hands of one whom he knew well as an unprincipled scoundrel, who had been obliged to seek refuge in England from those seeking reparation for deadly wrong they had suffered at his hand. We know how his kindly intervention was received; how his sister, soured and disappointed in her mad love for Gavin Wardrop, turned her brother from the door. Robina Dempster had been a spoiled, selfish creature all her days, possessed even in youth of

that greed of gold which kept her in thrall to the end.

She it was who had fostered and fed her father's ire against David, and as she was his sole nurse and adviser in his weak old age, she alone was responsible for the cruel and unjust will which disinherited the only son, and made her sole possessor of Drumkeillour. But she had borne her punishment for her sin, for her later years had been the prey of remorse which poisoned her waking hours and was the haunting spectre of her dreams. Yet she made no reparation—nay, hardened her heart yet more and more against the brother whose only sin had been his unflinching regard for truth and honour, his fearless outspokenness regarding the lack of it in others. It was a common saying among Cupar folk, with whom David Dempster had been a universal favourite, 'that the puir lad was naebody's enemy but his ain.'

But now a mighty change had come, and soon, very soon, there would be a new reign at Drumkeillour, which would bring back to folks' memory the 'auld laird's time,' which had been a time of goodwill and peace.

Maggie Dempster was so happy that night that she could scarcely sleep. She sat long by her

window looking at the sleeping city shimmering in the white moonlight, her heart filled with a thousand happy dreams and bright anticipations of the future. Oh, if to-morrow were but here, so that Frank might share the happy tidings! It did not occur to Maggie that her lover might regard this great change in a light different from that in which it appeared to her. In her sweet, wholesome, unselfish nature, there was no room for the thought that a poor nameless orphan, struggling unaided through his medical studies, with none to lend a helping hand in life's stern battle, would hardly be considered a suitable match for Miss Dempster of Drumkeillour, though Maggie Dempster, the music teacher, had been envied the devotion of the clever student with the handsome face and winning ways. There were no such thoughts in Maggie Dempster's heart, nothing marred as yet the smiling future. How sweet it would be to help her lover through his struggles, not with her love and trust alone, but with that more substantial aid which is so powerful in the estimation of the world! Then how delicious at holiday times to have him at Drumkeillour, to wander together on its flowery braes and by its winding streams, which, though unseen, her father had taught her to love! Such were the sweet and

tender visions which flitted before Maggie's mind, making her sleep light and golden, little dreaming, poor girl, of the bitter pain in store. Next morning David Dempster walked for the last time to the dingy office in Frederick Street, only to inform his employers that he must quit their service at once. He made no boast of the reason, as nine out of ten in his circumstances would have done, for he had borne many humiliations in the office, and knew too well that he was only tolerated there out of a kind of contemptuous pity—the strong and prosperous have so little sympathy for their less fortunate neighbours, who grow feeble while they are growing old.

'Leave to-day!' exclaimed Mr. Macdowall, a pompous individual in broadcloth, and a great expanse of white shirt adorned with diamond studs. 'Why, Dempster, this is absurd; a month's warning on either side was our agreement, I think.'

'I cannot help it, sir,' replied David Dempster quietly. 'You must allow me to go, if you please.'

'What is your reason for the step, may I ask?' inquired the master with calm curiosity.

'The death of a near relation compels me to leave Edinburgh at once,' said David Dempster, quietly still.

'Ah, that is unfortunate—in our busiest time, too. We cannot promise to keep the situation open for you, Dempster.'

'Thank you, I do not expect you to do so,' was the courteous reply; for, however vexed or hurt he might be by the rudeness of others, David Dempster never by any chance forgot for a moment that he was a gentleman.

'Well, if you must go, you must, I suppose,' said Mr. Macdowall sourly, for he did not by any means relish losing the old man's services. He was slow and unmethodical perhaps, but he was the most trustworthy person in their employment. 'The month is not half-run yet. You can scarcely expect a month's salary in full,' said Mr. Macdowall, reaching for his cheque-book. As he did so, his eye fell on the obituary column of the *Scotsman* lying on the desk. The first announcement there caught his eye:

'At Drumkeillour, Cupar, N.B., Miss Robina Dempster of Drumkeillour and Pitskene, aged 68.'

'Dempster, is this your relative?' he asked, turning hawk-like eyes in boundless curiosity on the face of his clerk.

'My sister,' replied David Dempster quickly, resenting at last his employer's questioning; then, to

that gentleman's astonishment, he walked out of the room. When Mr. Macdowall recovered from his double surprise, he sent the office boy after David Dempster to bring him back. But in a few minutes the lad returned with the message that Mr. Dempster had no more time to waste, and that if Mr. Macdowall had anything to say to him, he could address him to Drumkeillour. Mr. Macdowall bit his lip, and wished his partner would come in. How blind both had been, not to have guessed that Dempster was something other than he seemed! A Dempster of Drumkeillour! Impossible! Macdowall was a Thornton man by birth, and knew Drumkeillour and Pitskene very well by name. He bit his lip in annoyance as he recalled the countless humiliations David Dempster had suffered at his hands, and his busy brain was already concocting a clever epistle, destined to make ample restitution and excuse for the same. I may state here that the letter was duly written and sent to Drumkeillour, but to this day, Messrs Macdowall & West await a reply.

While her father was out, Maggie had been making hurried preparations for their sudden journey; but she had found time to send a messenger to Frank's lodgings asking him to come over at once. It was only a chance that he might be in;

but, fortunately, he had not yet gone to his work at the Infirmary, and Maggie's note was so urgent, and yet so inexplicable, that he set out for Buccleuch Place at once. He found Maggie in the parlour, with flushed face and untidy hair, vigorously packing a huge portmanteau on the floor.

'Hullo, little woman! what's all this?' he exclaimed in amazement. 'Going to the antipodes, eh?'

'No. Oh, Frank, such a thing has happened!' she exclaimed breathlessly, not even pausing in her labours. 'Aunt Robina has died; and just think, daddy has got Drumkeillour at last.'

Frank sat down, and stared at the girl in greater amazement still.

'Don't think me very heartless, Frank,' said Maggie, with a little uncertain smile. 'But you know I can't pretend to be sorry when I'm not one bit sorry! Why, I'm as glad as glad can be! Think of the comfort, and the happiness, and the peace which will be poor papa's at last, after his hard, hard life! Why don't you speak, and say you are glad with me?'

'Where are *you* going, Maggie?' Frank asked, in a very low voice, and not looking elated at all.

'Going? Why, to Drumkeillour, of course, you

stupid boy. We're going off at one o'clock this very day,' said Maggie, and, missing something in her lover, she stood up suddenly, and looked him straight in the face. Then, as something of the truth dawned upon her, she crept up to him and laid one fair arm about his neck. It was unusual for her to make any demonstration of love, and Frank had loved and honoured her all the more for her maidenly pride. But she saw it was needed now. So she cast aside her reserve.

'Frank, Frank!' she whispered, and her sweet face was very near to his, and the tangled brown curls touched his dark hair, 'don't look so! It will not make any difference, dear. Oh, how could it?'

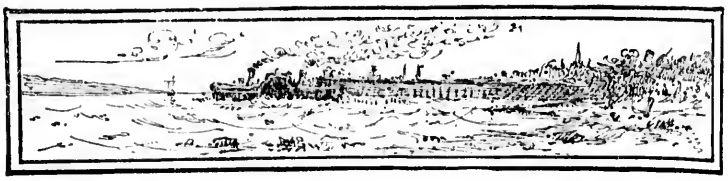
The half sob in her voice conquered him, and he clasped his passionate arms about her, and kissed the trembling tears away.

'Forgive me, Maggie! My darling, I could not help it just for a moment. There will be such a great gulf between us; will love be strong enough to bridge it, my dear love? It is because I care for you so, that I am afraid.'

'If this change were to make any difference in me, Frank, after all you have been to us, after the way in which you have loved and toiled and denied yourself for us, I should not be fit to live,' said

Maggie, with a great earnestness shining in her clear brown eyes; then she laid her hands on his tall shoulders with a gentle, clinging touch which told how they loved to rest there. 'I am yours for ever and ever, Frank, for I do love you—indeed I do, with my whole heart,' she said, and so for a moment the cloud which had lowered a little over the horizon of these two young lives was swallowed up in the sunshine of perfect faith and love.

I am afraid the packing made but little progress for a time. Well might they make the most of these golden moments, since many an hour of bitter pain was at hand for both.



CHAPTER VI.

TWO SCHEMERS.

'EH, Effie Gourlay, if only I had the pooer tae pit they twa blecks oot o' Drumkeillour!' So said Kirsty Forgan, driven in her desperation to make a confidante of her young handmaiden, and she dashed some angry tears away as she spoke, for the limit of her endurance was reached; she could bear no more. She had gone by chance into the library, to find the Wardrops, father and son, rummaging cabinets and drawers, as if the whole concern were their own. What they were searching for Kirsty knew not, but surmised that it might be for some scraps of paper which might entitle them to lay hands on some of Miss Dempster's possessions.

Alone in the still night watches Robina Dempster had breathed her last, and faithful Kirsty's regret and

self-reproach were very keen. Absorbed in her sorrow for her mistress, Kirsty had not observed the deep disappointment visible on the face of Gavin Wardrop when he was told that the feeble spark of life had fled for ever from the bosom of the mistress of Drumkeillour. Gavin Wardrop's entreaties and protestations, his wheedling and caressing ways had apparently been utterly lost upon the old lady; she had heard him in silence, and departed without making him one penny richer. So his sacrifice of himself as he was pleased to term the fortnight he had spent at Drumkeillour beside its dying mistress, had been utterly in vain. She died intestate, and David Dempster, as next of kin, would at once enter into possession. Words could not describe the deep and thankful joy experienced by Kirsty Forgan when she learned that such was the case. She could hardly believe that it could be true, and that the plotting and scheming of the lawyers had come to nought. Poor Kirsty, between sorrow and anxiety for her mistress, and dislike and dread of the Wardrops, had had much to bear of late. She had trembled with a sore trembling for the fate of Drumkeillour.

Effie Gourlay continued her washing of the luncheon dishes, just as if she had not heard her neighbour's remark. Effie was a discreet girl, and

knew when to hold her tongue; but, like the majority of silent people, she kept her eyes wide open. It was a very small trifle, indeed, which escaped her; and though Kirsty did not suspect it, Effie had so ingeniously put two and two together, that she knew exactly how matters stood in Drumkeillour, and being of a slower, more calculating nature than impulsive Kirsty, she could have given her some information on points which Kirsty did not quite understand. But she was too prudent to say anything, or to volunteer information unasked, knowing full well how quick Kirsty would be to resent it.

'If Dauvit Dempster disna come to Drumkeillour the day, Effie,' said Kirsty, 'I'll be obleeged to gang to Embro' mysel', an' tell him the ongauns. What richt hae twa writer bodies to rummage the mistress's drawers and desks, I wad like to ken. I dinna ken which I like warst. The young ane's a sly fox; his shiftin' e'en an' smooth tongue are jist made for leein'. Can ye no' speak, lassie? Ye hinna seen muckle, but ye micht ken there's something wrang.'

'Whaur are they the noo?' asked Effie, as stolidly as if she were asking if she would put the kettle on.

'They're in the library, Effie Gourlay; an' they hae drawers open that has been under lock an' key sin'

'What richt hae twa writer bodies to rummage the mistress's drawers and desks?'—*Page* 66.

ever I cam' to Drumkeillour,' said Kirsty. 'If Dauvit Dempster dinna mak' haste to Drumkeillour, I doot he may find it's gane past him after a'. I'm sure I dinna ken what writers were made for. They dae mair mischief than doctors, and that's no' little. Eh, they're a black crew.'

'D'ye ken what I wad dae, if I were you, Kirsty?' said Effie quietly.

'No, lassie; what's that?'

'I'd gang into the library, an' I'd sit there, an' watch, jist as oor Jenny watches the mice,' said Effie, polishing a tumbler till it shone again. 'An' I wadna heed what they said. I'd watch that they didna steal naething till the maister comes. That's what I wad dae; though I dinna ken muckle, I wadna let them twa dae what they like wi' the mistress's things.'

Kirsty turned round and stared into the face of her handmaiden in genuine astonishment.

'Dod, lassie, wha wad hae thocht ye had as muckle gumption!' she exclaimed. 'Twa heids is better than ane yet, I see. I'll jist dae that. It micht be worth yer while to keek in after a wee an' see the girns on my gentlemen's ill veesages. I'll jist awa'.'

And, chuckling to herself over Effie's bright idea, Kirsty retired with haste up the kitchen stairs and entered the library.

'Well, my woman, what do you want now?' asked the old man, looking up in a sharp, displeased way from his inspection of the papers littering the centre table.

'That's my business,' was Kirsty's rather unexpected retort, and, walking over to the octagon window, she sat down in the shadow of the heavy moreen curtains, and folded her arms with deliberation across her chest.

Mr. Wardrop stood up and looked at Kirsty in haughty inquiry. If a glance could have withered her, she might have shrunk away under the lawyer's look. But Kirsty was not thin-skinned, and now that she had taken one step, she was prepared to enjoy a tussle with him. She had nothing to lose; he could do her no harm, and she might do good service for Drumkeillour by openly defying him.

'What do you mean, eh? Do you know who you are speaking to, eh?' he asked, in his blustering fashion. 'I suppose you think because your mistress is away that you are of some importance here. I will soon teach you otherwise. Leave the room instantly. How *dare* you intrude so impertinently here?'

'Ay, I ken brawly wha I'm speakin' tae, an' he kens me,' said Kirsty, with a slow nod. 'Gang on

wi' yer investigations, Maister Wardrop. If they be honest, ye'll no' heed me. I'll no' fash ye, I'se warrant ye. As for gaun oot o' here, I micht set *you* oot wi' a hantle mair face.'

It would be difficult to describe the look of mingled rage and annoyance on Gavin Wardrop's face. Kirsty, however, was master of the situation, and she knew it well.

'We had better suspend our examinations till the laird arrives,' he said to his son, loudly enough for Kirsty to hear. 'Doubtless he will be able to help us.' Then, turning to that resolute person, he added menacingly, 'Look here, woman, directly Mr. Dempster arrives he shall be informed of your gross impertinence to your late mistress's legal advisers. He doubtless will punish you as you deserve.'

'Ay, dootless he wull, honest man,' said Kirsty, and her eyes filled again. 'Blithely wull I tak' my earnin's frae him. Him an' me's no' frien' tae ane anither. What wad I no gie to hear his fit on the door-stane o' Drumkeillour!'

In sour silence Gavin Wardrop gathered up the papers and returned them to their places in drawer and cabinet, then father and son quitted the room, leaving Kirsty victorious. Having thus been worsted in the house, they took their hats and strolled out of

doors, and as the day was fine and mild for October they could enjoy their talk undisturbed.

'What are we staying here for?' asked young Gavin, as he lighted his cigar. 'The game being up, the sooner we get back to town the better. Do you suppose the new laird will have anything to say to us?'

'Don't be in such a hurry, lad. We'll wait and see,' said the old man cautiously. 'It's a pity now that I didn't come myself instead of sending you. I could have put the screw on the old lady, I believe. Anyway, I should have had something for my pains.'

'There isn't a scrap of anything in the shape of a will,' said Gavin more contentedly, soothed by the fragrant fumes of his Havanna. 'It'll be a fine change for Dempster and his daughter. I'm sure they'll not appreciate the place half so well as I could have done,' he added, looking round on the wooded slopes and fertile valleys watered by the flowing Eden, thinking with envious regret what a fair heritage it would be for any man to call his own.

'Talking of the game, it is not quite up yet,' said old Gavin, in his slow, cautious way. 'It's like playing a game of chess, boy, and we have one more left on the board. You must stay here and marry David Dempster's daughter.'

'Whew!' The cigar fell from young Guy's lips in his amazement, and, standing still, he regarded his father with a blank stare.

'Fact,' said old Guy with a sagacious nod; 'it's the only way you can ever get your finger in the pie now.'

