

THE
GREEN
GRAVES
OF
BALGOWRIE
BY
JANE HELEN
FINDLATER

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THE GREEN GRAVES

OF

BALGOWRIE

BY

JANE HELEN FINDLATER

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LONDON

1896

“O Time,
That cut'st down all,
And scarce leav'st here
Memorial
Of any men that were!”

HERRICK.

“ ‘That's a melancholy tale,’ said the merry-faced gentleman.

“ ‘It's a tale of life, and life is made up of such sorrows,’ returned the other.”

Nicholas Nickleby.

The Green Graves of Balgowrie

I

“Their graves have been green for ninety years and more,” said my grandmother, as she finished telling me the tale of Henrietta and Lucie Marjorybanks; “so you may make what use you like of their story.”

“Don’t tell me it’s true,” I said—for my eyes were wet.

“Well, that is the story as my mother told it to me; and she had seen them face to face—she was the Maggie Pelham of the tale.”

“Ah, Life, there are stranger things in you than were ever written!” I said.

And I have held to that opinion ever since.

* * * * *

The old house of Balgowrie stands on a rising ground, and looks seaward over a wide bay where the tide rushes in with a long tumbling surf. To the back of the house the country is wooded, and is intersected by deep and very muddy roads. Once upon a time the Balgowrie garden, which lay to the south and was protected by high walls from the sea-winds, blossomed and brought forth; but now the walls are broken down, and the salt winds whistle over the flowers. Veils of fog-like grey moss cover the apple trees, and the fruit is green and sour that grows on their neglected branches; the rose bushes are all gone to leaf, and each rose has a little mossy green heart; the jasmine has grown into a great tree that hangs all to one side over the south wall, and path and turf have long ago been merged into one.

The house itself is little more than a ruin now. Its old gables are stained to half a dozen hues with the damp of years, and yellow sea-lichen has crept over the slates, colouring them like autumn sunlight. House-leek covers the rounded steps that lead up to the door, and wallflower is growing bravely in every chink. The only memorial that “envious time” has left of Henrietta and Lucie Marjorybanks in the place that once knew them, is a heart cut upon the west turret window, with the name “Lucie” scrawled above it, and underneath, the words “United hearts death only parts,” with over all the date 1775.

Some wild pigeons—far-away descendants of the fan-tails that once fed from Lucie's hand—still flutter round the doo-cote: they are the only living things about the place.

But even in its better days Balgowrie was a lonely—an eerie spot: rat-haunted, and with a reputation for being ghost-haunted too, which had kept it empty for years before it came into the hands of Mrs. Henry Marjorybanks in the year of grace 1766.

The widow, with her two little daughters, aged respectively nine and twelve, had not been long settled at Balgowrie before the neighbouring gentry came jolting over the miry roads in their yellow coaches to pay her their respects. But these overtures of friendship were received with great coldness, and the only return made was a week later, when John Silence, the widow's man-servant, went round the neighbourhood, leaving his lady's card upon those families who had honoured her with a visit. This, in an age much more punctilious than our own in matters of etiquette, was considered an outrageous breach of good manners, and Mrs. Henry Marjorybanks was not disturbed by more visitors.

This was exactly what the widow had desired. Her object in taking a lonely house in a lonely neighbourhood had been to cut herself off, so far as is possible in this life, from the world of living men. Her success was admirable. After the first few weeks no stranger ever passed through the gates of Balgowrie, and the two little girls, Henrietta and Lucie, grew up in as complete isolation as any castaways on a desert shore.

The only communication which Mrs. Marjorybanks kept up with the outer world was by letter. She corresponded with but one person, a certain Mrs. Pelham, then residing in London, and her reasons for choosing this lady as her friend were of a piece with Mrs. Marjorybanks' other eccentricities, as the following story will show: The late Henry Marjorybanks, in the days of his youth, had fallen deeply in love with a beautiful girl, who rejected his addresses, and married another suitor, Charles Pelham by name. Marjorybanks was inconsolable. He fell, indeed, into very poor health, and adopted peculiar and rather pessimistic views. While in this state he made the acquaintance of the woman who was afterwards to become his wife. She was considerably his senior, but their ideas seemed wonderfully harmonious; according to herself, she had "tasted the pleasures of this world and proved their hollowness." Presumably, however, she had now a desire to prove the hollowness of matrimony, for she exerted herself not a little to gain the affections of Henry Marjorybanks. This she never did; but she gained his hand, which was the next best thing to

do, and retired with him to a lonely village in the south of Scotland, where the curious couple lived for many years. Here Henrietta and Lucie were born and spent the first years of life, and here their father died when the children had reached the ages of twelve and of nine. Whether Mrs. Marjorybanks had, after her own strange fashion, been attached to her husband, or whether she only imagined that she had been, she certainly assumed all the most profound trappings of woe when he died. The place became hateful to her, and she cast about for some equally lonely house where to bury herself and her unfortunate daughters. At the same time she opened a correspondence with Mrs. Pelham by returning to her several letters which she had found among her late husband's papers. Mrs. Pelham had also become a widow. Of several children, only one remained to her, a daughter of nearly the same age as Henrietta.

The similarity of their circumstances struck Mrs. Marjorybanks. "You are bereaved like myself; you have a daughter whose age corresponds with that of my Henrietta; above all, I see that you were my husband's first love," she wrote to Mrs. Pelham, at the same time praying her to continue the correspondence.

"The woman must be mad!" Mrs. Pelham had exclaimed on the receipt of this letter, and the impression did not wear off as the time went on, and her unknown correspondent continued to ply her with the most voluminous letters ever penned.

In these letters Mrs. Marjorybanks poured out her ideas on every subject under heaven. She expressed herself cleverly, and there was a strong flavour of originality in all her views. These were not the conventional views held by every decorous woman of the day. Mrs. Marjorybanks had evidently been born several generations too soon. Her religious beliefs—or want of belief, for she boldly named herself "atheist"—would only be considered a bore now, when every sensible person is weary of "doubts"; in these days they were mentioned under the breath. In politics she was a radical; before the days of socialism she was a socialist; wherever opportunity offered, she placed herself in opposition to established use and wont. "I count it one of my greatest mercies," she wrote in one of these exuberant epistles, "that I have children to educate. My daughters are intelligent; they shall not be trained like every other woman in Britain; their personalities will be allowed free scope; my daughters shall not be turned out like ninepins."

Mrs. Pelham, a gracious, womanly "fine lady" of the old school, seeing that her opinion was of some weight with her extraordinary unknown friend, tried a little remonstrance here.

“It would be better to concede a little to the generally received views upon education,” she wrote; “and your daughters, I feel sure, would benefit by mixing with other gentlewomen.”

But the widow was immovable. She had formed her own ideas of what her daughters were to be, and she held to these with determination.

The children who had fallen into such strange hands for guidance were very unlike each other both in appearance and in character.

Henrietta, the elder of the two, was a tall girl for her age, with dark, lank hair and grey eyes, while Lucie was like a child in a picture, with fair curls and brilliantly blue eyes. Henrietta had her mother’s peculiarity of character—though in the daughter it had not that harshness which made Mrs. Marjorybanks unpleasant; yet Henrietta never did everything exactly like other people, never expressed herself in a commonplace way, and, indeed, had far too pronounced ideas of her own on every point. Lucie was nothing more or less at this time than a child—as sweet and fresh as only children can be.

What would have struck any outsider rather painfully in coming into this household at Balgowrie, was the dread which the children had of their mother. She never ill-treated them in any way, and did not even believe in severe punishments, yet every year the children seemed to draw farther away from her—farther and farther, into a close little world of their own. Their dread had been quite instinctive and unacknowledged till one day,—it was a damp November afternoon, and the physical oppression outside may have affected the child,—as Henrietta stood by the hall window watching her mother, who was coming up the steps from the garden, wrapped in her long black cloak, suddenly little Lucie pulled her sister by the sleeve, and in a choking whisper, as if afraid of her own voice, cried out—

“Oh, Harrie, I’m frightened!”

“Frightened, Lucie? It’s not dark.”

“Of . . . of *her*,” cried the child. Harrie would not, from her superior pedestal of three extra years, have admitted to Lucie the sudden panic that overcame her also at these words. Fear is so much worse when we acknowledge it. For a moment she thought blindly of “running” somewhere—anywhere—away from this terror. Then she said only, “Nonsense, Lucie!” and established her supremacy for ever over Lucie’s weaker character. They never spoke of it again.

II

The first object of Mrs. Marjorybanks' Educational System was the development of character rather than the acquisition of knowledge. "No character," she maintained (in one of those prolix letters which she devoted to educational subjects), "can take its individual bent if it is subjected to the authority of an older mind too soon"; and, following this idea, Henrietta and Lucie ran wild and lessonless for the first dozen years of their lives. By the phrase "the authority of an older mind" Mrs. Marjorybanks seemed to imply its influence rather than the usual meaning of the word "authority," for she exacted implicit obedience from her children in all physical matters, and only left them without a guide in the more perplexing ways of the mind. If, as all intelligent children will, they asked her questions, she had none of those ready-made answers which are safer satisfactions to the growing mental appetite than anything else; instead of these, Mrs. Marjorybanks bade the children "think for themselves," or "come to a decision for themselves," and their decisions on many subjects were very quaint in consequence. They grew up utterly ignorant of the outside world, and having only a verbal knowledge of any of the facts of life. Reading, which, with the addition of writing, was their only accomplishment, will not, after all, teach a child much if nothing it reads is explained to it. "They will grasp the forces that sway the world better, if they come to understand them without preconceived ideas," wrote Mrs. Marjorybanks.

So the children had lived on year after year untaught, and probably would have remained ignorant even longer, if an accident had not sent them a teacher who happened to please their mother.

One damp November afternoon, a few months after the arrival of Mrs. Marjorybanks and her daughters at Balgowrie, as they returned from their usual walk, a riderless horse feeding by the roadside attracted their attention. Mrs. Marjorybanks looked up and down the lane for the owner of the horse, then she stepped up to the beast, and, taking it by the bridle, turned its head towards Balgowrie.

"Someone has met with an accident," she said. "We will send Silence to the village to make inquiries."

The little girls were quite pleased by this amusing episode. It was so delightful to try to keep up with a horse—it got over the ground at such an

amazing pace with no effort at all! They took little runs beside it and laughed. But as they came round the turn of the lane, the rider lay across the path, a sight that checked their mirth.

“Hold the horse, Henrietta,” said the widow shortly, bending over the figure on the road.

“Oh, madam, is he hurt—is he dead?” cried the children.

They knew that something called Death existed, and used the word glibly enough.

Mrs. Marjorybanks knelt down and examined the man.

“No; only drunk,” she said, “and stunned.”

“Drunk? what does that mean?” the children asked each other by signs, for the word had no meaning for them.

But as they spoke, the man sat up and began to look about him in rather a bewildered fashion. He was a handsome elderly man, with thick grey hair and a fine smooth skin.

“Come, sir,” cried Mrs. Marjorybanks, “get up, and thank your good luck you can. Had I not come this way, you might have lain here long enough, to be ridden over by the first waggon that passed. Here, get up—I will help you.”

“It seems I’ve had something of a tumble, madam,” he said, feeling the back of his head meditatively with his ringed hand. “That horse is the very deuce to shy when the light is bad.”

“A good rider should be surer of his seat than that,” retorted the widow.

She prided herself on administering home truths, and always judged of people by the way in which they received such remarks. This man seemed quite to understand her. He only laughed, and asked Mrs. Marjorybanks to be kind enough to help him to rise.

“For, faith, madam, as you insinuate, I’m perhaps not so steady as might be,” he said, laughing again.

His straightforwardness quite won the widow’s heart. She helped the stranger to his feet and inquired after his injuries.

“You’re all right now, whatever you were when you fell, sir,” she said, intending to be amiable. “But since your head has suffered, you had best take my arm to Balgowrie and rest there for an hour or two.”

The stranger, however, professed himself quite able to walk unaided, and at a slow pace they made their way through the lane, the older people first, Henrietta and Lucie behind, leading the horse.

When they reached the house, Mrs. Marjorybanks bade the children run away to Hester, and herself ushered the unknown gentleman upstairs.

Hester was the old servant who united the functions of nurse, maid, and housemaid at Balgowrie. Hers had indeed been the only care that Henrietta and Lucie had ever known. She it was who cut out and made for them the curious garments they wore; she had even taught the children to read and write, for Hester had been a farmer's daughter from the south country, and prided herself on her genteel speech, very different from the rough Doric speech of Silence and the kitchen "lass," who, together with the gardener, formed the rest of the domestic staff at Balgowrie. Hester did not quite approve of Mrs. Marjorybanks' views on education, but knew her place too well to interfere with them. The little girls, meeting her on the stairs, stopped her to ask with wide eyes, "Hester, what is *drunk*?" And Hester with great prudence replied, "A weakness gentlemen suffer from, misses," but would not say more.

"It must be very uncomfortable," said Lucie sympathetically. "I hope he will soon feel better."

Later in the evening, when the children came down to the drawing-room, the unknown guest sat by the fire, looking quite well. He and Mrs. Marjorybanks seemed to be talking very earnestly together.

Henrietta came forward into the firelight, curtsying low to the stranger, as she had been taught to do.

"I hope that you find yourself better, sir?" she said, with her funny grown-up manner. "You seemed to be so sadly drunk in the afternoon."

It would have been impossible to suspect intention in such an earnest-faced, sympathetic little speaker. The stranger held out a plump white hand to her and answered her question as gravely as it was put.

"Yes, my little lady, I find myself much better."

Then he flung back his head against the high-backed chair and laughed till the gaunt Balgowrie drawing-room echoed with his mirth. The children were startled, and shrank back, hand in hand, into the shadow. Then the stranger rose from his seat, wiping his eyes, which streamed from the force of his laughter, and turned to Mrs. Marjorybanks.

“Ah, madam, you must pardon me! Children are so delightful, they go to the point as we never can.”

He called to them to come nearer, and asked their names and their ages, not in the perfunctory way common to “grown people,” but as an evident preface to friendship. When he sat down again, Lucie came and stood beside his chair, placing her tiny fat hand on his knee, and Harrie, understanding the unspoken compact between them, began to turn his ring round and round on his finger.

“What are you called, sir?” she asked.

“I am called Dr. Hallijohn, Henrietta, and I am minister of Eastermuir, if you know what that means,” he said gravely.

III

Dr. Cornelius Hallijohn, at the time I speak of, was perhaps as manifestly unsuited for his calling as a man could well be. But his father, a hard-living, impecunious country gentleman, had been the patron of Eastermuir, and having a son to provide for, and little prospect of having much to leave him, had sent Cornelius into the Church. Ten to one Eastermuir would be vacant by the time Cornelius was ready for it, he had calculated, looking upon the grey hairs and tottering gait of the then incumbent.

And Cornelius, having been born with a silver spoon in his mouth, had stepped comfortably into this fat living at the age of three-and-twenty, and at the close of a genial pursuit of divinity at St. Andrews. His father, a few years later, died almost bankrupt, but the lucky Cornelius very shortly after this fell heir to an uncle's money, and settled down, lonely, it is true, but possessed of most ample means, and a nature admirably fitted to enjoy them.

These were not the evangelical days when even a country minister, by industriously bearing upon his heart the souls of his parishioners, can be busy in spite of a sparsely populated district. The handsome, idle young man found small amusement here, and sought it eagerly elsewhere. Now for twenty inactive years the minister of Eastermuir had done nothing beyond the compulsory duties of marrying, burying, baptizing, and preaching. Twice each Sunday he had preached—vain repetitions that fell from careless lips upon deaf ears. The sick died with scant prayers to ease their going; the funerals were hurried oftentimes; the baptisms delayed. But souls from the parish of Eastermuir appeared before God none the less, and gave in their account of the things done in the body, without reference to the aids of the Church. As for the children, they got baptized some time, provided their parents exercised sufficient patience, and Dr. Hallijohn generally patched up a tardy christening by a very welcome crown piece.

In twenty years of life in a small place a man must do one of two things: he must wed himself to the place and its interests, or he must divorce it from him, and clasp some other bride. Dr. Cornelius Hallijohn had chosen the latter course. Eastermuir and its people were to him a bugbear and a bondage, to be forgotten and escaped from as best might be, and he joined himself to pleasure gaily. He was not, strictly speaking, a sober man, but it would have been equally unjust to call him a drunkard; his lapses from

sobriety were infrequent, and were owing far more to a social disposition and love of good-fellowship than to love of liquor. Just now and then, as on the present occasion, he went a little too far. But ministers in these happy days were not expected, as they are now, to be absolutely perfect, and allowances were made for "Dr. Cornelius," as he was familiarly called in the parish. Among the upper classes there were too many in glass houses to admit of much stone-throwing; and the working people, who dearly love a gentleman, overlooked a good deal in Dr. Cornelius because of his high-handed, fine-gentleman manners, and laughed indulgently at the ways of the gentry.

So the parish of Eastermuir had been shepherded for nigh on twenty years. Dr. Cornelius was growing grey in its service, and no one breathed of reform in church matters.

Dr. Cornelius rode home late on the night of his rather ignominious introduction at Balgowrie. He did not hurry his horse as they passed along the silent, miry roads, but went at a foot pace, the reins hanging loosely from his hands. The night was very dark, and so silent it was in these deserted lanes, that the creaking of the saddle leather, and the soft hoof-falls on the fallen leaves that carpeted the road, seemed to intrude upon some sanctity of nature.

The Manse stood in a walled garden; an iron-studded door admitted the outside world. It was a large and very comfortable house, but the study was perhaps the most delightful room in it. Bookshelves lined the walls from floor to ceiling, and the room smelt spicily of the calf bindings. To-night, as Dr. Cornelius came in from the dark November fogs to its warmth and lights, it seemed a very picture of comfort. He walked up to the blazing wood fire and stood looking down into it for a moment. Then he turned and looked round the large firelit room, taking in, as if he had been a stranger, all the comfort and plenty of its atmosphere. But these cannot have been what struck him, after all, for suddenly he spoke out what must have been the end of some train of thought—

“. . . But—O God, pity my empty house—my empty heart!”

He crossed to the side of the fireplace and sat down. Like many lonely men, Dr. Cornelius sometimes spoke to himself. Just now, as he sat looking into the fire, he uttered his thoughts aloud.

“. . . That woman! I wonder, is she mad? Near to it, I fancy; . . . but ah, the children—the children!”

He sat silent for a little, and his thoughts must have strayed away from Balgowrie, for when he spoke again, he seemed to be addressing some one.

“. . . I think I have forgiven you, Penelope, for that—for everything except for the children that might have been mine—children like these I saw to-night. The paternal instinct seems to die harder than the other. I'm incapable of love nowadays, but I'd sell my soul for children like these.”

He rose and began to pace up and down the room, then laughed gently, heartily, as a man laughs only at his own foibles.

“Yes, sell my soul, but never marry some good, intolerable woman, and take all the horrible, beautiful worries of a family on my shoulders; that I will never do now.”

As he spoke, the door opened, and James, the man-servant, looked in.

“Will ye be for anything the nicht, sir?” he asked.

“No, nothing to-night. I am going to bed, James. You may put out the lights,” said Dr. Cornelius.

He went upstairs slowly, and, closing his door behind him, stumbled across the room in the dark to where the window was indicated by a faint square of light. He drew up the blind and stared out into the night. There were neither moon nor stars, and the fog had turned to rain, that fell with a dispiriting drip upon the slates.

“No, no, Cornelius,” he said. “You are joined to your idols, and God has left you alone.”

IV

After this manner, then, Dr. Cornelius Hallijohn gained admittance to Balgowrie, and by reason of those very grave inconsistencies which would have shocked other people, he seemed to find favour in the eyes of Mrs. Marjorybanks.

It tickled her rather malignant sense of humour to see the chosen minister of Christ subject to all the commonest frailties of humanity.

With more even than the genial hospitality of the times, she pressed the Doctor to taste her vintage on the occasion of his next call at Balgowrie; while he, with the connoisseur's horror of "women's wine," courteously declined the proffered refreshment.

But the widow was insistent; she drank excellent wine, and was aware of it. Dr. Cornelius was not allowed to refuse, and found his opinion of the Balgowrie cellar change with his first sip.

"Your glass is empty, sir," said Mrs. Marjorybanks then, poisoning the decanter in her long white fingers; and the Doctor had held it out to be refilled, when, glancing up, he caught a gleam of amusement in the widow's eye. For a moment he hesitated, then—

"Thank you, madam," he said. "I find your port excellent."

She poured the red liquor slowly into his glass with a sort of icy satisfaction in the act; and said Dr. Cornelius to himself as he watched her, "Circe—you won't find it so easy to bewitch me as you think. Two glasses of port are not the way—I can carry more than that."

Which was true enough. But after this the widow never could persuade Dr. Cornelius to go beyond one glass. He had taken her measure once for all. There sprang up between them an intimacy of the kind which sometimes exists between "two of a trade"—neither trusted the other, both were on the defensive, yet were willing to accept each other with their limitations.

The widow had frankly expressed her feelings regarding him to Dr. Cornelius.

"I like you, sir," she said. "For you are no hypocrite; you really do not profess godliness—only a palpable form of it; and no one can doubt for a

moment that your only reason for remaining in the Church is the fat living you get out of it.”

Dr. Cornelius bowed. “Perhaps you are right, madam; but do you not consider that my sermons smack of hypocrisy?”

“I have never heard them,” said the widow, “and never intend to. But, after all, it is the life that preaches, not precept; so, if you preach like Paul and live like Bacchus, there is no doubt about which will be the sermon.”

“None whatever,” assented the Doctor.

He, on his part, was equally candid, seeing that candour was the “open sesame” to the widow’s heart.

“You must know, madam,” he said, sipping the fragrant port, “that I consider your views extreme and your ideas impracticable. In this low-toned world the true wisdom is to tune oneself down to its tone, otherwise one is always out of harmony with it. The average of wit is extremely low. The greater part of mankind cannot take in a new idea—let them jog on with the old ones.”

“If the rest of the world is witless and without ideas of progress, I see all the more need for mine,” said the widow.

“Except that the witless world will call you a fool,” said Dr. Cornelius.

“ ’Twas ever the fate of reformers,” she said.

So through endless arguments this odd friendship ran upon its way. Arguments on religion, on politics, on education—on all things in heaven and earth. And ever at the close of the interminable conversations Dr. Cornelius would say as he rose to go—

“And the children, madam? May I see my young friends to-day?”

The widow would bid him look in the garden on his way out. “They were generally in the garden,” she added.

And so they were, even on the chilliest November days. The steps that led up to the sundial were a very favourite playground with them, and there they were to be found playing the delicious imaginative games of lonely children, and would rise demurely when Dr. Cornelius appeared, to curtsy to him and let him know what their game was. Even in that stately-mannered age there was an inimitable quaintness in their ways, and Henrietta, from diligent perusal of long-worded, half-understood books, had picked up the strangest collection of words and phrases imaginable.

“You find us engaged in our favourite pastime, sir,” she would say, indicating by this fine sentence a very simple amusement they never seemed to tire of.

They pulled bunches of house-leek from the walls, and, sitting on the sundial steps, crushed the succulent leaves with stones, and filled bottles with the juice.

“We are apothecaries, you see, sir,” explained Henrietta. “I am Court apothecary to His Majesty King George, and Lucie is my assistant. We are extremely busy to-day, for there has been an outbreak of the smallpox, and all the resources of our skill are called into use.”

“Oh, I see!” said Dr. Cornelius, entering into the game with that imperturbable gravity which wins a child’s heart immediately.

He sat down beside them and pulled up his coat sleeve.

“As you see, Dr. Marjorybanks, I have sustained a serious injury; perhaps your skill can prescribe for it,” he said, indicating a bruise which discoloured the womanish whiteness of the flesh. “I received this blow two or three weeks ago—one afternoon when I had the ill fortune to fall from my horse,” he explained solemnly.

“Oh, it’s blue!” screamed Lucie, quite wild with delight at such unexpected excitement being added to the game. But Henrietta reproved her junior assistant with great sternness.

“I fear you are suffering severely, sir,” she said, poking the blue mark gingerly. “May I prescribe some of our celebrated mixture? Dr. Lucie, bring a bottle of our best mixture immediately. I shall apply it myself, sir, with your permission.”

“I am fortunate to have such advisers,” said the Doctor, surrendering his arm to the tender mercies of the Court physicians with his finest bow.

The bruise lasted a wonderfully long time, in spite of the celebrated mixture; and when this, which was after all a summer game, though it was played far on into autumn, was peremptorily stopped by a snowstorm, Dr. Cornelius even found his way to the attics, where the children played in winter, and invented quite new games there. Henrietta would meet him at the head of the attic stair, with her demure curtsy and—“Dear sir, we have been thinking all week of the various amusements you suggested to us last Saturday, and if it meets with your approval, we think we will play at a levee, if you will be King George.”

Then how grandly Dr. Cornelius extended the royal hand, while Henrietta and Lucie, in all the glories of an old brocade dressing-gown and a tablecloth respectively, trailed past their gracious monarch and saluted his white fingers.

The garrets at Balgowrie were hideously cold, but imagination lights a fire that mere external chilliness is powerless to put out, and Henrietta and Lucie would not have given up the freezing levees of the attics for the warmest playroom you could have offered them.

As time went on, the villagers seeing Dr. Cornelius so often at Balgowrie, declared that he and the widow were to “make a match of it,” and concluded that their ages were very suitable. They would have marvelled much if they could have read the thoughts of the supposed suitor each day, as the door of Balgowrie closed behind him.

“That woman and her ideas! her talk! she is enough to drive a man out of his reason. I wonder how long I can go on listening to her. Have I gained any influence over her in all these months, I wonder? She is wonderfully set in her ways for a woman—most of them divagate off their theories constantly, but she is always on the same trail—one-ideaed. That is where her touch of madness comes in, and yet she is sane enough!”

No, certainly Dr. Cornelius was not in love—not in love with a woman, and that woman the widow—but in love with childhood—uncared for, worse than motherless childhood—childhood at the mercy of whims and theories; a helpless living sacrifice ready to be offered up.

V

Winter in 1766 was a stern reality. Frost was frost, and when the snows fell they lay for weeks. People were more real too, I fancy, and were made of such much sterner stuff, that even in these bitter seasons it never occurred to the ladies of 1766 to wear anything more comfortable than those low-necked gowns which look so picturesque as shown in the miniatures of the day, and must have been so chilly—as judged by our modern ideas. Even children were brought up in this Spartan manner, and poor Henrietta and Lucie used to scamper through the draughty Balgowrie passages, or play in the freezing attics, in little scanty muslin frocks with short sleeves and low necks. Mrs. Marjorybanks would have laughed at the idea of protecting them from the cold. It was not the fashion of the day.

One icy afternoon, the second winter after the widow's arrival at Balgowrie, when the roads were deep in snow and the big gaunt drawing-room filled with the staring white light reflected off the snow-covered ground, Dr. Hallijohn was announced to pay his respects to Mrs. Marjorybanks. The widow was sitting beside the fire—it was a small one—in a straight-backed chair, reading her favourite author, Voltaire, the arch-heretic of the day. She laid aside her book at the Doctor's entrance, and greeted him with her finest curtsy.

“To tell you truth, sir,” she said, “I was wishing to see you. It is some time since you have honoured us with a visit, and I have been considering various things in the meantime.”

“The roads must be my excuse, madam,” said the Doctor. “They are heavy for man and beast in this weather.”

“Better say your ministerial duties at once,” said the widow, who never lost an opportunity of sneering at the cloth.

The Doctor leaned back against the mantelshelf, a handsome, unclerical figure enough in his long riding boots. He laughed gently.

“As you suggest, madam—my clerical duties; but I ask you, what right have men to die or to be born in such weather as this?”

“So you have been cheering some passing soul, as I divined?—or is it the holy rite of baptism that you have administered?”

“Both—both, I can assure you, madam. A man must die at Eastriggs Farm, seven weary miles from here, and over his grave I must offer petitions this day, to the tune of the north wind, and with six inches of snow on the ground. As for the baptism, that was at Selton, seven miles the other direction, an it please you, and ‘would Dr. Hallijohn hasten, for the child was near death’—seven miles, in haste, with the horse’s feet balling every mile of the way.”

“You are the slave of the public, Dr. Hallijohn, and to-night will sleep the sleep of the just, after such a day of usefulness.”

Nothing can be more monotonous than sarcasm. The Doctor was weary of the widow’s sneers. He sat down and brought the conversation round to her own affairs.

“You mentioned that your own time had been occupied, with the best of all occupations—thought. May I ask for the result, madam?”

“It is the education of my daughters which has occupied my thoughts so much,” said Mrs. Marjorybanks; “and with this result, Doctor, that I wish you to undertake their education.”

“Oh!” said Dr. Cornelius, drawing out the little monosyllable expressively.

“You see, sir,” she continued, “I think I can trust you not to teach them any of the follies of religion. You evidently do not believe in ‘religion’ so called,—your life evidences that,—and from what I know of your character, you are too honest to teach my daughters what you disbelieve.”

“But,” interrupted the Doctor, “I am not too honest to preach religion.”

“Tush! we have argued that before. ’Tis a palpable farce your preaching, sir, whereas your teaching of my daughters would be serious earnest. I have explained my educational views to you often enough, and you must understand that I wish my daughters to reach years of maturity without all the network of preconceived ideas that clogs the mental machinery of half the world. Women especially are degradingly superstitious, just the fools of priests and the dupes of worn-out beliefs. Of course my daughters, as you know, have no beliefs, luckily do not understand the meaning of the wretched word—I wish them to have no foibles either.”

Dr. Cornelius was not in the least surprised by this request. For the last twelve months he had been working for nothing else, and had expected his efforts to be successful sooner or later. It had been a long fight, unspoken, unconscious on Mrs. Marjorybanks’ side, between their two very acute

minds. "She has far too many ideas of her own for a woman," Dr. Cornelius had said to himself; "but if she is given her head, without contradiction of any kind, she will come in time to believe that my ideas are her own, and will trust the children to me to educate—then I can see what can be done." So, when the request was made, he sat silent for a few exultant minutes, as if considering the matter very gravely.

"Well, madam," he said at length, "you ask a great deal of me. But, to tell you the truth, I am fond of the children, and I will undertake it on one condition."

"And that is—?" queried the widow.

"That I take my own way with their education."

"Your own way, of course, Doctor, but on my lines."

"My own way, on my own lines. If you have sufficient confidence in me, from what you know of my character after twelve months' study of it, to trust me with the children at all, you may trust me with them altogether."

"And what will you teach them? what will you begin with?" asked the widow, with a shade of distrust in her voice.

"Well, I shall teach them many things they are ignorant of at present, madam; but, as I said before, if you think that I am the sort of man to train your daughters as you wish, then trust them to me: if not, let someone else conduct their education."

Mrs. Marjorybanks was unaccustomed to firmness in those about her. Her servants and the children were like wax in her hands; she had expected to bind down Dr. Cornelius with promises and conditions as many as she would. His distinct refusal to be answerable in any way for his teaching startled her. Their eyes met in the last struggle of this unspoken battle of will; the widow's questioning, uneasy glance asking as plainly as words, "Can I do as I like with this man?"—the Doctor's hard, unconcerned stare answering, "No, you cannot." She accepted its reply.

"Sir, I will trust you with my daughters," she said.

"Without conditions?—I teach them what I think they ought to know, as I think it should be taught, and when I think they should learn it?"

"Yes."

"Then the matter is settled. I shall have great pleasure, madam, in teaching your daughters, and I hope your confidence will not be misplaced."

Mrs. Marjorybanks rang for the usual refreshment it was her habit to offer, and they drank their accustomed glass of port together over educational schemes.

“I must see my young pupils,” said the Doctor, as he made his adieus in the fast falling dusk.

“They are probably upstairs,” said the widow. “Silence will find them for you.”

But Dr. Cornelius did not ask the assistance of Silence. He stumbled up the dark attic stairs towards the chink of light that showed under the playroom door. At the sound of his voice it flew open, and the children ran forward to meet him. He sat down on the top step of the stair, taking Lucie on to his knee.

“Ah, Loo, my own, what cold little hands!” he said—for he petted Lucie extravagantly.

Henrietta stood beside them: she was growing now into a tall, plain-looking girl. When they played together, the sisters seemed wonderfully of an age, except for Henrietta’s curious, pedantic speech. But every now and then, when the games were over, she would turn into quite another creature, and the three years dividing her from Lucie might have been ten.

As she stood just then looking down at Lucie and Dr. Cornelius, she had taken one of these grown-up turns. Her great dark eyes glowed with tender admiration for all Lucie’s babyish charms as she lay nestled against the Doctor’s arm, with her yellow curls and dimpled cheeks.

“You really make a mistake, sir,” she said. “We are not cold—it is only superficial. We have been playing that delightful game of the robber and the balls that you invented for us with the bowls.”

“Come and sit here, Harrie,” said Dr. Cornelius, making room for her on the step beside him. “I have something to tell you.”

“Yes, sir, we are all attention,” said Henrietta, settling her stiff little skirts as she sat down.

Lucie, too comfortable to raise her head, let herself be included in this speech.

“I have been speaking to your mother,” said Dr. Cornelius, “and she and I have agreed that I am to teach you lessons now: you are to come to my house every day for them.”

Lucie buried her face in the Doctor's cambric frills, rather sleepily saying—

“I do not like lessons, sir; I had rather just come to see you, please.”

“And you, Harrie?” he asked.

Henrietta turned and looked straight into his face. Then, resting her hand suddenly on his knee, she spoke with an arresting earnestness.

“Will I *know*, sir?” she said.

There was a penetrating wistfulness in her voice, a deep and hungry question in her eyes.

“Know what, Harrie my dear?”

“Everything—I wish to learn something—oh, I do not know what it is!—something I cannot understand.”

“Ah, Harrie, you have started on a long quest!” he said.

VI

Life took on quite a new complexion for Henrietta and Lucie after this. Their days, instead of being spent in aimless, undisciplined play, were planned out for them into hours for learning and saying their lessons. Every afternoon they walked down to the Manse under the care of Silence, and were duly escorted home by him two or three hours later.

But all this sounds grim enough, and does not express in the least the rush of happiness that had come into their lives. For at the Manse they found a whole new world of interest for their inquiring little minds. There was an atmosphere of comfort and cheerfulness here that was wanting in the bleak Balgowrie room—the fires were so large, and the sun seemed to be always shining in at the south-looking windows, so the little girls were soon quite as much at home in it as in the house that bore that often misapplied name for them. Henrietta specially loved the spicy leather-smelling study, and would stand before the bookshelves running her fingers lovingly along the bindings, like a genuine book-lover. For Lucie there was no place so dear as the housekeeper's room. It lay at the end of a long yellow-stained passage, and the children always chased each other along the passage when lessons were done, to be welcomed by Mrs. Allan, the housekeeper, with ample cordiality and jelly scones. She had two little stools waiting for them before the fire, and on these the children sat, munching their scones and chattering gaily, till Silence, all too soon, appeared with his inevitable punctuality, and the same invariable form, "We maun be movin', young leddies."

It required some ingenuity on the part of Dr. Cornelius to educate Henrietta and Lucie together; for not their ages only, but their characters and capacities, were so widely different. Dear Lucie was never a scholar; it took infinite trouble and petting to coax knowledge into her pretty little head, and Dr. Cornelius invented easy tasks, and explained them to her every day with unfailing patience. But Henrietta leapt into the knowledge so long withheld from her. She could not now study hard enough, and her mind began to expand as suddenly as the crumpled bud of a field-poppy furls out when once the restraining green outer sheath has cracked open. It was well she had fallen into wise hands that restrained her stretching ambitions, and held her down to unimaginative everyday studies, for Henrietta would have been a temptation to most teachers, and would have worked her little brain stupid if she had been allowed to. As it was, she galloped through the elements of

learning at an amazing pace. It was not only her knowledge that increased, however; she was seizing on every new impression and idea with that eager young intelligence. Every day she had fresh questions to ask and fresh puzzles to propound. It had dawned upon her, with a delicious thrill of pleasure, that in Dr. Cornelius she had found someone who would never refuse to explain anything to her, and she took full advantage of the discovery.

“You say you *never* find it trouble you to answer my questions, sir?” she said. And, “Never, Harrie my dear, never,” said Dr. Cornelius from the bottom of his heart. But he soon found that Henrietta was apt to be embarrassing in her investigations after truth.

One afternoon, as was her way when she wished to ask for an explanation, Henrietta came and laid her hand on her teacher’s knee.

“Eh—yes, Harrie; what is it?” Dr. Cornelius asked.

He was reading a letter at the moment. The room was very quiet. Lucie, dear child, had fallen asleep in the arm-chair over the preparation of one of her tiny tasks.

“What is it to be ‘damned,’ sir, if you please?”

“Why, Harrie, where did you find these words? I do not think it is in your lesson-book, is it?”

“No, sir, I heard you say it. Yesterday, when James came to the door and said that Robert Yule wished to speak to you, you said, ‘Robert Yule be damned.’ What is it to be ‘damned,’ sir?”

“In its original meaning, it meant, I believe, to go to hell. Are you nearly done with that verb, my child?”

“Yes, sir, very nearly. And where is hell? and why was Robert Yule to go there?”

“Oh, woman, woman! Theology has a fatal fascination for you all at all ages!” ejaculated Dr. Cornelius. “I suppose I must teach you that next.”

“Shall I get the atlas?” queried Henrietta innocently, but was bidden instead to sit down beside her teacher, and there received her first outline of the doctrine of a future state. It is a staggering one when communicated to a young mind for the first time. But Henrietta did not take it in much just then.

“That will be something quite new to think about,” she said in a very satisfied tone. “But what a very bad man Robert Yule must be, sir!”

“Very far from it, Harrie.”

“Then why?”—Henrietta stopped bewildered, and Dr. Cornelius, seeing himself hopelessly incriminated, could only put a brave face to the matter.

“Ah, Harrie,” he said, “I should not say things like that; ’tis what is known as swearing—a most unministerial habit, in truth!”

“Then why do you do it, sir?”

“Why?—why do I do many things and say more, Harrie?” he said, with a shrug of his shoulders.

And Henrietta made this little note in that curiously acquisitive mind of hers, that *Dr. Hallijohn sometimes swore; that is to say, he said he wished people to go to hell, which is another world, situated somewhere, but not marked in the atlas; and he said it was wrong to swear, therefore Dr. Hallijohn must sometimes do what was wrong. It was all extremely puzzling, was it not?* A conclusion, this, which was to be verified in another way before very long.

Lessons were not conducted after a very conventional fashion at the Manse. On cold days they were often said round the fire, and when they were over, Lucie always sat on the Doctor’s knee for half an hour, while Henrietta was given, as a special honour, “the parishioner’s chair” all to herself on the opposite side of the hearth. How they chattered and laughed in these delicious half-hours—laughed as they never did at home, and chattered with a freedom that was unknown to them in their mother’s presence. They were only half-conscious themselves of the chilling personality that awed their home life; but revelled to the full in the freedom and genial atmosphere of the Manse.

Mrs. Marjorybanks, if she had known what a cheerful, wholesome life the children led there, would probably have found some excuse for changing their instructor. For the good lady did not approve of open-air methods; she considered their results too commonplace: she was anxious to educate her daughters in as peculiar a manner as possible. But, quite without any idea of deceit, the children were silent on the subject of their lessons. They told their mother what “studies” were given them, and Dr. Cornelius gave her business-like reports upon their progress every month, but none of the pleasures of the case were entered upon, so the widow was quite contented. “Pleasure is dissipating” was one of the senseless formulas which she habitually practised upon her daughters, sometimes even going the length of preparing slight disappointments for them—“Disappointment braces the

mind," she used to say. It was no wonder that the children hid their pleasures from her almost instinctively.

