Oliphant Margaret

The Ladies Lindores. Volume 3 of 3

Маргарет Олифант

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Содержание

Margaret Oliphant
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CHAPTER XXXII

Left to themselves, Millefleurs and Beaufort stood opposite to each other for a moment with some embarrassment. To have anything to do with a quarrel is always painful for the third person; and it was so entirely unexpected, out of the way of all his habits, that Beaufort felt himself exceptionally incapable of dealing with it. "Millefleurs," he said with hesitation, "I don't understand all this. That was a very strange tone to take in speaking to – a friend."

He felt for the first time like a tutor discharging an uncomfortable office, knowing that it must be done, yet that he was not the man to do it, and that of all the youthful individuals in the world, the last person to be so lectured was Millefleurs.

"Naturally you think so. The circumstances make all the difference, don't you know," said Millefleurs, with his ordinary composure. "And the situation. In 'Frisco it might not have been of any great consequence. Helping a bully out of the world is not much of a crime there. But then it's never hushed up. No one makes a secret of it: that is the thing that sets one's blood up, don't you know. Not for Torrance's sake – who, so far as I can make out, was a cad – or poor Lady Car's, to whom it's something like a deliverance – "

"Torrance!" cried Beaufort, with a gasp. "Lady – Car! Do you mean to say – "

"Then – " said Millefleurs, "he never told you? That is a curious piece of evidence. They do things straightforward in Denver City – not like that. He never spoke of an event which had made the country ring – "

"Torrance!" repeated Beaufort, bewildered. The world seemed all to reel about him. He gazed at his companion with eyes wide opened but scarcely capable of vision. By-and-by he sat down abruptly on the nearest chair. He did not hear what Millefleurs was saying. Presently he turned to him, interrupting him unconsciously. "Torrance!" he repeated; "let there be no mistake. You mean the man – to whom Carry – Lady Caroline – was married?"

Millefleurs fixed upon him his little keen black eyes. He recalled to himself tones and looks which had struck him at the moment, on which he had not been able to put any interpretation. He nodded his head without saying anything. He was as keen after any piece of human history as a hound on a scent. And now he was too much interested, too eager for new information, to speak.

"And it happened," said Beaufort, "on Thursday – on the day I arrived?" He drew a long breath to relieve his breast, then waved his hand. "Yes; if that is all, Erskine told me of it," he said.

"You have something to do with them also, old fellow," said Millefleurs, patting him on the shoulder. "I knew there was something. Come along and walk with me. I must see it out; but perhaps we had better not meet again just now – Erskine and I, don't you know. Perhaps I was rude. Come along; it is your duty to get me out of harm's way. Was there anything remarkable, by the way, in the fact that this happened just when you arrived?"

Beaufort made no reply; he scarcely heard, so violently were his pulses beating in his ears, so high was the tide of new life rising in his veins. Who can think of the perplexities, even the dangers, of another, when something unparalleled, something that stirs up his very being, has happened to himself? But he allowed himself to be led out into the open air, which was a relief – to the road leading to Lindores, from which they soon came in sight of Tinto dominating the country round from its platform. Millefleurs stopped at the point where this first came in view, to point out how high it rose above the river, and how the path ascended through the overhanging woods. The Scaur itself was visible like a red streak on the face of the height. "You can see for yourself that horse or man

who plunged over that would have little hope," Millefleurs said. But Beaufort did not hear him. He stood and gazed, with a sense of freedom and possibility which went to his head like wine. Even the ordinary bonds of nature did not seem to hold him. His mind seemed to expand and float away over the wide country. Of all people in the world he was the last who could cross that distance actually, who could present himself to the lady there – the widow – the woman who had married Torrance. He could not offer his services or his sympathy to Carry; he alone of all the world was absolutely shut out from her, more than a stranger: and yet he stood gazing at the place where she was, feeling himself go out upon the air, upon the empty space, towards her. The sensation dizzied his brain and bewildered all his faculties. Millefleurs flowed on, making a hundred remarks and guesses, but Beaufort did not hear him. He would have said afterwards, that as he never spoke, it was impossible he could have betrayed himself. But he betrayed himself completely, and something more than himself, to the keen little eyes of Millefleurs.

The day passed as days full of agitation pass – looking long, protracted, endless – blank hours of suspense following the moment of excitement. Sir James Montgomery had gone away shaking his good grey head. He had not believed John Erskine's story – that is, he believed that there was something suppressed. He had listened with the profoundest interest up to a certain point, but after that he had shaken his head. "You would have done better to tell me everything," he said, as he went away. "It would have been more wise – more wise." He shook his head; the very truth of the story went against it. There was so much that fitted into the hypothesis of the country-side. But then there came that *suppressio veri* which took all the value from the statement. Sir James went away fully determined to repeat the story in the most favourable way – to give the best representation of it possible; but he was not satisfied. It was with a most serious face that he mounted his horse and rode away, shaking his head from time to time. "No, no," he said to himself, "that will never hold water – that will never hold water!" When this interview was over, John went back to his library and sat down in his usual chair with a sense of exhaustion and hopelessness which it would be difficult to describe. He had told his story as best he could, searching his memory for every detail; but he had not been believed. He had gone on, growing impassioned in his self-defence – growing indignant, feeling himself powerless in face of that blank wall of incredulity, that steady incapacity to believe. "Why should I tell you a lie?" he cried, at last. "Do not you see? Have you not said that it was for my interest to tell you the truth?" "I am not saying you have told a lie," Sir James said, always shaking his head. "No, no – no lie. You will never be accused of that." When he went away, he had laid his heavy old hand on John's shoulder. "My poor lad, if you had only had the courage to open your heart all the way!" he said. John felt like a victim in the hands of the Inquisition. What did they want him to confess? Half maddened, he felt as if a little more pressure, a few more twists of the screw, would make him accuse himself of anything, and confess all that they might require.

He did not know how long he sat there, silent, doing nothing, not even thinking anything, alone with himself and the cloud that hung over his life, with a consciousness that all his movements were watched, that even this would be something against him, a proof of that remorse which belongs to guilt. And thus the slow moments, every one slower than the other, more full of oppression, rolled over him. Beaufort had disappeared, and did not return till late in the afternoon, when the twilight was falling. A few words only passed between them, and these related solely to Beaufort's thoughts, not to Erskine's.

"It is *her* husband who has been killed," Beaufort said; "you never told me."

"I could not tell you. It was too extraordinary; it was an impiety," John said.

But neither did he ask himself what he meant, nor did Beaufort ask him. They said nothing more to each other, except such civilities as are indispensable when men eat together, – for they dined all the same, notwithstanding the circumstances. In every crisis men must still dine; it is the only thing that is inevitable, in trouble or in joy.

And then the night followed. Night is horrible, yet it is consolatory to those who are in suspense. John could not suppose that his trials were over, that nothing was to follow; but by ten o'clock or so he said to himself, with relief, that nothing could happen to-night. Rolls, too, had evidently arrived at the same conclusion. He was heard to close and bolt the door ostentatiously while it was still early, and there was something in the very noise he made which proclaimed the satisfaction with which he did it. But after this there was a long black evening still, and hours of darkness, to follow, which John did not know how to get through. Almost he had made up his mind to step out of the window at midnight, as Rolls had suggested, and withdraw from all this alarm and unjust suspicion. He did go out, and felt the cool freshness of the night caress him, hot and weary as he was, and thought with a sigh of distant places far away, where he might be safe from all these frets and passions. But he knew, if he did so, that his cause would be lost for ever – that nothing could save him or his reputation. Perhaps in no case could anything save him: but if he fled, his ruin was certain. "What did it matter," he thought, with bitterness, "that he had no witnesses to produce, that nobody would believe him? And if he were condemned, what would any one care? His mother, indeed, would feel the shame, but more the shame than anything else; and her name was not Erskine, nor that of any of her family. There was no one who actually belonged to him in the wide world, to whom his living or dying could be of any consequence." As he stood alone with these bitter thoughts, on the terrace, looking out upon the night, feeling the wind blow upon him from the fields of sleep, but no other trace in the darkness of the great wide landscape which he knew lay stretched out like a map under cover of the clouds, something breathed another name in his ear. Ah! how did he know if she would care? Sometimes he had thought so, hoped so, vaguely, with a tremor of alarmed delight. But if this shadow of crime came over him, would Edith stoop under it to say a word of consolation? – would she? could she? He stood still for a long time on the terrace, with the lighted window and common life behind him, and all the secrets of the hidden night before, and asked himself what she would do. What would she do? That question, and not the other, was, after all, the great one in life.

Next morning John awoke with the sense of a coming trial, which made his heart jump in his breast the moment he opened his eyes, though it was some time before he recollected what it was. But he did so at last, and accepted the certainty with outward calm. He came down-stairs with a steady conviction of what was about to happen. To make up his mind to it was something. He sat down at the breakfast-table opposite to Beaufort – who was restless and uncomfortable – with a calm which he felt to be fictitious, but which nevertheless was calm.

"You must remember," he said, "Beaufort, whatever happens, that Dalrulzian is altogether at your command."

"What can happen?" Beaufort asked.

"I scarcely know. I can be taken away, I suppose, and examined somewhere. You had better come with me. You are a barrister, and might help; and besides, it will always be for your advantage to get a little insight into Scotch law."

"I might be of use, perhaps; but in that case, you must tell me everything," Beaufort said.

"I ask no better," said the young man; and he repeated the narrative which he had told to Sir James Montgomery. "Don't you disbelieve me. What I say to you is the whole truth," he said, – "everything that there is to say."

"To disbelieve you would be impossible," said Beaufort, which was the first gleam of consolation he had. They had a long consultation, some of which was surprised by Rolls, who went and came, busy about the door, with sombre and undisguised anxiety.

Beaufort scouted the idea that there could be any question of murder. "Had you done as they suppose – seized the bridle in self-defence, and forced the horse a step too far – it would still only be accident," he said, – "at the very worst and bitterest, manslaughter; though I don't see how it could bear even such a verdict as that. There is no occasion for unnecessary alarm. Anything more is impossible."

At this moment Rolls came in; his countenance was lightened, yet excited. "There is one – that would like to speak to you, sir," he said.

There could be no doubt as to what the summons was. Rolls lingered behind when his master, with changing colour, but self-possession, left the room. He came up to Beaufort stealthily. "Sir," he said – "sir, will *yon* be all true?"