'It's all very well for *you* to lay plans for *me*,' said his son grimly. 'It's easy enough to prescribe the pill you don't have to swallow!'

'Drumkeillour and its money bags would make a thick enough gilding for even a very bitter pill,' said the old schemer quietly.

'But the girl may be as ugly as that old dragon indoors, and have as bad a temper, for aught I know,' said young Guy. 'Think of a fellow having to drag out an existence with such. It is not easy to live comfortably with a woman you don't care a fig for, especially if she have nothing to recommend her but her gold.'

'Not so bad as you would think, my boy. Your mother and I have managed to live very comfortably together for nearly thirty years, and there wasn't much love in our case to begin with.'

The slightest possible shade of contempt gleamed in young Gavin's eyes as he listened to his father's remarks, which he felt to be in the worst of taste.

But he made no reply, save by giving vent to an unpromising grunt.

'But the chances are that David Dempster's girl will be desirable enough, so far as looks are concerned, and there can't be much wrong with her disposition. Her father was always a good sort of a chap, selfish a little, and her mother was one of the few angels there are here below, so I don't think you need concern yourself about that.'

'Suppose she won't have me, what then?'

'There shouldn't be much fear of that, boy, at your age, and with such an appearance,' said the old man, not without pride. 'Women are all fools, more or less. Flatter them, and you can make anything you like out of them. Why, even I, old as I am, would not be afraid to go in and win.'

'There are few like you, dad,' said young Guy, with a dry laugh which implied a great deal. 'But how am I to get acquainted with the girl? I can't stay here unless they ask me.'

'You must contrive to get an invitation somehow, but we will leave that for after consideration. We must see what like they are. Surely they will be here some time to-day.'

Even while he spoke, the train in which David Dempster and his daughter had travelled from

Edinburgh was steaming into Cupar station. When they alighted, David Dempster looked about him with a strange, swift, almost mournful glance, for there were many changes here, and he did not see a familiar face. None of the officials were old enough to remember him; yet few could have recognised in the bent and broken-down old man the noble youth whom Cupar folk had loved to call the young laird of Drumkeillour. How peaceful and serene looked the old town in the clear October light! the same quiet, sleepy, picturesque place he remembered of yore. As they drove slowly up the Bonnygate in a hired carriage, he sat back in his corner, as if afraid any should recognise him; but Maggie, with all the curiosity of youth, peered out of the open window, interested beyond measure in the little town of which she had heard so often. As may be expected, Miss Dempster's death and the future of Drumkeillour were topics of absorbing interest just then to the town's folk, and when David Dempster had given the cabman the order to drive to Drumkeillour, the man had looked hard at him, wondering with all his might whether he was to have the honour of driving the new laird. The road to Drumkeillour traversed a stretch of finely cultivated country, and, though the harvest was all ingathered on the low-lying lands, the

stubble fields with their fringes of autumn-hued trees had a beauty all their own. The leaves had not begun to fall yet, for there had been no wild winds or fierce rains to disturb them; these quiet, golden days were like the sunny blink before the breaking of the storm. The weather-wise predicted an early and a hard winter, for the hawthorn bloom had been too plentiful in early summer, then the swallows had taken flight before the harvest was well begun, and the robins had long been in their place. But as yet all these signs had failed, for the weather was mild and balmy, and there were as yet no indications of a storm.

After half-an-hour's drive, Maggie, still peering out, saw a venerable stone gateway in the distance, which her heart told her was the entrance to Drumkeillour.

'Papa, is this it?' she asked breathlessly.

Then the old man sat up, and looked out, all his listlessness gone.

'Ay, ay, Maggie, this is Drumkeillour.'

Then they swept through between the ivied pillars into the cool dim shades of the beech avenue. Oh the thousand lively and variegated hues on these noble trees, silent witnesses to the age of Drumkeillour! Maggie felt awed as she looked out upon

their gnarled and knotted trunks, and at the huge boughs interlacing overhead; and, without knowing why, she trembled in every limb. It was a strange experience for David Dempster, this lonely, sad home-coming to the house of his fathers, from which he had been exiled so long.

'Oh, daddy, how beautiful! what a home! Oh, I don't wonder that you loved it so!' she exclaimed, when at length the fine old house, clothed with the beauty of centuries, was revealed to her excited gaze; but still her father spoke never a word. He had forgotten her; he was oblivious to the interests and concerns of the moment. The old man's heart and thoughts just then were in the land of long ago.

CHAPTER VII.

A STRANGE HOME-COMING.

'EFFIE, that's no' coach-wheels, is't?' asked Kirsty Forgan, starting up from the cup of tea with which she was calming her excited nerves.

'Ay is't,' answered Effie, and running into the still-room, which commanded a partial view of the front entrance, she peered anxiously out.

'It's Jamie Anderson's cab, an' there's a gentleman an' a leddy in't. Eh, sic a bonny sweet leddy, Kirsty,' she called out, but Kirsty was already half-way up the stair to the hall; and Effie returned to the kitchen to find the teapot upset on the table, and a brown stream flowing above the pat of fresh butter on the plate. 'Weel, I never! Things is jist gaun clean tapsalteerie,' said the damsel, as she proceeded to rectify the accident. She had cause for the exclama-

tion, for when did careful Kirsty ever do such a thing? Had it been Effie herself, it might have been a matter of small account.

Wide open did Kirsty throw the hall door, and out upon the steps, all her heart shining in her honest eyes; her welcome, at least, would not be wanting to Drumkeillour's rightful heirs. She saw the slim, graceful figure of a young girl alight first, then very tenderly assist the old man, whom Kirsty Forgan could scarcely recognise as David Dempster, the gay young laird of long ago. But when he looked towards her and smiled, her doubts fled, for that was his father's dear smile, the winsome blink which had made the auld laird so dear to every heart.

'Oh, Maister Dauvid, my dear, welcome hame! a hundred thoosand welcomes to Drumkeillour!' she cried, clasping her two hands over his outstretched one, quite overcome.

'Thank you, Kirsty; yours is the kent face in what is almost "the strange land" to me now,' he said, with a mournful smile. 'This is my daughter—a real Dempster, isn't she, Kirsty?'

'Ay, ay, a real Dempster, true enough,' said Kirsty, looking with keen interest upon the winsome young face, and the lissom figure which had a dignity of its own, as became a daughter of Drumkeillour.

'Eh, sir, it's the blink o' the sun to see yer face again. Richt gled am I that ye ha'e come at last, for there ha'e been bonnie ongauns this while, I can tell ye, in Drumkeillour. You're no' a meenit ower sune. But come in, come in. There'll be plenty time to crack efter hand.' So saying, Kirsty, almost beside herself in her excitement and joy, hastened to lead the way into the house, only pausing to look, again and again, first at the laird, as she proudly called him, and yet more proudly at the bright young creature who, without a doubt, must bring nothing but sunshine to Drumkeillour.

'So my poor sister is at rest at last,' said David Dempster, when they entered the house. 'I shall have a great deal to hear from you, Kirsty. Tell me when she died?'

'Yestreen, sir, jist at sundoon,' answered Kirsty. 'Eh, Maister Dauvid, what way did ye no' come when I sent for ye mair nor a week syne?'

'I did not get your letter, Kirsty. Probably it had been wrongly addressed.'

'I durstna spier at the mistress whaur ye bade, ye ken; but I kent that last time we heard o' ye it was some gate aboot Holyrood, so I jist sent it on chance.'

'It is five years since we left the little cottage at

St. Leonard's, Kirsty,' said David Dempster. 'No arrangements have been made for the funeral, I suppose?'

''Deed, sir, hoo I'm to tell ye I dinna ken, but Wardrop, the writer, ye ken, has ta'en a hantle upon hissel, an' I believe the bids are a' oot the day,' said Kirsty, with an indignant catch in her voice. 'Ay, there's bonnie -ongauns, I can tell ye, in Drumkeillour.'

'Wardrop! By what right did he presume to take so much upon himself? He knew I was alive. Did he suppose me incapable of performing these duties?' asked David Dempster, with a heat which astonished Maggie not a little; she never remembered having seen her father's even serenity so disturbed before.

'Dinna spier his richt. He kens nane but impidence,' said Kirsty. 'But here they come, the auld cock an' the young, as croose as ye like,' she added grimly. 'My certie, they'll get the odds putten on them noo.'

'Take my daughter upstairs, Kirsty, while I speak to those gentlemen,' said David Dempster, and again Maggie looked at him in amazement. Where was the old meek humility which had so often touched and pained her? All gone, and in its place a new

dignity and hauteur of manner which became him rarely well. He was a Dempster of Drumkeillour now beyond a doubt, and, oh, did not Kirsty Forgan chuckle to herself as she led her young mistress upstairs? If only she could have been present to see 'the odds put on the Wardrops,' her cup of satisfaction would have been filled to the brim.

The Wardrops had been interrupted in their confidential chat as they emerged from the shrubbery by the sight of Jamie Anderson's cab driving rapidly away from the house. Instantly surmising who had arrived, they made haste indoors, eager to greet the new laird and his daughter.

'Mr. Dempster!' exclaimed the old man, advancing effusively with outstretched hand. 'May I bid you welcome, sir, to Drumkeillour.'

David Dempster coldly bowed, and ignored the offered hand. He had not forgotten the past, though Gavin Wardrop seemed to desire that he should.

'Will you step in here, sir?' he said, quietly opening the library door. 'I have several things to inquire about. Doubtless you will be able and willing to accord me all the information in your power. Your son, I presume?'

'Yes. Mr. Dempster, my only boy. These stalwart

fellows make us quite old fogies, don't they?' said Gavin Wardrop jocosely, to hide his bitter chagrin at the reception accorded him. 'He may come in, I suppose? He is my partner now, and in all my secrets, if I have any. Ha, ha!'

David Dempster nodded; but there came no shadow of an answering smile on his grave face.

'You have been the legal adviser of the late Miss Dempster for several years, I believe,' he said, when the door was shut, and lifting his keen eyes inquiringly to the lawyer's face.

'Yes; Miss Dempster did honour me with her confidence,' was the reply. 'I am prepared to render an immediate and faithful account of my stewardship, Mr. Dempster. I flatter myself that neither Drumkeillour nor Pitskene has been the worse for me.'

David Dempster smiled very slightly but made no remark on that subject.

'I am told you have sent out invitations for the funeral,' he said. 'Did my sister authorize you to do so?'

'No; it is purely out of consideration for you, sir,' said Gavin Wardrop quickly. 'Pardon the remark, but you have been so long away from the district that you must be comparatively a stranger in it.

There have been many changes, as you will find ere you have been long in Drumkeillour.'

'Did you send them in my name?'

'Yes,' answered the lawyer rather confusedly, for he was uttering a deliberate lie. 'I am sorry if I have presumed, Mr. Dempster. I assure you it was purely out of regard for your late sister and her interests that I took any concern in the matter.'

David Dempster waved his hand deprecatingly, and looked at his watch. 'You return to Dundee to-night, I presume, or are you staying in the town? In any case, I shall be glad if you will dine with us. There will be time enough for us to discuss business matters by and by. But I may as well tell you that it is my intention to ask my old friend, Mr. Wilson (who, I am glad to learn, is still alive), to investigate my legal affairs.'

So saying, David Dempster walked out of the room, leaving father and son staring at each other in helpless rage. It was very long, indeed, since they had been so humiliated; without a doubt, their game was wholly lost.

'Let me get out of this cursed place,' said young Gavin, pale with anger. 'Confound him, he made my blood boil! It made me sick to see you smile

and fawn upon him, when he was trampling on you all the time—a needy lawyer's clerk, too! Who is he that he should give himself such intolerable airs!'

'Softly, softly, boy,' said old Guy, with a peculiar sly glance of his shifting eyes. 'We'll turn the tables by and by. That hot temper of yours will be your undoing, if you don't watch yourself. We will just go cautiously. Trust me, we'll get the whip hand of Mr. David Dempster some day, and then we'll pay him out. All things come to those who wait.'

'He has virtually turned us out of the house,' fumed young Gavin. 'Are you going to stay and eat his bread after the way he has treated us?'

'Of course I am, and I'll have it buttered on both sides too,' chuckled old Guy. 'Calm yourself, my lad. I want to see the girl, and so do you, if you would only think of it. Who knows, she may assist unwittingly to make her father pay sweetly for this day's work. Old Wilson, confound him! to step into *my* shoes. That means a few hundreds a year from my pocket into his, and yet the old pious hypocrite is as rich as a Jew. But we'll be even with them all.'

While the lawyers were thus relieving their

minds, Maggie Dempster had been shown to the guest-chamber, and was there removing her travelling garb, Kirsty standing by, putting in a word here and there, though rendered more silent than usual by her unspeakable thankfulness and joy. Oh, to see a young maiden again in Drumkeillour, what a joy that was! what a joy, too, to look on her sweet young face, and watch her swift, graceful movements, as she flitted about the room! It was no marvel that the faithful soul who loved Drumkeillour and the Dempsters so well should be almost overcome.

'I should like to see poor Aunt Robina, Kirsty,' said Maggie. 'Will you take me to her room?'

'Ay, that wull I, my lamb,' answered Kirsty readily. 'Jist come this way.'

Miss Dempster's rooms were on the same flat as the guest-chamber, and when Maggie followed Kirsty into the darkened stillness, she involuntarily drew in her breath, impressed by the solemnity of the place. On the high tent-bed, with the dark moreen curtains closely drawn, lay the mortal remains of the mistress of Drumkeillour, and while Kirsty approached to uncover the face, Maggie drew aside the window hangings and pulled up the blind to admit a more cheerful light into the gloomy room.

Then she stepped back to Kirsty's side and looked upon the face of the kinswoman she had never seen in her life.

'I did not think Aunt Robina would look like that,' she said to herself, in a whisper. 'Surely she is much changed.'

'Ay, my daughter, she is changed indeed,' said her father, who had found his way upstairs to the chamber of death.

'She has a noble, beautiful face, papa,' said Maggie, slipping her hand within his arms. 'Looking at it, I cannot think it was she who kept up bitterness in her heart so long.'

'The majesty of death has set its seal upon her, Maggie,' said the old man gently. 'Av, ay, my poor sister.'

Deep emotion struggled with him, for in that serene and beautiful face he saw the sister of his love, as he remembered her at her best in the days of long ago.

'How did she die, Kirsty?' he asked the faithful soul who was crying quietly over this meeting of the living and the dead.

'She was gey sair distressed, but slippet awa' cannily at the hinner end,' she answered. 'Oh, Maister Dauvid, my man, if she wad but

open her e'en and bid ye welcome to Drumkeillour.'

David Dempster smiled somewhat mournfully, and drew his daughter's hand yet more closely within his arm.

'Come, Maggie, we have been here long enough,' he said; and Maggie obeyed him, nothing loth.

'Mr. Wardrop and his son will dine with us to-night, Kirsty,' he said, when they were out upon the landing. 'I suppose we will not have long to wait.'

'Dine!' repeated Kirsty. 'Wull they no' breakfast and sup an' a'? They're bidin' here.'

'They understand that I expect them to leave to-night,' said David Dempster, whereat a look of delighted satisfaction leaped into Kirsty's eyes.

'I kent ye wad pit the odds on them, sir,' she repeated emphatically. 'Eh, if only ye had come quicker.'

Then Kirsty retired down to the kitchen, and, unable to contain herself, made a confidante of Effie while she was putting the finishing touches to the dinner.

David Dempster took Maggie into the drawing-room, and it seemed to the girl that the old-fashioned, cosy room, with its rich but somewhat faded

furnishings, was a place strangely familiar, like the realization of a half-forgotten dream.

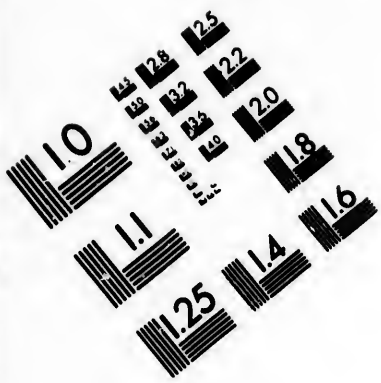
'There is the harp, my dear, on which your grandmother used to play. She was a highly accomplished woman, and a beauty as well. I remember as a boy thinking in the kirk that my mother was like an angel from heaven when she wore her white bonnet and white silk plaid, and my father used to look at her as if he thought so too.'

