

The Laurel Bush eBook

The Laurel Bush by Dinah Craik

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Chapter 1.

It was a very ugly bush indeed; that is, so far as any thing in nature can be really ugly. It was lopsided—having on the one hand a stunted stump or two, while on the other a huge heavy branch swept down to the gravel-walk. It had a crooked gnarled trunk or stem, hollow enough to entice any weak-minded bird to build a nest there—only it was so near to the ground, and also to the garden gate. Besides, the owners of the garden, evidently of practical mind, had made use of it to place between a fork in its branches a sort of letter-box—not the government regulation one, for twenty years ago this had not been thought of; but a rough receptacle, where, the house being a good way off, letters might be deposited, instead of; as hitherto, in a hole in the trunk—near the foot of the tree, and under shelter of its mass of evergreen leaves.

This letter-box; made by the boys of the family at the instigation and with the assistance of their tutor, had proved so attractive to some exceedingly incautious sparrow that during the intervals of the post she had begun a nest there, which was found by the boys. Exceedingly wild boys they were, and a great trouble to their old grandmother, with whom they were staying the summer, and their young governess—“Misfortune,” as they called her, her real name being Miss Williams—Fortune Williams. The nickname was a little too near the truth, as a keener observer than mischievous boys would have read in her quiet, sometimes sad, face; and it had been stopped rather severely by the tutor of the elder boys, a young man whom the grandmother had been forced to get, to “keep them in order!” He was a Mr. Robert Roy, once a student, now a teacher of the “humanities,” from the neighboring town—I beg its pardon—city; and a lovely old city it is!—of St. Andrews. Thence he was in the habit of coming to them three and often four days in the week, teaching of mornings and walking of afternoons. They had expected him this afternoon, but their grandmother had carried them off on some pleasure excursion; and being a lady of inexact habits—one, too, to whom tutors were tutors and nothing more—she had merely said to Miss Williams, as the carriage drove away, “When Mr. Roy comes, tell him he is not wanted till tomorrow.”

And so Miss Williams had waited at the gate, not wishing him to have the additional trouble of walking up to the house, for she knew every minute of his time was precious. The poor and the hard-working can understand and sympathize with one another. Only a tutor and only a governess: Mrs. Dalziel drove away and never thought of them again. They were mere machines—servants to whom she paid their wages, and so that they did sufficient service to deserve these wages, she never interfered with them, nor, indeed, wasted a moment's consideration upon them or their concerns.



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Consequently they were in the somewhat rare and peculiar position of a young man and young woman (perhaps Mrs. Dalziel would have taken exception to the words “young lady and young gentleman”) thrown together day after day, week after week—nay, it had now become month after month—to all intents and purposes quite alone, except for the children. They taught together, there being but one school-room; walked out together, for the two younger boys refused to be separated from their older brothers; and, in short, spent two-thirds of their existence together, without let or hindrance, comment or observation, from any mortal soul.

I do not wish to make any mystery in this story. A young woman of twenty-five and a young man of thirty, both perfectly alone in the world—orphans, without brother or sister—having to earn their own bread, and earn it hardly, and being placed in circumstances where they had every opportunity of intimate friendship, sympathy, whatever you like to call it: who could doubt what would happen? The more so, as there was no one to suggest that it might happen; no one to watch them or warn them, or waken them with worldly-minded hints; or else to rise up, after the fashion of so many wise parents and guardians and well-intentioned friends, and indignantly shut the stable door *after* the steed is stolen.

No. That something which was so sure to happen had happened; you might have seen it in their eyes, have heard it in the very tone of their voices, though they still talked in a very commonplace way, and still called each other “Miss Williams” and “Mr. Roy.” In fact, their whole demeanor to one another was characterized by the grave and even formal decorum which was natural to very reserved people, just trembling on the verge of that discovery which will unlock the heart of each to the other, and annihilate reserve forever between the two whom Heaven has designed and meant to become one; a completed existence. If by any mischance this does not come about, each may lead a very creditable and not unhappy life; but it will be a locked-up life, one to which no third person is ever likely to find the key.

Whether such natures are to envied or pitied is more than I can say; but at least they are more to be respected than the people who wear their hearts upon their sleeves for daws to peck at, and very often are all the prouder the more they are pecked at, and the more elegantly they bleed; which was not likely to be the case with either of these young folks, young as they were.

They were young, and youth is always interesting and even comely; but beyond that there was nothing remarkable about either. He was Scotch; she English, or rather Welsh. She had the clear blue Welsh eye, the funny *retrousee* Welsh nose; but with the prettiest little mouth underneath it—firm, close, and sweet; full of sensitiveness, but a sensitiveness that was controlled and guided by that best possession to either man or woman, a good strong will. No one could doubt that the young governess had, what was a very useful thing to a governess, “a will of her own;” but not a domineering or obnoxious will, which indeed is seldom will at all, but merely obstinacy.

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For the rest, Miss Williams was a little woman, or gave the impression of being so, from her slight figure and delicate hands and feet. I doubt if any one would have called her pretty, until he or she had learned to love her. For there are two distinct kinds of love, one in which the eye instructs the heart, and the other in which the heart informs and guides the eye. There have been men who, seeing an unknown beautiful face, have felt sure it implied the most beautiful soul in the world, pursued it, worshiped it, wooed and won it, found the fancy true, and loved the woman forever. Other men there are who would simply say, "I don't know if such a one is handsome or not; I only know she is herself—and mine." Both loves are good; nay, it is difficult to say which is best. But the latter would be the most likely to any one who became attached to Fortune Williams.

Also, perhaps to Robert Roy, though no one expects good looks in his sex; indeed, they are mostly rather objectionable. Women do not usually care for a very handsome man; and men are prone to set him down as conceited. No one could lay either charge to Mr. Roy. He was only an honest-looking Scotchman, tall and strong and manly. Not "red," in spite of his name, but dark-skinned and dark-haired; in no way resembling his great namesake, Rob Roy Macgregor, as the boys sometimes called him behind his back—never to his face. Gentle as the young man was, there was something about him which effectually prevented any one's taking the smallest liberty with him. Though he had been a teacher of boys ever since he was seventeen—and I have heard one of the fraternity confess that it is almost impossible to be a school-master for ten years without becoming a tyrant—still it was a pleasant and sweet-tempered face. Very far from a weak face, though; when Mr. Roy said a thing must be done, every one of his boys knew it *must* be done, and there was no use saying any more about it.

He had unquestionably that rare gift, the power of authority; though this did not necessarily imply self-control; for some people can rule every body except themselves. But Robert Roy's clear, calm, rather sad eye, and a certain patient expression about the mouth, implied that he too had enough of the hard training of life to be able to govern himself. And that is more difficult to a man than to a woman.

"all thy passions, matched with mine,
Are as moonlight unto sunlight,
and as water unto wine."

A truth which even Fortune's tender heart did not fully take in, deep as was her sympathy for him; for his toilsome, lonely life, lived more in shadow than in sunshine, and with every temptation to the selfishness which is so apt to follow self-dependence, and the bitterness that to a proud spirit so often makes the sting of poverty. Yet he was neither selfish nor bitter; only a little reserved, silent, and—except with children—rather grave.



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She stood watching him now, for she could see him a long way off across the level Links, and noticed that he stopped more than once to look at the golf-players. He was a capital golfer himself, but had never any time to play. Between his own studies and the teaching by which he earned the money to prosecute them, every hour was filled up. So he turned his back on the pleasant pastime, which seems to have such an extraordinary fascination for those who pursue it, and came on to his daily work, with that resolute deliberate step, bent on going direct to his point and turning aside for nothing.

Fortune knew it well by this time; had learned to distinguish it from all others in the world. There are some footsteps which, by a pardonable poetical license, we say “we should hear in our graves,” and though this girl did not think of that, for death looked far off, and she was scarcely a poetical person, still, many a morning, when, sitting at her school-room window, she heard Mr. Roy coming steadily down the gravel-walk, she was conscious of—something that people can not feel twice in a life-time.

And now, when he approached with that kind smile of his, which brightened into double pleasure when he saw who was waiting for him, she was aware of a wild heartbeat, a sense of exceeding joy, and then of relief and rest. He was “comfortable” to her. She could express it in no other way. At sight of his face and at sound of his voice all worldly cares and troubles, of which she had a good many, seemed to fall off. To be with him was like having an arm to lean on, a light to walk by; and she had walked alone so long.

“Good-afternoon, Miss Williams.”

“Good-afternoon, Mr. Roy.”

They said no more than that, but the stupidest person in the world might have seen that they were glad to meet, glad to be together. Though neither they nor any one else could have explained the mysterious fact, the foundation of all love stories in books or in life—and which the present author owns, after having written many books and seen a great deal of life, is to her also as great a mystery as ever—Why do certain people like to be together? What is the inexplicable attraction which makes them seek one another, suit one another, put up with one another’s weaknesses, condone one another’s faults (when neither are too great to lessen love), and to the last day of life find a charm in one another’s society which extends to no other human being. Happy love or lost love, a full world or an empty world, life with joy or life without it—that is all the difference. Which some people think very small, and that does not matter; and perhaps it does not—to many people. But it does to some, and I incline to put in that category Miss Williams and Mr. Roy.

They stood by the laurel bush, having just shaken hands more hastily than they usually did; but the absence of the children, and the very unusual fact of their being quite alone,

gave to both a certain shyness, and she had drawn her hand away, saying, with a slight blush:



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“Mrs. Dalziel desired me to meet you and tell you that you might have a holiday today. She has taken her boys with her to Elie. I dare say you will not be sorry to gain an hour or two for yourself; though I am sorry you should have the trouble of the walk for nothing.”

“For nothing?”—with the least shadow of a smile, not of annoyance, certainly.

“Indeed, I would have let you know if I could, but she decided at the very last minute; and if I had proposed that a messenger should have been sent to stop you, I am afraid—it would not have been answered.”

“Of course not;” and they interchanged an amused look—these fellow-victims to the well-known ways of the household—which, however, neither grumbled at; it was merely an outside thing, this treatment of both as mere tutor and governess. After all (as he sometimes said, when some special rudeness—not himself, but to her—vexed him), they were tutor and governess; but they were something else besides; something which, the instant their chains were lifted off, made them feel free and young and strong, and comforted them with comfort unspeakable.

“She bade me apologize. No, I am afraid, if I tell the absolute truth, she did not bid me, but I do apologize.”