"What? Neither Mr Erskine nor myself is in the habit of saying what is not true."

"That's no doubt the case. I'm saying nothing of him; but you might have smoothed it off a bit, just to soothe him. Will it be all exact yon you said about manslaughter? Manslaughter is just culpable homicide, so far as I can see. And what's the punishment for manslaughter (as you call it), if you'll be so kind as say?"

"That depends on the gravity of the case, on the character of the judge, on many things. A year's, two years' imprisonment – perhaps only a month or two. I have known it but a day."

"And previous character would be taken into account?" said Rolls; "and aggravation, and – many a thing more?"

"No doubt; it is a thing upon which no certain rule can be observed. It may be next to no harm at all, or it may be close upon murder. In such a case as this, severity is very unlikely."

"But it will make a pairting," said Rolls, solemnly, "atween him and all he maist cares for. I'm no' of the young maister's mind myself. There are some would have set him far better, and in every way more suitable; but what a man likes himself, it's that will please him, and no' what another man likes. It takes us a' a lang time," said Rolls, shaking his head, "to learn that. Many's the one in my place would think here's just a grand opportunity to pairt him and – them; but you see I take his ain wishes into consideration."

The old servant spoke less to Beaufort than to himself; but the visitor was not accustomed to hold such colloquies with a family butler. He stared, then grew impatient, and disposed to resent the old fellow's familiarity. The next moment the bell rang, and Rolls hurried away. Beaufort followed him out into the hall, where a man was standing evidently on guard. John was at the door of the drawing-room, pale, but perfectly composed. "The dogcart immediately," he said to Rolls, and beckoned to Beaufort to come in. "I am going before the sheriff-substitute about this matter," he said. "Beaufort, you will come with me. Mr Granger, this is my friend Mr Beaufort, an English barrister. He may go with me, I suppose, to watch over my interests? You see that what we were threatened with yesterday has come to pass."

"I see, indeed," said Beaufort, "with sorrow and surprise. What is it that has to be done now?"

"The sheriff will make no objection," said the head of the county police, a plain, grave man, with regret in his face. "It's my duty to take Mr Erskine before the sheriff. The result of the examination will be, let us hope, that he'll come cannily home again, when all has been inquired into in due form. There is no reason to take a gloomy view. The sheriff will maybe find there's no case: and I'm sure I wish so with all my heart."

They all sat round with the utmost gravity to listen to this little speech. It was not a moment for light-heartedness. John sat between the table and the door, in perfect self-command, yet very pale. Notwithstanding all the respect shown to him, and the good feeling from which he had everything to hope, the most innocent of men may be excused a feeling of dismay when he is, to all intents and purposes, arrested on a criminal charge, with issues to his good fame and social estimation, even if nothing more, which it is impossible to calculate. They sat in silence while the dogcart was getting ready, a strange little company. After a while, the officer, to lessen the embarrassment of the moment, and make everything pleasant, began to address various little remarks about the weather and other commonplace topics to the two gentlemen, such as, "This is a very agreeable change from all the wet we've been having;" or, "The news this morning is more satisfactory about that Afghan business." The responses made, as may be supposed, were not very effusive. It was a relief when the dogcart came to the door. Old Rolls stood and watched it go down the avenue, with his countenance firmly

set, and a stern resolution gathering about his mouth. Bauby stole out and stood by his side in the morning light, with her apron to her eyes, and her capacious bosom convulsed with sobs. "Eh, that I should have lived to see this day, and shame come to oor dwallin'!" cried Bauby; "and as bonny a young lad as ever steppit, and as good!"

"Hold your peace, woman!" said her brother; "ye may see shame come nearer hame or a's done."

"Eh, Tammas, man! what do you ca' nearer hame? My heart's just broken; and what will his mammaw say?" the faithful creature cried.

Meanwhile it might have been a party of pleasure that threaded its way among the trees, somewhat closely packed in the dogcart, but no more than they might have been, starting for the moors. John Erskine drove himself to the examination which was to decide his fate one way or another, with all the appearance of a perfectly free agent. The horse was fresh, the morning bright; and though the four men were a heavy load, they skimmed along the country road as gaily as if all had been well. Tinto was visible for the greater part of the way. They passed by the very gates of Lindores. John had shaken himself together as he took the reins in his hand, and with perhaps a little unconscious bravado, paused now and then to indicate a favourite point of view to his friend. But he had harder work in store. Just before they reached Dunearn, he perceived drawn up by the roadside Lady Lindores's carriage, in which Edith was seated alone. Impossible to describe the feelings with which, as across a gulf of pain and trouble, the unfortunate young man, at this crisis of his fate, looked at the girl with whom, when he last saw her, he had been so near the edge of a mutual understanding. It was impossible for him now to do other than draw up by the side of the carriage to speak to her; and there, in the hearing of the two men who formed his escort, and whose presence was heavy on his heart, the following conversation took place. Edith looked up at him with a smile and an expression of pleasure which brightened her whole aspect. She was in mourning, and somewhat pale.

"I am waiting for mamma," she said. "One of her pensioners is ill in that cottage. I was glad of the chance of bringing her out for a little air. We are with poor Carry, you know."

"How is Lady Caroline?" John asked.

"Oh, well enough, when one considers all things," said Edith, hastily; and to escape that subject, which was not to be entered on before strangers, she said, "You are going to Dunearn?"

"On painful business," he said. "I wonder if I may ask you one thing?" She looked up at him with a smile which said much – a smile of trust and belief, which might have encouraged any man to speak. Edith had no fear of what he might ask her. For John it was more difficult to command himself and his voice at that moment than at any previous one since his trial began. He cleared his throat with an effort, and his voice was husky. "You will hear things said of me – that may make you turn from – an old friend altogether. I want you not to believe them. And tell Lady Lindores. Do not believe them. It is not true."

"Mr Erskine, what is it – what is it? You may be sure I shall believe nothing against you – nor mamma either! Is it – is it – " her eyes fixed upon him anxiously and upon the stranger beside him, whose face was unknown to her, and who sat blank and passive like a servant, yet who was not a servant. Edith rose in the carriage in her great anxiety, and gazed as if she would have read a volume in John's face. What it cost him to look at her and to keep a kind of smile on his, it would be hard to tell.

"I cannot enter into explanations now. I may not be able to do so soon. Only – tell Lady Lindores."

She held out her hand to him, which he stooped to touch – it was all he could do – and once more gave him an anxious, tender smile. "You may trust both mamma and me," she said.

And in another moment, so it seemed, the dogcart stopped again. John went over the streets of Dunearn like a man in a dream – in a sort of exquisite anguish, a mingled sweetness and bitterness such as never went into words. Their looks seemed to cling together, as, with a start, the horse went on; and now they stopped again and got down – for a very different encounter. Even now, however, John's progress was to be interrupted. Some one called to him as he was about to go into the sheriff's

court in the little Town-house of Dunearn. "Is that you, John Erskine? and what has brought you here?" in peremptory tones. He turned round quickly. It was Miss Barbara in her pony-carriage, which Nora was driving. The old lady leaned across the young one and beckoned to him with some impatience. "Come here. What are you doing in Dunearn without coming to me? It's true I'm out, and you would not have found me; but Janet would have understood to be prepared for your luncheon. And what's your business in the Town-house this fine morning, and with strange company?" Miss Barbara said. She cast a keen glance at the man, who stood aside respectfully enough, and yet, backed by his assistant, kept a watchful eye on John.

"I am afraid I cannot wait to tell you now. It is not pleasant business," John said.

"Come round here," said the old lady, imperiously; "can I keep on skreighing to you before all the town? Come round here." Her keen eyes took in the whole scene: John's glance at his grave companion, the most imperceptible gesture with which that person made way for him. Miss Barbara's perceptions were keen. She gripped her nephew by the arm. "John Erskine, have ye done anything to bring ye within the power of the law?"

"Nothing," he said firmly, meeting her eye.

"Then what does that man mean glowering at you? Lord guide us! what is it, boy? It cannot be money, for money has none of these penalties now."

"It is not money – nor anything worth a thought."

"Mr Erskine," said the officer, civilly, "the sheriff is waiting." And after that, there was no more to be said.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Rolls went up-stairs and dressed himself in his best – his "blacks," which he kept for going to funerals and other solemnities – not the dress in which he waited at table and did his ordinary business. The coat, with its broad, square tails, gave him an appearance something between that of a respectable farmer and a parish minister – a little too solemn for the one, too secular for the other; and to show that he was "his own man," and for to-day at least no man's servant, he enveloped his throat in a large black silk neckerchief, square in shape, and folded like a substantial bandage with a little bow in the front. His forehead was lined with thought. When he had finished his toilet, he opened the large wooden "kist" which stood in a corner of his room, and was the final receptacle of all his worldly goods. Out of that he took a blue-spotted handkerchief, in which a pocket-book was carefully wrapped up, and took from it a few somewhat dirty pound-notes. Then restoring the pocket-book, he locked the kist carefully, and went down-stairs with the key – a very large one – in his hand. This he gave to Bauby, who still hung about the door with her apron to her eyes. "You should go ben to your work, my woman," said Rolls, "and no make the worst of what's happened: in a' likelihood the master will be back afore the dinner's ready." "Do you think that, Tammas? do you really think that?" cried Bauby, brightening up and showing symptoms of an inclination to cry for joy as she had done for sorrow. "I'm no' saying what I think. I'm thinking mony things beyond the power o' a woman person to faddom," said Rolls, solemnly. "And if the maister should be back, it's real possible I mayna be back. You'll just behave conformably, and put forrit Marget. If she wasna so frightened, she's no' a bad notion at a' of waiting at table. And if there's ony question where I am, or what's become of me – "

"Oh, Tammas, what will I say? It will be the second time in a week. He'll no' like it," cried Bauby, diverted from one trouble to another. The absence of her brother when the dinner was ready was almost as extraordinary as her master's conveyance away to unknown dangers by the functionaries of the law.

"If he's here to be angry, a' will be well," said Rolls, grimly; and then he handed her the key. "If there should be any question about me, when I'm no', here to answer for myself, you'll inform whoever it concerns that the kist is yours and everything in it, in proof of which you'll produce the key. That's no' to say but what you'll respect the bits of things in it, and hand me back possession when I come, soon or late," said Rolls. "You'll mind what I say to you, Bauby. It's yours in the one case, but no' in the other. You'll take possession if there is ony other claimant; but me being back, you'll respect my rights."