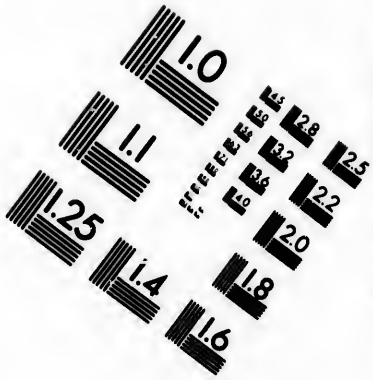
'Is there no portrait of grandmamma in Drumkeillour?' asked Maggie, touching with hesitating, reverent finger the strings which had been silent so long.

'Yes, my love; you will see the family portraits in the dining-room. Ah, there is the gong. Come, my dear, and I will take you down.'

To Maggie it was the most astonishing thing in the world to see the perfect naturalness and dignity with which her father comported himself in these changed circumstances, and already the life they had only quitted that morning began to fade away, and to appear unreal and shadowy, as if it had long been left behind.

When they entered the dining-room, Maggie started to see two gentlemen standing on the hearth-rug, and the colour leaped to her cheeks





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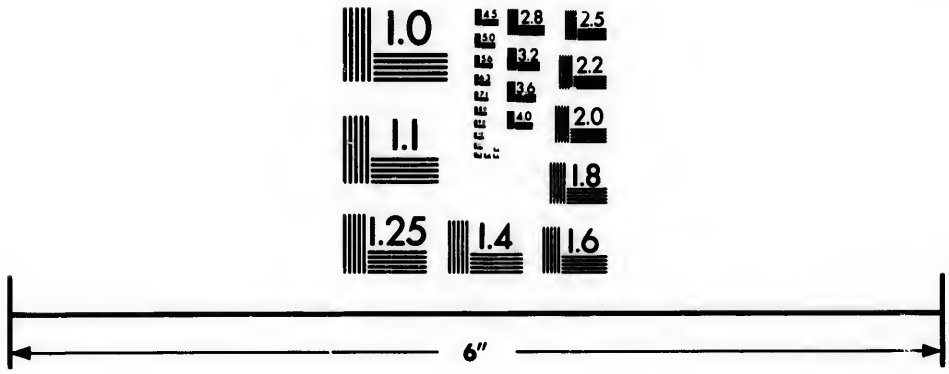

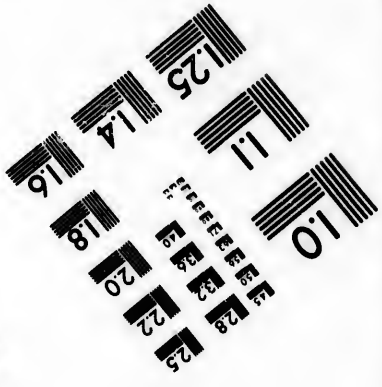

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when she saw the looks of undisguised admiration and surprise with which the younger regarded her.

'Mr. Wardrop, Mr. Gavin Wardrop,—my daughter,' said David Dempster briefly; and at once taking his seat at the table, he motioned Maggie to his right hand. Gavin Wardrop, the younger, could scarcely take his eyes from the fair face of the maiden at the table. How different from the picture he had drawn!

Conversation did not flag, for old Wardrop, politic and clever beyond measure, took care to keep it sustained, and also to avoid all unpleasant or uninteresting topics. In spite of himself, David Dempster felt interested in the lawyer's talk, and enjoyed it, too, it was so long since he had been in entertaining company.

Gavin Wardrop spoke once or twice to Maggie, and though she answered him frankly enough, she appeared rather to desire to listen to the discussion between her elders. So good an impression did Gavin Wardrop make upon the new laird, that after dinner, instead of being curtly dismissed, he was invited to take a little stroll in the grounds. Then Maggie had to get her hat and shawl, and it was young Guy who adjusted her wrap, and who walked

by her side through the leafy shadows of the beech avenue. None could be more chivalrous and attentive, more kind and considerate, than young Gavin Wardrop when he chose; but in this instance it was no effort, but a deep and strange longing to please this beautiful dreamy-eyed maiden, who had about her an exquisite dignity and reserve, which was to him her greatest charm. They did not talk much as they walked. Maggie's eyes wandered over the wide-spreading lands of Drumkeillour, thinking with a passionate thrill of joy that it had all come back to its rightful heir, and that her father's destiny was fulfilled at last. Gavin Wardrop had forgotten all about Drumkeillour. Its fertile acres, its rich rent-roll, were of no account to him. Into his passionate heart had crept a strange fascination, a deep and absorbing love for the woman at his side—a love which would prove the bane or blessing of his life. To some natures love does come in such sudden and absorbing inspiration, while with others it is the slow growth of years. But Maggie was sublimely indifferent of the fact, oblivious almost of his presence; her love was already won, her true heart given for ever into the keeping of one worthy of her.

'It is near sunset,' said old Guy, wily to the last, and quick to leave while the good impression

lasted. 'Guy, my lad, we will need to get our traps together. You have tempted us, Mr. Dempster, till we have allowed the last train to depart without us. But I daresay they will make us very comfortable at the County.'

'There is no need to change your quarters for one night, Mr. Wardrop,' said David Dempster. 'You are welcome to remain till morning at Drumkeillour.'

'You are most kind, but we will not intrude,' said the lawyer quietly, knowing that it would be to their advantage to make a show of independence. 'I am quite satisfied now that I have seen you, and had a pleasant hour with you. If I mistake not, my boy is enjoying the society of your charming daughter —a true Dempster, if you will permit me to say so, and to predict that the heiress of Drumkeillour will at once become the star of county society.'

David Dempster smiled; the lawyer's praise of Maggie pleased him. He did not urge his invitation, but when they left an hour later he cordially asked them back to Drumkeillour.

'Old Wardrop has evidently reformed, Maggie,' he said, as if in apology for what he had done. 'He is quite different in every way. What do you think of the son?'

'I have never thought of him at all, papa,' answered Maggie truthfully. 'But I do not like the old gentleman. I don't think he is sincere.'

'He was not in the old days when I knew him; but I think—nay, I am sure, he is a better man now. He really spoke very nicely to-night. I am sorry I was so short with him when I came.'

Maggie made no reply. She was not thinking very much of what her father was saying, it must be told; her thoughts had taken wings across the Firth to Edinburgh. Would Frank miss her to-night? she wondered. How strange to think that when he was busy as usual at his books, she should be standing on the terrace at Drumkeillour, and that the old place should now be her home! There was something mingling with her deep satisfaction, a vague uneasiness, perhaps a prevision of coming pain weighing heavily upon her heart! But it fled in a moment at the sound of her father's voice bidding her come away into the house, for the dews were falling and it was getting late.

CHAPTER VIII.

RIVALS.

'NOW, then, Frank, am I changed, or am I just the same'—

'Dear little woman, yes,' supplemented Frank; and he put his arm round the slender shoulders, and took the kiss he had longed to steal an hour ago, when he arrived at Drumkeillour. They were standing together under the trysting-tree by the side of the Keillour burn, which wound a silver thread throughout the woods at the back of the house. This was Frank's first visit to Drumkeillour, though nearly three months had elapsed since the change in the lives of the Dempsters. And this was Christmas week, the first week of the college recess, too, and the young student was free from books and work for the few precious days he was to spend at Drumkeillour with his

darling. 'Let me look at you, Maggie,' he said, turning her face round to his and looking into it with passionate eyes. 'My darling, you are lovelier than ever. Oh, Maggie, how I love you!'

'Do you, Frank?'

Maggie's innocent eyes, full of perfect love and trust, uplifted themselves shyly to his, and a little tremulous smile played about the sweet lips as she spoke.

'Don't you believe it, Maggie?'

'Yes, when you look like that. What a long, long time it is, Frank, since we stood together like this!'

'It makes it all the sweeter, to me at least,' said Frank promptly. 'Now, Maggie, I have been working very, very hard, and have had precious little to cheer me on. You must be very good to me now.'

'I mean to be. Yes, you have been working hard, Frank. Take care of yourself. There is not so much need for it now.'

'Yes, there is. Greater need,' said Frank gravely. 'I must be able to offer you some equivalent for all you will give to me, Maggie.'

'Why? If I have enough for both, Frank, is not that the same thing?' asked Maggie wistfully.

'Not quite,' answered Frank, with a slight smile. 'Maggie, you will never change to me? My darling, I believe my life would be wrecked were you to throw me over now. I could not live without you.'

'Frank, do you see or feel any change in me?'

'No; but I live in constant dread. Here and now I am perfectly happy and at rest, but directly I am back at the old dreary round of life I am beset with tormenting fears. You see I never know what you may be about, you elf.'

Maggie laughed, and leaned her head contentedly on his arm.

'I am so happy, Frank; so very, very happy. I really feel as if I had not a care in the world.'

'That is good. Please God you may be always able to say as much. You were made for sunshine and happiness, Maggie,' said Frank fondly. 'And you have had your share of sorrow.'

'Doesn't papa look happy and young? Oh, Frank, what a joy it is to me to see how thoroughly happy he is! and how they all love him! They say there never has been such a laird in Drumkeillour.'

'I believe it. I see he is bound up in the place.

It will not be so hard for him to part with you as it would have been six months ago.'

'Oh, but he will not need to part with me for ever so long. It will be a great while before you are ready for me, Frank.'

'Not so very long. I go up for my final in April, you know, and I shall do well, Maggie.'

'How well, Frank?'

'I have made up my mind to carry off the highest honours. I have worked for it night and day, and I will succeed.'

'How determined you are, Frank!'

'It is for your sake, sweet.'

'How proud I shall be of you, Frank!—but there, are we not staying here too long? What o'clock is it?'

'Six.'

'Oh, then, we must go. Mr. Wardrop arrives at half-past six, and we dine at seven; and I have a new frock to put on, Frank, all in honour of you. There, now, are you not longing to see it?'

'I don't care what you have on so long as I see you, Maggie.'

'Oh, but you must. I like to be admired,' laughed Maggie. 'Well, let us go in now.'

'Wardrop?—is that the old lawyer you used to be so bitter against?'

'Oh, no; it's his son. He is such a nice fellow, Frank. I hope you will be friends.'

'What's he coming here for?'

'Why, because papa asked him, of course! It was most thoughtful of papa; for, of course, he guessed we should want to be a great deal together, and yet you don't seem one bit grateful. Gavin Wardrop has been here ever so often. He sometimes comes over from Dundee and stays from Friday till Monday.'

'Oh, does he? I wasn't aware of that before.'

'Dear me, Frank, how can you look so! I shall begin to think you must be jealous, and how delightful that would be!' said Maggie jokingly, though the light fingers on his arm gave him a very loving pressure.

'If I were really jealous, my darling, I don't think you would find it particularly delightful,' he said; and as they left the shadow of the trees, he took her to his heart again as if he would never let her go. The Christmas moon was high in the wintry sky, shining upon them in goodwill and peace, a happy young pair who loved each other passing well, and who hoped that one day they might walk the

way of life together. So long did they linger, that when at last they sped into the house, they had only five minutes wherein to dress for dinner. Mr. Wardrop had arrived, Effie told her young mistress when she came up to the dressing-room to give her some help.

Frank made good use of his time, and was first in the drawing-room; but the other two gentlemen followed him almost immediately.

'This is Mr. Wardrop, Frank,' said David Dempster. 'Mr. Macleod, Guy, of whom you have often heard me speak.'

Frank bowed somewhat stiffly, and regarded the interloper, as he mentally termed him, with a very keen and penetrating scrutiny, which Guy Wardrop was not slow to return. The two felt jealous of each other, for as yet Guy did not know on what footing the student came to Drumkeillour, David Dempster not having satisfied his curiosity. As for Maggie, she kept her secret well. Presently they heard her light footfall on the stair, and she came gaily into the room, a vision of beauty in a robe of rich black lace, looped up here and there with sprays of white chrysanthemums and maiden fern. Frank looked on jealously while she shook hands frankly with Guy, telling him she was glad to see him again.

They seemed to be on easy and familiar terms, and Frank read Wardrop's secret the moment Maggie entered the room; and immediately the young fellow's spirits fell to zero. He was not so handsome as Wardrop, nor had he that peculiar charm of outward manner which goes so far with some; then, in comparison with the partner of the wealthy firm of lawyers, he was a nobody, with nothing but his true love and honest manhood to recommend him. The thought of these things weighed heavily on poor Frank, and made him moody and silent at dinner, while Maggie and Guy chatted gaily and incessantly, teasing and bantering each other with a freedom which amazed and horrified poor Frank. He felt wild and wicked against Wardrop, and indignant with Maggie. What right had she to smile upon the interloper so sweetly while he was by? Did she not belong to him? Had she not given him solemnly her plighted troth a year ago at St. Anthony's Well, under the shadow of Arthur Seat? And had they not pledged themselves to each other again and again in its mystic waters? Oh, what a mockery these sweet memories seemed to-night! And all the time the foolish fellow was tormenting himself with these gloomy thoughts, Maggie's true heart was yearning unspeakably over him, and had he but looked with

penetrating eyes, he might have seen deep love for him shining in her earnest eyes. She felt amazed and vexed that he sat so silent and reserved, because she knew him to be so clever and so far superior to Wardrop, who had a fair exterior, and a winning manner which made him appear much more attractive than he really was. But, unconscious of Maggie's loving approbations, Frank ate his dinner in unpromising silence, and felt unutterably relieved when it was over, and Maggie rose to go to the drawing-room. He immediately followed her there; while Guy Wardrop, much against his will, remained to smoke a cigar with the old gentleman.

'Now then, Maggie,' said Frank, when they were alone together, 'what was the use of telling me Guy Wardrop only came here because your father asked him? The fellow comes to see you, and no other. I'—

'I will not listen to you, Frank,' interrupted Maggie in her sweet, wilful way. 'That is the way of men; they are never happier than when trying to make dispeace. Guy Wardrop and I are very good friends, and I enjoy his company. He at least thinks I am worth talking to. There now! you deserve that for the way you behaved at dinner to-night.'

'Does he know that you belong to me, I should like to know?' asked Frank, with that calm air of proprietorship which made Maggie's heart thrill.

'I didn't tell him, you may be sure,' she said demurely.

'Then somebody must, if only for his own sake, poor beggar,' said Frank, more charitably now, for when they were alone he felt secure in his darling's love. 'It's a shame, you know, to let him come on false pretences. He's doing his best to win you.'

'How very penetrating you are, Frank! Nobody ever suspected such a thing, and I don't believe a word of it. Don't you think I would know that, if anybody did?'

'Don't know; you see, I've been made a fool of, so it makes me quick to detect the signs in others,' said Frank grimly. 'Oh, Maggie, I wish you had never left Edinburgh. I, at least, was happier there.'

'Frank, dear, you are making yourself and me miserable without a cause,' said Maggie, with that grave earnestness which sat so exquisitely upon her. 'I do assure you, you are mistaken; Guy Wardrop only comes here because he knew my aunt, and because papa and I are kind to him.

He has no sisters, and we are just like brother and sister—indeed we are.'

'My darling, I am a cross, jealous bear, but it is because I love you so,' said Frank fondly. 'Maggie, promise me nothing will ever come between us. My hopes are all built upon you, and for your sake I shall succeed in life; only don't leave me. How could I live without you, my little woman?'

'Frank, I fear you love me too much. It makes me afraid sometimes when I think how much I am to you; and yet it makes me very happy too.'

These sweet moments were interrupted just then by the entrance of David Dempster and Guy Wardrop, and in an instant Maggie changed from the earnest, loving maiden to a gay, changeful creature, full of laughter and sunny jest, which rippled from her lips like some summer stream. The very change in her might have infused confidence and peace into Frank's heart; but he could not read between the lines, and he fancied her face brightened and her whole manner changed when Guy Wardrop entered the room.