On the long summer afternoons lessons became very nominal at the Manse. There were bunches of little blood-red roses that clustered round the study window, nodding in the most inviting way, as if saying, "What a wasting of time to be indoors!" and in the kitchen-garden there were red gooseberries of enormous size to be eaten at all hours; and then there were the bees to watch. Lucie was afraid of the bees, having once been stung, and required a reassuring hand to lead her up to the hives; but Henrietta loved the wise, diligent little workers, and insisted upon visiting them every day. Best of all, there was Barnabas, the Doctor's horse, who fed in a paddock, and came to eat carrots from their delighted hands. Barnabas was very gentle, and the children were mounted on his unresisting back every day, and rode round the field screaming with pleasure at the jolting of his long backbone at every step.

"And do you know, sir," said Henrietta one day as she was lifted off, "the first time I saw Barnabas, that day when you were so drunk, on the road, I was quite frightened of him; I was alarmed, I think, by his height. Mother directed me to take hold of the bridle. Do you remember?"

"Yes," said the Doctor rather curtly, giving Barnabas a slap that sent him capering over the field.

Henrietta continued her musings. "How fortunate it was for us, sir, that you should be taken ill like that, for had it not been for that, I fear we would never have made your acquaintance. I hope that you will not suffer in the same way again, however," she added, with quick sympathy. Dr. Cornelius did not reply, and Henrietta concluded that the subject was a distasteful one.

Summer merged into autumn, and winter fell over Eastermuir again, with its cruel frosts and long, long snow. A year now—such a short, happy year—had passed since Henrietta and Lucie had begun their education. In it the great need of childhood as well as age had been supplied—they had found someone to love and trust. Older pupils might have very easily discovered faults in Dr. Cornelius, but Henrietta and Lucie did not consider him capable of wrong-doing; there were no spots on their sun. They poured out a fulness of love and confidence upon him.

One bitter afternoon, when they came in, Dr. Cornelius was walking up and down the study rather impatiently. "Late!" he said, and Henrietta, curiously business-like for her age, glanced at the clock—by her way of

reading the clock they were early, but she said nothing, and they sat down to their lessons. Before they were well begun, Dr. Cornelius interrupted them.

“Give me a drink, Harrie my dear,” he said, indicating a bottle which stood on a small table beside the fire. It was a well-known object to the children, looked upon and handled with the greatest respect. Three bottles were contained in the one, welded together, but having separate mouths, and each mouth was stoppered with a dainty silver cork. It was the Doctor’s custom to have a drink every afternoon when lessons were done, and the children had the privilege of handling the sacred Dutch bottle day about. But to-day it was far from the canonical hour. Henrietta obeyed with surprised alacrity.

“ ’Tis very early to-day, sir,” she said, as she crossed the room, balancing the glass in both hands.

“I’m put out and cross, Harrie. Here, give me another,” he said, disposing very expeditiously of the liquor.

Henrietta obeyed, and they resumed lessons. Lucie stumbled a little in the conjugating of her verb, and Dr. Cornelius rose impatiently and began to pace up and down the room. Then Henrietta began her verbs. She seldom faltered over her tasks, but to-day something seemed to have gone wrong. She made two mistakes running, an unknown fault with her.

Dr. Cornelius strode across the room angrily.

“So this is what you call preparing your lessons, is it? What do you mean by it?” he said, and shook Henrietta roughly. She found it impossible to believe that Dr. Cornelius was really angry.

“How well you pretend!” she cried, with a delighted little scream of laughter at this bit of the histrionic art introduced into lesson hours.

But a second glance at the face above her made Henrietta silent with terror—its expression was unmistakable.

“By ——, I’ll teach you to laugh at me!” said Dr. Cornelius.

He sent the Latin grammar spinning from his hand, but his aim was unsteady, and the book flew past Henrietta and fell upon the floor. There was a moment of tense silence, then Henrietta gripped Lucie’s hand, and whispered the one word, “*Run!*” Dr. Cornelius had turned in his walk up and down, and in another moment the children had reached the door and made their escape. Along the yellow-stained passage they fled, scarcely feeling the ground under them in their terror, and fell against the door of Mrs. Allan’s

room, too frightened to feel for the handle. It seemed a century to them before the door opened, and they saw in the pleasant brightness beyond, the familiar figure of Mrs. Allan.

“My conscience, Miss Harrie, what’s wrong?” she cried; for Henrietta, still holding Lucie’s hand, stumbled across the floor and buried her face against the old woman’s skirts in an agony of sobs.

“Ah, Mrs. Allan, I do not know! It is dreadful—it is Dr. Hallijohn! Oh, do not let him come here! he is angry with us. Oh, I hear him coming! Oh! oh!”

She clung to Mrs. Allan and sobbed, almost screamed with terror.

“Tut, tut, Miss Harrie! there’s no one has a mind to hurt you; here’s Silence himsel’ beside ye,” said the good woman, exchanging a hurried glance with him as she spoke. Then, moving to the door, she barred the threshold with her ample person.

“The young ladies are away home, sir,” Henrietta heard her say. She stopped her sobs to listen to what Dr. Cornelius was saying. She could not quite make out, for his kind voice sounded changed somehow.

“Tut, tut, Doctor!” said Mrs. Allan then—her invariable reproof. She closed the door, and stood with her back against it.

“Ye’ll take the young ladies home the back way, Mr. Silence,” she said. “His Reverence is none so well to-day, I’m thinkin’. Miss Lucie my dear, there’s a fine bit gingerbread for each of ye on the table.”

Silence pressed the bonnie brown cake into Lucie’s plump little hand, who found the substantial comfort very pleasing, but Henrietta would not touch it.

“No, I thank you, Mrs. Allan; I do not feel inclined to eat anything. I only wish to get home,” she said, extending her hand to Silence for protection.

The homeward way was very quiet—Henrietta would not speak; the silence was broken only by the munching of Lucie’s gingerbread. On the steps Henrietta paused, assuming her most grown-up air.

“Silence,” she said, “please do not mention this to Hester or to Mrs. Marjorybanks.”

“Very good, Miss Henrietta,” he responded, being a staunch upholder of the Church.

That was a very long night to Henrietta. Lucie's deep, dreamless slumbers fell over her like a mantle when her head touched the pillow, but Henrietta tossed about till the breaking of the day. A child's first disillusionment is terribly bitter. For Henrietta it was not so much disillusionment, indeed, as despair. She did not in the least understand the cause of Dr. Cornelius' behaviour; she only knew that, whereas she had trusted him with all her heart, she could now do so no longer. She would always be expecting this horror to fall on her again. She would never feel the same beautiful confidence. The idol had feet of clay. And there was no one to tell it to. Lucie seemed suddenly separated from her by gulfs of age—a child to be protected and reassured, not frightened by mentioning this horror they had witnessed. With a sudden hot rush of despairing tears she thought, "Only yesterday, I would have told Dr. Hallijohn, but *I can't tell him about himself.*" Was the kind, dear friend gone for altogether now? Was everyone false and disappointing? Was there anyone in the world to trust and love wholly? With these sorry questions beating through her head, Henrietta fell asleep as the morning came in, and woke an hour or two later, feeling, oh, so old!

VII

The children did not discuss this sad matter together. Lucie only said tentatively the next morning, "I suppose we will go for our lessons to-day?" and Henrietta replied, "Yes, certainly. We must prepare them very well, Lucie."

But when they reached the Manse gate, the children drew very close to Silence. Mrs. Allan herself opened the door.

"Ah, misses, here you are! and I was just to send up Thomas with a message. The Doctor's not so well to-day; I think maybe he'll not be for seeing you to-day."

Henrietta took up a resolute stand on the doorstep.

"I am very sorry, but I should like to see Dr. Hallijohn. Perhaps Lucie might sit with you, Mrs. Allan, and I might see him alone." Her face was white, and her eyes very red.

Mrs. Allan hesitated. "I'll just see, Miss Harrie," she said, preceding her to the study door. "This is Miss Henrietta, sir," she said, with an introductory cough, speaking into darkness, for all the study blinds were drawn down.

"Come in, Harrie," said the voice that Henrietta loved.

She gave a quick tug to Mrs. Allan's gown and whispered, "I am not afraid—not very. I will just go in, if you will leave me."

The door closed behind Mrs. Allan, and Henrietta groped her way across the dear familiar room that was so horribly dark. She stood still in the middle of her journey, saying in a very faint little voice, "'Tis very dark, sir." Her heart stood still with terror; would that horrible, unknown Person arise in the darkness to meet her?

Dr. Cornelius was stretched on two chairs beside the fire. He stirred it at the moment of Henrietta's entrance, and the room was suddenly lit up by the leaping flames, showing her as she stood shrinkingly in the middle of the floor.

"Harrie—Harrie, dearest child!—it cannot be that you are afraid of me?" he said, rising and coming forward to meet her.

“No,” began Henrietta, and then, quickly drawing back towards the door—“Yes, oh yes, sir—dreadfully!” she cried.

With her whole heart, she longed to turn and fly towards Mrs. Allan and safety, yet her wounded love drew her irresistibly, against herself, towards its object.

Dr. Cornelius returned to the fireside, sitting down so that the bright light played across his face.

“Look at me, Harrie; I am just as usual,” he said. “Can you not come and sit by me?”

Henrietta drew nearer and nearer, till she stood in the circle of firelight, looking with those terribly searching eyes of hers straight into the Doctor’s face.

“What was it?” she asked slowly, when she had finished the examination.

Dr. Cornelius did not reply for a full minute, then he held out his hand to Henrietta and drew her close to him.

“Would you rather love me with your eyes shut or with your eyes open, Harrie?”

“Which is best, sir? you know,” she said, in spite of her shattered trust.

“Open, Harrie; but the process is painful.”

“Will I feel the same?—that is all I wish, sir; for oh, I do not feel as if I ever could!” she cried, gulping down her tears.

“Why, Harrie, you are grown into an old woman in a night. Now, by all that is dear to me, child, I have nearly broken my heart thinking how I frightened you yesterday.”

“Will you do it again, sir? Oh, please do not! Oh, will you explain to me, sir?”

“Yes; I suppose it must be done. I drank too much yesterday, Harrie—that’s the whole matter.”

“Is that ‘drunkenness’?” asked Harrie in an awestruck voice.

“Well, a degree of it; I was not actually drunk yesterday, Harrie, only excited with it.”

“I would not wish to see you ‘actually drunk,’ sir. You are not nice when you drink too much. Why do you do it?”

“I do not do it very often, Harrie; and why I ever do it at all I know not! But it’s a habit I confess I’ve given little thought to till to-day.”

Henrietta withdrew her hand from the Doctor’s, and stood silently looking into the fire for a little. Then she said very slowly—

“I must always love you, dear sir, for your great kindness; but I think it will not be possible for me to trust you again as I have done. Are my eyes open now?”

These were the great drinking days, when priest and layman alike drank and spared not, and Dr. Cornelius had spoken truly when he said his own lapses from sobriety had never troubled him much; but Henrietta’s words went like a knife to his heart.

“Ah, Harrie, Harrie, don’t say that! Forget, and you will never see me like that again. I give you my word for it.”

“It would make no difference, sir, whether I saw it or not, if you continued to do it,” she said, with a cold sorrow in her voice. “I would not forget that you might be—like yesterday—when I was not there.”

The firelight sparkled suddenly on the familiar bottle, standing in its accustomed place beside Dr. Cornelius’ chair. Henrietta watched the dancing gleam for a moment, and then, snatching up the bottle, she flung it down on to the stone hearth with a passionate gesture. The delicate necks of the curious old flask cracked across as it touched the stone, and the liquor hissed among the wood ash. She watched it for a moment, and then ran to Dr. Cornelius and flung her arms round his neck.

“Dear sir, I cannot do anything but love you, whatever you do!” she cried.

Dr. Cornelius stroked her hair softly. “You are true to your sex, Harrie; but we have been destroyed by that very tenderness from the beginning of all things,” he said.

“I fear I do not quite understand you, sir.”

“No, I should suppose you did not. We will close this subject for evermore between us. So you have broken my Dutch bottle? that is a simple cure, if it prove one.”

“I am very sorry; it was not mine to break, sir,” said Henrietta, looking down ruefully at the shining fragments now that the heat of her anger was past.

Dr. Cornelius stooped down and felt among them.

“Here, Harrie,” he said, “here is a memorial of a very unhappy half-hour.” He held the three silver-topped corks in the palm of his hand.

“No, I thank you, sir; I think I will not require a memorial,” said Henrietta.

“What! do you refuse these fine corks for the ‘celebrated mixture’ bottles?” he said lightly. He had been treating the whole matter too seriously, he thought; it would be better now to pass it off with a joke.

But Henrietta did not see it in the same light.

“I find myself doubting whether we will ever play at ‘Court Physicians’ again,” she said sadly.

With the wisdom of fourteen years, and a broken idol, she seemed to herself to have put away childish things.

VIII

Following the precedent of a certain class of story-book, it would now be pleasant to relate that Dr. Cornelius after this renounced the devil and his works for ever. But although this is the way of the story-book, it is not the way of the world. Dr. Cornelius still drank his port as usual, and occasionally came home drunk from the meetings of Presbytery. He was only careful that the children should know nothing of this. The Dutch bottle was not replaced, and the subject received decent burial at both their hands—which, perhaps, was the best thing that could be done. Dr. Cornelius having once repented of the fright he had given his little pupils, gave the matter no further attention. Sentiment had no part in his nature; there was no reason, by his way of thinking, why he should deny himself his wine because he once made a mistake, and had he been told that there was, he would have called it sentimental nonsense.

But I doubt if Henrietta ever was quite a child again after this incident. She had learned life's bitterest lesson early, and where disillusionment comes in, childhood goes out. Not that her love for Dr. Cornelius suffered any diminution—that was an impossibility to her nature; but the former divinity was now only a fellow-creature—and there is a difference between the two. Dr. Cornelius was a little annoyed by her quietness for a time. She was unnaturally eager over lessons, and indifferent to play; but he began to think the child was really growing up, and forgot to connect her gravity with his own conduct. Lessons became a more serious matter, and Lucie began to be left very far behind on the path of knowledge.

The teacher acknowledged with a sigh that children had an unfortunate way of growing up, and addressed himself in earnest to the task of keeping pace with the rapacious demands of Henrietta's mental appetite. But sometimes, as he sat sipping his port, Dr. Cornelius would find himself wondering how his experiment would end. The girls were unquestionably growing up, he would admit with a frown, and growing up very unlike the rest of the world; they required direction from a woman's hand now, it was evident. And this they were not likely to get. Whenever he left home nowadays, Dr. Cornelius took careful note of the girls he met, and these observations all tended to confirm his impression of the oddity of poor Henrietta and Lucie. Even his masculine eyes discerned the absence of any pretence at following the fashion in their dress; Hester's dressmaking was

elemental in its simplicity, and was not calculated to display their best points. Dr. Cornelius would sit and mourn over his pupils to his old cousin, Matilda Hallijohn, each visit he paid her in Edinburgh. She, good lady, would suggest all manner of schemes for the relief of the little prisoners—they were to be sent to stay with their relations, their father's people, or they were to come and visit her, or they were to go to London to visit the Pelhams. But to each and all of these propositions Dr. Cornelius found a negative. Mrs. Marjorybanks held no communication that he knew of with either her own or her husband's relations. She would never permit her daughters to visit a stranger; and as little would she permit them to visit in London.

“Easier far to get a prisoner out of the Tolbooth, Matilda, than to get these poor children from Balgowrie,” he would conclude.

“’Tis clear then, Cornelius, you must just do your best for them yourself,” said Miss Hallijohn. “You’re not the man I would have chosen to educate young women, but strange instruments are chosen under Providence,” she would add, smiling, for the cousins were very good friends.

This was, indeed, the only conclusion that anyone could have come to. Mrs. Marjorybanks had her own ideas on education, and would hold to them against the advice of all the world. The girls must take their chance, and turn out as best they might. Dr. Cornelius, it appeared, was to be their only teacher—he must do all in his power for them, and leave the rest to Fate. At least he could educate them well—that was always something; then perhaps—perhaps—strange are the freaks of fortune—relations might interfere—Mrs. Marjorybanks might die—it was surely impossible that things could go on for ever like this. So, comforting himself with this thought, Dr. Cornelius continued his instructions, looking as hopefully as might be towards the future for help. And Henrietta and Lucie, quite unconscious of all the anxiety they occasioned, lived on their quiet lives from month to month and from year to year, leaving childhood behind them so gradually that they scarcely knew it was gone, entering into life insensibly, through long, eventless, and, on the whole, happy weeks.

IX

As time went on, Mrs. Marjorybanks, herself an indefatigable correspondent, determined to establish communication between Maggie Pelham, the daughter of her own unknown friend, and Henrietta.

The girls had a good deal in common, she had discovered, in a kindred love of study, so they began to correspond upon the simple, girlish subject of mathematics. It is possible that Maggie Pelham was not so single-eyed in her devotion to study as her letters would at first have indicated; the truth was that kind-hearted Mrs. Pelham, whose heart ached for the unknown children she heard so much about from their mother, thought that this was the best way of establishing an intimacy between them and her own children. She was acute enough to see that Mrs. Marjorybanks would never permit her daughter to correspond with an entirely unintellectual correspondent, so Maggie's studious tastes were put well to the fore, there was no great mention made of relaxation or pleasuring, and every now and then a kind message was sent—"Would the girls not come up to London and see their unknown friends there." As yet these hints had been quite disregarded, but the correspondence continued. It gradually assumed a less formal tone, and Henrietta and Lucie came to love the bright tales of London ways and manners, and to look forward to the monthly budget.

In reply, Henrietta sent long outpourings on books and ideas, mixed with quaint enough pictures of the home life at Balgowrie. These letters, of which Maggie Pelham had a whole bundle, were such letters as are never written in the degenerate days of the penny post. They were several pages in length, and written in a handwriting most exquisitely minute and delicate. Selecting one at random from the bundle, it runs thus:—

"MY DEAREST MARGARET,—It is with great pleasure that I take up my pen for the ever pleasant task of writing to you. But, immersed as you are in the gaieties of the capital, I can hardly expect to gain your interest in our homely provincial affairs. You ask what we have been about in these long winter days, so I must gratify your curiosity by giving you some account of them.

"For myself,—who am a tiresome bookworm, and only care for grubbing away among my favourite authors,—the time has not seemed long. Do you not find, dear Margaret, as you go on with

life, an increasing interest and curiosity regarding its ultimate issues? Each day, as I follow some train of reasoning as found in one of the books I love, I say to myself, ‘Shall I find it here?’ Yet each day, as I close the volume, I find myself confessing that the problem is still a problem to me—will it always be so, I wonder? Among the books I have found most deeply engrossing is one which my dear teacher, Dr. Hallijohn, has directed my attention to. He considers it the pivot of ancient as well as of modern thought; it is named *The Bible*. He does not believe all its teachings, but thinks every well-informed person should have some knowledge of them. They appear to me wonderfully short-sighted in some respects, wonderfully long-sighted in others—as, how will you reconcile these apparently dissimilar axioms: ‘Love not the world, neither the things of the world’; and ‘Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when these shall fail, it may receive you into everlasting habitations’? Dr. Hallijohn has taught me all the generally received ideas about the Bible, but my mother, it appears, does not agree with him in admiring its teaching, so till lately the book itself was not put into my hands. Now, I am happy to say, I am allowed full liberty in my reading. I have thought much upon what is contained in this book about *another life*—it seems a curious idea. Why should we require another life? this one, it appears to me, is tremendous enough without another. Dr. Hallijohn tells me the idea is ‘specially held by those who have broken hearts.’ Is there no mending of them here? It seems a clumsy arrangement. . . .

“But I weary you with these matters, as I am sorry to say I sometimes weary my dearest Lucie. Her interests are far other than mine. Did you hear her play and sing, you would, I feel sure, be enchanted, for, young as she is, her voice is sweetness itself. She is never weary of this, and will sit for hours at a time at the spinnet. Then she loves all the outdoor creatures. Every morning she will be out across the courtyard, even in these heavy snows, to feed the hens! The peacock is her special favourite, and even the cow she must visit daily. You mention in your last letter the elegant new work you occupy your leisure with; I feel sure that were Lucie with you, she would be anxious to try to emulate you—for a needle is seldom out of her fingers! it is her implement, just as the pen is mine. She is making for herself, and for me, who am so

clumsy with my needle, a set of tucked nightdresses of extraordinary fineness.

“It would amuse you to see our old Hester’s look of contempt as she sweeps past me sitting over my books, to give Lucie her advice on the setting of the innumerable tucks. Hester does not consider that study is womanly, and cannot praise Lucie’s handiwork too highly. If she were not my dearest joy, I might indeed be nettled and teased by the constant interruptions she occasions, for Hester is always coming up to nudge my elbow, saying, ‘Miss Henrietta, will you cast your eye on this seam for a moment? Did ever you see such stitching? Miss Lucie has a real taste for her needle.’ Then I will look up, rather crossly sometimes, saying, ‘Don’t bother me, Hester, I am busy,’ and she gathers up the work and carries it off. Lucie sits always in the west turret, which looks seawards, and receives all the afternoon and evening light. She has a lark in a cage there, and sits whistling to it over her sewing half the day. We do not now go daily to the Manse for our lessons, but twice a week we have that pleasure. I am now beginning to study Greek, but Lucie has rebelled at that, and Dr. Hallijohn sides with her. He is of opinion that Greek is not essential to a girl’s education.

“For me, I cannot learn enough; I must learn everything it is possible for me to acquire. While I am at my Greek lesson, Lucie goes into Mrs. Allan the housekeeper’s room and bakes gingerbread or plum-cake. Lucie is strangely fond of cookery. Then, when I am done, we—Dr. Hallijohn and I—come in and watch the baking—Lucie has her sleeves rolled up and wears a large apron; sometimes she will insist upon our tasting the cakes, which are always very good, before they are rolled up and given to Silence to carry home for us—for Dr. Hallijohn will never eat sweets; he says they ‘coarsen the palate.’ In the evenings we play whist, or my mother reads aloud to us. We are reading the works of Voltaire at present, which I find deeply interesting. I have indeed given you a long description of our employments, dear Margaret, and must crave your patience in their tediousness.

“I shall hope very soon for another of your most charming letters, which seem to link us on with the great outer world of which we see so little. Meantime, with kindest remembrances

from all our circle to you and to Mrs. Pelham,—I remain, ever most affectionately yours,

“HENRIETTA MARJORYBANKS.”

But the story of Henrietta and Lucie as told in these letters would be a very long one. The bundle of yellowing manuscript lies in a drawer now, together with a portfolio tied up with ribbon strings, containing the minute pencil sketches which formed one of the occupations of Lucie's existence. There is a drawing of Balgowrie, where every turret and crow-step gable is etched in with extraordinary veracity of detail, and Henrietta's handwriting supplies the verses that are placed below this picture of the house that was called home by the two solitary girls.

X

Mrs. Marjorybanks had ideas of her own upon manners as well as upon education. When Henrietta and Lucie had reached the ages of sixteen and thirteen respectively, she had announced to them that it was now time for their "polite education to begin." And this branch of education had been continued ever since.

"So that you may hold your own in the world, it is necessary that you should learn its tone," she had said.

"But, madam," Henrietta ventured to ask, "are we not going to live always at Balgowrie?"

"It may happen not," the widow had replied.

The walls of Balgowrie had truly been a close enough prison those many years now, for the two young creatures penned in between them. Although travelling was not very common in those days, still even then there was something unusual in girls of their age who had never been out of one lonely parish for so many years.

"I suppose we shall get out of it some day," Henrietta used to say.

But, like the captive accustomed to his chain, they did not yet rebel at all against their captivity. Henrietta was wrapped up in study of every kind, and Lucie was still too much of a child to feel anything singular in the solitude of their lot. As seen from the outside, the girls were strange enough. It must be remembered that they had never spoken to a young person of their own age, and had passed their time exclusively in the society of a very eccentric woman and an elderly man of somewhat easy morals. Henrietta's manners bore traces of this—they were a mixture of preciseness and of mannish brusqueness. Lucie was too entirely feminine by nature to acquire any masculine traits, but she was a quaint little lady enough, even at thirteen. Dressed by their mother quite without regard to the fashions of the day, they needed all the peculiar charm that was their greatest gift, to carry off the impression of strangeness they produced at first sight.

"We shall have a reception every Thursday evening, and I shall instruct you in the art of conversation, in dancing, and in deportment," said Mrs. Marjorybanks.

On Thursday evening the girls were bidden to put on their best frocks—curious sprigged muslins they were—and to come down to the drawing-room.

They found Mrs. Marjorybanks in full evening dress (of twenty years old fashion) standing at one end of the drawing-room. She advanced to meet them with a sweeping curtsy, while instructing them *sotto voce* to do the same. Then ensued introductions, which were given at great length, and where chairs took the place of human beings. Mrs. Marjorybanks would sweep up to an arm-chair, saying, “Allow me, Sir Horace, to present to you my daughter, Miss Henrietta Marjorybanks;” and then, with such a wave of her gloved hand, and another billowy curtsy—“Sir Horace Walpole. Henrietta, our . . .”

Poor Henrietta, overcome with the honours of this presentation, remained dumb after she had made her curtsy, till the widow indicated that she, as Sir Horace, was ready to enter into conversation upon all the topics of the day. Surely the angels must have laughed, if they did not weep, to watch these ghostly receptions of bodyless guests, and listen to the talk that was carried on in the echoing old room. When conversation flagged, the dancing began. Lucie supplied the music; perched upon the high stool before the spinnet, she tinkled away sometimes for an hour at a time, shivering and nodding by turns over the notes. Then Henrietta would take her place, and Lucie would dance. Mrs. Marjorybanks was incapable of fatigue, and would have paced the minuet all night if the fancy had taken her. As it was, the receptions went on from seven till eleven,—four weary, weary hours,—and then the girls stole off to bed, cold and tired. Thursday evening became a black spot to look forward to through the week, and as time went on, the receptions became more and more irksome. Monotony, more than any grief, wears upon young creatures—it has a deadening quality all its own. The girls complained bitterly of the infliction to Dr. Cornelius, who was wise enough to laugh at it, and professed himself anxious to join in the game.

“Why, you used to like the levees in the attics,” he said. “This must be the same thing on a more majestic scale; pray invite me next week.”

But Henrietta shook her head.

“It was quite different then, sir. I begin to see that where the element of coercion comes in, there pleasure ceases.”

“I wonder if you are a budding philosopher, Harrie—something must surely come out of these magnificent sentences of yours,” said the Doctor.

He was beginning to realise, more and more seriously every year, the oddness of his poor young pupils. He would pace up and down the study of nights, revolving plans for their release—plans that ended in nothing, for the widow was inflexible in her views upon the beneficial effects of solitude upon the young mind. All that a man could do Dr. Cornelius had done. But experience of life, of men and of manners, of that great teacher we call the world, cannot be imparted second hand. “They must waken up some day to find themselves in the thick of a great struggle, where every man’s hand, and specially every woman’s, is against them, and they unarmed against their foes—they will only realise that they have foes by the wounds they will receive. Ah, poor lambs!—it’s cruel—I could almost pray they might never leave the curious fold they are in. Only, what a waste of Harrie’s powers and Lucie’s looks!—why, the child will be lovely a few years hence.”

So moaned Dr. Cornelius month by month and year by year. He even tried some remonstrance with Mrs. Marjorybanks.

“Would you not allow your daughters to make some friends of their own age, madam?” he asked. “Would you not go into Edinburgh for the winter months, and give them the advantages of society?”

But Mrs. Marjorybanks only smiled.

“I have established a correspondence between Henrietta and the daughter of my friend Mrs. Pelham. I consider that correspondence is fully more stimulating to the character than friendship. Henrietta writes an excellent letter, and enters, indeed, into all the topics of the day with Miss Margaret Pelham.”

As you have seen, “all the topics of the day,” as they existed for Henrietta, were mainly dissertations upon religion, mathematics, and philosophy—her only interests in life, and Maggie Pelham, a gay young maiden just entering on the pleasures of a London season, would sometimes laugh a good deal over the funnily-worded letters. But there was a touch of rareness in all that Henrietta did which made her lengthiest epistles worth the reading. She struck out new phrases and ideas constantly, and when she came down from the clouds to describe their daily life at Balgowrie to her unknown friend, she made it all so real and unconsciously touching that Maggie Pelham would cry out with moist eyes to her mother—

“Madam, do you not think we might invite Henrietta and Lucie to visit us?”

And Mrs. Pelham would shake her head regretfully, saying, “We might ask them very often, Maggie my dear, and have always the same reply. I fear Mrs. Marjorybanks is demented, poor lady, or something very like it—’tis a sad pity for the poor girls.”

So time wore on, and this long lane of life that hedged in Henrietta and Lucie seemed no nearer a turning than when they had first come to Balgowrie nine long years before.

Henrietta was one-and-twenty and Lucie eighteen when an event occurred which changed the current of their lives at last.

XI

“So,” said Dr. Cornelius, sitting looking into the fire, and speaking to himself, “So the time has come. I see trouble ahead.”

Strange things had been happening at Balgowrie. For the last ten days a visitor had been there—and that visitor a man, young, and extraordinarily good-looking, and of pleasant address. “Lessons,” properly so called, were at an end now that Henrietta and Lucie were grown to years of discretion, but Dr. Cornelius still “directed their studies,” as Henrietta phrased it, and directed their lives too, so far as it was in his very limited power to do. So the advent of this disturbing stranger had given him much food for thought. “Very good for the girls,” he had said at first, but a nearer acquaintance with Captain Dan Charteris, in his more unguarded moments over a bottle of claret, and in the absence of the ladies, had caused Dr. Cornelius some little anxiety.

“’Pon my soul! I never knew I was so squeamish before,” he said, with a smile. “It’s Lucie, I see;” and then added slowly, as an after-thought, “happily.” He sat silent after this for a little, and then rose, and stood gazing into a little oval mirror that hung over the mantelshelf, examining himself closely, as if with some quite new interest.

“Why, Cornelius, how old are you now?” he said. “Let me see—fifty-two, is it—or fifty-three?—and your hair grey—grey as silver. Heavens! what a fool you are!”

The glass reflected a very personable man, however, for all his grey hairs and fifty years, and Dr. Cornelius was not slow to recognise the fact. The gentlemen of last century had admirable constitutions in spite of their potations; and those which Dr. Cornelius had indulged in had left no trace upon him beyond the slightly deeper tint than nature’s which suffused his fine, smooth skin, giving him, when taken in conjunction with his grey hair, something the effect of wearing rouge and powder. He leaned his arms on the mantelshelf and continued to gaze at this comely reflection. He was quite sufficiently conscious of his own attractions; and, following the precedent of ninety-nine men out of a hundred, finished his survey by the remark, “Most women would have me;” but toned down the vain-glorious thought by the heartfelt addition—“except Harrie, she is unlike all other women. I believe it would shock and wound her to think I ever thought of

her after this fashion; and, besides, she cares for none of these things. Why, I doubt if the child would know what I was driving at if I made love to her. Yet one cannot wait for ever. If Lucie and this Charteris were to make it out, there might then be a chance for me, but those girls are twined together like the strands of a rope. . . .”

So he mused on, as men, and women too, will do to the end of time when it is a question of love. The fire died down into a little heap of white ash, and the eight-day clock in the hall struck twelve in its ponderous, sure-footed style, before the musings came to an end.

And meanwhile, at Balgowrie, Henrietta and Lucie were entering, all unknown to themselves, into woman’s kingdom. The stranger had arrived on one of the Thursday reception evenings. It was a lovely May night, and the long, sweet-scented dusk tantalised the girls with thoughts of what the garden would be like were they only at liberty to stray through it, instead of going over the long played-out farce of the receptions. Lucie was specially petulant this evening. As she and Henrietta were donning their evening gowns together, she broke out in bitter complaint. “It is too hard, Harrie! How long do you suppose this is to go on?” and then, lowering her voice and drawing nearer to her sister, she added, “*I believe mother is crazy, Harrie.*”

Henrietta tightened her lips for a moment. Then she said gently, “You must get ready, Lucie. It does no good, but rather harm, to complain. Come and let me fasten your ribbons, dear.”

Lucie plumped down on her knees before Henrietta, bringing her white shoulders on a level with her hand; but just as the ribbons were being gathered up into a neat little favour, a tremendous knock echoed through the quiet house. The girls held their breath to listen, and, in the silence that followed, they heard the startled rats scamper off through the walls.

Lucie was on her feet in a moment. “What can it be, Harrie? Dr. Hallijohn never knocks, and there is no one else to come” (she was unconscious of the pathos that lay in the statement). “Let me look out,” she added, pulling aside the toilet table, and squeezing into the window niche. “Why, Harrie,” she cried, “it’s a horse—a horse I have never seen before.”

“The horse could not knock, child; who is on it?” laughed Henrietta.

“I cannot see; I shall go and look down the passage.”

Lucie ran to the door and stood with her head turned in the direction of the front staircase, listening intently. Presently she returned to say incredulously, "It is a man, Harrie, and he has come upstairs."

"It *must* be Dr. Hallijohn; you have mistaken about the horse," said Henrietta, with composure, slipping on the hair bracelets which formed her curiously ungirlish ornament, and clasping a tiny gold chain, to which a miniature was suspended, round her throat. "I wish Dr. Hallijohn had not come," she said. "I dislike that even he should see this, and I fear that mother will not forego the reception on any account. Let us come downstairs, Lucie."

On the stair they met Hester, with an almost awed expression on her face. "I am to tell you, young ladies, that Captain Charteris is in the drawing-room."

"*Who?*" said the girls in a breath.

"A gentleman, calling himself Captain Charteris, misses, and that is all I know of him," said Hester.

Henrietta and Lucie exchanged glances of entire amazement, and, Henrietta leading the way, they entered the drawing-room.

Mrs. Marjorybanks stood in her usual reception dress at the far end of the room; no chair, but a living, breathing man stood beside her. To understand the feelings of Henrietta and Lucie at this sight, it must be remembered that this was literally the first young man to whom they had ever addressed a word—almost, indeed, the first young man they had ever seen.

He was a very pleasant specimen of the new species to look upon—tall, and carrying himself bravely, with a crop of dark red curls, and eyes of wonderful blue; altogether an uncommon man in appearance and in address. He came forward to meet the girls, who stood still for a moment in slight embarrassment.

"This gentleman, Captain Charteris, has been sent here by our friend Mrs. Pelham," said Mrs. Marjorybanks; "and, unused as we are to the exercise of hospitality, I am honoured to entertain any friend of Mrs. Pelham's."

Henrietta held out her hand awkwardly and in silence, but Lucie said very sweetly, "The Pelhams seem dear friends of ours, although we have never seen them. Have you ridden all the way from London, sir, or did you come by coach?"

“By sea from London, and rode from Edinburgh. I had a mount from a friend there. Forty miles, is it not? and a long forty at that, Miss Marjorybanks,” he said, running his gallant eyes over Lucie for a moment.

But further conversation was interrupted by Mrs. Marjorybanks, who said firmly, “It is our custom, Captain Charteris, to go through the outward forms of society every week in our secluded home, and if you will excuse us, we will just proceed with our reception as usual. If you are fatigued by your ride, Silence will show you to your room; but if not, perhaps you will join in our entertainment.”

The young soldier was rather perplexed by this announcement. What did the “outward forms of society” mean? However, as it seemed the best way to spend his evening, he signified to the widow his pleasure at being included in their party.

Poor Henrietta and Lucie! Was it possible they had to go through this farce before a stranger—to converse in his presence with a chair apiece, and be introduced with stern formality to the sofa? They hardly dared to look up as Mrs. Marjorybanks began her introductions; their tongues seemed to cleave to the roof of their mouths with shyness and the smarting sense of the stranger’s inevitable ridicule. He leaned back against the mantelshelf for a few minutes, listening and taking it all in, then suddenly sprang forward and bowed low before Lucie, while Mrs. Marjorybanks brought out a long-winded introduction.

“Gad!” he said; “it’s a better game than some I have played! Permit me, madam, to take the place of this gentleman;” and with that he shoved aside the inanimate partner which had just had the honour of introduction to Lucie, and placed himself in its stead.

“Now,” thought Lucie, “there is no more need to feel shy—I am not speaking to a chair;” and, her tongue being unloosed, she chattered to the Captain as though she had known him all her life. Lucie was, in fact, rather like those tropic birds we read of in travellers’ tales, who, having never seen the cruel monster man, are quite without fear of him, and will alight on the very barrel of his gun without dreaming of danger. Her ignorance of men and manners was so profound that she was not even self-conscious.

“It is quite amusing to us to see a stranger, I can assure you, sir,” she said; “for, as you see, our receptions are not very crowded.”

“Beauty has always her court,” he said, with his finest bow. But Lucie was not sophisticated enough to appreciate the compliment, so he went on

—“Have you agreeable neighbours here, Miss Marjorybanks?”

“Neighbours?” queried Lucie. “We have Dr. Hallijohn. He is the only person we ever see.”

“The only person?”

“Yes. He used to give us lessons, but since we have grown up, we have stopped that partially—at least I have. My sister Henrietta is very fond of books.”

“And what do you do with yourself all day, if I may make bold to ask?” said the Captain.

“I sew, sir, and I play upon the spinnet, and I feed the hens, and we walk out each afternoon; and in the evenings we read aloud the works of Mr. Hume—at least we are reading them at present; they are very instructive, but I would prefer a romance.”

“Miss Pelham warned me I was coming among learned ladies,” said Captain Charteris, laughing. “She has a great opinion of Miss Henrietta’s learning.”

“Oh, will you tell me about Miss Pelham, sir? Will you describe her to me?” cried Lucie delightedly. “We have corresponded for a very long time, but we have never met, and I should like beyond all things to hear about her.”

“What shall I tell you, then? Miss Pelham is a very lovely young lady, the toast of half London by now, and as sweet as she is lovely, report has it.”

“Then you do not know her yourself, sir?” said Lucie. The Captain shrugged his shoulders lightly.

“We were good friends enough once, Miss Marjorybanks, and are still, for that matter; but I’ve been out of London for two years now, while Miss Peggy has been entering society with a flourish of trumpets, so we are scarce as intimate as we once were.”

“Society? how singular it must be to ‘enter society’!” exclaimed Lucie in her artless way, and Charteris laughed.

“I suppose you will do it some day yourself,” he said. But Lucie shook her head.

“I do not fancy that I ever shall. Tell me, sir, is it very delightful to ‘enter society’?—and there is another phrase which I have heard Dr. Hallijohn

employ—‘seeing something of the world.’ Have you ‘seen something of the world?’”

“Well, yes,—I fancy I have,” he said, laughing a very pleasant laugh, that impelled Lucie to laugh also.

“Ah, tell me about ‘the world’ then, that will be delightful!” she said, turning her blue eyes up to the Captain’s face in that charming way she had.

And he, nothing loath, set himself to the task.

“ ’Tis a wide word ‘the world,’ ” he said, “and I’ve seen but small part of it after all. What shall I tell you about?”

“Wars. Have you ever been in a battle? I should like to hear about that,” said Lucie, settling herself down to listen, like another Desdemona, to the tales of bloodshed.

“I had the good luck to see active service when I was a boy; but these are old stories now—we’ve fallen on peaceful times, the more’s the pity, unless we get some fighting with the colonies.”