"I wuss I would ken what you meant first," said Bauby, gazing at him wistfully. Rolls had an air of satisfaction on his face for the first time: he was pleased to have puzzled her. His face relaxed almost into a smile as he said, "According to a' probabilities, you'll soon understand that."

With these words he set out from the hall-door, walking very deliberately, and crushing the pebbles under his feet at every step. He had taken his best silk umbrella, which, loosened from its habitual folds, and used as a stick, made a sort of flapping accompaniment to his progress, like a large bird walking by him. As he turned from the door the solemnity of his aspect returned. He walked slowly, thinking as he went – thinking so profoundly that he scarcely saw Peggy at the lodge, and passed her, taking no notice of her in the gravity of his preoccupation. She said afterwards that it was awfu' evident he had something on his mind. She told Jean Tamson, who was in the lodge at the moment – come for a crack, and talking of nothing else but this very subject, – "I wouldna wonder," she said, "but Mr Rolls kens more about it than any of us." This at least was what she informed the world she had said to her gossip when all was known.

It was four miles to Dunearn; but old Rolls was a steady, good walker, with no irregularity about him. Every step he took was just of the same length as the step before. Yard for yard he did his four

miles in the regulated time, neither shorter nor longer. When he arrived at the Town-house, there was a little flutter about the door as of people dispersing; but there had not been any number of people, and though the rumour of what had transpired had begun to blow about the place, there were not as yet many gazers. By-and-by, as he stood outside, his master came out, with one of the emissaries of the morning close by him, and Beaufort behind. John Erskine was pale; but there was a sort of smile on his face – a smile which had no pleasure in it, but some contempt, and that sort of outward looking to heaven and earth, with the head held high, and the nostrils somewhat dilated, which is so often the aspect of a man unjustly accused. He was making light of it to himself – persuading himself that it was nothing and meant nothing. He saw Rolls standing by, and waved his hand to him. "What! have you walked all this way," he said, "old Truepenny," – with something of the same levity of despair which dictated the same words to Hamlet, – "to see the last of me?"

"It's not come to that, sir, I hope," said Rolls, with a seriousness which was as solemn as if what John had said was real. The young man laughed.

"You will pack my portmanteau and send it after me: I suppose I may be allowed that?" he said. The officer who was in attendance bowed his head. The people about gathered round, staring at John with too much surprise to express any other emotion; and by-and-by the party drove off again, nobody apparently divining exactly what it all meant. There were a number of petty cases to be tried by the sheriff, who was in the Town-house, as it was called, and as many different interests as there were loungers about. Rolls went in with hesitating steps after his master had disappeared. The old man had come, in full expectation of the event which had happened; but fact is always different from anticipation. When he saw what he had only looked for, the effect upon him was something overwhelming. He stood staring and gaping in the little crowd which gradually drew together, realising only after it was over what had taken place before their eyes. "What's wrang with the young maister, Mr Rolls?" said one of the bystanders. "Let me be!" cried the old man, shaking himself free; and he went into the Town-house with tottering steps. He had intended taking certain bold and immediate steps, carrying out the project he had been framing in his mind; but his nerves were shaken when the moment came. The law terrified him. If his master, in all the strength and confidence of his youth, was thus peremptorily dealt with, what aggravations might not he, an old and humble individual – nothing but a servant – look for? He was cowed. He stole up to an attendant and made faltering inquiries. "What will they have settled about yon case?" he said. "About what case? – the sheep-lifting, or the unlawfu' wounding, or the robbery at Willyam Tamson's – " "Nane o' thae things – nane o' thae things," said old Rolls. "It's about young Mr Erskine of Dalrulzian." "Oh, ay, ay," said the attendant, shaking his head; "that's very serious. The circumstances a' point to some agent mair than accident – that's what the sherra says, and he canna see his way to discharging the panel." "The panel![1]– he's nae panel! – mind what you're saying," cried Rolls. "Well, maybe that's going owre fast. I would say the gentleman under suspicion. He maun just bide the result of a mair formal examination – that's a' I can tell ye; I have nae time to enter into particulars," the official said.

Rolls, who had meant such heroic things, turned away tremulously. He went out again, scarcely knowing where he was going, into the streets of Dunearn. There everybody looked at him with curious eyes. The town had at last become conscious of what had happened: from a public-house in the environs a stone had been thrown at John Erskine as he went past, and hootings had risen on his path. This roused the population fully, and now the streets were full of groups discussing the matter. Torrance, as has been said, was popular in his way, especially now in that warmth of pity and charity which follows a sudden and unexpected death; and John Erskine was comparatively unknown. The tide was strongly against him, as a semi-foreigner – a man who had come from "abroad." "He'll find here that gentle and simple must keep the laws alike," said one. "A man daurna ride roughshod over his fellows here."

[1] *Scotticè*, accused.

Old Rolls heard the growl of popular excitement, and it alarmed him still more. "If it was me they would tear me in bits," he said to himself. His alarm on this point, as much as his original intention, drove him in at Mr Monypenny's door, which was in his way. He was afraid of being recognised as the butler at Dalrulzian ("for everybody kens me," he said to himself, with mingled pride and panic), and he was anxious to consult the "man of business" who had Dalrulzian estate in his hands.

Mr Monypenny was out; and Rolls requested permission to sit down and wait. He had a long time of quiet to think over his plan again, and he did think it over, and recovered his courage. After a time Mrs Monypenny, hearing who it was, sent to request him to have some cold beef in the kitchen, an offer of which Rolls availed himself at once. "For what is the use of punishing yourself?" he said. "A man's more qualified for everything when he has eaten his dinner." He was very serious, and unlike his usual cheerfully communicative mood, in Mr Monypenny's kitchen. The maids did not know what had come over him. To have such a grand subject of discourse as his master's arrest, and yet to be so silent, struck them with astonishment; but they, too, remarked his perturbed countenance afterwards, and said to one another, "I told you there was mair in him than met the eye."

Meanwhile Miss Barbara and her young companion had been driving up and down in the pony-carriage in a state of great excitement. They had passed the Town-house half-a-dozen times, always looking for the reappearance of John; but he, as was to be expected, had come out and gone away in the interval between. Miss Barbara had maintained during the whole time a lively monologue, scarcely interrupted by her young companion. "I've heard what they daured to say," Miss Barbara cried; "as if one of my family would stoop to soil his fingers with any Tinto of them all! What were the Torrances but bonnet-lairds till old Torrance married the railway man's daughter? But I never thought they would have dared to do anything against an Erskine. Times are changed. (Go round by the Stone Bridge, Nora; it's an easier road for the pony.) What would my father have said if he had heard a descendant of his evened with one of that race? That's what your Radicalism comes to."

"But death is the same, whether it comes to a saint or – a bully; and life has to be protected," said Nora, fired with political ardour.

"Life – and death. They're grand words to use: a drunk man falling over a steep bank that it was the wonder of the whole country-side he had not gone over years and years before."

Nora did not say any more. She was not so warm a partisan as Miss Barbara's companion ought to have been. She drove along quietly, taking no further part in the talk, which the old lady maintained alone. "How can I go in to my peaceful house and eat my comfortable dinner, not knowing but my own flesh and blood may be shut up in a jail?" she said. Then she added quickly, "There's that lad, young Rintoul. I'm not fond of any of his family; but I suppose he's a gentleman. He'll go in and ask what has happened. Fast – to your right hand, Nora. Now draw up. He sees what I mean. Lord Rintoul," added Miss Barbara, "I have a favour to ask of you. You may have heard my nephew John Erskine's name bandied about these late days. He's been in the Town-house before the sheriff and the procurator-fiscal this hour and a half or more. It's not for me to ask the town-bodies about what has happened. Will you go and bring me word?"

Rintoul stood silent for a moment before he made any reply. Her voice seemed to have called him from painful reflections of his own, the chain of which he could not in a moment break. He gave her a half-bewildered look, then turned to Nora, who looked at him more gently, with sympathetic eyes. How haggard he looked, and worn! – he who had been so ruddy and manly, only too much flesh and blood, almost too little inclination to be moved by emotion or sentiment, – was all this because of the sudden death of his brother-in-law, a man for whom he cared nothing? Nora was extraordinarily impressed by Rintoul's changed appearance. Miss Barbara, preoccupied by her own anxieties, scarcely noticed him at all.

"In the Town-house with the sheriff? What does that mean?"

"I forgot you were English," said Miss Barbara with a touch of contempt. "It means some examination of witnesses anent the death of Pat Torrance, your brother-in-law. What my nephew should have to do with it, I cannot tell you. It's just that I would have you inquire."

"He can have nothing to do with it," said Rintoul; and then he stopped short, and the momentary animation died out of his face. He shivered as he stood in the sunshine, which was as warm as September ever is in Scotland. "It must be a mistake; we have heard nothing of this," he said. "I am sure Carry – would be averse to any fuss. It was such a thing for her that there was no coroner's inquest. I made sure we were all safe. You must be mistaken," he said.

"Lord Rintoul," said Nora, who was given to opposition, "though there is no coroner's inquest, there must be justice; and if they think Mr Erskine has anything to do with it – "

"He has nothing to do with it," said Rintoul, with petulant impatience. Miss Barbara stretched her hand over Nora to grasp his, but this gesture seemed to drive him back into himself. He withdrew a little from the side of the pony-carriage, and made a pretence of not seeing the old lady's outstretched hand. Miss Barbara was shocked, and gave him a curious look; but she was not prepared for disrespect, and did not expect it. She went on more eagerly than before —

"And here I am helpless," she said. "I cannot go in myself. I will not send Nora. Will you do my errand, Lord Rintoul? Bring me word, not here, but to my house. I am going home."