Frank Macleod had at least one staunch ally in Drumkeillour; for Kirsty Forgan, after one long, keen, searching glance into his face, had mentally decided that he would do, that he was worthy of

her bonnie bairn, and that the sooner they were married the better. Kirsty had transferred all her love for the old Dempsters to the new laird and his daughter, but there was one point upon which *she* and they could never hope to agree, and that was the Wardrops. 'Nothing less than a revelation from above,' she was wont to say, would ever cause her to change her mind, or to forget her lifelong grudge against the Wardrops. She was vexed to see them come, and glad to see them go, and right well did she know what was the object of their coming, only she made a mistake in not giving young Guy credit for any disinterested motive in his wooing of Maggie, the heiress of Drumkeillour. If the truth must be told, Kirsty did not consider Guy Wardrop capable of such a feeling as love. Having satisfactorily settled in her own mind that Frank Macleod was the right man, she immediately resolved, with her usual practical way, to put him on his guard, to give him a hint as to how matters stood, and to advise him, if need be, to make sure of Maggie without delay. Kirsty was not troubled by any thought of the disparity in circumstances between the pair—if they loved each other, nothing more was needed, in her opinion; for, in spite of her eccentricities, there was a spice of sentiment hidden

away in her heart which would have astonished those who only knew the bristly exterior. She had her opportunity somewhat unexpectedly that night, and, as was her wont, took advantage of it at once. She had gone into the dining-room, and catching a gleam of Miss Dempster's white shawl through the open window, she stood still for a few moments, and watched the pair walking to and fro under the trees in the park. It was not Frank who was beside her, but young Wardrop, who seemed more earnest and devoted than Kirsty liked to see. Her eyes flashed indignantly, and she muttered something under her breath not at all complimentary to Gavin Wardrop. Where was the young gentleman from Edinburgh, she wondered, that this should be allowed to go on? Just then, to her astonishment, he came into the room, and she turned round and looked him anxiously in the face. She was wondering whether she might venture, on their very short acquaintance, to speak a little of her mind.

'I have come for a book Mr. Dempster left here, Kirsty,' he said in his kind, frank way. 'Did you see it?'

'Ay, I saw'd an put it whaur it should be in

the library. I canna lairn the laird to keep things in their places,' she said in her comical way. 'Bide there, an' I'll bring'd till ye.'

Kirsty was not many seconds gone, and, as she placed the book in his hands, she looked at him again with a peculiar, wistful earnestness which made him say involuntarily, 'Well, Kirsty?'

'Oh, sir, I dinna want to be impident; an' ye maunna mind what I say,' she said then, almost hurriedly. 'When ye cam' in, I was just watchin' Miss Maggie an' young Wardrop. Maister Macleod, sir, I canna think ye like to see thon ony mair nor me.'

Frank's face flushed, and the cloud settled on his brow.

'Ye'll no' mind me, sir, it's no' ooten impidence, though I'm but a servant wummin; but, oh, Maister Frank, he comes o' a bad stock, an' I'm terrified for the bairn an' for Drumkeillour. He has a fine, sweet way wi' him, but he's fause at heart,' said Kirsty, in her earnestness laying her hand on his arm. 'If ye wud jist mairry her as sune's ye can, sir, it wad be a braw day for us a'. I ken ye hae a true heart by the blink o' yer e'e. I hae been fain to see ye mony a time, though I kent ye maun be guid, else ye wud never have been Miss Maggie's choice.'

'I hope to deserve your good opinions, Kirsty,' said Frank. 'I will not forget what you have said.'

So saying, he stepped out of the window and walked straight across the turf to where the pair were slowly sauntering to and fro in the moonlight.

'Maggie, come and walk as far as the loop gates with me,' he said quietly, but in a voice which made Maggie turn to him at once, and lay her hand on his arm. She blushed deeply as she did so; for, of course, the truth must be plain enough to Gavin Wardrop now.

'Will you be so good as to take that book to Mr. Dempster? He is in the drawing-room,' Frank said very courteously; and Gavin Wardrop was so astonished that he mechanically took the book and went away.

'You have brought the book, Guy,' said the laird when Wardrop entered the drawing-room. 'I thought you were out with my daughter. I suppose Frank would claim her, eh?' and the old man chuckled a little to himself as if he rather enjoyed it.

'Who is Mr. Macleod, Mr. Dempster? Has he

right to claim Miss Dempster's company?' asked Gavin Wardrop shortly.

'Right? Well, I should think he has a better right than any other, as things go,' laughed the laird. 'Is it possible that you did not know he is my daughter's affianced lover?'

CHAPTER IX.

SHADOWS.

FRANK had only a very few days to spend at Drumkeillour, and these were to him a strange commingling of happiness and misery, of hope and misgiving fear. He was by nature impulsive, hasty, and a trifle jealous, and his acute perception of the difference in Maggie Den p-ster's position and his own made him feel and imagine things which had no foundation in fact. Maggie seemed to enjoy Gavin Wardrop's company, as did all who came in contact with him, for he possessed in no small degree the art of pleasing. When he left Drumkeillour at the end of the week, Maggie felt that some shadow had risen between them, and she was conscious of a change in Frank which pained her deeply. It was not that he was less devoted and affectionate, but the old sunshine

seemed gone from him, and he was a quiet, moody man, as different from the Frank of other days as could well be imagined. Do not blame him though he misjudged and misunderstood Maggie, for he had much to try him, and the very intensity of his love was a torment to him. He left Gavin Wardrop at Drumkeillour, and took his departure with a gloomy foreboding that the victor remained in the field.

'Frank is much changed, Maggie,' said David Dempster that night after he had gone. 'I fear he is studying too hard, poor boy, in spite of my many warnings.'

'Yes, he is changed, papa,' said Maggie with a sigh; and Gavin Wardrop saw a bright tear glisten on the brown eyelash, and involuntarily bit his lip. Maggie paid no attention to him just then, her heart had gone back almost with longing to the old Edinburgh days, which, though full of anxiety and toil, had not lacked their own deep sweetness, which now she could not call hers. Gavin Wardrop had been taught almost from infancy to study and trade upon human weakness, and having keenly observed the gradual gathering of the cloud between the lovers, remained at Drumkeillour, sure that he might turn it to his own advantage. He had vowed to

win Maggie Dempster, not for her wealth, but for herself. His love for her was like a fierce lava tide of passion, which her utter indifference only increased. He had been taught to scheme and wait the fulfilment of his ends, and so he determined to scheme and wait for this the greatest desire of his life.

'Have I not outstayed my welcome at Drumkeillour, Miss Dempster?' he asked in a low voice, and moving nearer to her side as he spoke.

'Oh, no,' answered Maggie, with a swift bright smile, which made his pulses thrill. 'What put such a thing into your head? We should be disconsolate without you. Where would papa's game at chess be in the evenings? You know how he enjoys beating you.'

'It is time I was thinking of going home, though,' said Wardrop. 'It is not the best thing for me to remain here.'

'Why?' Maggie asked impulsively; and the instant her face flushed the deepest carmine, for remembrance of Frank's warning rushed into her mind.

'I cannot think that you do not know, Miss Dempster,' said Gavin Wardrop in low, meaning tones; and for the moment Maggie felt as if she

were under a spell, which prevented her movement or speech. Her father had left the room, and they were alone in the fire-lit room—when had man a better occasion to plead his suit? 'It were better for me had I never come to Drumkeillour, Maggie,' said Gavin Wardrop, forgetting in one moment his resolve to bide his time, and speaking in passionate tones, which told how deeply he felt what he said. 'I have been mad to come here time after time, to live in the sunshine of your presence, to worship you, and indulge in dreams which I know now were only purest folly. It was cruel, cruel, Maggie, to have kept me in ignorance that you were already bound.'

'I did not know—how could I?—that you—you thought so much of me,' said Maggie tremblingly, and with the hot blood rushing to and receding from her cheek. 'I did not mean to be cruel, and I am very, very sorry. Oh, do you not believe it?'

'I must, if you say it,' said Gavin Wardrop. 'I know I am mad, presumptuous; but I have thought once or twice that perhaps I might not need to sue in vain. Maggie, I love you as my own soul. I would be content with so little in return, and I would devote my life to your happiness.'

'I thought papa had told you that'— said Maggie, growing very pale.

'That you were engaged to Macleod. Yes; and I have watched you, Maggie, and I know how unworthy he is of your heart. He does not, cannot love you as I do, else he could not treat you with such utter indifference,' said Gavin Wardrop, unconscious that he was damaging his own interests, and lowering himself in the estimation of the woman he so madly loved. He saw the beautiful face grow paler still, and the sweet, proud lips take a sudden, unwonted curve.

'Mr. Wardrop!' the clear young voice rung out sharply, and without a falter in its tone, 'you forget, I think, that you are talking of my future husband, who loves me, and whom I love. It is unworthy of you to blame him when he merits no blame. It is for me to accuse him of indifference. I am ashamed of and disappointed in you. I thought you were my friend.'

'That is the way of women, to mock those who love them with an offer of empty friendship,' said Gavin Wardrop, and in his keen pain a look of bitter scorn came upon his face. 'I thank you for the lesson you have taught me, Maggie Dempster. I am pleased that you have used me to while away

an idle hour in your lover's absence; and I shall remember it with gratitude all my life.'

Maggie, terrified and astounded at those harsh, sneering words, looked at him a moment in indignant inquiry, and then fled from the room. She must be alone, to think out the mingled experiences of that day, to recover from the shock Gavin Wardrop had given her, and to examine herself in order to see whether he had accused her without a cause. She came out of the ordeal blameless. She had treated Gavin Wardrop as she might have treated a girl friend, with perfect frank sincerity, and he had misunderstood her, that was all. Again and again her fair face crimsoned at the thought that she had been playing with a man's heart, unconsciously giving hope when there was none; and then her cheek would pale again, when a doubt of Frank's devotion crossed her mind. She had felt him changed, but she had not thought his indifference so marked that others would notice it too. As she sat there in the dim firelight, her heart grew heavy as lead, and she could have wished that she had never seen Drumkeillour. There had been no such shadow between Frank and her in the old days, which, though full of care, had had their own deep joys, for poverty and sympathy had only served to bind them yet more

closely together. But now it was so changed—so sadly, miserably changed. She looked round discontentedly at the pretty and luxurious dressing-room which had given her such pleasure, and gave a sigh for the little attic bed-chamber in Buccleuch Place, from the little window of which she had so often sat and watched the moon rise above the sleeping city. So distressed and out of sorts did Maggie feel that night that she did not go downstairs again, but went early to bed, glad to lay her aching head on the pillow, and find rest for her anxious heart in the oblivion of sleep. She was haunted all night long by strange dreams, in which Frank Macleod and Gavin Wardrop both played conspicuous parts. Towards morning another figure came upon the scene, that of her Aunt Robina, who seemed to be standing by her, beckoning her to come with her. So vivid and real did each act of that dream appear to the girl's mind, that she awakened in a strange nervousness, and started up almost expecting to see her aunt still in the room. The grey winter dawn was creeping into the room, and she could hear the maids stirring below. Lying down for a few minutes, she recalled the dream, and then, impressed still further by its vividness, she hurriedly rose and began to dress. She would, at least, satisfy herself

by visiting the library, where the chief interest of the dream had centred. The light had broadened before she was ready, and as she ran downstairs she saw through the open hall door the radiance of the sunrise beginning to tinge the east. The library, always shadowy and dull, seemed almost gloomy in the grey morning light; the windows were all shuttered still, except the quaint octagon casement at the far end, which was open a little, though the heavy curtains were still undrawn. There was a velvet cushioned seat round the octagon window, and in its snug corner any one could sit secure from observation. Maggie glanced carelessly round the room, and then, unable to repress a smile at her own folly, she began to tap the panels of the oaken wall, and to listen, eagerly expecting to hear them give forth a hollow sound. She went carefully along the wall, and meeting with no indication of a hollow space behind the panel, she was about to withdraw when her quick eye was arrested by what appeared to be an open seam in the wood, just above a curious old oak bureau in one of the darkest corners of the room. She tapped quickly and lightly on the panel, and in a moment detected the difference in the sound. She began to tremble then, for she had obeyed the promptings of her dream more out of idle curiosity

than from any idea that it might prove a reality. Could it be possible that this gloomy room had its secret, which would not permit the dead to rest? she asked herself; and her hand rested on the top of the bureau, for she felt a strange, unaccountable sinking of heart. Then, summoning up all her courage, she set to work to try and open the secret door, for beyond a doubt there was a cavity behind. For a time her efforts were in vain; but at length, without being conscious of it, she touched the spring, and back flew the sliding panel, revealing a square recess in the wall. Pale as death, Maggie Dempster's hand went forth and lifted a folded paper which lay there, unfolded it, and began to read. Oh, what words of deadly import were these which had the power to blanch that pale cheek, and to whiten the sweet lips, and to bring that stony horror into the deep, earnest eyes? Again and yet again did Maggie Dempster read these ominous words, and then, with a low, shuddering sigh she cast the paper back to its hiding, let the panel spring to its place, and, covering her face with her hands, fled from the room. Little did she dream who had been a witness to her work, whose eyes had peered eagerly round the curtain watching every play of her features, every

gesture, every changing expression which came and went upon her face.

Directly she was gone, Gavin Wardrop rose from his corner in the octagon window, walked to the door, deliberately turned the key in the lock, and approached the recess where stood the old bureau. His slim, skilful fingers speedily discovered the mystery of the secret panel, its hidden spring obeyed his touch, and in a moment his hand closed over the paper which seemed to cause Maggie Dempster such keen distress. A quick, eager light of joy sprang to his eyes as he read these words:—

'I, Robina Anne Dempster, being in my right mind and sound judgment, do write down this my last will and testament, which will set aside and make null and void all other documents whatsoever. To my brother, David, I bequeath the sum of one hundred pounds, to be paid within three weeks after my death, on condition that he attends my obsequies and pays me every respect befitting a kinswoman. Let him not marvel at the smallness of the sum. He knows I do not consider myself in his debt. To my niece, Margaret Dempster, I bequeath Drumkeillour and Pitskene, solely upon one condition, that she becomes the wife of Gavin Wardrop, son of my old and dear friend, Gavin Wardrop, solicitor, Dundee. And further, in order that the old race may not become extinct, and that there may still continue to be Dempsters in Drumkeillour, I require

Gavin Wardrop to take the name of Dempster immediately upon his marriage with my niece. In the event of my niece refusing to comply with the conditions of this will, I herewith make Gavin Wardrop, junior, my sole heir, on condition that he takes the name of Dempster; and I herewith charge my friend, Gavin Wardrop, senior, to see that these my last behests are faithfully carried out. I make no mention here of my faithful servant, Christina Forgan, her future being already assured. To this I witness my hand, at Drumkeillour, on the twenty-first day of September eighteen hundred and sixty seven.

'ROBINA ANNE DEMPSTER.'

It would be difficult, nay, impossible, to describe the expression of Gavin Wardrop's face as he read these (to him) very precious words. How the whirligig of time brought its revenges after all; here was a powerful weapon in his hands, here was the magic wand which would give him all he desired upon the earth. 'All things indeed come to those who wait, my queen,' he said to himself as he replaced the precious document in the secret panel. 'Now, I have something to keep me in amusement here. First of all, Maggie, I shall watch you, and see what deep design may enter into your little heart. It was a lucky chance which made me rise early and come to this precious room. Who would

have thought this day was to be fraught with such momentous issues?'

Just then the breakfast bell rang, and Gavin Wardrop, carefully concealing his elation, and assuming his usual repose of manner, unlocked the door, and proceeded leisurely to the dining-room.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT IT COST.

'YOU are not well, Maggie; what is it, my bairn? You have not been like yourself these last two days.'

'I am quite well, papa, a little down in spirits perhaps; but that will soon pass,' said Maggie with a forced smile; but she turned her head swiftly away, for her eyes filled suddenly with unbidden tears.

