МАРГАРЕТ ОЛИФАНТ

THE LAIRD OF NORLAW; A SCOTTISH STORY

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

The house of Norlaw stands upon the slope of a low hill, under shelter of the three mystic Eildons, and not very far from that little ancient town which, in the language of the author of "Waverley," is called Kennaquhair.

A low, peaceable, fertile slope, bearing trees to its top-most height, and corn on its shoulders, with a little river running by its base, which manages, after many circuits, to wind its way into Tweed. The house, which is built low upon the hill, is two stories in front, but, owing to the unequal level, only one behind. The garden is all at the back, where the ground is sheltered, but in front, the green, natural surface of the hill descends softly to the water without any thing to break its verdure. There are clumps of trees on each side, straying as nature planted them, but nothing adorns the sloping lawn, which is not called a lawn, nor used for any purposes of ornament by the household of Norlaw.

Close by, at the right hand of this homely house, stands an extraordinary foil to its serenity and peacefulness. The old castle of Norlaw, gaunt and bare, and windowless, not a towered and battlemented pile, but a straight, square, savage mass of masonry, with windows pierced high up in its walls in even rows, like a prison, and the gray stone-work below, as high under the first range of windows as the roof of the modern house, rising up blank, like a rock, without the slightest break or opening. To see this strange old ruin, in the very heart of the peaceful country, without a feature of nature to correspond with its sullen strength, nor a circumstance to suggest the times and the danger which made that necessary, is the strangest thing in the world; all the more that the ground has no special capacities for defense, and that the castle is not a picturesque baronial accumulation of turrets and battlements, but a big, austere, fortified dwelling-house, which modern engineering could make an end of in half a day.

It showed, however, if it did nothing better, that the Livingstones were knights and gentlemen, in the day when the Border was an unquiet habitation—and for this, if for nothing else, was held in no little honor by the yeoman Livingstone, direct descendant of the Sir Rodericks and Sir Anthonys, who farmed the remains of his paternal property, and dwelt in the modern house of Norlaw.

This house was little more than a farm-house in appearance, and nothing more in reality. The door opened into a square hall, on either side of which was a large room, with three deep-set windows in each; four of these windows looked out upon the lawn and the water, while one broke each corner of the outer wall. On the side nearest the castle, a little behind the front level of the house, was an "outshot," a little wing built to the side, which formed the kitchen, upon the ever-open door of which the corner window of the common family sitting room kept up a vigilant inspection. A plentiful number of bed-chambers up-stairs were reached by a good stair-case, and a gallery which encircled the hall; the architecture was of the most monotonous and simple regularity; so many windows on one side soberly poising so many windows on the other. The stair-case made a rounded projection at the back of the house, which was surmounted by a steep little turret roof, blue-slated, and bearing a tiny vane for its crown, after the fashion of the countryside; and this, which glimmered pleasantly among the garden fruit trees when you looked down from the top of the hill—and the one-storied projection, which was the kitchen, were the only two features which broke the perfect plainness and uniformity of the house.

But though it was July when this history begins, the flush of summer—and though the sunshine was sweet upon the trees and the water, and the bare old walls of the castle, there was little animation in Norlaw. The blinds were drawn up in the east room, the best apartment—though the sun streamed

in at the end window, and "the Mistress" was not wont to leave her favorite carpet to the tender mercies of that bright intruder; and the blinds were down in the dining-room, which nobody had entered this morning, and where even the Mistress's chair and little table in the corner window could not keep a vicarious watch upon the kitchen door. It was not needful; the two maids were very quiet, and not disposed to amuse themselves. Marget, the elder one, who was the byrewoman, and had responsibilities, went about the kitchen very solemnly, speaking with a gravity which became the occasion; and Janet, who was the house-servant, and soft-hearted, stood at the table, washing cups and saucers, very slowly, and with the most elaborate care, lest one of them should tingle upon the other, and putting up her apron very often to wipe the tears from her eyes. Outside, on the broad stone before the kitchen door, a little ragged boy sat, crying bitterly—and no one else was to be seen about the house.

"Jenny," said the elder maid, at last, "give that bairn a piece, and send him away. There's enow of us to greet—for what we're a' to do for a puir distressed family, when aince the will o' God's accomplished this day, I canna tell."

"Oh, woman, dinna speak! he'll maybe win through," cried Jenny, with renewed tears.

Marget was calm in her superior knowledge.

"I ken a death-bed from a sick-bed," she said, with solemnity; "I've seen them baith—and weel I kent, a week come the morn, that it was little good looking for the doctor, or wearying aye for his physic time, or thinking the next draught or the next pill would do. Eh sirs! ane canna see when it's ane's ain trouble; if it had been ony ither man, the Mistress would have kent as weel as me."

"It's an awfu' guid judge that's never wrang," said Jenny, with a little impatience. "He's a guid faither, and a guid maister; it's my hope he'll cheat you a' yet, baith the doctor and you."

Marget shook her head, and went solemnly to a great wooden press, which almost filled one side of the kitchen, to get the "piece" which Jenny showed no intention of bestowing upon the child at the door. Pondering for a moment over the basket of oat cakes, Marget changed her mind, and selected a fine, thin, flour one, from a little pile.

"It's next to funeral bread," she said to herself, in vindication of her choice; "Tammie, my man, the maister would be nae better if ye could mak' the water grit with tears—run away hame, like a good bairn; tell your mother neither the Mistress nor me will forget her, and ye can say, I'll let her ken; and there's a piece to help ye hame."

"I dinna want ony pieces—I want to ken if he's better," said the boy; "my mother said I wasna to come back till there was good news."

"Whisht, sirrah, he'll hear you on his death-bed," said Marget, "but it'll no do *you* ony harm, bairn; the Mistress will aye mind your mother; take your piece and run away."

The child's only answer was to bury his face in his hands, and break into a new fit of crying. Marget came in again, discomfited; after a while she took out a little wooden cup of milk to him, and set it down upon the stone without a word. She was not sufficiently hard-hearted to frown upon the child's grief.

"Eh, woman Jenny!" she cried, after an interval, "to think a man could have so little pith, and yet get in like this to folk's hearts!"

"As if ye didna ken the haill tale," cried Jenny, with indignant tears, "how the maister found the wean afield with his broken leg, and carried him hame—and how there's ever been plenty, baith milk and meal, for thae puir orphants, and Tammie's schooling, and aye a kind word to mend a'—and yet, forsooth, the bairn maunna greet when the maister's at his latter end!"

"We'll a' have cause," said Marget, abruptly; "three bonnie lads that might be knights and earls, every one, and no' a thing but debt and dool, nor a trade to set their hand to. Haud yer peace!—do ye think there's no trade but bakers and tailors, and the like o' that? and there's Huntley, and Patie, and Cosmo, my bonnie bairns!—there never was three Livingstones like them, nor three of ony other name as far as Tyne runs—and the very bairn at the door has muckle to look to as they!"

"But it's nae concern o' yours, or o' mine. I'm sure the maister was aye very good to me," said Jenny, retiring into tears, and a *non sequitur*.

"No, that's true—it's nae concern o' yours—*you're* no' an auld servant like me," said her companion, promptly, "but for mysel' I've sung to them a' in their cradles; I would work for them with my hands, and thankful; but I wouldna desire that of them to let the like o' me work, or the Mistress toil, to keep them in idleset. Na, woman—I'm jealous for my bairns—I would break my heart if Huntley was content to be just like his father; if either the Mistress or the lads will listen to me, I'll gie my word to send them a' away."

"Send them away—and their mother in mourning? Oh, my patience! what for?"

"To make their fortune," said Marget, and she hung the great pot on the great iron hook above the fire, with a sort of heroic gesture, which might have been amusing under other circumstances—for Marget believed in making fortunes, and had the impulse of magnificent hope at her heart.

"Eh, woman! you're hard-hearted," said her softer companion, "to blame the Maister at his last, and plan to leave the Mistress her lane in the world! I would make them abide with her to comfort her, if it was me."

Marget made no answer—she had comforted herself with the flush of fancy which pictured these three sons of the house, each completing his triumph—and she was the byrewoman and had to consider the cattle, and cherish as much as remained of pastoral wealth in this impoverished house. She went out with her dark printed gown carefully "kilted" over her red and blue striped petticoat, and a pail in her hand. She was a woman of forty, a farm servant used to out-of-door work and homely ways, and had neither youth nor sentiment to soften her manners or enlarge her mind. Yet her heart smote her when she thought of the father of the house, who lay dying while she made her criticism upon him, true though it was.

"Has he no' been a good master to me? and would I spare tears if they could ease him?" she said to herself, as she rubbed them away from her eyes. "But folk can greet in the dark when there's no work to do," she added, peremptorily, and so went to her dairy and her thoughts. Tender-hearted Jenny cried in the kitchen, doing no good to any one; but up-stairs in the room of death, where the family waited, there were still no tears.

CHAPTER II

Half a mile below Norlaw, “as Tyne runs,” stood the village of Kirkbride. Tyne was but one of the many undistinguished Tynes which water the south of Scotland and the north of England, a clear trout stream, rapid and brown, and lively, with linns and pools, and bits of woodland belonging to it, which the biggest brother of its name could not excel; and Kirkbride also was but one of a host of Kirkbrides, which preserved through the country, long after every stone of it had mouldered, the name of some little chapel raised to St. Bridget. This was an irregular hamlet, straggling over two mounds of rising ground, between which Tyne had been pleased to make a way for himself. The morsel of village street was on one bank of the water, a row of irregular houses, in the midst of which flourished two shops; while at the south end, as it was called, a little inn projected across the road, giving, with this corner, and the open space which it sheltered, an air of village coziness to the place which its size scarcely warranted. The other bank of the water was well covered with trees —drooping birches and alders, not too heavy in their foliage to hide the half dozen cottages which stood at different elevations on the ascending road, nor to vail at the summit the great jargonel pear-tree on the gable wall of the manse, which dwelt upon that height, looking down paternally and with authority upon the houses of the village. The church was further back, and partially hidden by trees, which, seeing this edifice was in the prevailing fashion of rural Scottish churches—a square barn with a little steeple stuck upon it—was all the better for the landscape. A spire never comes amiss at a little distance, when Nature has fair play and trees enough—and the hillock, with its foliage and its cottages, its cozy manse and spire among the trees, filled with thoughts of rural felicity the stray anglers who came now and then to fish in Tyne and consume the produce of their labor in the gable parlor of the Norlaw Arms.

The doctor had just passed through the village. On his way he had been assailed by more than one inquiry. The sympathy of the hamlet was strong, and its curiosity neighborly,—and more than one woman retired into her cottage, shaking her head over the news she received.

“Keep us a’! Norlaw! I mind him afore he could either walk or speak—and *then* I was in service, in the auld mistress’s time, at Me’mar,” said one of the village grandmothers, who stood upon the threshold of a very little house, where the village mangle was in operation. The old woman stood at the door, looking after the doctor, as he trotted off on his stout pony; she was speaking to herself, and not to the little audience behind, upon whom, however, she turned, as the wayfarer disappeared from her eyes, and laying down her bundle on the table, with a sigh, “Eh, Merran Hastie!” she exclaimed, “he’s been guid to you.”

The person thus addressed needed no further inducement to put her apron to her eyes. The room was very small, half occupied by the mangle, which a strong country girl was turning; and even in this summer day the apartment was not over bright, seeing that the last arrival stood in the doorway, and that the little window was half covered by a curtain of coarse green gauze. Two other village matrons had come with their “claes,” to talk over the danger of their neighbor and landlord, and to comfort the poor widow who had found an active benefactor in “Norlaw.” She was comforted, grateful and grieved though she was; and the gossips, though they looked grave, entered *con amore* into the subject; what the Mistress was likely to do, and how the family would be “left.”

“My man says they’ll a’ be roupit, baith stock and plenishing,” said the mason’s wife. “Me’mar himsel’ gave our John an insight into how it was. I judge he maun have lent Norlaw siller; for when he saw the dry-stane dike, where his ground marches with Norlaw, he gave ane of his humphs, and says he to John, ‘A guid kick would drive it down;’ says he, ‘it’ll last out *his* time, and for my part, I’m no a man for small fields;’ so grannie, there’s a family less, you may say already, in the country-side.”

"I'll tarry till I see it," said the old woman; "the ane of his family that's likest Norlaw, is his youngest son; and if Me'mar himsel', or the evil ane, his marrow, get clean the better of Huntley and Patrick, not to say the Mistress, it'll be a marvel to me."

"Norlaw was aye an unthrift," said Mrs. Mickle, who kept the grocer's shop in Kirkbride; "nobody could tell, when he was a young man, how he got through his siller. It aye burnt his pockets till he got it spent, and ye never could say what it was on."

"Oh, whisht!" exclaimed the widow; "me, and the like of me, can tell well what it was on."

"Haud a' your tongues," said the old woman; "if any body kens about Norlaw, it's me; I was bairn's-maid at Me'mar, in the time of the auld mistress, as a' the town kens, and I'm well acquaint with a' his pedigree, and mind him a' his life, and the truth's just this, whatever any body may say. He didna get his ain fancy when he was a young lad, and he's never been the same man ever sinsyne."

"Eh! was Norlaw crossed in love?" said the girl at the mangle, staying her grinding to listen; "but I'm no sorry for him; a man that wasna content with the Mistress doesna deserve a good wife."

"Ay, lass; you're coming to have your ain thoughts on such like matters, are ye?" said the old woman; "but take you my word, Susie, that a woman may be the fairest and the faithfu'est that ever stood on a hearthstane, but if she's no her man's fancy, she's nae guid there."

"Susie's very right," said the mason's wife; "he wasna blate! for a better wife than the Mistress never put her hand into ony housewifeskep, and it's her that's to be pitied with a man like you; and our John says—"

"I kent about Norlaw before ever you were born, or John either," said the old woman; "and what I say's *fac*, and what you say's fancy. Norlaw had never a thought in his head, from ten to five-and-twenty, but half of it was for auld Me'mar's ae daughter. I'm no saying he's a strong man of his nature, like them that clear their ain road, or make their ain fortune; but he might have held his ain better than he's ever done, if he had been matched to his fancy when he was a young lad, and had a' his life before him; that's just what I've to say."

"Weel, grannie, its awfu' hard," said the mason's wife; "the Mistress was a bonnie woman in her day, and a spirit that would face onything; and to wear out her life for a man that wasna heeding about her, and be left in her prime a dowerless widow!—Ye may say what ye like—but I wouldna thole the like for the best man in the country-side, let alone Norlaw."

"Naebody would, if they kent," said the oracle, "but what's a woman to do, if she's married and bound, and bairns at her foot, before she ever finds out what's been lying a' the time in her man's heart?"

"Then it was just a shame!" cried Susie, at the mangle, with tears in her eyes; "a burning shame! Eh Grannie, to find it out *then*! I would rather dee!"

"Ay, ay," said the old woman, shaking her head; "young folk think so—but that's life."

"I'll never think weel of Norlaw again—I'll never believe a lad mair! they might be thinking ony mischief in their heart," cried Susie, hastily putting up her particular bundle, and dashing a tear off her hot cheek. "They can greet for him that likes; I'll think of naebody but the Mistress—no me!"

Whereupon this keen sympathizer, who had some thoughts of her own on the matter, rushed forth, disturbing the elder group, whose interest was calmer and more speculative.

"Aweel, aweel! we're a' frail and full of shortcomings," said the widow; "but naebody kens how kind Norlaw has been to me. My little Tammie's away somegate about the house now. I thought the bairn's heart would break when he heard the news first. I'm sure there's no one hour, night or day, that he wouldna lay down his life for Norlaw."

"He was aye a kind man and weel likit—most folk are that spend their siller free, and take a' thing easy," said Mrs. Mickle, with a sigh which was partly for that weakness of human nature, and partly for the departing spirit.

Then new customers began to come in, and the group dispersed. By this time it was getting late in the afternoon, and John Mellerstone's wife had to bethink herself of her husband's supper, and

Mrs. Mickle of her evening cup of tea. The sun had begun to slant over the face of the brae opposite to them, brightening the drooping bushes with touches of gold, and glowing upon the white gable wall of the manse, obscured with the wealthy branches of its jargonel tree. The minister was making his way thoughtfully up the path, with his hat over his face a little, and his hands under the square skirts of his coat, never pausing to look down, as was his custom when his mind was at ease. He, too, had been at Norlaw, and his thoughts were still there.

CHAPTER III

The sun was shining into the west chamber at Norlaw. It was the room immediately over the dining-room, a large apartment, paneled and painted in a faint green color, with one window to the front and one to the side of the house. The side window looked immediately upon the old castle, and on the heavy masses of blunt-leaved ivy which hung in wild festoons everywhere from this front of the ruin; and the sun shone in gloriously to the sick chamber, with a strange mockery of the weakness and the sorrow there. This bed was what used to be called a "tent-bed," with heavy curtains of dark brown moreen, closely drawn at the foot, but looped up about the pillows. At the side nearest the sunshine, the Mistress, whose place had been there for weeks, stood by the bed measuring out some medicine for the sufferer. A fortnight's almost ceaseless watching had not sufficed to pale the cheek of health, or waste the vigor of this wife, who was so soon to be a widow. Her fresh, middle-aged, matronly bloom, her dress careful and seemly, her anxious and troubled brow, where deep solicitude and hope had scarcely given way to the dread certainty which everybody else acknowledged, made a very strange contrast, indeed, to the wasted, dying, eager face which lay among those pillows, with already that immovable yellow pallor on its features which never passes away; a long, thin hand, wasted to the bone, was on the coverlid, but the sufferer looked up, with his eager, large black eyes toward the medicine glass in his wife's hand with a singular eagerness. He knew, at last, that he was dying, and even in the solemnity of those last moments, this weak, graceful mind, true to the instincts of its nature, thought with desire and anxiety of dying well.

The three sons of the house were in the room watching with their mother. Huntley, who could scarcely keep still, even in the awe of this shadow of death, stood by the front window, often drawing close to the bed, but unable to continue there. The second, who was his mother's son, a healthful, ruddy, practical lad, kept on the opposite side of the bed, ready to help his mother in moving the patient. And at the foot, concealed by the curtains, a delicate boy of fifteen, with his face buried in his hands, sat upon an old square ottoman, observing nothing. This was Cosmo, the youngest and favorite, the only one of his children who really resembled Norlaw.

The caprice of change was strong upon the dying man; he wanted his position altered twenty times in half an hour. He had not any thing much to say, yet he was hard to please for the manner of saying it; and longed, half in a human and tender yearning for remembrance, and half with the weakness of his character, that his children should never forget these last words of his, nor the circumstances of his dying. He was a good man, but he carried the defects of his personality with him to the very door of heaven. When, at last, the pillows were arranged round him, so as to raise him on his bed in the attitude he wished, he called his children, in his trembling voice. Huntley came forward from the window, with a swelling heart, scarcely able to keep down the tears of his first grief. Patrick stood by the bed-side, holding down his head, with a stubborn composure—and Cosmo, stealing forward, threw himself on his knees and hid his sobbing in the coverlid. They were all on one side, and on the other stood the mother, the care on her brow blanching into conviction, and all her tremulous anxiety calmed with a determination not to disturb this last scene. It *was* the last. Hope could not stand before the look of death upon that face.

"My sons," said Norlaw, "I am just dying; but I know where I am in this strait, trusting in my Saviour. You'll remember I said this, when I'm gone."

There was a pause. Cosmo sobbed aloud in the silence, clinging to the coverlid, and Huntley's breast heaved high with a tumultuous motion—but there was not a word said to break the monologue of the father, who was going away.

"And now you'll have no father to guide you further," he continued, with a strange pity for them in his voice. "There's your mother, at my side—as true a wife and as faithful, as ever a man had for

a blessing. Boys, I leave your mother, for her jointure, the love you've had for me. Let her have it all —all—make amends to her. Martha, I've not been the man I might have been to you."

These last words were spoken in a tone of sudden compunction, strangely unlike the almost formal dignity of the first part of his address, and he turned his eager, dying eyes to her, with a startled apprehension of this truth, foreign to all his previous thoughts. She could not have spoken, to save his life. She took his hand between hers, with a low groan, and held it, looking at him with a pitiful, appealing face. The self-accusation was like an injury to her, and he was persuaded to feel it so, and to return to the current of his thoughts.

"Let your mother be your counselor; she has ever been mine," he said once more, with his sad, dying dignity. "I say nothing about your plans, because plans are ill adjuncts to a death-bed; but you'll do your best, every one, and keep your name without blemish, and fear God and honor your mother. If I were to speak for a twelvemonth I could not find more to say."

Again a pause; but this time, besides the sobs of Cosmo, Patrick's tears were dropping, like heavy drops of rain, upon the side of the bed, and Huntley crushed the curtain in his hand to support himself, and only staid here quite against his nature by strong compulsion of his will. Whether he deserved it or not, this man's fortune, all his life, had been to be loved.

"This night, Huntley will be Livingstone of Norlaw," continued the father; "but the world is fading out of my sight, boys—only I mind, and you know, that things have gone ill with us for many a year—make just the best that can be made, and never give up this house and the old name of your fathers. Me'mar will try his worst against you; ay, I ought to say more; but I'm wearing faint—I'm not able; you'll have to ask your mother. Martha, give me something to keep me up a moment more."