“What for, Miss Williams?”

“For your having been brought out all this way just to go back again.”

“I do not mind it, I assure you.”

“And as for the lost lesson—”

“The boys will not mourn over it, I dare say. In fact, their term with me is so soon coming to an end that it does not signify much. They told me they are going back to England to school next week. Do you go back too?”

“Not just yet—not till next Christmas. Mrs. Dalziel talks of wintering in London; but she is so vague in her plans that I am never sure from one week to another what she will do.”

“And what are your plans? *You* always know what you intend to do.”

“Yes, I think so,” answered Miss Williams, smiling. “One of the few things I remember of my mother was hearing her say of me, that ‘her little girl was a little girl who always knew her own mind.’ I think I do. I may not be always able to carry it out, but I think I know it.”



“Of course,” said Mr. Roy, absently and somewhat vaguely, as he stood beside the laurel bush, pulling one of its shiny leaves to pieces, and looking right ahead, across the sunshiny Links, the long shore of yellow sands, where the mermaids might well delight to come and “take hands”—to the smooth, dazzling, far-away sea. No sea is more beautiful than that at St. Andrews.

Its sleepy glitter seemed to have lulled Robert Roy into a sudden meditation, of which no word of his companion came to rouse him. In truth, she, never given much to talking, simply stood, as she often did, silently beside him, quite satisfied with the mere comfort of his presence.



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I am afraid that this Fortune Williams will be considered a very weak-minded young woman. She was not a bit a coquette, she had not the slightest wish to flirt with any man. Nor was she a proud beauty desirous to subjugate the other sex; and drag them triumphantly at her chariot wheels. She did not see the credit, or the use, or the pleasure of any such proceeding. She was a self-contained, self-dependent woman. Thoroughly a woman; not indifferent at all to womanhood's best blessing; still she could live without it if necessary, as she could have lived without anything which it had pleased God to deny her. She was not a creature likely to die for love, or do wrong for love, which some people think the only test of love's strength, instead of its utmost weakness; but that she was capable of love, for all her composure and quietness, capable of it, and ready for it, in its intensest, most passionate, and most enduring form, the God who made her knew, if no one else did.

Her time would come; indeed, had come already. She had too much self-respect to let him guess it, but I am afraid she was very fond of—or, if that is a foolish phrase, deeply attached to—Robert Roy. He had been so good to her, at once strong and tender, chivalrous, respectful, and kind; and she had no father, no brother, no other man at all to judge him by, except the accidental men whom she had met in society, creatures on two legs who wore coats and trousers, who had been civil to her, as she to them, but who had never interested her in the smallest degree, perhaps because she knew so little of them. But no; it would have been just the same had she known them a thousand years. She was not “a man's woman,” that is, one of those women who feel interested in any thing in the shape of a man, and make men interested in them accordingly, for the root of much masculine affection is pure vanity. That celebrated Scottish song,

“Come deaf, or come blind, or come cripple,
O come, ony ane o' them a'!
Far better be married to something,
Than no to be married ava,”

was a rhyme that would never have touched the stony heart of Fortune Williams. And yet, let me own it once more, she was very, very fond of Robert Roy. He had never spoken to her one word of love, actual love, no more than he spoke now, as they stood side by side, looking with the same eyes on the same scene. I say the same eyes, for they were exceedingly alike in their tastes. There was no need ever to go into long explanations about this or that; a glance sufficed, or a word, to show each what the other enjoyed; and both had the quiet conviction that they were enjoying it together. Now as that sweet, still, sunshiny view met their mutual gaze, they fell into no poetical raptures, but just stood and looked, taking it all in with exceeding pleasure, as they had done many and many a time, but never, it seemed, so perfectly as now.

“What a lovely afternoon!” she said at last.



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“Yes. It is a pity to waste it. Have you any thing special to do? What did you mean to employ yourself with, now your birds are flown?”

“Oh, I can always find something to do.”

“But need you find it? We both work so hard. If we could only now and then have a little bit of pleasure!”

He put it so simply, yet almost with a sigh. This poor girl's heart responded to it suddenly, wildly. She was only twenty-five, yet sometimes she felt quite old, or rather as if she had never been young. The constant teaching, teaching of rough boys too—for she had had the whole four till Mr. Roy took the two elder off her hands—the necessity of grinding hard out of school hours to keep herself up in Latin, Euclid, and other branches which do not usually form a part of a feminine education, only having a great natural love of work, she had taught herself—all these things combined to make her life a dull life, a hard life, till Robert Roy came into it. And sometimes even now the desperate craving to enjoy—not only to endure, but to enjoy—to take a little of the natural pleasures of her age—came to the poor governess very sorely, especially on days such as this, when all the outward world looked so gay, so idle, and she worked so hard.

So did Robert Roy. Life was not easier to him than to herself; she knew that; and when he said, half joking, as if he wanted to feel his way, “Let us imitate our boys, and take a half holiday,” she only laughed, but did not refuse.

How could she refuse? There were the long smooth sands on either side the Eden, stretching away into indefinite distance, with not a human being upon them to break their loneliness, or, if there was, he or she looked a mere dot, not human at all. Even if these two had been afraid of being seen walking together—which they hardly were, being too unimportant for any one to care whether they were friends or lovers, or what not—there was nobody to see them, except in the character of two black dots on the yellow sands.

“It is low water; suppose we go and look for sea-anemones. One of my pupils wants some, and I promised to try and find one the first spare hour I had.”

“But we shall not find anemones on the sands.”

“Shells, then, you practical woman! We'll gather shells. It will be all the same to that poor invalid boy—and to me,” added he, with that involuntary sigh which she had noticed more than once, and which had begun to strike on her ears not quite painfully. Sighs, when we are young, mean differently to what they do in after-years. “I don't care very much where I go, or what I do; I only want—well, to be happy for an hour, if Providence will let me.”



“Why should not Providence let you?” said Fortune, gently. “Few people deserve it more.”

“You are kind to think so; but you are always kind to every body.”



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By this time they had left their position by the laurel bush, and were walking along side by side, according as he had suggested. This silent, instinctive acquiescence in what he wished done—it had happened once or twice before, startling her a little at herself; for, as I have said, Miss Williams was not at all the kind of person to do every thing that every body asked her, without considering whether it was right or wrong. She could obey, but it would depend entirely upon whom she had to obey, which, indeed, makes the sole difference between loving disciples and slavish fools.

It was a lovely day, one of those serene autumn days peculiar to Scotland—I was going to say Saint Andrews; and any one who knows the ancient city will know exactly how it looks in the still, strongly spiritualized light of such an afternoon, with the ruins, the castle, cathedral, and St. Regulus's tower standing out sharply against the intensely blue sky, and on the other side—on both sides—the yellow sweep of sand curving away into the distance, and melting into the sunshiny sea.

Many a time, in their prescribed walks with their young tribe, Miss Williams and Mr. Roy had taken this stroll across the Links and round by the sands to the mouth of the Eden, leaving behind them a long and sinuous track of many footsteps, little and large, but now there were only two lines—"foot-prints on the sands of Time," as he jestingly called them, turning round and pointing to the marks of the dainty feet that walked so steadily and straightly beside his own.

"They seem made to go together, those two tracks," said he.

Why did he say it? Was he the kind of man to talk thus without meaning it? If so, alas! she was not exactly the woman to be thus talked to. Nothing fell on her lightly. Perhaps it was her misfortune, perhaps even her fault, but so it was.

Robert Roy did not "make love;" not at all. Possibly he never could have done it in the ordinary way. Sweet things, polite things were very difficult to him either to do or to say. Even the tenderness that was in him came out as if by accident; but, oh! how infinitely tender he could be! Enough to make any one who loved him die easily, quietly, if only just holding his hand.

There is an incident in Dickens's touching *Tale of two Cities*, where a young man going innocent to the guillotine, and riding on the death-cart with a young girl whom he had never before seen, is able to sustain and comfort her, even to the last awful moment, by the look of his face and the clasp of his hand. That man, I have often thought, must have been something not unlike Robert Roy.

Such men are rare, but they do exist; and it was Fortune's lot, or she believed it was, to have found one. That was enough. She went along the shining sands in a dream of perfect content, perfect happiness, thinking—and was it strange or wrong that she should so think?—that if it were God's will she should thus walk through life, the



thorniest path would seem smooth, the hardest road easy. She had no fear of life, if lived beside him; or of death—love is stronger than death; at least this sort of love, of which only strong natures are capable, and out of which are made, not the lyrics, perhaps, but the epics, the psalms, or the tragedies of our mortal existence.



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I have explained thus much about these two friends—lovers that may be, or might have been—because they never would have done it themselves. Neither was given to much speaking. Indeed, I fear their conversation this day, if recorded, would have been of the most feeble kind—brief, fragmentary, mere comments on the things about them, or abstract remarks not particularly clever or brilliant. They were neither of them what you would call brilliant people; yet they were happy, and the hours flew by like a few minutes, until they found themselves back again beside the laurel bush at the gate, when Mr. Roy suddenly said:

“Do not go in yet. I mean, need you go in? It is scarcely past sunset; the boys will not be home for an hour yet; they don’t want you, and I—I want you so. In your English sense,” he added, with a laugh, referring to one of their many arguments, scholastic or otherwise, wherein she had insisted that to want meant *Anglice*, to wish or to crave, whereas in Scotland it was always used like the French *manquer*, to miss or to need.

“Shall we begin that fight over again?” asked she, smiling; for every thing, even fighting, seemed pleasant today.

“No, I have no wish to fight; I want to consult you seriously on a purely personal matter, if you would not mind taking that trouble.”

Fortune looked sorry. That was one of the bad things in him (the best man alive have their bad things), the pride which apes humility, the self-distrust which often wounds another so keenly. Her answer was given with a grave and simple sincerity that ought to have been reproach enough.

“Mr. Roy, I would not mind any amount of trouble if I could be of use to you; you know that.”

“Forgive me! Yes, I do know it. I believe in you and your goodness to the very bottom of my heart.”

She tried to say “Thank you,” but her lips refused to utter a word. It was so difficult to go on talking like ordinary friends, when she knew, and he must know she knew, that one more word would make them—not friends at all—something infinitely better, closer, dearer; but that word was his to speak, not hers. There are women who will “help a man on”—propose to him, marry him indeed—while he is under the pleasing delusion that he does it all himself; but Fortune Williams was not one of these. She remained silent and passive, waiting for the next thing he should say. It came: something the shock of which she never forgot as long as she lived; and he said it with his eyes on her face, so that, if it killed her, she must keep quiet and composed, as she did.