“Ah yes, in America; but you have not told me about your battles,” pouted Lucie.

“Let me see—what can I tell you?—’tis so long ago, Miss Marjorybanks, I’ve forgot the most of it.” But, in spite of this protestation, Charteris found one or two stories to tell. He broke off in the middle of one of them at sight of Lucie’s blanching cheeks.

“Ah, go on,” she cried; “I am so silly, I go white when things stir me, sir. I do not wish you to stop—pray continue your story. May I ask my sister Henrietta to join us? ’twould interest her vastly—and she does not whiten as I do at nothing.”

But Charteris would not finish the story. He said they had had enough of it; nor would he go over any of the former stirring tales for Henrietta’s benefit. He did not seem to find her such a sympathetic listener. So, instead of conversation, he paced the minuet with Lucie; and with this and supper, the hours, generally so leaden in their passing, slipped away unheeded.

The girls had plenty to talk of that night.

XII

Captain Charteris had not intended to pay a long visit to Balgowrie. He had only thought of claiming the widow's hospitality for a few nights in passing on his way through Scotland, but the few nights extended to seven or eight, and still there was no mention made of his journey being resumed.

The unusual presence in the house of necessity brought about a change there in some respects. Mrs. Marjorybanks remarked to her daughters that it was their duty to entertain the visitor, but she made no suggestions as to how it was to be done, only said, "You are worth but little if you cannot amuse an idle man for a day or so;" and with this undeniable truth she left the girls, and shut herself up to pen one of her interminable letters. It was more like the idle man entertaining them, as it proved; and for this kind of thing Charteris showed himself admirably fitted.

"Do you not ride?" he asked Lucie, on the second morning of his stay at Balgowrie.

He was standing beside her in the west turret, looking along the great curve of beach that lay below the house towards the west.

"Those are sands for a gallop indeed," he added.

"No, sir; my mother has never kept a horse," said Lucie. "But why do you not ride out by yourself on this fine morning?"

"I find myself poor company, you see," he said, looking down into Lucie's blue eyes.

"I feel sure that Dr. Hallijohn would ride with you. He rides every day. Shall I send Silence down with a note to him?" asked Lucie innocently.

Even two days of determined pretty speeches had not taught her how to take a compliment.

"No, no; but—let me see—would Dr. whatever-his-name-is not lend you his horse? I shall be proud to be your teacher in horsemanship."

Lucie flushed with delight. "I should like it beyond everything. I am sure he would—only I fear mother would not allow me to—she does not like us to enjoy ourselves," she added naïvely.

“But this is not enjoyment—at least, we shall not call it so. We shall say that it is a lesson. Every lady should know how to ride; it is quite necessary, I can assure you, Miss Lucie.”

“We might ask her, at least,” said Lucie.

“Oh, I’ll do that—let me ask Mrs. Marjorybanks,” he said, and strode out of the room in search of his hostess without wasting more time.

Lucie was in a fever of excitement and delight. How often she had longed to ride! and there was a delicious excitement in the teacher too. Life had acquired a sudden saltiness after its long vapidness, and she walked about the room clasping and unclasping her fingers, dreading to hear that the proposed pleasure had been forbidden.

The Captain returned very soon. “Mrs. Marjorybanks is quite pleased. Will you send Silence for the horse? And your mother even tells me she has a habit for you.”

“Oh yes, I have often dressed up in it!” cried Lucie, breathless with pleasure. “And are we really going? Ah, but why can Henrietta not come too?” she said, her happy face clouding over.

Charteris drew in his breath in a half-whistle of intense inward amusement. “If she was not as innocent as a dove, wouldn’t that have been a coquette’s question?” he said to himself; but aloud—

“I fear we cannot furnish ourselves with three horses, Miss Lucie; it is a sad pity, but perhaps Miss Marjorybanks, who is so studious, would despise it for wasted time.”

“Oh no. But why should Harrie not go instead of me?” said Lucie, struck with a fresh thought.

“Ah, but you were the first I proposed to instruct,” said Charteris quickly. “And before the morning loses its freshness, can we get the horse?”

Lucie ran off to write a note to Dr. Cornelius, praying for the use of Saul (who had succeeded Barnabas when that long-suffering steed went the way of all horseflesh), and ended her note with an ecstatic girlish postscript, “I am so much excited,” that made Dr. Cornelius smile. But in the meantime a new difficulty had risen—a side-saddle.

“What the deuce am I thinking about?” said the Captain. “The parson doesn’t ride side fashion, I fear.”

Lucie's face fell—the cup was to be dashed from her lips after all. But the Captain was determined. There was an inn, was there not? he asked—was there ever an inn without a side-saddle? So Silence, when he at last appeared grimly leading Saul up to the steps, was bidden return to the village and search up a saddle. “Fine ongoing,” he muttered under his breath as he departed reluctantly, relinquishing Saul into the hands of Captain Charteris.

Henrietta and Lucie had both come out on to the steps to meet the well-known steed, and Lucie had to get carrots and sugar immediately for her favourite.

“Dr. Hallijohn had another horse we liked even better,” she said. “He was a dear beast, black, and with a white star on his nose. We were deeply attached to Barnabas, but he had to be sold two years ago; he became too old. Now we are very fond of Saul, although we hardly think his colour so impressive.”

“Not so like a parson, perhaps,” said Charteris, slapping Saul's sleek bay coat approvingly.

It seemed as if Silence would never return. Saul was fed until the Captain remonstrated, and yet the laggard did not appear. At last he hove in sight, with—yes—the saddle riding triumphantly on his head. Lucie did not wait for further sight of the prize, but flew upstairs to don her habit.

Ah, what a picture she made some minutes later as she came out a little shyly on to the steps! The habit, cut in the fashion of thirty years before, was of bright blue cloth, and trimmed profusely with tarnished gilt buttons. She wore along with it a small feathered hat with the plume falling over one side of her bright face. The habit, made for her mother, was much too long, and she had some ado to gather up the voluminous folds in her little white fingers. Her cheeks were like blush roses with excitement and pleasure.

“Ah!” said Charteris appreciatively, drawing in his breath; but to himself—“Fancy that habit in town!”—the picturesque and the fashionable go not always hand in hand.

“Now, are you frightened, Miss Lucie?” he asked; “or do you think I can take care of you?”

“Oh, I could not be frightened of Saul, I know him so intimately,” said she. “But you know, sir, he is of great height; I fear you must lift me up.”

The Captain did not demur. It was far pleasanter to put a hand on each side of that dainty little waist and toss her up on to her saddle like a feather,

than it would have been to go through a lesson in the art of mounting—that could come another day. He gathered up the reins and gave them into the little white fingers, with great emphasis upon how to hold them; then sprang into his saddle and turned the horses' heads towards the shore. Did any man ever ride like Dan Charteris? Horse and man seemed one in an indescribable harmony of motion. To see him ride past was to feel you should applaud such a gallant sight! For such an expert horseman he had wonderful patience with a beginner in the art. Lucie was not nervous, in spite of being perched up so high and being pitched about in her saddle at every stride of her steed: she laughed and joked over it all—her curls flew out from under her hat and blew about her face in the fresh salt wind—she was a bewitching pupil. They paced up and down the sands slowly at first, and then a little less cautiously as Lucie got a better seat.

“Ah, this is the most delightful day of my life,” she said, as they pulled up the horses to let her regain her breath a little.

And Charteris was nearly of the same opinion as he watched her glowing cheeks and clear blue eyes. It was a little damping to have her say, “If only Harrie were here!”—but she would learn greater wisdom before long.

“I must stay for another day or two, if Mrs. Marjorybanks will extend her hospitality so far, and by that time I will have made a first-rate horsewoman of you,” he said.

“But then I will have no one to ride with,” said Lucie, with a fascinating little pout, turning her eyes up to his.

She was getting on a little already, he thought, as he looked down into them.

Henrietta had been rather anxious meantime. She went up to the west turret window and watched the riders as they cantered along the sands. Something almost intangible stirred at her heart—was it jealousy, or an uneasy feeling that, after all, Captain Charteris was only a stranger to them? She could not say.

“Oh, is he not nice?” said Lucie that night, as the girls were alone together.

“He—he is pleasing,” said Henrietta, with a more distinct tug at her heart-strings this time. After only two days!

XIII

The Captain's visit lengthened out. He had found favour in the eyes of Mrs. Marjorybanks by assuring her that he considered all forms of faith equally vain, and by appreciating the contents of her cellar. "He is a gentleman of the old school," the widow said. So she gave him of her best, and did not play the chaperon at all. She scorned such conventionalities. Certainly the visitor was a wonderful addition to the strange little circle at Balgowrie. The house put on an air of habitation that it had never known before. Its long passages echoed to the Captain's laughter and whistling, and the snatches of gay little tunes that were ever on his lips. In the evenings he and Lucie sang together, or in the long dusks of May they would wander about the garden, amusing themselves with nothing, as all young creatures can, if they are left alone. Henrietta, of course, was always there, for Lucie would not go alone; but it must be said that her position became not altogether a pleasant one. She could not help acknowledging that Charteris, for one, would have preferred to be alone with Lucie. "I suppose this is what in romances is termed *Love*," she said, with infinite scorn. She knew very little about love, and cared less; for her it was a figment of the popular fancy, a curious superstition that had somehow become universal—a name. The realities of life, for Henrietta, were only study—the pursuit of knowledge under any form—and her love for two people—Lucie and Dr. Cornelius. Between these sisters, so unlike in character, there had grown up that exquisite intimacy which is so close as to be unconscious of its own preciousness. There was, as it were, one heart between them; the gropings of speech were superfluous. As you may sometimes see two branches of a tree almost grown together by continued pressure one upon the other, so these characters, that started on their journey so far apart, had been welded into one by their dependence on each other. Now a thin edge of the outer world's dividing wedge began to push itself between them, and Henrietta winced sharply and sorely as the intruding presence asserted itself beyond a doubt. The first pin-prick had been the thought that Charteris was in love with Lucie—but like a knife at her heart came the conviction that Lucie was in love with him. Where confidence is absolute there is seldom much speech—most things are understood. Lucie said no word to Henrietta of the sudden summer in her heart—it would have seemed quite unnecessary to her to do so. But she laughed and sang out of the fulness of her happiness, and Henrietta did not need to be told about it. And from her calm standpoint

Henrietta at first smiled too; for Lucy did not take love very seriously. It was only a delicious frolic then, new and intensely exciting, the first sip of life.

But when Charteris had been now three weeks at Balgowrie (a long enough visit, in all conscience, for a self-invited guest), the frolic came to a sudden end. Lucie woke up to find that she had staked her happiness at this fascinating game, and Henrietta, watching, trembled and held her breath to see such high play.

It was one of those May evenings when the light seems unwilling to say good-night to the budding world, and lingers very long in a splendid after-glow. The apple trees were a sheet of blossom, and little puffs of wind came up from the sea, smelling salt and fresh, to mix their saltiness with the heavy scent of the blossom. It was a delight to draw breath in such sweetness. Lucy and Charteris had gone out to the garden, and were leaning over the low wall at the end of the orchard, looking towards the sunset. An interruption was the last thing they looked for, and the appearance of Silence, bearing a salver, on which lay a large crested envelope, was not welcome. Letters were no everyday event in 1775, and Silence presented the missive with a bow of solemn reverence.

“A letter?” said Charteris carelessly. “It grows too dark to read it now—eh, Lucie?”

He ventured upon her name for the first time under cover of the reassuring dusk. The retreating figure of Silence, as he disappeared among the apple trees, seemed to leave them doubly alone.

“Oh, I think you could still see to read it, sir,” she said, catching up the big envelope, and slowly spelling out its address.

“Well—here goes,” he said, taking it from her with a lingering touch of her little white hand. “Come, and we shall read it together; I shall let you into all my secrets.”

He spread out the sheet towards the glow that indicated where sunset had been, and they bent their heads over it in the effort to decipher its contents. The letter was inscribed under His Majesty’s seal, and summoned Captain Dan Charteris to London with all speed.

“To-morrow, that means,” he said blankly. “Gad! but the time has wings in Scotland, I think.”

Lucie said nothing; for her heart had stood still in a moment of utter dismay, and now she was gulping down her tears, and could not trust herself

to speak. Charteris probably understood the situation. He put his arm very gently round Lucie's neck and kissed her.

"Never fear, Lucie. We'll meet again this side the grave," he said lightly.

"I—I hope so," she stammered. "I should not care very much for the other side;" and, yielding to the soft pressure of his arm, Lucie buried her face on his breast and sobbed out of very joy.

Charteris did not take very long to kiss away her tears. He did not say much; but kisses are wonderfully reassuring.

"We must go in, Dan," she said at last, remembering how long they must have been absent from the house; but before they turned to go, she looked up into her lover's face, to stamp it on her memory for ever. As he stood there in the dull red glow, Charteris seemed like some sculptured bronze knight. His colouring was indistinguishable in the dusk; his hair looked black as night, and his blue eyes, except where a reflection from the sky gave them a flash of scarlet, might have been coals for blackness.

And Charteris, taking a farewell look also, saw Lucie like a little white ghost against the dark tree stems behind her.

"Why, you might be on t'other side already, child," he cried, laughing, and passing his arm through hers.

"The other side of what?" queried Lucie.

"Of the grave, you little white ghost!" he said.

XIV

The drawing-room was quite dark when Lucie and Charteris came in. Mrs. Marjorybanks had a curious habit of pacing up and down the room like a caged beast at times, and to-night she had one of her restless fits upon her. She passed from end to end of the long room without a moment's pause for breath, moving with almost a man's stride. At the window Henrietta sat, holding a book close to her eyes to catch the last rays of light. Mrs. Marjorybanks did not stop for a moment as they entered, but said shortly—

“You are late,” and passed them on her rapid walk.

Charteris fell into step with her, however, and forced conversation by the announcement of his summons to London. The widow did not seem to be disturbed at all.

“Everything comes to an end, you see, Charteris,” she said. “We have enjoyed your company, and now we must enjoy your absence.”

He had learned to laugh at her queer speeches,—a condition of life at Balgowrie. So he laughed at this, and they paced up and down together for a few more turns, before Charteris remembered that his effects must be packed that night, to catch the Edinburgh coach on its way through the village in the early dawn. He excused himself, and went off to his packing, whistling along the passage very light-heartedly.

Lucie had gone over to the window where Henrietta sat. They did not speak, but Lucie slipped her hand into Henrietta's, and gave it a little excited squeeze, then she went into the west turret and leaned against the window frame, looking out across the darkness to the long red bar that still lingered in the western sky. Standing there, she heard Charteris come into the drawing-room again and ask where she was.

“I am here, sir,” she said softly; and he crossed the room, and stooped his head to pass through the low entrance to the turret.

“I am come to ask a favour of you, Lucie,” he said. “And must you call me ‘sir,’ by the way? Well, this is it. Why, it is too dark to see here. I wished you to mend my laced coat for me.”

“Oh, I can do that with pleasure! I shall get a light, if you wait one moment,” said Lucie.

She rang for Silence, who came in with a lamp, and grumbled under his breath when sent for another for the turret.

“My sewing things are here,” Lucie explained, as if explanations were necessary for her wish to be alone with her lover.

Charteris spread out all the gaudy bravery of his laced coat across her knee. Some of the gold braid had been torn, and the lace was come loose from its ruffling.

“Small use I have had for it; I thought to wear it at Holyrood,” he said, with a grimace at the finery.

“Oh, I should like to see you in it, above all things!” cried Lucie, with all a woman’s enthusiasm for uniform. It was the first she had ever set eyes upon, and she could not but admire it infinitely.

“Ah! who knows? Perhaps some day you may,” said the Captain, indicating where the repair was needed in a very utilitarian way.

Lucie’s fingers played long with the laced coat. You may be sure she put her best sewing into it; but at last she had to confess the pleasant task was done.

“You will remember me when next you wear it,” she said shyly, as she folded it up with beautiful exactness into the proper folds.

“And what will you remember me by?” said Charteris.

“I am in no danger of forgetting, sir—Dan, I mean,” said Lucie softly.

Charteris was standing beside the little turret window, and as Lucie spoke, he drew the diamond ring from his finger, and began to draw something on the pane.

“Oh, what is it?” she said, starting up to look at what he did, and letting her hand rest on his shoulder for a moment as she leaned forward.

“A heart, little lady—yours or mine,” he said. “And here goes your name above it, and 1775, and D. R. C. for my name; and what shall we have underneath?”

“Whatever you like,” said Lucie.

Charteris went on scrawling some words on the pane.

“See—does that please you?” he asked at length.

“‘United hearts death only parts,’” read Lucie slowly. “Ah, Dan, that is beautiful!”

But further sentimentalities were stopped by the announcement of supper, a meal which Charteris partook of with his wonted perfection of appetite, while Lucie could not even make a pretence of eating.

She did not make much pretence of sleeping either; for oh, the hours passed quickly enough that were bringing her nearer and nearer to “Good-bye”—they would have flown with intolerable swiftness in dreams.

Charteris rode away in the splendid morning sunshine, and Lucie and Henrietta stood on the steps to watch his going. His farewells had been quite unemotional; he only pressed Lucie’s hand a moment longer than Henrietta’s.

The sisters stood together watching till the last glimpse of horse and rider had disappeared. Neither spoke, but Henrietta passed her arm round Lucie’s neck. Faithless Lucie! the caress only brought to her mind the remembrance of another, the same, but so different, and her tears fell fast. She pushed away Henrietta’s arm and sprang down the steps and along the orchard walk till she reached the old wall where she had stood the night before with Charteris.

“He is away—he is away! and not even Harrie can make up for him!” she cried. And, leaning her head on the old wall, she tasted the bitterness of first parting. Dan was gone—had ridden away into the great busy world in which he played his graceful, daring part; while she stayed here, penned up alone in this garden, as much out of his world as if she were in the moon and he on earth. Every step of his horse was at that moment carrying him farther and farther away from her, into the unknown and far away, where she might not follow—whence he would not come for—oh, centuries! And the whole world was black and dull, except just that happy spot where he chanced to be. Lucie wept on till she was too tired to weep any more, then she dried her eyes and smiled a faint, watery smile, remembering that, after all, it was happiness, not grief, that she had found. Then she thought of Henrietta with a pang of self-reproach, and the thought sent her racing down the orchard towards the house.

Henrietta, who did not love the sunlight as Lucie did, had gone indoors. She was sitting in the library as usual, a book open before her, her face supported on her hand; but as Lucie came nearer, she saw that the book was all blotted with tears. Henrietta, it is true, was reading at that moment a hard lesson in the book of life. As was their habit, the sisters did not waste words.

Lucie knelt down beside Henrietta, and they cried together silently. It was quite as sad a thought to Lucie as to Henrietta that someone from the outside had stepped in between them. At last Henrietta said pensively—

“You are not my little sister any longer—you are as old as I am all of a sudden.”

At this Lucie rose with great dignity, saying, “Older, Harrie; I am in love—what we have heard so much about.”

And then they both laughed, and Henrietta said in her heart, “Lucie is a child still.”

XV

So Lucie was child enough to be delighted for a time with her new sensation.

But as you will sometimes see a child that is smitten by some sad and wasting illness play about merrily enough at first, then become daily quieter, as the burden weighs heavier and heavier in its flesh, till at last all the games are forgotten and the toys are put away—so Lucie became very sober after a time, and her usual occupations seemed to have lost all zest for her. She did not sing as of yore over her work, and would sometimes let her diligent needle fall unregarded on to her lap for a minute or two, and sit gazing out vacantly into the garden. Then all the little incidents of Dan's visit that it had been her delight to go over in conversation with Henrietta became prohibited subjects, and gradually even his name died out of their talk: for, alas! Dan seemed to have forgotten all about Balgowrie.

Henrietta was distracted. She tried by every art in her power to interest and amuse Lucie, but, after all, what had she to offer as a balancing interest to this great absorbing one that filled her sister's heart? Abstract subjects demand before everything that an undivided mind be brought to their consideration, and philosophy and mathematics roused no enthusiasm in Lucie when another and a very concrete subject filled the foreground of her mind. The only interest she found in anything was in Maggie Pelham's letters. They were a slight link of connection with Charteris, and welcome on that score.

At last Henrietta could bear it no longer. She must speak to someone—get some help. It was a simple matter in one way, for she had no difficulty as to who should be her adviser—there was only Dr. Cornelius.

So she walked down to the Manse one afternoon “with a book.” But the book was a transparent excuse, as Dr. Cornelius was quick to see when she turned her troubled eyes to his.

“There is something wrong, Harrie,” he said.

Henrietta, who never could say a thing like other people, did not tell her errand at once. She entered upon the subject in one of her long-winded sentences, that were like the preparatory remarks of her favourite novelists.

“Sir,” she said, “I have been coming to conclusions regarding love. I believe now, what I have disputed with you, that it is one of the vital forces of the world.”

“Ah, you have come to that conclusion, Harrie? Well, you never come to conclusions without having good grounds for them—may I inquire further?”

But here Henrietta broke down. She clasped her hands in a queer tragic attitude she had, just like a stage posture rather overdone, and turned to Dr. Cornelius with streaming eyes.

“Oh, sir, it is Lucie—my dearest, my own Lucie! She cares for that man, and for no other thing on earth. You must have noticed that she grows thinner and paler each day. I am breaking my heart over her.”

“Tut, tut, Harrie! you take matters too seriously; ’tis a childish complaint we all pass through,” said Dr. Cornelius lightly, and he patted Henrietta’s shoulder encouragingly.

“But she lies awake half the night, and weeps and weeps when she thinks I do not hear her; and she does not care about the pigeons, or the hens, or her lark any longer.”

“We have all lain awake—no—I believe you have not—I have, many a time, though, and see me now,” said Dr. Cornelius. He certainly had not suffered materially from his vigils: Henrietta allowed herself to feel comforted by a glance at his smooth face, where even fifty and odd years had written no wrinkles as yet.

Seeing her a little reassured, Dr. Cornelius began to look at the other side of the picture.

“It is not a very wholesome process all the same, Henrietta,” he said; “I agree with you there—Lucie looks ill and thin—she requires change before anything. Would nothing induce your mother to send her away from home?”

“You know my mother, sir,” said Henrietta hopelessly.

“I only know one thing of her, that you cannot really calculate exactly upon her actions in any way: there is just a fractional chance that if you proposed this at the right moment, Mrs. Marjorybanks might suddenly consent to it.”

“And where would Lucie go? We have no friends that I know of.”

“To London—where her heart is—to your friend Mrs. Pelham. Henrietta, I shall write to Mrs. Pelham myself about this, with your

consent.”

“I fear, I fear, sir, it is useless!” and then with a sudden lowering of her voice and a passionate, despairing movement of her hands, “Only God can help us, sir—our mother is mad!”

“My dear, my dear!” said Dr. Cornelius soothingly, but to himself he ejaculated, “Has she only found that out now?” Aloud he said, “Now we play the parson—you should not speak of that Aid as the last resort.”

“I have only two—you and God—I came to you first,” said Henrietta simply. She had hewn out some rudimentary religious beliefs for herself, but she was so destitute of conventional religiosity that her expressions might sometimes, as in the present instance, seem to savour of irreverence. But irreverence was very far from Henrietta’s nature. After she had said this, she sat looking at Dr. Cornelius silently.

“Cornelius,” she said suddenly (it was the first time she had ever spoken his name, and he started to hear it from her lips),—“Cornelius, I never like you so little as when you say things of that sort.”

“Of which sort, Harrie?”

“‘Playing the parson.’ I know enough to know that if there is a God you should not make a joke of serving Him; and if there is not, or if you think there is not, you should scorn to live on the teaching of lies.”

Henrietta spoke with eyes that flashed and a ringing voice, and Dr. Cornelius, watching her, felt a throb of triumph at his heart. He listened to her quietly, then stepped forward and took her hand in his.

“One cares something for the man one finds such heavy fault with, Harrie,” he said. “And since when did you become old enough to rebuke me by my Christian name?”

“I do not know—since we seemed to become the same age,” said Henrietta, looking into his face with her steady eyes.

Dr. Cornelius hesitated for a moment—had the right time come at last? Then he took Henrietta’s face between his hands and turned it up towards his own, and kissed her lips.

“We are not teacher and pupil any longer, Harrie, but man and woman—I found that out some time ago. I was waiting to see when you would make the discovery.”

“ ’Tis very pleasant, sir.”

“And will you find it very pleasant to marry me, Harrie?” There was a long pause then.

“Yes, I think I shall—but Lucie?”

The lover is proverbially impatient, so perhaps it was not surprising that Dr. Cornelius should be provoked at this.

“Lucie, Lucie, Lucie!” he cried. “Can you never forget her for a moment? This is not the time to think of her, Harrie—surely your own affairs and mine might occupy you for a little?” He could not be angry with Henrietta, but he came very near it just then.

“My affairs and Lucie’s are the same, I think,” said Henrietta; but Dr. Cornelius questioned this statement firmly.

“No, no, Harrie; you must make up your mind to take your separate ways at last. She has got her lover, and you have got yours. Your affairs are very different, instead of being identical.”

He had risen, and stood now leaning against the mantelshelf. Henrietta rose also. She was playing a part that was quite new to her, and in which she did not feel easy as yet. She was not one of the women to whom love-making comes by nature; she found no sweet words waiting on her tongue, and the very fulness of her feeling hindered its expression. To help out her halting words, she came up to Dr. Cornelius, placing her hands on his shoulders with a quick, gentle movement, and looking into his face.

“You must not mind, sir,” she stammered out. “You—you are my—my lover . . . but oh, Lucie is my very life!”

He laughed at her shyness, stroking her hair, and looking deep into her eyes to read their baffling honesty, that had never had a thought to hide. “There’s not one woman in a thousand could stand that test, Harrie,” he said, for she turned up her face to his like a child.

“You have not said anything about Lucie,” said Henrietta, and at this Dr. Cornelius laughed more loudly than before.

“Ah, Harrie, Harrie, you will never act like other women—never! I can swear that you have just heard the first words of love-making you have ever listened to, and instead of being fluttered by them, you return to your starting-point as if nothing had happened! So it appears we must settle Lucie’s affairs first?”

“If we did, I could then think more undisturbedly about my own,” said Henrietta.

Dr. Cornelius made a grimace and shrugged his shoulders.

“Madam is business-like,” he said. “Pray be seated, then, and let us finish the first subject before we begin on the second. I have only one advice to give. Send Lucie to London. I shall arrange it. Give me three weeks or so, Henrietta, and I will see if it can be done. Keep your mind easy about Lucie—‘men have died, and worms have eaten them, but not for love,’ as your favourite Shakespeare has it.”

“Yes; men,” said Henrietta curtly.

“And women less so—women are not so constant as they are represented to be. We all console ourselves, and so do they. Now, are you at leisure to discuss our personal affairs?”

“Yes, I am; but you must speak, if you please, sir, for I am so unaccustomed to conversation like this that I cannot say what is in my heart—you must understand it.”

“Oh, love is easily learned. Come and say, ‘I love you, Cornelius;’ surely that is easy enough, and it is all I wish.”

“I have never done anything but love you for all these years; I do not need to tell you.”

“Then will you leave Lucie and come to me?”

“Yes, some time. You could not ask me to leave her now.”

“Remember my grey hairs, Harrie. I shall have a shorter lease of happiness than most men.”

“Then it must be all the deeper,” said Henrietta. “If we had met each other when you were young,—the same age with me,—I could never have felt as I do to you now. Why, you have been my father and brother and lover all in one, and I love you with the love of all the three!”

“I used to think you were not meant for marriage, Harrie,—you are not the domestic angel woman,—but I am losing that impression now.”

“I—I have one or two womanly feelings, sir,” said Henrietta reflectively. “I cannot love sewing and baking, but really my heart is not hard; I care for a few things besides study.”

“And you are the one woman in the world for me. I love your inky fingers and your learned sentences beyond all the womanly virtues of the veriest Dorcas. Ah, and some day I shall be proud of you!—some day the

world will hear of you, Harrie, and the learned sentences will come to something.”

“I doubt if I shall ever do much; I think that God has shut in my life between walls.”

“But you are going to break through the walls. You will come out into the world with me, dear, and forget the prison-house, and see men and things new and strange, and it will be like the entering a new life.”

Henrietta’s great eyes glowed, and her queer, expressive face was lighted up with pleasure. She sat gazing into the fire, and repeated his words slowly in the silence that followed—

“I shall see men and things new and strange, . . . and it will be like the entering a new life.”

XVI

After Henrietta had gone, Dr. Cornelius sat thinking for a long time over what had passed. He was not entirely satisfied. The affection Henrietta had for him was beautiful, ideal in some ways,—the steady, natural outgrowth from their earlier relation of teacher and scholar,—but did it not want just the one thing needful? “She is too sure of me,” he reflected; “women adore an element of uncertainty. I am ever with her, and all that I have is hers, and she knows it. I shall go away, like Lucie’s cavalier, and see if the like salutary effects follow. I would give something to see Harrie grow thin and pale for me! If I thought she would give up study, and sit looking at the moon and sighing, I would stay away from her dear presence for a year of Sundays! But she does not love me after that fashion yet. Well, I shall go to London, and take Lucie with me, and perhaps Mademoiselle may find time heavier on her hands without us.”

Dr. Cornelius accordingly laid his plans for going to London, and some three weeks later came to announce them at Balgowrie. He had written to Mrs. Pelham, as arranged, and knew that by this time her invitation to Lucie must have arrived.

The news of his intended journey (a great one it was considered in those days) was received with astonishment.

“You are going to London?” cried Henrietta incredulously, and not without a momentary feeling of pique; she had hitherto heard long beforehand of the smallest change in Dr. Cornelius’ plans. “Why, sir, I do not remember that you have quitted the parish, except to go to Edinburgh, since we came here,” she added.

“Then you see there is all the more need of my going, Harrie; the moss grows over a man in a place like this. Once upon a time I went to London whenever the fancy took me; but nowadays my ministerial duties are so pressing that London does not see much of me.”

He glanced at Henrietta as he said this, to see if she was sufficiently provoked by his levity; but Henrietta affected not to understand his intention, so he added—

“But these are not matters to joke upon; the ministerial calling is a solemn one—eh, Harrie?”

Henrietta refused to reply, however, so Dr. Cornelius had to change the subject. He went directly to his point, addressing Mrs. Marjorybanks now.

“I have been wondering, madam, if you would not think of allowing Lucie to come up to London with me? I do not think she is looking well, and I see she makes no progress with her studies; she requires some stimulus; perhaps you might arrange for her pursuing some course of study under fresh auspices in town if you thought of letting her go there for a time.”

“I do not approve of change for young people,” said the widow, with great finality of tone.

“I was not urging the advantages of change, madam, but of stimulus—of emulation, incentive, ambition. Lucie is apt to be lazy in her studies; but if she were placed among other girls, and fired with the desire to keep pace with them, she might become more industrious. Henrietta needs no incentive to study; but after considering Lucie’s temperament carefully, I have come to the conclusion that emulation alone will make her work. Of course it is for you to decide. I only proposed that she should accompany me to London as it seemed a good opportunity for her going, and as I remembered your good friend Mrs. Pelham had so often invited your daughters to visit her.”

“I had an invitation from Mrs. Pelham to-day for Lucie,” said Mrs. Marjorybanks.

“And will you not consider it as a possibility, madam, now that you know Lucie would have a responsible escort?”

“It is a possibility,” said the widow; and Lucie, sitting at work beside her, held her breath, and broke her needle across, in the effort to direct it with such trembling fingers.

“It would be a pleasure to me,” said Dr. Cornelius. “And before leaving town I would see that all arrangements about Lucie’s studies being properly carried on were completed. I would myself interview her proposed masters, and let them understand that the object of their pupil’s coming to London was entirely that she might benefit mentally, and not that she might enter upon all the frivolities of town life.”

Dr. Cornelius spoke with extraordinary gravity. He even rose and walked over to where Lucie sat tremblingly at work, and laid a hand on her shoulder, saying in his sternest tones—

“It will be no laughing matter this, Lucie. Some people have an idea that London is a place to amuse oneself in; but you will find that you will be

compelled to work there, however dilatory you may be over your studies here.”

He stood, as he said this, with his back to the widow, and even as the severe words fell from his lips, Lucie saw his eyes laugh reassuringly into hers. She said—

“Yes, sir,” very meekly, and waited to hear the upshot of the discussion.

Dr. Cornelius returned to his seat beside Mrs. Marjorybanks.

“I fear I shall hurry Lucie’s preparations,” he said, taking it for granted now that she was to be allowed to go with him, “for I intend to leave for London at the end of the week. But I am sure, madam, that you do not think it necessary to make any great preparations for a stay in the capital; and should any little changes of toilet be desirable, Mrs. Pelham will arrange about them, no doubt. The boat sails for London from Leith Harbour on Saturday morning. Can Lucie be ready to go to Edinburgh with me on Friday?”

It seemed a century to all the impatient listeners before Mrs. Marjorybanks spoke. “Yes,” she said at last, and Dr. Cornelius had triumphed. He did not show any signs of surprise or of pleasure.

“I thought you would agree with me, madam,” he said. “We are so generally agreed upon most subjects that I felt sure it was only necessary to point out this matter to you to gain your consent to my plan.”

Then he rose and bade them all adieu, and Henrietta’s heart felt heavy in the prospect of her coming loneliness, and Lucie’s very soul sang for joy.

XVII

It was a chilly October dawn that saw Lucie start on her travels—an excited, sobbing little person, clad in weird garments made after no known canons of fashion past or present. The Edinburgh coach passed through Eastermuir at six in the morning, and Henrietta had come down to the village to see the travellers off in it. Her heart, too, was in her mouth as they stood together in the chill morning dusk, waiting for the arrival of the coach. The sisters had never been parted before, even for a day, and now that the moment of separation was come, both of them would have been willing that the London visit should be renounced, that they might stay together.

Lucie's courage was entirely gone, and she sobbed openly under her odd green silk bonnet, and clung to Henrietta,—indeed, it is doubtful whether she would ever have gone if Dr. Cornelius had not been her escort. But there was an infectious cheerfulness in his solid, handsome presence as he appeared, rolled up in a long driving coat, and carrying for his own and Lucie's benefit an armful of wraps.

“A stage-coach is the last place for sentiment, Lucie,” he said; “its discomforts are too practical to admit of it; so you must dry these sweet tears, and set your mind to facing the trials of the way with heroism. By the time you have jolted for two or three hours in the coach, I doubt your tears will be falling for yourself, not for Harrie.”

“You seem very cheerful, sir, in the face of all that is before you,” said Henrietta demurely, and Dr. Cornelius laughed, assuring her that he rather liked discomfort as a change.

“I shall take you to London next, Harrie,—to see men and things,” he said.

Lucie did not understand the allusion, or why Henrietta blushed suddenly and hotly at his words. For Henrietta had told her nothing of what had passed between herself and Dr. Cornelius. “If she had been happy, I must have told her,” she thought; “but it would kill her just now to think that I even dreamed of leaving her.” So the blush rather mystified Lucie.

The coach came rumbling up then—mud-spattered, with steaming horses. The driver, a red-faced man encased in a multitude of coats, greeted Dr. Cornelius heartily—

“You’re for the road, Doctor?” he cried, and pulled up his cattle alongside of the little group.

The moment of parting had come, and Lucie flung herself upon Henrietta’s neck, clinging to her as if she would never let her go, till Dr. Cornelius remarked gently that the coach could not wait any longer.

He lifted Lucie into the inside of the vehicle, and turned to say good-bye to Henrietta. She was crying unrestrainedly now, and with a movement of impatience he recognised that she wept for Lucie’s going, not for his. He waited for her to speak, but she had no words, so, pressing her hand silently, he jumped up beside the driver, and wrapped his coat about him in the keen air.

With a strain of the horses at the collar, a jolt of the coach, and a great splash of mud from the heavy roads, off they went; and Henrietta, standing forlorn among the puddles, watched the two people who formed her world disappear like shadows into the mists of the morning.

It was perhaps as well that Lucie was the only inside passenger for the first stage of the journey; for she crept away to one end of the coach and nearly cried her eyes out. The road lay along the shore at first,—by the edge of the sands where she had ridden with Charteris,—and the remembrance made her sob all the more as they rumbled along round the great curve of the bay. The breakers were tumbling in with the same roar that had sounded in her ears from childhood. She was leaving all that was familiar and dear, and going out into the unknown and terrible world, and at the thought poor Lucie sobbed more and more bitterly.

But as they left the well-known shore behind, and the road turned inland, Lucie dried her eyes, and began to look about her. She had never been more than ten miles from Balgowrie since they came to it, and her recollections of life before that date were too indistinct to count for much. Now they were passing through villages and past houses unknown to her even by name, and it was wonderfully interesting. A greater interest than the scenery, however, appeared very soon, in the person of another passenger, a stout countrywoman, carrying a baby. Now, strange as it may seem, Lucie had never, in the whole course of her nearly eighteen years’ pilgrimage, seen a baby so close at hand. Mrs. Marjorybanks did not approve of the girls visiting their poor neighbours, and they had never even spoken to the people as they passed on the roads. So when Lucie was brought face to face with this, one of the wonders of the world, she held her breath for delight. After a

little she moved across the coach and sat down beside the woman, as if irresistibly drawn towards the little bundle she held in her arms.

“May I—may I see the baby?” she faltered out at last; and the woman opened up her shawl immediately, to display the little waxen sleeping face to Lucie’s wondering eyes.

“Oh, it is beautiful, most beautiful! I suppose it is asleep just now? will it waken if I touch it? Might I touch its head?—it looks so soft,” she cried, and the woman said something which she took to be an assent from her amused smile. She leaned forward and touched the soft little head gingerly.

“How *delightful* it is!” she exclaimed. “I should like beyond anything to hold it for a little.”

“They’re an unco fash,” said the unemotional mother.

Lucie did not understand what “fash” meant in the least, but the woman placed the child in her arms, and she sat watching its gentle breaths come and go, breathless herself with excitement.

When it opened its eyes and cried it was a new wonder (“Just like a doll come to life,” said Lucie); and when, restored to the parental arms to receive substantial material comfort, the little creature spread out its tiny dimpled hand against the mother’s breast, Lucie cried out for pleasure.

“I had no idea they were so delightful,” she said, speaking as if of an unknown species.

The mother fairly laughed.

“In a’ the warl’, woman, whaur are ye come frae? A body ’d say ye’d ne’er set eyes on a wean afore.”

Lucie thought it necessary to reply, “I come from a village called Eastermuir.”

“An’ hae they nae bairns in Eastermuir? My word, it maun be a fine place thon!”

“Oh yes, there are children in the village, but I have never spoken to one before—not that I have spoken to this one either. Can it speak yet?”

“Sakes! she’s fair daft, I’m thinkin’!” exclaimed the amused mother. “He’ll no’ hae his tongue for twa year yet.”

“Two years! that seems a long time,” said Lucie reflectively, gazing at the child.

Now that conversation had begun, the woman seemed anxious to continue it.

“Yon’s ‘Doctor Cornelius,’ as they ca’ him, on the top,” she said, indicating the roof of the coach with an upward nod. “Ye’ll ken the Doctor, maybe?”

“I *know* Dr. Hallijohn very well,” said Lucie doubtfully. “He is taking care of me on the journey.”

“He’s a fine man the Doctor,” said the woman quickly, restraining an inclination to gossip over his delinquencies as she saw Lucie was a friend.