He gave a little bow of assent, and stood on the pavement looking after them as they drove away. He stood longer than was necessary for that, till they had disappeared round the corner of the High Street, till the children about – of whom there was always a large supply in Dunearn – began to gape at him with expectations of amusement. "Look at the man glowering frae him," these spectators cried, and a small pebble tumbled along the flags where he stood – a harmless experiment to see if there was any fun in him. He did not notice this, nor any other outside occurrence, but after a while got slowly under way again, as if the operation was difficult, and went on to the Town-house. When he got there, he went in reluctantly, with evident disinclination. The attendant who had talked to Rolls made way for him respectfully. The other people about opened the doors and took off their hats to the young potentate. A small case which was going on at the time was even suspended while the sheriff, not nearly so great a man, answered his lordship's questions in his own person. "Yes, there has been an examination," the sheriff said. "The circumstances are very suspicious. I have thought it best to order that young Erskine should be detained till there can be a more complete investigation. That, it is to be hoped, will clear the matter up; but if not – "

Lord Rintoul's fair and ruddy countenance was dark with anxiety and pain. "You cannot mean," he said, "that you believe Erskine – "

"I believe nothing but what there is evidence for," the sheriff said. "We are not men of theories, Lord Rintoul. Experience shows every day that men do the most unlikely things. I hear he's shown an *animus*, – and there are two or three points very strange. I saw it my duty to give orders that he should be detained – "

"You have sent him to prison, do you mean?" There was a sharp tone as of personal anguish in Rintoul's voice. "But you'll admit him to bail? My father, I, Millefleurs, any gentleman in the country – "

"Will be his bail? I doubt if it's a bailable offence: but if Lord Lindores were willing to do that, no doubt it would have a good effect. However, nothing can be done before the investigation," said the sheriff; "a day or two will do the young man no harm."

This was all he could elicit. The sheriff was a man who had a great idea of his office, and it was not often that he had a case so interesting and important. The attendants thought Lord Rintoul had been drinking, as he stumbled out. He went along the quiet street with an uncertain step, now and then taking off his hat that the air might refresh him. He, too, stopped at Mr Monypenny's door, as Rolls had done a very short time before. It was afternoon now, and the shadows were lengthening as he reached Miss Barbara's house. What a sunny glimpse there was from door to door, across the

little hall to the garden, where the brightness of the autumn flowers made a flush of colour! Rintoul saw a figure against the light which was not Miss Barbara's. There was in him a forlorn desire for consolation. "Don't tell Miss Barbara I am here just yet," he said hastily to the maid, and opened the glass-door, beyond which Nora stood among all the geraniums and mignonette. There was no agitation about her. She was not sufficiently interested in John Erskine to be deeply troubled by the idea of annoyance to him as his old aunt was, or alarmed by a passing shadow upon his name. She was serene and calm in this quiet world of flowers and greenness where no trouble was. She welcomed him with a smile. "Miss Barbara is very anxious," she said. "She has gone up-stairs to rest, but I am to let her know when you come."

"Wait a little," he said, glad of the interval; "*you* are not anxious."

"Not so much. Of course I am interested in my friends' friends – but I don't know very much of Mr Erskine," said Nora, unable to divest herself altogether of the imaginative offence that lay between John and her. "And it cannot do him much harm, can it? It will only be disagreeable – till the facts are known. Young men," she said, with a smile, "have a right to have something unpleasant happen to them now and then; they have so much the best of it in other ways."

"Do you think so," he said, with a seriousness which put her levity to shame. "To be sent to prison – to have a stigma put upon you – perhaps to be tried for your life! – that is rather worse than mere unpleasantness."

Nora was greatly impressed, not only by the gravity of what he said, but the air with which he said it. "It surely cannot be so bad as that: and he – is innocent, Lord Rintoul?"

"I have no doubt of it," cried Rintoul, eagerly, – "no doubt of it! If there is any one to blame, it is some one – whom most likely nobody suspects. What would you think of the man who had done it, and yet said nothing, but let John Erskine suffer for his fault?"

"I do not believe," said Nora, like Desdemona, "that there could be any such man. It is impossible. You think too badly of human nature. How can you suppose another would do what you know you would not do yourself? Oh no, no, never! Lord Rintoul – " She paused after this little outburst, and drawing a step nearer to him, asked in a low and horror-stricken tone – "Do you really think that poor Mr Torrance was – murdered?"

"No, no!" he cried almost violently – "no, no!" He stopped short, with a dryness in his throat, as if he could not speak; then resumed, in a quieter tone – "But I think in all likelihood there was, as people imagine, a quarrel, a scuffle – and that somebody – took hold of the mare's bridle – "

"Some tramp, no doubt," said Nora, sympathetically, much affected by his emotion, "who perhaps doesn't even know – "

"That is it," said Rintoul, eagerly – "who perhaps never dreamt at the moment. And even if he knows now, such a man might think, as you did, that it would come to nothing with Erskine. I believe it will come to nothing – a day, or two days, in prison."

"But if it should turn out more serious," said Nora, "even a tramp – would give himself up, surely – would never let an innocent man suffer?"

"We must hope so, at least," said Lord Rintoul. His countenance had never relaxed all this time. It was almost solemn, set, and rigid – the muscles about his mouth unmoving. "There should not be any question about right and wrong, I know," he said, "but such a man might say to himself – he might think – Young Erskine is a gentleman, and I'm only a common fellow – they will treat him better than they would treat me. He might say to himself – "

"I cannot believe it," cried Nora. "In such a case there could be no question of what any one would do. It is like A B C. What! let another man suffer for something you have done! Oh no, no – even in the nursery one knows better than that!"

"I don't think," said Rintoul, "that you ever can understand all the excuses a man will make for himself till you've been in the same position. Things look so different when you've done it – from what they do when some one else has done it. There are so many things to be taken into consideration.

Punishment is not the same to all; it might ruin one, and not do much harm to another. A man might feel justified, or at least there would be excuses for him, if he let another bear the punishment which would not hurt *him* much, but would be destructive to himself. Of course it would be his business to make it up somehow."

"Lord Rintoul, this is dreadful doctrine!" said Nora; "if it were carried out, then you might do any wickedness you wished, and hire somebody to be punished instead of you." She laughed half nervously, shaking off the graver turn the conversation had taken. "But this is absurd," she said; "of course you don't mean that. I think I know what you mean; – but I must not delay longer, I must tell Miss Barbara."

"Don't disturb her now," said Rintoul, eagerly. "Besides, I really have not time. If you would say that it is unfortunately true – that Erskine is – detained till there can be a full investigation. I am hurrying off to get bail for him, for of course they must accept bail – and it will only be for a few days. The investigation – at which we shall all be examined," he said, with a nervous tremor, – "will clear up everything, I hope."

"I hope so, with all my heart," said Nora, waving her hand to him as he hurried away. Rintoul had reached the garden door on his way out, when he suddenly paused, and came back to her, and took that hand, holding it for a moment between his own.

"All this is very hard upon me," he said, incoherently; "it gives me a great deal of misery. Feel for me – stand by me. Will you, Nora? I don't care for the rest, if you – "

And he wrung her hand almost violently, dropped it, and hurried away. The girl stood looking after him with wonder and dismay, and yet with a gush of a different kind of feeling, which filled her heart with a confusing warmth. "A great deal of misery!" Was it the tenderness of his heart for his sister, for the unfortunate man who had been summoned out of the world so abruptly – though he did not love him – and for his friend who was unjustly accused, which made Rintoul say this? But anyhow, Nora was not capable of resisting such an appeal. Poor Rintoul: though he did not show it to any one, how tender he was, how full of sympathy! John Erskine (against whom she could not help entertaining a little grudge) died out of her mind altogether. She was so much more sorry for the other, who felt it so deeply though it was not his concern.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Beaufort drove home on that eventful afternoon by himself. He had left his friend in the county jail, in a state in which surprise was still perhaps the predominant feeling. John had said little on the way, except to point out, with something which perhaps bore the character of bravado, the new features of the landscape beyond Dunearn. "It is an opportunity for you to see a little more of the country," he said, with a smile. Something of the same indignant amusement which had been his first apparent sensation on hearing the sheriff's decision was still in his manner now. He held his head high and a little thrown back, his nostrils were dilated, his eyes more widely open and alert than usual, and a smile in which there was a little scorn was upon his face. Those who did not know John or human nature might have thought him unusually triumphant, excited by some occurrence which enhanced instead of humiliating his pride. "I cannot tell you how surprised I am to see you here, Mr Erskine," said the governor of the jail with consternation. "You cannot be more surprised than I am," said John. He gave his orders about the things he wanted in the same tone, taking no notice of the anxious suggestion that it would only be for a few days. He was too deeply offended with fate to show it. He only smiled and said, "The first step is so extraordinary that I prefer not to anticipate the next." "But they must allow you bail," said Beaufort; "that must be my first care." John laughed. He would not condescend to be anxious. "Or hang me," he said; "the one just as sensible as the other." Beaufort drove away with the strangest feelings, guiding his friend's horse along the road with which he was so little acquainted, but from which presently he saw the great house of Tinto on one side, and on the other the towers of Lindores appearing from among the trees. How hard it was to keep his thoughts to John, with these exciting objects on either side of him! This country road, which all its length kept him in sight of the big castellated front of Tinto, with its flag half-mast high – the house in which she was who had been his love and promised bride – seemed to Beaufort to have become the very thread of his fate. That Carry should be there within his reach, that she should be free and mistress of herself, that there should be even a certain link of connection which brought him naturally once more within the circle of her immediate surroundings, was so wonderful that everything else seemed of less importance. He could not disengage his thoughts from this. He was not a man in whose mind generosity was the first or even a primary quality, and it is so difficult to think first of another when our own affairs are at an exciting stage. The only step which he could think of for John's advantage confused him still more, for it was the first direct step possible to put him once more in contact with Carry. He turned up the avenue of Lindores with a thrill of sensation which penetrated his whole being. He was relieved indeed to know that the ladies were not there – that he would not at least be exposed to their scrutiny, and to the self-betrayal that could scarcely fail to follow; but the very sight and name of the house was enough to move him almost beyond his errand. The last rays of the sunset had gone out, and the autumn evening began to darken by the time he got there. He went on like a man in a dream, feeling the very air about him tremulous with his fate, although he made an attempt to think of John first. How could he think of anything but of Carry, who was free? or recollect anything except that the mistress of this house had allowed him to call her mother; and that even its lord, before he was its lord, had not refused to permit the suggestion of a filial relationship? There was a carriage already standing before the door when he drove up, but his mind was by this time too much excited to be moved by any outside circumstance. But when he stepped into the hall upon his mission, and, following the servant to the presence of Lord Lindores, suddenly found himself face to face with the two ladies going out, Beaufort's agitation was extreme. They were returning to Tinto, after a day's expedition in search of those "things" which seem always necessary in every domestic crisis. Lady Lindores recognised him with a start and cry of amazement. "Mr Beaufort! you here!" she cried, unable to contain herself. She added, "at such a time!" in a lower tone, with the self-betrayal to which impulsive persons are always liable, and with so much indignation mingled with

her astonishment, that a man in full possession of his faculties might have drawn from it the most favourable auguries. But Beaufort, to do him justice, was not cool enough for this. He said hurriedly, "I came on Thursday – I knew nothing. I came – because it was impossible to help it." Edith had come close up behind her mother, and grasped her arm, half in support, half in reproof. "You knew Mr Beaufort was coming, mamma; why should you be surprised?" she said, with a certain disdain in the tone with which she named him. Edith was unreasonable, like all the rest. She would have had him throw away everything rather than come here to interfere with Carry's comfort, notwithstanding that her own father had invited him to come, and though it had been explained to her that all his prospects depended upon the favour of the Duke, Lord Millefleurs's gracious papa. Her idea was, that a man should have thrown away all that, rather than put himself in a false position, or expose a woman whom he had once loved to embarrassment and pain. They were all unreasonable together, but each in his or her characteristic way. After these first utterances of agitation, however, they all stopped short and looked at each other in the waning light, and awoke to a recollection of the ordinary conventionalities which in such circumstances are so great a relief to everybody concerned.