She did so hurriedly, with a look of pain; but when he had taken a little wine, the sick man's eye wandered.

"I had something more to say," he repeated, faintly; "never mind—your mother will tell you every thing;—serve God, and be good to your mother, and mind that I die in faith. Bairns, when ye come to your latter end, take heed to set your foot fast upon the rock, that I may find you all again."

They thought he had ended now his farewell to them. They laid him down tenderly, and, with awe and hidden tears, watched how the glow of sunset faded and the evening gray stole in over that pallid face which, for the moment, was all the world to their eyes. Sometimes, he said a faint word to his wife, who sat holding his hand. He was conscious, and calm, and departing. His sins had been like a child's sins—capricious, wayward, fanciful transgressions. He had never harmed any one but himself and his own household—remorseful recollections did not trouble him—and, weak as he was, all his life long he had kept tender in his heart a child's faith. He was dying like a Christian, though not even his faith and comfort, nor the great shadow of death which he was meeting, could sublime his last hours out of nature. God does not always make a Christian's death-bed sublime. But he was fast going where there is no longer any weakness, and the calm of the evening rest was on the ending of his life.

Candles had been brought softly into the room; the moon rose, the night wore on, but they still waited. No one could withdraw from that watch, which it is agony to keep, and yet worse agony to be debarred from keeping, and when it was midnight, the pale face began to flush by intervals, and the fainting frame to grow restless and uneasy. Cosmo, poor boy, struck with the change, rose up to look at him, with a wild, sudden hope that he was getting better; but Cosmo shrunk appalled at the sudden cry which burst as strong as if perfect health had uttered it from the heaving, panting heart of his father.

"Huntley, Huntley, Huntley!" cried the dying man, but it was not his son he called. "Do I know her name? She's but Mary of Melmar—evermore Mary to me—and the will is there—in the mid chamber. Aye!—where is she?—your mother will tell you all—it's too late for me."

The last words were irresolute and confused, dropping back into the faint whispers of death. When he began to speak, his wife had risen from her seat by the bed-side—her cheeks flushed, she held his hand tight, and over the face of her tenderness came an indescribable cloud of mortification,

of love aggrieved and impatient, which could not be concealed. She did not speak, but stood watching him, holding his hand close in her own, even after he was silent—and not even when the head sank lower down among the pillows, and the eyes grew dim, and the last hour came, did the watcher resume the patient seat which she had kept so long. She stood by him with a mind disquieted, doing every thing that she could do—quick to see, and tender to minister; but the sacramental calm of the vigil was broken—and the widow still stood by the bed when the early summer light came in over her shoulder, to show how, with the night, this life was over, and every thing was changed. Then she fell down by the bed-side, scarcely able to move her strained limbs, and struck to the heart with the chill of her widowhood.

It was all over—all over—and the new day, in a blaze of terrible sunshine, and the new solitude of life, were to begin together. But her sons, as they were forced to withdraw from the room where one was dead, and one lost in the first blind agony of a survivor, did not know what last pang of a long bitterness that was, which struck its final sting, to aggravate all her grievous trouble, into their mother's heart.

CHAPTER IV

Those slow days of household gloom and darkness, when death lies in the house, and every thought and every sound still bears an involuntary reference to the solemn inmate, resting unconscious of them all, went slowly over the roof of Norlaw. Sunday came, doubly mournful; a day in which Scottish decorum demanded that no one should stir abroad, even to church, and which hung indescribably heavy in those curtained rooms, and through the unbroken stillness of its leisure, upon the three youths who had not even their mother's melancholy society to help them through the day. The Mistress was in her own room, closely shut up with her Bible and her sorrow, taking that first Sabbath of her widowhood, a solitary day of privilege and indulgence, for her own grief. Not a sound was audible in the house; Jenny, who could be best spared, and who was somewhat afraid of the solemn quietness of Norlaw, had been sent away early this morning, to spend the Sabbath with her mother, in Kirkbride, and Marget sat alone in the kitchen, with a closed door and partially shuttered window, reading to herself half aloud from the big Bible in her lap. In the perfect stillness it was possible to hear the monotonous hum of her half-whispering voice, and sometimes the dull fall of the ashes on the kitchen hearth, but not a sound besides.

The blinds were all down in the dining-room, and the lower half of the shutters closed. Though the July sun made triumphant daylight even in spite of this, it was such a stifling, closed-in, melancholy light, bright upon the upper walls and the roof, but darkened and close around the lads, that the memory of it never quite passed out of their hearts. This room, too, was paneled and painted of that dull drab color, which middle-class dining-rooms even now delight in; there were no pictures on the walls, for the family of Norlaw were careless of ornaments, like most families of their country and rank. A dull small clock upon the black marble mantel-piece, and a great china jar on the well-polished, old-fashioned sideboard, were the only articles in which any thing beyond use was even aimed at. The chairs were of heavy mahogany and hair-cloth—a portion of the long dining-table, with a large leaf folded down, very near as black as ebony, and polished like a mirror, stood between the front windows—and the two round ends of this same dining-table stood in the centre of the room, large enough for family purposes, and covered with a red and blue table-cover. There was a heavy large chintz easy-chair at the fire-place, and a little table supporting a covered work-basket in the corner window—yet the room had not been used to look a dull room, heavy and dismal though it was to-day.

The youngest boy sat by the table, leaning over a large family Bible, full of quaint old pictures. Cosmo saw the pictures without seeing them—he was leaning both his elbows on the table, supporting his head with a pair of long, fair hands, which his boy's jacket, which he had outgrown, left bare to the wrists. His first agony of grief had fallen into a dull aching; his eyes were observant of the faintest lines of those familiar wood-cuts, yet he could not have told what was the subject of one of them, though he knew them all by heart. He was fair-haired, pale, and delicate, with sensitive features, and dark eyes, like his father's, which had a strange effect in contrast with the extreme lightness of his hair and complexion. He was the tender boy—the mother's child of the household, and it was Cosmo of whom the village gossips spoke, when they took comfort in the thought that only his youngest son was like Norlaw.

Next to Cosmo, sitting idly on a chair, watching how a stream of confined sunshine came in overhead, at the side of the blind, was Huntley, the eldest son. He was very dark, very ruddy, with close curls of black hair, and eyes of happy hazel-brown. Heretofore, Huntley Livingstone's principal characteristic had been a total incapacity to keep still. For many a year Marget had lamented over him, that he would not "behave himself," and even the Mistress had spoken her mind only too often on the same subject. Huntley would not join, with gravity and decorum, even the circle of evening visitors who gathered on unfrequent occasions round the fireside of Norlaw. He had perpetually something

on hand to keep him in motion, and if nothing better was to be had, would rummage through lumber-room and family treasury, hunting up dusty old sets of newspapers and magazines, risking the safety of precious old hereditary parchments, finding a hundred forgotten trifles, which he had nothing to do with. So that it was rare, even on winter evenings, to find Huntley at rest in the family circle; it was his wont to appear in it at intervals bringing something with him which had no right to be there —to be ordered off peremptorily by his mother with the intruding article; to be heard, all the evening through, knocking in nails, and putting up shelves for Marget, or making some one of the countless alterations, which had always to be made in his own bed-chamber and private sanctuary; and finally, to reappear for the family worship, during which he kept as still as his nature would permit, and the family supper, at which Huntley's feats, in cutting down great loaves of bread, and demolishing oat-cakes, were a standing joke in the household. This was the old Huntley, when all was well in Norlaw. Now he sat still, watching that narrow blade of sunshine, burning in compressed and close by the side of the blind; it was like his own nature, in those early days of household grief.

Patrick was a less remarkable boy than either of his brothers; he was most like Huntley, and had the same eyes, and the same crisp, short curls of black hair. But Patrick had a medium in him; he did what was needful, with the quickest practical sense; he was strong in his perception of right and justice; so strong, that the Quixotry of boyish enthusiasm had never moved him; he was not, in short, a describable person; at this present moment, he was steadily occupied with a volume of sermons; they were extremely heavy metal, but Patrick went on with them, holding fast his mind by that anchor of heaviness. It was not that his gravity was remarkable, or his spiritual appreciation great; but something was needful to keep the spirit afloat in that atmosphere of death; the boys had been "too well brought up" to think of profaning the Sabbath with light literature; and amusing themselves while their father lay dead was a sin quite as heinous. So Patrick Livingstone read, with a knitted brow, sermons of the old Johnsonian period, and Cosmo pondered the quaint Bible woodcuts, and Huntley watched the sunshine; and they had not spoken a word to each other for at least an hour.

Huntley was the first to break the silence.

"I wish to-morrow were come and gone," he exclaimed, suddenly, rising up and taking a rapid turn through the room; "a week of this would kill me."

Cosmo looked up, with an almost feminine reproof in his tearful black eyes.

"Well, laddie," said the elder brother; "dinna look at me with these e'en! If it would have lengthened out his days an hour, or saved him a pang, would I have spared years to do it? but what is *he* heeding for all this gloom and silence now?"

"Nothing," said the second brother, "but the neighbors care, and so does my mother; it's nothing, but it's all we can give—and he *would* have heeded and been pleased, had he thought beforehand on what we should be doing now."

It was so true, that Huntley sat down again overpowered. Yes, *he* would have been pleased to think of every particular of the "respect" which belonged to the dead. The closed houses, the darkened rooms, the funeral train; that tender human spirit would have clung to every one of them in his thoughts, keeping the warmth of human sympathy close to him to the latest possibility, little, little though he knew about them now.

"What troubles me is standing still," said Huntley, with a sigh. "I can not tell what's before us; I don't think even my mother knows; I believe it's worse than we can think of; and we've neither friends, nor money, nor influence. Here are we three Livingstones, and I'm not twenty, and we've debts in money to meet, and mortgages on the land, and nothing in the world but our hands and our heads, and what strength and wit God has given us. I'm not grumbling—but to think upon it all, and to think now that—that he's gone, and we're alone and for ourselves—and to sit still neither doing nor planning, it's that that troubles me!"

"Huntley, it's Sabbath day!" said Cosmo.

"Ay, I ken! it's Sabbath and rest, but not to us," cried the young man; "here's me, that should have seen my way—I'm old enough—me that should have known where I was going, and how I was going, and been able to spare a hand for you; and I'm the biggest burden of all; a man without a trade to turn his hand to, a man without knowledge in his head or skill in his fingers—and to sit still and never say a word, and see them creeping down, day by day, and every thing put back as if life could be put back and wait. True, Patie! what would you have me do?"

"Make up your mind, and wait till it's time to tell it," said Patie, without either reproof or sympathy; but Cosmo was more moved—he came to his eldest brother with a soft step.

"Huntley," said Cosmo, in the soft speech of their childhood, "what makes ye speak about a trade, you that are Livingstone of Norlaw? It's for us to gang and seek our fortunes; you're the chief of your name, and the lands are yours—they canna ruin *you*, Huntley. I see the difference mysel', the folks see it in the country-side; and as for Patie and me, we'll seek our fortunes—we're only the youngest sons, it's our inheritance; but Norlaw, and home, and the name, are with you."

This appeal had the strangest effect upon Huntley; it seemed to dissipate in an instant all the impatience and excitement of the youth's grief; he put his arm round Cosmo, with a sudden melting of heart and countenance.

"Do ye hear him, Patie?" cried Huntley, with tears; "he thinks home's home forever, because the race has been here a thousand years; he thinks I'm a prince delivering my kingdom! Cosmo, the land's gone; I know there's not an acre ours after to-morrow. I've found it out, bit by bit, though nobody said a word; but we'll save the house, and the old castle, if we should never have a penny over, for mother and you."

The boy stared aghast into his brother's face. The land! it had been Cosmo's dream by night, and thought by day. The poetic child had made, indeed, a heroic kingdom and inheritance out of that little patrimonial farm. Notwithstanding, he turned to Patie for confirmation, but found no comfort there.

"As you think best, Huntley," said the second son, "but what is a name? My mother will care little for Norlaw when we are gone, and the name of a landed family has kept us poor. *I've* found things out as well as you. I thought it would be best to part with all."

"It was almost his last word," said Huntley, sadly.

"Ay, but he could not tell," said the stout-hearted boy; "he was of another mind from you or me; he did not think that our strength and our lives were for better use than to be wasted on a word. What's Norlaw Castle to us, more than a castle in a book? Ay, Cosmo, it's true. Would you drag a burden of debt at Huntley's feet for the sake of an acre of corn-land, or four old walls? We've been kept down and kept in prison, us and our forbears, because of Norlaw. I say we should go free."

"And I," cried Cosmo, lifting his long, white hand in sudden passion, "I, if Huntley does not care for the name, nor for my father's last wish, nor for the house of our ancestors; I will never rest night nor day, though I break my heart or lose my life, till I redeem Norlaw!"

Huntley, whose arm still rested on the boy's shoulder, drew him closer, with a look which had caught a tender, sympathetic, half-compassionate enthusiasm from his.

"We'll save Norlaw for my father's son," said the elder brother; and, young as Huntley was, he looked with eyes full of love and pity upon this boy, who inherited more from his father than his name. Huntley had been brought up in all the natural love and reverence of a well-ordered family; he knew there was weakness in his father's character, beautiful, lovable, tender weakness, for which, somehow, people only seem to like him better. He had not permitted himself to see yet what harm and selfish unconsciousness of others that graceful temperament had hidden. He looked at Cosmo, thinking as a strong mind thinks of that constitution which is called poetic—of the sensitive nature which would shrink from unkindness, and the tender spirit which could not bear the trials of the world; and the lad's heart expanded over his father's son.

Patie got up from his chair, and went to the little bookcase in the corner to look for another book of sermons. This boy could not blind his eyes, even with family affection. He loved his father,

but he knew plainly, and in so many words, that his father had ruined their inheritance. He could not help seeing that this amiable tenderness bore no better fruit than selfishness or cruelty. He thought it would be right and just to all their hopes to part with even the name of Norlaw. But it was not his concern; he was ready to give his opinion at the proper time, but not to stand out unreasonably against the decision of his elder brother; and when he, too, looked at Cosmo, it was with soberer eyes than those of Huntley—not that he cared less for his father's son—but Patrick could not help seeing with those clear eyes of his; and what he feared to see was not the sensitive nature and the tender spirit, but the self-regard which lay beneath.

Which of them was right, or whether either of them were right, this history will best show.

CHAPTER V

Sabbath night; a July night, sweet with summer stars and moonlight, and with no darkness in it: the water running soft with its quietest murmur, the thrush and blackbird beguiled to sing almost as late as the southland nightingale; the scent of the late roses coming round the corner of the house on the faint breeze; the stars clustered in a little crowd over the gaunt castle walls, and in the distance the three weird Eildons, standing out dark against the pale azure blue and flood of moonlight; a Sabbath evening with not a sound in it, save the sweetest sounds of nature, a visible holy blessing of quiet and repose.

But the table was spread in the dining-parlor at Norlaw; there was a basket of oat-cakes and flour "bannocks" upon the table, in a snowy napkin, and butter, and milk, and cheese, all of the freshest and most fragrant, the produce of their own lands. Two candles made a little spot of light upon the white table-cloth, but left all the rest of the room in dreary shadow. To see it was enough to tell that some calamity oppressed the house—and when the widow came in, with her face of exhaustion, and eyes which could weep no more for very weariness, when the boys followed slowly one by one, and Marget coming in with the solemn, noiseless step, so unusual to her, hovered about them with all her portentous gravity, and unwonted attendance, it was not hard to conclude that they ate and drank under the shadow of death. The Mistress had not appeared that day, from the early breakfast until now; it was the only time before or after when she faltered from the ways of common life.

When they had ended the meal, which no one cared to taste, and when the lads began to think with some comfort, in the weariness of their youth, that the day at last was over, Mrs. Livingstone drew her chair away from the table, and looked at them all with the sorrowful tenderness of a mother and a widow. Then, after a long interval, she spoke.

"Bairns!" she said, with a voice which was hoarse with solicitude and weeping, "you're a' thinking what you're to do, and though it's the Sabbath day, I canna blame ye, but me, I'm but a weak woman—I could not say a word to counsel ye, if it was to save the breaking of my heart this day."

"We never looked for it, mother. There's time enough! do you think we would press our plans on you?" cried the eager Huntley, who had been groaning but a few hours ago, at this compulsory delay.

"Na, I could not do it," said the mother, turning her head aside, and drawing the hem of her apron through her fingers, while the tears dropped slowly out of her tired eyes; "this is the last Sabbath day that him and me will be under the same roof. I canna speak to you, bairns; I'm but a weak woman, and I've been his wife this five-and-twenty years."

After a pause, the Mistress dried her eyes, and went on hurriedly:—

"But I ken ye must have your ain thoughts; the like of you canna keep still a long summer day, though it is a Sabbath; and, bairns, I've just this to say to you; ye canna fear mair than we'll have to meet. I'm thankful even that he's gane hame before the storm falls; for you're a' young, and can stand a blast. There's plenty to do, and plenty to bear. I dinna forbid ye thinking, though it's Sabbath night, and death is among us; but oh! laddies, think in a godly manner, and ask a blessing—dinna darken the Sabbath with worldly thoughts, and him lying on his last bed up the stair!"

The boys drew near to her simultaneously, with a common impulse. She heard the rustle and motion of their youthful grief, but she still kept her head aside, and drew tightly through her fingers the hem of her apron.

"The day after the morn," continued the widow, "I'll be ready with all that I ken, and ready to hear whatever you think for yourselves; think discreetly, and I'll no' oppose, and think soberly, without pride, for we're at the foot of the brae. And we've nae friends to advise us, bairns," continued the Mistress, raising her head a little with the very pride which she deprecated; "we've neither kith nor kin to take us by the hand, nor give us counsel. Maybe it's a' the better—for we've only Providence to trust to now, and ourselves."

By this time she had risen up, and taking the candle which Patrick had lighted for her, she stood with the little flat brass sconce in her hand, and the light flickering over her face, still looking down. Yet she lingered, as if she had something more to say. It burst from her lips, at last, suddenly, almost with passion.

"Bairns! take heed, in your very innermost hearts, that ye think no blame!" cried the widow; and when she had said these words, hastened away, as if afraid to follow up or to weaken them by another syllable. When she was gone, the lads stood silently about the table, each of them with an additional ache in his heart. There *was* blame which might be thought, which might be spoken; even she was aware of it, in the jealous regard of her early grief.

"The Mistress has bidden you a' good night," said Marget, entering softly; "ye've taen nae supper, and ye took nae dinner; how are ye to live and work, growing laddies like you, if you gang on at this rate? Ye mean to break my heart amang you. If ye never break bread, Huntley Livingstone, how will you get through the morn?"

"I wish it was over," cried Huntley, once more.

"And so do I. Eh! bairns, when I see those blinds a' drawn down, it makes my heart sick," cried Marget, "and grief itsel's easier to thole when ane has ane's wark in hand. But I didna come to haver nonsense here. I came to bid ye a' gang to your beds, like good laddies. Ye'll a' sleep; that's the good of being young. The Mistress, I daur to say, and even mysel', will not close an eye this night."

"Would my mother let you remain with her, Marget?" said Huntley; "I can't bear to think she's alone in her trouble. Somebody should have come to stay with her; Katie Logan from the manse, perhaps. Why did not some one think of it before?"

"Whisht! and gang to your beds," said Marget; "no fremd person, however kindly, ever wins so far into the Mistress's heart. If she had been blessed with a daughter of her ain, it might have been different. Na, Huntley, your mother wouldna put up with me. She's no ane to have either friend or servant tending on her sorrows. Some women would, but no' the Mistress; and I'm o' the same mind mysel'. Gang to your beds, and get your rest, like good bairns; the morn will be a new day."

"Shut up the house and sleep; that's all we can do," said Cosmo; "but I canna rest—and he'll never be another night in this house. Oh, father, father! I'll keep the watch for your sake!"

"If he's in this house, he's here," said Patrick, suddenly, to the great amazement of his hearers, moved for once into a higher imagination than any of them; "do you hear me Cosmo? if he's out of heaven, he's here; he's no' on yon bed dead. It's no' *him* that's to be carried to Dryburgh. Watching's past and done, unless he watches us; he's either in heaven, or he's here."

"Eh, laddie! God bless you, that's true!" cried Marget, moved into sudden tears. There was not composure enough among them to add another word; they went to their rooms silently, not to disturb their mother's solitude. But Huntley could not rest; he came softly down stairs again, through the darkened house, to find Marget sitting by the fire which she had just "gathered" to last all night, reading her last chapter in the big Bible, and startled her by drawing the bolts softly aside and stepping out into the open air.

"I must breathe," the lad said with a voice full of broken sobs.