Just then the coach drew up before an inn, and the “fine man” came to help Lucie out, for they were to breakfast here. She noticed how the people about the place seemed to know Dr. Cornelius, and he would pass a word with each of them, as if they were old friends. They all looked curiously at Lucie too, and even the bucolic mind seemed to find something a little curious in her appearance, for as she and Dr. Cornelius passed into the parlour where they were to breakfast, the maids stood smiling and whispering to watch her.

Lucie had a pretty good appetite in spite of her morning of weeping, and sat down to discuss cold ham and oatcakes with great pleasure. She had to describe to Dr. Cornelius her wonderful encounter with a real live baby of only two months old, and she did so with an enthusiasm that made him smile.

“You are intended to be a mother, Lucie, without doubt,” he said.

“Ah, you are laughing at me, sir; but do you not find them very delightful little creatures?”

“They do tug at one’s heart-strings,” said Dr. Cornelius sentimentally, as he carved another slice of ham. “Here, my dear, you must have some more; remember what a long day is before you.”

“Why have you never married, sir, when you are so fond of children?” asked Lucie after a minute’s silence.

“Why?—oh, every man has his story, I suppose,” said Dr. Cornelius evasively. “To which fact I owe any popularity I possess. I am a wretched parson, Lucie; I cannot for the life of me reprove a man, and for that very reason I hear all their stories.”

“Do good ‘parsons’ always reprove people, sir?—they must be very disagreeable, I think, if they do.”

“Not at all—it is sometimes exquisitely pleasant to be reprovèd—it depends upon who does it altogether.”

Dr. Cornelius gazed out through the window in the direction of Easternmuir with a reminiscent smile about his lips, forgetting his breakfast in a, for him, most unusual way.

“I do not think you are eating as much breakfast as I am, sir,” said Lucie.

Which was perfectly true. The fresh horses were being yoked below the window, and Lucie rose and stood looking out at them.

Dr. Cornelius paced up and down the narrow panelled parlour, stopping to look at the prints on the walls. He seemed occupied with something else, however, Lucie thought; then she heard him say, with great decision—“‘Henry’—yes, of course.”

“Who is Henry?” she asked, turning round in surprise.

“Did I speak? A stupid habit of mine, Lucie—someone I was thinking about,” said Dr. Cornelius.

“Henry was my father’s name: Henrietta was called after him,” said Lucie.

“Called after her father? Exactly as it should be; children should always be named after their parents. My dear Lucie, we must come downstairs; the coach is ready to start.”

And down they went, and Lucie was bundled into the stuffy vehicle again to resume her journey.

The way seemed interminable. Lucie felt as if she must have reached the end of the earth when at last the coach drew up in the High Street of Edinburgh. And the confusion! and the noise! In absolute terror of the unknown faces, the jarring sounds of the streets,—the first she had ever trod,—and the tall frowning houses overlooking her, Lucie clung to Dr. Cornelius. It was well they had only a few steps to go through the street before reaching the close where old Miss Hallijohn was to bid them welcome. Lucie was bewildered, almost weeping with fear when they stood at last under the shelter of the doorway.

“Oh,” she gasped, “is this what a town is like? Sir, I am so much alarmed, I fear I shall be in your way.”

Dr. Cornelius laughed. “It is an attempt at a town, Lucie: what will you say to London town itself if this scares you? Well, we must come upstairs,

and I shall present you to my good cousin.”

Miss Matilda Hallijohn sat at work in her panelled room looking out over the street. She was a fine old lady, with silver hair dressed high on cushions after the fashion of the day, and a dress of stiff brocaded black satin. Lucie had never seen hair dressed after this prevalent mode, and gazed at it in mute astonishment. Balgowrie made no concessions to the foibles of fashion. The old lady received them with great cordiality, and remarked to Lucie that “Cousin Cornelius had often spoken of her and of her sister.”

But at mention of her sister poor Lucie broke down. She had a sudden vision of what it would be if Harrie could come into this unfamiliar room—how it would seem like home in a moment, and fear and strangeness would vanish away.

“Tut, tut! the bairn’s tired out, Cornelius,” said Miss Hallijohn. “Come away and lie down, my dear;” and she led Lucie up to a little fusty-smelling bedroom at the very top of the house—so high up that it must be among the clouds, Lucie thought. It had one tiny window set into an extraordinarily deep window niche, and the room seemed to contain nothing but bed, so massive in size was the yellow-curtained, four-posted resting-place that stood at one end of it. Miss Hallijohn drew back the curtains and patted the pillows enticingly; but the strange, town-smelling room was terrible to poor home-sick Lucie. How could she rest in that unknown bed, behind these sober yellow hangings, without one familiar object in sight? But suddenly, with a little cry of joy, she ran forward to the window; for through the smoke, over the roofs and chimney-cans, beyond the distant fields, and, indeed, almost indistinguishable in the creeping October mists, her country eyes had discerned a dim blue line dotted with white and brown sails.

“Oh, it is the sea—the sea!” she cried. “Oh, why is it so far away?”

“To be sure it is the Forth, my dear—the same sea you look out on at home,” said Miss Hallijohn reassuringly.

She could scarcely get Lucie to leave the window and lie down, for, tired as she was, the poor child could not tear herself away from this newly-found link with home—the same sea that was washing up over the sands at Eastermuir—the sands where Henrietta was probably walking at that very moment. And at this fresh thought of Henrietta Lucie began to cry again more sadly than before. Miss Hallijohn led her away from the window at last almost by force.

“Things will appear quite differently after you have rested for a few hours, Lucie,” she said.

She could not find it in her heart to address this forlorn little person as Miss Marjorybanks.

“I shall send Joan my maid to waken you at six o’clock. We drink tea at that hour. Come, my dear, you must compose yourself and lie down quietly.”

So Lucie composed herself as best she could behind the yellow curtains. She was glad to be alone at last, and employed her first half-hour of solitude in shedding many soothing, unobserved tears. Then she lay and listened to the unaccustomed noises that floated up from the street. Strange, strange, they seemed to her country ears! the rolling of wheels and the monotonous footfalls on the paving-stones. As evening drew on, there were the cries of hucksters in the street—then an oyster-woman came down the close and stood below the window and gave her melancholy call, suggestive to the uninitiated of all that is weird and desolate rather than of the pleasures of the table. Lucie sat up, quite alarmed by it, but as nothing seemed to happen, she lay down again. Very gradually the noises became indistinct: the roll of passing wheels turned into the surf that broke along the sands at home on the wild winter nights; these footsteps could only be her mother’s, pacing as usual up and down the drawing-room at Balgowrie; and the oyster-seller’s cry resolved itself into the old brown owl that lived in the holly tree.

“I wonder if it has caught a mouse?” Lucie asked herself sleepily, and remembered nothing more.

Downstairs, Miss Hallijohn sat engaged in conversation with Dr. Cornelius.

“You are surely never going to take that poor child to London like that, Cornelius?” she said. “She is far more peculiar than I had anticipated even from your descriptions—and a pretty girl as ever was, too, had she the ordinary advantages of dress and of manner.”

“Come, Matilda, her manners are those of the lady that she is,” said Dr. Cornelius.

“A lady certainly; but there is a peculiarity. She is unlike the young people I see about me, she is so strangely nervous and discomposed.”

“Oh, I assure you her manners are charming as a rule—the child is over-excited and wearied out to-day. In general she is not nervous at all.”

“But with strangers, Cornelius? How will she comport herself in London society, if she is so overcome here?”

“That will pass off. Remember she has never left home before in the seventeen and a half years that make up her sum of life.”

Miss Hallijohn shook her head profoundly.

“And her dress is most peculiar, Cornelius—every young woman of any social standing wears her hair dressed high at present, and a hoop. Now poor Miss Marjorybanks is wearing her hair much as nature arranged it, and her gowns are as flat as my hand. She is most peculiar to look at, in spite of that lovely complexion and those eyes. Your first duty on reaching London must be to procure new clothes for her at any cost—it should have been done before she went. ’Tis cruelty sending a child among strangers dressed after such a fashion.”

“I was thankful enough to get permission to take her as she is. If you knew the difficulties I had to contend with, Matilda, you would congratulate me on my cleverness, instead of finding fault with me.”

“I fear the mother is quite demented,” said Miss Hallijohn. “And what of the other sister?”

“Henrietta? Henrietta is very different from Lucie,” said Dr. Cornelius slowly. “I daresay you would consider her fully more peculiar—she is in some respects; but she has—oh, she has a thousand qualities that Lucie has not got—originality, strength of purpose, courage, perseverance”—

He stopped suddenly, afraid that he had said too much, and added in an off-hand manner—

“One finds out these differences in character after teaching children so long.”

“Is Henrietta a child?” asked Miss Hallijohn, picking up a stitch in her knitting with extreme elaboration.

“That is the worst of cousins—they think it permissible to search out one’s affairs as much as they like,” said Dr. Cornelius; and at this Miss Hallijohn laughed gently.

“I did not know that Henrietta Marjorybanks’ age formed any part of your affairs, my good cousin, but since you assure me that it is so, I am compelled to believe you.”

“Well, I trust you are pleased by the intelligence?”

“Let me see,” said Miss Hallijohn, laying down her knitting with deliberation, and assuming an air of calculation. “How long ago was it? Yes—twenty-five years ago, Cornelius, you came into this very room, and told me you would hang yourself for love of Penelope North. It was immediately after she jilted you. I told you then you would live to marry a better woman, and advised you to defer the hanging for a time. I confess I had almost despaired of seeing my prophecy come true; even yet the young lady is unknown to me, so I can scarcely judge between her and what I remember of Penelope North after more than a score of years.”

“You would find them strangely different, of that I am certain. Henrietta is no faint reflection of my first love.”

“Not by all accounts. Do you remember Penelope at the Commissioner’s ball in ’51?”

“Yes,” said Dr. Cornelius slowly. “I have a very good memory. But if she could stand beside Henrietta in all the beauty she wore that night, I would not even remember to look at her once.”

“Cornelius, Cornelius, you will be a boy to the day of your death! And tell me, why are you leaving your charmer in this way? for you tell me you will make a considerable stay in London.”

“I am leaving her because she hardly loves me enough yet—does that seem a good reason to your wisdom?”

“Ah, come! now I think better of Mistress Henrietta,” cried the old lady. “The best women need a second asking—they do not give their hearts away too soon; but I admit that at your time of life, cousin, it is trying to have a wavering bride—you are none too young.”

“Oh, my age be —— Pardon me, Matilda; ’tis your own fault entirely, for reminding me of what I am striving to forget.”

“Well, well, cousin, your wife will have several faults to correct in you,” said Miss Hallijohn. “And when she has succeeded in that, you will make her a good husband. Kindly ring the bell for me now; I must send Joan to waken our young friend.”

Lucie looked very sleepy when she appeared, but after they had drunk tea together, she wakened up, and became more like herself. Dr. Cornelius went out later, and Lucie was left alone with Miss Hallijohn. When he returned, it was to find Lucie sitting close by the old lady, hand in hand with her, her cheeks pink with pleasure, and no trace of tears to be seen.

“Oh, sir,” she cried, jumping up to meet Dr. Cornelius, “Miss Hallijohn is most kind! I have told her all about Harrie, and all about Balgowrie, and—and everything. And when I return from London, Harrie and I are to come and visit Miss Hallijohn together. She thinks she will like Harrie quite as much as we do—and indeed she could not be disappointed in that, could she, sir?”

“Not by our way of thinking, Lucie. But, Matilda, I am surprised that *at your time of life* you have not more sense than to keep this child up so late. Are you remembering that the boat sails at nine to-morrow morning from Leith, and Lucie requires a good night’s rest before she starts?”

“Tut, tut, Cornelius! none of your airs of a family man for me. Your toddy is waiting you by the fire. Come away, Lucie my dear; we will leave my gentleman to himself, since he wishes to be rid of us.”

Lucie laughed gaily, and ran up the corkscrew stair so quickly that her hostess was left far behind, and she had to turn back to meet her again. The little bedroom did not seem at all melancholy to her now, and she fell asleep dreaming of the time when she and Henrietta would occupy it together—when they would laugh at the strange town noises, and waken to see the dawn coming in over the hundred roofs below.

XVIII

Dr. Cornelius began to realise that he would have his own difficulties with Lucie on the journey to London. For after they had bidden adieu to Miss Hallijohn, and were jolting down to Leith in the coach, Lucie became very apprehensive. The coach was crowded, and the strange faces seemed to fill her with uneasiness. She drew close to Dr. Cornelius, and shrank behind him to escape observation—which, indeed, was not to be wondered at, for the poor child's dress was sufficiently odd to attract attention to her anywhere, and, added to her pretty face, made the rough-mannered passengers stare at her unmercifully. But when the coach drew up at Leith pier, things became much worse. Dr. Cornelius left Lucie for a moment to look after the shipping of their luggage, and was just coming leisurely back up the quay to find her, when he saw the little crowd of people beside the coach parting as if to let someone pass, and Lucie ran towards him, holding out her hands with a pitiful gesture of terror. Some of the crowd laughed loudly, and from the better-class passengers there was a ripple of amused comment upon the odd little figure flying down the quay.

“My dear Lucie,” exclaimed Dr. Cornelius, “what is the matter?” He took the cold little hands she held out to him and smiled into her white face.

“I—I do not know, sir. I felt bewildered after you left me. The people seem to press on me. I must look peculiar, surely, for they were all laughing. Oh, you must never leave me again.”

“Come away with me,” said Dr. Cornelius, but with rather a sinking heart he thought, “Matilda was right; her dress is cruelly peculiar. I should have thought of it before.” He led her on board, and sought out a sheltered corner of the deck. There he sat beside her, and treated Lucie to a little good advice. “You must not give way to these nervous feelings, Lucie. No one is wishing to hurt you; you are perfectly safe, and I am never very far from you. If your dress is not very fashionable, we shall get you new garments in London—never mind it just now; and, indeed, if you are like most amateur sailors, it is not much use you will have for your clothes for the next day or so.”

They watched the other passengers come aboard, and Lucie, feeling once more sheltered and protected, was vastly entertained by the sight. A great many fine people, it appeared, were travelling by this boat, and Dr.

Cornelius could tell her who they were individually. He even seemed to know some of them, and, after they had set sail, several people came up to speak with him. Lucie shrank into the corner behind Dr. Cornelius, and watched and listened. Wonderfully fine the ladies looked to her eyes in their hoops and tall headdresses, the like of which she had never dreamed of before.

Everyone seemed charmed to recognise Dr. Cornelius; in especial one young lady who was travelling along with her father, a rather severe-looking elderly man, whom Dr. Cornelius addressed as “My lord.”

“We are sure of an amusing voyage when you are on board, Doctor,” she remarked, smiling very sweetly.

And Dr. Cornelius bowed and made her some pretty speech in return. He introduced Lucie very carefully to the girl (Lady Mary Crichton by name), explaining to Lady Mary that his young charge was not accustomed to travelling, and requesting her kind oversight of Lucie in the ladies’ cabin.

At which Lucie cried out in dismay, “Oh, sir, shall I not have a room to myself?”

And Lady Mary laughed till she cried, saying, “I must be very repulsive, Miss Marjorybanks; had I been a toad, you could not have looked more frightened.”

She was a good-humoured, handsome young woman, dressed in the extreme of the fashion, and wearing a great deal of rouge—a thing which Lucie had never even heard of, and which impressed her vastly. She volunteered to take Lucie down to the cabin, and could not understand her reluctance to go with her, till Dr. Cornelius laughingly told her that Lucie was afraid of all strangers, he feared.

“Afraid? *of me!*” said Lady Mary incredulously, but she soon saw that it was too true. Lucie refused to move from Dr. Cornelius’ side.

“If you please, sir,” was all she said, but in such an appealing voice that it was irresistible.

“Well, if I do not ask too much, Lady Mary,” said Dr. Cornelius, “will you not sit down by us? and when Miss Marjorybanks knows you better, she will change her opinion of you.”

Lady Mary was nothing loath, and sat down to enter on a brisk one-sided flirtation with Dr. Cornelius. She chaffed him gaily upon his country life, his

infrequent appearances in Edinburgh society, his grey hair—every imaginable subject.

Lucie sat by and received her first lesson in flirtation, but she began to feel less fear of Lady Mary, and once or twice joined in the conversation with a timid little remark. At last she crossed from Dr. Cornelius' side and seated herself beside Lady Mary, with one of the graceful, sudden little movements she had.

“I feel I am not in the least afraid of you now, madam,” she said; “and I shall be much less alarmed among the other ladies if you are with me.”

“Oh, you must not ‘madam’ me, madam,” laughed Lady Mary. “I am not so much older than yourself—’tis only the dress I wear,” she added, sweeping a rather amused eye over Lucie’s sorry garments.

The breeze freshened, and they went rocking down the Forth, past the low green shores of East Lothian, and out, out, out, into the wide fresh sea. Dr. Cornelius bade Lucie stand up, and pointed over to the land—miles away, and veiled in a blue haze.

“There is home, Lucie,” he said,—“home, and Henrietta. Are you sending your heart over to her?”

It was too much for poor Lucie, and she broke down once more into pitiful sobs. She began to look very white and miserable, too, with the ship’s motion, so Lady Mary took her briskly by the arm.

“Come, Miss Marjorybanks, let me have the pleasure of showing you our luxurious quarters,” she said, and led Lucie down the companion ladder.

The days that followed were not pleasant; for Lucie proved a very bad sailor indeed, and had to remain in her berth all the time. She would have fared very badly without good-natured Lady Mary, who came and sat beside her whenever she was able, and entertained her with all that was going on above. Lucie was amused to see how much she thought of Dr. Cornelius; it was quite a new idea to her that anyone should consider him young.

“Why, Lady Mary, I think of Dr. Hallijohn as my father, with the deepest respect,” she said one day, and Lady Mary laughed.

“Yes, I am sure you do; to tell you the truth, if I were in your place, I should be in love with him; his grey hair and fine complexion are irresistible. Confess now, my dear Miss Marjorybanks, they are singularly attractive.”

"*In love* with Dr. Hallijohn?" said Lucie so wonderingly that the other girl laughed.

"'Pon my word, Miss Marjorybanks, I think that he has taught you very insufficiently. I do not think you know what the phrase '*in love*' means. I shall tell Dr. Hallijohn that to-night."

"I—I think I understand what it means," said Lucie, and her white cheeks were suddenly bathed all over with the loveliest rose-colour.

"Oh, oh!" cried Lady Mary; "I thought we were too much out of the world at Eastermuir to have ever seen a young man to fall in love with, but I see we are just like other young women, are we not?" And she bent down and kissed Lucie's pink, pink cheek. Lucie was weak and tired, and at these words turned away from the light, and felt an inclination to cry, that was become painfully common with her nowadays. Lady Mary averted the coming tears by a change of subject.

"You should keep your preceptor in better order, Miss Marjorybanks," she said. "The dear man drinks quite a shocking quantity of wine for one of his calling. Indeed, my father tells me 'tis the reason why Dr. Hallijohn has never been Moderator of Assembly—and he such a popular man too."

"Does Dr. Hallijohn drink much wine?" said Lucie—a far-away incident of her childhood had almost passed from her memory now, and nothing had happened since to revive the remembrance. The note of disapproval in Lady Mary's remarks gave her a feeling of uneasiness.

"Indeed he does; why, last night I doubt if he quite knew what he was saying."

"Oh!" said Lucie, mystified and shocked.

"Did you not know?—how curious, when you are such friends! Well, a great many do the same, and no one thinks twice of it. 'Tis just because everyone likes Dr. Hallijohn so much that they remark on it."

Lucie thought a great deal over this conversation, and decided to write all about it to Henrietta, which, perhaps, was not the happiest conclusion she could have arrived at.

In spite of her terror for strangers, Lucie made friends wonderfully fast, and before they had reached London, seemed to have known Lady Mary half a lifetime. She poured into her good-natured ear all her tremors and fears, her despairing sensations of terror when left alone with strangers, and her dread that her clothes were peculiar. This undoubted fact Lady Mary was too

honest to deny. She even pressed Lucie to allow her maid to dress her up in one of her own dresses, so that she might arrive at the Pelhams' in more everyday attire. But Lucie would not consent to this, having a good deal of pride, so they agreed that her first expedition in London must be to the shops. Lady Mary tried to fortify Lucie's courage and assure her that her nervous fears would soon disappear, but when at the end of the week they came into dock, Lucie was, if possible, more terrified than ever. The terror of the crowd "pressing on her" was like a nightmare, and she became quite faint with agitation. Dr. Cornelius had some ado to get her safely into the Pelhams' coach when it was at last discovered among the crowd of other vehicles, and she could only articulate a feeble little word of good-bye to Lady Mary, who came to the door of the coach to see the last of her curious fellow-passenger.

"I shall come and see you, Miss Marjorybanks," she said, nodding gaily to her. "Good-bye, and keep up your courage, my dear." And with a parting word of chaff with Dr. Cornelius, she disappeared in the crowd.

A minute later Lucie saw her drive off with her father in a large yellow coach, with powdered men standing on the rumble. She turned to smile into Lucie's coach as she passed, and to wave a reassuring hand.

Lucie was thankful to be on land again, and once out of the crowd, quite enjoyed her drive up from the docks. When the traffic became very dense, she felt a little scared, and drew nearer to Dr. Cornelius, hoping that the horses would not put their noses through the windows; still, she was not on foot among the crowd, so did not really mind it much.

They drew up at last before the Pelhams' door. Dr. Cornelius helped Lucie out. The ground seemed to rock under her as they walked upstairs, and then in alarmingly loud tones the butler announced her name. She shrank back, but Dr. Cornelius said, with quite extraordinary sternness—

"Go into the room first, Lucie, and speak to Mrs. Pelham."

So, dizzy with fright, Lucie obeyed, stumbling blindly forward to where Mrs. Pelham stood holding out both hands in welcome, her kind face lighted up with smiles.

XIX

“So this is Henry Marjorybanks’ child!” said Mrs. Pelham. She stooped down, (for she was a very tall woman,) parted Lucie’s curls from her forehead as if to see her better, and kissed her on the cheek.

A girl rather older than Lucie came from the far end of the room and greeted her after the same fashion. She was tall like her mother, fair, and walked with a fine easy motion, like a ship under canvas. As she bore down upon her across the room, Lucie felt an inclination to turn and fly, but as she bent to kiss her, Maggie Pelham smiled—her smile revealed the most good-natured of dimples, and she spoke in a voice that was like a caress.

“I am so delighted that you are come at last, Lucie,” she said. “I am sure we shall be happy together.”

Lucie was reassured, but still far too frightened to speak. The strange, rich house and these unknown women struck her silent—she was oppressed by the feeling that she should speak and yet had nothing to say. Her eyes filled slowly with tears, and she could only press Maggie Pelham’s hand in response.

Dr. Cornelius was speaking now with Mrs. Pelham, but Lucie’s heart stood still when he came up to her, smiling and holding out his hand.

“I must leave you with your friends now, Lucie,” he said, “having brought you here. I shall come to see you very soon, but I daresay you will have forgotten me altogether in the pleasures of town.”

Lucie caught hold of his arm desperately.

“Oh, sir, do not go! Oh, dear sir—dearest Dr. Hallijohn, do not leave me all alone!” she cried, turning her face up to his in piteous entreaty, the tears running down her cheeks.

“My dear Lucie,” said Dr. Cornelius, quite sternly for him, “you are forgetting yourself. You are with the kindest of friends, you are not alone. Come, say good-bye to me, my child, and dry your eyes.”

But Lucie clung to him all the more.

“You must not go, sir! I am so much alarmed! I have no one that is known to me. Oh, Harrie, why did I ever leave you!”

Mrs. Pelham exchanged glances with Dr. Cornelius, who shook his head sternly.

“I must go, Lucie. You have never disobeyed me before, and surely you will not do so now?—you must stop crying, and not distress Mrs. Pelham any more. I shall come to see you to-morrow.”

He disengaged himself from her clinging little hands, and made his adieus to Mrs. Pelham, who, much perplexed by her strange guest, would have had him stay with all her heart. But a significant frown from Dr. Cornelius warned her not to press him to remain. As the door closed behind him, Lucie sprang forward.

“Oh, let me go with Dr. Hallijohn!” she cried. “I cannot stay here without him.”

She caught the handle of the door, and in her terrified haste could not even turn it. Like some wild creature that has strayed into the haunts of men, and, blind with fear, cannot see how it entered, she ran across the room and then back to the door again, hardly knowing what she did. Mrs. Pelham laid her hand on her shoulder, and spoke words whose prosaic kindness was soothing.

“My dear Lucie, you are very tired. What will you have to eat? Do you drink wine? or will you have a dish of tea? or some milk?”

Lucie sank down on one of the sofas, sobbing violently, ashamed of her own conduct now, but as yet too much upset to control herself. Maggie Pelham came and sat beside her, and stroked the limp little hand that Lucie yielded into hers.

“I think she would like some tea, mother,” she said. “Do you not think it would revive her after her long drive from the docks? See how cold her hands are.”

“Oh,” began Lucie through her sobs, “you must think me sadly unmannerly. I—I—cannot tell you what it is. I—I—know you are good and kind. It is something that rises in me when I see strangers that I cannot fight against. I felt the same when I arrived in Edinburgh, but there Dr. Hallijohn did not leave me; now”— She sobbed again and again.

“I quite understand all you are feeling,” said Maggie in her caressing voice—she who had never known what the feeling of shyness meant. “But you will very soon forget that, dear, and remember that we really know you quite well—it is only our *faces* that are strange to each other. Why, remember how many letters we have written to each other!”

This seemed to cheer Lucie a little; it joined the dreadful, unusual present on to the peaceful and familiar past—to Henrietta sitting in the window niche writing—writing to the girl who sat holding her by the hand at this moment. Lucie dried her eyes and smiled faintly.

“I suppose it is our solitary life hitherto that has given me this feeling of alarm when I come among strangers. I feel sure you will pardon me, madam,” she said, addressing Mrs. Pelham, who had taken up her work again and sat beside them.

“My dear Lucie, you need never think of it again,” she replied. “And tell me, how is your mother? and your sister Henrietta, whom we seem to know so well from her delightful letters?”

Lucie was wiled into conversation quite easily now. An hour later, no one would have recognised her for the same girl as the half-wild creature who ran round the room crying for escape. She laughed and talked gaily, telling all the little incidents of her voyage from Leith, which seemed quite as great a feat to her as a voyage to the Antipodes is to other people. Mrs. Pelham and Maggie were charmed, and concluded a little rashly that, the initial difficulties being over, all would go smoothly and well. Lucie made a very pleasing and piquant visitor—her outlook on life was, naturally, extremely fresh, her comments on everything entirely unconventional. Now she would have Maggie rise and let her examine her dress, and must handle with gentle, inquiring fingers the huge erection of cushions which graced Maggie’s beautiful head. She laughed merrily over it, and over Maggie’s vast hoop and high-heeled brocade shoes.

“And Lady Mary tells me that I must procure the same for myself immediately, madam,” she said, addressing Mrs. Pelham.

“Well, I think, unlike your mother, that some concession to fashion is necessary, Lucie. Perhaps it will be as well to buy you some new gowns—we shall see.”

While expressing herself so moderately, Mrs. Pelham decided conclusively that Lucie could not possibly go out in her present garments, and that no time must be lost in procuring other clothes for her use. To prevent exposing Lucie to remark in the shops, however, Mrs. Pelham decided to send for the milliners and dressmakers to take her orders at home, and, in the meantime, she must be kept indoors if possible.

So, among a feminine gossiping over ribbons and modes—what would be most becoming in colour and texture and make—ended Lucie’s first day

in London.

XX

It was rather a delicate matter to suggest to Lucie next morning that she must stay in the house, owing to her very peculiar appearance; for she declared herself quite rested, and anxious to go out and see some of the wonders of London. Mrs. Pelham was specially anxious that no painful consciousness of her own oddity should strike Lucie—she was quite shy enough without this added torture. So, when she expressed her wish to go out, Mrs. Pelham could only reply evasively, “My dear, I feel sure you would be better to remain indoors to-day.”

“Ah, madam,” cried Lucie, “pray allow me to go out! I am accustomed to a country life,” (as if she needed to tell them this, poor child!) “and cannot bear to be a day in the house;—the walls choke me. Indeed, indeed, madam, my health will not suffer from the fresh air.”

“You must be weak still, Lucie, after such prolonged sea-sickness. You are exceedingly pale to-day,” objected Mrs. Pelham.

“Ah, but, madam, I shall remain pale if I stay indoors—it is but the air I need. Can you not allow me to go out?”

Mrs. Pelham moved to the window—ostensibly to look at the sky, really to take a hurried survey of the Square. It looked very quiet certainly at this early hour in the forenoon, and the garden which the Square surrounds was quite deserted. No doubt the air would do Lucie good, and there was no danger of her exciting remark at this hour and in the quiet Square. Mrs. Pelham, after making these calculations, gave her consent.

“You may go out, then, Lucie, but not beyond the gardens, or round the Square. Your strength cannot be equal to prolonged exercise,” she said. “Maggie will go with you, as I am busy.”

Now Maggie Pelham, albeit good-natured, was also a very fashionable young woman, and she did not relish the idea of walking out with such an oddly habited companion, even in the chaste solitudes of the Square; but she was as curiously obedient as were all young women in the good old days, so she had just to conquer her feelings, and profess herself delighted to accompany Lucie.

They sallied out together—as queerly matched a couple as ever trod London streets. Maggie, tall, and seeming taller by reason of her cushioned

head, her ample skirts, and her high-heeled shoes; Lucie, her slim girlish figure disguised by the hideously ill-fitting black silk sacque she wore over a long and perfectly limp skirt, her sweet face and golden hair engulfed under a mighty green silk bonnet, under which, by her mother's direction, it had always been her habit to assume a white nightcap whose frilled edge fitted all round her face like a frame.

With the first breath of the outer air Lucie's colour began to freshen. She looked round her on every side most eagerly.

"So this is London—London, that I have dreamed of so often. Do you know, Maggie, that last summer I dreamed every night that I was in London? I did not know then what a city was like, except from prints, but I knew in my dream that the place was London."

"How strange! what could make you do that?" said Maggie in rather a preoccupied tone, and quickening her steps to reach the gate leading into the gardens. For she had become aware that three rude little message boys were following close behind them, pointing at Lucie's great silk bonnet, and making audible fun of her. Maggie was a fine lady, and they were most insignificant errand boys, but their ridicule was acutely painful to her all the same, so she directed Lucie's steps into the gardens, where the hooting urchins might not follow. Their Cockney speech was happily quite unintelligible to Lucie, who walked on unheedingly.

But, rather to Maggie's surprise, Lucie did not seem to care about the gardens much. "The pavement felt so delightfully *new* under my feet, Maggie," she said, after they had paced about under the sere-leaved town trees for some time. "Do you not think we might return to the Square?"

Maggie could not find it in her heart to object, but took a hurried glance round the Square as they returned to it. Carriages stood at several of the doors now, waiting to take their owners out for their morning airings; footmen hung about at the carriage doors, to exchange a little gossip with the coachmen; and everywhere the ubiquitous message boy was delivering parcels.

Maggie thought to put as brave a face upon it as possible, so, drawing up her fine figure, spreading out her rustling skirts, and holding her cushioned head very high, she sailed along the pavement.

They passed the first carriage, and the second. A low snigger of laughter had followed them each time.

“How rude Englishmen are!” Lucie remarked, innocent that it was herself alone who roused their mirth, and continuing her walk with great composure.

But as they reached rather a deserted corner of the Square, a man coming towards them stared so insolently at Lucie that she shrank back, and he, seeing her alarm, as he passed suddenly poked his head almost under the queer green silk bonnet, saying, “Pretty or ugly, my dear?”

Lucie started back with a scream, catching hold of Maggie’s arm, and the man laughed loudly as he passed on.

“Don’t look at the insolent brute,” said Maggie, sweeping along the pavement, looking finer than ever in her hot indignation. “We shall come in, darling; see, we have only one half of the Square to go round now.”

Lucie had some ado to reach home, however, for her knees shook under her, and she was faint and sick with fear. She did not speak till they got safely indoors. Then she faced round on Maggie suddenly. “Tell me,” she said, “am I so peculiar in appearance that people will insult me in the streets? Was *that* why Mrs. Pelham did not wish me to go out, and why you wished me to stay in the gardens?”

“Your—your dress *is* peculiar, Lucie,” faltered Maggie, shaken out of her usual suave composure by the vexation of their adventure. She was almost ready to burst into tears through sympathy with her poor, queer little friend.

Lucie sat down with a curiously stricken look. She did not seem to find tears any relief.

“Why did I ever leave home, Maggie?” she said, in a bitter dry voice. “I see it all now quite distinctly. It was *I* the people on Leith pier laughed at; and Lady Mary knew it, and that was why she wished me to wear her clothes; and it was *I* these footmen laughed at—and that man—oh!” She gave a little short scream like a dagger stab at the remembrance of it.

Maggie sat down beside her and tried some consolations. “It is only your dress, after all, Lucie dear,” she said; “and that will be put right in a few days. You must not think of this again.”

But Lucie shook her head.

“Ah no, Maggie. I see my dress is peculiar, but I see more than that. I see I am queer all though—unlike you—unlike Lady Mary—I suppose unlike

every other girl. It could not be otherwise. We have lived so much alone—been so strangely brought up. I did not know it before, but I see it all now.”

“Ah, dearest Lucie, do not speak like this! It is quite a mistake. When you are dressed like other people, you will be looked at only because you are so pretty,” said Maggie in her cooing voice. “Come, let us go upstairs and tell mother about this. Things always appear in quite another light after she has heard them;” and she drew Lucie’s arm through hers, to lead her to Mrs. Pelham.

“You must tell her, then,” said Lucie; “I cannot speak about it.”

So Maggie told the story of their discomfiture with great eloquence.

Mrs. Pelham made very light of it. “My dear girls, anyone is liable to be rudely spoken to in the streets; ’tis annoying at the moment, but you should never give it another thought; why, I have been rudely addressed many a time myself, Lucie, and you do not suppose that I grieved over it,” she said. But in her heart of hearts Mrs. Pelham was more annoyed than she could say. She had hoped to get Lucie properly dressed before she had awakened to any overwhelming sense of her own peculiarities—now it was too late; and to her morbid fear of strangers Lucie would add a dread of ridicule.

“You look quite pale, Lucie,” she said. “You must go and lie down. I told you you were not strong enough to walk out yet.”

Lucie made no objection to this proposal, and allowed Maggie to take her to her own room, and tuck her up in a quilt, without a dissenting word. But when the door had closed behind Maggie, Lucie gave herself up to despair. Sitting up in bed with clasped hands, she rocked herself backwards and forwards. “Oh, Harrie, Harrie dear, can you not come to me? Even though you are so far away, don’t you know how miserable I am? Oh, why did I ever come to London; why did I ever leave you? I am not like other people; everyone laughs at me, and I am so frightened and bewildered. I want only you, Harrie, in all the world.”

It was like a prayer, and Harrie her divinity.

Then, worn out with it all, Lucie lay down again, staring up at the ceiling with a pained, tired-out expression. “Why did I come?” she was asking herself over and over. Deep down in her heart the answer lay, but even to herself Lucie did not speak it. Then a thought came and tormented her like a stinging fly. “I must go out, whatever it costs me, for I may meet him anywhere; if I stay in the house, as I long to do, I may never see him. I cannot speak to the Pelhams of him.”

She had that common delusion of country folk—that in a city which counts its inhabitants by millions there was a likelihood of her meeting among the throng the one man she desired to see in all London! So Lucie made a resolution, as she lay there, to conquer her fears and go out as usual, for there was a chance—a possibility—perhaps a probability,—and her breath came shorter and her pale face flushed at the thought.

When she came downstairs an hour later, Mrs. Pelham was delighted to see Lucie so composed again.

“I am going to take your advice, madam,” she said, “and remain in the house till my new dresses are ready; and then I shall go out, and think as little as I can of what occurred to-day.”

In the afternoon Dr. Cornelius came, which cheered Lucie further. She had persuaded Mrs. Pelham and Maggie to go out as usual, and was sitting alone in the drawing-room when he arrived.

“Ah, dear sir!” she cried, running across the room to meet him, with her little white hands held out in welcome, after a pretty way she had.

Dr. Cornelius sat down beside her, holding her hands still in his, and smiling.

“So you are still alive, Lucie, in spite of my desertion of you yesterday? And how are you, and how do you agree with your new friends?”

“Ah, sir, was it only yesterday? Yes, I believe it was. I seem already to have been a century in London, and have so much to tell you I do not know where to begin. The Pelhams are most kind. Maggie I feel sure I shall love dearly, and Mrs. Pelham is exactly like the mothers in books. Why, sir, she interests herself in Maggie’s *clothes*! and they speak together of all manner of things which Harrie and I would never mention to our mother—is not that peculiar? And oh, sir, my clothes are quite peculiar. I can hardly tell you the vexation I have undergone. I am not to go out until I get new dresses and bonnets, and my hair is to be dressed on cushions to the height of nearly two feet, and I am to wear it *powdered white*, and high-heeled shoes on which I am confident I shall fall—and then I may go out. And oh, sir, when can I hear from Harrie?”

Lucie wound up her breathless torrent of words at last, and Dr. Cornelius leaned back against the sofa cushions, laughing heartily.

“My dear child, you must repeat that all over again more slowly, if you wish me to take in its meaning. Your dress seems to bulk most largely in your mind’s eye. Pray what vexation did you undergo?”

Then Lucie, almost in tears, told the story of her disastrous little walk in the Square; and Dr. Cornelius listened gravely, and then laughed like Mrs. Pelham, and assured her it was a matter of no importance.

“But it has hurt me—hurt me at my heart, sir,” said Lucie, laying her hand over that organ expressively. “I cannot tell you how miserable I was over it. I feel that I am so different from other people. That is what pains me.”

“My dear Lucie, all women are sadly imitative, ’tis one of their worst qualities. Before you have been here for three weeks, I doubt there will be no originality left in you.”

“I—I trust not,” said Lucie most devoutly. “And you, sir, what have you done? I have forgotten to inquire after your affairs in my own preoccupation.”

“Let me see. I have called on some of my friends, and I have purchased new clothes,—like yourself,—and wished myself back in Eastermuir.”

“Why, sir, I thought you loved town above everything,” cried Lucie, with wide eyes.

“I am become too old, apparently. I would give the whole of London for the muddiest road in the parish, and”—

“And what, sir?”

“Can you not guess? Have you no idea of what my heart most desires?”

“N—no,” said Lucie, after having given the subject some consideration. “I cannot imagine, unless it is Henrietta—but then you do not feel as I do to her.”

Dr. Cornelius watched her face narrowly as she spoke, and read no hidden understanding of his thoughts there.

“Lucie,” he said suddenly, “did Harrie tell you nothing? did she never repeat to you what I said to her shortly before we left home?”

“No, sir, she never said anything to me—anything . . . anything. I do not understand what you are speaking about.”

“She never told you that I asked her to marry me?”

“To marry *you*, sir? *Harrie!* You must surely be in jest, Dr. Hallijohn?”

“Jest! No, indeed, Lucie, most sober earnest. But how did Harrie tell you nothing about this? I thought you had no secrets from each other?”

“No,” said Lucie slowly; “she must have had some reason for not telling me. Perhaps you will tell me what Harrie said when you asked her to marry you?”

“She said Yes.”

“And she is going to do it?”

“Yes.”

“When, sir?”

“Ah, there is our point of separation! She cannot leave you, she says.”

“Yes, I thought that was it,” said Lucie slowly. “Dear, dearest Harrie, she would not even let me grieve over it.”