'Come here, Maggie,' said the old man tenderly; and Maggie rose, and, seating herself at his feet, hid her face upon his knee. And for a little there was utter silence in the quiet room, broken at last by a long, sobbing sigh, which burst from Maggie's pale lips.

'My dear! my Maggie!' exclaimed David Dempster, and his hand fell with a strange, infinite tenderness on the sad drooping head. He thought he knew the

trouble, and that Frank Macleod was the cause of his darling's pain.

'Brighter days will come, my lassie,' he said fondly, 'and the shadow will pass from your heart. The lad is a little quick and independent. When his position is assured, he will be more like the Frank of old. In spite of the sorrow it is to you, my dear, I cannot but admire the spirit of the boy. You will have a noble husband one day, Maggie.' A little tremulous smile touched for a moment Maggie's lips, and vanished as pitifully as it came.

'Daddy,' said she at length, with a strange, wistful eagerness of look and tone, 'do you love Drumkeillour very much?'

'Love it, bairn? ay, every rood and pole,' said the old man, and his eye turned towards the window as if to scan his dear heritage of fertile meadow and sylvan plain. 'Ay, ay, my heart is bound up in Drumkeillour.'

'If we had to leave it now, daddy, wouldn't that be a terrible thing?'

'It would kill me, Maggie.'

'Not so bad as that, daddy, surely not so bad as that,' said Maggie almost wildly. 'We were happy together before we ever saw Drumkeillour, and we could be happy again.'

'If we had to leave it now, daddy, wouldn't that be a terrible thing?'—*Page* 120.

'Yes, yes, my daughter; I did not mean that I loved you less, although I said my heart was bound up in Drumkeillour,' said the old man with soothing tenderness, for he saw that the girl's nerves were unstrung. '*You* will always be first, Maggie; only you must see what a blessed change this must be for me. It is just coming home, you know, after a life-long exile in a weary land. Yes; I thank God that He has given me the eventide at Drumkeillour.'

Down dropped Maggie's head on her father's knee, and a mute but passionate prayer for strength and guidance rose from her anguished heart. She was torn with conflicting thoughts, wearied with the deep struggle betwixt right and wrong, exhausted by her efforts to decide what course to pursue. And she must fight her battle alone, she must either reveal the secret of the sliding panel, or keep it for evermore.

'Where is Guy?' asked David Dempster at length. 'Isn't it time tea was in, Maggie? It is getting quite dark. If he would come back, we would have some music, and you would brighten up, wouldn't you? He is a pleasant young man, Guy Wardrop; do you not think so, Maggie?'

'I don't know, daddy,' answered Maggie vaguely, for her thoughts were not of him. 'I will ring for tea, and then run and brush my hair,' she said,

jumping up, and speaking with forced gaiety. Mr. Wardrop should not be long. He was to return by the four train.'

'I suppose his father waited his advice on some business matter. I don't wonder at it. Guy Wardrop is a shrewd fellow, and sees as far as most men. Well, are you off? That's right, my dear; I like to see you smile. Now that we have so much to make us happy, you must not give your old father an anxious heart, Maggie.'

'I will not, papa. I will spare you every anxiety. I would almost die to see you happy, daddy,' said Maggie, and, moved beyond her wont by the pathos of her father's bent shoulders and white head, she put her arm about his neck and laid her cheek to his, as she used to do in her childish days. And that mute caress was like a seal to her vow, but it seemed to her also like a farewell for ever to peace of mind. Well, it was for love of him, to save him care, to give him a peaceful and happy old age, that she would take the step which the still small voice warned her was in the wrong direction. Surely when she was called to account for her sin, her motive would not be overlooked. She left the drawing-room, and instead of proceeding to her own room, she ran downstairs to the library, and shut

herself in. The lamps were not yet lighted, but the ruddy firelight was sufficient for her work. Trembling in every limb, she paused before the bureau, and sought with outstretched finger for the sliding panel. In obedience to her touch the spring flew back, and her hand closed over the document which had been a death-blow to so many bright hopes. Tottering over to the fireplace, she knelt down and read again the shameful and unjust will. Her cheeks burned as she did so, and when she had read it to the end, she leaned her head on her hand for a few moments, and tried to think what her life would be were she to reveal the existence of the paper, and then, for her father's sake, fulfil its conditions to the very letter. She shuddered as she contemplated a life spent with Gavin Wardrop as his wife, for of late Maggie's keen eyes had occasionally penetrated beneath the bland and winning exterior, and obtained glimpses of an inner self which repelled and astonished her. And to give up her own love, which was the very sunshine of her heart, to bid farewell for ever to what had been the sweetness of life to her, to transfer her devotion from Frank to Guy Wardrop—was her daughterly love equal to such a sacrifice of herself? Tears welled in her eyes and ran down her cheeks,

as she thought of her kind father, so happy in Drumkeillour, so thankful and grateful for his blessings, so tranquil in his declining years; how, oh, how could she let the blow fall on him? In the midst of these conflicting thoughts, the tempter slipped in behind Maggie Dempster, and whispered to her how she could be free. By one little action, the simple lifting of her hand, she would be rid of the difficulties which beset her. The dancing flames seemed eager for a prey, and it would be so easily done, the work of an instant, and the unjust deed would be no more. Could it be any great wrong, she asked herself, to destroy a will which could bring nothing but misery to those whom it concerned? Then bitterness filled her soul at the thought of him who was to be the greatest gainer. Why should Gavin Wardrop step in and share Drumkeillour with them? What claim had he upon the old name? Why should he, without any seeking of his own, receive what was the rightful due of others?

Hard thoughts of the dead rose up in the girl's gentle soul, until she was almost frightened at her herself. The tea bell presently broke upon her reverie; she heard Gavin Wardrop's voice in the hall, and sprang to her feet. How could she fulfil the conditions of the document in her hand when

the very sound of that voice seemed to jar upon her heart? A moment's hesitation, a quick sobbing breath, a prayer for pardon, and the deed was done. Up leapt the dancing flame, caught the fluttering sheet in its deadly embrace, and in a moment a little shower of ashes fell out upon the hearth, all that remained of the last will and testament of the mistress of Drumkeillour.

When Maggie entered the drawing-room by and by to make out the tea, Gavin Wardrop looked at her with searching admiration. Never had she appeared so lovely. The simple tea gown of white cashmere, with its knots of black ribbon and graceful lace trimmings, was exquisitely becoming to her, and there was a bright, radiant flush on her fair cheek and a brilliance in her eye which gave her an almost unnatural charm. Watching her so closely, Guy Wardrop saw the slim white hands tremble over her dainty work; and he knew in a moment that the girl was labouring under intense excitement. She spoke incessantly, rattling from one gay subject to another, with a smile and a laugh ever on her lips, but her mirth had no music in it. It was simply a cloak for a deeper feeling, a mask for the misery of her soul. 'Sing us something, Maggie,' said the old man when they had finished tea

'Why, my love, you are not leaving us already, surely?'

'Yes, papa, I am not well; my head aches, and whirls all round,' said Maggie hurriedly. 'I will lie down for an hour, but you will see me at dinner.'

So saying, she glided from the room, leaving her father somewhat troubled in spirit. But as the subject was not one he could discuss with a stranger, he could only strive to hide his anxiety, and, turning to Guy, he courteously and kindly inquired whether he had had a pleasant journey and had found his father well. Much as David Dempster enjoyed Gavin Wardrop's company, he could almost have wished him away from Drumkeillour now that Maggie was so evidently far from being well in mind and body; and even while he was chatting away to the young lawyer, the old man was concocting a little scheme whereby everything would be made right and Maggie happy again. He would write to Frank and ask him to come specially to Drumkeillour, and then, if there were no strangers present, surely the shadow which had fallen between the young people would be swept away for ever. Little did he guess what business had taken Gavin Wardrop to Dundee, nor did he dream how the happiness of himself and his bairn lay in the hands

of two unscrupulous and determined men, who would allow nothing to stand in the way of their selfish interests. The conversation flagged at length, and when Mr. Dempster left the room, Gavin Wardrop betook himself to the library just for another peep at the precious document, which had given himself and his father such a pleasant surprise. They had talked long over the matter that day, and Guy had returned to Drumkeillour well advised what course he was to pursue, and, though it involved deceit, what did it matter when it was to bring such a rich reward? Only one lamp burned on the centre table, and the fire had quite gone down, and on the hearth lay the little heap of charred paper which Maggie's startled eyes had watched little more than an hour ago.

Gavin Wardrop turned the key in the door, and with eager hand sought once more the secret panel. It was a little time before it yielded to his touch; but when at length the sliding door flew back, lo! nothing was to be seen but the little empty cavity, which had been robbed of its treasure.

'By Jove, it's gone! Can she have destroyed it, I wonder? Surely never! She would be frightened to do such a thing,' he muttered. 'And yet would that not be the cause of her agitation this afternoon?

If it is so, then I'll need to play my cards with consummate skill, or the game will be utterly lost. It's my last chance.'

Contrary to the expectation of the gentlemen, Maggie appeared at dinner, and again she was changed. Her face was deadly pale, her eyes encircled by dark shadows, her mouth drooping and sad, her whole manner languid and listless in the extreme. She merely toyed with the food on her plate, and uttered no word except when compelled to answer any remark addressed to her. Gavin Wardrop watched her narrowly, and each time Maggie met the subtle glance of that keen, cold eye a strange tremor shook her; she almost felt as if her secret had revealed itself already in her altered look and manner. Poor girl, it was foreign to her nature to wear the mask of deceit.

Gavin Wardrop, whose profession it was to study those with whom he came in contact, and who could read at a glance every expression of the human face, was convinced that his surmise concerning the destruction of the will was correct. Now, unless he could take Maggie unawares by one bold stroke, he must bid farewell for ever to her and to Drumkeillour. His attention was distracted by his own scheming thoughts, and David Dempster found the young

people but indifferent company. Immediately after dessert Maggie retired, and the gentlemen talked a little over their claret; then Mr. Dempster took the easy-chair on the hearth and bade Guy run away and talk to Maggie while he got his 'forty winks,' as he was wont to call the little nap in which he invariably indulged immediately after dinner.

Very willingly, and yet with a peculiar feeling of hesitation, Gavin Wardrop left the room in search of Maggie. His instinct led him to the library, and as he stood for a moment on the threshold, he saw the slender, graceful figure standing on the hearth, the fair head bowed down, apparently in deep dejection, on her folded arms. The whole attitude was one of touching despondency, and the man felt his whole heart rush out to her in a wave of yearning love. The movement he made in closing the door caused her to start, and suddenly turn her head, and again that guilty crimson rushed to neck and cheek and brow, for her heart was heavy with dread and sick with apprehension. In these few hours she had suffered for her sin, and borne a punishment heavy enough.

'Mr. Wardrop!' she said faintly. 'Have you left papa all alone?'

'He is having his nap,' answered Guy Wardrop

in a quiet voice, and his eye fixed hers with a peculiar deep glance which made her heart beat with fear.

'It cannot be very pleasant for us to be together; we are not the friends we were,' she said hurriedly, and her fingers interlaced each other nervously, telling how great was the inner agitation. 'I think I had better go upstairs.'

'In a moment, Miss Dempster,' said Gavin Wardrop calmly and quietly. 'Though, as you say, we are not the friends we were, I have an appeal to make to you, a favour to beg which I hope you will see it to be your interest to grant.'

CHAPTER XI.

AT HIS MERCY.

'WHAT is it? What are you talking about, Mr. Wardrop?' asked Maggie in a voiceless whisper, and it was pitiful to see the look of terror in the wide startled eyes.

'Do not look so alarmed, Miss Dempster,' said Guy, with a smile. 'I only wish to tell you that my father is desirous that I should return at once to Dundee. I have been here long enough—too long, unfortunately, for my own peace of mind.'

A sigh of relief fluttered from the girl's pale lips, and the colour began slowly to return to her blanched cheeks. 'Papa will be sorry to lose you, Mr. Wardrop,' she forced herself to say. 'Have you told him yet?'

'No; I wished to tell you first. Maggie, is there absolutely no chance for me? I know how decidedly you spoke before, but I *cannot* give up so easily,' he said passionately.

A look of utter weariness crossed the girl's face, and she deprecatingly waved her hand.

'Mr. Wardrop, spare yourself and me. My decision was unalterable. Why refer to the subject again? It is neither just nor kind,' she said, a trifle impatiently, for she felt ill and out of sorts, and could not now feel sorry for him. Then she made a motion to leave the room; but again Gavin Wardrop stepped in before her.

'Not yet. I have one thing more to say to you, Maggie Dempster,' he said firmly, and his eyes were fixed mercilessly on her face. He saw the restless colour come and go, noted and understood the uneasy glance of the startled eye. 'Do you know how much depends upon your decision regarding me? Yes; I think you do.'

'I do not understand you, Mr. Wardrop,' said Maggie, attempting to speak with hauteur, but she could not hide her agitation.

'I think you do,' he repeated slowly. 'Maggie, for your father's sake, would it not be better for you to listen more kindly to me? It would kill

him to leave Drumkeillour, and unless you become my wife, both you and he must quit it.'

'It was a cruel and unjust will,' said Maggie in a gasping whisper.

'Yes; but the nature of the will makes no difference to the crime its destruction involves,' said Gavin Wardrop quietly. In his voice there was no suspicion of the agitation and dread which possessed him. He was playing a game at hazard, and it would require his most consummate skill to ensure success. His cold, penetrating eye never for a moment left the girl's distressed face; and he was almost master of the situation. He would take it for granted that she had destroyed the will, and speak accordingly.

'Listen to me, Maggie,' he said in low, clear tones. 'Have you never heard that it is customary for a person who makes a will to leave a duplicate in the hands of legal advisers? You were too hurried in your conclusions. Had you thought only a moment, you would have guessed that another copy existed somewhere, and that in all likelihood it lay with us.'

The poor girl, quite overcome, sank into a chair, and covered her pallid face with her hands. Truly,

her sin had found her out, and now its consequences were beginning to hem her in.

'I knew long ago what were Miss Dempster's wishes and intentions regarding Drumkeillour,' said Gavin Wardrop; 'but I was indifferent regarding them till I saw you. Believe me, Maggie, had I not loved you, I would never have troubled you nor Drumkeillour. I am not one of those who could marry a woman solely for her possessions.'

The bowed figure started visibly. She had not thought Gavin Wardrop capable of such a generous motive.

'When I saw you,' he continued presently, and his voice lost its cold, measured tone, for he did love the girl before him, 'I knew you were the only woman in the world for me, and I determined to win your love before I let you know how your aunt's will bound you to me. But for that other fellow, I believe I should have succeeded.'

'No, no,' fell in a sobbing whisper from Maggie's lips.

'There is no alternative now, Maggie. Unless you fulfil the conditions of Miss Dempster's will, you know what remains.'

'Only separation from Drumkeillour for papa and me,' said Maggie. 'What can it involve more?'

'Something worse. You have little experience of such things, but you must know that the destroying of a will is a felonious offence, Maggie,' said Gavin Wardrop, and his voice trembled with excitement. He was playing a desperate game.

'No one saw me! You cannot prove it!' exclaimed Maggie, springing to her feet, for she was brought to bay.

A gleam of satisfaction leaped into Guy Wardrop's dark eye; but Maggie's nerves were too completely unstrung to enable her to read the expression on her tormentor's face, though he was making capital out of hers.

'You are very sure, Maggie,' he said meaningly. 'What if *I* saw you?'

'You did not! you could not! you were at Dundee!' exclaimed Maggie. 'How could you see me when you were not in the house?'

'There are windows, Maggie, and even walls have eyes sometimes as well as ears,' he said quietly. 'You are completely in my power, but you will find me neither harsh nor ungenerous. I love you, Maggie, almost as my own soul.'

'If you so love me as you say, be pitiful, be generous to me!' she exclaimed, clasping her hands in entreaty. 'Let me go away from Drumkeillour back to the obscure poverty in which, at least, I was happy. Do not hold me to the bond of the will. Do not, Guy Wardrop, and you will earn my life-long gratitude.'