The night was like a night of heaven, if such a glory is, where all glories are. The moon was more lavish in her full, mellow splendor, than she had ever been before, to Huntley's eyes; the sky seemed as light as day, almost too luminous to show the stars, which were there shining softly in myriads, though you could scarcely see them; and the water flowed, and the trees rustled, with a perfection of still music, exquisite, and silent, and beyond description, which Nature only knows when she is alone. The youth turned back again with a sob which eased his heart. Out of doors nothing but splendor, glory, a beatitude calm and full as heaven; within, nothing but death and the presence of death, heavy, like a pall, upon the house and all its inmates. He went back to his rest, with the wonder of humanity in his heart; when, God help us, should this terrible difference be over? when

should the dutiful creation, expanding thus, while the rebel sleeps, receive once more its fullest note of harmony, its better Eden, the race for whom sin and sorrow has ended for evermore?

CHAPTER VI

The day of the funeral rose with a merciful cloud over its brightness—a sorrowful bustle was in the house of Norlaw; some of the attendants of the burial train were to return to dine, as the custom was, and Marget and Jenny were fully employed in the kitchen, with the assistance of the mother of the latter, who was a widow herself, full of sorrowful experience, and liked, as is not unusual in her class, to assist in the melancholy labors of such an "occasion." The east room was open for the reception of the funeral guests, and on the table were set out decanters of wine, and liberal plates of a delicate cake which used to bear the dismal title of funeral biscuit in Scotland. The widow, who put on for the first time to-day, the dress which henceforward she should wear all her life, kept her own apartment, where the wife of the principal farmer near, and Catharine Logan, the minister's daughter, had joined her; for though she would much rather have been left alone, use and precedent were strong upon the Mistress, and she would not willingly have broken through any of the formal and unalterable customs of the country-side. The guests gathered gradually about the melancholy house; it was to be "a great funeral." As horseman after horseman arrived, the women in the kitchen looked out from the corner of their closed shutters, with mournful pride and satisfaction; every household of any standing in the district came out to show "respect" to Norlaw—and even the widow in her darkened room felt a certain pleasure in the sounds which came softened to her ear, the horses' hoofs, the clash of stirrup and bridle, and the murmur of open-air voices, which even the "occasion" could not subdue beyond a certain measure.

The lads were all assembled in the east room to receive their guests, and with them, the earliest arrival of all, was the minister, lending his kindly support and aid to Huntley, in this earliest and saddest exercise of his new duties as head of the house. One good thing was, that the visitors did not feel themselves called upon to overwhelm the fatherless youth with condolences. A hearty grasp of rough hands; a subdued word of friendship and encouragement, as one by one, or in little clusters, those great rustic figures, all in solemn mourning, collected in the room, were all that "the family" were called upon to undergo.

The hum of conversation which immediately began, subdued in tone and grave in expression, but still conversation such as rural neighbors use, interspersed with inquiries and shakes of the head, as to how this household was "left," was a relief to the immediate mourners, though perhaps it was not much in accordance with the sentiment of the time. It was etiquette that the wine and cake should be served to all present, and when all the guests were assembled, the minister rose, and called them to prayer. They stood in strange groups, those stalwart, ruddy southland men, about the table—one covering his eyes with his hand, one standing erect, with his head bowed, some leaning against the wall, or over the chairs. Perhaps eyes unaccustomed to such a scene might have thought there was little reverence in the fashion of this funeral service; but there was at least perfect silence, through which the grave voice of the minister rose steadily, yet not without a falter of personal emotion. It was not the solemn impersonal words which other churches say over every man whom death makes sacred. It was an individual voice, asking comfort for the living, thanking God for the dead—and when that was done the ceremonial was so far over, and Norlaw had only now to be carried to his grave.

All the preparations were thus far accomplished. The three brothers and Dr. Logan had taken their place in the mourning coach; some distant relatives had taken possession of another; and the bulk of the guests had mounted and were forming into a procession behind. Every thing had progressed thus far, when some sudden obstruction became visible to the horsemen without. The funeral attendants closed round the hearse, the horses were seized by strangers, and their forward motion checked; already the farmers behind, leaping from their horses, crowded on to ascertain the cause of the detention; but the very fact of it was not immediately visible to the youths who were most interested. When the sudden contention of voices startled Huntley, the lad gazed out of the window

for a moment in the wild resentment of grief, and then dashing open the door, sprang into the midst of the crowd; a man who was not in mourning, and held a baton in his hand, stood firm and resolute, with his hand upon the door of the hearse; other men conspicuous among the funeral guests, in their every-day dress, kept close by him, supporting their superior. The guides of the funeral equipage were already in high altercation with the intruders, yet, even at their loudest, were visibly afraid of them.

"Take out the horses, Grierson—do your duty!" shouted the leader at the hearse door; "stand back, ye blockheads, in the name of the law! I'm here to do my orders; stand back, or it'll be waur for ye a'—ha! wha's here?"

It was Huntley, whose firm young grasp was on the sturdy shoulder of the speaker.

"Leave the door, or I'll fell you!" cried the lad, in breathless passion, shaking with his clutch of fury the strong thick-set frame which had double his strength; "what do you want here?—how do you dare to stop the funeral? take off your hand off the door, or I'll fell you to the ground!"

"Whisht, lad, whisht—it's a sheriff's officer; speak him canny and he'll hear reason," cried one of the farmers, hastily laying a detaining grasp on Huntley's arm. The intruder stood his ground firmly. He took his hand from the door, not in obedience to the threat, but to the grief which burned in the youth's eyes.

"My lad, it's little pleasure to me," he said, in a voice which was not without respect, "but I must do my duty. Felling me's no' easy, but felling the law is harder still. Make him stand aside, any of you that's his friend, and has sense to ken; there's no mortal good in resisting; this funeral can not gang on this day."

"Let go—stand back; speak to *me*," said Huntley, throwing off the grasp of his friend, and turning to his opponent a face in which bitter shame and distress began to take the place of passion; "stand aside, every man—what right have *you* to stop us burying our dead? I'm his son; come here and tell me."

"I am very sorry for you, my lad, but I can not help it," said the officer; "I'm bound to arrest the body of Patrick Livingstone, of Norlaw. It may be a cruel thing, but I must do my duty. I'm Alexander Elliot, sheriff's officer at Melrose; I want to make no disturbance more than can be helped. Take my advice. Take in the coffin to the house and bid the neighbors back for another day. And, in the meantime, look up your friends and settle your scores with Melmar. It's the best you can do."

"Elliot," said Dr. Logan, over his shoulder, "do you call this law, to arrest the dead? He's far beyond debt and trouble now. For shame!—leave the living to meet their troubles, but let them bury their dead."

"And so I would, minister, if it was me," said Elliot, twirling his baton in his hand, and looking down with momentary shame and confusion; "but I've as little to do with the business as you have," he added, hurriedly. "I give you my advice for the best, but I must do my duty. Grierson, look to thae youngsters—dang them a'—do ye ca' that mair seemly? it's waur than me!"

Cosmo Livingstone, wild with a boy's passion, and stupefied with grief, had sprung up to the driving-seat of the hearse while this discussion proceeded; and lashing the half-loosed horses, had urged them forward with a violent and unseemly speed, which threw down on either side the men who were at their heads, and dispersed the crowd in momentary alarm. The frightened animals dashed forward wildly for a few steps, but speedily brought up in their unaccustomed career by the shouts and pursuit of the attendants, carried the melancholy vehicle down the slope and paused, snorting, at the edge of the stream, through which, the boy, half mad with excitement, would have driven them. Perhaps the wild gallop of the hearse, though only for so short a distance, horrified the bystanders more than the real interruption. One of the funeral guests seized Cosmo in his strong arms, and lifted him down like a child; the others led the panting horses back at the reverential pace which became the solemn burden they were bearing; and after that outbreak of passion, the question was settled without further discussion. Patrick Livingstone, his eyes swollen and heavy with burning tears,

which he could not shed, led the way, while the bearers once more carried to his vacant room all that remained of Norlaw.

The mass of the funeral guests paused only long enough to maintain some degree of quietness and decency; they dispersed with natural good feeling, without aggravating the unfortunate family with condolence or observation. Huntley, with the minister and the principal farmer of the district, Mr. Blackadder, of Tyneside, who happened to be also an old and steady friend of their father, stood at a little distance with the officer, investigating the detainer which kept the dead out of his grave; the melancholy empty hearse and dismal coaches crept off slowly along the high road; and Cosmo, trembling in every limb with the violence of his excitement, stood speechless at the door, gazing after them, falling, in the quick revulsion of his temperament, from unnatural passion into utter and prostrate despondency. The poor boy scarcely knew who it was that drew him into the house, and spoke those words of comfort which relieved his overcharged heart by tears. It was pretty Katie Logan, crying herself, and scarcely able to speak, who had been sent down from the widow's room, by Mrs. Blackadder, to find out what the commotion was; and who, struck with horror and amazement, as at a sacrilege, was terrified to go up again, to break the tender, proud heart of Norlaw's mourning wife, with such terrible news.

Presently the mournful little party came in to the east room, which still stood as they had left it, with the funeral bread and wine upon the table. Patrick came to join them immediately, and the two lads bent their heads together over the paper: a thousand pounds, borrowed by a hundred at a time from Mr. Huntley, of Melmar, over and above the mortgages which that gentleman held on the better part of the lands of Norlaw. The boys read it with a passion of indignation and shame in their hearts; their father's affairs, on his funeral day, publicly "exposed" to all the countryside; their private distress and painful prospects, and his unthrift and weakness made the talk of every gossip in the country. Huntley and Patrick drew a hard breath, and clasped each other's hands with the grip of desperation. But Norlaw lay unburied on his death-bed; they could not bury him till this money was paid; it was an appalling sum to people in their class, already deeply impoverished, and in the first tingle of this distressing blow, they saw no light either on one side or the other, and could not tell what to do.

"But I can not understand," said Dr. Logan, who was a man limited and literal, although a most pious minister and the father of his people; "I can not understand how law can sanction what even nature holds up her hand against. The dead—man! how dare ye step in with your worldly arrests and warrants, when the Lord has been before you? how dare ye put your bit baton across the grave, where a righteous man should have been laid this day?"

"I have to do my duty," said the immovable Elliot, "how daur ye, is naething to me. I must do according to my instructions—and ye ken, doctor, it's but a man's body can be apprehended ony time. Neither you nor me can lay grips on his soul."

"Hush, mocker!" cried the distressed clergyman; "but what is to be done? Mr. Blackadder, these bairns can not get this money but with time and toil. If that will do any good, I'll go immediately to Me'mar myself."

"Never," cried Huntley; "never—any thing but that. I'll sell myself for a slave before I'll take a favor from my father's enemy."

"It's in Whitelaw's hands, the writer in Melrose. I'll ride down there and ask about it," said Blackadder; "whisht, Huntley! the minister's presence should learn you better—and every honest man can but pity and scorn ane that makes war with the dead; I'll ride round to Whitelaw. My wife's a sensible woman—she'll break it softly to your mother—and see you do nothing to make it worse. I suppose, Elliot, when I come back I'll find you here."

"Ay, sir, I'm safe enough," said the officer significantly, as "Tyneside" rose to leave the room. Huntley went with him silently to the stable, where his horse stood still saddled.

"I see what's in your eye," said Blackadder, in a whisper; "take heart and do it; trust not a man more than is needful, and dinna be violent. I'll be back before dark, but I may not chance to speak to you again. Do what's in your heart."

Huntley wrung the friendly hand held out to him, and went in without a word. His old restless activity seemed to have returned to him, and there was a kindling fire in his hazel eyes which meant some purpose.

Good Dr. Logan took the lad's hands, and poured comfort and kindness into his ears; but Huntley could scarcely pause to listen. It was not strange—and it seemed almost hard to bid the youth have patience when the vulgar law—stubborn and immovable—the law of money and merchandise, kept joint possession with death of this melancholy house.

CHAPTER VII

Huntley could not see his mother after this outrage became known to her. The widow resented it with all a woman's horror and passion, and with all the shame of a Scottish matron, jealous, above all things, of privacy and "respect." Pretty Katie Logan sat at her feet crying in inarticulate and unreasoning sympathy, which was better for the Mistress than all the wisdom and consolation with which good Mrs. Blackadder endeavored to support her. In the kitchen, Jenny and her mother cried too, the latter telling doleful stories of similar circumstances which she had known; but Marget went about with a burning cheek, watching "the laddies" with a jealous tenderness, which no one but their mother could have surpassed, eager to read their looks and anticipate their meaning. It was a sultry, oppressive day, hot and cloudy, threatening a thunder storm; and it is impossible to describe the still heavier oppression of distress and excitement in this closed-up and gloomy house. When Marget went out to the byre, late in the afternoon, several hours after these occurrences, Huntley came to her secretly by a back way. What he said roused the spirit of a hero in Marget's frame. She put aside her pail on the instant, smoothed down her new black gown over her petticoat, and threw a shawl across her head.

"This moment, laddie—this instant—ye may trust me!" cried Marget, with a sob; and before Huntley, passing round behind the offices, came in sight of the high road, his messenger had already disappeared on the way to Kirkbride.

Then Huntley drew his cap over his eyes, threw round him a gray shepherd's plaid, as a partial disguise, and set out in the opposite direction. Before he reached his journey's end, the sweeping deluge of a thunder storm came down upon those uplands, in white sheets of falling water. The lad did not pause to take shelter, scarcely to take breath, but pushed on till he reached some scattered cottages, where the men were just returning from their day's work. At that time the rain and the western sun, through the thickness of the thunder cloud, made a gorgeous, lurid, unearthly glow, like what it might make through the smoke of a great battle. Huntley called one of the men to him into a little hollow below the hamlet. He was one of the servants of Norlaw, as were most of these cottagers. The young master told his tale with little loss of words, and met with the hearty and ready assent of his horrified listener.

"I'll no' fail ye, Maister Huntley; neither will the Laidlaws. I'll bring them up by the darkening; ye may reckon upon them and me," said the laborer; "and what use burdening yoursel' with mair, unless it were to show respect. There's enow, with ane of you lads to take turns, and us three."

"Not at the darkening—at midnight, Willie; or at earliest at eleven, when it's quite dark," said Huntley.

"At eleven! mid nicht! I'm no heeding; but what will we say to the wives?" said Willie, scratching his head in momentary dismay.

"Say—but not till you leave them—that you're coming to serve Norlaw in extremity," said Huntley; "and to make my brothers and me debtors to your kindness forever."

"Whisht about that," said Willie Noble; "mony a guid turn's come to us out of Norlaw;—and Peggie's nae like the maist of women—she'll hear reason. If we can aince win owre Tweed, we're safe, Maister Huntley; but it's a weary long way to there. What would you say to a guid horse and a light cart? there's few folk about the roads at night."

Huntley shrunk with involuntary horror from the details even of his own arrangement.

"I'll take care for that," he said, hurriedly; "but we could not take a carriage over Tweed, and that is why I ask this help from you."

"And kindly welcome; I wish to heaven it had been a blyther errand for your sake," said the man, heartily; "but we maun take what God sends; and wha's to keep the officer quiet, for that's the chief of the haill plan?"

"I've to think of that yet," said Huntley, turning his face towards home with a heavy sigh.

"I'd bind him neck and heels, and put him in Tyne to cool himsel'!" said Willie, with a fervent effusion of indignation. Huntley only bade him remember the hour, shook his hard hand, and hurried away.

It was a painful, troubled, unhappy evening, full of the excitement of a conspiracy. When Huntley and Patrick communicated with each other it was impossible to say, for they never seemed to meet alone, and Patrick had taken upon himself the hard duty of keeping Elliot company.

The minister and his daughter departed sadly in the twilight, knowing no comfort for the family they left. And Mr. Blackadder returned gloomily from his visit to the attorney, bringing the news that he had no authority to stop proceedings till he consulted with his principal, after which, in good time, and with a look and grasp of Huntley's hand, which were full of meaning, the good farmer, too, took his wife away.

Then came the real struggle. The officer kept his watch in the dining-room, to which he had shifted from some precautionary notion, and sat there in the great chintz easy-chair, which the hearts of the lads burned to see him occupy, perfectly content to talk to Patie, and to consume soberly a very large measure of toddy, the materials for which stood on the table the whole evening. Patie discharged his painful office like a hero. He sat by the other side of the table, listening to the man's stories, refusing to meet Huntley's eye when by chance he entered the room, and taking no note of the reproachful, indignant glances of Cosmo, who still knew nothing of their plans, and could not keep his patience when he saw his brother entertaining this coarse intruder in their sorrowful affairs.

Huntley, meanwhile, moved about stealthily, making all the arrangements. It was a considerable discouragement to find that the officer had made up his mind to spend the night in the dining-room, where Marget, with a swell and excitement in her homely form, which, fortunately, Elliot's eyes were not sufficiently enlightened to see, prepared the hair-cloth sofa for his night's repose. He was sober, in spite of the toddy, but it seemed more than mortal powers could bear, keeping awake.

It was midnight; and Huntley knew by Marget's face that his assistants were in attendance, but still they scarcely ventured to say to each other that every thing was ready for their melancholy office.

Midnight, and the house was still. Yet such a perturbed and miserable stillness, tingling with apprehension and watchfulness! The widow had left her sorrowful retirement up-stairs; she stood outside on the gallery in the darkness, with her hands clasped close together, keeping down all natural pangs in this unnatural hardship. Marget, who was strong and resolute, stood watching breathless at the closed door of the dining-room, with a great plaid in her hands, which nobody understood the occasion for. No one else was to be seen, save a train of four black figures moving noiselessly up the stairs. At every step these midnight emissaries took, Marget held her breath harder, and the Mistress clasped her hand upon her heart with an agonizing idea that its throbs must be heard throughout the house. A single faint ray of light directed their way to the room where the dead lay; all beside was in the deepest darkness of a stormy night—and once more with a merciful noise pattering loud upon the trees without, came down the deluge of the thunder storm.

It was at this moment that Cosmo, sitting in his own room, trying to compose his heart with a chapter in his Bible, saw, for he could not hear, his door open, and Huntley's face, pale with agitation, look in.

"Come!" said the elder brother, who was almost speechless with strong excitement.

"Where?" cried the amazed boy.

Huntley held up his hand to bar speaking.

"To bury my father," he answered, with a voice which, deep in solemn meaning, seemed, somehow, to be without common sound, and rather to convey itself to the mind, than to speak to the ear.

Without a word, Cosmo rose and followed. His brother held him fast upon the dark gallery, in a speechless grip of intense emotion. Cosmo could scarcely restrain the natural cry of terror, the natural sob out of his boy's heart.

It went down solemnly and noiselessly, down the muffled stair, that something, dark and heavy, which the noiseless figures carried. At the foot of the stairs, Patie, his own pale face the only thing there on which the light fell fully, held with a steady, patient determination, and without a tremble, the little rush light, hid in a lantern, which guided their descent, and in the darkness above stood the Mistress, like a figure in a dream, with her hands pressed on her heart.

Then a blast of colder air, a louder sound of the thunder-rain. The two brothers stole down stairs, Huntley still holding fast by Cosmo's arm—and in another moment the whole procession stood safe and free, in the garden, under the blast of big rain and the mighty masses of cloud. So far, all was safe; and thus, under shelter of the midnight, set forth from his sad house, the funeral of Norlaw.

CHAPTER VIII

That night was a night of storms. When the heavy rain ceased, peals of thunder shook the house, and vivid lightning flashed through the darkness. When the funeral procession was safe, Marget fastened her plaid across the door of the dining-room as a precaution, and went up stairs to attend to the Mistress. She found the widow kneeling down, where she had stood, leaning her hands and her face against the railings of the gallery, not fainting, perfectly conscious, yet in a condition in comparison with which a swoon would have been happiness. Her hands clung tight and rigid about the rails. She had sunk upon her knees from pure exhaustion, and kept that position for the same reason. Yet she was terribly conscious of the approach of Marget, afraid of her in the darkness, as if she were an enemy. The faithful servant managed to rouse her after great pains, and at last was able to lead her down stairs, to the gathered fire in the kitchen, where the two sat in the darkness, with one red spark of fire preserving some appearance of life in the apartment, listening to the blast of rain against the window, watching the flashes of wild light which blazed through the three round holes in the kitchen shutter, and the thunder which echoed far among the distant hills. Sitting together without a word, listening with feverish anxiety to every sound, and fearing every moment that the storm must wake their undesired inmate, who could not stir in the dining-room without their hearing. It was thus the solemn night passed, lingering and terrible, over the heads of the women who remained at home.

And through that wild summer midnight—through the heavy roads, where their feet sank at every step, and the fluttering ghostly branches on the hedgerows, which caught the rude pall, a large black shawl, which had been thrown over the coffin—the melancholy clandestine procession made its way. When they had gone about half a mile, they were met by the old post-chaise from the Norlaw Arms, at Kirkbride, which had been waiting there for them. In it, relieving each other, the little party proceeded onward. At length they came to Tweed, to the pebbly beach, where the ferryman's boat lay fastened by its iron ring and hempen cable. But for the fortunate chance of finding it here, Huntley, who was unrivaled in all athletic exercises, had looked for nothing better than swimming across the river, to fetch the boat from the other side. Rapidly, yet reverently, their solemn burden was laid in the boat; two of the men, by this time, had ventured to light torches, which they had brought with them, wrapt in a plaid. The rain had ceased. The broad breast of Tweed "grit" with those floods, and overflowing the pebbles for a few yards before they reached the real margin of the stream, flowed rapidly and strongly, with a dark, swift current, marked with foam, which it required no small effort to strike steadily across. The dark trees, glistening with big drops of rain—the unseen depths on either side, only perceptible to their senses by the cold full breath of wind which blew over them—the sound of water running fierce in an expanded tide; and as they set out upon the river, the surrounding gleam of water shining under their torches, and the strong swell of downward motion, against which they had to struggle, composed altogether a scene which no one there soon forgot. The boat had to return a second time, to convey all its passengers; and then once more, with the solemn tramp of a procession, the little party went on in the darkness to the grave.