“You know the boys’ lessons end next week. The week after I go—that is, I have almost decided to go—to India.”



“To India!”

“Yes, For which, no doubt, you think me very changeable, having said so often that I meant to keep to a scholar’s life, and be a professor one day, perhaps, if by any means I could get salt to my porridge. Well, now I am not satisfied with salt to my porridge; I wish to get rich.”



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She did not say, "Why?" She thought she had not looked it; but he answered: "Never mind why. I do wish it, and I will be rich yet, if I can. Are you very much surprised?"

Surprised she certainly was; but she answered, honestly, "Indeed, you are the last person I should suspect of being worldly-minded."

"Thank you; that is kind. No, just; merely just. One ought to have faith in people; I am afraid my own deficiency is want of faith. It takes so much to make me believe for a moment that any one cares for me."

How hard it was to be silent—harder still to speak! But she did not speak.

"I can understand that; I have often felt the same. It is the natural consequence of a very lonely life. If you and I had had fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters, we might have been different."

"Perhaps so. But about India. For a long time—that is, for many weeks—I have been casting about in my mind how to change my way of life, to look out for something that would help me to earn money, and quickly, but there seemed no chance whatever. Until suddenly one has opened."

And then he explained how the father of one of one of his pupils, grateful for certain benefits, which Mr. Roy did not specify, and noticing certain business qualities in him—"which I suppose I have, though I didn't know it," added he, with a smile—had offered him a situation in a merchant's office at Calcutta: a position of great trust and responsibility, for three years certain, with the option of then giving it up or continuing it.

"And continuing means making a fortune. Even three years means making something, with my 'stingy' habits. Only I must go at once. Nor is there any time left me for my decision; it must be yes or no. Which shall it be?"

The sudden appeal—made, too, as if though it was nothing—that terrible yes or no, which to her made all the difference of living or only half living, of feeling the sun in or out of the world. What could she answer? What could she answer? Trembling violently, she yet answered, in a steady voice, "You must decide for yourself. A woman can not understand a man."

"Nor a man a woman, thoroughly. There is only one thing which helps both to comprehend one another."

One thing! she knew what it was. Surely so did he. But that strange distrustfulness of which he had spoken, or the hesitation which the strongest and bravest men have at times, came between.



“Oh, the little more, and how much it is!
Oh, the little less, and what worlds away!”

If, instead of looking vaguely out upon the sea, he had looked into this poor girl’s face; if, instead of keeping silence, he had only spoken one word! But he neither looked nor spoke, and the moment passed by. And there are some moments which people would sometimes give a whole lifetime to recall and use differently; but in vain.



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“My engagement is only for three years,” he resumed; “and, if alive, I mean to come back. Dead or alive, I was going to say, but you would not care to see my ghost, I presume? I beg your pardon: I ought not to make a joke of such serious things.”

“No, you ought not.”

She felt herself almost speechless, that in another minute she might burst into sobs. He saw it—at least he saw a very little of it, and misinterpreted the rest.

“I have tired you. Take my arm. You will soon be at home now.” Then, after a pause, “You will not be displeased at any thing I have said? We part friends? No, we do not part; I shall see you every day for a week, and be able to tell you all particulars of my journey, if you care to hear.”

“Thank you, yes—I do care.”

They stood together, arm in arm. The dews were falling; a sweet, soft lilac haze had begun to creep over the sea—the solemn; far-away sea that he was so soon to cross. Involuntarily she clung to his arm. So near, yet so apart! Why must it be? She could have borne his going away, if it was for his good, if he wished it; and something whispered to her that this sudden desire to get rich was not for himself alone. But, oh! If he would only speak! One word—one little word! After that, any thing might come—the separation of life, the bitterness of death. To the two hearts that had once opened each to each, in the full recognition of mutual love, there could never more be any real parting.

But that one word he did not say. He only took the little hand that lay on his arm and pressed it, and held it—years after, the feeling of that clasp was as fresh on her fingers as yesterday—the hearing the foot of some accidental passer-by, he let it go, and did not take it again.

Just at this moment the sound of distant carriage wheels was heard.

“That must be Mrs. Dalziel and the boys.”

“Then I had better go. Good-by”

The daydream was over. It had all come back again—the forlorn, dreary, hard-working world.

“Good-by, Mr. Roy.” And they shook hands.

“One word,” he said hastily. “I shall write to you—you will allow me?—and I shall see you several times, a good many times before I go?”



“I hope so.”

“Then, for the present, good-by. That means,” he added, earnestly, ““God be with you! And I know he always will.”

In another minute Fortune found herself standing beside the laurel bush, alone, listening to the sound of Mr. Roy’s footsteps down the road—listening, listening, as if, with the exceeding tension, her brain would burst.

The carriage came, passed by; it was not Mrs. Dalziel’s after all. She thought he might discover this, and come back again; so she waited a little—five minutes, ten—beside the laurel bush. But he did not come. No footstep, no voice; nothing but the faint, far-away sound of the long waves washing in upon the sands.



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It was not the brain that felt like to burst now, but the heart. She clasped her hands above her head. It did not matter; there was no creature to see or hear that appeal—was it to man or God?—that wild, broken sob, so contrary to her usual self-controlled and self-contained nature. And then she learned her forehead against the gate, just where Robert Roy had accidentally laid his hand in opening it, and wept bitterly.

Chapter 2.

The “every day” on which Mr. Roy had reckoned for seeing his friend, or whatsoever else he considered Miss Williams to be, proved a failure. Her youngest pupil fell ill, and she was kept beside him, and away from the school-room, until the doctor could decide whether the illness was infectious or not. It turned out to be very trifling—a most trivial thing altogether, yet weighted with a pain most difficult to bear, a sense of fatality that almost overwhelmed one person at least. What the other felt she did not know. He came daily as usual; she watched him come and go, and sometimes he turned and they exchanged a greeting from the window. But beyond that, she had to take all passively. What could she, only a woman, do or say or plan? Nothing. Women’s business is to sit down and endure.

She had counted these days—Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday—as if they had been years. And now they were all gone, had fled like minutes, fled emptily away. A few fragmentary facts she had had to feed on, communicated by the boys in their rough talk.

“Mr. Roy was rather cross today.”

“Not cross, Dick—only dull.”

“Mr. Roy asked why David did not come in to lessons, and said he hoped he would be better by Saturday.”

“Mr. Roy said good-by to us all, and gave us each something to remember him by when he was out in India. Did Miss Williams know he was going out to India? Oh, how jolly!”

“Yes, and he sails next week, and the name of his ship is the *Queen of the South*, and he goes by Liverpool instead of Southampton, because it costs less; and he leaves St. Andrews on Monday morning.”

“Are you sure he said Monday morning?” For that was Saturday night.

“Certain, because he has to get his outfit still. Oh, what fun it must be!”

And the boys went on, greatly excited, and repeating everything Mr. Roy had told them—for he had made them fond of him, even in those few months—expatiating with



delight on his future career, as a merchant or something, they did not quite know what; but no doubt it would be far nicer and more amusing than stopping at home and grinding forever on horrid books. Didn't Miss Williams think so?

Miss Williams only smiled. She knew how all his life he had loved "those horrid books," preferring them to pleasure, recreation, almost to daily bread; how he had lived on the hope that one day he—born only a farmer's son—might do something, write something. "I also am of Arcadia." He might have done it or not—the genius may or may not have been there; but the ambition certainly was. Could he have thrown it all aside? And Why?



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Not for mere love of money; she knew him too well for that. He was a thorough book-worm, simple in all his tastes and habits—simple almost to penuriousness; but it was a penuriousness born of hard fortunes, and he never allowed it to affect any body but himself. Still, there was no doubt he did not care for money, or luxury, or worldly position—any of the things that lesser men count large enough to work and struggle and die for. To give up the pursuits he loved, deliberately to choose others, to change his whole life thus, and expatriate himself, as it were, for years—perhaps for always—why did he do it, or for whom?

Was it for a woman? Was it for her? If ever, in those long empty days and wakeful nights, this last thought entered Fortune's mind, she stifled it as something which, once to have fully believed and then disbelieved would have killed her.

That she should have done the like for him—that or any thing else involving any amount of heroism or self-sacrifice—well, it was natural, right; but that he should do it for her? That he should change his whole purpose of life that he might be able to marry quickly, to shelter in his bosom a poor girl who was not able to fight the world as a man could, the thing—not so very impossible, after all—seemed to her almost incredible! And yet (I am telling a mere love story, remember—a foolish, innocent love story, without apologizing for either the folly or the innocence) sometimes she was so far “left to herself,” as the Scotch say, that she did believe it: in the still twilights, in the wakeful nights, in the one solitary half hour of intense relief, when, all her boys being safe in bed, she rushed out into the garden under the silent stars to sob, to moan, to speak out loud words which nobody could possibly hear.

“He is going away, and I shall never see him again. And I love him better than any thing in all this world. I couldn't help it—he couldn't help it. But, oh! It's hard—hard!”

And then, altogether breaking down, she would begin to cry like a child. She missed him so, even this week, after having for weeks and months been with him every day; but it was less like a girl missing her lover—who was, after all, not her lover—than a child mourning helplessly for the familiar voice, the guiding, helpful hand. With all the rest of the world Fortune Williams was an independent, energetic woman, self-contained, brave, and strong, as a solitary governess had need to be; but beside Robert Roy she felt like a child, and she cried for him like a child,

“And with no language but a cry.”

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So the week ended and Sunday came, kept at Mrs. Dalziel's like the Scotch Sundays of twenty years ago. No visitor ever entered the house, wherein all the meals were cold and the blinds drawn down, as if for a funeral. The family went to church for the entire day, St. Andrews being too far off for any return home "between sermons." Usually one servant was left in charge, turn and turn about; but this Sunday Mrs. Dalziel, having put the governess in the nurse's place beside the ailing child, thought shrewdly she might as well put her in the servant's place too, and let her take charge of the kitchen fire as well as of little David. Being English, Miss Williams was not so exact about "ordinances" as a Scotch woman would have been; so Mrs. Dalziel had no hesitation in asking her to remain at home alone the whole day in charge of her pupil.