'And your father? What will it be to him in his weak old age to turn his back upon Drumkeillour? You know how he is bound up in the place. Parting from it will be certain death to him, and then what of you?'

Again Maggie's face fell upon her trembling hands. The thought of her father, of the blow falling upon him, was more than she could bear.

'Then look at the other side of the picture,' urged Gavin Wardrop. 'Only be my wife, Maggie, and I will strive to make your life one long summer day. You can call into being all the good in me, and there is nothing I will not be nor do to make you happy. The world will never know aught of the hidden will. It can say of me what it will. I am ready to bear its verdict, to let it believe me an adventurer who married you for what you had, if only you will be my wife, Maggie, and let me try to win your love.'

'To-morrow!' said Maggie, in a faint, intense whisper. 'Give me till to-morrow to think over it, to decide. It is not very long when it is a matter of life or death,' she added, with a look of such deep pathos that the man's heart smote him. He loved her with a selfish love, and yet he would fain have spared her such keen pain.

'By all means. My darling, I will not be hard upon you. Remember I love you, and would die to serve you.'

Maggie smiled wanly, for his protestations seemed a very mockery. If he would indeed die to save her, why not let her go free?

'May I go now? I feel so strangely. My brain is whirling. I will be calmer to-morrow. I will come here in the morning, and tell you my decision. Only promise me you will say nothing to papa till I give you leave. Spare him as long as possible.'

'Your word is law,' said Gavin Wardrop fervently, and raising one of the white hands respectfully to his lips, he opened the library door for her to pass out.

Maggie's weak and trembling limbs could scarcely bear her upstairs; but at length she

reached her own room, which she gladly entered, and, locking the door, threw herself on the bed. Oh, to fall asleep and wake no more! Such was the wild desire of her soul. But there could be no rest until the battle was fought, until the matter was decided either way. So, after the wild fit of sobbing had spent itself, she rose, and, moving over to the window, drew up the blind, and sat down there. It was a fine winter night; the sky was clear as crystal, and studded with countless stars, while above the spires of the town the moon was slowly rising, its weird light touching the spreading landscape with its own wondrous beauty.

As far as her yearning eyes could reach, the lands belonged to Drumkeillour,—only yesterday she had looked upon it with such pride, secure in its possession. And now it was hers no more, save upon one condition. She shuddered at the thought of Gavin Wardrop, and a low moan escaped her lips as she thought of Frank, toiling in the city for love of her. Centuries seemed to have elapsed since the old happy days, when there had been no cloud upon their happiness, save the shadow cast by poverty. Rather that shadow a thousand times than the curse of riches, which had darkened her

heart almost since the day she first set foot in Drumkeillour.

She sat long by the uncurtained window, with her pale face leaning on her hand, her eyes dark with pain, her heart breaking with its load of care. She felt in a maze of bewilderment, and could scarcely concentrate her mind upon one thought for a moment. She was quite oblivious of the flight of time, and started when there came a knock to her chamber door.

'It's me, Miss Maggie!' said Kirsty's kind voice. 'The laird's anxious aboot ye, and set me up to spier what was wrang. Can I no' dae onything for ye?'

'No, thank you, Kirsty,' answered Maggie, rising, but making no movement to open the door, for she felt that she dared not face, just then, Kirsty's keen, penetrating gaze.

'Let me in, my lamb. If yer heid's bad, I'll bring ye a hot bottle an' a drink o' horehound tea. I'm sure yer fire's out, an' ye maun be as cauld's ice.'

Maggie smiled slightly, for her head was burning with fever heat. 'No, thank you, Kirsty; I am quite warm. Tell papa, with my love, that I would rather not see him to-night, and that I'll be better in the morning,' she answered.

'Imphm!' said Kirsty ominously to herself. 'There's something wrang wi' the bairn, an' I'se warrant that Wardrop has something to dae wi't. Eh, but I could wring his neck for him brawlys.'

Not many minutes after Kirsty's unwilling departure, the laird himself came to his daughter's door. 'Maggie, Maggie, let me in, my dear!' he said, knocking all the time. 'What is the matter? I am very anxious about you. I had better send away at once for Doctor Bonthron.'

'Indeed no, papa. It is nothing; I am much better. I am going away to bed, and will be all right in the morning,' said Maggie falteringly. 'Good-night, dear papa. Indeed, I will be better to-morrow.'

There was nothing for the old man but to retire as Kirsty had done, but he, too, felt anxious and ill at ease. Little did he dream of the sleepless vigil Maggie kept through the silent, solemn watches of the night, of the sad farewell his darling bade to happiness and hope, of the vows taken for his dear sake.

Gavin Wardrop was downstairs half an hour earlier than usual, but Maggie was in the library before him. She turned round when he entered,

and acknowledged his salutation by a cold and distant bow.

'I am glad you have come down,' she said, in clear, low, passionless voice. 'The sooner we understand each other the better. I agree to your terms.'

'You will be mine, Maggie!' exclaimed Guy Wardrop eagerly, and involuntarily took a step towards her, but she drew herself away.

'Some day,' she said more hurriedly, 'but you will not hurry me. You will give me time to—to—get accustomed to it,' she said, with a dreary smile. 'I will be your wife some day, for papa's sake, and to save Drumkeillour.'

'My darling, you will never regret it!' exclaimed Wardrop, in genuine sincerity, too much elated to think of the reasons which induced her to accept him.

'If you really care for me as you say,' she said, with difficulty, 'will you do what I ask? Will you go away from Drumkeillour at once—to-day, if possible?'

'That is hard lines, Maggie,' he said ruefully.

'It will be better for you, for us both. I am afraid if you stay I shall repent, and I must have time to break it to papa, and to—to sever the old

tie,' she said; and now the rich tide of crimson swept to her face, and the lids dropped over the shadowed eyes as if to hide their pain.

'Maggie, if you will only promise to be kind, to try and care a little for me, I will agree to anything,' said Guy Wardrop passionately. 'There is nothing I will not do to show you my devotion.'

She turned her head away with a gesture of weariness she could not repress. In time she might grow accustomed, but now the thing was so new and strange and hateful she could not control herself.

'You know why I will marry you, Gavin Wardrop,' she said, turning her eyes full upon his face at length. 'Do not misunderstand me at the very outset. For my father's sake, I will do my duty towards you as a wife, but you must not expect more. I have no love to give.'

'I will not believe it. If there is any truth in the old adage, that love begets love, you will not be long cold to me, Maggie, for I will lay siege to your heart,—ay, and win it too,—if not before, after you are my wife.'

Maggie shivered. Could it be that she was listening to this man calmly talking of her as his wife? Surely it must be some hideous, cruel dream.

She shook her head. 'Do not deceive yourself

Do not build up false hopes. I do not deceive you,' she said. 'I will keep my promise in the letter. I will not fail in duty to you, for my father's sake.'

'You will at least let me come sometimes and see you, and you will not try me too long, Maggie,' said Guy, almost humble in his absorbing love. 'I am willing to do all you ask, only do not forget what it must be for me to love you as I do, and to be banished from your presence.'

'I will get it all over as soon as possible. I will tell papa, and write the other letter,' she said quietly. 'And after that is done, perhaps it would be better not to wait. I do not think I could continue. The sooner it is all over the better, at least for me.' She did not flatter, she made no secret of the sacrifice she was making, and yet she did not rouse his pride or independence. Her very shrinking from him made him all the more eager to win.

'There is the breakfast bell. I must go and speak to papa,' she said hurriedly. 'Then you will go to-day, and leave the rest to me. I will not fail.'

'Nor shall I. Your slightest word is my command, my queen,' said Guy Wardrop gallantly.

She bowed, and swept out of the room. He had longed to clasp her to his heart, but that marble calm, that distant hauteur kept him back, defying him even to touch her hand.

But he did not despair. The day must and would come when she would melt towards him, when she would give love for love. He was full of hope, and the future was roseate with promise.

CHAPTER XII.

BREAKING IT.

'PARDON the question, but has Miss Dempster anything on her mind?'

It was Dr. Bonthron who spoke, and Mr. Dempster looked considerably surprised at the question.

'I hardly know how to answer you, Doctor; but I suppose you can keep a secret.'

'Many are entrusted to me, Mr. Dempster,' said the physician, with a slight smile. 'If there is anything troubling Miss Dempster, it might be better that I should know. The sooner it can be removed, the more quickly she will recover. As it is, I can do very little for her.'

'My daughter was engaged to be married before we came to Drumkeillour,' said Mr.

Dempster. 'He was a fine young man. I loved him as my own son. He was studying medicine in Edinburgh.'

'Indeed,' said the Doctor with interest. 'And has something come between them?'

'His pride, I think. You see, he feels that there is a difference in their positions, and he is too sensitive. Not but that I admire him for it; but my girl is wilful a little, you know, as girls will be, and so I think they have differed, though she has not told me anything of it.'

'A lovers' quarrel, which, I suppose, will right itself,' said the Doctor, with a smile. 'And yet,' he added thoughtfully, 'it appears to me as if Miss Dempster's trouble were more deeply seated. There is a hopelessness about her I do not like to see.'

'That is her nature, she is either on the heights or in the depths,' said the laird. 'Well, what would you advise?'

'Well, if you are right, I hardly know what to say. An old bachelor is not quite the person to advise in such a case, is he?' asked the physician, with a dry laugh. 'It is really extraordinary what trouble these young people cause themselves and others over such trifles. I must confess I am a

trifle anxious about your daughter, and would advise you to take her away for a little, unless there is a hope of reconciliation between herself and the young gentleman, whose independence, by the way, like you, I cannot but admire. What is his name, Mr. Dempster?'

'Macleod—Frank Macleod.'

'Ah! I wonder, can he be the son of my old friend, Robert Macleod of Girvan?'

'His father was a medical man, I understand, in Ayrshire. He is an orphan now.'

'Then it will be the very same. He comes of a good stock, Mr. Dempster, and a son of Robert Macleod is match enough even for a daughter of Drumkeillour. Pardon my plain speaking. Should Mr. Macleod come soon to Drumkeillour, will you ask him to call? I should like to see him for his father's sake. Ay, poor Bob!'

An unwonted moisture stood in the old man's eyes, not called there by memory of his friend alone, but by another picture of a fair face, of two grey eyes which had mirrored a pure and gentle soul, of the sweet true woman whom Robert Macleod had called wife, not knowing that his happiness was the death-blow to the hopes of his friend. Stephen

Bonthron had never met another, but throughout a lonely life had remained true to the memory of one. Such had been the romance in the life of the doctor, whose eccentricities were only tolerated for the sake of his exceptional skill. Bidding the physician good afternoon, David Dempster returned to the drawing-room with a somewhat heavy heart. Maggie was sitting where he had left her, a listless, languid figure, leaning back in her low chair, with her shadowed eyes fixed on the dancing flames. She did not even lift her head when her father re-entered the room. The struggle of the last few days had exhausted every faculty, mental and physical, and she was too utterly worn out now to exert herself even for her father's sake. She felt indifferent whether she lived or died; only one thought remained with her night and day, that she was bound to Guy Wardrop, and that soon she must fulfil her vow.

'Maggie, my dear lassie, I am deeply concerned about you,' said her father's anxious voice, and he laid his hand tenderly on her head.

'Why, papa? Has Doctor Bonthron been frightening you?' she asked, with that forced smile, so sadly different from the sunny gleams which had been wont to light up her face. 'I told you there was

no use sending for him, that he could do no good, and that I would be better soon, but you would persist.'

'It was time,' said the old man gravely. 'He says you have something on your mind, Maggie, and I begin to think he is right.'

'What right have you or he to think or say that?' she exclaimed petulantly. 'What can I have on my mind? He just imagines things.'

'Perhaps; but still I think he is right. I am going to Edinburgh early in the morning, Maggie.'

'What for, papa?'

'To see Frank. I must have some explanation of his extraordinary treatment of you.'

'Of me! You have more need to question my treatment of him, papa,' said Maggie mournfully.

'When did you hear from him, Maggie?'

'The day after he went home from Drumkeillour.'

'And when did you write to him?'

'Some days ago.'

'Have you had an answer?'

'Not yet, and I do not expect one. Frank will

not write to me any more, papa, because I have given him up,' said Maggie, in a voice which her effort to keep calm rendered harsh and cold.

'Given him up! Has it come to that already, Maggie?'

The girl inclined her head on her breast, feeling that she could not trust herself to utter another word.

'I am very sorry, Maggie, and I cannot understand it. I thought you loved him too well to give him up so easily. It will be a great blow to him, Maggie. I hope, I hope that fortune has not changed you.'

'You must think of me what you will, papa. I cannot vindicate myself in your eyes,' said Maggie, rising to her feet, very pale, very self-possessed, and yet trembling in every limb. 'I must tell you it all, papa. I have given up Frank, because I am going to marry Gavin Wardrop.'

'What?'

Maggie nodded, and a dreary smile touched her white lips, and vanished as quickly as it came.

'So I am very changeable, am I not—a perfect weathercock, as I said to Guy?' she said, with a pitiful attempt at mirth. 'So I wrote to Frank,

telling him, and, of course, I do not expect to hear any more from him. No doubt he will speedily forget me, or get some one else to console him.'

The old man looked fixedly into the face of his daughter, and a heavy sigh escaped his lips. Could that pale, worn creature, uttering so lightly such mocking words, be the sweet, gentle, warm-hearted girl, whose every word and action had breathed the spirit of truth and love? 'I cannot understand this at all, Maggie. I am perplexed, and bewildered, and deeply grieved. Oh, my dear, have you weighed well what you have done? Gavin Wardrop is an estimable young man, but between the two, in my eyes, there is no comparison.'

'Nor in mine,' echoed Maggie under her breath, but she preserved her outward cloak.

You do not understand the ways of women, papa. They are all alike. What is it Byron says? Their vows are writ on sand, or something to that effect. I am but proving the truth of his words. Don't look so grieved, papa,' she added hurriedly, for the sight of her father's bewildered, sorrowful face nearly broke her down. 'Above all, don't turn away from me. Love me now and always, for, indeed, I have nobody in the world but you.'

She threw herself on his breast, and clung to him sobbing, as if her overcharged heart would break. 'I wish I had never seen Drumkeillour,' she said brokenly. 'Aunt Robina's money has not brought us happiness.'

'If it is to break your heart in this way, I am tempted to re-echo your wish,' said the old man sorrowfully. 'But why should you be so unhappy? Have you not given up Frank and accepted the other of your own accord? Nobody urged you to it?'

'No, no! I did it of my own accord. It is foolish of me to make a fuss about nothing,' said Maggie more calmly. 'I am not so unhappy as you think, dear papa. I think I am not so well as I was, and I break down more easily, that is all.'

'It is enough, Maggie; you were not wont to be so easily overcome. Why, what a brave little woman you used to be in the old days, when you had so many privations! Perhaps prosperity has not been good for us. Perhaps we have been too foolishly, selfishly happy in Drumkeillour,' said the old man, with a strange wistfulness, which brought the tears again to Maggie's eyes.

It was her turn now to soothe, and in the very act she gained strength and courage for herself. To sustain and comfort her father's declining years, to see him surrounded with all needful good in the old home he loved so well, and to know that but for her he must have become once more an exile, would not these be sufficient to atone for the sacrifice of herself? Then through time this keen pain must die away. When the irrevocable step should be taken, surely there must come a deep contentment and peace born of the thought that she had at least done her duty. She retired early that night, and David Dempster sat long by the library fire pondering these changes in his mind. He could not understand Maggie, nor did he like the prospects she had mapped out for herself. Gavin Wardrop was a pleasant visitor, a clever, entertaining young man; but he had not that indefinable something which in Frank inspired such confidence and love. Old stories of the nature of the Wardrops, old suspicions which had slumbered during the last few months, cropped up again in his mind, causing him much uneasiness and concern. Altogether, David Dempster felt in a more uncomfortable frame of mind than he had been in for many a day. In the middle of these somewhat gloomy

cogitations, Kirsty entered the room with the supper tray. Although they dined late, it was Kirsty's pleasure to provide another light repast at ten o'clock, in the shape of a cup of coffee and a bit of delicious toast for the young mistress, and something more stimulating for the laird.