And then the night calmed, and a wild, frightened moon looked out of the clouds into solemn Dryburgh, in the midst of her old monkish orchards. Through the great grass-grown roofless nave, the white light fell in a sudden calm, pallid and silent as death itself, yet looking on like an amazed spectator of the scene.

The open grave stood ready as it had been prepared this morning—a dark, yawning breach in the wet grass, its edge all defined and glistening in the moonlight. It was in one of the small side chapels, overgrown with grass and ivy, which are just distinguishable from the main mass of the ruin; here the torches blazed and the dark figures grouped together, and in a solemn and mysterious silence these solitary remains of the old house of God looked on at the funeral. The storm was over; the thunder clouds rolled away to the north; the face of the heavens cleared; the moon grew brighter.

High against the sky stood out the Catherine window in its frame of ivy, the solitary shafts and walls from which the trees waved—and in a solemn gloom, broken by flashes of light which magnified the shadow, lay those morsels of the ancient building which still retained a cover. The wind rustled through the trees, shaking down great drops of moisture, which fell with a startling coldness upon the faces of the mourners, some of whom began to feel the thrill of superstitious awe. It was the only sound, save that of the subdued footsteps round the grave, and the last heavy, dreadful bustle of human exertion, letting down the silent inhabitant into his last resting-place, which sounded over the burial of Norlaw.

And now, at last, it was all over; the terrible excitement, the dismal, long, self-restraint, the unnatural force of human resentment and defiance which had mingled with the grief of these three lads. At last he was in his grave, solemnly and safely; at last he was secure where no man could insult what remained of him, or profane his dwelling-place. As the moon shone on the leveled soil, Cosmo cried aloud in a boyish agony of nature, and fell upon the wet grass beside the grave. The cry rang through all the solemn echoes of the place. Some startled birds flew out of the ivied crevices, and made wild, bewildered circles of fright among the walls. A pang of sudden terror fell upon the rustic attendants; the torch bearers let their lights fall, and the chief among them hurriedly entreated Huntley to linger no longer.

"A's done!" said Willie Noble, lifting his bonnet reverently from his head. "Farewell to a good master that I humbly hope's in heaven lang afore now. We can do him nae further good, and the lads are timid of the place. Maister Huntley, may I give them the word to turn hame?"

So they turned home; the three brothers, last and lingering, turned back to life and their troubles —all the weary weight of toil which *he* had left on their shoulders, for whom this solemn midnight expedition was their last personal service. The three came together, hand in hand, saying never a word—their hearts "grit" like Tweed, and flowing full with unspeakable emotions—and passed softly under the old fruit trees, which shed heavy dew upon their heads, and through the wet paths which shone in lines of silver under the moon; Tweed, lying full in a sudden revelation of moonlight, one bank falling off into soft shadows of trees, the other guarding with a ledge of rock some fair boundary of possession, and the bubbles of foam gleaming bright upon the rapid current, was not more unlike the invisible gloomy river over which they passed an hour ago, than was their own coming and going. The strain was out of their young spirits, the fire of excitement had consumed itself, and Norlaw's sons, like lads as they were, were melting, each one silently and secretly, into the mood of tears and loving recollections, the very tenderness of grief.

And when Marget took down the shutter from the window, to see by the early morning light how this night of watching had at last taken the bloom from the Mistress' face, three other faces, white with the wear of extreme emotion, but tender as the morning faces of children, appeared to her coming slowly and calmly, and with weariness, along the green bank before the house. They had not spoken all the way. They were worn out with passion and sorrow, and want of rest—even with want of food—for these days had been terrible days for boys of their age to struggle through. Marget could not restrain a cry of mingled alarm and triumph. That, and the sound of the bolts withdrawn from the door, did what the thunder storm could not do. It broke the slumbers of the sheriff's officer, who had slept till now. He ran to the window hastily, and drew aside the curtain—he saw the face of the widow at the kitchen-door; the lads, travel-soiled and weary, with their wet clothes and exhausted faces, coming up to meet her; and the slumbrous sentinel rushed out of the room to entangle himself in the folds of Marget's plaid, and overwhelm her with angry questions; for she came to his call instantly, with a pretense of care and solicitude exasperating enough under any circumstances.

"Where have the lads been?" cried Elliot, throwing down at her, torn through the middle, the plaid which she had hung across his door.

"They've been at their father's funeral," said Marget, solemnly, "puir bairns!—through the storm and the midnicht, to Dryburgh, to the family grave."

The man turned into the room again in a pretended passion—but, sheriff's officer though he was, perhaps he was not sorry for once in his life to find himself foiled.

CHAPTER IX

"Put on your bonnet, Katie, and come with me—the like of you should be able to be some comfort to that poor widow at Norlaw," said Dr. Logan to his daughter, as they stood together in the manse garden, after their early breakfast.

After the storm, it was a lovely summer morning, tender, dewy, refreshed, full of the songs of birds and odors of flowers.

Katie Logan was only eighteen, but felt herself a great deal older. She was the eldest child of a late marriage, and had been mother and mistress in the manse for four long years. The minister, as is the fate of ministers, had waited long for this modest preferment, and many a heavy thought it gave him to see his children young and motherless, and to remember that he himself was reaching near the limit of human life; but Katie was her father's comfort in this trouble, as in most others; and it seemed so natural to see her in full care and management of her four little brothers and sisters, that the chances of Katie having a life of her own before her, independent of the manse, seldom troubled the thoughts of her father.

Katie did not look a day older than she was; but she had that indescribable elder-sister bearing, that pretty shade of thoughtfulness upon her frank face, which an early responsibility throws into the looks of very children. Even a young wife, in all the importance of independent sway, must have looked but a novice in presence of the minister's daughter, who had to be mistress and mother at fourteen, and had kept the manse cosy and in order, regulated the economies, darned the stockings, and even cut out the little frocks and pinafores from that time until now. Katie knew more about measles and hooping-cough than many a mother, and was skilled how to take a cold "in time," and check an incipient fever. The minister thought no one else, save his dead wife, could have managed the three hundred pounds of the manse income, so as to leave a comfortable sum over every year, to be laid by for "the bairns," and comforted himself with the thought that when he himself was "called away," little Johnnie and Charlie, Colin and Isabel, would still have Katie, the mother-sister, who already had been their guardian so long.

"I'm ready, papa!" said Katie; "but Mrs. Livingstone does not care about a stranger's sympathy. It's no' like one belonging to herself. She may think it very kind and be pleased with it, in a way; but it still feels like an interference at the bottom of her heart."

"She's a peculiar woman," said Dr. Logan, "but you are not to be called a stranger, my dear: and it's no small pleasure to me, Katie, to think that there are few houses in the parish where you are not just as welcome as myself."

Katie made no reply to this. She did not think it would much mend the matter with the Mistress to be reckoned as one of the houses in the parish. So she tied on her bonnet quietly, and took her father's arm, and turned down the brae toward Norlaw; for this little woman had the admirable quality of knowing, not only how to speak with great good sense, but how to refrain.

"I'm truly concerned about this family," said Dr. Logan; "indeed, I may say, I'm very much perplexed in my mind how to do. A state of things like this can not be tolerated in a Christian country, Katie. The dead denied decent burial! It's horrible to think of; so I see no better for it, my dear, than to take a quiet ride to Melmar, without letting on to any body, and seeing for myself what's to be done with *him*."

"I don't like Mr. Huntley, papa," said Katie, decidedly.

"That may be, my dear; but still, I suppose he's just like other folk, looking after his own interest, without meaning any particular harm to any body, unless they come in his way. Oh, human nature!" said the minister; "the most of us are just like that, Katie, though we seldom can see it; but there can be little doubt that Melmar was greatly incensed against poor Norlaw, who was nobody's enemy but his own."

"And his sons!" said Katie, hastily. "Poor boys! I wonder what they'll do?" This was one peculiarity of her elder-sisterly position which Katie had not escaped. She thought it quite natural and proper to speak of Patie and Huntley Livingstone, one of whom was about her own age, and one considerably her senior, as the "boys," and to take a maternal interest in them; even Dr. Logan, excellent man, did not see any thing to smile at in this. He answered with the most perfect seriousness, echoing her words:—

"Poor boys! We're short-sighted mortals, Katie; but there's no telling—it might be all the better for them that they're left to themselves, and are no more subject to poor Norlaw. But about Melmar? I think, my dear, I might as well ride over there to-day."

"Wait till we've seen Mrs. Livingstone, papa," said the prudent Katie. "Do you see that man on the road—who is it? He's in an awful hurry. I think I've seen him before."

"Robert Mushet, from the hill; he's always in a hurry, like most idle people," said the minister.

"No; it's not Robbie, papa; he's as like the officer as he can look," said Katie, straining her eyes over the high bank which lay between his path and the high-road.

"Whisht, my dear—the officer? Do you mean the exciseman, Katie? It might very well be him, without making any difference to us."

"I'm sure it's him—the man that came to Norlaw yesterday!" cried Katie, triumphantly, hastening the good doctor along the by-road at a pace to which he was not accustomed. "Something's happened! Oh papa, be quick and let us on."

"Canny, my dear, canny!" said Dr. Logan. "I fear you must be mistaken, Katie; but if you're right, I'm very glad to think that Melmar must have seen the error of his way."

Katie was very indifferent about Melmar; but she pressed on eagerly, full of interest to know what had happened at Norlaw. When they came in sight of the house, it was evident by its changed aspect that things were altered there. The windows were open, the blinds drawn up, the sunshine once more entering freely as of old. The minister went forward with a mind perturbed; he did not at all comprehend what this could mean.

The door was opened to them by Marget, who took them into the east room with a certain solemn importance, and who wore her new mourning and her afternoon cap with black ribbons, in preparation for visitors.

"I've got them a' persuaded to take a rest—a' but Huntley," said Marget; "for yesterday and last night were enough to kill baith the laddies and their mother—no' a morsel o' meat within their lips, nor a wink of sleep to their e'en."

"You alarm me, Marget; what does all this mean?" cried Dr. Logan, waving his hand towards the open windows.

Katie, more eager and more quick-witted, watched the motion of Marget's lips, yet found out the truth before she spoke.

"The maister's funeral," said Marget, with a solemn triumph, though her voice broke, in spite of herself, in natural sorrow, "took place yestreen, at midnicht, sir, as there was nae other way for it, in the orderings of Providence. Maister Huntley arranged it so."

"Oh, poor boys!" cried Katie Logan, and she threw herself down on a chair, and cried heartily in sympathy, and grief, and joy. Nothing else was possible; the scene, the circumstances, the cause, were not to be spoken of. There was no way but that way, of showing how this young heart at least felt with the strained hearts of the family of Norlaw.

"Ye may say sae, Miss Katie," said Marget, crying too in little outbursts, from which she recovered to wipe her eyes and curtsey apologetically to the minister. "After a' they gaed through yesterday, to start in the storm and the dark, and lay him in his grave by torchlight in the dead of the night—three laddies, that I mind, just like yesterday, bits of bairns about the house—it's enough to break ane's heart!"

"I am very much startled," said Dr. Logan, pacing slowly up and down the room; "it was a very out-of-the-way proceeding. Dear me!—at midnight—by torchlight!—Poor Norlaw! But still I can not say I blame them—I can not but acknowledge I'm very well pleased it's over. Dear me! who could have thought it, without asking my advice or any body's,—these boys! but I suppose, Katie, my dear, if they are all resting, we may as well think of turning back, unless Marget thinks Mrs. Livingstone would like to have you beside her for the rest of the day."

"No, papa; she would like best to be by herself—and so would I, if it was me," said Katie, promptly.

"Eh, Miss Katie! the like of you for understanding—and you so young!" cried Marget, with real admiration; "but the minister canna gang away till he's seen young Norlaw."

"Who?" cried Dr. Logan, in amazement.

"My young master, sir, the present Norlaw," said Marget, with a curtsey which was not without defiance.

The good minister shook his head.

"Poor laddie!" said Doctor Logan, "I wish him many better things than his inheritance; but I would gladly see Huntley. If you are sure he's up and able to see us, tell him I'm here."

"I'll tell him *wha's* here," said Marget, under her breath, as she went softly away; "eh, my puir bairn! I'd gie my little finger cheerful for the twa of them, to see them draw together; and mair unlikely things have come to pass. Guid forgive me for thinking of the like in a house of death!"

Yet, unfortunately, it was hard to avoid thinking of such profane possibilities in the presence of two young people like Huntley and Katie—especially for a woman; not a few people in the parish, of speculative minds, who could see a long way before them, had already lightly linked their names together as country gossips use, and perhaps Huntley half understood what was the meaning of the slight but significant emphasis, with which Marget intimated that "the minister and *Miss Katie*" were waiting to see him.

The youth went with great readiness. They were, at least, of all others, the friends whom Huntley was the least reluctant to confide in, and whose kindness he appreciated best.

And when pretty Katie Logan sprang forward, still half crying, and with bright tears hanging upon her eye-lashes, to take her old playmate's hand, almost tenderly, in her great concern and sympathy for him, the lad's heart warmed, he could scarcely tell how. He felt involuntarily, almost unwillingly, as if this salutation and regard all to himself was a sudden little refuge of brighter life opened for him out of the universal sorrow which was about his own house and way. The tears came to Huntley's eyes—but they were tears of relief, of ease and comfort to his heart. He almost thought he could have liked, if Katie had been alone, to sit down by her side, and tell her all that he had suffered, all that he looked forward to. But the sight of the minister, fortunately, composed Huntley. Dr. Logan, excellent man as he was, did not seem so desirable a confidant.

"I don't mean to blame you, my dear boy," said the minister, earnestly; "it was a shock to my feelings, I allow, but do not think of getting blame from me, Huntley. I was shut up entirely in the matter, myself; I did not see what to do; and I could not venture to say that it was not the wisest thing, and the only plan to clear your way."

There was a little pause, for Huntley either would not, or could not, speak—and then Dr. Logan resumed:

"We came this morning, Katie and me, to see what use we could be; but now the worst's over, Huntley, I'm thinking we'll just go our way back again, and leave you to rest—for Katie thinks your mother will be best pleased to be alone."

"Do you think so?" said Huntley, looking eagerly into Katie's face.

"Yes, unless I could be your real sister for a while, as long as Mrs. Livingstone needed me," said Katie, with a smile, "and I almost wish I could—I am so good at it—to take care of you boys."

"There is no fear of us now," said Huntley. "The worst's over, as the minister says. We've had no time to think what we're to do, Dr. Logan; but I'll come and tell you whenever we can see what's before us."

"I'll be very glad, Huntley; but I'll tell you what's better than telling me," said Dr. Logan. "Katie has a cousin, a very clever writer in Edinburgh—I knew there was something I wanted to tell you, and I had very near forgotten—if you'll take my advice, you'll go in, it's not very far, and get him to manage the whole thing for you. Here's the address that Katie wrote down last night. Tell your mother about it, Huntley, and that it's my advice you should have a sound man in the law to look after your concerns; and come down to the manse as soon as you can, if it were only for a change; and you'll give your mother our regards, and we'll bid you good-day."

"And dinna think more than you should, or grieve more, Huntley—and come and see us," said Katie, offering him her hand again.

Huntley took it, half joyfully, half inclined to burst out into boyish tears once more. He thought it would have been a comfort and refreshment to have had her here, this wearied, melancholy day. But somehow, he did not think with equal satisfaction of Katie's cousin. It seemed to Huntley he would almost rather employ any "writer" than this one, to smooth out the raveled concerns of Norlaw.

CHAPTER X

Common daylight, common life, the dead buried out of their sight, the windows open, the servants coming to ask common questions about the cattle and the land. Nothing changed, except that the father was no longer visible among them—that Huntley sat at the foot of the table, and the Mistress grew familiar with her widow's cap. Oh, cruel life! This was how it swallowed up all the solemnities of their grief.

And now it was the evening, and the eager youths could be restrained no longer. Common custom had aroused even the Mistress out of her inaction, sitting by the corner window, she had once more begun mechanically to notice what went and came at the kitchen door—had been very angry with the packman, who had seduced Jenny to admit him—and with Jenny for so far forgetting the decorum due to "an afflicted house;" had even once noticed, and been partially displeased by the black ribbons in Marget's cap, which it was extravagant to wear in the morning; and with melancholy self-reproof had opened the work basket, which had been left to gather dust for weeks past.

"I needna be idle *now*"—the Mistress said to herself, with a heavy sigh; and Huntley and Patie perceived that it was no longer too early to enter upon their own plans and views.

With this purpose, they came to her about sunset, when she had settled herself after her old fashion to her evening's work. She saw instinctively what was coming, and, with natural feeling, shrunk for the moment. She was a little impatient, too, her grief taking that form.

"Keep a distance, keep a distance, bairns!" cried the Mistress; "let me have room to breathe in! and I'm sure if ye were but lassies, and could have something in your hands to do, it would be a comfort to me. There's Jenny, the light-headed thing, taken her stocking to the door, as if nothing was amiss in the house. Pity me!—but I'll not be fashed with *her* long, that's a comfort to think of. Laddies, laddies, can ye no keep still? What are ye a'wanting with me?"

"Mother, it's time to think what we're to do; neither Patie nor me can keep quiet, when we think of what's before us," said Huntley—"and there's little comfort in settling on any thing till we can speak of it to you."

The Mistress gave way at these words to a sudden little outbreak of tears, which you might almost have supposed were tears of anger, and which she wiped off hurriedly with an agitated hand. Then she proceeded very rapidly with the work she had taken up, which was a dark gray woolen stocking—a familiar work, which she could get on with almost without looking at it. She did look at her knitting, however, intently, bending her head over it, not venturing to look up at her children; and thus it was that they found themselves permitted to proceed.

"Mother," said Huntley, with a deep blush—"I'm a man, but I've learned nothing to make my bread by. Because I'm the eldest, and should be of most use, I'm the greatest burden. I understand about the land and the cattle, and after a while I might manage a farm, but that's slow work and weary—and the first that should be done is to get rid of me."

"Hold your peace!" cried the Mistress, with a break in her voice; "how dare ye say the like of that to your mother? Are you not my eldest son, the stay of the house? Wherefore do ye say this to me?"

"Because it's true, mother," said Huntley, firmly; "and though it's true I'm not discouraged. The worst is, I see nothing I can do near you, as I might have done if I had been younger, and had time to spare to learn a trade. Such as it is, I'm very well content with my trade, too; but what could I do with it here? Get a place as a grieve, maybe, through Tyneside's help, and the minister's, and be able to stock a small farm by the time I was forty years old. But that would please neither you nor me. Mother, you must send me away!"

The Mistress did not look up, did not move—went on steadily with her rapid knitting—but she said:—

"Where?" with a sharp accent, like a cry.

"I've been thinking of that," said Huntley, slowly; "If I went to America, or Canada, or any such place, I would be like to stay. My mind's against staying; I want to come back—to keep home in my eye. So I say Australia, mother."

"America, Canada, Australia!—the laddie's wild!" cried the Mistress. "Do you mean to say ye'll be an emigrant? a bairn of mine?"

Emigration was not then what it is now; it was the last resort—sadly resisted, sadly yielded to—of the "broken man;" and Huntley's mother saw her son, in imagination, in a dreary den of a cabin, in a poor little trading ship, with a bundle on the end of a stick, and despair in his heart, when he spoke of going away.

"There's more kinds of emigrants than one kind, mother," said Patie.

"Ay," said the Mistress, her imagination shifting, in spite of her, to a dismal family scene, in which the poor wife had the baby tied on her back in a shawl, and the children at her feet were crying with cold and hunger, and the husband at her side looking desperate. "I've seen folk on the road to America—ay, laddies, mony a time. I'm older than you are. I ken what like they look; but pity me, did I ever think the like of that would be evened to a bairn of mine!"

"Mother," said Huntley, with a cheerfulness which he did not quite feel, "an emigrant goes away to stay—I should not do that—I am going, if I can, to make a fortune, and come home—and it's not America; there are towns *there* already like our own, and a man, I suppose, has only a greater chance of getting bread enough to eat. I could get bread enough in our own country-side; but I mean to get more if I can—I mean to get a sheep farm and grow rich, as everybody does out there."

"Poor laddie! Do they sell sheep and lands out there to them that have no siller?" said the Mistress. "If you canna stock a farm at hame, where you're kent and your name respected, Huntley Livingstone, how will you do it there?"