Thus faded, Fortune thought, her last hope of seeing Robert Roy again, either at church—where he usually sat in the Dalziel pew, by the old lady's request, to make the boys "behave"—or walking down the street, where he sometimes took the two eldest to eat their "piece" at his lodgings. All was now ended; yet on the hope—or dread—of this last Sunday she had hung, she now felt with what intensity, till it was gone.

Fortune was the kind of woman who, were it given her to fight, could fight to the death, against fate or circumstances; but when her part was simply passive, she could also endure. Not, as some do, with angry grief or futile resistance, but with a quiet patience so complete that only a very quick eye would have found out she was suffering at all.

Little David did not, certainly. When hour after hour, she sat by his sofa, interesting him as best she could in the dull "good" books which alone were allowed of Sundays, and then passing into word-of-mouth stories—the beautiful Bible stories over which her own voice trembled while she told them—Ruth, with her piteous cry, "Whither thou goest, I will go; where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried;" Jonathan, whose soul "clave to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul"—all these histories of passionate fidelity and agonized parting—for every sort of love is essentially the same—how they went to her heart.

Oh, the awful quietness of that Sunday, that Sabbath which was not rest, in which the hours crawled on in sunshiny stillness, neither voices nor steps nor sounds of any kind breaking the death-like hush of everything. At length the boy fell asleep; and then Fortune seemed to wake up for the first time to the full consciousness of what was and what was about to be.

All of a sudden she heard steps on the gravel below; then the hall bell rang through the silent house. She knew who it was even before she opened the door and saw him standing there.

"May I come in? They told me you were keeping house alone, and I said I should just walk over to bid you and Davie good-by."



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Roy's manner was grave and matter-of-fact—a little constrained, perhaps, but not much—and he looked so exceedingly pale and tired that; without any hesitation, she took him into the school-room, where they were sitting, and gave him the arm-chair by Davie's sofa.

“Yes, I own to being rather overdone; I have had so much to arrange, for I must leave here tomorrow, as I think you know.”

“The boys told me.”

“I thought they would. I should have done it myself, but every day I hoped to see you. It was this fellow's fault, I suppose,” patting Davie's head. “He seems quite well now, and as jolly as possible. You don't know what it is to say ‘Good-by,’ David, my son.” Mr. Roy, who always got on well with children, had a trick of calling his younger pupils “My Son.”

“Why do you say ‘good-by’ at all, then!” asked the child, a mischievous but winning young scamp of six or seven, who had as many tricks as a monkey or a magpie. In fact, in chattering and hiding things he was nearly as bad as a magpie, and the torment of his governess's life; yet she was fond of him. “Why do you bid us good-by, Mr. Roy? Why don't you stay always with Miss Williams and me?”

“I wish to God I could.”

She heard that, heard it distinctly, though it was spoken beneath his breath; and she felt the look, turned for one moment upon her as she stood by the window. She never forgot either—never, as long as she lived. Some words, some looks, can deceive, perhaps quite unconsciously, by being either more demonstrative than was meant, or the exaggeration of coldness to hide its opposite; but sometimes a glance, a tone, betrays, or rather reveals, the real truth in a manner that nothing afterward can ever falsify. For one instant, one instant only, Fortune felt sure, quite sure, that in some way or other she was very dear to Robert Roy. If the next minute he had taken her into his arms, and said or looked the words which, to an earnest-minded, sincere man like him, constitute a pledge for life, never to be disannulled or denied, she could have hardly have felt more completely his own.

But he did not say them; he said nothing at all; sat leaning his head on his hand, with an expression so weary, so sad, that all the coaxing ways of little Davie could hardly win from him more than a faint smile. He looked so old, too, and he was but just thirty. Only thirty—only twenty-five; and yet these two were bearing, seemed to have borne for years, the burden of life, feeling all its hardships and none of its sweetnesses. Would things ever change? Would he have the courage (it was his part, not hers) to make them change, at least in one way, by bringing about that heart-union which to all pure and true natures is consolation for every human woe?

“I wonder,” he said, sitting down and taking David on his knee—“I wonder if it is best to bear things one’s self, or to let another share the burden?”

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Easily—oh, how easily!—could Fortune have answered this—have told him that, whether he wished it or not, two did really bear his burdens, and perhaps the one who bore it secretly and silently had not the lightest share. But she did not speak: it was not possible.

“How shall I hear of you Miss Williams?” he said, after a long silence. “You are not likely to leave the Dalziel family?”

“No,” she answered; “and if I did, I could always be heard of, the Dalziels are so well known hereabouts. Still, a poor wandering governess easily drops out of people’s memory.”

“And a poor wandering tutor too. But I am not a tutor any more, and I hope I shall not be poor long. Friends can not lose one another; such friends as you and I have been. I will take care we shall not do it, that is, if—but never mind that. You have been very good to me, and I have often bothered you very much, I fear. You will be almost glad to get rid of me.”

She might have turned upon him eyes swimming with tears—woman’s tears—that engine of power which they say no man can ever resist; but I think, if so, a woman like Fortune would have scorned to use it. Those poor weary eyes, which could weep oceans alone under the stars, were perfectly dry now—dry and fastened on the ground, as she replied, in a grave steady voice,

“You do not believe that, else you would never have said it.”

Her composure must have surprised him, for he looked suddenly up, then begged her pardon. “I did not hurt you, surely? We must not part with the least shadow of unkindness between us.”

“No.” She offered her hand, and he took it—gently, affectionately, but only affectionately. The one step beyond affection, which leads into another world, another life, he seemed determined not to pass.

For at least half an hour he sat there with David on his knee, or rising up restlessly to pace the room with David on his shoulder; but apparently not desiring the child’s absence, rather wishing to keep him as a sort of barrier. Against what?—himself? And so minute after minute slipped by; and Miss Williams, sitting in her place by the window, already saw, dotting the Links, group after group of the afternoon church-goers wandering quietly home—so quietly, so happily, fathers and mothers and children, companions and friends—for whom was no parting and no pain.

Mr. Roy suddenly took out his watch. “I must go now; I see I have spent all but my last five minutes. Good-by, David, my lad; you’ll be a big man, maybe, when I see you



again. Miss Williams” (standing before her with an expression on his face such as she had never seen before), “before I go there was a question I had determined to ask you—a purely ethical question which a friend of mine has been putting to me, and I could not answer; that is, I could from the man’s side, the worldly side. A woman might think differently.”



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“What is it?”

“Simply this. If a man has not a half-penny, ought he to ask a woman to share it? Rather an Irish way of putting the matter,” with a laugh, not without bitterness, “but you understand. Ought he not to wait till he has at least something to offer besides himself: Is it not mean, selfish, cowardly, to bind a woman to all the chances or mischances of his lot, instead of fighting it out alone like a man: My friend thinks so, and I—I agree with him.”

“Then why did you ask me.”

The words, though low and clear, were cold and sharp—sharp with almost unbearable pain. Every atom of pride in her was roused. Whether he loved her and would not tell her so, or loved some other woman and wished her know it, it was all the same. He was evidently determined to go away free and leave her free; and perhaps many sensible men or women would say he was right in so doing.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, almost humbly. “I ought not to have spoken of this at all. I ought just to have said ‘Good-by,’ and nothing more.” And he took her hand.

There was on it one ring, not very valuable, but she always liked to wear it, as it had belonged to her mother. Robert Roy drew it off, and put it deliberately into his pocket.

“Give me this; you shall have it back again when I am dead, or you are married, whichever happens first. Do you understand?”

Putting David aside (indeed, he seemed for the first time to forget the boy’s presence), he took her by the two hands and looked down into her face. Apparently he read something there, something which startled him, almost shocked him.

Irresolute, alas! Too late; for just then all the three Dalziel boys rushed into the house and the school-room, followed by their grandmother. The old lady looked a good deal surprised, perhaps a little displeased, fro on to the other.

Mr. Roy perceived it, and recovered himself in an instant, letting go Fortune’s hands and placing himself in front of her, between her and Mrs. Dalziel. Long afterward she remembered that trivial act—remembered it with the tender gratitude of the protected toward the protector, if nothing more.

“You see, I came, as I told you I should, if possible, to bid Miss Williams good-by, and wee Davie. They both kindly admitted me, and we have had half an hour’s merry chat, have we not Davie? Now, my man, good-by.” He took up the little fellow and kissed him, and then extended his hand. “Good-by, Miss Williams. I hope your little pupils will value you as you deserve.”



Then, with a courteous and formal farewell to the old lady, and a most uproarious one from the boys, he went to the door, but turned round, saying to the eldest boy, distinctly and clearly—though she was at the farther end of the room, she heard, and was sure he meant her to hear every word:

“By-the-by, Archy, there is something I was about to explain to Miss Williams. Tell her I will write it. She is quite sure to have a letter from me tomorrow—no, on Tuesday morning.”

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And so he went away, bravely and cheerily, the boys accompanying him to the gate, and shouting and waving their hats to him as he crossed the Links, until their grandmother reprovingly suggested that it was Sunday.

“But Mr. Roy does not go off to India every Sunday. Hurrah! I wish we were all going too. Three cheers for Mr. Roy.” “Mr. Roy is a very fine fellow, and I hope he will do well,” said Mrs. Dalziel, touched by their enthusiasm; also by some old memories, for, like many St. Andrews folk, she was strongly linked with India, and had sent off one-half of her numerous family to live or die there. There was something like a tear in her old eyes, though not for the young tutor; but it effectually kept her from either looking at or thinking of the governess. And she forgot them both immediately. They were merely the tutor and the governess.

As for the boys, they chattered vehemently all tea-time about Mr. Roy, and their envy of the “jolly” life he was going to; then their minds turned to their own affairs, and there was silence.

The kind of silence, most of us know it, when any one belonging to a household, or very familiar there, goes away on a long indefinite absence. At first there is little consciousness of absence at all; we are so constantly expecting the door to be opened for the customary presence that we scarcely even miss the known voice, or face, or hand. By-and-by, however, we do miss it, and there comes a general, loud, shallow lamentation which soon cures itself, and implies an easy and comfortable forgetfulness before long. Except with some, or possibly only one, who is, most likely the one who has never been heard to utter a word of regret, or seen to shed a single tear.