"We must not detain you, Mr Beaufort," Lady Lindores said; "you were going to my husband – or Lord Millefleurs – who is still here."

The last four words were said with a certain significance, as if intended for a hint, – persuade him, they seemed to say, that this is not a time to remain here. "It is getting late, mother," said Edith, with a touch of impatience.

"One moment, Lady Lindores. I must tell you why I have come: not for myself – to ask help for Erskine, whom I have just left in custody, charged with having occasioned somehow – I can't tell you how – the death of – the late accident – your son-in-law," Beaufort stammered out.

The next moment he seemed to be surrounded by them, by their cries of dismay, by their anxious questions. A sharp keen pang of offence was the first feeling in Beaufort's mind, – that John should be so much more interesting to them than he was! It gave him a shock even in the excitement of the moment.

"This was what he meant" – he could at last hear Edith distinctly after the momentary babel of mutual exclamations – "this was what he meant: that we might hear something, which he might not be able to explain, but that we were to believe in him – you and I, mamma."

"Of course we believe in him," cried Lady Lindores; "but something else must be done, something more. Come this way, Mr Beaufort; Lord Lindores is here."

She called him Mr Beaufort without any hesitation now – not pausing, as she had done before, with the more familiar name on her lips. It was John who was in the foreground now – John who, perhaps, for anything they knew, had caused the event which had put them in mourning. With a whimsical mortification and envy, Beaufort exaggerated in his own mind the distress caused by this event. For the moment he looked upon it as a matter of real loss and pain to this unthinking family who showed such interest in the person who perhaps – But the sentiment did not go so far as to be put into words; it resolved itself into a half-indignant wonder at the interest taken in John, and sense of injured superiority on his own account – he, of whom no man could say that he had been instrumental in causing the death even of a dog.

Lady Lindores led the way hastily into the library, where three figures were visible against the dim light in the window as the others came in. Lord Lindores, seated in his chair; little Millefleurs, leaning against the window, half turned towards the landscape; and in front of the light, with his back to it, Rintoul, who was speaking. "With you as bail," he was saying, "he may be set free to-night. Don't let him be a night in that place."

"Are you speaking of John Erskine, Robin, my dear boy? Oh, not a night, not an hour! Don't lose any time. It is too dreadful, too preposterous. Your father will go directly. Take the carriage, which is at the door. If we are a little late, what does it matter?" said Lady Lindores, coming forward, another shadow in the dim light. Millefleurs turned half round, but did not come away from the

window on which he was leaning. He was somewhat surprised too, very curious, perhaps a trifle indignant, to see all this fuss made about Erskine. He drew up his plump little person, altogether indifferent to the pronounced manifestation of all its curves against the light, and looked beyond Lady Lindores to Edith, – Edith, who hurried after her mother, swift and silent, as if they were one being, moved by the same unnecessary excitement. Millefleurs had not been in a comfortable state of mind during these last days. The delay irritated him; though Lord Lindores assured him that all was well, he could not feel that all was well. Why should not Edith see him, and give him his answer? She was not so overwhelmed with grief for that brute. What did it mean? And now, though she could not see him on such urgent cause, she was able to interest herself in this eager way on behalf of John Erskine! Millefleurs was very tolerant, and when the circumstances demanded it, could be magnanimous, but he thought he had reason of offence here.

There was a momentary pause – enough to show that Lord Lindores did not share the feeling so warmly expressed. "I am surprised that you should all be so inconsiderate," he said; "you, at least, Rintoul, who generally show more understanding. I have understood that Erskine had laid himself under suspicion. Can you imagine that I, so near a connection of poor Torrance, am the right person to interfere on behalf perhaps of his – murd – that is to say, of the cause – of the instrument – "

"It is impossible," cried Edith, with such decision that her soft voice seemed hard – "impossible! Can any one suppose for a moment – "

"Be silent, Edith," cried her father.

"Why should she be silent?" said Lady Lindores. "Robert, think what you are saying. We have all known John Erskine for years. He is as incapable as I am – as unlikely as any one of us here. Because you are so near a connection, is not that the very reason why you should interfere? For God's sake, think of that poor boy in prison – in prison! and lose no time."

"I will do it, mother," said Rintoul.

"Oh, God bless you, my boy! I knew you were always right at heart."

"Rintoul," said his father, "enthusiasm of this sort is new in you. Let us take a little common-sense into the question. In the first place, nothing can be done to-night – that is evident. Then consider a moment: what does 'in prison' mean? In the governor's comfortable rooms, where he will be as well off as at home; and probably – for he is not without sense – will be taking the most reasonable view of the matter. He will know perfectly well that if he deserves it he will find friends; in short, that we are all his friends, and that everybody will be too glad to assist him – as soon as he has cleared himself – "

"As soon as he wants it no longer," cried Lady Lindores.

"My dear, you are always violent; you are always a partisan," said her husband, drawing back his chair a little, with the air of having ended the discussion; and there was a pause – one of those breathless pauses of helplessness, yet rebellion, which make sick the hearts of women. Lady Lindores clasped her hands together with a despairing movement. "This is the curse of our life," she cried. "I can do nothing; I cannot go against your father, Edith, and yet I am neither a fool nor a child. God help us women! we have to stand by, whatever wrong is done, and submit – submit. That is all that is left for us to do – "

"Submit!" Edith said. She was young and strong, and had not learned her lesson. It galled her beyond endurance. She stood and looked round her, seeing the whiteness of the faces, but little else in the evening gloom. Was it true that there was nothing – nothing in her power? In poetry, a girl can throw herself on her knees, can weep and plead – but only weep and plead; and she, who had not been trained to that, who was conscious of her individuality, her independent mind and judgment in every nerve – heaven above! was she as helpless still? She stood breathless for a moment, with wondering eyes fixed on the darkness, with a gasp of proud resistance to fate. Submit to injustice, to cruel heartlessness of those who could aid, to still more cruel helplessness – impotence, on her own part? She stood for a moment gazing at the blank wall that seemed to rise before her, as the poor, the helpless have to do, – as women have to do in all circumstances. It was her first experience in this

kind. She had been proud to know that she was not as Carry, that no tyranny could crush her spirit: but this was different. She had not anticipated such a trial as this. There came from her bosom one sob of supreme pain which she could not keep in. Not for John only, whom she could not help in his moment of need, but for herself also – to feel herself impotent, helpless, powerless as a child.

Millefleurs came forward from the window hurriedly. Perhaps being so much a man of his time it was he who understood that gasp of suffering best. He said, "Lady Edith, if I can help – " quickly, on the impulse of the moment; then, thorough little gentleman as he was, checked himself. "Lady Lindores, though I am a stranger, yet my name is good enough. Tell me what to do and I will do it. Perhaps it is better that Lord Lindores should not commit himself. But I am free, don't you know," he said, with something of the easy little chirrup of more ordinary times. Why was it that, at such a moment, Edith, of all others, in her personal despair, should burst out into that strange little laugh? She grasped her mother's arm with both hands in her excitement. Here was a tragic irony and ridicule penetrating the misery of the crisis like a sharp arrow which pricked the girl to the very heart.

This sympathiser immediately changed the face of affairs. Lord Lindores, indeed, continued to hold himself apart, pushing back his chair once more; but even to Lord Lindores, Millefleurs made a difference. He said no more about enthusiasm or common-sense, but listened, not without an occasional word of direction. They clustered together like a band of shadows against the great window, which was full of the paleness of the night. Beaufort, who was the person most acquainted with all the circumstances, recovered his sense of personal importance as he told his story. But after all, it was not as the narrator of John Erskine's story that he cared to gain importance in the eyes of Carry's family, any more than it was as bail for John Erskine that Lord Millefleurs desired to make himself agreeable to the ladies at Lindores. Both of the strangers, thus caught in the net of difficulties and dangers which surrounded their old comrade, resented it more or less; but what could they do? Edith took no further part in the consultation. She retired behind her mother, whose arm she continued to hold firm and fast in both her hands. When she was moved by the talk going on at her side she grasped that arm tightly, which was her only sign of emotion, but for the rest retired into the darkness where no one could see, and into herself, a still more effectual retirement. Lady Lindores felt that her daughter's two hands clasping her were like a sort of anchor which Edith had thrown out in her shipwreck to grasp at some certainty. She bore the pressure with a half smile and sigh. She too had felt the shipwreck with keen passion, still more serious than that of Edith: but she had no one to anchor to. She felt this, half with a grateful sense of what she herself was still good for; but still more, perhaps, with that other personal sense which comes to most – that with all the relationships of life still round her, mother and wife, she, for all solace and support, was like most of us virtually alone.

CHAPTER XXXV

"Your master is just a young fool. Why, in the name of a' that's reasonable," cried Mr Monypenny, "did he not send for me?"

"Sir," said Rolls, "you're too sensible a man not to know that the last thing a lad is likely to do is what's reasonable, especially when he's in that flurry, and just furious at being blamed."