"That's just what I have to find out," said Huntley, with spirit; "a man may be clear he's to do a thing, without seeing how at the moment. With your consent, I'm going to Australia, mother; if there's any thing over, when all our affairs are settled, I'll get my share—and as for the sheep and the land, they're in Providence; but I doubt them as little as if they were on the lea before my eyes. I'm no' a man out of a town that knows nothing about it. I'm country bred and have been among beasts all my days. Do you think I'm feared! Though I've little to start with, mother, you'll see me back rich enough to do credit to the name of Norlaw!"

His mother shook her head.

"It's easy to make a fortune on a summer night at hame, before a lad's twenty, or kens the world," she said. "I've seen mony a stronger man than you, Huntley, come hame baith penniless and hopeless—and the like of such grand plans, they're but trouble and sadness to me."

Perhaps Huntley was discouraged by the words; at all events he made no reply—and the mind of his mother gradually expanded. She looked up from her knitting suddenly, with a rapid tender glance.

"Maybe I'm wrong," said the Mistress; "there's some will win and some will fail in spite of the haill world. The Lord take the care of my bairns! Who am I, that I should be able to guide you, three lads, coming to be men? Huntley, you're the auldest, and you're strong. I canna say stay at hame—I dinna see what to bid you do. You must take your ain will, and I'll no' oppose."

If Huntley thanked his mother at all it was in very few words, for the politenesses were not cultivated among them, the feelings of this Scottish family lying somewhat deep, and expressing themselves otherwise than in common words; but the Mistress brushed her hand over her eyes hurriedly, with something like a restrained sob, intermitting for a single instant, and no longer, the rapid glitter of her "wires"—but you would scarcely have supposed that the heart of the mother was moved thus far, to hear the tone of her next words. She turned to her second son without looking at him.

"And where are *you* for, Patie Livingstone?" said the Mistress, with almost a sarcastic sharpness. "It should be India, or the North Pole to pleasure you."

Patie was not emboldened by this address; it seemed, indeed, rather to discomfit the lad; not as a reproach, but as showing a greater expectation of his purposes than they warranted.

"You know what I aimed at long ago, mother," he said, with hesitation. "It may be that we can ill afford a 'prentice time now—but I'm no' above working while I learn. I can scramble up as well as Huntley. I'll go either to Glasgow or to Liverpool, to one of the founderies there."

"Folk dinna learn to be *civil* engineers in founderies," said the Mistress; "they're nothing better than smiths at the anvil. You wanted to build a light-house, Patie, when ye were a little bairn—but you'll no' learn there."

"I'll maybe learn better. There's to be railroads soon, everywhere," said Patie, with a little glow upon his face. "I'll do what I can—if I'm only to be a smith, I'll be a smith like a man, and learn my business. The light-house was a fancy; but I may learn what's as good, and more profitable. There's some railroads already, mother, and there's more beginning every day."

"My poor bairn!" said the Mistress, for the first time bestowing a glance of pity upon Patie —"if your fortune has to wait for its making till folk gang riding over a' the roads on steam horses, like what's written in the papers, I'll never live to see it. There's that man they ca' Stephenson, he's made something or other that's a great wonder; but, laddie, you dinna think that roads like that can go far? They may have them up about London—and truly you might live to make another, I'll no' say—but I would rather build a tower to keep ships from being wrecked than make a road for folk to break their necks on, if it was me."

"Folk that are born to break their necks will break them on any kind of road," said Patie, with great gravity; "but I've read about it all, and I think a man only needs to know what he has to do, to thrive; and besides, mother, there's more need for engines than upon railroads. It's a business worth a man's while."

"Patie," said the Mistress, solemnly, "I've given my consent to Huntley to gang thousands of miles away over the sea; but if *you* gang among thae engines, that are merciless and senseless, and can tear a living creature like a rag of claith—I've seen them, laddie, with my own e'en, clanging and clinking like the evil place itself—I'll think it's Patie that's in the lion's mouth, and no' my eldest son."

"Well, mother!" said Patie, sturdily—"if I were in the lion's mouth, and yet had room to keep clear, would you be feared for me?"

This appeal took the Mistress entirely without preparation. She brushed her hands hastily over her eyes once more, and went on with her knitting. Then a long, hard-drawn breath, which was not a sigh, came from the mother's breast; in the midst of her objections, her determination not to be satisfied, a certain unaccountable pride in the vigor, and strength, and resolution of her sons rose in the kindred spirit of their mother. She was not "feared"—neither for one nor the other of the bold youths by her side. Her own strong vitality went forth with them, with an indescribable swell of exhilaration—yet she was their mother, and a widow, and it wrung her heart to arrange quietly how they were to leave her and their home.

"And me?" said Cosmo, coming to his mother's side.

He had no determination to announce—he came out of his thoughts, and his musings, and his earnest listening, to lay that white, long hand of his upon his mother's arm. It was the touch which made the full cup run over. The widow leaned her head suddenly upon her boy's shoulder, surprised into an outburst of tears and weakness, unusual and overpowering—and the other lads came close to this group, touched to the heart like their mother. They cried out among their tears that Cosmo must not go away—that he was too young—too tender! What they had not felt for themselves, they felt for him—there seemed something forlorn, pathetic, miserable, in the very thought of this boy going forth to meet the world and its troubles. This boy, the child of the house, the son who was like his father, the tenderest spirit of them all!

Yet Cosmo, who had no plans, and who was only sixteen, was rather indignant at this universal conclusion. He yielded at last, only because the tears were still in his mother's eyes, and because they were all more persistent than he was—and sat down at a little distance, not sullen, but as near so as was possible to him, his cheek glowing with a suspicion that they thought him a child. But soon the conversation passed to other matters, which Cosmo could not resist. They began to speak of Melmar, their unprovoked enemy, and then the three lads looked at each other, taking resolution from that telegraphic conference; and Huntley, with the blood rising in his cheeks, for the first time asked his mother, in the name of them all, for that tale which her husband, on his death-bed, had deputed her to tell them, the story of the will which was in the mid-chamber, and that Mary who was Mary of Melmar evermore in the memory of Norlaw.

At the question the tears dried out of the Mistress's eyes, an impatient color came to her face —and it was so hard to elicit this story from her aggrieved and unsympathetic mind, that it may be better for Mrs. Livingstone, in the estimation of other people, if we tell what she told in other words than hers.

CHAPTER XI

Yet we do not see why we are called upon to defend Mrs. Livingstone, who was very well able, under most circumstances, to take care of herself. She did not by any means receive her sons' inquiries with a good grace. On the contrary, she evaded them hotly, with unmistakable dislike and impatience.

"Mary of Me'mar! what is she to you?" said the Mistress. "Let bygones be bygones, bairns—she's been the fash of my life, one way and another. Hold your peace, Cosmo Livingstone! Do you think I can tell this like a story out of a book. There's plenty gossips in the countryside could tell you the ins and the outs of it better than me—"

"About the mid-chamber and the will, mother?" asked Patrick.

"Weel, maybe, no about that," said the Mistress, slightly mollified; "if that's what ye want. This Mary Huntley, laddies, I ken very little about her. She was away out of these parts before my time. I never doubted she was light-headed, and liked to be admired and petted. She was Me'mar's only bairn; maybe that might be some excuse for her—for he was an auld man and fond. But, kind as he was, she ran away from him to marry some lad that naebody kent—and went off out of the country with her ne'er-do-weel man, and has never been heard tell of from that time to this—that's a' I ken about her."

This was said so peremptorily and conclusively, setting aside at once any further question, that even these lads, who were not particularly skilled in the heart or its emotions, perceived by instinct, that their mother knew a great deal more about her—more than any inducement in the world could persuade her to tell.

"I've heard that Me'mar was hurt to the heart," said the Mistress, "and no much wonder. His bairn that he had thought nothing too good for! and to think of her running off from *him*, a lone auld man, to be married upon a stranger-lad without friends, that naebody kent any good o', and that turned out just as was to be expected. Oh, aye! it does grand to make into a story—and the like of you, you think it all for love, and a warm heart, and a' the rest of it; but I think it's but an ill heart that would desert hame and friends, and an auld man above three-score, for its ain will and pleasure. So Me'mar took it very sore to heart; he would not have her name named to him for years. And the next living creature in this world that he liked best, after his ungrateful daughter, was—laddies, you'll no' be surprised—just him that's gone from us—that everybody likit weel—just Norlaw."

There was a pause after this, the Mistress's displeasure melting into a sob of her permanent grief; and then the tale was resumed more gently, more slowly, as if she had sinned against the dead by the warmth and almost resentment of her first words.

"Me'mar lived to be an auld man," said the Mistress. "He aye lived on till Patie was about five years auld, and a' our bairns born. He was very good aye to me; mony's the present he sent me, when I was a young thing, and was more heeding for bonnie-dies, and took great notice of Huntley, and was kind to the whole house. It was said through a' the country-side that ye were to be his heirs, and truly so you might have been, but for one thing and anither; no' that I'm heeding—you'll be a' the better for making your way in the world yourselves."

"And the will, mother?" said Huntley, with a little eagerness.

"I'm coming to the will; have patience;" said the Mistress, who had not a great deal herself, to tell the truth. "Bairns, it's no' time yet for me to speak to you of your father; but he was aye a just man, with a tender heart for the unfortunate—you ken that as well as me. He wouldna take advantage of another man's weakness, or another man's ill-doing, far less of a poor silly lassie, that, maybe, didna ken what she was about. And when the old man made his will, Norlaw would not let him leave his lands beyond his ain flesh and blood. So the will was made, that Mary Huntley, if she ever came back, was to be heir of Melmar, and if she never came back, nor could be heard tell of, every thing was left to Patrick Livingstone, of Norlaw."

It was impossible to restrain the start of amazement with which Huntley, growing red and agitated, sprang to his feet, and the others stirred out of their quietness of listening. Their mother took no time to answer the eager questions in their eyes, nor to hear even the exclamations which burst from them unawares. She bent her head again, and drew through her fingers, rapidly, the hem of her apron. She did not see, nor seem to think of, her children. Her mind was busy about the heaviest epoch of her own life.

"When Melmar died, search was caused to be made every place for his daughter," said the Mistress, passing back and forwards through her hands this tight strip of her apron. "Your father thought of nothing else, night nor day; a' for justice, bairns, doubtless for justice—that nobody might think he would take an advantage of his kinswoman, though he could not approve of her ways! He went to Edinburgh himself, and from there to London. I was young then, and Cosmo little mair than an infant, and a' thing left in my hands. Aye this one and the other one coming to tell about Mary Huntley—and Norlaw away looking for her—and the very papers full of the heiress—and me my lane in the house, and little used to be left to mysel'. I mind every thing as if it had happened this very day."

The Mistress paused once more—it was only to draw a long breath of pain, ere she hurried on with the unwelcome tale, which now had a strange interest, even for herself. The boys could not tell what was the bitterness of the time which their mother indicated by these compressed and significant words; but it was impossible to hear even her voice without perceiving something of the long-past troubles, intense and vivid as her nature, which nothing in the world could have induced her to disclose.

"The upshot was, she could not be found," said the Mistress, abruptly; "either she never heard tell that she was sought for, or she took guilt to herself, and would not appear. They kept up the search as long as a year, but they never heard a word, or got a clue to where she was."

"And then?" cried Huntley, with extreme excitement.

"And then," said the Mistress—"was he a man to take another person's lands, when but a year had gane?" She spoke with a visible self-restraint, strong and bitter—the coercion which a mind of energy and power puts upon itself, determining not to think otherwise than with approbation of the acts of a weaker nature—and with something deeper underlying even this. "He said she would still come hame some day, as was most likely. He would not take up her rights, and her living, as he was persuaded in his mind. The will was proved in law, for her sake, but he would not take possession of the land, nor put forward his claims to it, because he said she lived, and would come hame. So, laddies, there's the tale. A Mr. Huntley, a writer, from the northcountry, a far-away friend, came in and claimed as next of kin. Mary of Melmar was lost and gane, and could not be found, and Norlaw would not put in his ain claim, though it was clear. He said it would be taking her rights, and that then she would never come back to claim her land. So the strange man got possession and kept it, and hated Norlaw. And from that day to this, what with having an enemy, and the thought of that unfortunate woman coming back, and the knowledge in his heart that he had let a wrongful heir step in—what with all that bairns, and more than that, another day of prosperity never came to this house of Norlaw."

"Then we are the heirs of Me'mar!" said Huntley; "we, and not my father's enemy! Mother, why did we never hear this before?"

"Na, lads," said the Mistress, with an indescribable bitterness in her tone; "it's her and her bairns that are the heirs—and they're to be found, and claim their inheritance, soon or syne."

"Then this is what I'll do," cried Cosmo, springing to his feet; "I'll go over all the world, but I'll find Mary of Melmar! I'm not so strong as Huntley, or as Patie, but I'm strong enough for this. I'll do what my father wished—if she should be in the furtherest corner of the earth, I'll bring her hame!"

To the extreme amazement of the boys, the Mistress laid a violent hand on Cosmo's shoulder, and, either with intention or unconsciously, shook the whole frame of the slender lad with her impetuous grasp.

"Will ye?" cried his mother, with a sharpness of suffering in her voice that confounded them. "Is it no' enough, all that's past? Am I to begin again? Am I to bring up *sons* for her service? Oh, patience, patience! it's more than a woman like me can bear!"

Amazed, grieved, disturbed by her words and her aspect, her sons gathered around her. She pushed them away impatiently, and rose up.

"Bairns, dinna anger me!—I'm no' meek enough," said the Mistress, her face flushing with a mixture of mortification and displeasure. "You've had your will, and heard the story—but I tell you this woman's been a vexation to me all my life—and it's no' your part, any one of you, to begin it a' over again."

CHAPTER XII

This story, which Mrs. Livingstone told with reluctance, and, in fact, did not tell half of, was, though the youths did not know it, the story of the very bitterest portion of their mother's life. The Mistress never told, either to them or to any one else, how, roused in her honest love and wifely sincerity into sympathy with her husband's generous efforts to preserve her own inheritance to his runaway cousin, she had very soon good reason to be sick of the very name of Mary of Me'mar; how she found out that, after years long of her faithful, warm-hearted, affectionate society, after the birth of children and consecration of time, after all the unfailing courage and exertions, by which her stout spirit had done much to set him right in the world, and, above all, in spite of the unfeigned and undivided love of a full heart like her own, the visionary heart of her husband had all this time been hankering after his first love.

Without preparation, and without softening, the Mistress found this out. He would not advantage his own family at the cost of Mary; he would seek for Mary through the whole world. These had been the words of Norlaw, ten years after Mary of Melmar's disappearance, and even years after he had become the father of Huntley. The unsuspecting wife thought no harm; then he went and came for a whole year seeking for his cousin; and during that time, left alone day after day, and month after month, the mistress of Norlaw found out the secret. It was a hard thing for her, with her strong personality and burning individual heart, to bear; but she did bear it with an indignant heroism, never saying a word to mortal ear. He himself never knew that she had discovered his prior love, or resented it. She would have scorned herself could she have reproached him or even made him conscious of her own feelings. Good fortune and strong affection at the bottom happily kept contempt out of the Mistress's indignation; but her heart continued sore for years with the discovery —sore, mortified, humiliated. To think that all her wifely, faithful regard had clung unwittingly to a man who, professing to cherish her, followed, with a wandering heart, a girl who had run away from him years before to be another man's wife! The Mistress had borne it steadily and soberly, so that no one knew of her discovery, but she had never got beyond this abiding mortification and injury; and it was not much wonder that she started with a sudden burst of exasperated feeling, when Cosmo, her own son, echoed his father's foolish words. Her youngest boy, her favorite and last nursling, the one bird that was to be left in the nest, could stir to this same mad search, when he had not yet ambition enough to stir for his own fortune. It was the last drop which made all this bitterness run over. No wonder that the Mistress lost command of herself for once, and going up to her own room in a gust of aggravated and angry emotions, thrust Cosmo away from her, and cried, "Am I to bring up sons for *her* service?" in the indignation of her heart.

Yes, it was a very pretty story for romance. The young girl running away, "all for love"—the faithful forsaken lover thinking of her in secret—rising up to defend her rights after ten long years —eagerly searching for her—and, with a jealous tenderness, refusing to do any thing which might compromise her title, while he alone still fondly believed in her return. A very pretty story, with love, and nothing else, for its theme. Yet, unfortunately, these pretty stories have a dark enough aspect often on the other side; and the Mistress, mortified, silent, indignant, cheated in her own perfect confidence and honest tenderness, when you saw her behind the scenes of the other pretty picture, took a great deal of the beauty out of that first-love and romantic constancy of Norlaw.

When Mrs. Livingstone went to her room, the sons, vexed and troubled, were a long time silent. Cosmo withdrew into a corner, and leaned his head on his mother's little table. He, too, was deeply mortified, and could not keep back the hot boyish tears from his eyes—he felt himself set aside like a child—he felt the shame of a sensitive temperament at perceiving how greatly his mother was disturbed. Somehow she seemed to have betrayed herself, and Cosmo, jealous for her perfect honor, was uneasy and abashed at this disturbance of it; while still his heart, young, eager, inexperienced,

loving romance, secretly longed to hear more of this mystery, and secretly repeated his determination. Huntley, who was pacing up and down the room, lifting and replacing every thing in his way which could be lifted, was simply confounded and thunderstruck, which emotions Patie shared with his elder brother. Patie, however, was the most practical of the three, and it was he who first broke the silence.

"Somehow or other this vexes my mother," said Patie; "let us ask her no more questions about it; but, Huntley, you ought to know all the hiding-holes about the house. You should look up this will and put it in safe hands."

"In safe hands?—I'll act upon it forthwith! Are we to keep terms with Melmar after all that's past, and with power to turn him out of his seat?" cried Huntley; "no, surely; I'll put it into hands that will carry it into effect, and that without delay."

"They would want either this Mary, or proof that she was dead, before they would do any thing in it," said Patie, doubtfully; "and yet it's a shame!"

"She is not dead!" interrupted Cosmo; "why my mother should be angry, I can't tell; but I'll find out Mary of Melmar, I know I shall, though it should be twenty years!"

"Be quiet, Cosmo," said his elder brother, "and see that no one troubles my mother with another question; she does not like it, and I will not have her disturbed; but I'll tell you what I'll do. We know little about business, and we're not of a patient race. Me'mar had better not come near any of us just now, unless it were you, Patie, that can master yourself. I should like to knock him down, and my mother would do worse. I'll write to this friend of the minister's, this writer, and put it all in his hands —it's the best thing I can see. What do you say?"

Patie gave his assent readily; Cosmo did not say any thing. The boy began to feel his youth somewhat bitterly, and to think that they did not care for his opinion; so he went out, and swung himself up by an old elm tree into one of the vacant windows of the castle, a favorite seat of Cosmo, where, among the cool ivy, and hidden by the deep recess of the thick old wall, he could see the sunset, and watch how the shadows stole over the earth. The Eildons were at his right hand, paling gradually out of their royal purple against the pale sky in the east, and the last long rays of the sunset, too low to reach them, fell golden-yellow upon Tyne, and shed a pathetic light on the soft green bank before the door of Norlaw. The common sounds of life were not so subdued now about this lonely house; even the cackle of poultry and bark of dogs seemed louder since the shutters were opened and the curtains drawn back—and Marget went firmly forth upon her errands to the byre, and the hush and stealth of mourning had left the place already. Who would not escape somewhere into some personal refuge out of the oppressive shadow of grief, while youth remains to make that possible? Huntley had been startled to feel that there was such an escape for himself when Katie Logan took his hand in the fullness of her sympathy—and Huntley and Patie together were seeking a similar ease now in discussing the plans of their future life together. Cosmo was only a boy; he had no plans yet which could be called plans—and he was too young to be moved by the hand or the voice of any woman. So he sat among the ivy in the ledge of the deep old window, with his head uncovered, his fair hair falling over his long white hands, and those dark liquid eyes of his gazing forth upon as fair a landscape as ever entered into the dream of a poet.

If Cosmo was a poet he was not aware of it; yet his heart was easing itself after his fashion. He was too young to apprehend the position of his mother, and how it broke into the superficial romance of his father's life. He thought only of Mary of Melmar, of the girl, beautiful, young, and unfortunate, who ran away "for love," and had literally left all for her husband's sake; he thought of displacing his father's enemy and restoring his father's first love to her rights. In imagination he pursued her through all the storied countries to which a young fancy naturally turns. He saw himself delivering her out of dangers, suddenly appearing when she was in peril or poverty, dispersing her enemies like a champion of chivalry, and bringing her home in triumph. This was how, while his brothers comforted themselves with an earnest discussion of possibilities, and while his mother, differing from them as age differs from youth—and as personal bereavement, which nothing can ever make up, and which

changes the whole current of a life, differs from a natural removal and separation—returned into the depths of the past and lived them over again—this is how Cosmo made his first personal escape out of his first grief.