“But would you grieve, Lucie? This is why I have spoken to you about it. My dear, I’ve known you both too long and too well not to know what you are to each other; but tell me, would you wish Henrietta not to marry me, in case it should separate you?”

“Nothing could separate us, sir.”

“Then will you persuade her to do it? Ah, Lucie, I am young no longer; and even if twenty years of life were left me yet, that would be too short a time to have with Harrie.”

“But, sir, I thought you said that Harrie promised to do it?”

“Yes, in the far future—the future we know nothing of. We have nothing in this unsatisfactory world but the day we are living, and yet she puts it off indefinitely; that is where I wish your help, Lucie—persuade her not to delay our marriage.”

“What is she waiting for, sir? How would it be easier for us to be parted then than it would be now?” asked Lucie; but a flood of colour rushed over her pale face as she spoke.

Dr. Cornelius patted her hand kindly.

“Yes, yes, Lucie; many things might happen, of course. Your mother might even allow you to come and live with us—if you could not live half a mile apart; but these arrangements are rather premature. When you write to Harrie, pray tell her all I have said to you, and tell her also your own ideas on the subject. You are not jealous of me, Lucie?”

“Jealous!” laughed Lucie. “No, sir; you are you, and I am I, to Harrie—the one does not take the other’s place. I confess I am surprised—most

exceedingly surprised, but not jealous.”

“ ’Pon my soul, I wish you had more reason for jealousy, Lucie! My one fault with Harrie is that she thinks more of you than of me. I am jealous, if you like. ’Tis hard on a man, you must admit.”

“Oh, sir! oh, Dr. Hallijohn! it is too laughable. Pardon me, but I have never heard you speak like this, and look like this—and for Harrie!”

And Lucie went off into delightful little girlish ecstasies of laughter, which did not altogether please Dr. Cornelius. He rose and paced up and down the room rather impatiently.

“I hardly see the joke myself, Lucie,” he said quite crossly.

But Lucie laughed on; and a moment later Mrs. Pelham and Maggie came in, delighted to hear such mirthful sounds. Lucie could not explain the cause of her laughter, but Dr. Cornelius summoned up sufficient self-control to laugh also, and tell Mrs. Pelham that Lucie was laughing at him.

“She has never seen me in town before, madam,” he said, “and she assures me I look most peculiar to-day; perhaps my new lace ruffles are accountable for the change in my appearance. She is a sadly unmannerly child, is she not, and wanting in all proper respect for her guardian?”

“Well, he seems to have a good effect upon her spirits, sir. We were a little *triste* this morning, were we not, Lucie? but we have forgotten all that now over Dr. Hallijohn’s ruffles,” said Mrs. Pelham; and, sitting down, she entered with zest upon a description of the various purchases she had made for Lucie that afternoon.

“We are filling your pupil’s head with vanity, sir,” she said to Dr. Cornelius; “and when you come to see us next, you will not recognise her in all her fine feathers. You must come to the play with us on Thursday evening, and have the pleasure of escorting Lucie to it for the first time. I think her new dresses will be ready by that time. Pray keep yourself disengaged for that evening if you can, sir; it will add both to Lucie’s and to our pleasure to have your company there.”

So Dr. Cornelius promised to come on Thursday and escort Lucie to the play for the first time. He smiled most graciously in accepting the invitation; but as he walked down the Square a few minutes later: “The play!” he said to himself; “the play! what can be duller than the play—when you have the wrong woman sitting by you?”

XXI

On Thursday morning Maggie Pelham denied herself to all visitors, and entered upon the arduous work of dressing Lucie for the first time in fashionable garments.

Before anything else could be begun, Lucie's hair had to be elaborately done after the prevailing mode. This was a work of both time and trouble, and involved the presence of a hairdresser for some two hours, who, following the recipe for this style of erection, added "*false locks to supply deficiency of native hair, pomatum in profusion, greasy wool to bolster up the adopted locks, and grey powder to conceal dust,*" till a structure some two feet in height was built up on poor Lucie's unaccustomed head.

"Why, the weight of it is terrible, Maggie!" she cried, as she surveyed her image in the mirror, slowly turning her head from side to side as she spoke.

"Oh, you will soon get accustomed to it. Why, that is a most moderate head-dress! I would have had it some inches higher had I had my way, but mother considered that you should not be tried with too great weight at first, so I told the man to keep it low."

"*Low!*" murmured Lucie, and Maggie laughed.

"Wait till you look round you at the play to-night, and see if you believe me then! Almeria Carpenter, I can assure you, would not be seen out of doors with her hair under three feet high—and plumes above that!"

"'Tis sadly uncomfortable," said Lucie ruefully; but the glass gave back a distinctly pleasing reflection as she gazed into its depths, so she decided to suffer pain with pride's proverbial courage.

The next process was the donning of her hoop, and Maggie was soon speechless with laughter at Lucie's attempts to manage her ungainly new adjunct.

"My dear, *this* is how you sit down," she cried, recovering from her amusement to illustrate to Lucie that careful movement which was necessary in crinoline times when one sat down. "With the *greatest* circumspection, Lucie—to sit down hurriedly is fatal—slightly to one side, and keeping down the hoops with one hand as you subside into your chair—otherwise it

jumps up round you most ungracefully. Cultivate slow movements, my dear, I assure you they are necessary.”

But the art of walking and sitting down in a hoop is no easy matter, and Lucie felt curiously ill at ease as she moved about. The hoop seemed to steer her, not she the hoop, and to sit down was a terror, when this mass of flounces had a way of springing up into her very face. Her tight and high-heeled shoes were an added discomfort; but she certainly surveyed her pretty foot with great pleasure in spite of the trying pressure it was undergoing.

As the day wore on, Lucie became a little more sure of herself in the new clothes, and by four o'clock, when Dr. Cornelius arrived for dinner, she crossed the room to greet him with wonderful assurance.

“So my little bird has donned her fine feathers?” he said. “And do they feel very uncomfortable?”

“I must confess, sir, to some uneasiness in my head,” said poor Lucie. “The weight of all that I now carry on it is considerable; but I think in time I shall learn the management of my skirts; and already I am in love with my shoes;” she lifted her flounces elegantly to display the tips of her little slippers as she spoke.

“I told you so—I told you so,” laughed Dr. Cornelius; “women are all alike.”

With what a thumping heart under her tight, long-waisted bodice, did Lucie step into the coach that was to convey them to Drury Lane that evening!

“You must not be frightened for the crowd at the theatre door, Lucie,” said Mrs. Pelham. “Dr. Hallijohn, pray give your arm to Lucie as we enter. I am too old a play-goer to need your protection.”

Lucie sat looking out from the coach window into the blue fog, but when they reached the more crowded thoroughfares, the hurrying crowds and the lights seemed to press upon her brain—she shrank back into the corner and covered her eyes with her hands.

“It is fine, Lucie, the rush of life in the streets—you should not shrink from it in that way,” said Dr. Cornelius. “When I was young,—as I once was,—it used to go to my head like wine.”

“It is terrible, sir! Ah, must we really get out among this crowd? Pray, madam, send me home in the coach and go to the play without me!” she begged of Mrs. Pelham as they drew up before the theatre door.

“Come, Lucie,” said Dr. Cornelius, standing at the step and holding out his arms to lift her down.

She stood irresolute, half drawing back into the shadow of the coach from the glare of the lights, a target for many eyes, in her dainty dress, her powder, and her ribbons.

“If you are desirous of notice, Lucie, you are doing your best to attract it,” said Dr. Cornelius impatiently; and another reassuring word from Mrs. Pelham at last induced Lucie to step out upon the pavement.

Dr. Cornelius drew her arm through his, and, Mrs. Pelham and Maggie following, they went up the theatre steps. It was a moment of absolute agony to Lucie—the crowd might as well have been wild beasts as men, so great was her terror of them. When they entered the vestibule, her fear subsided a little, and she turned round to look for Maggie. Now Maggie had hitherto appeared to Lucie only in the light of home, and she hardly recognised this haughty-paced young lady who was coming up the steps with such a fine air by Mrs. Pelham’s side. All the men standing about the vestibule were putting up their glasses to stare at her, and Lucie heard one of them say, “There goes pretty Peggy,” as Maggie swept up the stair.

“Do you not mind, Maggie?” said Lucie, as she joined her.

“What, dear?” queried Maggie, with a would-be innocent smile, and Dr. Cornelius laughed.

The house was full, the curtain just about to rise, when they came into the box. Mrs. Pelham gave Lucie a seat at one side, facing the stage, and Maggie and Dr. Cornelius sat behind.

Lucie gave one peep over the edge of the box, down upon the great throng below, another timid glance round the house with its crowded tiers of seats, and then sank back behind the curtain, covering her face with her hands.

“Oh, take me home, madam—pray, pray take me home!” she cried. “It is awful! ’Tis just like the judgment day we used to read of in that book, the Bible, long ago—all these crowds and crowds of waiting people.”

Mrs. Pelham laid her kind hand on Lucie’s arm.

“There is nothing to alarm you, Lucie—see, we are shut in by ourselves here, none of the crowd can reach us. Try, my dear, to look round you again.”

Lucie ventured upon another look.

“Oh, it makes me giddy, madam! my head goes round and round,” she said helplessly.

“You will feel better when the lights are put down,” said Mrs. Pelham reassuringly. “Sit still for a little, my dear, and then try to look round you again; by degrees you will be able to do it.”

Maggie, in the meantime, was taking a comprehensive survey of the house, and pointing out several notable people to Dr. Cornelius.

“There are few persons of distinction in town just now,” she said, “but such as there are, are here to-night. See, there is George Selwyn”—

“Yes, and old Queensberry too—ten years have not improved his appearance, truly.”

“Most odious old man! pray do not look at him, sir—he will kiss his hand across the house at me in another moment,” said Maggie, turning her face resolutely in the other direction. “Ah, there is Almeria Carpenter! Lucie, Lucie, I must insist upon your looking down at the stalls!—there is Almeria Carpenter, the most fashionable woman in London. See—she wears yards of tiffany on her head to-night!”

But Lucie could not yet bring herself to look down again at that terrible sea of men and women. She leaned back behind the curtain, struggling for self-control, and listened to Maggie’s lively comments on the crowd.

“See, sir, there is the Duchess of Devonshire—is she not most lovely?—yes, to the right, with ostrich plumes in her hair; and that is Sir Horace Walpole in the stalls—he looks ill, poor man, doubtless another attack of the gout—he suffers sadly from it, they say. No, Royalty does not favour us to-night. When is the curtain going up, I wonder? Tell me, sir, how long is it since you were at the play?”

“Some ten years it must be, Miss Pelham. At my time of life we think less of the vanities of this world. I have devoted myself so exclusively to the duties of my calling of late years that I have been unable to come to town.”

“Now, sir, you are jesting—but I declare I never know when you speak in earnest and when you jest,” said Maggie. “For myself, I should not have imagined you so devoted to your calling.”

“Maggie, Maggie, for shame!” said Mrs. Pelham reprovingly. “The young ladies of the present day, sir, lose all sense of propriety in conversation,” she added, turning to Dr. Cornelius, with an indulgent smile at her pretty daughter even as she spoke.

Lucie by this time had determined to venture on another look at the crowd. She opened her eyes warily—not daring to look down first, but across at the mysterious curtain as it flapped in the draught from behind the stage. Then she gradually let her eyes fall to the orchestra, and thence to the stalls and all the bewildering lights and colours there.

What a show it was! So this was life? Had all this pomp and brilliancy really been going on always?—it seemed to her a sudden creation; but when she considered the matter, she knew that of course it had always existed through the dead years of her former life, and away back and back before she had even lived. The great and noisy and moving world had been rushing on while she and Henrietta had lived unaware of it, buried as deep as if they were in their graves, at poor sleepy old Balgowrie!

Maggie leaned forward and tapped her arm with her fan. “How do you like it, Lucie?” she asked, smiling.

“Oh, I think—I think that I have never been alive before!” said Lucie. Now that her first nervous fears were past, she leaned her arms on the edge of the box and gazed down in a fascinated way at the crowd below her. It was play enough.

A pitying contempt for her own lifeless life came over her. “These people have all *lived*—they have been alive all their lives—while I have been as good as dead!” she thought. “Why, each of these hundreds of men and women have a story of their own—I had rather sit and look at them than at all the acting in the world.”

But the lights at that very moment went down, and the great human spectacle was hidden from her eyes. The curtain creaked up on its pulleys, sending a puff of air to fan her ribbons, and with thunders of applause, David Garrick stepped out upon the stage. Lucie started at the noise, and Maggie leaned forward and whispered—

“Garrick—and there comes Mrs. Pope—ah, is she not charming?”

And then little ripples of laughter broke out here and there from the darkness; and then shouts of mirth. Dr. Cornelius and Maggie were laughing till they wept, and Mrs. Pelham was smiling quietly behind her fan; even Lucie at last forgot all her fears and agitations, and joined in the merriment. At the end of the first act her face was all smiles. She turned, with one of her quick, bird-like movements, laying her hand on Dr. Cornelius’ sleeve.

“Ah, sir, I have but one regret, and you have it too, I feel sure—why, why is Harrie not here?”

“And this is Thursday night,” said he, with an expressive little movement of the shoulders. “I have been thinking of her this hour back.”

“Thursday? so it is—I lose count of time here. How disagreeable of me to forget! Yes, Maggie, poor Harrie will just be curtseying to the chairs at this moment, while we enjoy ourselves so much!”

“Perhaps your mother will not insist upon these exercises when Henrietta is alone?” suggested Mrs. Pelham.

“Ah, madam, you do not know my mother!” cried Lucie, and Dr. Cornelius agreed that it would be very unlike Mrs. Marjorybanks’ stringent habits to put off the reception on account of Lucie’s absence.

“Never mind, Lucie, she will make up for it in days to come—what a bout of play-going she will have then!” he said, with a smile that Lucie understood.

“But I am wasting my time in conversation,” cried Lucie suddenly, turning with all the delicious animation that was hers when she lost her timidity, towards the front of the box. “Why, I have all this wonderful crowd to observe! Now that I have got over the first feeling of alarm, it inspires me with nothing but interest. Pray, Maggie, come beside me and point out those you know by sight!” As she spoke, Lucie was gazing anxiously round the house. “Oh, it is most bewildering!” she said in a hopeless tone. “I do not think it would be possible to distinguish any one person among such a multitude. Tell me, Maggie, can you do so?”

“Why, yes, of course, and so would you, Lucie, with some practice.”

“People look so strangely alike when you see them all together,” said Lucie. But to herself she added, “No one is like Dan—I should see him among a thousand if he were there. Ah, he cannot be here to-night!”

And Dan Charteris, taking a masterly survey of the boxes and their occupants, remarked to the man beside him—

“Who’s that with Peggy Pelham? I seem to know the face . . . By ——, it’s Lucie Marjorybanks!” adding to himself, “Lucky I saw her! I meant to pay my respects to Mistress Peggy to-morrow—now I shall be ‘out of town.’”

XXII

Lucie looked sadly white and weary when she came downstairs next morning.

“I fear that hot air and the late hours we kept last night do not agree with your country roses,” said Mrs. Pelham, as she kissed the white cheek. “I must take you for an airing this morning.”

“Ah, madam, I am longing to be out!” cried Lucie. “Only the thought of those crowded and terrible streets is so overpowering to me—I do not know how I shall summon courage to walk out in them.”

“We shall drive, Lucie, through the crowded streets, and then you shall have a short walk in the Park with me, and drive back. You will surely not feel any alarm in my company. I am more of a protection than Maggie, am I not?”

“I fear, madam, that I am stupid enough to feel alarm in any company,” said Lucie, knowing too well the tremors that would overcome her.

But the day was bright, and as they drove along the brilliant morning streets, Lucie felt reassured. Hyde Park Corner gave her pause indeed, and she held her breath for a moment at sight of the crowd. Then Mrs. Pelham bade her descend from the coach, and she tremblingly obeyed; for all her sweetness Mrs. Pelham had an air of great authority, and Lucie did not dare to hesitate over her commands. So they left the coach and paced up and down the sweet greenness of the Park together.

“My dear child,” said Mrs. Pelham reprovingly, “you must try to control your nervous fear of strangers. You recoil from each one you meet as though he were a murderer.”

“I can only ask you to have patience with me, madam,” said poor Lucie rather piteously; for in her heart of hearts she had a hopeless fear that it was impossible for her to overcome these feelings of nervous terror. As they returned towards Hyde Park Corner, she suddenly caught hold of Mrs. Pelham’s arm and pointed forward.

“Madam, madam, there is a crowd!—a real crowd! Oh, what shall we do? It is impossible to get through it to the coach.”

Mrs. Pelham walked calmly forward.

“ ’Tis nothing alarming, Lucie—a regiment crossing the street merely—there is no great crowd, but the traffic is stopped for a few minutes till they pass by.” Lucie drew in her breath and bit her lips.

“I have never seen a regiment,” she said softly.

“Then shall we go on and see it, my dear?” asked Mrs. Pelham, a little surprised that Lucie should think of approaching the crowd.

“Y—e—s,” said Lucy. She had become very pale, and gripped Mrs. Pelham’s arm for protection.

On either side of the street the people stood in lanes, while a long string of horsemen filed past with jingling bridles and helmets that flashed in the morning sun. The ground shook with the tramp of the horses; the air vibrated with the quick pulsing of the drums; and at that gallant sight Lucie forgot her fears.

“Ah, how beautiful, madam!” she cried, with the quick admiration of her sympathetic nature. “And how that beating music goes to the heart!”

Then, looking up the advancing lines of riders, she suddenly held her breath, for Dan Charteris was among them.

On he came—looking rather intently before him, and at someone ahead; but just as he passed by where Lucie stood, he turned in his saddle to speak to the man who rode beside him, and she actually caught the echo of his words . . . “At four o’clock, then” . . . as he rode past. But he never noticed Lucie’s little figure among the crowd. He wore a laced coat.

“Why, that was Captain Charteris, Lucie!” said Mrs. Pelham. “Did you recognise your former guest in all his military trappings?”

Lucie could not reply for a moment. Then she spoke quietly—

“Yes, madam. I had seen his laced coat before.”

“I must ask him to dine with us soon,” said Mrs. Pelham. “Come, my dear, we can cross to the coach now—the last horseman has ridden by.”

Lucie obeyed, scarcely knowing what she did, for she was straining her eyes to follow Dan’s retreating figure for one more moment. As it vanished round the corner, she listened to catch the last strain of the music he rode to.

At first the gay marching tune floated high over the roll of traffic, then one by one its notes became indistinguishable, swallowed up in the city’s roar, and only a distant throbbing of the drums, like the far-away beating of some giant heart, reached her ear.

“Lucie, Lucie! are you dreaming, my dear?” said Mrs. Pelham, laying her hand on Lucie’s knee to attract her wandering attention.

She had climbed into the coach and seated herself in it quite mechanically, and though Mrs. Pelham had spoken twice, she had received no answer.

“I—I was thinking about home,” stammered Lucie, with some, if not absolute, truthfulness.

The noisy streets had disappeared—she seemed to stand beside the low wall of the Balgowrie orchard on a wonderful spring night,—a night of strange enchantment,—and to feel on her lips again the kisses of his mouth—his who had ridden past her a moment before unknowingly.

“Ah, Lucie, you think too much of home; we must make you forget it,” said Mrs. Pelham, with an indulgent smile; and Lucie, hardly following the drift of her words, cried out hastily—

“Forget it?—ah no, madam—never on this side the grave!”

“There is no doubt the poor child has been strangely brought up,” thought Mrs. Pelham, quite mystified by the intensity of the reply.

“There is Apsley House, Lucie. ’Tis an important new building, erected only some six years ago by Lord Chancellor Apsley,” she said, to divert the girl’s attention from this strange brooding upon her home. “And there is the ‘Pillars of Hercules’—a great dining place of the military men about town.”

Lucie did not bestow much heed on Apsley House, but the “Pillars of Hercules” roused no little interest in her.

When they reached home, Maggie was entertaining company. Lucie had entered the room before she knew that strangers were in it, and the sight of their unknown faces made her stand still in dismay. There were several young women and two men, and together they contrived to make no little noise. Maggie glanced up at Lucie rather nervously, to see how she would meet all these strange eyes that were levelled at her, but she spoke in her usual gentle, cooing voice—

“Ah, Lucie, you are come in! Have you had an agreeable airing? Come and let me present you to my friend Lady Almeria Carpenter, and to Mr. Rigby and Mr. Savage.”

Lucie came forward into the group with a heightened colour. Claspng her dear little hands together in nervous agitation, and glancing from one to

another of the party, she curtsied low and tried to smile. But the colour suddenly deserted her cheeks, and crying out—

“Oh, Maggie, I cannot, I cannot!” she turned and ran towards the door. Maggie rose quickly to follow her, then stopped and returned to her visitors.

“My friend Miss Marjorybanks is not strong,” she explained. “I think she sometimes finds it difficult to meet strangers.”

The fashionable Almeria smiled rather contemptuously, and one of the men made a stupid little joke, and they all laughed, and forgot Lucie—Lucie, who sat wringing her hands and weeping in her own room.

“I am a fool! I am unlike everyone here. I must go home to Harrie. Oh, I am so frightened! I cannot bear this town life, these strange people, and all the noise. I must—I must go home—and yet I cannot. Not half an hour ago I saw him—if I stay, I shall see him really—see him and speak with him again, and ask him why he has never written all these dreadful months; and he will explain, and I shall be happy again. I have almost forgotten what it is like to be happy now; and oh, how happy I was with him! but it seems so long ago.”

Lucy was really hardly conscious how great was the strain upon her nerves of the sudden change from Balgowrie to London. The conventual retirement of her life there had, in fact, perfectly unfitted her for life in a town, and she was tried far more than she knew by it.

She sat, a bewildered, pathetic little figure in her unaccustomed trappings; a longing possessed her for ‘hame, hame, hame,’ silent, peaceful Balgowrie, far from noisy streets and strange faces, with only Harrie—dearest and most familiar.

Yet here she must stay—tied by her heart-strings to the great roaring city—there was no help for it. She dried her tears and tried to smile; then summoned up courage to go downstairs again.

The visitors had gone, and Maggie met her without any reference to what had passed. Only a little later she said gently—

“We are having some friends to dinner next week, Lucie; I hope you will not mind, dear.”

“No, no,” said Lucie hastily; and then she asked rather shyly who the guests were to be.

“Only Almeria and Mr. Rigby and Mr. Savage, and mother intends to invite Dr. Hallijohn and Captain Charteris, who are both friends of yours.”

“I shall try not to be so stupid again, Maggie,” said Lucie, with the tears in her voice, if not in her eyes. “You must have blushed for me this morning, I am sure, before all your friends.”

Maggie, however, made light of the whole matter, and assured Lucie that her friends had thought nothing of it.

“We have asked them for Monday afternoon, and this is Friday,” said Maggie. “You will have time to get quite accustomed to strange faces before Monday, Lucie. We are going to take you out every day—on Saturday you must walk in the Mall, and on Sunday you must go to church. Why, by Monday you will think nothing of two or three strangers!”

“Do you really think so?” asked Lucie; and Maggie assured her that time would certainly prove a cure for all her fears.

XXIII

It had taken little more than two weeks for all the events narrated above to befall Lucie. Of course, to her these weeks seemed like centuries, as is always the case when a great deal of incident is suddenly crammed into a hitherto eventless life; but for Henrietta, time had been passing slowly enough. For oh, the house was empty, empty!—and the garden deserted, and the village forsaken.

It was a gloomy lot for any young person to be thrown entirely upon Mrs. Marjorybanks for companionship. Every year the good lady's peculiarities increased: she preferred to be silent now when she and Henrietta walked out together, and would only walk upon what in the country phrase are termed the "back roads"—deep and muddy lanes leading inland, and used for little but the carting of field produce. Wrapped in her long black cloak, she would march along in the cart ruts with the stride of a grenadier, only occasionally looking over her shoulder to fling a word at Henrietta, trudging behind her through the puddles. The roads round Balgowrie were so unfrequented that they would sometimes walk for miles without meeting another human being—a strange-looking couple enough in their out-of-the-world garments.

It was well for Henrietta that she was gifted by nature with a singularly vivid imagination, so that on these lonely trudges she kept the blithest company, and sometimes would break into a little trill of laughter over her own imaginings; then she would reprove herself for laughing aloud—remembering that Dr. Hallijohn had told her it was "a pity to be eccentric in one's habits."

At home there were only old Hester and Silence to talk to, but Henrietta found great relief in their society from the oppressive silence which her mother maintained sometimes for hours together.

She would call Hester upstairs at night to brush her hair, and together they would go over in imagination all Lucie's triumphs in London town.

The first week of her absence they had of course to follow Lucie in thought upon her journey. And this was no light task; for Henrietta had never left Eastermuir for ten years, and had come from another country village almost as remote; while Hester's travels had never extended beyond the Border. Yet from Henrietta's misty recollections of her one journey in a

stage-coach, and Hester's confused version of a migration, conducted while in the service of another family, between Jedburgh and Edinburgh in a travelling carriage, they constructed some sort of theories upon Lucie's travels. The journey by sea was baffling to both of them; but Henrietta aided imagination by extracts from books of travel, and formed very alarming visions of billows running mountains high, while the ship tossed like a cockle-shell in the trough of the waves. Hester, however, would not allow her young mistress to dwell on this dark picture, so when they knew that the boat must have arrived in London, they conjured up Lucie in more cheerful scenes—Lucie at the play, Lucie in the Park, Lucie in Westminster, Lucie at the Tower—the classic haunts so familiar to them by name, so unknown in experience.

“I am fancying Miss Lucie at the play to-night, Hester,” Henrietta would say. “How enchanted she will be! how she will be wishing that I were with her!”

“I wish the same, Miss Harrie, indeed. And what think you will Miss Lucie wear to the play?”

“Her bottle-green sacque surely, Hester; or do you think she will appear in the blue taffeta?”

This was a point they could not agree upon, for Henrietta held out for the green sacque, while Hester considered the taffeta better suited to the occasion. Twenty years ago, the gay lady who travelled from Jedburgh to Edinburgh had been in the habit of going to the play, and of wearing taffeta gowns for it; and, starting from the assumption that fashion is an unchanging quantity, Hester maintained that taffeta was worn by every gentlewoman at the play. So they had just to agree to differ on this point, and would wander off into other excursions of the fancy.

One day when Henrietta was feeling particularly lonely, she went down to the Manse to see Mrs. Allan. The good woman was getting old and frail now, but she would insist upon taking her visitor all over the house, to see in what good order it was kept in Dr. Hallijohn's absence. Henrietta followed her, smiling, through all these pleasant rooms that were half home to her already, and would one day be home indeed. “It will be like the ‘home’ in books,” she thought,—“a name to charm with.”

On her return from this visit, Henrietta sat down to write to Dr. Cornelius. It was the first letter she had written to him since his departure for town, and she felt that it was rather a difficult one to write.

“Would Lucie see it?” she thought; “and is it going to be what is called a love-letter?”

The letter, when finished, certainly did not answer to the generally received idea of a love-letter.

“MY DEAR SIR,”—it ran,—“I feel sure that Lucie has shown you the letter which I wrote to her two days after she left me, and which must by this time have reached her dear hands. But I feel equally sure that you will expect to receive a letter to yourself, therefore I am sending you this, though, as you are well aware, there is little of interest for me to relate to you.

“I cannot express to you how long the days are now that I am alone. I even find it a difficult matter to pursue my studies steadily. I miss Lucie’s presence in the room beside me, and as I sit down to read, will often find my thoughts away in London with her—and you.

“My mother has elected lately to walk in the East Loan, and as the weather has been rainy and the road is much cut up with carts, (they are carting the turnips from the high fields at present,) we walk daily over the ankles in mire. I try to laugh at this discomfort, but find it hard work making jokes alone.

“I went yesterday through a great slough of despond as I trudged through the mire; and as I have little else to tell you, dear sir, I will tell you what I felt. I felt so cruelly hedged in—do you know that I have never seen a town? I have never even entered a church door, (but I think that I have sometimes worshipped God.) I have heard no music but what Lucie can bring out of the spinnet and what the birds make in the branches in the spring.

“Yet just beyond this life of mine is a great and wonderful world where men and women *live*; there is beauty that I cannot imagine—not if I strain my poor powers to cracking—for does not Locke hold that the highest imagination is a remembrance of something experienced? I have experienced so little that my imagination itself is stunted. I have been starved in experience—the one thing in life worth living for. What is study, and what is knowledge, and what is truth itself, (if we could find it?) I wish to live, live, live—

“Oh, sir! I passed some miserable hours. And, indeed, discontent is a hateful sin. Then, all of a sudden, I remembered the words you said to me: ‘*You shall see men and things new and strange, and it will be like the entering a new life.*’ And like a cloud my discontent vanished, and I knew that you spoke truly, and that some day I shall see all that I am fretting for now. I looked down at such muddy boots, and thought that instead of toiling along these back roads, I would one day walk with you in all the places which are only names to me now—London—Paris, perhaps—it might even be Rome—‘*the entering a new life*’ indeed!

“So that is enough of morbid thoughts.

“I went to-day to call upon Mrs. Allan. She would have me see over the house, that I might report to you in what good order she keeps it in your absence—as if you ever doubted that!

“I went into the study, which looked strange indeed all ‘swept and garnished.’ The dear books gave me welcome, it is true, but for the rest, it was bleak enough. Then she would have me go upstairs, that I might say that you required a new stair carpet. I daresay, sir, that it would give Mrs. Allan infinite pleasure did you purchase one—for myself, I would never have noticed that this one was worn out.

“She also desires fresh curtains in your room. I recommended a large-flowered chintz, as she would have me give an opinion, and I trust you will not find fault with my choice.

“And now, sir, it is I who must find fault most seriously with you—for I saw upon your writing-table that new edition of the works of Spinoza which you told me you were getting. I brought it home with me to study, and on the title-page I read in your handwriting, (which is terribly clear,) ‘*Henrietta and Cornelius Hallijohn, Oct. 1775.*’ Now, Cornelius, I am not Henrietta Hallijohn yet, and it was extremely injudicious in you to write my name thus on your books and leave them for Mrs. Allan to examine. I do not imagine that the works of Spinoza would attract her beyond the title-page, but then that is the one page which it would be undesirable for her to peruse, and I do not doubt that she has already done so. My dear sir, when will you learn to be more judicious, and care a little for the opinion of the outside world?

Since ever I knew you,—and that is ten years now,—you have not cared a snap of your fingers for what is said of you—surely this is a great mistake? Can anyone afford to do this? I shall keep Spinoza till your return, and then you can erase my name from the title-page—or I can keep it till I have a right to it! . . .

“I had meant to end here, but a letter from Lucie has just reached me, written the day after her arrival in London—in the evening. She tells me of your visit to her, and of all that passed between you. I am glad—so glad—in one way, that there is now no longer any secret in my mind from Lucie; but I trust she was not hurt about it. You made her understand everything? You did not let her have the impression that I would ever leave her, even to come to you? Pray, dear Cornelius, do not be annoyed with me for saying this. I do not know how it will be, but somehow I feel that it will all become plain, and that we shall not be parted: I mean Lucie and I.

“Expression sometimes seems to fail me; but you will understand what I would say, as you always do.—And I am ever yours,

“HENRIETTA MARJORYBANKS.

“*P.S.*—I suppose you will show this to Lucie. I cannot write often enough to please her, so pray do so.

“H. M.”

This document, which reached Dr. Cornelius' hands on the morning of the day on which he was to dine with the Pelhams, did not seem to give him much satisfaction.

“Show it to Lucie! 'Pon my soul! the first attempt at a love-letter that she sends me. Very likely. 'Pray do so,' forsooth!” He folded up the letter and put it into the breast pocket of his coat with a half tender, half impatient movement. “And she is not in love with me as she should be,” he continued. “She thinks of her marriage as a deliverance from the house of bondage merely—it isn't a personal matter with her yet. She must taste all the things she has been so long denied first, then perhaps she will be at leisure to fall in love with me. I have taught her all she knows—I must teach her how to fall in love too! Well, if she learns it as well as her teacher . . . As I said to Lucie, I'd give all London just now for the 'back roads' behind Balgowrie—if Harrie was there with me. And time was when I banished the thought of

Eastermuir from me in town, dreading the very remembrance of its dulness!” So he mused on as he took his way towards the Square—in the roaring Strand he heard Henrietta’s voice, in the crowd of Piccadilly she was walking beside him like a shadow. What a passion it was with him! In his preoccupation he knocked up against people as he walked.

“Tush! You are not fit to live among civilised men, with your thoughts four hundred miles away!” he said to himself impatiently, as he apologised hurriedly for the second of these accidents.

XXIV

The other guests had arrived at Mrs. Pelham's, and were getting through the *mauvais quart-d'heure* as best they might when Dr. Cornelius came into the room. Mrs. Pelham, Maggie, Lucie, Lady Almeria Carpenter, Mr. Rigby, and Mr. Savage made up the party so far, and Dr. Cornelius, enumerating them mentally, perceived that another gentleman must still be coming.

"I feared I was late, madam," he said; "but I fancy someone else is later still—am I right?"

"I expected Captain Charteris," said Mrs. Pelham, with a shade of annoyance in her voice. "But, strangely enough, he has never sent a reply to my invitation, so we shall not wait for him. If he arrives, well and good; if not, we can make shift without his company."

Dr. Cornelius looked curiously at Lucie, who stood by the fireplace talking—or, to be more exact, attempting to talk—with Mr. Rigby. "If Charteris was the first, this is assuredly only the second man she has spoken to in her short life," thought Dr. Cornelius, wondering sympathetically how she was getting on with the unknown quantity. He was a tall, vacant-looking man, wearing what in those days was termed a "quizzing-glass" in one eye, and as he spoke to Lucie, he stared her completely out of countenance.

"Have you been to the play since coming to town, Miss Marjorybanks?" he was asking; for Mr. Rigby was what might be called a persistent type—just as his prototype of 1895 is ever to be heard with the query, "Been to the theatres?" on his lips, so this gallant of 1775 was, in like manner, "putting" Lucie "to the question"!

"No—yes, yes—I mean no," stammered Lucie, wringing her little white fingers painfully.

"Which is it?" he said, and laughed, and stared even harder at poor Lucie.

She looked nervously round the room, and asked, in a confused manner, "Which is what?" which certainly was absolute nonsense.

Dr. Cornelius crossed the room to her assistance.

"Miss Marjorybanks was at the play with me on Thursday," he said. "Garrick. We all laughed until we cried. Next time we shall go to see

tragedy, and then we shall cry until we laugh. I never find anything so amusing as a tragedy!”

Rigby gazed at Dr. Cornelius through the quizzing-glass, as if to ask who he might be; then his eye fell before the steady, amused expression of the older man. Lucie breathed a little more freely, but Dr. Cornelius noticed that she was trembling and shivering as if with an ague. His heart bled for her pitiable nervousness.

“I am sorry that I am not to have the honour of taking you down to dinner, Lucie,” he said; “for I have messages for you from Henrietta.”

He said this partly to prepare her for the ordeal of Rigby’s escort. Lucie cast an imploring look at him—a look of absolute despair. But he could only smile to her, as he turned to offer his arm to Mrs. Pelham.

Lucie laid her trembling little fingers on Rigby’s arm. Her head went round, her whole body shook with fear. What could she say to this man? She must speak to him for the next hour and half, and she had nothing whatever to say. Moreover, he was laughing at her, she was sure; he had seen her run away from the room on Friday, and, no doubt, thought her quite peculiar. Oh, why had Mrs. Pelham been cruel enough to send her down with him? In the extremity of her nervous suffering, she almost forgot the disappointment of not seeing Dan Charteris, as she had thought to do. As they reached the dining-room, she became aware that Rigby had been saying something—indeed, it occurred to her that he was repeating the same remark over and over again in slightly different forms—

“Have you been in town before?”

“Is this your first visit to London?”

“I suppose you have been in town before?”

“I suppose you have visited London before?”

Lucie blushed fiercely at her own stupidity, and became doubly stupid.

“I—no—I—I have never been in London before,” she managed to say, and sat down in the first seat she saw. Then she heard Rigby’s voice remark icily—

“Pardon me, our seats are farther up the table, Miss Marjorybanks.”

She rose hurriedly, upsetting two wineglasses, and reached her own chair at last. “Now,” she thought, giddy with shyness,—“now I must make an effort to be like other people.” She glanced across at Maggie’s pretty,

tranquil face, and at Almeria's expression of immovable ease; then, with a terrible attempt at calmness she did not feel, she turned to make a remark to Mr. Rigby—

“I find London very”—she began; but he faced round upon her with an ironical expression, that a duller person than Lucie would have easily interpreted—“Come away, country cousin, with your comments on London,” he seemed to say; and the words died on her lips.

Rigby was, in fact, in very bad temper, and wreaked it unmercifully on Lucie. He had expected to go down to dinner with Lady Almeria, and instead found himself coupled with a shy girl from the country, without a word to say for herself, and, withal, a person of no importance. Rigby had a deep love for persons of importance. He allowed a long silence to fall, to impress Lucie thoroughly with the idea that he had nothing whatever to say to her. Then, as a sacrifice to the goddess of civility, he seemed to rack his brains for a subject, produced it condescendingly, and gave Lucie another chance to be amusing if she could. It was nothing very brilliant, only the invariable question—

“Did you enjoy Garrick on Friday?”

“Yes,” said Lucie.

She was quite aware that he was behaving rudely. She would have liked to be rude to him in return, but instead she was only smitten with silence. She looked towards Dr. Cornelius with piteous eyes, but he was separated from her by the whole length of the table. There was another long pause.

“Do you prefer silence to conversation, Miss Marjorybanks?” asked Rigby; “or perhaps you disapprove of play-going?”

“No,” said Lucie; she could find nothing more to say.

“I am sure, now, that you find we Londoners most frivolous. You occupy yourselves more profitably in the country, do you not?”

“Yes.”

“Come! what do you principally find fault with here—is it our manners or our morals?”

“Neither. I mean to say”—

“‘Neither you mean to say.’ That is enigmatical. ‘Neither you mean to say.’ Pray explain yourself, Miss Marjorybanks.”

Poor Lucie became incoherent. She answered at random, and her confused replies only made Rigby more witty at her expense. At last, losing all self-control, she rose and ran from the room with a little gasping sob.

Rigby saw that he had gone too far, and was full of tardy repentance.

Mrs. Pelham, with her quiet suavity, desired Maggie to go and see how Lucie was, assuring the rest of the party that her young friend was subject to slight attacks of faintness, which need not cause anyone anxiety. But she added, *sotto voce*, to Dr. Cornelius, "Poor child, what can I do with her? I am at my wits' end."

"Patience, patience, and again patience, madam," he said. "You must remember that you have the habits of all her lifetime to combat."

When the ladies adjourned to the drawing-room, they found Lucie there. She looked pale, and had evidently been weeping, but seemed quite composed, and joined in their conversation with the artless sweetness that she had at times. Even the fashionable Almeria unbent towards her, when she said, with a shy smile, "I am so much alarmed by the presence of strangers, that I lose all self-control. Tell me, do you think it possible to conquer such fears?"

Both Maggie and Lady Almeria laughed heartily at this, and Lucie felt quite cheered by their mirth.

"I shall attempt a little more conversation with that terrible Mr. Rigby when he comes upstairs," she said bravely. "I can scarcely believe that neither of you two feel alarmed by him."

"If there is any question of alarm, 'tis on his side, I can assure you, Miss Marjorybanks," said Lady Almeria.