Miss Williams, now left sole mistress in the school room, gave her lessons as usual there that Monday morning, and walked with all four boys on the Links all afternoon. It was a very bright day, as beautiful as Sunday had been, and they communicated to her the interesting facts, learned at golfing that morning, that Mr. Roy and his portmanteau had been seen at Leuchars on the way to Burntisland, and he would likely have a good crossing, as the sea was very calm. There had lately been some equinoctial gales, which had interested the boys amazingly, and they calculated with ingenious pertinacity whether such gales were likely to occur again when Mr. Roy was in the Bay of Biscay, and, if his ship were wrecked, what he would be supposed to do. They were quite sure that he would conduct himself with great heroism, perhaps escape on a single plank, or a raft made by his own hands, and they consulted Miss Williams, who of course was peripatetic cyclopedia of all scholastic information, as to which port in France or Spain he was likely to be drifted to, supposing this exciting event did happen.

She answered their questions with her usual ready kindness. She felt like a person in a dream, yet a not unhappy dream, for she still heard the voice, still felt the clasp of the strong, tender, sustaining hands. And tomorrow would be Tuesday.

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Tuesday was a wet morning. The bright days were done. Soon after dawn Fortune had woke up and watched the sunrise, till a chill fog crept over the sea and blotted it out; then gradually blotted out the land also, the Links, the town, every thing. A regular St. Andrews "haar;" and St. Andrews people know what that is. Miss Williams had seen it once or twice before, but never so bad as this—blighting, penetrating, and so dense that you could hardly see your hand before you.

But Fortune scarcely felt it. She said to herself, "Today is Tuesday," which meant nothing to any one else, every thing to her. For she knew the absolute faithfulness, the careful accuracy, in great things and small, with which she had to do. If Robert Roy said, "I will write on such a day," he was as sure to write as that the day would dawn; that is, so far as his own will went; and will, not circumstance, is the strongest agent in this world.

Therefore she waited quietly for the postman's horn. It sounded at last.

"I'll go," cried Archy. "Just look at the haar! I shall have to grope my way to the gate."

He came back, after what seemed an almost endless time, rubbing his head and declaring he had nearly blinded himself by running right into the laurel bush.

"I couldn't see for the fog. I only hope I've left none of the letters behind. No, no; all right. Such a lot! It's the Indian mail. There's for you, and you, boys." He dealt them out with a merry, careless hand.

There was no letter for Miss Williams—a circumstance so usual that nobody noticed it or her, as she sat silent in her corner, while the children read noisily and gaily the letters from their far-away parents.

Her letter—what had befallen it? Had he forgotten to write? But Robert Roy never forgot any thing. Nor did he delay any thing that he could possibly do at the time he promised. He was one of the very few people in this world who in small things as in great are absolutely reliable. It seemed so impossible to believe he had not written, when he said he would, that as a last hope, she stole out with a plaid over her head and crept through the sidewalks of the garden, almost groping her way through the fog, and, like Archy, stumbling over the low boughs of the laurel bush to the letter-box it held. Her trembling hands felt in every corner, but no letter was there.

She went wearily back; weary at heart, but patient still. A love like hers, self-existent and sufficient to itself, is very patient, quite unlike the other and more common form of the passion; not love, but a diseased craving to be loved, which causes a thousand imaginary miseries and wrongs. Sharp was her pain, poor girl; but she was not angry, and after her first stab of disappointment her courage rose. All was well with him; he

had been seen cheerily starting for Edinburgh; and her own temporary suffering was a comparatively a small thing. It could not last: the letter would come tomorrow.

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But it did not, nor the next day, nor the next. On the fourth day her heart felt like to break.

I think, of all pains not mortal, few are worse than this small silent agony of waiting for the post; letting all the day's hope climax upon a single minute, which passes by, and the hope with it, and then comes another day of dumb endurance, if not despair. This even with ordinary letters upon which any thing of moment depends. With others, such as this letter of Robert Roy's—let us not speak of it. Some may imagine, others may have known, a similar suspense. They will understand why, long years afterward, Fortune Williams was heard to say, with a quiver of the lip that could have told its bitter tale, "No; when I have a letter to write, I never put off writing it for single day."

As these days wore on—these cruel days, never remembered without a shiver of pain, and of wonder that she could have lived through them at all—the whole fabric of reasons, arguments, excuses, that she had built up, for him and herself, gradually crumbled away. Had she altogether misapprehended the purport of his promised letter? Was it just some ordinary note, about her boys and their studies perhaps, which, after all, he had not thought it worthwhile to write? Yet surely it was worth while, if only to send a kindly and courteous farewell to a friend, after so close an intimacy and in face of so indefinite a separation.

A friend? Only a friend? Words may deceive, eyes seldom can. And there had been love in his eyes. Not mere liking, but actual love. She had seen it, felt it, with that almost unerring instinct that women have, whether they return the love or not. In the latter case, they seldom doubt it; in the former, they often do.

"Could I have been mistaken?" she thought, with a burning pang of shame. "Oh, why did he not speak—just one word? After that, I could have borne any thing."

But he had not spoken, had not written. He had let himself drop out of her life as completely as a falling star drops out of the sky, a ship sinks down in mid-ocean, or—any other poetical simile, used under such circumstances by romantic people.

Fortune Williams was not romantic; at least, what romance was in her lay deep down, and came out in act rather than word. She neither wept nor raved nor cultivated any external signs of a breaking heart. A little paler she grew, a little quieter, but nobody observed this: indeed, it came to be one of her deepest causes of thankfulness that there was nobody to observe any thing—that she had no living soul belonging to her, neither father, mother, brother, nor sister, to pity her or to blame him; since to think him either blamable or blamed would have been the sharpest torture she could have known.



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She was saved that and some few other things by being only a governess, instead of one of Fate's cherished darlings, nestled in a family home. She had no time to grieve, except in the dead of night, when "the rain was on the roof." It so happened that, after the haar, there set in a season of continuous, sullen, depressing rain. But at night-time, and for the ten minutes between post hour and lesson hour—which she generally passed in her own room—if her mother, who died when she was ten-years old, could have seen her, she would have said, "My poor child."

Robert Roy had once involuntarily called her so, when by accident one of her rough boys hurt her hand, and he himself bound it up, with the indescribable tenderness which the strong only know how to show or feel. Well she remembered this; indeed, almost every thing he had said or done came back upon her now—vividly, as we recall the words and looks of the dead—mingled with such a hungering pain, such a cruel "miss" of him, daily and hourly, his companionship, help, counsel, every thing she had lacked all her life, and never found but with him and from him. And he was gone, had broken his promise, had left her without a single farewell word.

That he had cared for her, in some sort of way, she was certain; for he was one of those who never say a word too large—nay, he usually said much less than he felt. Whatever he had felt for her—whether friendship, affection, love—must have been true. There was in his nature intense reserve, but no falseness, no insincerity, not an atom of pretense of any kind.

If he did not love her, why not tell her so? What was there to hinder him? Nothing, except that strange notion of the "dishonorableness" of asking a woman's love when one has nothing but love to give her in return. This, even, he had seemed at the last to have set aside, as if he could not go away without speaking. And yet he did it.

Perhaps he thought she did not care for him? He had once said a man ought to feel quite sure of a woman before he asked her. Also, that he should never ask twice, since, if she did not know her own mind then, she never would know it, and such a woman was the worst possible bargain a man could make in marriage.

Not know her own mind! Alas, poor soul, Fortune knew it only too well. In that dreadful fortnight it was "borne in upon her," as pious people say, that though she felt kindly to all human beings, the one human being who was necessary to her—without whom her life might be busy, indeed, and useful, but never perfect, an endurance instead of joy—was this young man, as solitary as herself, as poor, as hard-working; good, gentle, brave Robert Roy.

Oh why had they not come together, heart to heart—just they two, so alone in the world—and ever after belonged to one another, even though it had been years and years before they were married?



“If only he had love me, and told me so!” was her bitter cry. “I could have waited ever so hardly, and quite alone, if only I might have had a right to him, and been his comfort, as he was mine. But now—now—”



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Yet still she waited, looking forward daily to that dreadful post hour; and when it had gone by, nerving herself to endure until tomorrow. At last hope, slowly dying, was killed outright.

One day at tea-time the boys blurted out, with happy carelessness, their short-lived regrets for him being quite over, the news that Mr. Roy had sailed.

“Not for Calcutta, but Shanghai, a much longer voyage. He can’t be heard of for a year at least, and it will be many years before he comes back. I wonder if he will come back rich. They say he will: quite a nabob, perhaps, and take a place in the Highlands, and invite us all—you too, Miss Williams. I once asked him, and he said, ‘Of course.’ Stop, you are pouring my tea over into the saucer.”

This was the only error she made, but went on filling the cups with a steady hand, smiling and speaking mechanically, as people can sometimes. When the tea was quite over, she slipped away into her room, and was missing for a long time.

So all was over. No more waiting for that vague “something to happen.” Nothing could happen now. He was far away across the seas, and she must just go back to her old monotonous life, as if it had never been any different—as if she had never seen his face nor heard his voice, never known the blessing of his companionship, friendship, love, whatever it was, or whatever he had meant it to be. No, he could not have loved her; or to have gone away would have been—she did not realize whether right or wrong—but simply impossible.

Once, wearying herself with helpless conjectures, a thought, sudden and sharp as steel, went through her heart. He was nearly thirty; few lives are thus long without some sort of love in them. Perhaps he was already bound to some other woman, and finding himself drifting into too pleasant intimacy with herself, wished to draw back in time. Such things had happened, sometimes almost blamelessly, though most miserably to all parties. But with him it was not likely to happen. He was too clear sighted, strong, and honest. He would never “drift” into anything. What he did would be done with a calm deliberate will, incapable of the slightest deception either toward others or himself. Besides, he had at different times told her the whole story of his life, and there was no love in it; only work, hard work, poverty, courage, and endurance, like her own.

“No, he could never have deceived me, neither me nor any one else,” she often said to herself, almost joyfully, though the tears were running down. “What ever it was, it was not that. I am glad—glad. I had far rather believe he never loved me than that he had been false to another woman for my sake. And I believe in him still; I shall always believe in him. He is perfectly good, perfectly true. And so it does not much matter about me.”



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I am afraid those young ladies who like plenty of lovers, who expect to be adored, and are vexed when they are not adored, and most nobly indignant when forsaken, will think very meanly of my poor Fortune Williams. They may console themselves by thinking she was not a young lady at all—only a woman. Such women are not too common, but they exist occasionally. And they bear their cross and dree their weird (i.e., endure); but their lot, at any rate, only concerns themselves, and has one advantage, that it in no way injures the happiness of other people.