CHAPTER XIII

"Oh! Patricia! Sinclair has been telling me such a story," cried a young girl, suddenly rushing upon another, in a narrow winding road through the woods which clothed a steep bank of Tyne; at this spot, for one exclusive mile, the rapid little river was "private property," the embellishment of a gentleman's grounds—shut out from vulgar admiration. Tyne, indifferent alike to admiration and exclusivism, was not less happy on that account; but foamed over his stony channel as brisk, as brown, and as clear, as when he ran in unrestricted freedom by the old castle walls of Norlaw. The path was slippery and irregular with great roots of trees, and one or two brooks, unseen, trickled down the brae below the underwood, only detected by the slender, half visible rivulet on the path which you had to step across, or the homely plank half penetrated by water, which bridged over Tyne's invisible tributary. They did not appear, these fairy springs, but they added each a tingle, like so many harp strings, to the many sounds of Nature. Through this winding road, or rather upon it, for she was not going anywhere, the elder of these two interlocutors had been for some time wandering. She was a delicate looking girl of seventeen, with blue eyes and pale golden hair, rather pretty, but very slight, and evidently not in strong health. The sudden plunge down upon her, which her younger sister made from the top of the brae, took away Patricia's breath, and made her drop the book which she had been reading. This was no very great matter, for the book was rather an indifferent production, being one of those books of poetry which one reads at seventeen, and never after—but it was rather more important that the color came violently into her pale cheek, and she clasped her hands upon her side, with a gasp which terrified the young hoiden.

"Oh, I forgot!" she cried, in sympathy, as eager as her onslaught had been. "Oh! have I hurt you? I did not mean it, you know."

"No, Joanna," said Patricia, faintly, "but you forget my nerves always—you never had any yourself."

Which was perfectly true, and not to be denied. These two, Patricia and Joanna Huntley, were the only daughters of their father's house—the only children, indeed, save one son, who was abroad. There were not many feminine family names in this branch of the house of Huntley, and invention in this matter being very sparely exercised in these parts, it came about that the girls were called after their uncles, and that the third girl, had there been such an unlucky little individual, following in the track of her sisters, would have turned out Jemima or Robina, according as the balance rose in favor of her father's brother or her mother's. Fortunately, Joanna was the last fruit of the household tree, which had blossomed sparely. She was only fifteen, tall, strong, red haired, and full of vigor —the greatest contrast imaginable to her pretty pale sister, whom Joanna devoutly believed in as a beauty, but secretly did somewhat grieve over as a fool. The younger sister was not in the least pretty, and knew it, but she was clever, and Joanna knew that also, which made an agreeable counterpoise. She was extremely honest, downright and straightforward, speaking the truth with less elegance than force, but speaking it always; and on the whole was a good girl, though not always a very pleasant one. At this present moment she was flushed, breathless, and eager, having run all the way from the house with something to tell. But Patricia's "nerves" could not bear the sudden announcement, though that delicate young lady loved a piece of news fully as well as her sister. Joanna, therefore, stood still, making hasty and awkward apologies, and eager to do something to amend her mistake, while her delicate companion recovered breath. There was something more than nerves in the young lady's discomposure. She was feeble by nature, the invalid of the family, which Joanna, knowing no sympathetic ailment in her own vigorous person, sometimes had the ill luck to forget.

"And my poor book!" said poor Patricia, picking up the unfortunate volume, which lay fluttering with open leaves on the very edge of that tiny current trickling over the brown path, which,

save that it moved and caught an occasional sparkle of light, you could not have distinguished to be a burn. “Oh, Joanna, you are so thoughtless! what was all this haste about?”

“Oh, such a story!” cried Joanna, eagerly. “It’s easy to speak about nerves—but when I heard it I could have run to papa and given him a good shake—I could! and he deserved it! for they say it was all his blame.”

“I should like to hear what it was,” said Patricia, with an exasperating and intolerable meekness, which usually quite overpowered the patience of her sister.

But Joanna was too much interested in the present instance.

“It was Mr. Livingstone of Norlaw,” she said, sinking her voice; “he’s dead, and his funeral was stopped because he was in debt, and it was papa that did it—and the three boys got up at midnight and carried him on their shoulders, with torches in their hands, to Dryburgh, and buried him there. Sinclair says it’s true, every word; and I don’t know whether Huntley did not swim over Tweed to get the boat. Oh, Patricia! I feel as if I could both greet and cry hurra, if I were to see them; and as for papa, he deserves—I don’t know what he does not deserve!”

“I wish you would talk like a lady, Joanna,” said her sister, without taking any notice of this unfilial sentiment; “greet! you could just as well say cry, or weep, for that matter—and it’s only common people that say Tweed, as if they meant a person instead of a river; why don’t you say *the* Tweed, as people of education say?”

“He’s the truest person I know,” cried Joanna. “Tweed and Tyne! you may say that they’re just streams of water, if you like, but they’re more to me; but the question is papa—I knew he was ill enough and hard-hearted, but I never, never thought he could have been so bad as that—and I mean to go this very moment and ask him how it was.”

“I suppose papa knows better than we do,” said Patricia, with a slight sigh; “but I wish he would not do things that make people talk. It is very annoying. I dare say everybody will know about this soon, if it’s true. If it was all himself it would not so much matter, and you never go out anywhere, Joanna, so you don’t feel it—but is very unpleasant to mamma and me.”

“I was not thinking of either mamma or you; I was thinking of the Livingstones,” cried Joanna, with a flush of shame on her cheeks; “and I mean to go in this very instant, and ask him what it means.”

So saying, the impetuous girl rushed up the path, slowly followed by Patricia. It was one of the loveliest bits of woodland on the whole course of Tyne. Mosses and wild flowers, and the daintiest ferns known to Scotland, peeped out of every hollow—and overhead and around, stretching down half way across the river, and thrusting out, with Nature’s rare faculty of composition, their most graceful curves of foliage against the sky, were trees, not too great or ancient to overshadow the younger growth; trees of all descriptions, birches and beeches and willows, the white-limbed ash, with its green bunches of fruit, and the tender lime, with its honey blossoms. You could have almost counted every separate flash of sunshine which burned through the leaves, misty with motes and dazzling bright with that limitation; and yet the shadow overhead trembled and fluctuated with such a constant interchange, that the spot which was in shade one moment was in the brightest light the very next. The light gleamed in Joanna’s red hair, as she plunged along in her impetuous way towards the house, and fell in touches here and there upon the graceful little figure of her sister, in her close cottage bonnet and muslin gown, as Patricia came softly over the same road, book in hand. But we are bound to confess that neither of the two, perfectly accustomed and familiar as they were, found a moment’s leisure among their other thoughts to pause upon this scene; they went towards the house, the one after the other—Patricia with a due regard to decorum as well as to her nerves and feebleness of frame—Joanna totally without regard for either the one or the other; and both occupied, to the entire neglect of every thing else, with thoughts of their own.

The house of Melmar was placed upon a level platform of land, of a considerably lower altitude than this brae. Pausing to look at it, as neither Joanna nor Patricia did, on the rustic bridge which crossed the Tyne, and led from this woodland path into the smooth lawn and properly arranged trees

of "the private grounds," Melmar appeared only a large square house, pretentious, yet homely, built entirely for living in, and not for looking at. If Nature, with her trees, and grass, and bits of garden land, softening the angles and filling in the gaps, had done her best to make it seemly, the house was completely innocent of aiding in any such attempt. Yet, by sheer dint of persistence, having stood there for at least a hundred years, long enough to have patches of lichen here and there upon its walls, Melmar had gained that look of steadiness and security, and of belonging to the soil, which harmonizes even an ugly feature in a landscape. The door, which was sheltered by a little portico, with four tall pillars, in reality stone, but looking considerably like plaster, opened from without after the innocent fashion of the country. Running across the lawn, Joanna opened the door and plunged in, without further ado, into her father's study, which was at the end of a long passage looking out upon the other side of the house. He was not there—so the girl came rushing back again to the drawing-room, the door of which stood open, and once more encountering her sister there, did her best to disturb the delicate nerves a second time, and throw Patricia out of breath.

This papa, whom Joanna had no hesitation about bearding in his own den, could not surely be such an ogre after all. He was not an ogre. You could not have supposed, to look at him, that any exaltation of enmity, any heroic sentiment of revenge, could lodge within the breast of Mr. Huntley, of Melmar. He was a tall man, with a high, narrow head, and reddish grizzled hair. A man with plenty of forehead, making up in height for its want of breadth. He was rather jovial than otherwise in his manner, and carried about with him a little atmosphere of his own, a whiff of two distinct odors, not unusual attendants of elderly Scotsmen, twenty years ago, reminiscences of toddy and rappee. He looked around with a smile at the vehement entrance of Joanna. He permitted all kinds of rudenesses on the part of this girl, and took a certain pleasure in them. He was not in the slightest degree an exacting or punctilious father; but not all his indulgence, nor the practical jokes, banter, and teasing, which he administered to all children, his own, among the rest, when they were young enough—had secured him either fondness or respect at their hands. They got on very well on the whole. Patricia pouted at him, and Joanna took him to task roundly when they differed in opinion—but the affection they gave him was an affection of habit, and nothing more.

"I've come to speak to you, papa," cried Joanna. "I've just been hearing the whole story, every word—and oh, I think shame of you!—it's a disgrace, it's a sin—I wonder you dare look any of us in the face again!"

"Eh? what's all this?" said Melmar; "Joan in one of her tantrums already? Three times in a day! that's scarcely canny—I'll have to speak to your aunt Jean."

"Oh, papa!" cried Joanna, indignantly, "it's no fun—who do you think would carry *you* to Dryburgh if somebody stopped your funeral? not one! You would have to stay here in your coffin and never be buried—and I wouldna be sorry! You would deserve it, and nothing better—oh, I think shame on you!"

"What? in my coffin? that's a long look beforehand," said Melmar. "You may have time to think shame of me often enough before that time, Joan; but let's hear what's all this about Dryburgh and a funeral—who's been here?"

"Sinclair was here," cried Joanna, "and he heard it all at Kirkbride—every word—and he says you had better not be seen there, after all you've done at Norlaw."

"I am sure, papa, it's very hard," said Patricia. "You set everybody talking, and then people look strange at us. Mamma knows they do; and I could cry when I think that we're going out to-morrow, and it would have been such a nice party. But now everybody knows about this, and nobody will speak to us—it's too bad of you, papa."

"What is it, my darling?" cried Mrs. Huntley, from her easy chair.

"Eh, fat's this?" said Aunt Jean, wheeling round upon hers.

A popular commotion was rising; Melmar saw the premonitory tokens, and made his escape accordingly.

"Joan," he said, pulling her ear as he passed her, "you're an impudent monkey; but you may spare your wrath about Norlaw—I knew as little as you did that the man was dead—however, he is dead, and I don't break my heart; but you can tell Sinclair I'll tell him a word of my mind the next time I'm near Kirkbride."

"Sinclair doesna care!" said Joanna; but Melmar pulled a thick curl of her red hair, and betook himself to his study, leaving the rising gust of questions to wear itself out as it might.

CHAPTER XIV

The drawing-room of Melmar was a large room tolerably well furnished. Three long windows on one side of the apartment looked out upon the lawn before the house, carefully avoiding the view "up Tyne," which a little management might have made visible. The fire-place was at the upper end of the room, sparkling coldly with polished steel and brass, and decorated with a very elaborate construction of cut paper. The chairs were all covered with chintz in a large-flowered pattern, red and green—chintz which did not fit on well, and looked creasy and disorderly. A large crumb-cloth, spread over the bright-colored carpet, had the same disadvantage; one corner of it was constantly loose, folding up under the chairs and tripping unwary passengers. There was a round rose-wood table, sparely covered with books and ornaments, and another oblong one with a cover on it, which was meant for use.

By this last sat Mrs. Huntley, with some knitting in her lap, reclining in a cushioned chair, with her feet upon a high footstool. She was pale, with faint pink cheeks, and small, delicate features, a woman who had, to use her own expression, "enjoyed very bad health" all her life. She had very little character, not much animation, nothing very good nor very bad about her. It would scarcely have been true even to say that she loved her children; she was fond of them—particularly of Patricia—gave them a great many caresses and sweetmeats while they were young enough, and afterwards let them have their own will without restraint; but there did not seem enough of active life in her to deserve the title of any active sentiment. She was deeply learned in physic and invalid dietry, and liked to be petted and attended, to come down stairs at twelve o'clock, to lie on the sofa, to be led out for a little walk, carefully adapted to her weakness, and to receive all the little attentions proper to an invalid. Her exclusive pretensions in this respect had, it is true, been rather infringed upon of late years by Patricia, who sometimes threatened to be a more serious invalid than her mother, and who certainly assumed the character with almost equal satisfaction. However, Patricia was pretty well at the present moment, and Mrs. Huntley, supported by her maid, had only about half an hour ago come down stairs. She had a glass of toast-and-water on the table beside her, a smelling-bottle, an orange cut into quarters upon a china plate, a newspaper within reach of her hand, and her knitting in her lap. We beg Mrs. Huntley's pardon, it was not knitting, but netting—her industry consisted in making strange, shapeless caps, bags, and window-curtains, which became excessively yellow after they were washed, and were of no use to any creature; for the refined art of crotchet was not then invented, nor had fancy-work reached that perfection which belongs to it now.

In an arm-chair by one of the windows sat a very different person—an old woman, black-eyed, white-haired, wearing an old-fashioned black dress, with a snowy white muslin handkerchief pinned down to her waist in front and behind—a large muslin apron of the same spotless complexion, a cap of clear cambric trimmed with rich old-fashioned lace, and bound round with a broad black ribbon, which was tied in a bow on the top of her head. This was a relative of Mrs. Huntley, known as Aunt Jean in the house of Melmar. She was the last survivor of her family, and had a little annuity, just enough to keep her muslin kerchiefs and aprons and old-fashioned caps from wearing out. She was quite kindly used in this house where nobody paid any particular regard to her, but where long ago it had seemed very good fun to Melmar himself to get up a little delusion on the score of Aunt Jean's wealth, which, according to the inventor of it, was to be bequeathed to his daughter Joanna. This was a favorite joke of the head of the house; he was never tired of referring to Aunt Jean's fortune, or threatening Joanna with the chance of forfeiting it, which delicate and exquisite piece of fun was always followed by a loud laugh, equally delicate and characteristic. Aunt Jean, however, fortunately, was deaf, and never quite understood the wit of her nephew-in-law; she stuck quietly to her corner, made rather a pet of Joanna, persisted in horrifying Patricia by her dress and her dialect, which breathed somewhat strongly of Aberdeenshire, and by dint of keeping "thretty pennies," as she

said, in the corner of her old-fashioned leather purse—pennies which were like the oil in the widow's cruse, often spent, yet always existing—and in her drawers in her own room an unfailing store of lace, and muslins, and ribbons, old dresses, quaint examples of forgotten fashion, and pieces of rich stuff, such as girls love to turn over and speculate on possible uses for—kept up an extensive popularity. Aunt Jean was not in the very slightest degree an invalid—the tap of her little foot, which wore high-heeled shoes, was almost the smartest in the house. She sat in winter by the fire, in summer by one of the windows, knitting endless pairs of stockings, mits, and those shapeless little gloves, with a separate stall for the thumb, and one little bag for all the fingers, in which the hapless hands of babies are wont to be imprisoned. It was from an occupation of this kind that Aunt Jean turned, when the din of Joanna's accusation penetrated faintly into her ears.

"Eh, fat's that?" said Aunt Jean; it was something about a debt and a funeral, two things which were not particularly likely to interest Joanna. Something remarkably out of the usual course must have happened, and the old lady had all the likings of an old woman in the country. Gossip was sweet to her soul.

"Oh, mamma, so vexatious!" cried Patricia, in a voice which could not by any possibility reach the ears of Aunt Jean; "papa has been doing something to Mr. Livingstone, of Norlaw—he's dead, and there's been something done that looks cruel—oh! I'm sure I don't know exactly what it is—Joanna knows;—but only think how the people will look at us to-morrow night."

"Perhaps I may not be able to go, my dear," said Mrs. Huntley, with a sigh.

"Not able to go? after promising so long! mamma, that is cruel!" cried Patricia; "but nobody cares for me. I never have what other people have. I am to be shut up in this miserable prison of a place all my life—not able to go! Oh, mamma! but you'll all be sorry when there's no poor Patricia to be shut up and made a victim of any more!"

"I do think you're very unreasonable, Patricia," said Mrs. Huntley; "I've gone out three times this last month to please you—a great sacrifice for a person in my weak health—and Dr. Tait does not think late hours proper for you; besides, if there is any thing disagreeable about your papa, as you say, I really don't think my nerves could stand it."

"Fat's all this about?" said Aunt Jean; "you ken just as well as me that I canna hear a word of fat you're saying. Joan, my bairn, come you here—fa's dun wrang? Fat's happened? Eh! there's Patricia ta'en to the tears—fat's wrang?"

Nothing loth, Joanna rushed forward, and shouted her story into the old woman's ears. It was received with great curiosity and interest by the new hearers. Aunt Jean lifted up her hands in dismay, shook her head, made all the telegraphic signs with eye and mouth which are common to people restrained from full communication with their companions. Mrs. Huntley, too, was roused.

"It's like a scene in a novel," she said, with some animation; "but after all, Mr. Livingstone should not have been in debt to papa, you know. What with Oswald abroad, and you two at home, you can tell Aunt Jean we need all our money, Joanna; and if people die when they're in debt, what can they expect? I don't see, really, in my poor health, that I'm called upon to interfere."

"Fat's this I hear?" said Aunt Jean; "Livingstone o' Norlaw? Na, Jeanie, if that's true, your good man's been sair left to himself. Eh, woman! Livingstone! fat's a'body's thinking of? I would sooner have cut off my little finger if I had been Me'mar; that man!"

"Oh, what about him, Aunt Jean?" cried Joanna.

"Ay, bairn, but I maun think," said the old woman. "I'm no' so clear it's my duty to tell you. Your father kens his ain concerns, and so does your mother, in a measure, and so do I myself. I canna tell onybody mair than my ain secret, Joan. Hout ay! I'll tell you, fun I was a young lass, fat happened to me."

"I want to hear about Norlaw," cried Joanna, screaming into the old woman's ear.

"Aunt Jean!" cried Mrs. Huntley, making a sudden step out of her chair. "If you do, Me'mar will kill me—oh! hold your tongues, children! Do you think I can bear one of papa's passions—a person in my poor health? Aunt Jean, if you do, I'll never speak to you again!"

Aunt Jean contemplated her niece, with her twinkling black eyes, making a *moue* of vivid contempt as she nodded her head impatiently.

"Fat for can ye no hold your peace for a fool-wife?" said Aunt Jean; "did ye think I had as little wit as you? What about Norlaw? You see the laird here and him were aye ill friends. Hout ay! mony a ane's ill friends with Me'mar. I mind the bairns just fun you were born, Joan. Twa toddling wee anes, and ane in the cradle. Pity me! I mind it because I was losing my hearing, and turning a cankered auld wife; and it was them that took and buried their father? Honest lads! I would like to do them a good turn."

"But I know there's something more about Norlaw," cried Joanna, "and I'll say you're a cankered auld wife till you tell me—I will! and you would have told me before now but for mamma. Do you hear, Aunt Jean?"

"Hout ay, I hear," said the old woman, who could manage her deafness like most people who possess that defect—(where it is not extreme, a little deafness is in its way quite a possession) "but I maun take time to think fat it was I promised to tell you. Something that happened when I was a young lass. Just that, Joan—I was staying at my married sister's, that was your grandmother, and Jeanie, there, your mamaw, was a bit little bairn—she was aye a sma' thing of her years, taking physic for a constancy. There was a poor gentleman there, ane of the Gordons, as good blood in his veins as ony man in the kingdom, and better than the king's ain, that was only a German lairdie—but ye see this lad was poor, and fat should save him but he got into debt, and fat should help him but he died. So the sheriff's officers came and stopped the funeral; and the lads rose, a' the friends that were at it, and all the men on the ground, and fat should ail them to crack the officers' crowns, and lay them up in a chamber; but I've heard say it was a sair sicht to see the hearse rattling away at a trot, and a' the black coaches afterhand, as if it was a bridal—oh fie!—nothing else was in everybody's mouth on our side of the water, a' the mair because the Gordon lad that died was of the English chapel, and behoved to have a service o'er his grave, and the English minister was faint-hearted and feared. It wasna done at nicht, but in broad daylicht, and by the strong hand—and that happened—I wouldna say but it was forty year ago; for I was a young lass and your mamaw there a little bairn."

"I daresay, mamma," said Patricia, who had dried her tears, "that people don't know of it yet; and at the worst it was all papa's fault—I don't think we should be afraid to go—it wasn't our blame, I'm sure."

"If I should be able, my dear," said Mrs. Huntley, with her languid sigh—whereupon Patricia exerted herself to arrange her mother's pillow, and render her sundry little attentions which pleased her.

Poor little Patricia loved "society;" she wanted to shine and to be admired "like other girls"—even the dull dinner-parties of the surrounding lairds excited the fragile little soul, who knew no better, and she spent the rest of the day, oblivious of her former terrors concerning public opinion, in coaxing Mrs. Huntley into betterness; while Joanna, for her part, persecuted Aunt Jean with an unavailing but violent pertinacity, vainly hoping to gain some insight into a family secret. Patricia was successful in her endeavors; but there never was a more signal failure than that attack upon Aunt Jean.

CHAPTER XV

"Bless me callants! what are ye doing here?" said Marget, looking in at the door of the mid-chamber, where Huntley and Patrick Livingstone were together.