"Were you as afraid of Captain Charteris as all this, Lucie?" asked Maggie innocently. "For if you were, his stay at Balgowrie cannot have been much of a pleasure to you."

Lucie blushed hotly. "Afraid of Captain Charteris? Oh no! I never felt in the least afraid of him," she said.

Both the girls looked at her curiously.

"Why not, Lucie?" said Maggie. "I should have fancied him as quite as alarming a personage as poor, stupid Rigby."

"I do not know, Maggie. I fancy it was because I was at home, among everything that was familiar to me, and beside Henrietta—it was quite

different there.”

“I wonder if you would feel nervous in his company here?” said Maggie.

“I cannot understand his absence,” said Mrs. Pelham. “Captain Charteris is generally ready enough to accept my invitations.”

Almeria laughed, and Maggie frowned slightly; and as they were discussing the matter, a note was brought to Mrs. Pelham, who opened it, smiling.

“My young gentleman’s excuses,” she said, glancing over its contents. “‘Out of town’—‘only returned an hour ago.’—Ahem! Maggie my dear, ring the bell. Thomas, did you see Captain Charteris’ man when you delivered my note on Friday?”

“Yes, madam.”

“Did he mention if his master was out of town?”

“No, madam; said as the Captain was playing a game of hazard with another gentleman, but ’e’d have the note immediate.”

“That will do,” said Mrs. Pelham, smiling again, and Almeria and Maggie laughed more than ever.

“I should not like to incur your displeasure, madam, by false excuses,” said Almeria.

Mrs. Pelham rose and went across the room to her writing-desk.

“I shall let the young man feel the weight of my displeasure,” she said.

“MY DEAR SIR,”—her note ran,—“When you would make excuses to such an old friend as I am, pray make them honestly. You passed within half a yard of me an hour before I sent my invitation to you, and I hear on reliable authority that it reached you as you were enjoying a game of hazard with ‘another gentleman.’ In future, be more careful how you invent your excuses.—I am, my dear Dan, yours, etc.”

“I have not been too severe, as you see,” she said, handing the note to Maggie to read.

“No, indeed, madam! the young man is becoming intolerable,” said Maggie.

So the note was despatched, and, the gentlemen coming up from their wine at the moment, no one remembered more of Captain Charteris and his false excuses, with the exception of Lucie, who sat and pondered the matter very gravely—"Why had he not come?—why, why?"

She was not tried by further conversation with Mr. Rigby, for he had at once directed his attentions to Almeria; while Mr. Savage, Maggie, and Mrs. Pelham were speaking together.

Dr. Cornelius came and sat beside Lucie. "I have a letter from Henrietta to-day," he said, "which she bids me show to you; but I cannot obey her."

"Ah, sir, pray—pray let me see Harrie's letter!" cried Lucie, her eyes brimming up with tears. "I am so sad and unhappy to-day! I would feel another creature if I saw it."

"Can you ask me, Lucie?—the first love-letter Harrie has written me. No, it is mine, I am afraid—mine alone."

"But I know Harrie could write nothing, even to you, sir, that she would not like me to read," pleaded Lucie.

"Ah, I daresay not! But, even at the risk of being considered disagreeable, I cannot let you see it. You will be wishing to see mine to her next, Lucie."

"I am quite sure that if I were with her, Harrie would show them to me, sir," said Lucie, smiling a little mischievously.

"Happily you are not. Well, Harrie is well, but dull, walking on the back roads, poor darling, while we walk in Piccadilly. She treats me to various reflections."

"Oh, you need not try to *tell* me!" said Lucie impatiently. "I want Harrie's own words, and only them; I do not care for it second hand."

"Very well, cross-patch. But why did you run away from dinner, my child?" said Dr. Cornelius, changing his tone to one of gentle reproof.

"That—that terrible Mr. Rigby!" whispered Lucie, with a fearful glance towards her enemy.

"My dear, my dear! may you never meet greater lions in your path!" he said, laughing.

After their guests had gone, Maggie and Mrs. Pelham and Lucie stood chatting together by the fire, when Thomas came in with another note.

“Oh, may I see, madam?” cried Maggie, with her pretty head over her mother’s shoulder even as she spoke. “I wonder if he gives the real reason this time.”

Mrs. Pelham frowned slightly as she read.

“My dear Lucie,” she said, “I did not think for a moment that there was any reason why you and Captain Charteris should find it painful to meet each other. Had you told me of it, you may be sure I would never have asked him to my house.”

Lucie blushed, and stammered out something quite incoherent.

“You may read his note, as it concerns yourself,” said Mrs. Pelham, handing it to her.

“DEAR MADAM,”—it ran,—“since truth, like murder, will out, I must acquaint you with the fact that I had something of a flirtation with your pretty little friend, Miss Marjorybanks, whom you so kindly asked me to meet. I thought ’twould be uncomfortable for us both meeting, and blundered into stupid excuses, which you, my kind friend, will pardon now that the truth is told you.—Yours, etc.”

Lucie read the note over and over, staring down at the words, as if she did not take in their meaning. Then she handed back the note to Mrs. Pelham, saying gently, “Thank you, madam. I would not have felt it uncomfortable to meet Captain Charteris, but since he felt it, he was wise not to come.”

“Ah, young men are foolish—they cannot stand a rebuff,” said Mrs. Pelham.

Maggie looked mystified, and Lucie took up her work and sat down to sew as if her life depended on its being finished. The evening did not pass as pleasantly as usual; and Mrs. Pelham sent Lucie to bed early, under the impression that she was over tired.

XXV

That was a night of wonderful moonlight. The cold, greenish light flooded in through the windows, making the rooms almost as clear as day. It fell in a long streak across Maggie Pelham's bed, where she lay awake thinking over the events of the day. "That was very curious about Lucie and Dan Charteris," she thought; "most curious. I wonder what it was? I wonder if he asked her to marry him, and she refused? Well, I thought he wished to marry me—I could have sworn he did"— She stopped short in her reflections and sat up on one elbow in a startled way.

"Oh dear me!" she cried; "what's that?"

For a white figure was standing in the moonlit room—most ghostly to behold.

"Are you asleep, Maggie?" said Lucie's voice, dissipating her spectral fears.

"Oh, Lucie! Is there anything wrong? How you startled me!" said Maggie.

Lucie came up to the side of the bed and laid her hands on the pillow. She did not speak. Maggie sat up in earnest.

"My dear Lucie, what is wrong with you? You are as cold as ice. Come here beside me. Can you not sleep? Or have you had a bad dream? What is it?"

Lucie obeyed like a child, creeping under the blankets without a word. Then she suddenly buried her face in the pillow.

"Maggie, Maggie," she whispered, so low that Maggie scarcely caught the words, "I had to tell someone—oh, may I tell you? Oh, Harrie is not here, and I think my heart will break. He does not wish to see me—he does not love me—I have been deceiving myself all this time. Oh, it cannot be true that he does not care for me—tell me it is not true!"

The young are seldom good comforters—they have not suffered enough to be hopeful. When Maggie heard this revelation of Lucie's trouble, she thought there was no possible comfort she could offer her. "Why, it must be all her world gone!" she thought. She took Lucie's hand in hers and kissed her gently.

“Tell me about it, dear,” she said. “Perhaps you will feel better if you tell me all about it.”

So Lucie told her everything. All about Dan’s coming to Balgownie, and their walks and rides and talks—and the last night—how he kissed her, and how they were to meet again—how she mended his coat, and about the heart he cut on the west turret window, with ‘United hearts death only parts’ written round it—all the dear follies of first love that sound so pitiful in the telling and bulk so large in the heart.

Maggie listened with rising indignation. Her whole generous nature was hot with anger when Lucie had done.

“He is not worth the caring for!” she said angrily. “Oh, Lucie, darling, do not cry like that.”

Lucie turned wearily on the pillow.

“It is not only that, Maggie—it is everything. I am not like other people. I am going home—going at once. I cannot stay any longer here—it is killing me.”

There was a terrible, lifeless sound in her voice.

“Going home? Lucie, you are talking nonsense. What do you mean?” cried Maggie.

“I have made up my mind—I am going home. All this time I have been finding out how different I am from other people. I only stayed because—because I had to—I could not go while there was a hope of seeing him. Now I do not even care to stay. You have all been so kind to me; but life is a torture to me among strangers—I should never become accustomed to it.”

In vain Maggie argued and entreated—Lucie would only give the one reply—“I am going home.”

“Oh, it will seem different when the morning sun comes in,” said cheerful Maggie at last—she had never had a grief that seemed darker by contrast with day’s radiance.

“I am afraid to face the morning,” said Lucie.

“But we can tell mother about it,” said Maggie simply. “She can always put things straight; she will assure you that your nervous feelings can be conquered, and that you are quite like other people, and—but perhaps you would not care that even mother should know about—about”—

Maggie did not mention names. You will notice that young people have in general a very delicate finger where affairs of the heart are concerned. An older woman would have mentioned her lover's name in full to Lucie at that moment, and made her wince sharply.

"Yes, you must not tell dear Mrs. Pelham. You must not think that it is because I do not love her, Maggie; it is just that I could not bear a third person knowing. You—and Harrie when I get home—are enough."

"Yes, I understand," said Maggie quickly. "But you will tell mother about your feelings, will you not? I am sure she can make things appear in quite another light for you, and that you will remain with us."

"No one can make things different, Maggie. I have *got a sight of the truth*—I saw myself through other people's eyes last night; and I am going home."

"But what will Dr. Hallijohn say?"

"I do not care."

"And Henrietta?"

"She will understand when I tell her—almost before I tell her."

"And your mother?"

"I have not got a mother."

"Oh, Lucie!"

"When I see what Mrs. Pelham is to you, I see that I have never had a mother. Why, she has spoiled all my life! She has shut us up like nuns and made us peculiar! oh, so peculiar! and if I come home with all my happiness wrecked and done with, she will never know—because she does not care enough for us even to discern whether we are happy or unhappy. She sits reading Voltaire and writing essays on education—we might die before her eyes and she would scarcely lay down her book or her pen!"

All the pent-up bitterness of her loveless childhood found words, and Maggie listened in a sort of shocked sympathy.

"I think we would have been mad by this time if it had not been for Dr. Hallijohn," Lucie went on. "He has been mother and father both to us all these years—he made all the happiness we ever had. And we were happy, in our own way, when we were children—before we understood. I used to be so pleased with the world—with all the live things and flowers and sunshine—I love them still so dearly—till I came to see that we were shut into a

prison that there was no escape from. It was only this summer, after Captain Charteris was with us, that I saw it all, and then it seemed unbearable to me. Oh, Maggie, I have such capacities for happiness! I have been so happy often over nothing at all. But I shall never feel like that again, for *I have seen myself*, and how odd I am, and I have lost—oh, lost everything!”

Maggie had nothing to say—she could only weep along with Lucie, tears of such sincere sympathy as seldom flow in this artificial world. At last, when the night was far spent, Lucie dropped into an unquiet sleep, and Maggie, tired out with her vigils, was fain to follow suit.

The next morning after breakfast Maggie told Mrs. Pelham of Lucie’s desire to go home.

“I cannot hear of it for a moment—the poor child is barely come to us! ’Tis just a turn of home-sickness, Maggie. I will speak to her,” said Mrs. Pelham decisively. But after a long conversation with Lucie, even Mrs. Pelham was rather daunted. For Lucie did not contradict her, nor was she hysterical or extreme in her expressions. She listened quietly to all that Mrs. Pelham had to say, and then said only, “I am going home, madam. You are most kind, but I cannot stay.” Then would follow some more arguments—always listened to with the same attention, to be followed by the same reply—“I must beg you to excuse me, dear madam—I am going home.” At last, completely baffled, Mrs. Pelham sent a messenger for Dr. Cornelius. He arrived in the afternoon, and was at once acquainted with Lucie’s sudden determination to leave London.

“My dear Lucie,” he said, “I must ask you not to behave like a fool.”

Lucie winced: she had never had a harsh word from him before; yet she only replied as before—“I am going home, sir—I cannot stay.”

“Well, you shall go alone, then. Do you suppose that I am going to trundle back to Scotland before three weeks are gone?”

“I—I do not know,” and Lucie’s eyes brimmed up with tears. “I suppose I would reach alive even did I travel alone.”

“You can assuredly try,” said Dr. Cornelius hotly.

Patience was not his distinguishing characteristic. He was irritated that Lucie, after coming to town against such opposition from her mother, should so quickly give in to what he could only suppose was a fit of home-sickness.

Lucie caught hold of his hand.

“Do not—pray do not be angry with me, sir! I cannot stay—it will kill me outright. Can you not see for yourself how foolish I appear in society?—I am quite unfitted for it.”

“And how do you intend to fit yourself for it, Lucie? or have you decided to remain in Balgowrie for the rest of your natural life, and speak only to the chairs?”

Lucie considered gravely.

“Perhaps with Harrie I may some day leave Balgowrie again—alone I never can. If you knew a tenth part of what I have suffered since leaving home, you would not wonder that I wish to return,” she said.

“At least, Lucie, do not be in a hurry about this—consent to remain with your kind friends for a few weeks longer. If at the end of that time you are still as miserable as you are to-day, I will let you go.”

“No,” said Lucie; “I cannot stay.”

“Then you are going to travel alone?”

“Yes.”

“When do you start?”

“To-morrow, sir, if I can manage to.”

“My dear Lucie, I am out of all patience with you. You should not be so obstinate; you should take the advice of your elders. You are merely home-sick. Wait for a few days, and all these megrims will disappear.”

“No, sir, I know they will not,” said Lucie.

Dr. Cornelius rose impatiently.

“Well, take your own way. Doubtless you can arrange your own journey admirably. I wish you good-bye. I have various engagements to-morrow. If, as you say, you start then, I fear it will not be possible for me to see you again.”

He held out his hand in farewell. Lucie bit her lips to keep back the tears that were choking her.

“Good-bye, dear sir,” she said softly.

Dr. Cornelius did not for a moment dream that Lucie would think of starting for Scotland alone. He reproached himself a little for hastiness, and decided to buy the child a fine present as a peace-offering, and take it to her

the next day. "Then I shall quiz her on the subject of her journey, and we shall be good friends again," he said.

But Lucie was her mother's daughter. There was a ground-rock of determination in her character that did not appear often. When Dr. Cornelius had gone, she went upstairs and began to pack her things. Maggie came and stood helplessly looking on at these preparations for departure; and then Mrs. Pelham came and positively forbade her to continue them.

"I must keep you against your will, Lucie, if you will not stay with it, until I find a suitable escort for you. You cannot suppose that I would permit you to travel alone to Scotland?"

"Will you make inquiries, then, madam?" said Lucie.

She came up to Mrs. Pelham and placed her trembling little hands in hers, and looked up into her eyes with an expression that startled the older woman.

"Good heavens, child! how you resemble your father!" she said. "Yes, I shall find an escort for you, my dear, if you have a little patience."

"Now you will be good and sweet, Lucie," said Maggie in her cooing voice; "and let me remove those dresses from your trunk, and come downstairs, and we shall sing together, or sew, or what you please, so long as you are contented to stay with us a little longer."

"You do not think that it is *you* I wish to leave?" said Lucie. And they went downstairs together.

They had not been seated in the drawing-room for very long before a visitor was announced. It was Lady Mary Crichton, to wait upon Miss Marjorybanks.

The good-natured, loud-voiced girl came bouncing into the room, all smiles and exclamations.

"Why, is this you, Lucie? London has changed you amazingly! You seem six years older with the hair worn high! And how do you manage your hoop, my dear?—Miss Pelham? Ah, we have met before, I think, Miss Pelham, at some of the assemblies. You danced in a green brocade last year, did you not? Ah, yes, yes!"

She was quite breathless with all she had to say: her pleasure to see Lucie again—her excuses for not coming sooner—her desire to hear Lucie's impressions of London—all she had been doing herself, and inquiries as to how Lucie had employed her time. Maggie could not but smile to hear

anyone ask so many questions without waiting to receive any answers to them.

“And I am in a special hurry to-day,” she went on. “Indeed, I should be in James’ Square at my packing, and not here, but I could not resist a glimpse of you in the passing. Is it not annoying? Really I feel more like weeping just now than talking” (it did not appear to her auditors). “For we have heard to-day from Scotland of the serious illness of my grandmother. The dear old lady was in such health when we left home. It seems a stroke of some kind, most sudden, and my father will be off to-morrow, and take me with him. At her age, he says, it may be fatal. I do not think so myself; indeed, I would think it more reasonable to wait for further news; but my father is determined, so we start to-morrow.”

Maggie and Lucie exchanged glances.

“When are you going?” asked Lucie; “for I, too, am going home.”

“You are going home? You surprise me! Why, I thought you were to be the winter in town! I trust you have no bad news from home?”

“No, I thank you, I have no bad news.” Lucie broke down, finding it impossible to explain the situation.

“What is it? Pray tell me what is the matter?” asked Lady Mary in great astonishment.

“London does not seem to agree with Lucie; we think she must go home, for really she has been far from well since coming here—so subject to fits of giddiness,” said Maggie, rather lamely.

“But what a pity not to give yourself a little longer!” said Lady Mary. “No doubt you would soon begin to mend, and ’twill be most annoying to miss all the pleasures of a winter in town.”

“You may be sure we have used every argument with dear Lucie,” said Maggie. “She seems to feel that it is right for her to return to Scotland, so we were just going to try to find an escort for her.”

“If to-morrow is not too soon”—began Lady Mary doubtfully.

Lucie started up.

“Ah, you will take care of me? You are most kind! To-morrow is none too soon. I can easily be ready to go with you, if you will really burden yourself with the care of me.”

“Oh, it will be no burden, Lucie—my father is there to protect us both—I shall be glad of a companion; but the packet-boat sails at eight to-morrow—’tis an early start.”

Lucie appealed to Maggie. Could she manage it?

“Well, dear, if you still insist on going, I think you will be wise to go in Lady Mary’s company. It will be the same to us to send the coach to the docks at any hour.”

“Will you ask Mrs. Pelham about it?” asked Lucie; and Maggie left the room to find her mother.

“Now,” said Lady Mary resolutely, facing round on Lucy,—“now, Goosie, what is this? Take my advice and stay; as surely as you sit there, Lucie Marjorybanks, you will repent it if you run home. Oh, I know, I know! You are just shy and home-sick, my dear. Stay and face it out, and in a month’s time you will not know yourself for the same girl. I remember feeling shy myself when I first came out into society. No, no, you need not laugh; I swear I blushed whenever anyone looked at me!”

“You are dear and kind,” said Lucy, taking Lady Mary’s large hand in hers; “but you can never know all I feel—no one can who has not had our strange upbringing. It is quite different for you.”

“Pooh! not different in the least. Stay, Lucie—I entreat of you to stay.”

“It is impossible; I must go home, and as soon as I can. The Pelhams have been more than kind to me, but I cannot stay; it is killing me.”

Mrs. Pelham came in with Maggie at that moment.

“So I hear you are going to take Lucy away from us?” she said, as she shook hands with Lady Mary.

“Well, madam, I have been trying to persuade her to remain with you, but she seems determined, so perhaps it is as well for her to travel with us.”

“I suppose I must give my consent, Lucie,” said Mrs. Pelham. “It seems such a sudden arrangement. I have no time even to write to your mother.”

“It will not occur to my mother to think it strange,” said Lucie.

So Mrs. Pelham reluctantly made the necessary arrangements with Lady Mary, and the good-natured girl hurried away, shaking her head at Lucie, and assuring her “she was a sadly headstrong young woman,” and that till she saw her on board the boat, she would hope that a night’s reflection had changed her plans.

When Lady Mary was gone, Maggie followed Lucie upstairs to resume the interrupted packing. The wide new skirts were all to be folded up and crushed into Lucie's modest boxes.

"I think I shall take off my new things and travel in my old ones. I am going back to my old life," said Lucie; but Maggie would not hear of it, so the old garments were packed away. The evening was very sad, for they had come to love each other more than they knew in these two weeks. Mrs. Pelham said they would not work, but sit round the fire and talk for the last time. She made an effort to be cheerful, and put the best front upon Lucie's home-going.

"I wonder when we shall meet again, dear Lucie," she said. "This has not been a very happy time for you, I fear; but you must come again, bringing Henrietta with you, and then I do not think you will suffer from home-sickness."

Lucie sat looking into the fire. She did not reply for a minute, and then said slowly—

"I do not know, madam; looking into life, I seem to see nothing in the future. It may be a foolish thing to say, but I think it will stop when I go home."

"My dear Lucie, life does not stop, however monotonous it may be."

"No," said Lucie languidly; "perhaps it is only a feeling."

It was useless. They could not be cheerful. So Mrs. Pelham sent the girls to bed betimes, in preparation for their early start the next morning. She sat up late herself, reading over a bundle of letters written to her thirty years before by Lucie's father.

"Poor Henry! he was capable of such depths of feeling, and married without love after all—and that poor child is the end of it! She has all his feelings—Heaven send she has nothing else that he had!" she said to herself as she folded away the letters.

The morning sun was struggling out through the mists as Mrs. Pelham and Maggie stood on the landing-stage to see the last of Lucie. When the moment of parting came, Lucie flung herself upon Mrs. Pelham's neck in a burst of sobs, and then Maggie began to cry, and they all wept together.

"I shall never see you again—I know it, I know it!" said Lucie.

"The Lord bless you!" said Mrs. Pelham; not as the easy phrase goes, but as a prayer from the heart for one who was helpless and weary.

As the boat steered out into the river, Lucie still wept; but as one by one the towers of London town were swallowed up in the smoky mists, she stood dry-eyed on deck to see the last of the city where her lover dwelt: she was saying those terrible, silent farewells of the heart that are not said with tears.

XXVI

Under the kind escort of Lady Mary and her father, Lucie reached Edinburgh in safety. There she had to bid farewell to her friends, and repair once more to Miss Hallijohn's house in Campbell's Close. The good lady was astonished indeed to see Lucie back again from London so soon. She did not need to be told that something was amiss, for Lucie's tremulous manner told that all too plainly; but, like a prudent woman, she asked no questions, and began to look about for someone to take care of Lucie on the journey down to Eastermuir. It would have been inadmissible in 1775 for any young woman to venture alone in a stage-coach, so Lucie had to restrain her impatience, and wait until a suitable travelling companion should appear. She had not long to wait, however. On the morning after her arrival, Miss Hallijohn heard of "another gentlewoman" who journeyed in her direction, and under the severe eye of this elderly duenna, Lucie set off once again in the Eastermuir coach. She did not find much to say to her protectress, and answered the few questions put to her in such a far-away manner as made the older woman conclude that her young charge was slightly peculiar. All the way from Edinburgh—and a long, weary forty miles it is—Lucie sat gazing out at the landscape; every now and then she would put her head out at the coach window to taste the country air, drinking it in as a thirsty man drinks wine, yet when her companion made any remark on the scenery, she scarcely replied. So they relapsed at last into total silence, and Lucie was left to her sad thoughts. As they came at last in sight of Eastermuir, she felt a curious stir at her heart. Ah! there was the church, the inn, the handful of cottages, the Manse—and in the distance, over the tree-tops, one of the steep crow-step gables of Balgowrie.

"Ah, I have reached home at last!" she cried, as the coach drew up in the village street.

"You will be tired, no doubt. I have still ten miles between me and home," said her companion a little grimly, holding out her hand in farewell.

Lucie just pressed it for a moment and murmured some incoherent thanks; she was in such a hurry to descend. Then she found herself standing like one awakened suddenly from dreams, staring round her at the familiar sights of home. After the babel of London streets, the village seemed to be sleeping an enchanted sleep.

The girls had never been allowed to speak with the village people in a friendly way, yet the innkeeper had a word of welcome to Lucie none the less.

“Back again, missie?” he said, as he superintended the hoisting down of her luggage, glancing curiously the while at her altered appearance.

“I am glad to be home again,” said Lucie. “Have you seen my sister passing to-day?”

“No’ for three days back. Ye’ll be for a machine up to Balgowrie?”

“No, I thank you, I shall walk—I am tired with sitting so long in the coach; but will you send up my boxes?” said Lucie, and stepped away through the mud, holding up her wide skirts with some difficulty, and picking her steps across the cart tracks on her little high-heeled London shoes.

It was a very mild afternoon for the time of year—the mildness succeeding a night of wind and rain, which had left the roads if possible more miry than usual; yet a reflection of the soft skies overhead smiled up at Lucie from the puddles, and in the calm air the gnats were dancing as if it had been a summer’s day. Just a month since she left home! A week on the way—not quite a fortnight in town—and a week on the return journey. Lucie stood still to look incredulously at a tree which still bore some tattered yellow leaves. “The same leaves that were green on the branches when Dan was here,” she thought.

But ah, how sweet the country air was, after the stale vapours of London! And there was nothing and no one to fear. She need not look round her here in terror.

Her feet could not carry her swiftly enough along the well-known road—for was not Henrietta at the end of it? Lucie arrived quite breathless at the front door, and had to pause for a moment on the topmost step. Then she began to run up the old corkscrew stair. The familiar fusty smell that hung about the walls of Balgowrie greeted her as she ascended, together with the swirling draught which always blew down that stair as if through a funnel. The house was so silent that her racing footsteps echoed through it as she ran. At the drawing-room door, which stood ajar, Lucie stopped again to regain breath and to look in, half expecting to see some alteration there—it seemed so long since she had stood on that threshold. But there was no change. The wood fire was burning low, the hangings swayed in the draughts which were a part of Balgowrie, through the west turret window a

shaft of sunshine came in and lay along the faded carpet; and in the window-seat at the far end of the room Henrietta sat reading.

Lucie could not speak for a moment. She wished only to stand there and feast her eyes on the dear plain face bending so intently over its studies. But of a sudden Henrietta looked up and let her book fall with an exclamation; and Lucie, forgetful of hoops and heels, ran towards her up the great gaunt room, tripping over her skirts, and calling out between tears and laughter, "I am come home, Harrie, I am come home!"

She flung her arms round Henrietta, and in that divine moment of meeting it seemed that the former troubles were forgotten, neither could come again to mind. They clung together as though years had parted them—or as lovers estranged who come again to their tenderness.

"Lucie, Lucie, why have you come back? Oh, I am dreaming, I think!" cried Henrietta.

She rubbed her eyes and stared again, and fingered Lucie's stiff skirts, and passed her hands over her cushioned head, to try by one sense to verify the testimony of the other.

"Oh, do not doubt your eyes, Harrie. 'Tis me indeed," said Lucie. "I think I am dreaming, though; as I came picking my steps up from the village, I doubted if in reality I had ever trodden London streets."

"Your own clothes might have convinced you, I think. Why, Lucie, Lucie dear, I do not know you in these curious fashions!"

"Well, you will know me soon. I am not going to wear them here—Maggie would have me travel in them, but this very night I must take them off; above all, I must remove the cushions from my poor head, which has borne them these three weeks past."

"But tell me, dearest, why are you come back?" persisted Henrietta.

As she spoke, she saw that the colour in Lucie's cheeks had died down into a bright red spot in each of them, and that under her eyes there were transparent blue hollows.

"You are ill, Lucie," she cried. "That is why you have come home."

Lucie sat down and took Henrietta's hand in hers. "Oh no, Harrie, I am not ill," she said. "I shall tell you everything soon—I cannot just now—do you not understand? I should never have gone to London—that is all—'twas all a mistake. Oh, I am tired, tired, Harrie!" She leaned her head on Henrietta's shoulder and sat silent.

“You did right to come. Of course I understand. Did Dr. Hallijohn come too?”

“No. He was annoyed—angry with me. He wished me to stay; he did not know what was troubling me.”

“And he allowed you to come by yourself?” asked Henrietta, with sudden jealous anger for Lucie’s safety.

“Oh no; I had Lady Mary Crichton and her father with me—I was well protected. I shall tell you all about it—now I only wish to be still and with you. Where is mother?”

“She is in the library; had you not better come and see her now?”

“What will she say, Harrie?—she will ask me questions”—

“No, no, Lucie; do you not know our mother better? She will think it quite natural. Come, we shall go downstairs.”

They went down to the library together hand in hand after their old childish fashion. Mrs. Marjorybanks sat at her writing-desk. She did not evince much surprise at the unexpected appearance of her younger daughter.

“So you are come home, Lucie?” she said. Then, with a glance at her altered garments, “I daresay you found yourself somewhat peculiar among other people?” For the widow had seen plenty of the world and its ways in her own day.

The angry colour leaped up into Lucie’s pale face.

“I did indeed, madam,” she said bitterly. “’Twas a shame and a cruelty sending me among strangers to suffer as I did.”

“Such suffering is excellent discipline for young people. So you have returned? You have not made a long stay.”

“How could I stay?” cried Lucie. “And such suffering is good for no one, it makes one only bitter and hard. You have been cruel to us, madam—you have made us peculiar intentionally, when you might have saved us all such misery. You might have trained us like other girls, and made us happy and able to face the world, and instead you have ruined all our lives.”

Henrietta listened in horror: was this Lucie who was speaking?—this person grown suddenly older by years and years, and speaking so bitterly to her own mother. Mrs. Marjorybanks was less affected. She listened to Lucie’s words with a slight smile.

“I am thankful if my daughters are not like the ninepin girls of society,” she said at length. “But you seem to feel strongly on the subject, Lucie, and certainly express yourself somewhat unsuitably, considering whom you address.”

“How can I do anything else after all I have suffered?” said Lucie.

The widow turned again to her writing, with a hard little smile on her lips.

“You had best marry, Lucie, and try your own theories on your own daughters, as I have done,” she said, as she took up her pen.

Perhaps she did not intend this speech to be unkind, but to Lucie’s ears it had all the effect of the most coldly premeditated cruelty. She turned and ran from the room with an expression of perfect horror on her face.

“How could she? how could she?” she cried when Henrietta came upstairs and sat down by her.

“She did not know, dearest,” said Henrietta soothingly.

“Did not know!” echoed Lucie scornfully. Her whole gentle nature seemed to have been suddenly embittered, and Henrietta looked at her in wonder as she heard the cold and scornful sound of her voice.

“No, no, Lucie,” she said, taking her hand. “She cannot know—she notices nothing that befalls us—she is wrapped up in her own theories, and scarcely cares if we live or die: it was quite unintentional.”

“The whole of her system with us has not been unintentional, at least—she has wilfully made oddities of us. Oh, Harrie, you do not know yet, for you have never been out of this place or seen other people—you cannot realise how peculiar we are; not only our dress, but all our habits and ideas are strange. Those things which seem as natural to the rest of the world as breathing, are unusual and difficult to us, and we would need to acquire painfully all the usages which are second nature to them. If you knew the torture of meeting strangers, (other people like it!) and the terror of walking in streets, and the bewilderment of going to theatres or churches or other public places! It would take us years to become accustomed to these things.”

Henrietta listened gravely, with pained interest.

“I think you probably exaggerate our peculiarity, Lucie,” she said. “I cannot imagine your being anything but pleasing in your manner or address; and for the rest of it, these nervous fears would wear off sooner than you suppose.”

“No, no, no, Harrie! They increase, I assure you. How can one be at ease when one is different from everyone else? And our mother has done it all. Oh, Harrie, if I had only been like other girls, how happy I might have been! I am not ugly—’twas only that he saw me different in every way from those girls he was accustomed to be among. In the country—here where there was no one else—I seemed good enough; but in town, others who had those ordinary advantages I have never had—others seemed better to him. I do not blame him, Harrie; ’twas quite true—I could never have married him and gone about in the world with him. I only blame my mother. My heart is all hard and frozen, Harrie. It feels now like a stone.”

They sat together in the dusk, and Lucie told all her pitiable little story—the ridicule she had been subjected to—the foolishness she had exhibited—her fears, her efforts at self-control, her failure, and her despair. And what could Henrietta do or say? She sat and wept beside her and held her hand. Then the dusk deepened down to dark, and the room was only lighted by the fire that flickered away on the hearth, a quiet crackling accompaniment to their voices. Lucie dried her eyes and leaned back in her chair.

“Oh, Harrie,” she said, “I have been speaking for an hour all about myself and my unhappiness, and I have never said one word about you.”

Henrietta had not time to reply when the door opened and Hester came in with some wood for the fire. She advanced half-way up the long room, and then let the wood fall on the floor in her amazement.

“Miss Lucie!” she cried. “Preserve us all, am I seeing right?” The good old woman was frightened out of her senses.

“Yes, Hester dear; do not be alarmed,” said Lucie, running to meet her. “I am not a ghost—I am here in reality.” She dropped a kiss on her cheek as she spoke, and stooped to lift up some of the wood.

“Gude sakes! my dear bairn, to think on it! Miss Harrie, we little thought this morning to see her the night? Is it with the coach you came, Miss Lucie? Wait or I call Silence!”

She hurried from the room to summon him as she spoke—it was not often that such unlooked-for events fell out at Balgowrie. The hasty summons brought Silence, flushed from his afternoon nap before the kitchen fire, and, forgetful of appearances, in his shirt sleeves. He thought the drawing-room chimney, at the least, must have gone ablaze, to excite Hester in this manner. He dashed into the room with a handful of salt and an expression of interested excitement.

“Is’t alow, Hester? Awa for the saut-crock, woman—I jist gruppit frae the cruet. It’s no’ been sweepit thae ten years back!”

But Hester in her genteeler southern speech rebuked his hasty conclusions.

“’Tis Miss Lucie come home, Silence. Lay by the salt, man,” she said.

Silence was quite disappointed. He had almost hoped for a conflagration. He advanced towards the fire and surveyed Lucie with the freedom of old service.

“Losh me! an’ wi’ sic a heid!” he exclaimed.

Henrietta and Lucie laughed, with the relief of people who have been crying, and Lucie began to explain her own return.

“You see, London did not agree with me,” she said, “so I thought it better to return.”

“Thae toons are awfu’ for the health,” said Silence, and Hester broke into exclamations upon Lucie’s altered appearance—her thinness and her pallor.

Lucie rose with a look of weariness.

“Come, Hester,” she said, “I shall want your help to take down my hair—I am weary with the weight of it.”

Hester protested—it would be well to retain such a work of art upon her head; and in the meantime she, Hester, might learn to dress Henrietta’s locks after the same fashion. But Lucie would not hear of it; she carried Hester off upstairs to take down the pyramid of hair in spite of all her protestings, an operation, it proved, of time and difficulty.

That night, as Hester and Silence sat by the kitchen fire, they questioned shrewdly over the mystery of their young mistress’s return.

“I jalouse there’s mair in’t nor a bit dwam,” said Silence occultly.

Hester looked a great deal, but said nothing, and Silence resumed—

“When’ll the Doctor be back, think ye? I’m fair scunnert wi’ thae callants frae the toon that’s preachin’. No’ that the Doctor’s muckle o’ a preacher himsel’, but he’s aye a wiselike man i’ the poopit—thae toon bodies are sic shauchlin’ trash. But forby that, Hester, I’m aye easier i’ the mind about oor young leddies when the Doctor’s here. Ay, it’s time he was hame, I’m thinking.”

Henrietta had come to the same conclusion in different words as she sat in the firelight after Lucie had gone to bed. It was in their own room that Henrietta sat, and in the silence she heard Lucie's breathing as she slept.

Henrietta was troubled, not with Lucie's story alone, but with a cold fear that kept knocking at her heart. Lucie was ill. She had been ill all summer—she was worse since going to London; it was not unhappiness that was stamping that curious look upon her face. Henrietta rose and walked softly to the side of the bed. Lucie was sleeping heavily, tired out; in the firelight her face looked startlingly thin, the hollows under her eyes seemed deeper than ever, and the little hand tossed out from under the covering was almost transparent. Henrietta knew nothing of illness, but as she stood looking down at Lucie she felt that the fear she had seen far off in summer-time was come several steps nearer now—it seemed to be standing at the very door. She turned quickly away and began to undress. Her fingers shook, and she could scarcely unfasten the buttons of her bodice. When she lay down beside Lucie, she was cold and trembling all over. Lucie stirred in her sleep and said something—she had always a trick of speaking in her sleep. Henrietta leaned nearer to catch the words.

“United hearts death only parts,” Lucie was saying.

The next morning broke with a blattering storm of autumn wind and rain that sent the faded beech leaves swirling, gathered them up into handfuls and flung them against the window panes, and then careered off round the gables of the house like some mad thing.

Henrietta and Lucie sat in the library in the morning, for Henrietta had all her books round her there, and Lucie liked to be near her.

“I suppose you are doing mathematics as usual?” said Lucie, glancing round the room at the volumes piled everywhere, on the very floor, near the writing-table.

“Yes; oh, Lucie, 'tis a perfect science—the beauty of it!” cried Henrietta enthusiastically.

“I suppose so. I wish, Harrie, that I could love study as you do—I never feel that it is for any purpose. What use will it all be to you?”

“I do not know enough yet. Some day—years hence—perhaps I may be able to do something with it,” said Henrietta, her eyes lighting up in that eager way they had when any sudden thought inspired her.

Lucie walked to the window and stood looking out over the rain-drenched garden. Henrietta's heart was sore for her, but she said nothing,

only began to turn over some of her mathematical notes on the table. After a long survey of the garden, Lucie turned back to the room; then with a little half sigh, half sob, she huddled herself down in the corner of the sofa. Henrietta came quickly across to her, knelt down, and covered her face with kisses.

“Oh, Harrie, do you know how I feel: can you understand?” asked Lucie pitifully.

“I know, I know, dearest: this life seems bare, bare—no reason for living it!”

“Yes—oh, so bare—so bleak”—

“Lucie—dearest—now, if ever, you must call upon your soul and all that is within you to be stirred up. Love may have gone past you, but life is still here—wonderful life—life that is only the soul’s probation, the food that the soul lives upon. Must it be here and now with you, Lucie; can you not bear to have your joys withheld?”

“If I had a life, Harrie—but this is hardly life, this existence between the four walls of this house. Perhaps if I had one duty, one bit of reality in my life, I could bear it—but what is there?”

“There is reality enough of suffering, at least, Lucie—of denial of all that life properly holds.”

Lucie turned her head wearily on the pillow.

“I do not know what it is, Harrie—I cannot express it—something seems to have stopped or broken here,” she said, holding her hand quickly over her heart. “The something I lived by is run down—I do not think it can be mended.”

“Oh, you are tired; you are ill, Lucie. But tell me you will try to begin life again—begin it where it was interrupted—in May. Believe that there is interest and hope in everything still, even if you cannot feel it. For my sake, Lucie, tell me you will try.”

Henrietta pled as a man might plead for his life. At first Lucie would only shake her head.

“I do not care about any of the things I used to do,” she said. “I cannot pretend to.”

But at last she rose from the sofa and walked once or twice up and down the room.

“Henrietta,” she said, “this is over and done. I do not wish even you to speak of it again. I shall do all my usual work whether I care about it or not.”

She left the room, and came back after a little with a bundle of sewing in her hand.

“Stitches, stitches!” said Henrietta. “I have often wondered how such tiny things can hold a big garment together. It will be the same at the end of our lives, Lucie, I believe—we shall be surprised to see what we have fashioned out of all these trivial labours.”

“Harrie, Harrie! you should have been a parson—you would have made a better one than Dr. Hallijohn any day. When you are married to him, I protest you will write all his sermons!”

“Shall we talk about that?” asked Henrietta, putting away every pretence of work.

She came and sat beside the fire, and you may be sure this topic lasted them some time.