'Is Miss Maggie awa' to her bed, sir?' she asked, as she broke up the fire to boil the toddy kettle.

'Yes; she is not so well as I like to see, Kirsty,' answered the laird, glad of some one to share his anxiety.

'Ay; what did Doctor Bonthron say?' inquired Kirsty. 'No' that I wad lippen muckle till him, my horehound tea's faur afore his ill drugs for the maist feck o' troubles, but still the man should hae some skill.'

'He had a curious idea, Kirsty. He thought my daughter had something on her mind.'

'Did he, though? That's the very bee that's been in my bannet. What d'ye think it'll be, sir?' asked Kirsty, with all the candour and curiosity of a deeply interested inquirer. But if she was not deeply interested in the welfare of the heiress of Drumkeillour, who would be?

'You remember Mr. Macleod, Kirsty?'

'Ay, brawly that; as fine a chield as ever gaed in shoon. He hasna gi'en the bairn the slip?' she inquired, with the most intense interest.

'No; the bairn has given him up, Kirsty.'

'What way? Dinna think me impident, sir, but I was that prood o' them baith. Eh, but I wud hae been blithe to see him mak' his hame in Drumkeillour.'

'So would I, Kirsty; but you and I must just make up our minds to accept my daughter's choice.'

'What, sir?'

'You have been our faithful friend, Kirsty, and it is right to tell you that my daughter intends to marry Gavin Wardrop.'

'I kent it, sir! I kent it!' cried Kirsty, in a kind of wail. 'Naebody can get the better o' a Wardrop. He's just like the auld serpent that tempit Adam's wife, sir. Oh, what tempit the bairn to gie up a guid man for a bad? Eh, but she'll rue the day, as sure as I stand here.'

'I am suspicious that she has rued it already, Kirsty,' said the laird, with a deep sigh. 'There is a mystery in the matter which is puzzling me. I know you will help me if you can.'

'Wull I no'?' asked Kirsty excitedly. 'If there be onything underhand, I'll be at the bottom o'd. I've been ower muckle for the Wardrops afore, an' maybe I wull again. Oh, sir, I wunnert at ye lettin' them come an' come to Drumkeillour efter what they did to them that's awa'.'

'I did not want to be hard or unforgiving, Kirsty and certainly I never dreamed of events taking such a turn. I did it for the best.'

'I ken, I ken; ye was jist ower guid. It disna dae to be kind to sic folk, ye maun gie them tit for tat,' said Kirsty, and her eyes were full of tears. 'Oh, sir, my heart's jist like to break. There never has been sic days in Drumkeillour, but I doot they're at an end noo.'

'We must not despair, Kirsty. We must wait, and perhaps all may come right. I scarcely think my daughter will persist in this strange infatuation.'

Kirsty shook her head.

'Ye dinna ken lassies as weel as I ken them, sir. But there maun be nae waitin'. If there's onything to be dune, it maun be dune noo. Wull ye leave the thing to me, sir? I'll be at the bottom o'd if it has a bottom, an' if I canna set it richt, I'll mak' the best o' what's a' wrong.'

'I have the most implicit trust in you, Kirsty,' said the Laird. 'And if you can unravel this tangled web, you will have earned my lifelong gratitude.'

'Imphm,' said Kirsty philosophically. 'Weel, here's yer toddy. Ye maunna gang aff yer meat, ye ken, or that'll be waur an' mair o'd. If I hae a Wardrop tae fecht wi, I dinna need nae mair to fash me, I can tell ye. Eh, ye dinna ken them, sir, as weel as me!'

CHAPTER XIII.

KIRSTY TO THE RESCUE.

'I MUST get up to-day, Kirsty, for Mr. Wardrop will be here to dinner. Indeed, I am well enough to rise if you will only let me.'

'I winna,' answered Kirsty calmly; 'ye're no' in a fit state to gang doon the stair. Even the Doctor hissel', I'm sure, wudna let ye.'

Maggie smiled faintly, and lay down again, glad, it must be told, to obey the strong, kind will, for she had no desire to look on Guy Wardrop's face. The very thought of him, of his right to her, was almost more than she could bear. Only three weeks had passed since that strange and terrible day into which so much had been crowded; and, in spite of his promise, he had written to say he would be

at Drumkeillour that evening in time for dinner. Truth to tell, he was consumed with anxiety concerning Maggie, for the laird had considered it his duty to acquaint him with her illness, and he could not stay away.

During those three weary weeks Maggie had not been out of doors, even though the breathings of an early spring were in the mild air, and though all nature was full of promise, ready to rejoice because the gloom of winter had been so speedily chased away.

It seemed to those who loved the girl that her interest in life was dead. Kirsty Forgan watched her closely, studied every expression and glance, and was speedily convinced that some secret grief was preying upon her darling's heart. Day after day she resolved to broach the subject, but her heart always failed her, afraid lest she should try the feeble strength too far. Of one other thing Kirsty was also fully convinced, that unless something happened to ease the girl's mind, and to rouse her to interest in life, she would 'dwine awa,' for already the rounded cheek had lost its bloom, the bright eye its lustre, and a strange languor and lassitude seemed to possess her.

'Get her away for a change. Rouse her up by all means,' Doctor Bonthron had advised; but Maggie had resolutely refused to leave Drumkeillour. When Kirsty heard that Gavin Wardrop was coming, she resolved once more to speak to her young mistress. That very morning, too, the laird had looked into her face with mournful eyes, and had asked wistfully, 'Have you not found out anything yet?' and Kirsty was not able to stand that.

'Ay, there's a bonnie odds by the last time a young gentleman cam' in our way to eat his dinner wi' ye,' said Kirsty, in a queer quick way; and, with her back to the sofa, she whisked off some imaginary dust from the mirror on the dressing-table. 'It was, Whatten goon wull I pit on? and, D'ye think this'll dae, Kirsty? an' sic like. Ay, it was a bonnie odds. 'Eh, Miss Maggie, my doo, what way did ye set yon fine chap about his business? I said to mysel',—ay, and tae Effie tae,—when I saw ye thegither, that I never saw a brawer pair.'

'Hush, Kirsty! hush, hush!' fell in a sharp cry from the girl's trembling lips. Kirsty let her apron drop, and, turning to the sofa, knelt down upon her

knees, and looked, oh, so searchingly and lovingly, into her darling's face.

'Miss Maggie, I'm no' impident, only I canna bide tae see ye sae dowie. Tell auld Kirsty yer trouble, my lamb. She's lived langer in the world an' seen mair nor you, an' wha kens, she micht be able to help ye.'

'No, no, Kirsty; I must bear my trouble alone. I have brought it on myself,' answered Maggie very low.

'I canna tak' that in, my bairn, for ye wudna hurt a flea. In my e'en ye can dae nae wrang,' said Kirsty fondly. 'Eh, my dearie, if ye hae been wheedled into a covenant wi' Gavin Wardrop against yer wull, draw back afore it be ower late. I ken yer heart's no' in it, an' Lord help ye, if ye enter the mairrit state wi' sic feelings!'

'I could not help myself, Kirsty,' said Maggie in a whisper, and then she gave way to a burst of weeping so violent and prolonged that Kirsty was afraid. But she grew calm at length, and laying one white hand on Kirsty's toil-hardened one, she looked with wet, sad eyes into her face. 'You are quite right, Kirsty; my heart is not in the covenant I have made,' she said. 'If you will promise me

faithfully that what I tell you will never pass your lips, even to my father, I will trust you with the secret.'

'I promise, if by haudin' my tongue I dae ye nae harm, my dear,' said Kirsty; and without paying much attention to the conditional promise, Maggie began to tell her tale. It did not take long, and as Kirsty listened the utmost consternation sat upon her face.

'Eh, mercy me, to think that efter a' my watchin', the mischief should hae been dune!' she exclaimed almost hopelessly. 'Oh, Miss Maggie, what way did ye gang chappin' at thae auld wa's? But for you, they micht hae keepit their secret for ever.'

'It seemed like destiny, Kirsty,' said Maggie, with a faint smile. None but herself knew how unspeakable was the relief given by the sharing of her trouble with another. Her heart seemed lightened already of half its care.

'Eh, had I but kent o' that ither wull, I wad hae brunt it mysel',' said the faithful soul, with sorrowful energy. 'My lamb, is there nae way oot save by mairryin' Wardrop? It's an awfu' sacrifice o' yersel' to mak' for yer faither.'

'There is no other way. You see, he saw me

burn the will, and as he has the duplicate I could be convicted,' said Maggie, with a deep and painful flush. 'It is felony, you know. I must be grateful to him for sparing me and my father the disgrace of exposure.'

'Ye maunna believe a' *he* says, because ye ken he was jist made for leein',' said Kirsty. 'Eh, Miss Maggie, if ye wad jist let me gang doon to the Bonnygate an' see Maister Wulson. He wudna hurt a hair o' yer heid. He kens a' aboot the law an' thae kind o' things, as he's been brocht up to it a' his days; jist let me gang, my lamb.'

'If you do, Kirsty, I will never, never forgive you,' said Maggie almost wildly, for the thought of her crime and the punishment it merited had never left her night nor day. Contemplation of it had almost weakened her mind.

'Verra weel, verra weel, my bairn, I winna till ye gie me leave. Mercy me, there's the bell! Can that be *him* already?' cried Kirsty, springing up. 'Ay, it's jist him, for that's Jamie Anderson's cab. Ay, weel, you lie quate and still there, see, till I come back. I'll hae to gang and see efter the dinner. Lord forgi'e me for wishin' it micht stick in his thrapple,' she added under her breath.

'Dinna fash yer heid aboot naething, but try an' sleep. He'll no' see ye the nicht, an' maybe no' the morn. There maun be a way oot o' this tangle, but we'll see.'

So saying, and nodding cheerily, Kirsty left the room, taking care to lock the door after her, and put the key in her pocket. On the drawing-room landing she encountered Gavin Wardrop, portmanteau in hand, on his way to his rooms.

'Well, Kirsty, and how are you?' he asked, with patronising familiarity. Kirsty's only reply was a girn and a wrathful look; then she whisked past him, and ran down to the kitchen.

'He's come, Effie. Is the tatties on?' she inquired. 'Is the table set, an' the meat near dune? Ay, verra weel, get on yer muslin apron; ye'll hae tae gang tae the dinner-room an' gie them what they want. It's no me that'll wait on Mr. Gavin Wardrop this ae nicht.'

With her usual discreet silence, Effie got her muslin apron from the dresser drawer, and, after changing her cap for one with a knot of mauve ribbons in front, said she was ready for her duties.

'If the laird spiers for me, say I'm busy,' said

Kirsty. 'Weel, awa' an' ring the bell. It's twa meenits tae seevin, an' the tatties is jist ready. Oor gentleman'll mayb no' be ready, but folk's meat canna bide for him.'

It was quite patent to Effie that something more than usual had occurred to rouse Kirsty's ire against the lawyer, and her slow mind at once began to attempt the solution of the mystery. When the dinner was served, and Effie in the dining-room safely out of the way, Kirsty retired to the library. She felt consumed with curiosity regarding the secret panel, and, truth to tell, felt just a trifle aggrieved to think that it should have existed out of her knowledge. She took the precaution to turn the key in the lock, not wishing to be caught unawares at her investigations, and then lighting two candles on the bureau, began to search for the spring. Maggie had described the panel and its secret spring so minutely, that Kirsty's labours were speedily rewarded by seeing the panel suddenly slide back, and the cavity revealed to her curious and astonished gaze. She lifted one of the silver candlesticks, and holding it so that its full light shone on the place, proceeded to examine it with the deepest interest.

'Od, but that's a graun' howdy-hole,' she said. 'Sic a length it gangs back.'

Then she put her hand in; but, suddenly fancying she heard some one in the hall, she hastily withdrew it. As she did so, her fingers brushed against the left side of the cavity; then what was her astonishment to hear a peculiar click, and to see the little wall, as it might be called, disappear, revealing another cavity quite as large!

It was not empty. A folded paper lay in its safe hiding, and in an instant Kirsty's fingers closed over it, and a quick light sprang into her eyes. What if this precious paper should prove of use! what if this discovery should crown the other, and reveal something which would remove the cloud which overhung Drumkeillour! With trembling hands, Kirsty set down the candlestick, and unfolded the document, which was simply a sheet of note-paper with Robina Dempster's initials and the crest of Drumkeillour at the top. Kirsty, being familiar with her old mistress's crooked handwriting, had no difficulty in deciphering it now, even without the aid of her spectacles.

Thus it ran:—

'This is the last will and testament of Robina

Anne Dempster of Drumkeillour and Pitskene. I hereby leave and bequeath the lands and estate of Pitskene to my brother, David Dempster, solely for his use and benefit, together with the sum of five thousand pounds, to be paid within a month of my decease, and with it I beg his forgiveness for my long hardness of heart towards him. To my niece, his daughter, Margaret Dempster, I leave the lands and estate of Drumkeillour, solely for her use and benefit, together with all plate, furniture, and jewels, and the entire residue of my personal estate. And my prayer is, that she may make better use of it than her unhappy kinswoman.

'ROBINA DEMPSTER.

'DRUMKEILLOUR, *October 8th*, 1867.'

'The Lord be praised,' fell low and fervently from Kirsty's lips. 'Surely this'll pit a'thing richt. It was the guidin' o' Providence led me in here. My only fear is that the auld wull micht be a later date, but it couldna be, for this is the day afore she dee'd, but I'll no' tell Miss Maggie or I mak' sure.' Then Kirsty lifted her skirt and hid the precious document in the spacious pocket, which she tied on every morning as regularly as she donned her wrapper. Then she carefully closed the secret panels, after first examining to see whether there were any more mysterious openings, then blew out the candles, and retired in haste.

'Was the dinner a' richt, Effie?' she asked, when the damsel entered the kitchen with her dessert plates.

'Ay; but I'm gled to win awa'. The laird's awfu' dry to Maister Wardrop, an' when they sit lang without speakin', I'm aye like to lauch,' said Effie, with that peculiar sly twinkle in her eye which was the only sign of amusement she ever gave.

'Ay, he'll be dryer maybe afore he's franker, Effie,' said Kirsty enigmatically. 'Weel, tak' yer denner, see, till I gang up an' see what Miss Maggie's wantin'. Ye needna pit yer spune into that apple tairt; it'll dae for the morn.' So saying, Kirsty, almost beside herself with excitement, ran away upstairs to her mistress' dressing-room.

To her astonishment, she found her up and dressed, just fastening the lace at her throat with a pearl brooch. Whether it was that the soft folds of the black lace robe gave a peculiar slenderness to the figure, and made the face look paler by contrast, Kirsty could not tell, but she was struck by the exceedingly fragile appearance of the girl.

'What way did ye no' lie still when I telt ye Miss Maggie?' she asked. 'D'ye like the look o' yersel' noo ye are up an' dressed? D'ye no look fitter for yer bed?'

'Maybe; but I am going down to the drawing-room. Could Effie bring me a cup of tea before I go?'

'I'll bring'd. Dinna gang doon, mind, or I come back,' said Kirsty warningly, and ran with the utmost haste to the kitchen. In an incredibly short time she was back with the tray, and a morsel of delicious toast, which she was glad to see her patient seemed to enjoy.

'Miss Maggie, my dear, I dinna want to vex ye, but could ye mind whatten date was on that unco wull?' she inquired, with such suppressed eagerness that Maggie looked at her in surprise.

'Yes, I remember quite well. It was the 21st of September 1867, Kirsty,' she answered quietly.

'Weel, Miss Maggie, supposin' there was another wull, say a fortnicht or three weeks later, a' richt signed an' everything, wad that dae ony guid?' pursued Kirsty, trembling with excitement.

'I don't know very much about the law, Kirsty; but I am sure the latest will, if proved valid, would cancel every other,' answered Maggie, trembling too. 'But what is the use of supposing such a thing? It is impossible there could be any other.