It was a small apartment, originally intended for a dressing-room, and communicating by a door locked and barricaded on both sides with the east room, which was the guest-chamber of the house. Almost its sole piece of furniture was a large old-fashioned mahogany desk, standing upon a heavy frame of four tall legs, and filling half the space; it was not like the bureau of romance, with that secret drawer where some important document is always being discovered. The heavy lid was held open by Huntley's head, as he carried on his investigations. There were drawers enough, but they were all made by the hand of the joiner of Kirkbride, who knew nothing of secret contrivances—and these, as well as all the remaining space of the desk, were filled with the gatherings of Norlaw's life, trifles which some circumstance or other made important to him at the moment they were placed there, but which were now pathetic in their perfect insignificance and uselessness, closely connected as they were with the dead man's memory. Old letters, old receipts, old curiosities, a few coins and seals, and trifling memorials, and a heap of papers quite unintelligible and worthless, made up the store. In one drawer, however, Huntley had found what he wanted—the will—and along with it, carefully wrapped in at least a dozen different folds of paper, a little round curl of golden hair.

They were looking at this when Marget, whose question had not been answered, entered and closed the door. The lads were not aware of her presence till this sound startled them; when they heard it, Huntley hurriedly refolded the covers of this relic, which they had been looking at with a certain awe. Eye of stranger, even though it was this faithful old friend and servant, ought not to pry into their father's secret treasure. The Mistress's hair was of the darkest brown. It was not for love of their mother that Norlaw had kept so carefully this childish curl of gold.

"Laddies," said Marget, holding the door close behind her, and speaking low as she watched with a jealous eye the covering up of this secret, "some of ye's been minding the Mistress of auld troubles. I said to myself I would come and give you a good hearing—the haill three—what's Mary o' Melmar to you?"

"Did my mother tell you?" asked Huntley, with amazement.

"Her, laddies! na, it's little ye ken! *her* name the like o' that to the like o' me! But Cosmo behoved to ask about the story—he would part with his little finger to hear a story, that bairn—and 'deed I ken fine about it. What for could ye no' speak to me?"

"There was more than a story in Huntley's thoughts and in mine," said Patrick, shutting up the desk with some decision and authoritativeness.

"Hear him! my certy! that's setting up!" cried Marget; "I ken every thing about it for a' you're so grand. And I ken the paper in Huntley's hand is the will, and I ken I would run the risk o' firing the haill house, but I would have burnt it, afore he got sight o't, if it had been me."

"Why?" said Huntley, with a little impatience. It was not possible that the youth could read this bequest conferring Melmar, failing the natural heiress, on his father and himself, without a thrill of many emotions. He was ambitious, like every young man; he could not think of this fortune, which seemed almost to lie within his reach, without a stirring of the heart.

"It did nothing but harm to your father, and it can do nothing but mischief to you," said Marget, solemnly; "you're young and strong, and fit to make a fortune. But I tell you, Huntley Livingstone, if you attempt to seek this lass over the world, as your father did, you're a ruined man."

"Neither Huntley nor me believe in ruined men," said Patie; "we'll take care for that—go to your kye, and never mind."

"Don't be angry, Marget," said Huntley, who was more tender of the faithful retainer of the house; "trust us, as Patie says—besides, if she should never be found, Melmar's mine."

"Eh, whisht, lad! she'll come hame with half a dozen bairns before e'er your feet's across the door," cried Marget; "tell me to trust you, that are only callants, and dinna ken! Trust me, the twa of you! Gang and spend a' the best years of your life, if you like, seeking her, or witness that she's dead. If ye find her, ye're nane the better, if ye dinna find her, ye're aye deluded with the thought of a fortune ye canna claim—and if ye get word she's dead, there's still Melmar himself, that was bred a writer and kens a' the cheats of them, to fight the battle! They might say it was a false will—they might say, Guid forgive them! that Norlaw had beguiled the auld man. There's evil in't but nae guid; Huntley, you're your father's son, you're to make his amends to her. Dinna vex the Mistress's life with Mary of Melmar ony mair!"

"The short and the long of it all, Marget," said Patrick, who was at once more talkative and more peremptory than usual—"is, that you must mind your own business and we'll mind ours. Huntley's not a knight in a story-book, seeking a distressed lady. Huntley's not in love with Mary of Melmar; but if she's to be found she shall be found; and if she's dead my brother's the heir."

"No' till you're done wi' a' her bairns," cried Marget; "say there's nae mair than three of them, like yoursels—and the present Me'mar's been firm in his seat this thirteen years. Weel, weel, I daur to say Patie's right—it's nae business o' mine; but I'd sooner see you a' working for your bread, if it was just like laboring men, and I warn ye baith, the day's coming when ye'll think upon what I say!"

Marget disappeared, solemnly shaking her head as she said these last words. For the moment, the two youths said nothing to each other. The desk was locked softly, the will placed in an old pocket-book, to be deposited elsewhere, and then, for the first time, the young men's eyes met.

"She's right," said Patie, with sudden emphasis; "if you seek her yourself, Huntley, you'll neither get Me'mar nor fortune—it's true."

Huntley paid little attention to his brother. He stood looking out from the window, where, in the distance, to the north, the banks of Tyne rose high among the woods of Melmar—opposite to him, fertile fields, rich in the glow of coming harvest, lay the wealthy lands of his father's enemy—those lands which perhaps now, if he but knew it, were indisputably his own. He stood fascinated, looking out, tracing with an unconscious eagerness the line of the horizon, the low hills, and trees, and ripening corn, which, as far as he could see before him, were still part of the same inheritance. He was not a dreamy boy like Cosmo—he thought little of his father's old love, or of the triumph of restoring her to her inheritance. The Mary of Norlaw's fancy was but a shadow upon the future of his own. He thought, with a glow of personal ambition, of the fair stretch of country lying before him. Generous, high-spirited, and incapable of meanness, Huntley still had the impulse of conquest strong within him. He could not but think, with a rising heart, of this visible fortune which lay at his feet and seemed to be almost within his grasp. He could not but think, with indignant satisfaction, of unseating the false heir whose enmity had pursued Norlaw to the very grave. All the excitement which had gathered into these few past weeks still throbbed in Huntley's heart and stirred his brain. He could not moderate the pace of his thoughts or subdue his mind at anybody's bidding. If it should be hard to get justice and a hearing for his claims, this very difficulty increased the attraction—for it was his claims he thought of while the others were thinking of Mary of Melmar. He was not selfish, but he was young, and had an ardent mind and a strong individual character. Mary of Melmar—a white ghost, unreal and invisible—faded from his mind entirely. He thought, instead, of the man who had arrested Norlaw's funeral, and of the inheritance of which he was the rightful heir.

With all these fumes in his brain it was quite impossible that Huntley could listen soberly to the sober counsels of Patie, or to the warnings of the old servant. *They* begged him not to think of a search for Mary. *He* thought of nothing of the kind. Mary had taken no position of romance in the young man's fancy. The romance which blossomed in his eyes was a much less disinterested one than that which Cosmo mused upon in the old window of the castle. He thought of himself, of his own family, of all the possibilities and powers of an extensive land-owner, and with the flush of youthful self-belief, of a great life. He had stood thus at the window a long time gazing out, and paying no attention

to the occasional words of his sensible brother, when the sound of some one coming roused them both. It was the Mistress's firm footsteps ascending the stair—they both left the room immediately, agreed, at least, in one thing, to trouble their mother no more with recollections disagreeable to her. Then Patie went about his business, somewhat disturbed by the thought that Huntley meant to throw away a portion of his life in the same fruitless folly which had injured their father; while Huntley himself, remembering something that had to be done at Kirkbride, set off along the banks of Tyne at a great pace, which did not, however, overtake the swing of his thoughts. Marget, coming out to her kitchen door to look after him, held up her hands and exclaimed to herself, "The laddie's carried!" as she watched his rapid progress—which meaning, as it did, that Huntley was fairly lifted off his feet and possessed by a rapid and impetuous fancy, was perfectly correct—though the fancy itself was not such as Marget thought.

CHAPTER XVI

The village lay bright under the afternoon sun when Huntley Livingstone came in sight of it that day. It was perfectly quiet, as was its wont—some small children playing at the open doors, the elder ones, save here and there an elder daughter charged with the heavy responsibility of a baby, being for the most part safe at school. At the door of the Norlaw Arms an angler-visitor, with his rod over his shoulder, a single figure becalmed in the sunshine, stood lazily gazing about him—and in the shadow of the projecting gable of the inn, another stranger stood holding his horse before the door of the smithy, from whence big John Black, the smith, was about to issue to replace a lost shoe. John was the master of this important rural establishment, and was a big, soft-hearted giant, full of the good-humored obtuseness which so often accompanies great personal size and strength. Inside, in the fiery obscurity of the village Pandemonium, toiled a giant of quite a different order—a swarthy, thick-set little Cyclops, with a hump on his shoulder, and one eye. This was John's brother, the ruling spirit of mischief in Kirkbride, whom all the mothers of sons held in disgust and terror, and whom Dr. Logan himself could make no improvement in. Jacob, or Jaacob, as he was popularly called, was as strong as he was ugly, and, it was generally understood, as wicked as both. By natural consequence, his rustic neighbors found a considerable attraction in his society, and liked to repeat his sayings, which were not always funny, with explosions of laughter. Huntley's errand, as it happened, was with this individual, who was somewhat of a genius in his way, which was the way of agricultural implements. Jaacob had even taken out what he called a "paatent" for a new harrow of his own invention, and was, in right of this, the authority, on all such matters, of the country-side.

"Ye'll be carrying on the farm then?" said Jaacob. "A plow needs mair than a new coulter to drive it through a furrow—it'll be new work to you, Mr. Huntley, to gang atween the stilts yoursel'."

Huntley had descended suddenly out of the hurry of his fancies about Melmar, of which he already saw himself master. He came to the ground with rather a rude shock when he heard these words, and found himself on the hard earthen floor of the smithy, with the red sparks flying into the darkness over his head, and Jaacob's one eye twinkling at him in the fiery light. He was not the laird of Melmar to Jaacob, but only the son of the ruined Norlaw.

"What we want in the meantime is the plow," said Huntley, somewhat sharply, his face flushing in spite of himself; then he added, after a pause, all the humiliation of debt and poverty recurring to his mind, which had been defended for some time against that lesser pain by the excitement of grief, and to-day by the violent flush of ambitious hope. "I believe there is a bill—but if you'll send it up to the house I'll see to it without delay."

Bowed Jaacob was not ungenerous in his way, but he scorned to defend himself from any imputation of ungenerosity. He did not hasten, therefore, as might have been supposed, to say that the aforesaid bill was of no importance, and could wait. On the contrary, he proceeded, with sarcastic dryness in his tone:

"You'll find it hard work to get in your craps. How many acres have ye in wheat the year, Mr. Huntley? You'll no' ken? Houts, man! that's an ill beginning for a lad that farms his ain land."

In spite of himself, tears of mortification stole into Huntley's eyes. He turned his head away with a muttered exclamation.

"I don't know that we've half an acre safe!" cried Huntley, in the bitterness of his heart. His dream was broken. Me'mar, who was their chief creditor—Me'mar, whom he had not yet displaced—might be able to get into his hard worldly hands, for aught Huntley knew, every slope of Norlaw.

"Aweel, aweel, lad," said Jaacob, striking his hammer fiercely upon the glowing iron, "a' the better for you—you'll be your ain man—but I wouldna cheat myself with fancies if I was you. Make up your mind ae way or another, but dinna come here and speak to me about plows, as if that was

what your mind was set on. I'm no' a Solomon, but if you mean to thrive, never delude yoursalf with a sham."

"What's a' that?" said big John, as his customer mounted the reshod horse, and trotted off in leisurely fashion as became the day; "has Jaacob won to his books, Mr. Huntley? but I reckon he has his match when he has you."

John, however, who was rather proud of his brother's intellectual powers, thought no such thing—neither did the little Cyclops himself.

"Mind your ain business," said Jaacob, briefly; "what do you think a man learns out of books, you haverel? Na, if I'm onything, I'm a man of observation; and take my word, lad, there never was a man trove yet till he saw distinck where he was, and ordered his ways according. There's mysel'—do you think I could ever make ony progress, ae way or another, if I minded what a' these stupid ideots say?"

"What do they say?" said Huntley, who was too much occupied with his own thoughts to perceive the drift of Jaacob's personal observations.

"Na, d'ye think I'm heeding?" said Jaacob; "a man can rarely be more enlightened than his neighbors without suffering for't. A' this auld machinery of the world creaks like an auld bellows. There's naething but delusions on every side of ye. Ye canna be clear of a single thing that ye havena conquished for yoursel'."

Huntley, who had come out of the languid August afternoon, red in a glow of sunshine and heat, to which the very idea of long labor was alien, which accorded well enough with his own ambitious dreams and thoughts of sudden fortune—could not help feeling somehow as if Jaacob's hammer, beneath the strokes of which the sparks flew, struck himself as well as the iron. Melmar dissipated into thin air, in the ruddy atmosphere of the smithy. The two darkling giants, large and small, moving about in the fierce glow of the firelight, the puff of the bellows, plied by an attendant demon, and the ceaseless clank of the hammer, all combined to recall to reality and the present, the thoughts of the dreaming lad. In this atmosphere the long labors of the Australian emigrant looked much more reasonable and likely than any sudden enrichment; and with the unconscious self-reference of his age, Huntley took no pains to find out what Jaacob meant, but immediately applied the counsel to his own case.

"I suppose you're very right, Jacob," said Huntley; "but it's hard work making a fortune; maybe it's safer in the end than what comes to you from another man's labors; but still, to spend a life in gathering money, is no very great thing to look forward to."

"Money!" said Jaacob, contemptuously. "Na, lad; if that's your thought, you're no' in my way. Did you ever hear of a rich philosopher? ne'er a are have I heard tell o', though I ken the maist of that fraternity. Money! na! it's ideas, and no that sordid trash, that tempts me."

"And the mair fuil you!" said big John, half in chagrin, half in admiration. "You might have made your fortune twenty times over, if it hadna been for your philosophy."

"Whew!" whistled bowed Jaacob, with magnificent disdain; "what's a' the siller in the world and a' its delichts—grand houses, grand leddies, and a' the rest of thae vanities—to the purshuit of truth? That's what I'm saying, callant—take every thing on trust because you've heard sae a' your days, and your faither believed it before ye, gin ye please; but as for me, I'm no' the man for sham—I set my fit, if a' the world should come against me, on ideas I've won and battled for mysel'."

"When they're as reasonable as the harrow, I've nae objection," said big John; "but ilka man canna write his idies in wud and iron, Mr. Huntley. The like o' that may be a' very well for *him*, but it doesna answer you and me. Eh, man, but it's warm! If it wasna that philosophy's an awfu' drouthy thing—and the wife comes down on me like murder when I get a gill—I wouldna say but it's the best kind of wark for this weather. Ye'll be goin' up bye to the manse, Mr. Huntley. I hear they're aye very well pleased to see onybody out of Norlaw; but ye maunna say ye've been here, for Jaacob and the minister, they're at daggers drawn."

"Pish! nae such thing," cried Jaacob, with complacency; "the like of a man like yon shouldna mell with a man like me. It's no' a fair battle—I aye say sae—I can tak his measure fast enough, but he can nae mair tak mine than he can flee. Eh, lad! have you ta'en the gate? and no' a word mair about the plow?"

"I'll take your advice, Jacob," said Huntley; "the plow can stand till we see what use we'll have for it; but as for going between the stilts myself, if I do you'll see me draw as fair a furrow as any plowman about Kirkbride."

"Hurray!" said Jaacob; "the lad has some speerit after a'; never you mind—we'll send down somebody to see to the plow."

With this assurance, Huntley left the smithy; but not till Jaacob had begun to sing in the most singular of cracked and elvish voices, beating time with emphatic strokes of his hammer, "The Flaxen-headed Cowboy," a rustic and ancient ditty, much in favor in the country-side. Whether it was the gestures of the gnome which called them forth, or a ludicrous application of the song to himself, Huntley could not tell; but big John and the boy accompanied the chant with audible, yet restrained explosions of laughter. Huntley grew very red in spite of himself, as he hurried along to the little bridge. What a change from the fancy which possessed him as he came up the village street half an hour ago! He could not have believed that his hypothetical inheritance could have vanished so utterly; somehow he could not even recall that evanescent splendor. It was no longer the heir of Melmar who ascended the brae of Tyne, through the trees and scattered cottages towards the white-gabled manse. It was the same Huntley Livingstone who had buried his father at midnight, who had set his face against the evil fortune which seemed ready to overwhelm his house, and who had pledged himself to win in a new country a new and stable fortune for the race of Norlaw.

But the young man was by no means contented to part so lightly with his magnificent vision. He did all he could by dint of thinking to bring it back to his mind; but even when he paused at the top of the little hill and surveyed once more the fair fields of Melmar, he could not recover the enthusiasm and fervor of his former thoughts. Bowed Jaacob, with the odd philosophy which perceived other people's mistakes, but could not see its own ludicrous pretensions—big John, who believed in his brother—and the ruddy darkness of the smithy, where reality made a rude assault upon his vision —had disenchanted Huntley. He stood on the brae of Tyne, seeing every thing with practical and undazzled eyes, feeling himself to have a certain claim, difficult and doubtful, yet real, upon the lands before him; but seeing all the obstacles which lay in its way. And, distinct from this, far apart and separate, with a world between, lay the fortune far more secure and certain which Huntley had to make with his own hands.

It was with these thoughts that he entered the manse of Kirkbride.

CHAPTER XVII

Dr. Logan was in his study writing his sermon—Katie was alone in the manse parlor. It was a cheerful room, looking over the little front garden and down the brae to the roofs of the village from its front window, and peeping out through a flush of foliage upon Tyne and the Melmar woods from the other. The furniture was very simple, the carpet old, the walls painted of an ash-green, which was just one degree better than the drab-colored complexion of the Norlaw dining-room; but notwithstanding, the room was perfect and could not have been improved upon. There was only one easy-chair, and that was sacred to the minister; the others were of the ancient fashion of drawing-room chairs, once elaborately painted and gilded, but now much dimmed of their pristine splendor. Katie's own hands had made all the pretty chintz covers, which fitted without a wrinkle, and the result was extremely satisfactory—very much more agreeable to look upon than the crumpled covers of the Melmar drawing-room. There was a wonderful screen of needle work, in a very slim ebony frame in one corner, an old-fashioned work table, with a crimson bag and inlaid top, which could answer as a chess-board, in another—and a low bookcase, full of books, between the door and the end window. On the table, at this present moment, stood a basket, of goodly dimensions, full of stockings—and by the side of that a little pile of freshly-mangled linen, pinafores and other small garments in want of strings and buttons. It was Friday, very near the end of the week—so the minister, too wise to leave his preparations to the latest day, made ready for his weekly duty in the study, while Katie did her weekly mendings on the same principle in her own domain.

"You may go to the study if you please Huntley—my father will be glad to see you," said the young mistress of the manse, once more drawing Johnnie's sock over her hand after she had welcomed her visitor. Huntley did not avail himself of the privilege so soon as he might have done, considering that he had come with the intention of asking advice from the minister. It was pleasant to sit down in that quiet, bright, home-like room, which looked as though nothing could disturb its cheerful composure, and see that careful little woman among her family labors, so fresh, and bright, and young, yet so perfectly in her place among these pleasant cares. Huntley, whose mind was in a tumult of unaccustomed anxieties, and who felt himself oppressed with a burden of responsibility, and the new necessity of deciding for himself, sank into a chair opposite Katie, with a sensation of rest and relief which he had not felt for weeks before. She looked up to him brightly with those smiling brown eyes which were so young and yet so full of elder-sisterly thoughtfulness. She saw in a moment the shadow on Huntley's face, and proceeded to minister to it as if it had been a cloud upon the boyish horizon of one of her own young brothers. Katie could not help being half maternal even to Huntley.

"Something ails you," said the little woman—"are you tired, Huntley? Oh, I mind when grief was here, what hard, hard work it was keeping up a smile. Never mind me; look sorrowful, if you like, and take a rest. It makes me think how I felt myself when dear mamma died, to see you keeping up a face like that."

"Oh, Katie, I wish we had you at Norlaw!" cried the lad, with sudden earnestness.

"Yes," said Katie, simply, "if you had only had a sister, Huntley!—but Mrs. Livingstone does not care for strangers. And mothers are sometimes fondest of their sons—everybody says so; but I know you're the eldest, and every thing comes on you."

"Patie is the wisest," said Huntley, with a momentary smile; "I think he could manage better without me—and, Katie, I'll have to go away."

She looked up at him with a question in her eyes. She asked nothing audibly, but merely suspended her work, and turned, with a friendly anxiety, her steady, kind gaze upon Huntley's face. The young man was not "in love"—he was still too familiar with this sisterly face, and too much occupied with all the sudden troubles in which he had himself been plunged, to think of any such thing; but, unconsciously, Huntley paused before answering—paused to take the peaceful scene, the home

apartment, the bright serious eyes into his memory, a picture of strange influence and tenderness never to fade.