XXVII

Christmas passed, and New Year, and yet Dr. Cornelius did not return to Eastermuir. Even that patient flock which he shepherded after such an indifferent manner began to complain. For three months there had been no possibility of marriages or christenings, and the funerals were conducted as best might be without benefit of clergy. Had they suspected how the minister's heart was turning day by day and hour by hour towards his home, they would have been still more at a loss to account for his absence. As it was, the general and rather disrespectful opinion ran, that the Doctor was "taking a long spree."

Dr. Cornelius had heard of Lucie's sudden flight from the Pelhams', when he called upon them on the day following her going. He was filled with self-reproach that his last words with her had been impatient, and hastened off to write his apologies. Since then he had heard of Lucie's safe arrival from herself, and had also received letters every week from Henrietta. But these letters somehow seemed to ring false. What was wrong? Henrietta was not angry with him—of that he was confident—yet he read between the lines a note of constraint. The letters told of the usual walks and studies, of the Thursday receptions once more resumed by Lucy, of books, and of winter storms. Yet there seemed to be something behind it all. The lover pondered and frowned over them. "Perhaps Henrietta is piqued at my absence: so much the better; she will care for me more when I return," he said, and made arrangements for another fortnight's stay in town.

But one morning a very thin letter arrived, addressed in Henrietta's dear hand.

"She is angry," he said, smiling, as he cut it open.

Only a few words were scrawled across the page.

"*Oh, my dear heart,*" he read, "*when are you coming home? I am in such trouble. Do not mention this when you come.—H.*"

He glanced at the date—a week old. Henrietta must be in sore trouble indeed to write thus, and another week must pass before he could reach her. He turned away from his untasted breakfast to prepare for the journey, cursing the miles that lay between him and Henrietta. Five days by sea with a favouring wind, and another half day in the coach between Edinburgh and

Easternmuir. While by stage-coach—bah! It took a fortnight at the least. By good luck a packet-boat sailed for Scotland the next morning; but for twenty-four hours he must wait here in London town, while Henrietta sighed for him at Balgowrie.

After coming to this conclusion, Dr. Cornelius, being an elderly lover, returned to the breakfast-table, and made a wonderfully substantial meal. Then, being a lover as well as elderly, he went out and spent quite unjustifiable sums on presents for Henrietta—a ring first, and books to follow. This done, he whiled away the remainder of the day at White's, lost five guineas playing hazard with his thoughts three hundred miles away, went to the play for a last sight of David Garrick in *Macbeth*, and forgot to applaud his favourite actor; finally, went to bed and courted sleep with very indifferent success.

Then, at last, came the morning, and with it the longed-for starting time. The boat went rocking down the tide, and this impatient lover stood on deck and whistled for the wind.

A week later, Dr. Cornelius arrived at Easternmuir at three o'clock of a January afternoon. His unexpected arrival made quite a commotion at the Manse. Mrs. Allan bustled about delightedly to prepare a dinner of her best cookery, while James "put a light" to the ready laid fires, and poured out a stream of parochial gossip as he knelt on the hearthrug to watch the struggling flames.

"How are the ladies at Balgowrie?" was of course the first question that Dr. Cornelius asked. To his great relief James reported the ladies to be "just in their ordinar'." Surely, then, this hasty summons had been something of a fraud!

Dr. Cornelius would have liked to start there and then for Balgowrie; but prudence (which, at fifty, sometimes has the upper hand) whispered that dinner and a toilet were a better preparation for appearing at his best before the eyes of his lady-love, than hunger and somewhat travel-tashed clothing.

So it was like another old-time lover, "barbered ten times o'er," after an excellent dinner, and several glasses of excellent wine, that Dr. Cornelius at length rode off in the gathering dusk towards Balgowrie.

A great yellow moon came swinging up from behind the bank of trees to the south, and the last rays of daylight were mixed with its shining into a weird half-light. Saul, fresh from his long idleness, would not be held in, and broke into a gallop along the quiet tree-bordered lane; then, where the

road comes suddenly out from the shadow of the trees, he began to shy at the moonlit puddles, and look askance at a white milestone which stands there to tell weary travellers of the forty miles which at this spot lie between them and the capital of Scotland.

“And a weary forty miles it is in that damnable stage-coach,” said Dr. Cornelius, recalling the eight hours of jolting with a shrug.

Then Balgowrie came in sight, tall and dark against the sky. A glimmer of light showed from one or two of the windows—firelight it seemed to be, from its flickering. The place was as quiet as the grave; the only sound was a far-away “boom, boom” from the waves breaking along the great curve of bay to the west.

“What a living tomb it’s been for the poor children!” he thought, as he dismounted to lead Saul through the gateway and round to the stable. Silence appeared at the sound of his steps, with an air of studied unconcern.

“Ye’ve got hame, Doctor, at last?” he said, with the intention that his remark should be cutting. But this careless shepherd did not pay much heed to the opinion of his flock. He merely laughed, and flung the reins to Silence, asking if the ladies were at home.

“Whaur wad they be?” said Silence, who was not accustomed to gadabout habits in his employers.

Dr. Cornelius did not wait for further parley, but strode up the stair. He opened the drawing-room door softly and looked in. The room was lighted only by the fire. Henrietta and Lucie sat beside it, their voices making a little murmur in that echoing, gaunt room, like the sound of falling water.

He tapped lightly on the panelling of the wall with the handle of his riding-whip, and both the girls sprang up at the sound, and ran forward to greet him.

“Ah, dear sir!”

“Ah, Cornelius!”

The sound of their voices, the sight of their dear faces, something in the childish way they ran to meet him, sent a choking throb of happiness through his heart. “Poor lambs! I am all their help,” he thought; and, holding out his arms, he gathered them both up into a great, impartial, fatherly embrace.

“My dear children!” he said. Their faces were indistinct in that half-light. So far as he could distinguish, Lucie seemed to be smiling; yet for a moment

he thought that Henrietta sobbed against his heart.

“Faith, that was a tender scene!” he said, laughing at his own show of feeling. “Come, let me have a look at you both.”

He took the same old straight-backed chair beside the fire where one night long years before he had sat, and seen two little girls come shyly up the long room to curtsy to the stranger who was speaking with their mother. The little girls were changed indeed since these days; but Henrietta came and stood beside his chair just as she had done then. She even took his hand and began to twist the ring he wore round and round, a habit she had retained from her childish days. She used to do it as she repeated her Latin verbs.

She was asking him all manner of questions, scarcely waiting for his replies. Her cheeks were flushed and her great eyes flashed and glowed.

Dr. Cornelius looked up at her where she stood. “She loves me now,” he said, and answered her questions almost at random. Then, turning to look at Lucie, who had taken a seat on the opposite side of the fire, Dr. Cornelius at first sight of her face knew what Henrietta’s trouble was. For two months had worked a sorry change on Lucie. She sat there the chosen bride of Death.

“God help my poor Harrie!” he thought; even in this his thoughts went first to her.

Yet Henrietta wore no air of gloom. The first excitement of his coming over, she sat down and spoke just as usual. Dr. Cornelius inquired for Mrs. Marjorybanks, and Henrietta said she would soon be there; she was writing downstairs as usual.

“Dear sir, we are so delighted to have you home,” said Lucie. “And is Mrs. Allan not vastly pleased to see you?”

“She expressed herself most prettily on the occasion. I protest it is worth while going from home to be so welcomed on one’s return.”

“And have you brought a new stair carpet?” Henrietta inquired. “Mrs. Allan has had but one thought these three months past, and that thought ‘stair carpet.’”

“I fear I forgot it, Harrie. I came off hurriedly at the end.”

“And the Pelhams?” queried Lucie. “Have you seen them again?”

“But once, Lucie, since you left London. I waited upon Mrs. Pelham one day last week, but she was gone out; so I have no messages from them for you.”

Their talk ran pleasantly till Mrs. Marjorybanks appeared. Her coming always seemed to cast a gloom, and Dr. Cornelius did not remain very long after she came. Mrs. Allan, he said, would never forgive him if he supped away from home that night.

Henrietta prepared to go down to the door with him.

“You are riding, I suppose?” she said. “ ’Twill be dark in the lanes to-night.”

“Ah, we know our way, Harrie. Are you coming downstairs with me?”

“I must call Silence to bring round Saul,” said Henrietta, as they stumbled along the ill-lighted passages.

The twisting staircase was entirely dark; by contrast with its obscurity the night seemed clear when they reached the front door, though clouds had come across the moon. They stood together on the steps.

“What is it, Harrie?” said Dr. Cornelius, laying his hand on her shoulder.

She turned her face up to his; it showed in that dim light only as a white patch.

“Cornelius, do you not see? Lucie is dying,” she said brokenly.

“My poor Harrie—my poor child!” he said. For the pity of it the tears welled up into his eyes.

“What can I do? Oh, tell me, is there nothing I can do?” cried Henrietta, catching hold of his arm with both her hands.

“Does she complain of illness?” he asked.

“No; I could bear it if she did; she says nothing. She goes about as usual, only every week she stops some one thing or other from want of strength. Some day she will just lie down and stop everything. When I ask her if she feels ill, she says, ‘Only tired’; but she coughs terribly at times.”

“I shall get a doctor, Harrie. That at least we can do.”

“My mother has a prejudice against them; she will not have one into the house.”

“She cannot prevent one coming to my house, though, and you must bring Lucie there to see him. This is no time to hesitate at a little deception. I shall send to Edinburgh to-night. We’ll have Gillies the surgeon down; by to-morrow afternoon he will be here. You must bring Lucie then. Say I begged you to come to dine with me at four o’clock.”

“Do you think he can do anything?”

“Surely, Harrie! My dear, your affection makes you over-anxious.”

“Oh, it is good to have you here. I feel better already,” said Henrietta.

“Well, hasten Silence with my horse, child. You will catch your death of cold in this draught, and I must get home to send the message to town. James shall ride with it himself. Harrie, you will kiss me before I go?”

Henrietta raised her lips to his obediently; then, as if thinking over his words—

“James?” she said. “Oh, go yourself, Cornelius, that you may make sure!”

“James will do it perfectly, Harrie”—he began; but she interrupted hastily—

“The doctor you wished might not be able to come, and he would know nothing about getting another. Pray, pray go yourself!”

Dr. Cornelius hesitated for half a breath,—a vision of home and supper and rest rising alluringly before him.

“The sooner the better, then, my love,” he said. “For it grows late already, and forty miles are not ridden in a hurry. Come, good-bye again, sweetheart, for I must be off.”

“I shall send Silence round in a moment,” said Henrietta, and flitted off into the dark house like a shadow.

“’Tis no joke to be Henrietta’s lover,” said Dr. Cornelius, with a grimace, as he leapt into the saddle. “Five days have I tossed in that damned packet-boat, eight hours to-day have I jolted in that infernal coach, and at the end of it she starts me on a forty-mile ride at six o’clock of a January night!”

XXVIII

Henrietta was unaccustomed to interviewing doctors. She did not know anything about them, and felt an unnecessary dread of the serious-faced man who listened so intently to Lucie's breathing.

"I hope you do not find much wrong with my sister, sir?" she said anxiously, when the examination was over.

The doctor did not reply for a moment, then he bowed stiffly to Lucie, and said to Henrietta that he would give her all necessary directions if she would step with him into the next room.

She led the way into the study,—the dear study, hallowed to her by every happy memory of her childhood,—and stood rather nervously beside the fire.

"I hope you do not think my sister is very ill?" she repeated.

"My dear madam, is it possible that you are in ignorance of the grave nature of your sister's case?" said the doctor.

"You find her seriously ill, then?" cried Henrietta, with her funny stagey clapping of the hands. She turned her great eyes on him with a look he never forgot.

"I find her seriously ill, madam. I fear Miss Marjorybanks' lungs are incurably affected."

"Oh!" said Henrietta, drawing in her breath hard, and trying from her scanty knowledge of medical matters to imagine what this might mean.

"I fear we can do very little, madam. Had I seen your sister in an earlier stage of the disease, something might have been done to arrest its encroaches; now I can only advise you to exercise the utmost care, and to guard her against over-fatigue or exposure of any kind."

"You mean that my sister is going to die, sir?" said Henrietta, looking him full in the face.

"My dear madam, it is inevitable," said the doctor sadly.

"Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing."

“And how soon?”—Henrietta could not speak the words.

“Your sister may live for six months; more probably the end will come in three or four.”

“Ah, sir, you have told me the truth!—I thank you for that, at least,” said Henrietta, holding out her hand to him with one of her sudden frank impulses.

He offered her a chair, and sat down himself facing her, looking intently at her.

“If you can get your sister to go about as usual for a time, it would be as well, but do not persuade her to try anything she is disinclined for; I fear her strength will not last very long.” He paused, and then added firmly, “After that, you should have some one else to share the fatigues of nursing with you.”

“I shall nurse Lucie myself,” said Henrietta.

“Madam, ’tis a false system to sacrifice the living for the dying.” He looked at Henrietta sharply as he spoke.

“I could never allow a stranger to nurse her. I have plenty of strength for it myself,” said Henrietta.

“I must be frank with you, madam,” said the doctor, “and tell you that in families where there is a consumptive tendency, one member should not nurse the other. You must think of yourself as well as of your sister.”

“Ah, sir, you need not be afraid for me,” said Henrietta, with a sad little smile. “My life will be only too long now.”

As she sat there in the familiar room, what desolation swept over her heart! If Lucie left her, there could never be enough left in the world to live for. “And I was preaching to Lucie just the other day that no one should ever say that,” she thought. “I said to her that there was always life—‘beautiful life’—left, whatever was taken away. I know better now. There is life, and there is Cornelius, and there is all I wish and hope to do and see in all this wonderful world, where as yet I have seen nothing; and yet, if she goes, I care for none of these things. There will be just the *first* thing gone from my life, and what does anything matter then?”

Then she realised that she was sitting in silence, instead of speaking to the doctor.

“I shall follow all your directions, sir,” she said, rising. “And now I wish you good-day. Dr. Hallijohn will be with you immediately, I must take my sister home now; we live at some distance from here.”

She shook hands with the doctor and left the room; leaving with him an impression of her curiously individual personality, of her strange dress, her great, speaking eyes, and the scorching grief that was suddenly fallen upon her.

So, as the Scotch phrase goes, Henrietta had to “stand up to trouble.”

She never did anything quite like other people, and her way of facing this was of course unusual. In the first place, she attempted no deceptions with Lucie, but told her plainly that she had probably only three or four months of life remaining to her.

Lucie received the news incredulously. “Harrie dear,” she said, “I feel ill, and oh, so tired! but surely I am not dying, for I cannot have been made only to be unmade again before I have lived at all!”

Henrietta shook her head sadly. “I fear there is no mistake, Lucie. I am forced to believe it, and you must believe it too; it will be better for both of us not to be taken by surprise.”

“But do you understand, Harrie?”

“No, I am all bewildered; but there is time for us to think about it—three months.”

“It seems as if it were all a mistake, a blunder, that anyone should be created only to die. If I had even been very happy”—her blue eyes suddenly brimmed with tears.

“I see that terrible things are permitted in our lives,” said Henrietta slowly, “but I do not think they are mistakes; the whole world moves by order, and not by confusion—they are purposed, not accidental.”

“But what am I to do these three months, Harrie? Am I just to sit and wait? I am so frightened!” shivered poor Lucie.

“I am with you, Lucie.”

“But you cannot go with me.”

“Ah, Lucie, you must not think about the pain and suffering! You must fix your thoughts on the tremendous something that must be waiting just beyond death. ’Twill make you forget the miserable present.”

“I see nothing waiting. I love the world; and all that heaven that some people speak of could never make up to me for missing happiness here. Oh, Harrie, I have none of these wonderful thoughts and feelings that you have. I am afraid and reluctant to die. I do not wish to end—I wish to remain myself a little longer. One ends at death, does one not? We have always learned that from mother. I do not know what Dr. Hallijohn thinks; he never says.”

“I do not care what either of them say; life must in reality be only beginning for you, Lucie. This life is not reason enough for our existence.”

“Do you think so, Harrie?”

“Yes, I am sure of it; so sure of it that sometimes I am impatient to get done with this life and see into the next. I read a verse in one of David’s Psalms once: ‘*When shall I come and appear before God?*’ I have gone for days with that question sounding in my ears like bells—the thought of that appearance! I would not need to explain anything; to stand silent before God would be enough, while He reviewed all my life. If you get hold of that idea, Lucie, it will warm you through like the sun!”

Thus, day after day, and week after week, Henrietta supported the weaker nature that clung to her. She would speak of death only in one way—the entering a new life. She did not avoid the subject, but spoke of it often in the calmest, most cheerful manner. In another person it might have seemed almost an affectation, but Henrietta’s nature was so direct that it did not surprise or shock Lucie in the least to hear her say—

“Dearest, are you going to try to finish the embroidery you began? I am sure you could do so without fatiguing yourself. I shall send it to dear Mrs. Pelham after you are gone away.” It seemed much more natural to both of them to act in this way.

They sat and sewed together, just as usual, in the afternoons, till the day came when Lucie’s work dropped into her lap time and again from weariness. Then Henrietta rose and took it from her.

“I have been watching you, dearest; you are not fit to work now, you must not try. I shall finish it as well as I can. You must go to bed, Lucie; you are too tired now to stay up any longer.”

“Yes, much too tired,” consented Lucie.

“Will you come upstairs now? I will help you.”

“Yes. But let me—let me”—Lucie’s eyes filled up with tears as she spoke. “I should like to walk once up and down the room again, for I do not

think I shall ever come downstairs again, I feel so weak. Strange to think it is for the last time!”

She held out her dear, thin little hands to Henrietta, who supported her as she rose from the sofa where she had been lying. They walked up the long room together slowly.

“Now take me into the west turret,” said Lucie. She stood beside the little square window and traced on the pane the heart that was cut there. “This is false, dear Harrie,” she said, turning upon her with a sudden flashing smile. “Even death can’t part us. The other parting I had was sore enough, but *our* hearts will be ever together. Come, I am done with all this—done with love and done with life, Harrie.”

She stood for a moment looking out through the little window, over the curve of the bay, where a long white line of breakers was coming in; then up at the sky, yellowing with the approach of evening.

“Come, Harrie,” she said again gently; having taken her farewells.

Mrs. Marjorybanks protested against what she described as Lucie’s “invalid ways,” now that her poor child was unable to come downstairs any more. The widow, indeed, compelled her to make the attempt, and was scarcely convinced of her unfitness when she fainted at the foot of the staircase.

“ ’Tis just vapourish nonsense,” was her verdict.

Henrietta, stung at last to revolt, turned upon her mother with indignant, flashing eyes.

“ ’Tis death, not nonsense,” she said bitterly.

The widow laughed,—so little she knew or cared about her children in a practical way,—and walked off, leaving Henrietta and Hester to carry Lucie upstairs again. But after this she did not insist that Lucie should leave her room. She never visited her there, however; and to Henrietta, maintained that Lucie was suffering only from nervous illness. Her presence was not missed in the sickroom; and the sisters lived a curious imprisoned existence there by themselves. Dr. Cornelius came every afternoon to visit Lucie, and to take Henrietta out for some exercise. Hester would sit with the invalid while they were out, and then Dr. Cornelius would stay for an hour, and they would talk together, if Lucie was not too tired.

“You conduct sick-nursing on new principles, Harrie,” he said to her one day, actually laughing as he spoke, at the almost off-hand manner in which

Henrietta mentioned her approaching death before Lucie. “You are your mother’s daughter in some ways,” he added.

“My dear sir,” said Henrietta, “we all know about it—’tis the thought uppermost in all our minds; surely it is best to speak about it? It would appear far more mysterious and frightful to us both if we never mentioned it.”

Lucie looked up from her chair, where she lay propped by pillows.

“Tell me, sir, how do you visit those of your parishioners who are near death? Since I have become so ill myself, I am often wondering if there are many others in the same case, and though you are so delightfully kind to me, I am amused to see how foreign it is to your nature to come near what is melancholy.”

“I am better suited for the house of feasting, I fear, Lucie.”

“But you do go to see those who are dying, do you not, sir? Have you seen many people die of this illness of mine?”

“Many a one, Lucie There is a man dying of it at Eastriggs just now. What do I say? ’Pon my soul, I often am in straits for words. I give the poor devils a crown now and then when I see it needed—and, when they ask it, I pray.”

Henrietta laughed. “I fear you are but an indifferent parson, Cornelius. Do you remember Augustine’s words: *‘Thou hast framed us out of a wonderful mixture of parts, and joined heaven and earth together in one man’*? There is a quantity of earth about you, sir.”

“And little heaven, in truth, Harrie,” he said. “I have warm affections; they’re my one link with heaven.”

“You have been all our help, Cornelius,” said Henrietta quickly, as if her words had been too severe. She laid her hand on his knee as she spoke. He took it in his own, and they sat hand in hand, while their talk flowed on.

“You see, sir,” pursued Henrietta, who, in addressing him, vacillated between her old and her new style of address,—“You see, sir, my theory on death is this—it concerns the flesh, not the spirit. You see how our dear Lucie’s body is suffering, and we cannot help it; but we must turn all our attention and our powers to helping her mind, for it gets cast down by reason of the pain she has to bear.”

“Yes,” struck in Lucie. “And when at night I am worn out with pain and weariness, Harrie will begin with wonderful imaginings, till I nearly forget

to think how ill I am.”

“What sort of imaginings?” asked Dr. Cornelius.

“Not all imaginings, sir,” said Henrietta. “Some of them are, but others are taken from that curious book the Bible. ’Tis a most imaginative work! Some of its words rouse one like a trumpet, (not that I have ever heard a trumpet!) There is that part about ‘the great white throne’ and the ‘cloud of witnesses.’ Who will the witnesses be?—a cloud of them, pressing round one to get the latest tidings from the world they once lived on and loved in. And there is that expression ‘the armies of heaven’—don’t you see them?—hosts on hosts, rank above rank of unconquered men—armies that have never known defeat, shining like the sun, and strong with a strength that cannot even remember what weariness was like! And then the great light of Eternity when it breaks on us! Have you ever lain awake with closed eyes, and the sun has come suddenly out? Even through the lids you feel it has flooded the world; you are almost afraid to raise them in such brightness. ’Twill be just like that the moment before death—an almost unbearable heaven of light and peace shining through the flesh that covers our souls as the lids cover our eyes.”

“Harrie, Harrie!” said Dr. Cornelius almost roughly.

He rose as he spoke, and bent over Lucie to say good-bye.

“I am too earthly for these spiritual flights,” he said.

As he walked slowly homewards, he frowned and shook his head, looked down at the dead leaves below his feet, and then up at the high March skies above him.

“Harrie my dear, you are uncanny,” he said to himself. “’Tis the unnatural life you have led. When you have a husband and a home and children of your own, you will forget these unearthly fancies. Ah, these are the big, vitalising draughts that have satisfied the thirst of the world since time began! Give me to drink of these pleasures! ‘These all perish in the using,’ say the saints. What of it? One has had them—has had one’s day. Poor darling, she has had little enough of this world’s joys. Well, they are to come!—when she has passed through this Gethsemane, and a dark one it is for her.”

When March and April had passed away, and May was come, Lucie was drawing very near to the gates of death. Dr. Cornelius came every day to try to induce Henrietta to go out, for she was grown terribly thin and pale with the long nursing she had had; but Henrietta would not go out now.

“The time is coming too near, Cornelius,” she said, with her heroic smile. “I cannot leave her now. Why, I shall never be with her *here* again. I have just a certain number of days and hours of *the Lucie I know* left me. I do not know what she may be like when we meet again. When I come out walking with you, I feel that one of the hours is gone. I cannot come.”

So she never left Lucie now. She sat beside her, holding her hand, and they spoke together over their short, uneventful life—“*All we have known of the world,*” as they said.

The last day that Lucie was able to sit up was one of those days of fervent heat which come in early spring. The sun shone in through the deep-niched window, and a blackbird sang out suddenly in the blossoming orchard.

“Let me look out again,” said Lucie.

Henrietta raised her from the chair, and she crossed the room slowly towards the window. They stood there together, listening to the great hum of life that rises in springtime from the growing world.

The tears fell slowly down Lucie’s cheeks, and she suddenly stretched out her arms as if she would clasp something unseen.

“Oh, dear green earth, where I might have been so glad!” she cried. “I must leave you soon.”

She turned away from the window then, and leaned her head on Henrietta’s shoulder.

“I know the upper fields will be greener far,” said Henrietta steadily.

After this Lucie never left her bed again. And ah, how the poor child suffered and struggled! Henrietta scarcely left the room even to eat; certainly she never slept these last four days. But when Dr. Cornelius came in the afternoons, she met him always with the same smile. Then the last day came.

“We are suffering strange things in our poor body to-day,” she said, indicating Lucie. “My darling has not slept all night, and is sadly weary now.”

Dr. Cornelius thought she was looking almost as weary herself; her face seemed all eyes. He took her place beside Lucie, supporting her through her paroxysms of coughing, and bade Henrietta sit down and rest.

“ ’Tis new work for you, sir,” whispered Lucie, looking up at him with her blue eyes that could still laugh, and then she patted his hand. “So strong and soft!” she said.

“Yes—idle hands, Lucie,” he said. “Now that your cough seems better, perhaps you might sleep. We shall not speak—it is not good for you.”

Henrietta had sat down in a chair by the fire, for very weariness her eyes closed. There was silence in the room, broken only by the singing of the birds in the orchard coming in through the open window.

“Just hear them,” whispered Lucie, with a little touch on Dr. Cornelius’ hand.

She lay back against his arm with closed eyes, listening to that ecstatic chorus. Henrietta dozed in her chair. Dr. Cornelius scarcely dared to breathe, for fear he should disturb either of them. The birds seemed to be singing them both to sleep, he thought at last, looking down at Lucie’s face, where the look of terrible suffering had smoothed out, leaving it calm and sweet. She opened her eyes suddenly, and met his with a smile.

“Better,” she said, drawing in her breath gently.

“Henrietta!” said Dr. Cornelius quickly.

She sprang up from her chair broad awake in a moment. He motioned to her to take his place, and she slipped her arm round Lucie, who, with a little nestling movement of contentment, fell back against her breast. There she lay very still for a long time—only a flicker of breath came and went to show them that she still lived.

“Shall I go and bring your mother?” asked Dr. Cornelius, and Henrietta nodded. He rose and crossed towards the door.

“Ah! there she goes!” said Henrietta suddenly in a breathless whisper, just as though she had seen something pass out through Lucie’s parted lips.

Dr. Cornelius started at the strange words, and came back to the side of the bed.

“What! is she really gone?” he asked, bending over Lucie. Henrietta smiled curiously.

“How could I be mistaken,” she said, “when half my own life went with her?”

XXIX

Mrs. Marjorybanks found it impossible to deny that Lucie had really died; but she took the sad event as little to heart as anyone could have done.

“The way of all flesh,” she said reflectively: an undeniable truism. Then she expected that Henrietta would resume all the routine of life which had been interrupted by Lucie’s illness. But Henrietta had broken down at last; had given way to all her long pent-up misery, and, for weeks after Lucie’s death, refused to return to life, such as it was, at Balgowrie. She shut herself up in her own room, or sat under the trees in the garden all day, doing nothing, sunk in a sadness that seemed as if it would never lift.

Dr. Cornelius came as usual every day to see her, and she received him with a far-away look, and seemed scarcely to care to speak with him. She would take his hand, saying—

“Now we shall sit quiet; I have nothing to say, Cornelius.”

They were sitting thus silent in the orchard one lovely afternoon, when she looked up suddenly through the network of branches to that smiling summer heaven above them, saying—

“Ah, could you not come, even for a moment? I am so terribly sad! The orchard is most beautiful, and the sky so deeply blue! but they cannot please me without you. You could come down through that blue emptiness so quickly! It is not even as if it were a cloudy day; there is nothing but distance between us—empty blue distance. Come, come, Lucie! I am here!”

She rose, and stood with clasped hands, gazing up to the sky. Dr. Cornelius took her hands again in his.

“Henrietta,” he said, speaking almost harshly, and at the sound of his voice she started, and seemed to come back to earth with an effort. “Come and sit down here. I wish to speak to you,” he pursued. She took her place obediently beside him.

“Henrietta, you are a very clever woman; you can, when you will, do almost anything which you attempt. I am going to speak very plainly to you, and you must give me your attention.”

“Yes, sir,” said Henrietta, as if she were back in the schoolroom again.

“You are aware of the great peculiarities of your mother, Henrietta. Are you also aware that, unless you make a most resolute effort, you will become equally peculiar yourself?”

“I probably am peculiar already, sir. Poor Lucie told me that I was quite unconscious of my own peculiarities.”

“I was not speaking so much of outward things, Harrie, as of habits of mind. Do not call me cruel when I tell you that you must make a terrible effort of will now to separate yourself from the thought of the parting you have gone through, and to bring yourself back to this world. I am not speaking for myself, child; I could bear to be forgotten for a time; but if you brood in this way on your trouble, you will positively unhinge your brain. Your life is far too quiet; you are necessarily now thrown sadly in upon yourself, but if you choose to exert yourself, you can find something left yet in the world.”

“I know, I know, Cornelius; but just for a little—my grief is so new.”

“This is July, Henrietta. Lucie died in May.”

“What can I do, what can I do, Cornelius?” she cried, turning to bury her face on his shoulder in a burst of sobs.

Dr. Cornelius was thankful to see her tears. They, at least, were natural. He allowed her to weep on until she was tired, then he said gently—

“Henrietta, when are you going to marry me? Could you not do so soon? I have spoken to your mother about it, and she makes no objection, somewhat to my surprise. You are worn out and sad, my dear; you need a change of scene and of ideas after the long nursing and sadness you went through in spring.”

Henrietta shook her head. She would not speak, only sat silently holding his hand, her head resting on his shoulder. Every now and then she gave a little sob. At last, after a long silence, she spoke.

“You are quite right, Cornelius; all you have said is true. But I would rather not be married quite so soon. Will you wait until October? I will marry you in October. And now I shall take all your words to heart. Tomorrow I shall begin all my usual occupations again. I have been morbid. I have indeed been foolish.”

“Not foolish, my love; ’twas natural—most natural,” he said.

Henrietta sat forward on the garden seat resolutely.

“I have been working ever since autumn—since—since—since Lucie went to London—at a translation of Herodotus. I had made but scant progress with it when—when the interruption came; but I shall begin upon it again. Tell me, sir, do you think it too ambitious for me?”

“My dear Harrie, you have a hunger for overcoming difficulties. A translation of Herodotus!”

“Indeed, Cornelius, I found great pleasure in it. I worked at it for five hours each day when—when I was alone. Now that I am alone again, I shall work as long,” said poor Henrietta, choking back her tears.

“Till October, Harrie. After that, you stop working for a time. I am going to take you away from here.”

“To—?” questioned Henrietta.

“To where you will, so long as you are happy.”

“And your parishioners? Silence has told me they became impatient this winter at your long absence.”

“Parishioners, like children, should not be indulged—parishioners be _____”

“I remember the first time I heard you say that. ’Twas about a parishioner too,” said Henrietta, with a reminiscence of her former self in her amused eyes.

“You have too good a memory, Harrie. Let us pursue our plans for the future. We shall go—where?”

“Not to London, I think, Cornelius; it would be too sad for me; at every step I should be thinking how she was there. Will you take me to Paris? Ah, to see Paris at last!”

“Paris be it, then, Harrie—and farther if you desire it. Ah, life, life! there are fine things in you!”

Henrietta smiled rather a forlorn little smile, but it was a step in the right direction.

“I wonder if you will make me as fond of the world as you are yourself,” she said.

“Not in my way, Harrie. I love life for its own sake—always have and always will—for the taste of it and the fine heady feel of it. You will love it

always as an experience, an intellectual thing to be thought over, not merely swallowed down at a draught.”

Thus they talked on of the life that was to be.

The next day Henrietta went to work upon Herodotus, with something, too, of the old pleasure, as she fingered the musty volumes that had been her lifelong friends. She would take her books out to the orchard and study them there, with the tuneful birds keeping her company, the bees humming in the hives near at hand, and Lucie’s pigeons sometimes fluttering down from the doo-cote to see if their mistress was not returned yet. Henrietta’s eyes would fill suddenly with tears as they came wheeling down—a flurry of whiteness round her; but she choked back her tears, and turned resolutely to the pages of Herodotus. Cornelius had wished her to work—he was all she had in the world now, and she would please him. The effort was bracing, and brought its reward in greater calmness and less painful brooding on the sad past. When Dr. Cornelius came, Henrietta would smile now, and speak of her work, and together they would speak of dear Lucie almost with cheerfulness.

But, with it all, Henrietta still looked thin and pale. As the summer went on, Dr. Cornelius often looked at her anxiously, and asked her if she felt ill. Henrietta replied that she was tired, and had never felt very well since Lucie “went away,”—that was all.

“My dear, it is time you had me to care for you,” said her lover. “I fear Mrs. Marjorybanks is not very careful of your comfort and well-being.”

Henrietta laughed.

“Poor mother! her one care is fitting me for society. Do you know, Cornelius, that since Lucie left me, nothing has tried me so much as those terrible Thursdays? Why, the Thursday after Lucie’s funeral, I had to dress up in all my best finery, (such as it is!) and go through the whole weariful business. ’Tis a strange delusion! One of the best things about marrying will be to be done with these Thursdays!”

“Well, you have not many of them now, Harrie—but three or four.”

“Yes; this is September now. The end of October it is to be, Cornelius, is it not?”

“The beginning, if you will have it so, Harrie,” he said gallantly.

“Ah, no—the end, Cornelius. I am but now beginning to prepare my mind for marriage. ’Tis a great step—I have much to think of before

entering upon it.”

“You might have been thinking of it all summer, my dear, had you had a mind.”

“I was going to ask you, Cornelius, about another matter,” said Henrietta, with some hesitation. “And this is it—I spoke to my mother yesterday on the subject, but she would not listen to me for a moment, and bade me ‘give my thoughts to less trifling matters.’ I am not very frivolous, sir, and at one time it would never have occurred to me that other clothes than those I have were necessary. But now I know that they are curious, and that I must be dressed like the rest of the world before I enter it. How am I to manage this, Cornelius, for my mother refuses to speak of it with me?”

“My dear Harrie, I know little more than yourself about ladies’ dress. I fear I can be of little assistance to you.”

“I think,” began Henrietta, actually blushing, an almost unknown thing for her to do—“I think, Cornelius, that—that if you will give me money to buy my dresses, I can procure them.”

Dr. Cornelius laughed for joy.

“Don’t tell me, Harrie, that you thought twice of asking me for money!” he said. “Why, what a blockhead I was not to see what you were driving at. Money, my dear?—as much as you will, and the more the better. And how will you procure these garments?”

“I thought of writing to Maggie Pelham,” said Henrietta.

“And how long would that take? Stay a moment, Harrie. My cousin Matilda will buy them for you in Edinburgh. ’Twill be a pleasure to the dear woman—she fell in love with Lucie at first sight, and will be only too pleased to do this for you.”

“Ah, Lucie told me all about her—of the little room at the top of the house where she dreamed that we would come some day together!”

“Dear Lucie! I think I see her that night—sitting at Matilda’s knee when I came in. She had been telling her all about you. You must write explicit directions to Matilda of all that you desire, and she will do it for you.”

“Explicit directions, Cornelius! Can you fancy my explicit directions on fashion? No, it must be Miss Hallijohn who sends me directions of how to assume the dresses when they arrive.”

Dr. Cornelius laughed, and agreed with Henrietta that her ideas would doubtless be rather faulty.

“Cousin Matilda shall come down to Eastermuir for our wedding, Harrie. I can fancy her pleasure to deck you for the sacrifice with her own dainty old hands—she is a woman all over. I am going up to Edinburgh in ten days or so, and I shall bring her—and the dresses doubtless—back with me when I return.”

“Ah, that is a beautiful arrangement! I feel sure I shall love her. And what a comfort to me to have some one to speak to!—some woman, I mean. For poor mother hardly counts as a woman; and dear old Hester knows no more than myself of this dangerous ‘world’ that I am going to venture out into.”

“I hope ‘the world’ will not scare you as it scared poor Lucie,” said Dr. Cornelius.

“Ah, no. I am really less sensitive than she was, sir. I am very indifferent to the opinion of any but those who are very dear to me.”

“But, my dear, you have never tried,” he corrected, with a laugh.

“I stand corrected,” laughed Henrietta.

XXX

October came. A cold month, and specially cold it seemed this year. When Dr. Cornelius came to bid Henrietta good-bye before starting for Edinburgh, he frowned at her pale face.

“What have you been doing with yourself, child?” he asked.

Henrietta began to cough, and drew a little tippet she wore more closely round her.

“’Tis this searching cold, Cornelius; you have no idea of the cold of the house.”

“I am marrying you none too soon,” he said, looking at her uneasily. “Do you often cough like this, Harrie?”

“In damp, cold weather. I have never been well since Lucie left me. I was tired—so tired with it all. I shall be better soon.”

“Can you not heat the house or sit in the library while you cough so—that at least you might do.”

“My dear Cornelius, to have known my mother so long, you have the most wonderful ignorance of her peculiarities! If she fancies that I am self-indulgent in any way, she takes care to repress the tendency. When first I took this cough,—it has troubled me for nearly a year now,—’twas in that bitter frost last January. The cold was frightful. In our room, where, even though Lucie was complaining of illness, we only had a fire when Hester lighted it by stealth—in our room, I say, the water in our bath used to be covered with ice in the morning. We used to lie awake and shiver with the cold—and ah, how my darling coughed! Well, mother heard us complain, and after we were gone to bed one night, she came into the room and looked to see how many blankets were over us. Hester had only that night put on a third blanket, as she might not light our fire, and when mother saw this, she exclaimed in anger at our self-indulgence. ‘You are the merest Sybarites,’ she cried, and with that carried off the blanket, leaving us to shiver.”

Dr. Cornelius shook his head despairingly.

“Well, you must take what care you can of yourself, Harrie. To-morrow is Thursday: what a night you will have of it with the chairs! And bare shoulders in that barn of a room, too. Tell Hester as she loves me to light a

fire in your bedroom. Should she get her dismissal from your mother, I shall pledge myself to take her into my own employ.”

“I am accustomed to chills, Cornelius—do not be anxious. Enjoy yourself in town, dear sir. When next you are there, ’twill be hampered by a wife who is ignorant of all city ways,” said Henrietta, with almost her old archness.

“Yes; you can see me blushing for my boorish bride—instructing her when to curtsy, and directing her to keep to the right hand of the passers-by in the streets, prevailing upon her to attempt a crossing through the traffic, or using force to get her to enter a coach.”

“See that your prophecies are not verified,” laughed Henrietta. And they parted jesting.

Four days later, Dr. Cornelius received a note from Henrietta, a scrawl so indistinct that it was with difficulty that he made out its contents.

“Pray come home, Cornelius,” it ran. “I am so ill. On Thursday I was so cold, I ran upstairs to bed, coughing, and something broke in my chest.”

Dr. Cornelius did not stop to consider the hours of the stage-coach’s departure. His first thought was to reach Eastermuir at the utmost speed; his second to bring a doctor with him. The profession were not so rife in Edinburgh in those days, but without much difficulty he procured the services of that physician who had seen Lucie in spring. Then they set off together in a post-chaise on that weary forty-mile drive. Dr. Cornelius, remembering Mrs. Marjorybanks’ hatred of medical men, warned his companion that he must be prepared to gain an entrance to Balgownie by artifice.

“I shall introduce you as my groomsman,” he said.

“And under what pretence can I see the poor girl in her room?” queried the physician.