Humble as she was, she had her pride. If she wept, it was out of sight. If she wished herself dead, and a happy ghost, that by any means she might get near him, know where he was, and what he was doing, these dreams came only when her work was done, her boys asleep. Day never betrayed the secrets of the night. She set to work every morning at her daily labors with a dogged persistence, never allowing herself a minute's idleness wherein to sit down and mourn. And when, despite her will, she could not conquer the fits of nervous irritability that came over her at times—when the children's innocent voices used to pierce her like needles, and their incessant questions and perpetual company were almost more than she could bear—still, even then, all she did was to run away and hide herself for a little, coming back with a pleasant face and a smooth temper. Why should she scold them, poor lambs? They were all she had to love, or that loved her. And they did love her, with all their boyish hearts.

One day, however—the day before they all left St. Andrews for England, the two elder to go to school, and the younger ones to return with her to their maternal grand-mother in London—David said something which wounded her, vexed her, made her almost thankful to be going away.

She was standing by the laurel bush, which somehow had for her a strange fascination, and her hand was on the letter-box which the boys and Mr. Roy had made. There was a childish pleasure in touching it or any thing he had touched.

“I hope grandmamma won't take away that box,” said Archy. “She ought to keep it in memory of us and Mr. Roy. How cleverly he made it! Wasn't he clever now, Miss Williams?”

“Yes,” she answered and no more.

“I've got a better letter-box than yours,” said little Davie, mysteriously. “Shall I show it to you, Miss Williams? And perhaps,” with a knowing look—the mischievous lad! and yet he was more loving and lovable than all the rest, Mr. Roy's favorite, and hers—“perhaps you might even find a letter in it. Cook says she has seen you many a time watching for a letter from your sweetheart. Who is he?”



“I have none. Tell cook she should not talk such nonsense to little boys,” said the governess, gravely. But she felt hot from head to foot, and turning, walked slowly indoors. She did not go near the laurel bush again.



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After that, she was almost glad to get away, among strange people and strange places, where Robert Roy's name had never been heard. The familiar places—hallowed as no other spot in this world, could ever be—passed out of sight, and in another week her six months' happy life at St. Andrews had vanished, "like a dream when one awaketh."

Had she awaked? Or was her daily, outside life to be henceforth the dream, and this the reality?

Chapter 3.

What is a "wrecked" life? One which the waves of inexorable fate have beaten to pieces, or one that, like an unseaworthy ship, is ready to go down in any waters? What most destroy us? the things we might well blame ourselves for, only we seldom do, our follies, blunders, errors, not counting actual sins? or the things for which we can blame nobody but Providence—if we dared—such as our losses and griefs, our sicknesses of body and mind, all those afflictions which we call "the visitation of God?" Ay, and so they are, but not sent in wrath, or for ultimate evil. No amount of sorrow need make any human life harmful to man or unholy before God, as a discontented, unhappy life must needs be unholy in the sight of Him who in the mysterious economy of the universe seems to have one absolute law—He wastes nothing. He modifies, transmutes, substitutes, re-applies material to new uses; but apparently by Him nothing is ever really lost, nothing thrown away.

Therefore, I incline to believe, when I hear people talking of a "wrecked" existence, that whosoever is to blame, it is not Providence.

Nobody could have applied the term to Fortune Williams, looking at her as she sat in the drawing-room window of a house at Brighton, just where the gray of the Esplanade meets the green of the Downs—a ladies' boarding-school, where she had in her charge two pupils, left behind for the holidays, while the mistress took a few weeks' repose. She sat watching the sea, which was very beautiful, as even the Brighton sea can be sometimes. Her eyes were soft and calm; her hands were folded on her black silk dress, her pretty little tender-looking hands, unringed, for she was still Miss Williams, still a governess.

But even at thirty-five—she had now reached that age, nay, passed it—she was not what you would call "old-maidish." Perhaps because the motherly instinct, naturally very strong in her, had developed more and more. She was one of those governesses—the only sort who ought ever to attempt to be governesses—who really love children, ay, despite their naughtinesses and mischievousnesses and worrying ways; who feel that, after all, these little ones are "of the kingdom of heaven," and that the task of educating them for that kingdom somehow often brings us nearer to it ourselves.



Her heart, always tender to children, had gone out to them more and more every year, especially after that fatal year when a man took it and broke it. No, not broke it, but threw it carelessly away, wounding it so sorely that it never could be quite itself again. But it was a true and warm and womanly heart still.

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She had never heard of him—Robert Roy—never once, in any way, since that Sunday afternoon when he said, “I will write tomorrow,” and did not write, but let her drop from him altogether like a worthless thing. Cruel, somewhat, even to a mere acquaintance—but to her?

Well, all was past and gone, and the tide of years had flowed over it. Whatever it was, a mistake, a misfortune, or a wrong, nobody knew any thing about it. And the wound even was healed, in a sort of a way, and chiefly by the unconscious hands of these little “ministering angels,” who were angels that never hurt her, except by blotting their copy-books or not learning their lessons.

I know it may sound a ridiculous thing that a forlorn governess should be comforted for a lost love by the love of children; but it is true to nature. Women’s lives have successive phases, each following the other in natural gradation—maidenhood, wifehood, motherhood: in not one of which, ordinarily, we regret the one before it, to which it is nevertheless impossible to go back. But Fortune’s life had had none of these, excepting, perhaps, her one six months’ dream of love and spring. That being over, she fell back upon autumn days and autumn pleasures—which are very real pleasures, after all.

As she sat with the two little girls leaning against her lap—they were Indian children, unaccustomed to tenderness, and had already grown very fond of her—there was a look in her face, not at all like an ancient maiden or a governess, but almost motherly. You see the like in the faces of the Virgin Mary, as the old monks used to paint her, quaint, and not always lovely, but never common or coarse, and spiritualized by a look of mingled tenderness and sorrow into something beyond all beauty.

This woman’s face had it, so that people who had known Miss Williams as a girl were astonished to find her, as a middle-aged woman, grown “so good-looking.” To which one of her pupils once answered, naively, “It is because she looks so good.”

But this was after ten years and more. Of the first half of those years the less that is said, the better. She did not live; she merely endured life. Monotony without, a constant aching within—a restless gnawing want, a perpetual expectation, half hope, half fear; no human being could bear all this without being the worse for it, or the better. But the betterness came afterward, not first.

Sometimes her cravings to hear the smallest tidings of him, only if he were alive or dead, grew into such an agony that, had it not been for her entire helplessness in the matter, she might have tried some means of gaining information. But from his sudden change of plans, she was ignorant even of the name of the ship he had sailed by, the firm he had gone to. She could do absolutely nothing, and learn nothing. Here was something like the “Affliction of Margaret,” that poem of Wordsworth’s which, when her



little pupils recited it—as they often did—made her ready to sob out loud from the pang of its piteous reality:



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“I look for ghosts, but none will force
Their way to me: 'tis falsely said
That there was ever intercourse
Betwixt the living and the dead:
For surely then I should have sight
Of him I wait for day and night
With love and longings infinite.”

Still, in the depth of her heart she did not believe Robert Roy was dead; for her finger was still empty of that ring—her mother's ring—which he had drawn off, promising its return “when he was dead or she was married.” This implied that he never meant to lose sight of her. Nor, indeed, had he wished it, would it have been very difficult to find her, these ten years having been spent entirely in one place, an obscure village in the south of England, where she had lived as governess—first in the squire's family, then the rector's.

From the Dalziel family, where, as she had said to Mr. Roy, she hoped to remain for years, she had drifted away almost immediately; within a few months. At Christmas old Mrs. Dalziel had suddenly died; her son had returned home, sent his four boys to school in Germany, and gone back again to India. There was now, for the first time for half a century, not a single Dalziel left in St. Andrews.

But though all ties were broken connecting her with the dear old city, her boys still wrote to her now and then, and she to them, with a persistency for which her conscience smote her sometimes, knowing it was not wholly for their sakes. But they had never been near her, and she had little expectation of seeing any of them ever again, since by this time she had lived long enough to find out how easily people do drift asunder, and lose all clue to one another, unless some strong firm will or unconquerable habit of fidelity exists on one side or the other.

Since the Dalziels she had only lived in the two families before named, and had been lately driven from the last one by a catastrophe, if it may be called so, which had been the bitterest drop in her cup since the time she left St. Andrews.

The rector—a widower, and a feeble, gentle invalid, to whom naturally she had been kind and tender, regarding him with much the same sort of motherly feeling as she had regarded his children—suddenly asked her to become their mother in reality.

It was a great shock and a pang: almost a temptation; for they all loved her, and wished to keep her. She would have been such a blessing, such a brightness, in that dreary home. And to a woman no longer young, who had seen her youth pass without any brightness in it, God knows what an allurements it is to feel she has still the power of brightening other lives. If Fortune had yielded—if she had said yes, and married the rector—it would have been hardly wonderful, scarcely blamable. Nor would it have

been the first time that a good, conscientious, tender-hearted woman has married a man for pure tenderness.



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But she did not do it; not even when they clung around her—those forlorn, half-educated, but affectionate girls—entreating her to “marry papa, and make us all happy.” She could not—how could she? She felt very kindly to him. He had her sincere respect, almost affection; but when she looked into her own heart, she found there was not in it one atom of love, never had been, for any man alive except Robert Roy. While he was unmarried, for her to marry would be impossible.

And so she had the wisdom and courage to say to herself, and to them all, “This can not be;” to put aside the cup of attainable happiness, which might never have proved real happiness, because founded on an insincerity.

But the pain this cost was so great, the wrench of parting from her poor girls so cruel, that after it Miss Williams had a sharp illness, the first serious illness of her life. She struggled through it, quietly and alone, in one of those excellent “Governesses’ Homes,” where every body was very kind to her—some more than kind, affectionate. It was strange, she often thought, what an endless amount of affection followed her wherever she went. She was by no means one of those women who go about the world moaning that nobody loves them. Every body loved her, and she knew it—every body whose love was worth having—except Robert Roy.

Still her mind never changed; not even when, in the weakness of illness, there would come vague dreams of that peaceful rectory, with its quiet rooms and green garden; of the gentle, kindly hearted father, and the two loving girls whom she could have made so happy, and perhaps won happiness herself in the doing of it.

“I am a great fool, some people would say,” thought she, with a sad smile; “perhaps rather worse. Perhaps I am acting absolutely wrong in throwing away my chance of doing good. But I can not help it—I can not help it.”