"I thought of going to Australia," he said; "they say a man with a will to work and some knowledge, especially of cattle, is sure to thrive there. It matters but little, I think, Katie, whether I'm a hundred or a thousand miles away, so long as I *am* away; and I think the best place for me is there."

"But Australia is many a thousand miles away," said Katie, "at the other end of the world; and you can not come home to see your friends as you might do from a nearer place. If you go there, Huntley, we'll never see you again."

"I'll go there, that I may come back," said Huntley, eagerly; then he began to play with the ball of cotton which Katie was mending her children's stockings with; then he looked round the room wistfully once more. "And when I do come home," said the lad, "Katie, I wonder, I wonder, what changes I'll see here?"

"Oh, whisht!" cried Katie, with a little overflow of tears; "papa's not young, but he's no' very old; and if it's God's will, we'll aye be the same."

"It might be ten—fifteen years," said Huntley; "and I was not thinking of the minister; I was thinking of—other things."

Katie did not ask what these other things might be. The color rose in her cheek a little, but not enough to confuse her.

"The little ones will be all grown up," she said, with a quiet laugh; "perhaps some of them away too, Huntley, into the battle; and me an old Katie with a cap, keeping house for papa."

She glanced across the table for her cotton as she spoke, and, meeting Huntley's eye, blushed a little more, yet was not discomposed. The young man's heart beat louder, he could not very well tell why. Some confused words came rushing into his mind, but none of them were fit to say. His own face flushed with a hasty flood of unaccustomed and unascertained emotions; he rose up hastily, scarcely knowing how it was that the repose of the manse parlor was broken, yet feeling it. Dr. Logan called Katie from his study, and Huntley answered the call. He gave back the ball of cotton, and said hurriedly:—

"Dinna forget me, Katie, when *that* time comes;" and so went away.

That time! what time? Huntley could have given no explanation of what he meant; neither could Katie, who put up her hand softly to her eyes, and smiled a very faint smile, and said, "Poor boy!" with a little sigh as the door closed upon him. But perhaps explanations would have done but little good, and every thing answered perfectly well as it was.

Huntley came with a blush into the presence of the innocent and unconscious minister, who had forgotten his own youth many a long day ago, and had never yet been roused into consciousness that his little Katie might be something else than a good child and elder sister, in the perverse imaginations of other people. He looked up from his desk and his manuscript, and pushed up his spectacles on his forehead when the young man entered.

"Huntley! is that you? What's wrong, my man?" said Dr. Logan. He thought the lad could not have seen Katie, or he must have become more composed by this time; and the excellent pastor thought of nothing else than some new accident or coil at Norlaw.

"Nothing's wrong," said Huntley, who only blushed the more in shamefaced self-consciousness, "but I wanted to ask your advice."

Dr. Logan laid down his pen with resignation; it was a new pen, sharply nibbed, such as the minister loved, and he had just got a capital idea for the third head of his sermon, an idea which might be nowhere before Huntley had half stated his case. The minister paused a moment, trying very hard to connect his idea with something in the room which might recall it to him when his visitor was gone. He tried the inkstand, the pretty paper-weight on the table, and even his large red and green pocket-handkerchief, in vain. At last he thought he had secured it on the knob of the glass door of his bookcase; he nodded ruefully to Huntley and made a knot on his handkerchief.

"Now, Huntley, proceed, my boy," said the minister with a sigh; he held the knot on the handkerchief in his hand, and fixed his eyes on the bookcase. Certainly he had it safe now.

Huntley, glad to get out of his embarrassment so, plunged at once into his tale. He could not quite make out how it was that the excellent doctor looked so steadily at the bookcase, and gave himself such divided and wandering answers. However, at last the minister forgot his idea, and threw away the handkerchief in despair.

"Eh? what was that you were saying, Huntley?" said Dr. Logan. The story had to be gone over again. But, to Huntley's surprise, his friend knew all about it, more about it indeed than he did himself, and shook his head when Huntley vehemently declared his conviction that he was the true heir of Melmar.

"I make no doubt," said the minister, "that if *she* could be found, the will would stand—but I mind the writer laying it down very clear to me and Norlaw at the time that ye behoved to produce her alive or dead—that is, by evidence in the last case, no doubt—before your case could stand. It might be well worth a man's while that had enough to keep him, and nothing else to do—but I would not advise *you* to put off your time seeking Mary Huntley. You're the eldest son and the prop of your family. I would not advise it, Huntley, my man."

"Nor do I mean it," said Huntley, with a blush at his own wild fancies; "and if I had known that you knew it so well, I should not even have troubled you. No, doctor, I've written to your friend in Edinburgh—I want him to take all our affairs in hand, and save, if it is possible, Norlaw itself for my mother. What we'll have to begin upon after, I can't very well tell—but Cosmo is the only one of us too young to set out for himself. I will leave the other matter with Mr. Cassilis, and he can do what he thinks best."

"Very wise, Huntley, very wise," said the minister, whose mind was still fumbling after his idea; "and you're thinking of going abroad yourself, they tell me?—I don't doubt it's a shock to your mother, but I would say it was the best thing you could do. Charlie Cassilis, no doubt, will be coming here. He's aye very willing to come to the manse. I'll make Katie write him a line to-day, to say we'll expect him—and any thing I can do to further the business, you know you can rely upon—eh? what was that you said?"

"Nothing," said Huntley, "except that there's little time to lose, and I am interrupting you. Good-bye, Dr. Logan—I'll see you again before I go away."

"Before he goes away," said the minister, with perplexity, half rising to follow Huntley, as he hurried from the room; "what does the callant mean?" But just then Dr. Logan's eye returned to the knob of the bookcase, which no longer recalled that precious lost idea. "Poor human nature!" said the good man, with a sigh. He thought it rather selfish of Huntley to have disturbed his studies just at that particular moment—and it was the young man's human nature over which he sighed.

Huntley, meanwhile, went back again to Norlaw in a greater tumult of mind than that which had brought him forth. But he no longer thought of Melmar as he had done in that sudden golden vision of fortune and conquest. His heart leaped within him like one on the verge of a new world. These three scenes through which he had passed:—bowed Jaacob's odd philosophy and startling groundwork—"Trust in nothing that you have not conquered for yourself;" Katie's quiet home-parlor, her blush and glance of kindness, which perhaps understood his unspoken and sudden fervor as well as he did himself; and, beyond these, the sober, calm every-day minister, giving only an outside and momentary attention to those matters in which this young life had all its hopes at stake, minding his sermon, and only kindly indifferent to Huntley, had brought the youth on a long way in the education of his life. He could not have put it all into words, or explained it to the satisfaction of the philosopher; yet the shock of reality and actual life which brought him back to himself in the little smithy of Kirkbride—the warm light of Katie's eyes which had stirred, with something of personal and distinct identity, separate from family interests, and individual in the world, the young man's heart and spirit —and not least, though very different, the composed friendliness of the minister, pre-occupied with

his sermon, who had only a very spare amount of attention to bestow upon Huntley, and showed him that the world in general was not likely to be much absorbed by his interests, or startled by his hopes —were all very real, practical and permanent lessons. They sent him back to Norlaw an older man.

CHAPTER XVIII

Mr. Cassilis came to the manse in answer to Katie's invitation and the business of Huntley. He was young and did not particularly commend himself to the liking of the young master of Norlaw; but as he pleased all the other people very tolerably well, there were, perhaps, various reasons for the less friendly sentiment of Huntley. He was, however, a brisk man of business, and not sufficiently overburdened with occupation to prevent him entering heartily into the concerns of the half-ruined family.

All this time Patrick Livingstone had been quietly busy, collecting and arranging all his father's memoranda which seemed to throw any light upon their circumstances; among these were many hurried, and only half intelligible notes of transactions with the former Huntley of Melmar, from which it very shortly appeared that Norlaw's debts had all been contracted to his old kinsman, and had only come into possession of "the present Melmar," when he took possession of the house and property, as heir-at-law, on the old man's death. They had suspected this before, for it seemed very unlikely that one man should borrow of another, whose claims were so entirely antagonistic to his own—but these were their only real evidence—for Norlaw had been so irregular and unsystematic that it was impossible to tell what money might or might not have passed through his hands.

The lawyer took all these scratchy memorandums out of Patrick's hands, and examined them carefully in presence of the lads. They were in the east room, in the midst of a pile of old papers from which these had been selected. Patie had not completed his task—he was going over his father's letters, to see whether they threw any light on these forgotten transactions. It was no small task; for Norlaw, like most other men of trifling habits and unimportant correspondence, kept every thing that everybody wrote to him, and even scrawls of his own letters. Some of these scrawls were curious enough—among them were one or two anxious and elaborate epistles to people abroad, whom his search for his lost love had brought him into contact with; some, dating still further back, were intimations of the birth of his children, and other family events of importance to his wife's relations. They were all composed with considerable care, and in somewhat pompous diction; they threw wonderful light upon the weaknesses and vanities of this departed life, and indifferent people might have laughed at them—but Huntley and Patie blushed instead of laughing, or folded the scrawls away hurriedly with tears in their eyes. To them these memorials were still pathetic, tender, full of a touching appeal to their affection, too sacred to meet the common eye.

Presently, however, Patie caught a glimpse of a handwriting still more scratchy than his father's —the trembling characters of old age. It was a letter from old Melmar, the most important they had yet lighted upon—and ran thus:—

> "Dear Patrick,
>
> "Touching the matter that was under discussion betwixt us the last time I saw you, I have just this to say, namely, that I hold your receipts and acknowledgments for money in the interests of your wife and family, and not in my own. I know well what would happen if you knew yourself free to incur more responsibility; so, mind you, though you'll get them all at my death, and most likely Melmar to the boot, I'll take care, as long as I'm to the fore, to keep my hand over you for your good. You can let the Mistress see this if you please, and I'll wager a bodle she agrees with me. I can not give you them back—but unless you behave all the worse, they'll never leave my hands until they return to your own.
>
> *"H. Huntley."*

"Eh! what's that?" said Mr. Cassilis, looking up from his little lot of papers, as he saw the two brothers pass this letter between them.

They were half reluctant to show it; and when Huntley at last handed it across the table it was with a proud apology.

"My father was generous and liberal to the extreme. I suppose he was not what people call prudent; few understood him," said Huntley.

The lawyer took the paper with a half perceptible smile. He knew already what other people said of Norlaw.

However, he added old Melmar's letter with care to his own heap of scribbled memoranda.

"It's not very much good," he said, "but it shows intention. Unquestionably, neither the giver nor the receiver had any thought of payment for these loans. I had better see the present man to-morrow. What with the will and these he ought to come to reason."

"Me'mar?" cried Huntley—"no, I can have no appeal made to him on our behalf. Do you know how he persecuted my father?"

"I'm not much of an appealing man," said Cassilis, "but I had better see him. Don't be afraid—I'll not compromise you. You did not know much of the matter yourself, I understand, till recently. Be charitable—suppose he were as ignorant as you?"

"Stop!" cried Patie, "never mind personal feelings—is that all the value of the will?—to bring him to reason?"

"Not if I find Mary Huntley," said the young lawyer.

If *I* find. The young men exchanged glances—not quite sure that they were pleased with this transference of their interests.

"If she's to be found alive—or if she's dead, and we can prove it, every thing, of course, becomes as clear as daylight," said the minister's nephew, "and many a man would tell you that in these days either the one thing or the other is certain; but I've had some experience. I know there have been cases in which every effort was baffled; and failing either, I don't see at this moment what's to be done. You expect me to say, go to law, of course, but who's to pay the piper? Law's a very expensive luxury. Wait till you're rich, and then come down upon him—that is to say, if this search fails."

"But it is at least worth while to make the search," said Huntley, hastily, "and if it is so, it is too soon to treat with Melmar. Friendship is out of the question. Let us deal with him honestly. I can not accept a favor from a man one day and commence a lawsuit against him the next; it is not possible."

"In the meantime," said Cassilis, coolly sweeping all his papers up into a pocket-book, "you've committed your affairs into my hands, and I mean to do my best for my client, begging your pardon, whether my client perceives my tactics or no. Don't be offended. I'll claim these said acknowledgments as your right, and not as a favor. I want to see what kind of an animal this is that we're to fight; and to let you see what I mean, I may as well say that I've heard all the history of the last few weeks, and that I understand your feelings; but feelings, Livingstone, recollect, as your brother says, have little to do with the law."

Huntley could make very little further opposition; but he did not respond by any means to his new agent's friendliness; he received it even with a little *hauteur* and surliness, like a ridiculous young hero, finding out condescension and superiority, and sundry other of those agreeable figments of the jealous imagination, in the natural frankness of the young lawyer. If he had been fifty, or had known nothing of the manse, possibly Mr. Charles Cassilis, W. S., would have made a more favorable impression upon Huntley Livingstone.

CHAPTER XIX

"Do I look like a fool?"

The speaker was Huntley of Melmar, seated at that moment in his large leathern easy-chair at his own study-table; this was a long dim room, lined with dusty-looking bookcases, and lighted faintly by one window, from which nothing could be seen but a funereal yew-tree, which kept the room in perpetual shade. The whole apartment had a stifled, unventilated look, as if fresh air never entered it, as sunshine certainly never did; even in winter no fire could be coaxed into a blaze in Melmar's study—every thing was dusty, choked, and breathless, partaking in the general want of order visible through the house, with private additions of cheerlessness peculiarly its own.

And there could not well be a greater contrast than the two people in this room; Cassilis was young, good-looking, rather careless in manner, shrewd and quick, as became his profession, but by no means formal, as might have become it. He was not the solemn bearer of a legal challenge—a messenger of heroical enmity or hereditary dislike; he was only a morning visitor in a morning coat, quite as ready to talk of the last change of ministry or the ensuing election as of the immediate business which brought him here. Melmar sat watching him like an old cat, stealthy and absorbed. In *his* day business was managed in a different manner; and the old Aberdeen attorney watched with a chuckle of professional contempt and private satisfaction the informal proceedings of his younger brother and adversary. Mr. Huntley thought himself much too "deep" for the fathoming of this careless neophyte, while his visitor, on the other hand, found equal satisfaction in setting down the Laird of Melmar as one of the old school.

"Not exactly," said Cassilis, "but it's odd how often a fool and a man of sense are convertible terms. A man does a thing from a generous motive, and that's ridiculous, eh, Mr. Huntley? absurd to men of the world like you and me, who don't recognize the principle; but mind you, there *might* be circumstances which *might* induce the most sagacious of us, out of pure self-regard and prudence, to do the very same thing as the blockhead did out of generosity; the result would be the same, you know, in both cases—and who is to judge whether it is done by a wise man or a fool?"

"Aye, man, you're ironical, are you?" said Melmar, "very good practice, but it does not do with me—I'm too old for inuendoes; come, to the point. You've got a foolish case by the hand, though, of course, as an older man and member of the profession, I think it perfectly right of you not to seem conscious of that—*perfectly* proper. I highly approve of your demeanor in a professional point of view, my young friend."

"Which is very kind of you," said Cassilis, laughing; "I think it all the more so because I can't agree with you. Do you know, I hear everywhere about the country that there could not be a greater difference than between young Livingstone and his father?—quite a different man, I understand."

"Eh? and what's that to me?" asked Melmar, sharply.

"Well, you know, between ourselves as professional men," said Cassilis, laughing and speaking with the most delightful frankness, "if this Norlaw had been a man of spirit and energy, like his son, or indeed worth his salt, as people say, you know just as well as I do—possibly far better, for I bow to your experience—that you could not have had a chance of reigning here as you have done for so many years."

"What the deevil do you mean, sir?" cried Melmar, growing red and half rising from his chair; "is this language to hold to me, in my own house?"

"Nay, I was only appealing to your professional knowledge," said the young man, carelessly. "When you speak to me of the profession, of course I necessarily conclude that you are, at least, as well-informed as I am—and this is clear to anybody with half an eye. Mind you, I don't mean to say that young Livingstone's claim is weaker than his father's—you know it is not. I feel indeed that the whole matter is immensely simplified by having a professional man like yourself to deal with—for I

don't presume to suppose that I am telling you any thing that you don't know already; but possibly—I can't tell—the young man may not feel it for his interest to push his claims at this moment. It's for *my* interest that he should, of course, for it will be a capital case—but we can both wait; however, under the circumstances, I am perfectly justified in asking you to consider whether the little restitution I suggested to you would be the act of a fool or of a wise man."

Melmar had been gazing with a kind of hazy, speechless wrath at the speaker, who passed so jauntily and lightly over this subject, and took his own perfect acquaintance with its right and wrong, for granted, with so much coolness. When Cassilis came to this pause, however, no explosion followed. The florid face grew redder with a bursting fiery fullness, in which even the grizzled red fringes of hair sympathized—but, in spite of himself, Melmar was afraid. His "young friend," whom he had patronized and despised, seemed somehow to have got him completely in his power —seemed to see into the very thoughts of the old worldling, who thought himself so much wiser than his adversary. He made a pause of consideration, and felt much the reverse of comfortable. The unconcerned air of his visitor, which had relieved him at first, seemed somehow to give greater weight to his words now. If these downright blows were given in play, what should the serious strokes of the same hand be? and Melmar knew very well that the strength of his opponent's case lay in plain right and justice, while his was only to be held by art and stratagem. While he pondered, a sudden thought struck him—he rose, went to the window, glanced out there for a moment—then to the door, opened it and glanced along the long passage to make sure there were no listeners—then he returned to his chair, and bent towards the young lawyer, who had been watching all his proceedings with a half amused curiosity.

"To make an end of all this," said Melmar, with a very good imitation of impatience, "and because they are relatives of the old family, and friends, and all the rest of it—and to prove that I'm sorry for what took place at Norlaw's funeral—I'll tell you what I'll consent to do—"

"Well?" said Cassilis, quietly.

"I'll consent," continued Melmar, "because I'm not a man to have a will, or a bill, or any thing of the sort stuck into my face every moment of my life—I'll consent to give up all Norlaw's papers, every one of them, as a matter of favor, on condition that this document, that you've all made so much work about, shall be placed in my hands. After which I'll be able to look after my kinswoman's interests in the proper way—for, as for the fiction about those Livingstones, who have no more claim to Melmar than you have, *that's* quite beneath any notice from me. But on that condition, and to be done with the business, I'll consent to give up all my claims against Norlaw; and a more liberal offer never was made."

The young man looked steadily, and with a smile, into the old man's face—indeed, Mr. Cassilis went a step further, and did what is sometimes extremely impertinent, and always embarrassing. He looked into Melmar's eyes with a keen, yet laughing gaze, which his companion could by no means bear, and which made the florid face once more fiery red with a troubled and apprehensive rage.

"Would you advise me to accept this offer as one professional man might advise another?" said Cassilis, quietly, with his smile. That smile, and that look, and that question, silenced Melmar a thousand times more effectually than a vehement refusal of his proposition. This man was sometimes bold, but he was never brave. He saw himself found out in the laughing eyes of his young antagonist. He thought he had committed himself and exposed his weak point—somehow he seemed to stand self-betrayed and unvailed before this stranger, whose gaze was intolerable, and whose question he should have liked to answer with a curse, proper man as he was, if he had dared. But he did not dare, though the self-restraining effort brought the perspiration to his forehead. He scattered some papers on the table with an irrestrainable movement, a little safety-valve for his secret fury.

"Do as you please, you'll get no better," he said, hoarsely, gathering them up again, and turning his face from his young adversary, who did not now seem quite an opponent to be despised.

"I tell you frankly," said Mr. Cassilis, with that engaging candor of his, "that it's very much for my interest that young Livingstone should carry on his suit at once. It's for my interest, in short, to protract the whole business to my utmost ability; and a highly attractive case I have no doubt we should make of it—especially, Mr. Huntley, *especially* permit me to say, after the proposal you have just made. However, we understand all that, both you and I, and I must ask you again to consider what I said at first; here is this old man's letter, proving his intentions pretty distinctly; on our part we will not pay a penny under less than compulsion. I leave it entirely in your own hands—what will you do?"

Patricia Huntley was all alone in the drawing-room. She knew when Mr. Cassilis entered; she knew he had been shut up with papa for a very considerable time. She did not know any thing of the questions which were being put in the study, or how hard they were to answer. Though she read poetry-books, this poor little creature had very little to occupy her, save her bad health and her limited imagination—a visitor was an event to Patricia—especially when the visitor was young, rather handsome, and newly come from Edinburgh. She thought she might as well take an accidental stroll into the garden, and see what the gentlemen were about in the study. Accordingly, with her poetry-book in her hand, Patricia stole behind the yew-tree just at this particular moment and crisis of the conversation. She could see them both through the dim window, papa tumbling about his papers, and looking very stormy, Mr. Cassilis, smiling and genial as he always was. Perhaps the younger face of the two, being much the pleasanter, was, spite of filial veneration, the most attractive to Patricia. She thought Mr. Cassilis, who had been so long a time in the study, must surely have some very pleasant news to tell—but at the same time, with sincere and disinterested concern, felt that he must be dreadfully bored by so long an interview with papa. With a generous impulse she approached the window, and knocked on the glass playfully with her fingers.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.