“If madam is out, there will be no difficulty. If she is in, you must pay your respects to her for half an hour (damn her!), and when we go, I shall take you upstairs instead of down. I know the house well.”

“As you think best I am entirely in your hands.”

The long miles were gone over—more slowly, it seemed, to the anxious man who watched them, than ever before.

“On the way to funerals and meetings of Presbytery, I’ve seen the milestones seeming to flash past me,” he said in exasperation.

The doctor tried to allay his anxiety.

“These hæmorrhages are often more alarming than serious, my dear Hallijohn,” he said. “There may be no return. Much will depend on care in the future, and that you will be sure to give.”

“Care! The girl’s been murdered, as her sister was before her!”

It was late afternoon when they reached Balgowrie. Dr. Cornelius strode upstairs without ceremony, followed by Dr. Gillies. The drawing-room seemed empty at first sight; then they saw that Henrietta sat in the corner by the fire. She was terribly pale, and sat propped up by pillows, her hands idle on her knees. She gave a cry of welcome at sight of her lover.

“How are you, Harrie?” he said, bending over her as a mother over her child.

“Ah, so ill, Cornelius! I can scarcely speak,” she said, turning her eyes questioningly on the other man. Then, suddenly recognising him, she held out her hand. “You have come again, sir?” she said.

The words sent a thrill through Dr. Cornelius.

“Come, Harrie, surely you must be better to have come downstairs; I expected to find you in bed,” he said, affecting cheerfulness.

“My mother would have me rise. I was in bed for three days, because it was impossible for me to leave it, but to-day I thought it better to try to get up—easier than bearing her displeasure.”

“You will let Dr. Gillies examine you now, Harrie,” said Dr. Cornelius. “And tell him all about your illness.”

“But mother—if she were to come in,” objected Harrie.

“I have my lies ready. I shall go to the end of the room and intercept her if she enters. Go on, Gillies, as fast as may be while we are alone.”

Henrietta’s symptoms did not take long to relate. Nor did it take long for a clever doctor to take in the possibilities of her case.

“With care, madam, you may avoid a return of the more serious symptoms—with the very greatest care. If you will allow me to say it, I think that in your peculiar circumstances the sooner you can arrange for your wedding to take place the better.”

"I shall make all possible speed," struck in Dr. Cornelius.

"And then I shall recommend a journey to the South—some considerable stay there, indeed," pursued Dr. Gillies. "But Dr. Hallijohn tells me that you have already planned for this."

"I feel scarcely able"—began Henrietta.

"To be frank with you, madam, 'tis your best chance for speedy recovery. These old houses are very cold, and Dr. Hallijohn tells me that Mrs. Marjorybanks approves rather more than is usual of the Spartan system. You are not fit for it. You will require the utmost care."

"I shall do just as you think best," said Henrietta. "If you tell Dr. Hallijohn all about me, he will tell me afterwards, for, indeed, sir, your remaining here makes me most uneasy. You do not understand the peculiar prejudice which my mother has to gentlemen of your calling."

Dr. Gillies laughed.

"I'll be off, then, madam, for nothing can be worse than agitation for sick folk. Yes, I shall tell Dr. Hallijohn all about your case, and I doubt not you will find him, before many weeks are gone, the best of nurses."

Henrietta smiled a little wanly.

"He was ever kind," she said. "He does not need teaching in that."

The doctor rose and said good-bye, and Dr. Cornelius bent over Henrietta for a moment as he bade her good-night.

"Keep up your heart, dearest—before long you will be better. I shall be to see you early to-morrow," he said.

After the two men were gone, Henrietta leant back against her pillows and looked into the fire. She was not accustomed to illness, and the feeling of mental weakness it brings filled her with double melancholy. She rose and brought a book from the table, opened it, and tried to read. But the effort was fruitless, and the book was laid aside. Then her thoughts went on into life—life that was just beginning. And there they came to a sudden stop.

"*I am going to die—I shall never live—here,*" she said, speaking out aloud in that echoing room.

"*Here,*" repeated the echo faintly, and Henrietta shuddered, and looked round as if someone had spoken the word behind her.

“Tush! I am become nervous,” she said, reproving herself, and taking up her book resolutely.

The next day, when Dr. Cornelius came, he found Henrietta much the same. She welcomed him tenderly.

“Ah, what joy to see you! I have had such fears and fancies all by myself,” she said.

“I shall remove them all, Harrie. Come, let me send them scampering. I have arranged for our marriage to take place on Monday next,—that is not quite a week from now, this being Tuesday,—and must find some excellent reason for hastening it in this way to present to your mother. What shall it be, Harrie?”

“My mother never regarded a date in her life. ’Twill be all the same to her as if it had been the day we originally fixed.”

“That was but ten days later, after all. So, shall I speak of this to her as a settled thing? Will she find no fault?”

“None, I think, Cornelius. She has become singularly indifferent to what goes on round her. She has just a few unchanging ideas—letter-writing, her daily walks, and our Thursday receptions;—for the rest of it, she scarcely notices anything.”

“She will notice your leaving her, surely?”

“Scarcely. You see, she never misses dear Lucie. Since the day she died, she has never mentioned her.”

“She will not be agreeable to the cleric who has to marry us, I fear. You know my cloth was condoned for curious reasons, Harrie! I fear I cannot assure her of the scepticism and lax morals of good old Dickson from Eastbarns and keep a clear conscience, for a better soul never breathed.”

“I had not thought of that; but, after all, Cornelius, she was married herself by a churchman. So she need not object to my doing it.”

“Well, it must be attempted,” he said, smiling, and they sat silent for a minute or two.

“Cornelius,” said Henrietta suddenly, “I think that I am going to die; I do not think that I shall ever be married to you.”

“Good God, Harrie! why do you say that?” he cried.

“Because I feel it—I know it; and I am sure that Dr. Gillies knew it too. He is clever and hides his feelings, but he had a pitying sound in his voice that I heard quite distinctly through the reassuring things he said.”

“You are grown fanciful, Harrie.”

“No, I am not fanciful. I would not believe that I could get better if a dozen physicians said so. Ah, Cornelius, I must go—I feel it in me. I shall not be long here.”

Her deep conviction stirred him with a horrible fear. He leaned forward with a passionate movement, taking her hands in his.

“Harrie, Harrie, stay with me! For the love of God, stay with me! You are my very soul!”

“I cannot stay, Cornelius. Why, I am half-way across already,” she said sorrowfully.

“And all your powers—the talents I’ve seen growing and growing—all you might have done and been”—

“It is the Great Will,” said Henrietta in her steady voice. “And you overestimate me, Cornelius—you always did. The world will get on very well without me.”

“And I?”—

“Ah, my dear, my dear!”

Dr. Cornelius rose, and paced up and down the room. Then he came back to where Henrietta sat.

“Now, Henrietta, we have had enough of heroics. You are fanciful, and you must not indulge your fancies. You are ill; I can’t disguise from you that you even might die, had you a return of your former illness. But at present there is no question of that, and if human care can prevent it, there will be no question of it after you’re my wife. That’s but five days now. For pity’s sake, take care of yourself these five days! Whatever your mother says, do not listen to her. You have me to obey now.”

“I shall indeed do my best. And we shall go on with the arrangements for our wedding. My feelings may be mistaken, as you say. Do not suppose that I am frightened by these premonitions, Cornelius. I find them most curious indeed, but not alarming. I have no sort of dread of death. Too much that I love waits for me beyond it”—

“That is it, Harrie,” said Dr. Cornelius, turning almost fiercely on her. “You care more to go than to stay. You stay with but half a heart down here with me.”

“No,” said Henrietta in her curious, meditative voice, as if weighing the matter while she spoke. “I would gladly stay with you. I am sorry—sorry beyond expression—to leave this strange world unexplored. I should have liked to see some of the wonderful works of men—what they have achieved; but I am not sorry in another way, for oh, I weary to speak with her again!”

“Do not take it for granted like this, Harrie,” said Dr. Cornelius, but she went on, scarcely heeding him.

“Just to tell her every little thing again. If I went to-morrow, I would tell her how long the day appeared to-day, and the terrible evenings when I could not work, however hard I tried. And she would laugh and say, ‘Stupid Harrie, always thinking about work.’ For she will not have changed to me. We’ll meet again just where we left off. Shall we sit hand in hand, I wonder? Ah, we shall recall those dreadful hours before she left me! I thought then it would be a lifetime till we were together again, and it is but five months—though they have seemed so long.”

“Harrie, I’ll have no more of this,” said Dr. Cornelius sternly. “Your fancies have got the better of you—fancies and nothing else.”

“They seem strangely real to me, Cornelius. I have tried to combat them, knowing that one is fanciful in illness, but they return and return. I cannot help it.”

“They will disappear as you gain strength; meantime, you must disregard them, instead of giving them welcome.”

“I shall try to. Let us speak of other things, sir. Pray tell me, is Miss Halljohn coming to our wedding, now that it is to be hastened?”

“I have written to her, and doubtless she will come, bringing your dresses with her. When I was in town, (I had forgotten to tell you this,) she was immersed in finery, and for ever asking my judgment upon it.”

“She is most kind; I shall be most interested to see her,” said Henrietta, driving away with a resolute effort all her dark forebodings.

XXXI

“We shall receive our friends as usual this evening at seven o’clock, Henrietta,” said Mrs. Marjorybanks, as she rose from the dinner-table on Thursday afternoon. Henrietta was a little better, and had made the effort of coming into the dining-room that day, for the first time since her illness began.

“My dear madam, I must ask you to excuse me this evening,” she said in dismay. “I am scarcely able for the exertion of receiving company, and I fear my conversation would be most wearisome.”

“There is the more need that you should exert yourself to make it entertaining; society, Henrietta, would soon come to an end if its units allowed their conversational efforts to depend upon their inclination.”

“Madam, I am indeed annoyed to displease you, but I am quite unfit for the exertion,” pleaded Henrietta.

“And you intend to celebrate your wedding upon Monday?” asked Mrs. Marjorybanks.

“I do, madam, and for that reason I am specially anxious to avoid any return of this illness.”

“It is for the last time, Henrietta. I have tried to fulfil my duties as a parent in the past, to fit you for entering society, should it be your lot to do so; and I shall not fail at the end. For six years—from your sixteenth year up to the present day—I have never omitted this social exercise, and it is not to be omitted now. I shall receive you at seven this evening as usual.”

“I cannot, madam, I cannot,” said Henrietta despairingly. She thought of the long hours of weariness implied by the “social exercise,” of the cold room, and her own shoulders pitilessly exposed to the draughts which swirled through it, and remembered her promise to Dr. Cornelius to resist her mother’s commands where they endangered her health.

“I cannot, madam,” she repeated more firmly than before.

The widow was unaccustomed to contradiction. She took a quick turn up and down the room, and came back to where Henrietta stood, white and trembling, beside the table.

“I give you your choice, Henrietta,” she said. “You obey me, or you are not married on Monday. If you are unable for the one exertion, you are certainly unfit for the other, so choose which you will have.”

She cast a glance of positive triumph at her daughter, as though to say, “My will has conquered,” and stood waiting for her reply.

Henrietta knew her mother well, yet in desperation she made one more appeal.

“Pray, pray excuse me this once, dear madam!” she cried, clasping her hands in the old stagey attitude of entreaty.

“This once, Henrietta? This is for the last time. No; I have said what my will in the matter is, and to it I shall stick.”

Henrietta bowed her head silently. It was useless to resist further. She went slowly into the drawing-room and lay back in her chair with closed eyes. The afternoon crept on. She rang for Hester, and asked her to bring her some writing materials.

“Mrs. Marjorybanks will have the reception as usual to-night, Hester,” she said, raising her tired eyes to the old servant’s kindly, anxious face; “and, indeed, I feel most unfit for it.”

“Miss Harrie, ’twill be the death of you!” cried Hester in dismay.

“Like enough, Hester—but I have said all that I can say. My mother says my marriage is not to go on unless I am fit for this.”

Hester muttered incoherently—“The mistress, the mistress!” she said.

And Henrietta, letting her voice fall to a whisper, went on—

“You will stay with her, Hester, after I have gone? I know the difficulties of serving my poor mother now. For my sake you will stay with her, will you not? It is not as if I would be very far away either—I shall try to come often here to see her. I should be most uneasy did I leave her with any stranger.”

“I will that, Miss Harrie, for your sake and the sake of her that’s gone. And Silence the same. The kitchen lass will maybe give up her place, for the mistress is hard on her whiles, but you may trust to me, Miss Harrie.”

“I wish I could take you with me to my new home, Hester. To tell you truth, I have some misgivings of how I shall agree with good Mrs. Allan when I am her mistress. She has so long controlled Dr. Hallijohn’s household, that she may find it difficult to take my way in everything.”

“She’ll be ill to please, Miss Harrie my dear, if that’s her way. And if you’ll take my advice, Miss Harrie, you’ll lie down now an’ rest before the hour for dressing.”

“Yes, Hester; but first I must write something—just a few lines. Give me my writing materials beside me; and will you come and help me upstairs when the dressing-time comes?”

“I will, Miss Harrie, an’ here are the things,” said Hester.

“Thank you, that will do,” said Henrietta.

She wished to think over something, to be quiet for a little. As she lay back in her chair, tears gathered in her eyes and flowed down her cheeks—they fell on the sheet of paper she wrote on, and blotted the words.

“I may be wrong,” she said at last, as she finished writing; “yet I cannot but feel that I am right.”

When Hester came in again, however, Henrietta was quite calm. She spoke cheerfully with the old woman as she helped her to dress, recalling all the years that the curious rite had gone on since she and Lucie were children, and used to enjoy their Thursday evenings with the chairs.

“And then we began to weary of them, and then to hate them. And do you remember the evening that Captain Charteris arrived? We were dressing here together, Lucie and I, when we heard his knock upon the door. I remember our excitement. You met us in the hall, Hester, and told us a strange gentleman was come.”

“Yes, yes, Miss Harrie. Well, well, to think! A fine couple they’d have made if Miss Lucie had been spared.”

“She was spared that,” said Henrietta, with a sudden flash of bitterness. “He was a pitiful creature.”

“Now, now, Miss Harrie, as the gentlemen go”—began Hester, who, though she had no great opinion of the other sex, would always try to uphold them where there was a possible marriage in the case; but Henrietta cut her short.

“My shoes, Hester, and I am ready. Ah, how fatigued I am already!”

“Come, Miss Harrie, lean on me down the stair,” said Hester, and down they went.

Silence stood grimly at the back of the drawing-room door, as he had stood every Thursday night for the last six years.

“Miss Marjorybanks,” he announced, for the last time, flinging the door wide; and with faltering, slow steps, Henrietta went forward into the room.

Mrs. Marjorybanks stood as usual at the far end, preparing her best curtsey of welcome. The chairs were grouped in easy conversational attitudes near at hand.

“For the last time,” said Henrietta, to sustain herself, as she was waved to a seat and ceremoniously presented to her neighbour, the ottoman. A keen draught played upon her bare shoulders, and seemed to go through and through her.

“I hear that we are to have the pleasure of attending your nuptials upon Monday—may I venture to offer my congratulations to Miss Marjorybanks upon this auspicious event?” said the ottoman.

Henrietta bowed, as she had been instructed to do, and, for lack of other matter of interest, continued to converse about her forthcoming marriage.

“’Twill be most strange to leave Balgowrie, the home of my childhood; I can scarcely realise it as possible,” she said.

“This is a world of change,” said the sententious ottoman.

Henrietta’s conversation came to an end here. She was so cold that she could think of nothing else, and was overcome by a feeling of utter weakness.

“Ahem!” cried the ottoman.

Henrietta started, and began to cough violently. Then, making an effort to continue the conversation, she remarked upon the bitter weather. The ottoman considered that this was the season when the gentle exercise of the dance was especially agreeable, and begged Miss Marjorybanks to join him in the minuet. Henrietta politely signified her refusal, but an imperious gesture on the part of the ottoman—otherwise Mrs. Marjorybanks—constrained her to make the attempt. They paced it solemnly together, in silence, and then returned to the pleasures of conversation. At ten o’clock refreshments of a chilly sort were partaken of, and towards eleven o’clock, Henrietta, after bidding a ceremonious good-night to her hostess, crept off upstairs, supported by Hester.

“’Tis for the last time, Hester,” she said, and smiled.

XXXII

Dr. Cornelius rode up to Balgowrie early the next morning. The day was beautifully bright, a touch of frost in the air, and a cloudless sky.

“Ah, this weather must do Harrie good!” he thought, taking that view of frost which robust persons habitually lean to. The tingling air elated him like a draught of wine, and sent misgivings flying. “She grows dull about herself, poor girl—naturally enough, after all she saw poor Lucie suffer. When she has left Balgowrie, and come to me, and care, and kindness, she will soon be better,” he added.

As he rode up to the steps at Balgowrie, Mrs. Marjorybanks appeared at the far end of the long walk which stretched away from the front door. She was pacing up and down the walk, wrapped in her long cloak. Dr. Cornelius dismounted and went forward to meet her. She stopped abruptly and held out her hand.

“Henrietta is gone,” she said, for greeting.

“Gone—where?” he asked stupidly.

“Into darkness—she died last night,” said the widow, and resumed her pacing without another word.

Dr. Cornelius stood as if struck with a sudden palsy. He neither spoke nor moved. The bridle slipped from between his fingers, and Saul turned to nibble at a late autumn rose still blooming in the borders. Mrs. Marjorybanks, having walked to the end of the path, returned to where Dr. Cornelius stood.

(“Your horse is eating the rose leaves,”) she said parenthetically. “I am left alone. Hester will show you the remains, if you care to see them;” and with that she turned away to resume her march up and down the path.

Dr. Cornelius turned towards the house. He stumbled up the stair with the horrid words ringing in his ears—“*the remains*”—of all the world held for him. What hope remained now?—only the remainder of a misspent life—the remains of youth—the remains of life itself. The word played through his brain like a hideous tune. At the head of the stair he met old Hester. She came forward with a burst of sobs.

“Ah, sir, sir! I would have sent Silence—indeed, sir, ’twas no fault of mine—the mistress had some fault against it. Indeed, as you may see, sir, her senses are near gone now, an’ I must just obey her whimsies as best I can.”

“You can do no more, Hester. Will you take me upstairs?” said Dr. Cornelius.

The stair, the room he knew so sadly well. How often he had climbed to it in the days of Lucie’s illness! A dark room—the window in one corner, and much grown over with creepers. But to-day the bright morning sunlight came in slantingly and fell just across the bed. Hester uncovered the face of the dead, and Dr. Cornelius stood staring down stupidly at the dear face on the pillow. He would have liked to send Hester away, but the words would not come to him. She talked on, sobbing and exclamatory—

“She went off that sudden in the end, sir! Thursday night it was, as you know, sir, and the mistress would have her reception as usual. She’s set in her ways, and Miss Harrie could get but the one word from her—she must do this, or the wedding was not to be. I dressed her with these old hands, sir, an’ gave her an arm down the stair. The mistress kept her long at it—till near eleven, an’ Miss Harrie was faint-like when I gave her my support up the stair again. But never a word of complaint, sir, an’ she would have no great attention from me. Since ever she was ill, sir, I’ve slept on the floor beside her on a shakedown like—an’ last night, what with grief and anxiety, I was wakeful. I heard her cough late on in the night, and rose up in a great haste. The blood came in a stream from her lips that very moment, an’ I thought to see her die with never a word. I daren’t leave to call the mistress, and she fell back like death into my arms. Her lips moved, an’, begging your pardon, sir, these was the words she said: ‘Tell my dear Cornelius,’ says she, ‘that he will see me again.’ ‘Harrie my dear,’ says I, (forgetting the Miss, sir, for she was like my own,) ‘if I can leave you, dearie, for a minute, I’ll send Silence for Dr. Hallijohn.’ But she said, ‘No; too late, Hester,’ an’ closed her eyes. She spoke but the once again. She said, ‘*New and strange, the entering a new life,*’ and then, sudden-like, stretched out her arms with such a smile! ’Tis on her lips yet, sir. I looked over my shoulder to see who was come in, but the room was empty as you see it, an’ with that she fell back on my arm.”

Hester paused, expecting some comment, some word or expression of grief from her listener. But he gave none, only stood gazing down stonily at the dead body of the woman he loved. Hester began again: “You see, sir”—

“Go away, Hester,” said Dr. Cornelius, finding words at last; and with a dim sense of the profundity of his grief, Hester tiptoed across the creaking floor, and left him alone with the dead.

Dr. Cornelius had ridden up quickly to Balgowrie, and, as he stood there, could feel the warm blood pulsing through his heart. Ah, the cruel contrast! He laid his strong, glowing hand on Henrietta’s, as if trying to waken her from that stupid, impassive sleep, to chase away from her lips that smile that was not for him. Then, falling on his knees beside the bed, he cried out in his despairing grief—

“Harrie, Harrie, come back! It cannot be you’ve left me without a word!”

The great, unanswering silence fell. He rose to his feet again with a gesture almost of anger.

“Fifty years I’ve lived in a dying world,” he said bitterly, “and at the end of it I try to waken the dead!” Bending down, he kissed Henrietta’s smiling lips: “Good-bye, good-bye, and good-bye,” he said. “I might have known.”

XXXIII

Mrs. Marjorybanks did not long delay poor Henrietta's obsequies.

"Pray arrange the matter as swiftly as may be," she said to Dr. Cornelius. "These remains of frail humanity are best consigned to the dust." She also signified to him her wish that he should dispose as he thought best of all Henrietta's small possessions. "You are as good as her husband," she added, "so do what you will with her goods, as you could not have her person."

Hester sobbingly fell heir to all her young mistress's wardrobe—those strangely-fashioned garments. The more personal possessions—books and papers, all the paraphernalia of a studious life—Dr. Cornelius took down to the Manse. In Henrietta's writing-case he had found a letter addressed to himself, written on the Thursday afternoon before her death.

"DEAREST CORNELIUS,—Something makes me write this. If I am happily married to you on Monday, I shall tear it up; if not, it will come to your hands. I should like Hester to have my dear Lucie's work-box—because I think it is more natural and cheerful to use things which belonged at one time to those who are gone, than simply to lay them by. You would have no use for it, so pray give it to Hester. There is a book of Lucie's pencil drawings, on which she bestowed great pains, will you take it?—also you will find the bit of embroidery which was her last work. I could not part from it. 'Tis in my bureau drawer. Pray have the goodness to send it to Mrs. Pelham when you write to her, which you will do soon, I feel sure. Along with the embroidery, return to her the bundle of letters written to me during many years by dear Maggie Pelham, whom I never saw in this world, but whom I hope to hold converse with in the unknown Splendour where Time is forgot. You, my dear Cornelius,—almost my dear husband,—will take all my own books—the books which, since my childhood, you have yourself given to me at intervals. My name is written in them all. Also all my papers—the ridiculous translation of Herodotus, which runs to some 100 pages of MS., and the verses on various subjects, which may interest you. That is all. Ah, I had almost forgot! Will you take dear Lucie's lark,—the one she had so long,—or do you think it had better be given its liberty? As you think

best. Her pigeons, I fear, would not leave the doo-cote, or I would have asked you also to care for them. Silence is not careful of them. He says 'many a good hen's meat' is wasted on them! Perhaps he will be more tender of them now.

"You will sometimes visit my poor mother, will you not, Cornelius?"

"And yourself—I can't write—I could never say all the love I have towards you—dear father and lover in one—so I shall not try. Ah, comfort yourself! And do not use too much bad language at 'cruel Fate.' I never liked the habit. I must be done. You see I am become flippant, because after all it strikes me I may tear this up on Monday.—My dear heart, farewell: ever yours,

HENRIETTA."

This simple disposition of Henrietta's affairs was easily carried out. It took Dr. Cornelius only an hour's work to gather together the few possessions mentioned, and consign each to the person Henrietta had indicated. He did this the day before the funeral, for, in spite of Henrietta's request that he should sometimes visit her mother, he felt that it would be almost impossible for him to do so. Mrs. Marjorybanks had virtually murdered Henrietta: that was a fact he could never forget. In his excelling wrath and bitterness towards her, he could scarcely bring himself to address her, even on the arrangements necessary for the funeral. Even the poor woman's manifest irresponsibility could not soften the hard indignation he felt. When all was over, he said, when Henrietta's last behests were fulfilled, then he would turn his back on Balgowrie and its mistress for ever. She might die alone as she had chosen to live, unloved and forgotten; reaping what she had sowed.

Henrietta's writing-case was filled with fragmentary compositions—translations from Latin and from Greek, essays on philosophical subjects, poems, ideas jotted down for future use—all the first-fruits of a growing mind jumbled together without design. The poems were dated, and began many years previously. The last, bearing date of 17th October, seemed strangely significant to Dr. Cornelius as he read it—

“HER GRAVE.

“O grave! O grave!—when next the spring comes here,
Thy turf shall waken as the blue days pass
To buds and bells and blades of springing grass,
Whose life is from the earth that now is sere.
But the sweet haste of the revolving year
Brings not my love to me—with buds and grass.
The form that held the soul I loved, alas!
Is dust in dust—and will not reappear.
O faithless heart! dumb witnesses they tell
Of the great certainty that satisfies!
Life cannot end—so love knows no farewell.
At last—one day—that comes like spring’s surprise
To winter earth—the soul above the swell
Of death’s dismay shall rise, shall rise, shall rise!”

He folded up the paper and laid it away with a groan.

The funeral was most elemental in its simplicity, resolving itself into what, after all, a funeral really is, however much ceremony attends it,—the burying of a dead body. This was Mrs. Marjorybanks’ idea of what funerals should be; she would permit of no empty forms in her house. In arranging matters with Dr. Cornelius, she merely said, “You will come at any hour you think fit to-morrow to remove Henrietta’s body.” Nor did she notice or understand the involuntary shudder he gave at the words.

A very small company assembled in the churchyard the next day. Dr. Cornelius, Silence, James, and the sexton lowered the coffin into the grave, and Hester and Mrs. Allan stood sobbing beside it. Mrs. Marjorybanks had not expressed any desire to be present, and Dr. Cornelius had not urged her to come. There had been no prayer at Balgowrie, and the little company of mourners waited for the minister to give it at the grave. The formula of his funeral prayer was well known. The sexton, in the pause that followed the lowering of the coffin, had almost prompted Dr. Cornelius with the familiar words. He coughed slightly instead, and fidgeted, to signify that the time was come.

“O Almighty God”—began Dr. Cornelius; and there the often-repeated form of words deserted him, and he stood dumbly looking from one to another of the little group standing round the grave. They were all sorrowing with him, and this knowledge broke through conventions.

“I cannot pray,” he said simply. “You know that I have lost my all.” He signed to them to fill in the grave, and turned away.

The men worked quickly and silently, with only an expressive glance and grunt to each other over their work. Hester and Mrs. Allan moved slowly away, and as the afternoon shadows began to gather, Dr. Cornelius was left alone. He came back to stand beside the grave which had closed over his hope. And from behind a sullen wall of cloud that had covered the sky all day, the sun came out for a moment just before it set, a great scarlet world of flaming, triumphing glory. It blazed across the autumn land in a flood of red light, and smote with its level beams across the eyes of the man standing alone beside the newly-made grave.

“Great God,” he cried, raising his face towards the sky, “it’s a splendid world! And we’re crushed down like worms into its dust as surely as we aspire to a little hope or a moment’s joy.”

Then, pointing down at the grave as if calling it to witness, “And shall the dust praise Thee? look at the souls Thou hast made, and tortured, and brought down to the dust again!”

He turned away and took his heavy way homewards. The sun sank behind the clouds as suddenly as it had appeared, and dusk fell over the world like a mantle.

Dr. Cornelius did not look to the right hand or to the left. He walked in at his own gate without closing it behind him, and through the hall into the study. The room seemed full of the absent presence. He flung himself down into the arm-chair by the fire and rang the bell.

“Bring me a bottle of brandy, James,” he said.

The order was soon obeyed. He poured out a glass with a bitter smile on his lips.

“I’ll drink myself drunk. I’ll sleep like a hog, and waken and drink again. I’ve a cellarful of good French brandy, and I’ll play the deuce with it before the year is out. I’ll drink myself mad, and forget for a time. I’ll drink myself into my grave, and there I’ll forget for ever. Oh, I’ll die a jolly death—that’s in my own hand—no fate can rob me of that. I’m damned if I’ll be sober once for the next six weeks. We’ll see what that will do for me!”

He raised the glass to his lips, half drained it, then lay back in his chair with closed eyes, to feel the hot tickle of the liquor as it stole through him.

There came to him then, out of the shadows at the far end of the room, a well-remembered figure in a quaint, childish gown. This little visitor stood still, saying in a trembling voice, "'Tis very dark, sir"—and "Dark it is, Harrie—the darkness that cannot lift," he said, answering her out of the gloom that covered him. Then by that mysterious process which goes on in dreams (or visions, or whatever they are), the child, as she advanced towards him, grew and grew—first into Harrie—"Dear Harrie!" he cried, stretching out arms of love to her)—then into someone white and wonderful; the dead Harrie he had kissed, but alive, radiant—a soul whose conflicts were past. She stood beside him and spoke the words he had spoken in bitterness over her grave—

"The dust shall praise Him, Cornelius—the grave and pain and loss shall praise Him. All I could never do . . . all you have left undone—my work and your own, and the time is short."

She seemed to pass beside him, just letting her hand rest for a moment on his grey head at the last words. He turned in his chair to clasp her hand, and wakened to the silent, empty room, the blazing fire, and the half-drained glass of brandy.

The impulse of all sane men is to laugh at dreams. Perhaps Dr. Cornelius was hardly sane at the moment,—grief and sleepless nights may have wrought upon his usually steady brain, for he rose to his feet with a great oath.

"By Hell and Judgment, and the love I bore this woman, I'll never touch it again!" he cried.

Some memory of long ago stirred in him. He caught up the wine-glass and cast it down on to the hearthstone, just as Henrietta, an impulsive child, had broken his Dutch bottle there years before. Dr. Cornelius had spoken and acted half-dreamingly, now at the splintering of the glass he started broad awake.

"Harrie, Harrie, you're gone!" he exclaimed, gazing round the empty, firelit room, where only a moment before, clear as day, Henrietta had passed by him. In the intolerable silence that followed his words, her voice seemed still to speak.

"My work and your own, and the time is short," it repeated again, and yet again. He sat down and listened to that insistent whisper, telling him to live and work in a world where love was no more. It spoke in Henrietta's tones, and breathed the spirit of her whole life—strenuous—aspiring—at

war with circumstance that hedged her in on every hand, but fighting forward, hopeful and heroic.

The fire died to ashes, the slow hours passed, and Dr. Cornelius still sat on. He reviewed the wasted past, the lonely present, the dark future—a sorry company. And then of a sudden he cried out with a loud voice, “It’s God! it’s God!”

He had caught sight of the purpose of this heavy stroke that was fallen upon him—had felt the touch of that mighty Hand which moulds each man to his destined shape by processes of terribly individual pressure. And at the sight Shame and Humility and Hope came rushing into his heart—a crowd of gentle guests.

“No other thing would have done it. I doubt if I’m worth it. Yet . . . O God, save my soul!”

XXXIV

On a beautiful June day, thirty years—yes, fully thirty years—after Henrietta's death, Dr. Cornelius sat in his garden reading. A very old man now, with snow-white hair and stooping gait.

He had just laid down his book, and was looking round the sweet, blooming, bee-haunted garden, when he saw the gate open, and a man and woman advanced to where he sat. The woman came forward, smiling and holding out her hand.

"I must recall myself to your remembrance, sir, I fear," she said; but paused, as if to give Dr. Cornelius time to recognise her.

She was an elderly woman, with the remains of great beauty, and carrying herself as only women who have been much admired can do.

"My dear lady," said Dr. Cornelius, rising slowly, "I fear I am grown both blind and dull with the creeping years. May I ask?"—

"Do you remember Maggie Pelham?" she asked, with just that winning smile she used to bear.

"Ah! ah!" said Dr. Cornelius, drawing in his breath as if a remembrance stabbed him. He held out both hands to Maggie, gazing into her face.

"I have brought my husband to see you," said Maggie. "I had never been in Scotland before, but I was resolved to see you when I came, and to see the place I have so often heard about from Henrietta and Lucie Marjorybanks."

Thirty years of life and experience had not changed Maggie Pelham's warm heart. As she spoke their names, her kind eyes filled with tears. She grasped Dr. Cornelius by the hand, and stood gazing round the garden and up at the house, and then back again at the old man beside her.

"So this is the place, and they are gone, and you are still here?" she said at last. "It seems to me like a dream that I should come here to see it all!"

"Sit down, madam—sit down," said Dr. Cornelius, offering her a seat beside his own.

There was a moment's silence, and he passed his hand over his eyes before he spoke again.

“Yes, I am still here,” he said slowly. “I have lived long after man’s allotted time on earth.”

“Are you pleased to live so long?” asked Maggie’s husband.

He was an elderly man, of rather eccentric address. His very bright eyes seemed to be always on the alert for observation.

Maggie smiled indulgently, and turned to Dr. Cornelius. “You must pardon my husband, sir; he is for ever asking questions.”

“ ’Tis the best way to come at conclusions, madam. And now I must ask your pardon for a moment before I answer his question, for I have clean forgot your married name!”

“Oh, our name is Balderstone, sir,” said Maggie, laughing. “I remember writing to tell you of our marriage very long ago—’tis no wonder our name has escaped you.”

“Ah, I remember! Now, sir, I shall answer your question. I would willingly have done with life now; but there seems still so much for me to accomplish and fulfil in it, that I do not complain of this ‘long disease of living.’ ”

“So, so,” said Balderstone interestedly. “I had feared that life lost its grip in extreme old age.”

“Come, John, I will not listen further to your dissertations on life,” said Maggie. “I am come here to speak about human beings. Go away and philosophise by yourself, if you will, while I talk of old times with Dr. Hallijohn.”

“Ah, you wish to be alone, Maggie? you find me in the way,” he said, rising laughingly. “Well, I’ll walk round the garden while you talk.”

Maggie and Dr. Cornelius watched his figure disappear down the hedge-bordered path before they spoke.

“Happy, my dear?” he asked, wasting no time on subjects of indifferent interest.

“Ah, dear Dr. Hallijohn! happier than I have words for! We are so unlike, we have always been so unlike! And when first we married we were so delightfully poor, for I would not take money from mother, and he had none. Now, alas! I have all of hers since she left me. But perhaps it is well to have money when we are elderly—it is not like one’s young days. And our children—I have three sons and one daughter. Ah, my sons are great grown

men by this time—the eldest is five-and-twenty this year. They have filled my heart with happiness till it can hold no more.”

“I have often thought of you, and wondered how life went with you,” said Dr. Cornelius.

“I fear I am one of the people who get all the good things of this world,” said Maggie, in a sober tone. “I often think I have too much.”

“It is not every one who needs trial; there are souls that live always in the light,” said Dr. Cornelius.

“But here I am speaking only of myself, sir. Ah, I have so much to speak of with you! Tell me, how did Mrs. Marjorybanks die? You sent my mother an intimation of her death, but did not write of it to her.”

“That is an old story. Twenty years ago she died—ten years after Henrietta. She became more and more peculiar, and died most suddenly, in some sort of attack from the brain. I never saw her again after the day of my poor Harrie’s funeral. Madam, I did wrongly; but to this day, had I it in my power again, I should do the same! For she killed Henrietta. I could not forgive her.”

“Ah, it was sad—sad! Do you know, sir, though I never saw Henrietta, I loved her so strangely? I have every letter she ever wrote to me. I read some of them over again but the other day. Such clever letters! She used just to write out her soul in them, and her life into them. The world felt empty to me for a while after she left it.”

“She was by herself,” said Dr. Cornelius musingly.

“And Lucie—dear Lucie! I knew and loved her. I shall never forget the morning we parted at the docks. I knew in my heart somehow that we would never see her again. Ah, the dear, pretty, quaint-mannered child that she was in these far-away days!”

“Can you tell me what became of that fellow Charteris?” asked Dr. Cornelius, sitting forward eagerly, with a reminiscence of youthfulness in his voice.

Maggie laughed. “Yes, sir, indeed I can. This is what I know of Dan Charteris,” said Maggie, in a tone of the deepest satisfaction. “Perhaps you remember, sir, that I was good-looking in my youth? Ah, well, Dan Charteris knew it, and so did I. When I heard of Lucie’s death, I took my resolution. There is much in woman’s feeble hand sometimes. I led that man on, sir, with my every art, and I had many in these days, till he was mad with love. I

had him tied to my apron-strings for months. One day he offered me his fine hand, and finer heart. I made him my best curtsey. ‘You have not much to offer me, sir,’ I said; ‘but had you all the riches of this world, I would not have you.’ He was mad with love for me. He swore and prayed by turns, and told me I had been false, and had played fast and loose with him. At that I gave him one more curtsey. ‘I thought you had played fast and loose with too many people yourself, sir, to imagine that I was in earnest,’ I said, and then held out my hand to him, saying, ‘Come, Dan, we are old friends; let us remain such, with no more of these high words. Come, let us change the subject. Did my mother inform you of the sad news we had from Scotland of the death of my friend Henrietta Marjorybanks? She has not been very long of following her dear sister. ’Twas Lucie was your special friend, was it not?’ Well, I never saw Dan Charteris enter our door again, and did not regret the fact! He married next year. I never see him now.”

“I fear revenge is a horrid passion, madam, but you did well—you did well!” said Dr. Cornelius.

“And what came of ‘Hester’ and ‘Silence’?—such familiar names to me!” asked Maggie.

“Silence left the place at Mrs. Marjorybanks’ death; Hester came to my service, and lived some years here before her death. She was the last link with Balgowrie. I felt more alone after good Hester died. The sadness of old age, madam, lies in this, that we so often survive all those persons who were part of life when we were young.”

“I should like, sir, to see Balgowrie beyond everything. It is shut up, is it not? Would it be possible for me to go through it?” asked Maggie.

Dr. Cornelius rose with sudden energy.

“Yes, my dear madam. Ah, what a pleasure to speak with someone to whom their memory is dear! I cannot walk so far now, but we shall drive to Balgowrie. Will you come indoors till my carriage is ready? You will perhaps find it interesting to see the house you have heard of so often.”

The study had changed very little in thirty years. Maggie stood beside the fire and looked round the room with brimming eyes.

“I feel as if I knew every book here, as if I had often stood here before,” she said. “My dear sir, are you not lonely now, in your old age, with no one to care for you but servants?”

The old man smiled. “No, no, I am not lonely. I am not alone so much as you suppose, madam. I have the care of all this parish on these old hands.

Ah, you are smiling! Yes, I remember the days when I used to take it lightly enough. Now I have doubly to work, remembering these ‘years that the locust hath eaten.’ But shall I send for your husband to come with us to Balgowrie?” he said, turning the conversation hastily away from his own affairs.

“Yes, indeed, if you can find him,” said Maggie.

An hour later they all stood together on the Balgowrie steps. Dr. Cornelius had sent for the woman who had ostensible charge of the house. She stood on the threshold jingling her rusty keys.

“Are you coming in, sir?” asked Maggie gently.

Dr. Cornelius hesitated for a moment, then shook his head.

“I cannot,” he said, and turned away.

When Maggie came down to the door again, after her journey through the old house, Dr. Cornelius was standing on the steps. He did not seem to notice her approach. He stood with his face turned up to the fair summer sky, and spoke to one unseen. Said he—

“The sooner the better, my love, for it grows late.”

THE END

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Green Graves of Balgowrie* by Jane Findlater]