Mr Monypenny was walking up and down his business room with much haste and excitement. His house was built on the side of a slope, so that the room, which was level with the road on one side, was elevated on the upper floor at the other, and consequently had the advantage of a view bounded, as was general, by "that eternal Tinto," as he was in the habit of calling it. The good man, greatly disturbed by what he heard, walked to his window and stared out as Rolls spoke. And he shook his fist at the distant object of so many troubles. "Him and his big house and his ill ways – they've been the trouble of the country-side those fifteen years and more," cried the excited "man of business"; "and now we're not done with him, even when he's dead."

"Far from done with him," said Rolls, shaking his head. He was seated on the edge of a chair with his hat in his lap and a countenance of dismay. "If I might make so bold as to ask," he said, "what would ye say, sir, would be done if the worst came to the worst? I'm no' saying to Mr Erskine indiveedually," added Rolls – "for it's my belief he's had nothing ado with it – but granting that it's some person and no mere accident – "

"How can I tell – or any man?" said Mr Monypenny. "It depends entirely on the nature of the act. It's all supposition, so far as I can see. To pitch Pat Torrance over the Scaur, him and his big horse, with murderous intent, is more than John Erskine could have done, or any man I know. And there was no quarrel or motive. Culpable homicide – "

"That'll be what the English gentleman called manslaughter."

"Manslaughter is a wide word. It would all depend on the circumstances. A year; maybe six months only – If it were to turn out so – which I do not for a moment believe – " said Mr Monypenny, fixing his eyes upon Rolls with a determination which betrayed internal feebleness of belief.

"Nor me, sir – nor me!" cried Rolls, with the same look. They were like two conspirators regarding each other with the consciousness of the plot, which, even between themselves, each eyeing the other, they were determined to deny.

"But if by any evil chance it were to turn out so – I would advise a plain statement," said Mr Monypenny – "just a plain statement, concealing nothing. That should have been done at the moment: help should have been sought at the moment; there's the error. A misadventure like that might happen to any man. We might any of us be the means of such an accident: but panic is just the worst policy. Panic looks like guilt. If he's been so far left to himself as to take fright – to see that big man on his big horse thunderin' over the Scaur would be enough to make any man lose his head," the agent added, with a sort of apology in his tone.

"If you could think of the young master as in that poseetion," said Rolls.

"Which is just impossible," Mr Monypenny said, and then there was a little pause. "The wisest thing," he went on, "would be, just as I say, a plain statement. Such and such a thing happened. I lost my head. I thought there was nothing to be done. I was foolish enough to shrink from the name of it, or from the coolness it would make between me and my friends. Ay, very likely that might be the cause – the coolness it would make between him and the family at Lindores – "

"You're meaning always if there was onything in it at a'?"

"That is what I'm meaning. I will go and see him at once," Mr Monypenny said, "and that is the advice I will give. A plain story whatever it may be – just the facts; neither extenuate nor set down aught in malice. And as for you, Rolls, that seem to be mixed up in it yourself – "

"Ay, sir; I'm mixed up in it," said Rolls, turning upon him an inquiring yet half-defiant glance.

"It was you that found the body first. It was you that met your master at the gate. You're the most important witness, so far as I can see. Lord bless us, man!" said Mr Monypenny, forgetting precaution, "had you not the judgment, when you saw the lad had been in a tuilzie, to get him out of other folk's sight, and keep it to yourself?"

"There was John Tamson as well as me," said Rolls, very gravely; and then he added, "but ye canna see yet, Mr Monypenny, how it may a' turn."

"I see plenty," said the man of business, impatiently; and then he added, "the best thing you can do is to find out all you can about the ground, and other details. It was always unsafe; and there had been a great deal of rain. Very likely it was worse than ordinary that day. And call to mind any circumstances that might tell on our side. Ye had better come to me and make me acquainted with all your observations. Neglect nothing. The very way the beast was lying, if ye can rightly remember, might be a help. You're not without sense, Rolls. I've always had a high opinion of your sense. Now here's a chance for you to prove it – And come back to me, and we'll judge how the evidence tends. There's no need," he said, standing at the window once more with his back to his pupil, "to bring out any points that might turn – the other way."

"I'm not just such a fool as – some folk think," said Rolls; "and yet," he added, in an undertone, "for a' that, you canna see, Mr Monypenny, how it may all turn – "

"Don't haver, Rolls," said the agent, turning upon him angrily; "or speak out what you mean. There is no man can say how a thing will turn but he that has perfect knowledge of all the circumstances – which is not my case."

"That's what I was saying, sir," said Rolls, with a tranquil assumption which roused Mr Monypenny's temper; but the old man was so solemn in his air of superior knowledge, so full of sorrowful decision and despondency, that anger seemed out of place. The other grew alarmed as he looked at him.

"For God's sake, man," he cried, "if there's anything behind that I don't know, tell it! let me hear the worst. We must know the worst, if it's to make the best of it. Hide nothing from me."

"I give ye my word, sir, I'll hide nothing – when the time comes," said Rolls, with a sigh; "but I canna just unburden my bozume at this moment. There's mair thought needful and mair planning. And there's one thing I would like to make sure of, Mr Monypenny. If I'm put to expenses, or otherwise laid open to risk and ootlay – there's no doubt but it would be made up to me? And if, as might happen, anything serious was to befall – without doubt the young maister would think himself bound to take good care o' Bauby? She's my sister, maybe you'll mind: an aixcellent housekeeper and a good woman, though maybe I should leave her praises to ither folk. You see he hasna been brought up in the midst o' his ain folk, so to speak, or I would have little doubt."

"I cannot conceive what you mean, Rolls. Of course I know Bauby and her cookery both; but what risk you should run, or what she can have to do with it! Your expenses of course," said the agent, with a contemptuous wave of his hand, "you may be sure enough of. But you must have done pretty well in the service of the Dalrulzian family, Rolls. I'm surprised that you should think of this at such a moment – "

"That's just what I expectit, sir," said Rolls; "but maybe I ken my ain affairs best, having no man of business. And about Bauby, she's just what I care for most. I wouldna have her vexed or distresst for siller, or put out of her ordinar. The maister he's but a young man, and no' attached to us as he would have been had he been brought up at hame. It's a great drawback to a young lad, Mr Monypenny" – Rolls broke off his personal argument to say sententiously – "not to be brought up at hame."

"Because he does not get the chance of becoming attached to his servants?" said Mr Monypenny, with an impatient laugh. "Perhaps it may be so, but this is a curious moment to moralise on the subject."

"No' so curious as you think, sir; but I will not weary you," said Rolls, with some dignity. "When I was saying ootlay, I meant mair than just a sixpence here or there. But Bauby's the grand

question. I'm in a strange kind of a poseetion, and the one thing I'm clear in is my duty to her. She's been a rael guid sister to me; aye made me comfortable, studiet my ways, took an interest in all my bits o' fykes. I would ill like either scorn or trouble to come to Bauby. She's awfu' soft-hearted," said the old butler, solemnly gazing into vacancy with a reddening of his eyes. Something of that most moving of all sentiments, self-pity, was in his tone. He foresaw Bauby's apron at her eyes for him, and in her grief over her brother, his own heart was profoundly moved. "There will be some things that nobody can save her from: but for all that concerns this world, if I could be sure that nothing would happen to Bauby – "

"Well, Rolls, you're past my comprehension," said Mr Monypenny; "but so far as taking care of Bauby in case anything happens to you – though what should happen to you I have yet to learn."

"That is just so," said Rolls, getting up slowly. There was about him altogether a great solemnity, like a man at a funeral, Mr Monypenny said afterwards. "I cannot expect you to know, sir – that's atween me and my Maker. I'm no' going back to Dalrulzian. I cannot have my mind disturbed at this awfu' moment, as ye say, with weemen and their ways. If ye see the English gentleman, ye'll maybe explain. Marget has a very guid notion o' waitin'; she can do all that's necessary; and for me, I've ither work in hand."

"You must not look at everything in so gloomy a spirit, Rolls," said Mr Monypenny, holding out his hand. He was not in the habit of shaking hands with the butler, but there are occasions when rules are involuntarily broken through.

"No' a gloomy spirit, sir, but awfu' serious," said Rolls. "You'll tell the young maister no' to be down-hearted, but at the same time no' to be that prood. Help may come when it's little looked for. I'm no' a man of mony words, but I've been, as you say, sir, attached to the family all my days, and I have just a feeling for them more than common. The present gentleman's mother – her that married the English minister – was no' just what suited the house. Dalrulzian was nothing to her; and that's what I compleen o', that the young man was never brought up at hame, to have confidence in his ain folk. It would have been greatly for his advantage, sir," continued Rolls, "if he had but had the discernment to see that our bonnie Miss Nora was just the person; – but I mustna think now of making conditions," he said, hurriedly – "we'll leave that to his good sense. Mony thanks to you, sir, for hearing me out, and shaking my hand as ye've done; though there's maybe things I have said that are a wee hard to understand."

"Ay, Rolls," said Mr Monypenny, laughing, "you're just like the other prophets; a great deal of what you've said is Greek and Hebrew to me."