So she kept to her resolution, writing the occasional notes she had promised to write to her poor forsaken girls, without saying a word of her illness; and when she grew better, though not strong enough to undertake a new situation, finding her money slipping away—though, with her good salaries and small wants, she was not poor, and had already begun to lay up for a lonely old age—she accepted this temporary home at Miss Maclachlan’s, at Brighton. Was it—so strange are the under-currents which guide one’s outward life—was it because she had found a curious charm in the old lady’s Scotch tongue, unheard for years? That the two little pupils were Indian children, and that the house was at the seaside?—and she had never seen the sea since she left St. Andrews.

It was going back to the days of her youth to sit, as now, watching the sunshine glitter on the far-away ocean. The very smell of the sea-weed, the lap-lap of the little waves, brought back old recollections so vividly—old thoughts, some bitter, some sweet, but the sweetness generally over-coming the bitterness.

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“I have had all the joy that the world could bestow;
I have lived—I have loved.”

So sings the poet, and truly. Though to this woman love had brought not joy, but sorrow, still she had loved, and it had been the main-stay and stronghold of her life, even though to outsiders it might have appeared little better than a delusion, a dream. Once, and by one only, her whole nature had been drawn out, her ideal of moral right entirely satisfied. And nothing had ever shattered this ideal. She clung to it, as we cling to the memory of our dead children, who are children forever.

With a passionate fidelity she remembered all Robert Roy's goodness, his rare and noble qualities, resolutely shutting her eyes to what she might have judged severely, had it happened to another person—his total, unexplained, and inexplicable desertion of herself. It was utterly irreconcilable with all she had ever known of him; and being powerless to unravel it, she left it, just as we have to leave many a mystery in heaven and earth, with the humble cry, “I can not understand—I love.”

She loved him, that was all; and sometimes even yet, across that desert of despair, stretching before and behind her, came a wild hope, almost a conviction, that she would meet him again, somewhere, somehow. This day, even, when, after an hour's delicious idleness, she roused herself to take her little girls down to the beach, and sat on the shingle while they played, the sound and sights of the sea brought old times so vividly back that she could almost have fancied coming behind her the familiar step, the pleasant voice, as when Mr. Roy and his boys used to overtake her on the St. Andrews shore—Robert Roy, a young man, with his life all before him, as was hers. Now she was middle-aged, and he—he must be over forty by this time. How strange!

Stranger still that there had never occurred to her one possibility—that he “was not,” that God had taken him. But this her heart absolutely refused to accept. So long as he was in it, the world would never be quite empty to her. Afterward—But, as I said, there are some things which can not be faced and this was one of them.

All else she had faced long ago. She did not grieve now. As she walked with her children, listening to their endless talk with that patient sympathy which made all children love her, and which she often found was a better help to their education than dozens of lessons, there was on her face that peaceful expression which is the greatest preservative of youth, the greatest antidote to change. And so it was no wonder that a tall lad, passing and re-passing on the Esplanade with another youth, looked at her more than once with great curiosity, and advanced with hesitating politeness.

“I beg your pardon, ma'am, if I mistake; but you are so like a lady I once knew, and am now looking for. Are you Miss Williams?”



“My name is Williams, certainly; and you”—something in the curly light hair, the mischievous twinkle of the eye, struck her—“you can not be, it is scarcely possible—David Dalziel?”



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“But, I am, though,” cried the lad, shaking her hand as if he would shake it off. “And I call myself very clever to have remembered you, though I was such a little fellow when you left us, and I have only seen your photograph since. But you are not a bit altered—not one bit. And as I knew by your last letter to Archy that you were at Brighton, I thought I’d risk it and speak. Hurra! How very jolly!”

He had grown a handsome lad, the pretty wee Davie, an honest-looking lad too, apparently, and she was glad to see him. From the dignity of his eighteen years and five feet ten of height, he looked down upon the governess, and patronized her quite tenderly—dismissing his friend and walking home with her, telling her on the way all his affairs and that of his family with the volubility of little David Dalziel at St. Andrews.

“No, I’ve not forgotten St. Andrews one bit, though I was so small. I remember poor old grannie, and her cottage, and the garden, and the Links, and the golfing, and Mr. Roy. By-the-by, what has become of Mr. Roy?”

The suddenness of the question, nay, the very sound of a name totally silent for so many years, made Fortune’s heart throb till its beating was actual pain. Then came a sudden desperate hope, as she answered:

“I can not tell. I have never heard any thing of him. Have you?”

“No—yet, let me see. I think Archy once got a letter from him, a year or so after he went away; but we lost it somehow, and never answered it. We have never heard any thing since.”

Miss Williams sat down on one of the benches facing the sea, with a murmured excuse of being “tired.” One of her little girls crept beside her, stealing a hand in hers. She held it fast, her own shook so; but gradually she grew quite herself again. “I have been ill,” she explained, “and can not walk far. Let us sit down here a little. You were speaking about Mr. Roy, David?”

“Yes. What a good fellow he was! We called him Rob Roy, I remember, but only behind his back. He was strict, but he was a jolly old soul for all that. I believe I should know him again any day, as I did you. But perhaps he is dead; people die pretty fast abroad, and ten years is a long time, isn’t it?”

“A long time. And you never got any more letters?”

“No; or if they did come, they were lost, being directed probably to the care of poor old grannie, as ours was. We thought it so odd, after she was dead, you know.”

Thus the boy chattered on—his tongue had not shortened with his increasing inches—and every idle word sank down deep in his old governess’s heart.



Then it was only her whom Robert Roy had forsaken. He had written to his boys, probably would have gone on writing had they answered his letter. He was neither faithless nor forgetful. With an ingenuity that might have brought to any listener a smile or a tear, Miss Williams led the conversation round again till she could easily ask more concerning that one letter; but David, remembered little or nothing, except that it was dated from Shanghai, for his brothers had had a discussion whether Shanghai was in China or Japan. Then, boy-like, they had forgotten the whole matter.



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“Yes, by this time every body had forgotten him,” thought Fortune to herself, when having bidden David good-by at her door and arranged to meet him again—he was on a visit at Brighton before matriculating at Oxford next term—she sat down in own room, with a strangely bewildered feeling. “Mine, all mine,” she said, and her heart closed itself over him, her old friend at least, if nothing more, with a tenacity of tenderness as silent as it was strong.

From that day, though she saw, and was determined henceforward to see, as much as she could of young David Dalziel, she never once spoke to him of Mr. Roy.

Still, to have the lad coming about her was a pleasure, a fond link with the past, and to talk to him about his future was a pleasure too. He was the one of all the four—Mr. Roy always said so—who had “brains” enough to become a real student; and instead of following the others to India, he was to go to Oxford, and do his best there. His German education had left him few English friends. He was an affectionate, simple-hearted lad, and now that his mischievous days were done, was taking to thorough hard work. He attached himself to his old governess with an enthusiasm that a lad in his teens often conceives for a woman still young enough to be sympathetic, and intelligent enough to guide without ruling the errant fancy of that age. She, too, soon grew very fond of him. It made her strangely happy, this sudden rift of sunshine out of the never-forgotten heaven of her youth, now almost as far off as heaven itself.

I have said she never spoke to David about Mr. Roy, nor did she; but sometimes he spoke, and then she listened. It seemed to cheer her for hours, only to hear that name. She grew stronger, gayer, younger. Every body said how much good the sea was doing her, and so it was; but not exactly in the way people thought. The spell of silence upon her life had been broken, and though she knew all sensible persons would esteem her in this, as in that other matter, a great “fool,” still she could not stifle a vague hope that some time or other her blank life might change. Every little wave that swept in from the mysterious ocean, the ocean that lay between them two, seemed to carry a whispering message and lay it at her feet, “Wait and be patient, wait and be patient.”

She did wait, and the message came at last.

One day David Dalziel called, on one of his favorite daily rides, and threw a newspaper down at her door, where she was standing.

“An Indian paper my mother has just sent. There’s something in it that will interest you, and—”

His horse galloped off with the unfinished sentence; and supposing it was something concerning his family, she put the paper in her pocket to read at leisure while she sat on the beach. She had almost forgotten it, as she watched the waves, full of that pleasant idleness and dreamy peace so new in her life, and which the sound of the sea so often



brings to peaceful hearts, who have no dislike to its monotony, no dread of those solemn thoughts of infinitude, time and eternity, God and death and love, which it unconsciously gives, and which I think is the secret why some people say they have "such a horror of the sea-side."



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She had none; she loved it, for its sights and sounds were mixed up with all the happiness of her young days. She could have sat all this sunshiny morning on the beach doing absolutely nothing, had she not remembered David's newspaper; which, just to please him, she must look through. She did so, and in the corner, among the brief list of names in the obituary, she saw that of "Roy." Not himself, as she soon found, as soon as she could see to read, in the sudden blindness that came over her. Not himself. Only his child.

"On Christmas-day, at Shanghai, aged three and a half years, Isabella, the only and beloved daughter of Robert and Isabella Roy."

He was alive, then. That was her first thought, almost a joyful one, showing how deep had been her secret dread of the contrary. And he was married. His "only and beloved daughter?" Oh! how beloved she could well understand. Married, and a father; and his child was dead.

Many would think it strange (it would be in most women, but it was not in this woman) that the torrent of tears which burst forth, after her first few minutes of dry-eyed anguish, was less for herself, because he was married and he had lost him, than for him, because he had had a child and lost it—he who was so tender of heart, so fond of children. The thought of his grief brought such a consecration with it, that her grief—the grief most women might be expected to feel on reading suddenly in a newspaper that the man they loved was married to another—did not come. At least not at once. It did not burst upon her, as sorrow does sometimes, like a wild beast out of a jungle, slaying and devouring. She was not slain, not even stunned. After a few minutes it seemed to her as if it had happened long ago—as if she had always known it must happen, and was not astonished.

His "only and beloved daughter!" The words sung themselves in and out of her brain, to the murmur of the sea. How he must have loved the child! She could almost see him with the little one in his arms, or watching over her bed, or standing beside her small coffin. Three years and a half old! Then he must have been married a good while—long and long after she had gone on thinking of him as no righteous woman ever can go on thinking of another woman's husband.

One burning blush, one shiver from head to foot, one cry of piteous despair, which nobody heard but God—and she was not afraid of His hearing—and the struggle was over. She saw Robert Roy, with his child in his arms with his wife by his side, the same and yet a totally different man.