'No, it's no' impossible! There is anither! I was doon rakin' in the wa's, an' I found that, see! It's the mistress's wull, an' it's dated the day afore she dee'd,' cried Kirsty. 'Read it, my precious bairn. Am I no' richt?'

Maggie reached forth a shaking hand and took the paper, and her eyes devoured its contents. Then, as the full realization of its joyful meaning dawned upon her, it fluttered from her nerveless fingers, and, sinking back in her chair, to Kirsty's consternation she fainted clean away.

'Ye maun gang doon to the dinner-room, Kirsty; the laird's been ringin' for ye,' said Effie's voice at the door about half an hour later, when Kirsty had succeeded in restoring her young mistress to happy consciousness.

'If they want to see ye, Miss Maggie, what wull I say?' she asked, tenderly bending over the happy girl.

'Tell papa to come as soon as he can; and—and say to Mr. Wardrop I will see him in papa's presence in the library to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock.'

'Verra weel,' said Kirsty, and retired triumphantly to deliver her messages.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

IN the dingy sitting-room of his lodgings in Montague Street sat Frank Macleod on a dreary February afternoon.

It had rained all day, and it was raining still. A mist enveloped the slopes of Arthur's Seat and hung low over the town, making queer circles round the gas-lamps, which were lighted already, though it was only four o'clock.

Frank had trudged home from the University that afternoon without overcoat or umbrella, and he was drenched to the skin. The fire in the sitting-room was but newly lighted, and there was no appearance of his dinner on the table. The whole place was cold and uncomfortable in the extreme, but Frank did not mind. He rather enjoyed it, in fact. His dreary surroundings were in keeping with his state

of mind. That was dreary and low enough, for he felt as if he had really nothing left in the world to live for or to care about. He was only an atom of humanity, a solitary human being, of no interest or use to anybody in the wide world. When a man becomes convinced of that, he is generally rather indifferent to the minor accessories of life. He threw down his books, cast his wet coat in a heap on the stony haircloth couch, took off his boots, and began in a listless, uninterested sort of way to try and make the fire burn. After some time he was rewarded by seeing a sickly blue flame leap up between two lumps of coal—an uncertain flickering sort of flame, which did not appear to know whether it was its duty to spread or to disappear. It thought better of it, however, for it caught at the other side of a tiny piece of wood still smouldering, and in a few minutes quite a cheerful effect was produced by their combined efforts. Then Frank drew in the easy-chair, if it might so be called, and threw himself into it, in the hope that some genial warmth might thaw his chilled feet and limbs. As he leaned back in the chair, his face in its repose seemed thinner and more worn than of yore, and there were some sad, stern curves about the resolute, manly mouth which had not always been there. He put his finger-tips together, and, resting

his forehead on his palms, fell to thinking once more of what was scarcely ever absent from his mind night nor day. When the blow fell so suddenly upon him, when that brief cold epistle killed for ever the greatest hope of his life, he had sworn that he would forget, that he would put away for ever all thoughts of Maggie Dempster from his heart—a resolution easily made, but not quite so easily kept. For the sweet, dear face, the earnest, true eyes, the winning smile, would haunt him, hindering his work, torturing him in season and out of season, making his life an intolerable burden.

'Fact is,' he said to himself that night, 'this can't go on. There's nothing for it but to get out of this place. There isn't a street scarcely which I haven't walked with her; the whole place is full of associations. I'm falling back in my work—not that I care a rap whether I stand or fall now; but I may as well get out of Scotland. It can't matter to anybody what I make of myself now.'

As he spoke he drew out his pocket-book and took from it the black-edged sheet of note-paper which, had he been wise, he knew he ought to have destroyed long ago. He had kept his pain alive by reading it occasionally, not that he was likely to forget its contents; but it gave him a sort of grim satisfaction

just to read and re-read the words Maggie had penned. They were these :—

'DRUMKEILLOUR, *January 14th*, 1868.

'DEAR FRANK,—It is not an easy task I have before me; but it must be performed. Do you know what it is I am going to write, what I must write to you to-day? The last letter you will ever receive from me, because I can't be anything to you any more. I cannot tell you why, but I believe you will know; you were not at ease when you were here, and your fears were not groundless. I dare not say I am sorry; it would be a mockery from me to you. Only when you blame me most, when your heart is most bitter and hard against me, comfort yourself by knowing that you do not suffer alone. Do not attempt to write nor to see me again; my decision is final and unalterable. If I dared say more, it would be to thank you for all you have been to me and done for me in the past. I shall never forget it. And when you think—but there, I must restrain myself. I dare not write more.

'M. DEMPSTER.'

That was all. Brief, concise enough, beyond a doubt; and yet there seemed to Frank at times that there was an under-current of mystery, something which he could not read between the lines of that strange letter. He had obeyed its injunctions to the very letter. He had neither answered it, nor entertained for a moment any thought of crossing the Firth to

seek a personal explanation. When a woman gave him his dismissal, he knew how to accept it. She should not have the satisfaction of knowing in what way it affected him. But it had cut very deep, for all that. He had loved her so truly and devotedly; she had been so long the star of his existence, his bright incentive to the worthiest effort, that it was a hard struggle to realize that she was lost to him for ever. He had walked almost like a man in a dream since that dull January morning when the blow had fallen upon his happy heart. As the days went by, however, he began to face the thing, and to look at a future in which the woman he loved could have no place. It was dreary work, and the young fellow may be forgiven if at times he thought life scarcely worth living at all.

He folded up the letter again, hesitated a moment whether to drop it into the crackling fire, and then returned it to his pocket-book, and rose from his chair, wondering whether the landlady had fallen asleep cooking his dinner.

Just then the bell rang with that tremendous force peculiar to the postman's handling, and shortly the landlady came bustling in with a letter.

'Your dinner'll just be ben this very minute, Mr. Macleod,' she said apologetically. 'I had to go out to

see my sister at Canonmills, and Katie forgot to look after the things. Here's your letter, sir.'

'All right, Mrs. Donald,' said the lodger good-naturedly, and took the letter rather eagerly, for it had a black edge, and the envelope was the same shape as the one he had just returned to his pocket. The handwriting was Maggie's, and the post-mark Cupar. What did it mean? He waited till Mrs. Donald had laid the cloth and left the room, then with hasty fingers broke the seal. What was written within was brief and enigmatical enough.

'DRUMKEILLOUR, *February 14th*, 1868.

'DEAR FRANK,—Please come to Drumkeillour at once—to-day, if possible. Don't let anything deter you, only come. Will send to every train.

'MAGGIE.'

'Not if I know it!' exclaimed Frank, a hot flush of indignation mounting to his brow. 'Does she think I'm a puppet to go or stay at her pleasure? She must learn that I'm made of different stuff.'

So saying, Frank rang the bell furiously, just to relieve his mind, and demanded his dinner to be served instantly. Poor Mrs. Donald flew into a consternation, and rushed off to the kitchen to expedite matters, wondering all the time what could have

happened to throw her lodger into such an unwonted etmper. While she was bustling in and out of the room, Frank sat down at the window, and opening one of his class-books attempted to fix his mind on his notes. But in vain. His thoughts would flee to Drumkeillour, would seek to unravel the mystery which seemed to be going on there, and at last he threw down the book, and the next moment was studying that page of Murray's Time-table which gives information regarding trains for Fife and the north.

Half an hour later he was being rapidly driven along the Bridges to the Waverley Station, calling himself all the time a soft-headed fool!

. . . . . .

'Calm yourself, Maggie. You will make yourself quite ill again with this nervous excitement,' said David Dempster, laying a kind hand on his daughter's arm. She was walking up and down the long drawing-room, with flushed face and bright gleaming eyes, trembling in every limb. Never had she looked so exquisitely beautiful, although it was a more fragile beauty than that which had characterized bonnie Maggie Dempster a year ago. This time of trial had left a mark behind.

'I cannot be calm, daddy!' she answered feverishly. 'What if Frank will not come! I treated

him so shamefully, papa. I could not wonder very much although he stayed away.'

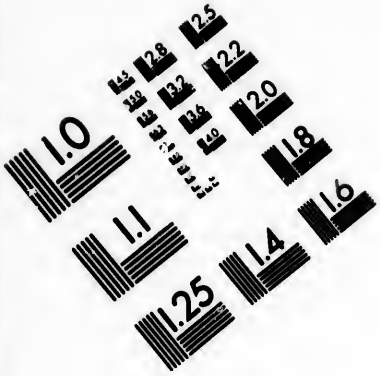
'I think he will come, my dearie,' said the old man soothingly. 'But you must not be disappointed though it should not be to-night. He might not just be prepared to fly whenever he got your letter.'

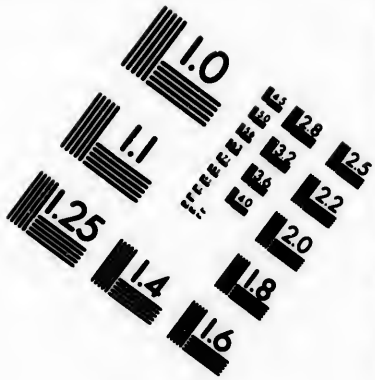
'Perhaps not,' said Maggie, with a quick sigh. 'But what if, after he hears all the story, he should turn against me? The crime was all the same, papa, though the will I destroyed was worthless.'

'Hush, hush, my darling,' said David Dempster, with infinite tenderness. 'You misjudge Frank. When he hears of the sacrifice you would have made of yourself for my sake, he will love and honour you a thousand times more.'

'I wish I could believe it,' said Maggie mournfully; then suddenly she lifted her eyes to her father's face with a wistful pathos which nearly overcame him. 'Papa, are you quite, quite sure Gavin Wardrop cannot harm me now? He looked so fearful, so vindictive yesterday. I cannot forget his face when he learned what Kirsty had found. I shall never forget it as long as I live.'

'His were empty threats, my darling. Do not let them disturb you. We do not know how much he





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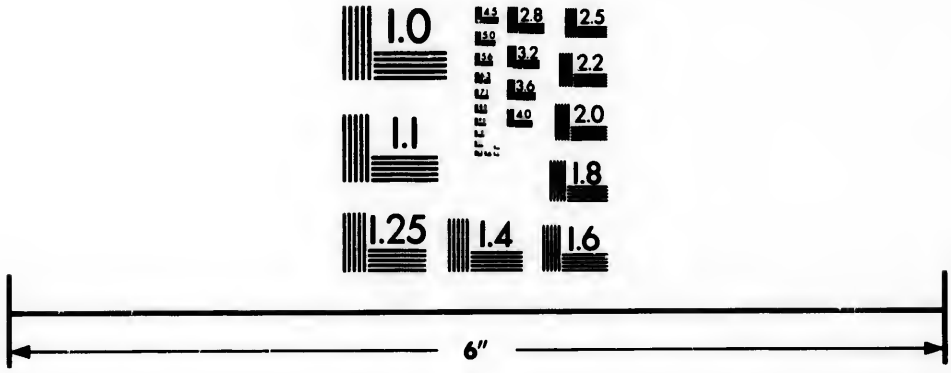

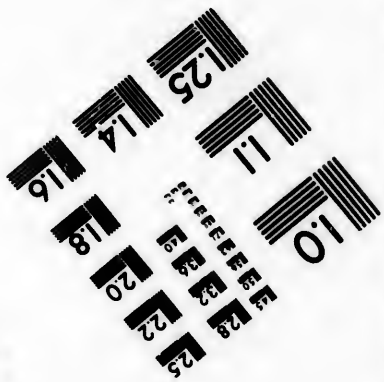

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assumed, nor how much he took for granted, so as to get you into his power. He only played a game of chance, which proved very nearly successful for him, and fatal to your happiness. Believe me, my darling, when I assure you the Wardrops will never trouble us again, and if they do, well, I shall be ready for them,' said the old man cheerfully. 'The mistake was in not taking our faithful Kirsty's advice at first. She was wiser than I.'

Listening to her father's quiet, reassuring words, the girl gradually grew calmer, and something of her hurried nervousness disappeared. But still she continued her restless walk, ever and anon glancing at the old-fashioned brass clock on the mantel, for time was fleeting fast. Meanwhile, in the kitchen Kirsty Forgan was sharing the excited expectancy of those in the drawing-room.

'Awa' oot, Effie, an' see if the coach binna at the lodge gates,' she said at length, unable to contain herself.

''Deed no; it's snawin', an' that wund's like to freeze ye. It'll no' bring them ony quicker,' answered Effie philosophically. 'If ye're that ill, ye can gang yersel'.'

'Eh, but ye're a thrawn hizzy, Effie Gourlay,' said

Kirsty rather snappishly, a remark which Effie heeded not.

She was trimming a new hat for herself, and thinking of the admiration it would create on the Sabbath day.

Effie was not, of course, acquainted with the inner mysteries of all that had transpired at Drumkeillour of late; for though she was a prudent maiden, it would not do, as Kirsty said, 'tae let her ken a'thing.'

'I'm sure that's coach-wheels!' said Kirsty at length. 'Ye're e'en's better nor mine, Effie. Ye micht keek oot at the still-room windy an' see.'

'No, no, it's no' the coach, it's a hoolet on the stable roof,' said Effie. 'It mak's a' kind o' soonds. Eh, but I believe ye're richt. I hear them noo,' she added; but Kirsty had already whisked out of the kitchen, and was half-way up the back-stair to the hall.

Just as she appeared at the baize door which shut off the back premises from the hall, the laird came down the front stair, then the big outer door opened, and in stepped the eagerly-expected guest, with the sleet drops still trembling on cheek and chin, for he had missed the Drumkeillour coach, which had only overtaken him at the lodge-gates.

'Welcome, welcome, Frank, my boy!' said the laird brokenly. Then Kirsty, unable to restrain herself, darted forward, and, seizing one of the astonished young man's hands, pressed it fervently to her lips.

'Eh, sir, I'm richt gled to see yer bonnie face back in Drumkeillour!' she said hysterically. 'Let me tak' aff yer coat, and let ye awa' up the stair. Oor bonnie bairn's wearied sair for ye.'

Frank looked inquiringly into the laird's face as these words fell rather incoherently from Kirsty's lips. Mystery seemed heaped upon mystery here.

'Yes, yes, Kirsty is right, my boy; but Maggie will tell you the story. I left her in the drawing-room; you will find her there.'

Then Frank, like a man still in a dream, laid down his coat and hat and went away upstairs. And there met him on the threshold of the drawing-room a slender figure in white, and when he saw the face radiant with such unspeakable love, his heart gave a great bound. Then those below heard the drawing-room door shut, and then a deep silence seemed to fall upon the house. It was the hush of peace, and happiness, and perfect love.

. . . . . .

These things happened some years ago, and are

like a dream to those living now in such deep happiness beneath the roof-tree of Drumkeillour.

The auld laird is still alive, able to walk about the dear old grounds with a grandchild clinging to each hand. And Kirsty Forgan is still an institute in Drumkeillour, and though in her own estimation she is indispensable to the right guiding of the house, her duties are very nominal indeed. It is an astonishing thing to those who knew her of yore, how she allows the Doctor's bairns to tyrannize over her as they do. If you asked her why, I daresay she would tell you she enjoyed it, and 'that the bairns maun have some pleasur' in life.'

Need I say how 'The Doctor,' as he loves to be called, is honoured in Fife? He is dear to young and old, rich and poor, sick and well. Everybody knows and loves Maggie Dempster's husband, and Cupar folk say it was a blessed day for them and for the country-side when he came to Drumkeillour.

The Wardrops are never seen and seldom heard of in the district; but they are in Dundee still, flourishing like green bay trees. And what of Maggie herself, the Doctor's happy, happy wife? In so calling her I think I have told you all there is to tell about her. But if any day you see, driving with two little children and an old gentleman about the

green country lanes, or meet in the Bonnygate, perhaps, a lady with a face so sweet and sunshiny, and eyes so bright and yet so serene and steadfast in their light, that you can scarcely keep from looking at her, or from turning round to watch her out of sight, you may be very sure you have seen Mrs. Macleod of Drumkeillour.

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