"No doubt, no doubt," said Rolls, shaking his head; there was no smile in him, not a line in his countenance that marked even incipient humour. Whatever he meant it was deadly earnest to Rolls. Mr Monypenny stood and watched him go out, with a laugh gurgling low down in his throat. "He was always a conceited body," he said to himself. But his inclination to laughter subsided as his visitor disappeared. It was no moment for laughing. And when Rolls was gone, the temptation to speculate on his words, and put meaning into them, subsided also, and Mr Monypenny gave himself up with great seriousness to consider the position. He ordered his little country carriage – something of the phaeton order, but not elegant enough for classification – and drove away as quickly as his comfortable cob would consent to go, to where John was. Such a thing had not happened to any person of importance in the county since he could remember. Debt, indeed – debt was common enough, and plenty of trouble always, about money, Mr Monypenny said to himself, shaking his head, as he went along. There had been borrowings and hypothecations of all sorts enough to make a financier's hair stand on end; but crime never! Not that men were better here than in other quarters; but among the gentry that had never happened. The good man ran on, in a rambling inaudible soliloquy, or rather colloquy with himself, as he drove on, asking how it was, after all, that incidents of the kind were so rare among the gentry. Was the breed better? He shook his head, remembering himself of various details which interfered with so easy a solution. Or was it that things were more easily hushed up? or that superior

education enforced a greater respect for the world's opinion, and made offences of this sort almost impossible? It was a strange thing (he thought) when you came to think of it. A fellow, now, like the late Tinto would have been in every kind of scrape had he been a poor man; but somehow, being a rich one, he had kept out of the hands of the law. Such a thing never happened from year's end to year's end. And to think now that it was not one of our ordinary Scots lairds, but the pink of education and good breeding, from England and abroad! This gave a momentary theoretical satisfaction to his musings by the way. But immediately after, he thought with self-reproach that it was young Erskine of whom he was permitting himself such criticism: young Dalrulzian, poor lad! all the more to be pitied that he had been brought up, as Rolls said, away from home, and with no father to look after him. The cob was used to take his own way along those roads which he knew so well, but at this point Mr Monypenny touched him with the indignity of a whip, and hurried along. He met Beaufort returning, driving, with a little hesitation at the corner of the road, John's dogcart homeward; and Mr Monypenny thought he recognised the dogcart, but he did not stop to say anything to the stranger, who naturally knew nothing of him. Nor was his interview with John at all satisfactory when he came to his journey's end. The young man received his man of business with that air of levity which, mixed with indignation, had been his prevailing mood since his arrest. He laughed when he said, "This is a curious place to receive you in," and for some time he would scarcely give any heed to the anxious questions and suggestions of Mr Monypenny. At length, however, this veil was thrown off, and John permitted the family friend, of whose faithfulness he could have no doubt, to see the depth of wounded feeling that lay below. "Of course it can be nothing to me," he said, still holding his head high. "They cannot prove a falsehood, however they may wish it; but to think that of all these men with whom I have eaten and drunk, who have professed to welcome me for my father's sake – to think that not one of them would step in to stand by a fellow, or give him the least support – "

"When you reflect that even I knew nothing about it," said Mr Monypenny – "not a word – till old Rolls came – "

"Did you hear none of the talk?" said John. "I did not hear it, indeed, but I have felt it in the air. I knew there was something. Everybody looked at me suspiciously; the very tone of their voice was changed – my own servants – "

"Your servants are very anxious about you, Mr Erskine, if I may judge from old Rolls. I have seldom seen a man so overcome; and if you will reflect that your other friends throughout the county can have heard nothing, any more than myself – "

"Then you did not hear the talk?" said John, somewhat eagerly. Mr Monypenny's countenance fell.

"I paid no attention to it. There's some story for ever going on in the country-side. Wise men just shut their ears," he said.

"Wise men are one thing and friends another," said John. "Had I no one who could have told me, at least, on how small a thread my reputation hung? I might have gone away," he said, with some vehemence, "at the height of it. If business, or even pleasure, had called me, no doubt I should, without a notion of any consequences. When I think of that I shiver. Supposing I had gone away?"

"In that case," said Mr Monypenny, clearing his throat; but he never got any further. This alarm affected him greatly. He began to believe that his client might be innocent altogether – an idea which, notwithstanding all the disclaimers which he and Rolls had exchanged, had not crossed his mind before; but when he heard John's story, his faith was shaken. He listened to it with the deepest interest, waiting for the moment when the confession would be made. But when it ended, without any end, so to speak, and John finally described Torrance as riding up towards the house, while he himself went down, Mr Monypenny's countenance fell. He was disappointed. The tale was such as he expected, with this important difference – it wanted a conclusion. The listener gave a gasp of interest when the crisis arrived, but his interest flagged at once when it was over, and nothing had happened. "And then?" he said, breathlessly. And then? – but there was no *then*. John gazed at him wondering, not

perceiving the failure of the story. "That is all," he said. Mr Monypenny grew almost angry as he sat gazing at him across the table.

"I have just been telling Rolls," he said, "that the best policy in such a case is just downright honest truth. To get into a panic and keep back anything is the greatest mistake. There is no need for any panic. You will be in the hands of those that take a great interest in you, Mr John – begging your pardon for using that name."

"You do not seem satisfied with what I have told you," John said.

"Oh, *me*! it's little consequence what I think; there's plenty to be thought upon before me. I would make no bones about it. In most things the real truth is the best, but most especially when you're under an accusation. I'm for no half measures, if you will let me say so."

"I will let you say whatever you please – so long as you understand what I am saying. I have told you everything. Do I look like a man in a panic?" said John.

"Panic has many meanings. I make no doubt you are a brave man, and ready to face fire and sword if there was any need. But this is different. If you please, we'll not fail to understand each other for want of plain speaking. Mr Erskine, I make no doubt that's all as true as gospel; but there's more to come. That's just a part of the story, not the whole."

"I don't mean to be offended by anything you say," said John, cheerfully. "I feel that it means kindness. There is nothing more to come. It is not a part, but the whole. It is the truth, and everything I know."

Mr Monypenny did not look up; he was drumming his foot softly against the table, and hanging his head with a despondent air as he listened. He did not stop the one nor raise the other, but went on working his under lip, which projected slightly. There is no such tacit evidence of dissatisfaction or unbelief. Some little sign invariably breaks the stillness of attention when the teller of a tale comes to its end, if his story has been believed. There is, if no words, some stir, however slight – movement of one kind or another, if only the change of an attitude. But Mr Monypenny did not pay this usual tribute when John's voice stopped. It was a stronger protest than if he had said, "I don't believe you," in ordinary words.

"I understand," said John, after a pause of a full minute, which seemed to him an hour. He laughed with something between despair and defiance. "Your mode of communication is very unmistakable, Mr Monypenny. It is Scotch, I suppose. One has always heard of Scotch caution and cannyness." If he had not been very bitter and sore at heart he would not have snatched at this aimless weapon of offence.

"Mr Erskine," said the agent, "a sneer is always easy. Gibes break no bones, but neither have they any healing in them. You may say what you like to me, but an argument like that will do you terrible little good with them that will have to judge at the end. I am giving no opinion myself. On my own account I will speak frankly. I would rather not have heard this story – unless I was to hear – "

"What?" cried John, in the heat of personal offence.

"More," said Mr Monypenny, regretfully – "more; just another dozen words would have been enough; but if there is no more to say – "

"I am not a man to make protestations of truth. There is no more to say, Mr Monypenny."

"Well-a-well," said the agent gloomily, shaking his head; "we must take just what is given – we must try to make the best of it. And you think there's nothing can be *proved* against you?" he said, with a slight emphasis. It required all John's self-command to keep his temper. He had to remind himself forcibly of the true and steady and long-tried kindness with which this doubter had stood by him, and cared for his interests all his life – a wise steward, a just guardian. These thoughts kept unseemly expressions from his lips, but he was not the less sore at heart. Even after the first blow of the criminal examination and his detention in prison, it had all seemed to him so simple. What could be necessary but to tell his story with sufficient distinctness (in which he thought he had failed before the sheriff)? Surely truth and falsehood were distinguishable at a glance, especially by those

who are accustomed to discriminate between them. But the blank of unbelief and disappointment with which Mr Monypenny heard his story chilled him to the heart. If he did not believe him, who would? He was angry, but anger is but a temporary sentiment when the mind is fairly at bay and finds itself hemmed in by difficulties and danger. He began to realise his position, the place in which he was, the circumstances surrounding him, as he had not yet done. The sheriff himself had been very civil, and deeply concerned to be the means of inflicting such an affront upon a county family; and he had added encouragingly that, on his return to Dunearn, in less than a week, when all the witnesses were got together, there was little doubt that a different light might be thrown on the affair; but Mr Monypenny's question was not so consolatory. "You think there's nothing can be *proved* against you?" John had been gazing at his agent across the table while all these painful reflections went through his mind.

"I must be careful what I say. I am not speaking as a lawyer," he said, with an uncomfortable smile. "What I meant was, that nothing could be proved which was untrue."

The agent shook his head. "When it's circumstantial evidence, you can never build upon that," he said. "No man saw it, you may say; but if all the facts point that way, it goes far with a jury. There are some other things you will perhaps tell me. Had you any quarrel ever with poor Tinto? Was there ill blood between you? Can any man give evidence, for example, 'I heard the panel say that he would have it out with Pat Torrance'? or – "

"For heaven's sake, what is the panel? and what connection is there between poor Torrance and – "

"Sir," said Mr Monypenny, sternly, "this is no time for jests; the panel is a Scotch law term, meaning the defender; or what you call the defendant in England. It's a terrible loss to a young man to be unacquainted even with the phraseology of his own country."

"That is very true," John said, with a laugh; "but at least it is no fault of mine. Well, suppose I am the panel, as you say – that does not make me a vulgar brawler, does it, likely to display hostile intentions in that way? You may be sure no man can say of me that I threatened to have it out with Pat Torrance – "

"It was inadvertent – it was inadvertent," said Mr Monypenny, waving his hand, with a slight flush of confusion; "I daresay you never said Pat – but what has that to do with it? – you know my meaning. Is there any one that can be produced to say – "

"I have quarrelled with Torrance almost as often as I have met him," said John, with obstinate decision. "I thought him a bully and a cad. If I did not tell him so, it was out of regard for his wife, and he was at liberty to find out my sentiments from my looks if it pleased him. I have never made the least pretence of liking the man."

Mr Monypenny went on shaking his head. "All this is bad," he said, "bad! – but it does not make a quarrel in the eye of the law," he added, more cheerfully; and he went on putting a variety of questions, of which John grew very weary. Some of these questions seemed to have very little bearing upon the subject; some irritated him as betraying beyond all a persistent doubt of his own story. Altogether, the first dreary afternoon in confinement was not made much more endurable by this visit. The room in which John had been placed was like the parlour of a somewhat shabby lodging-house – not worse than he had inhabited many a time while travelling. But the idea that he could not step outside, but was bound to this enclosure, was first ludicrous, and then intolerable. The window was rather higher than usual, and there were bars across it. When it became dark, a paraffin-lamp, such as is now universal in the country – smelling horribly, as is, alas! too universal also – was brought in, giving abundance of light, but making everything more squalid than before. And as Mr Monypenny made his notes, John's heart sank, and his impatience rose. He got up and began to pace about like a wild beast in a cage, as he said to himself. The sensation was more extraordinary than can be imagined. Not to be able, whatever might happen, to leave this shabby room. Whosoever might call to you, whatsoever might appeal to you, to be fixed there, all your impulses checked, impotent,

unable for the first time in your life to do what you had done every day of your life, to move out and in, to and fro as you pleased! John felt that if he had been a theatrical felon in a play, manacled and fettered, it would have been easier, more comprehensible. But to know that these four walls were his absolute boundaries, and that he could not go beyond them, was more astounding than any other sensation that had ever happened to him in his life. And when Mr Monypenny, with his careful brow, weighted with doubts and fears, unable to clear his countenance from the disapprobation that clouded it, got up to take his leave, and stood holding his client's hands, overwhelmed with sympathy, vexation, dissatisfaction, and pity, the impatience and bitter sense of the intolerable in John's mind could scarcely be restrained. "Whatever there may be more to say, whatever may come to your mind, you have but to send me a word, and I'll be at your call night or day," Mr Monypenny said.

"It is very unlikely that I should have anything more to say," said John; "but must I stay here?" It seemed incredible to him that he should be left even by his own "man of business." He had seen Beaufort go away with a sort of contemptuous certainty of speedy liberation; but Mr Monypenny had said nothing about liberation. "Surely there is nothing to prevent bail being accepted?" he said, with an eagerness he could not disguise.

"I will see about it," Mr Monypenny said. But the good agent went away with a dissatisfied countenance; and with a feeling that he must break through the walls or the barred window, must make his escape somehow – could not, would not, endure this extraordinary intolerable new thing – John Erskine heard the key turn in his door, and was left shut up with the paraffin-lamp, flaming and smelling more than ever, a prisoner and alone. Whether it was more ludicrous or more terrible, this annoying impossible farce-tragedy, it was hard to say.

CHAPTER XXXVI

The day after John's incarceration was the funeral day at Tinto. The whole country was moved by this great ceremonial. The funeral was to be more magnificent than ever funeral had been before for hundreds of miles around; and the number of the procession which followed the remains was greater than that of any assembly known in the country since the '45, when the whole district on one side or the other was "out." That everybody concerned should have found it impossible to think of John in the county jail, in face of the necessity of "showing respect" on this great occasion to the memory of Torrance, was natural. It was, indeed, out of the question to make any comparison between the two necessities. After all, what did it matter for one day? Those who were out of prison, and had never been in prison, and whose imagination was not affected like John's by that atmosphere of restraint, did not see any great harm that could happen. And the ceremony was one which could not be neglected. A Scotch funeral is somewhat terrible to those who have been accustomed to the pathetic and solemn ritual of the English Church; but there was something, too, impressive to the imagination, in that silent putting away of the old garment of humanity, – a stern submission, an acceptance of absolute doom, which, if it suggested little consolation, at least shed a wonderful awe on that conclusion no longer to be disturbed by mortal prayers or hopes. But Dr Stirling, the parish minister, was of the new school of the Scotch Church, and poor Torrance's body became, as it were, the flag of a religious party as it was laid in the grave. The great dining-room at Tinto, the largest room in the county, was crowded with a silent assembly gathered round the coffin while the first portion of the ceremony was carried out. It was such a scene as would have filled the heart of the dead man with exultation. Not one of the potentates of the county was absent; and behind them, in close ranks, with scarcely standing-room, came the smaller notabilities – bonnet lairds, village doctors, clergymen, schoolmasters, lost in the sea of the tenantry behind. At the upper end of the room, a very unusual group, stood the ladies. Lady Caroline in her widow's weeds, covered with crape from head to foot, her tall willowy figure drooping under the weight of those long clinging funeral robes, her face perfectly pale and more abstract and high-bred than ever, encircled by the whiteness of the cap – with her two little children standing by, and her mother and sister behind to support her – thrilled many an honest heart in the assembly. Women so seldom take part in funeral ceremonies in Scotland, that the farmers and country-folk were touched beyond measure by this apparition. It was described in scores of sympathetic houses for long after: "A snowdrift could not be whiter than the face of her; and the twa little bairns, puir things, glowering frae them, the image of poor Tinto himsel'." If there was any sceptic ready to suggest "that my leddy was never so happy a wife to be sic a mournin' widow," the spectators had a ready answer: "Eh, but she would be thinking to herself if I had maybe been a wee better to him – " Thus the popular verdict summed up the troubled story. Lady Caroline was pale enough for the *rôle* of the most impassioned mourner. She might have been chilled to stone by grief and pain for anything that was apparent. She did not speak or take notice of any one, as was natural. Even for her father she had not a word; and when her little boy was led away to follow his father to the grave, she sank into a chair, having, no doubt, the sympathetic bystanders thought, done all that her strength was capable of. This roused a very warm sympathetic feeling for Lady Car throughout all the country-side. If it had not been just perhaps a love-match, she had done her duty by Tinto, poor fellow! She had kept him in the right way as far as a woman could; and what was scarcely to be expected, but pleased the lookers-on most of all, she had presented an aspect of utter desolation at his funeral. All that a widow could feel was in her face, – or so at least the bystanders thought.

The solemn procession filed out of the room: little Tom Torrance clinging to his grandfather's hand, looking out with big projecting eyes like his father's upon all the wonderful scene, stumping along at the head of the black procession. Poor little Tommy! he had a feeling of his own importance more than anything else. His little brain was confused and buzzing. He had no real association in his

mind between the black thing in front of him and papa; but he knew that he had a right to walk first, to hold fast hold of grandpapa's finger, and keep with his little fat legs in advance of everybody. It is difficult to say how soon this sense of importance makes up for other wants and troubles. Tommy was only four, but he felt it; and his grandfather, who was nearly fifteen times as old, felt it too. He felt that to have this child in his hands and the management of a great estate for so long a minority, was worth something in the list of his ambitions; and thus they all went forth, trooping into the long line of carriages that shone in the veiled autumnal sunlight, up and down the avenue among the trees in endless succession. Even to get them under way was no small matter; and at the lodge gates and down the road there was almost as great a crowd of women and poor people waiting to see them go by. John Tamson's wife, by whose very cottage the mournful line passed, was full of tragic consciousness. "Eh!" she said, with bated breath, "to think that yon day when our John brought ben young Dalrulzian a' torn and disjasket to hae the dirt brushed off o' him – that yon day was the beginning of a' – " "Hold your tongue, woman," said John Tamson; "what has the ane to do with the ither? Ye're pitting things thegither that hae nae natural sequence; but ye ken naething of logic." "No' me," said the woman; "and I wuss that poor young lad just kent as little. If he hadna been so book-learned he would have been mair friendly-like with them that were of his ain kind and degree." And as the black line went past, which after a while became tedious, she recounted to her gossips once more the story which by this time everybody knew, but all were willing to hear over again under the excitement of this practical commentary. "Losh! would he leave him lying there and never cry for help?" some of the spectators said. "It was never our master that did that," said Peggy Blair from the Dalrulzian lodge, who had declared boldly from the beginning that she "took nae interest" even in this grand funeral. "And if it wasna your maister, wha was it that came ben to me with the red moul on his claes and his coat a' torn?" said Janet Tamson. "I wasna here and I canna tell," Peggy said, hot and furious. "I would never say what might happen in a moment if a gentleman was angry – and Pat Torrance had an awfu' tongue, as the haill county kens – but leave a man groanin' at the fit o' a rock, that's what our maister never did, if I were to die for't," the woman cried. This made a little sensation among the beholders; but when it was remarked that Dalrulzian was the only gentleman of the county who was absent from the funeral, and half-a-dozen voices together proclaimed the reason, – "He couldna be twa places at once; he's in the jyel for murder," Peggy was quenched altogether. Grief and shame were too much for her. She continued to sob, "No' our master!" till her voice ceased to be articulate in the midst of her tears.

Dr Stirling was seated in full canonicals – black silk gown and cambric bands – in one of the first carriages. It was he that his wife looked for when the procession passed the manse; and she put on her black bonnet, and covered herself with a veil, and went out very solemnly to the churchyard to see the burial. But it was not the burial she thought of, nor poor Tinto, nor even Lady Car, for whom all day she had been uttering notes of compassion: it was the innovation of the funeral service which occupied the mind of the minister's wife. With mingled pride and trembling she heard her husband in the silence begin his prayer by the side of the vault. It was a beautiful prayer – partly, no doubt, taken from the English liturgy, for which, she said, "the Doctor always had a high admiration;" but partly – "and that was far the best" – his own. It was the first time anything of the kind had been done in the county; and if ever there could be a funeral important enough for the introduction of a new ceremonial to mark it, it was this one: but what if the Presbytery were to take notice of the innovation? Perhaps the thrill of excitement in her enhanced the sense of the greatness of the step which the Doctor was taking, and his nobility in doing it. And in her eyes no ritual could have been more imposing. There were a great many of the attendants who thought it was "just Poppery," and a most dangerous beginning; but they were all hushed and reverential while the minister's voice went on.

When every one had left, and the house was perfectly silent after the hum and sound of so many feet, Lady Car herself went forward to the window and drew up the blind which covered it. The gloom disappeared, and the noonday sunshine streamed in in a moment. It was premature, and Lady

Lindores was grieved that she had not been quick enough to forestall her daughter; for it would have been better, she thought, if her hand had been the first to let in the light, and not that of the new-made widow. Carry went further, and opened the window. She stepped out upon the heavy stone balcony outside, and received the light full upon her, raising her head to it, and basking in the sunshine. She opened her pale lips to draw in great draughts of the sweet autumn air, and threw up her arms to the sunshine and to the sky. Lady Lindores stepped out after her, laying her hand upon her arm, with some alarm. "Carry – my darling, wait a little – " Carry did not make any reply. She said, "How long is it, mother?" still looking up into the clear depths of the sky. "How long is what, my love?" They were a strange group. A spectator might have thought that the pale creature in the midst, so ethereal, so wan, wrapped in mourning so profound, had gone distraught with care; while her child at her feet sat on the carpet in front of the window, the emblem of childish indifference, playing with her new shoes, which glittered and pleased her; and the two attendant figures, the anxious mother and sister, kept watch behind. In Carry the mystery all centred; and even those two who were nearest to her were bewildered, and could not make her out. Was she an Ophelia, moved out of her sweet wits by an anguish beyond bearing? Was she a woman repentant, appealing to heaven for forgiveness? Carry was none of these things. She who had been so dutiful all her life, resisting nobody, fulfilling all requirements to the letter, bearing the burden of all her responsibilities without rebellion or murmur, had ceased in a moment to consider outside necessities, even the decorum of her sorrowful condition. She gave a long sigh, dismissing, as it were, a weight from her breast. "It is five years and a half," she said. "I ought to remember, I that have counted every day, – and now is it possible, is it possible?"

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