She, too, when she rose up, and tried to walk, tried to feel that it was the same sea, the same shore, the same earth and sky, was a totally different woman. Something was lost, something never to be retrieved on this side the grave, but also something was found.



“He is alive,” she said to herself, with the same strange joy; for now she knew where he was, and what had happened to him. The silence of all these years was broken, the dead had come to life again, and the lost, in a sense, was found.



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Fortune Williams rose up and walked, in more senses than one; went round to fetch her little girls, as she had promised, from that newly opened delight of children, the Brighton Aquarium; staid a little with them, admiring the fishes; and when she reached home, and found David Dalziel in the drawing-room, met him and thanked him for bringing her the newspaper. "I suppose it was on account of that obituary notice of Mr. Roy's child," said she, calmly naming the name now. "What a sad thing! But still I am glad to know he is alive and well. So will you be. Shall you write to him?"

"Well, I don't know," answered the lad, carelessly crumpling up the newspaper and throwing it on the fire. Miss Williams made a faint movement to snatch it out, then disguised the gesture in some way, and silently watched it burn. "I don't quite see the use of writing. He's a family man now, and must have forgotten all about his old friends. Don't you think so?"

"Perhaps; only he was not the sort of person easily to forget."

She could defend him now; she could speak of him, and did speak more than once afterward, when David referred to the matter. And then the lad quitted Brighton for Oxford, and she was left in her old loneliness.

A loneliness which I will not speak of. She herself never referred to that time. After it, she roused herself to begin her life anew in a fresh home, to work hard, not only for daily bread but for that humble independence which she was determined to win before the dark hour when the most helpful become helpless, and the most independent are driven to fall a piteous burden into the charitable hands of friends or strangers—a thing to her so terrible that to save herself from the possibility of it, she who had never leaned upon any body, never had any body to lean on, became her one almost morbid desire.

She had no dread of a solitary old age but an old age beholden to either public or private charity was to her intolerable; and she had now few years left her to work in—a governess's life wears women out very fast. She determined to begin to work again immediately, laying by as much as possible yearly against the days when she could work no more; consulted Miss Maclachlan, who was most kind; and then sought and was just about going to another situation, with the highest salary she had yet earned, when an utterly unexpected change altered every thing.

Chapter 4.

The fly was already at the door, and Miss Williams, with her small luggage, would in five minutes have departed, followed by the good wishes of all the household, from Miss Maclachlan's school to her new situation, when the postman passed and left a letter for her.



“I will put it in my pocket and read it in the train,” she said, with a slight change of color. For she recognized the handwriting of that good man who had loved her, and whom she could not love.



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“Better read it now. No time like the present,” observed Miss Maclachlan.

Miss Williams did so. As soon as she was fairly started and alone in the fly, she opened it, with hands slightly trembling, for she was touched by the persistence of the good rector, and his faithfulness to her, a poor governess, when he might have married, as they said in his neighborhood, “anybody.” He would never marry any body now—he was dying.

“I have come to feel how wrong I was,” he wrote, “in ever trying to change our happy relations together. I have suffered for this—so have we all. But it is now too late for regret. My time has come. Do not grieve yourself by imagining it has come the faster through any decision of yours, but by slow, inevitable disease, which the doctors have only lately discovered. Nothing could have saved me. Be satisfied that there is no cause for you to give yourself one moment’s pain.” (How she sobbed over those shaky lines, more even than over the newspaper lines which she had read that sun-shiny morning on the shore!) “Remember only that you made me very happy—me and all mine—for years; that I loved you, as even at my age a man can love; as I shall love you to the end, which can not be very far off now. Would you dislike coming to see me just once again? My girls will so very glad, and nobody knows any thing. Besides, what matter? I am dying. Come, if you can within a week or so; they tell me I may last thus long. And I want to consult with you about my children. Therefore I will not say good-by now, only good-night, and God bless you.”

But it was good-by, after all. Though she did not wait the week; indeed, she waited for nothing, considered nothing, except her gratitude to this good man—the only man who had loved her—and her affection for the two girls, who would soon be fatherless; though she sent a telegram from Brighton to say she was coming, and arrived within twenty-four hours, still—she came too late.

When she reached the village she heard that his sufferings were all over; and a few yards from his garden wall, in the shade of the church-yard lime-tree, the old sexton was busy re-opening, after fourteen years, the family grave, where he was to be laid beside his wife the day after to-morrow. His two daughters, sitting alone together in the melancholy house, heard Miss Williams enter, and ran to meet her. With a feeling of nearness and tenderness such as she had scarcely ever felt for any human being, she clasped them close, and let them weep their hearts out in her motherly arms.



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Thus the current of her whole life was changed; for when Mr. Moseley's will was opened, it was found that, besides leaving Miss Williams a handsome legacy, carefully explained as being given "in gratitude for her care of his children," he had chosen her as their guardian, until they came of age or married, entreating her to reside with them, and desiring them to pay her all the respect due to "a near and dear relative." The tenderness with which he had arranged every thing, down to the minutest points, for them and herself, even amidst all his bodily sufferings, and in face of the supreme hour—which he had met, his daughters said, with a marvelous calmness, even joy—touched Fortune as perhaps nothing had ever touched her in all her life before. When she stood with her two poor orphans beside their father's grave, and returned with them to the desolate house, vowing within herself to be too them, all but in name, the mother he had wished her to be, this sense of duty—the strange new duty which had suddenly come to fill her empty life—was so strong, that she forgot every thing else—even Robert Roy.

And for months afterward—months of anxious business, involving the leaving of the Rectory, and the taking of a temporary house in the village, until they could decide where finally to settle—Miss Williams had scarcely a moment or a thought to spare for any beyond the vivid present. Past and future faded away together, except so far as concerned her girls.

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," were words which had helped her through many a dark time. Now, with all her might, she did her motherly duty to the orphan girls; and as she did so, by-and-by she began strangely to enjoy it, and to find also not a little of motherly pride and pleasure in them. She had not time to think of herself at all, or of the great blow which had fallen, the great change which had come, rendering it impossible for her to let herself feel as she had used to feel, dream as she used to dream, for years and years past. That one pathetic line

"I darena think o' Jamie, for that wad be a sin," burned itself into her heart, and needed nothing more.

"My children! I must only love my children now," was her continual thought, and she believed she did so.

It was not until spring came, healing the girls' grief as naturally as it covered their father's grave with violets and primroses, and making them cling a little less to home and her, a little more to the returning pleasures of their youth, for they were two pretty girls, well-born, with tolerable fortunes, and likely to be much sought after—not until the spring days left her much alone, did Fortune's mind recur to an idea which had struck her once, and then been set aside—to write to Robert Roy. Why should she not? Just a few friendly lines, telling him how, after long years, she had seen his name in the papers; how sorry she was, and



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yet glad—glad to think he was alive and well, and married; how she sent all kindly wishes to his wife and himself, and so on. In short the sort of letter that any body might write or receive, whatever had been the previous link between them. And she wrote it on an April day, one of those first days of spring which make young hearts throb with a vague delight, a nameless hope; and older ones—but is there any age when hope is quite dead? I think not, even to those who know that the only spring that will ever come to them will dawn in the world everlasting.

When her girls, entering, offered to post her letter, and Miss Williams answered gently that she would rather post it herself, as it required a foreign stamp, how little they guessed all that lay underneath, and how, over the first few lines, her hand had shaken so that she had to copy it three times. But the address, “Robert Roy, Shanghai”—all she could put, but she had little doubt it would find him—was written with that firm, clear hand which he had so often admired, saying he wished she could teach his boys to write as well. Would he recognize it? Would he be glad or sorry, or only indifferent? Had the world changed him? or, if she could look at him now, would he be the same Robert Roy—simple, true, sincere, and brave—every inch a man and a gentleman?

For the instant the old misery came back; the sharp, sharp pain; but she smothered it down. His dead child, his living, unknown wife, came between, with their soft ghostly hands. He was still himself; she hoped absolutely unchanged; but he was hers no more. Yet that strange yearning, the same which had impelled Mr. Moseley to write and say, “Come and see me before I die,” seemed impelling her to stretch a hand out across the seas—“Have you forgotten me: I have never forgotten you.” As she passed through the church-yard on her way to the village, and saw the rector’s grave lie smiling in the evening sunshine, Fortune thought what a strange lot hers had been. The man who had loved her, the man whom she had loved, were equally lost to her; equally dead and buried. And yet she lived still—her busy, active, and not unhappy life. It was God’s will, all; and it was best.

Another six months went by, and she still remained in the same place, though talking daily of leaving. They began to go into society again, she and her girls, and to receive visitors now and then: among the rest, David Dalziel, who had preserved his affectionate fidelity even when he went back to college, and had begun to discover somehow that the direct road from Oxford to every where was through this secluded village. I am afraid Miss Williams was not as alive as she ought to have been to this fact, and to the other fact that Helen and Janetta were not quite children now, but she let the young people be happy, and was happy with them, after her fashion. Still, hers was less happiness than peace; the deep peace which a storm-tossed vessel finds when kindly fate has towed it into harbor; with torn sails and broken masts, maybe, but still safe, never needing to go to sea any more.



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She had come to that point in life when we cease to be “afraid of evil tidings,” since nothing is likely to happen to us beyond what has happened. She told herself that she did not look forward to the answer from Shanghai, if indeed any came; nevertheless, she had ascertained what time the return mail would be likely to bring it. And, almost punctual to the day, a letter arrived with the postmark, “Shanghai.” Not his letter, nor his handwriting at all. And, besides, it was addressed to “Mrs. Williams.”

A shudder of fear, the only fear which could strike her now—that he might be dead—made Fortune stand irresolute a moment, then go up to her own room before she opened it.

“Madam,—I beg to apologize for having read nearly through your letter before comprehending that it was not meant for me, but probably for another Mr. Robert Roy, who left this place not long after I came here, and between whom and myself some confusion arose, till we became intimate, and discovered that we were most likely distant, very distant cousins. He came from St. Andrews, and was head clerk in a firm here, doing a very good business in tea and silk, until they mixed themselves up in the opium trade, which Mr. Roy, with one or two more of our community here, thought so objectionable that at last he threw up his situation and determined to seek his fortunes in Australia. It was a pity, for he was in a good way to get on rapidly, but everybody who knew him agreed it was just the sort of thing he was sure to do, and some respected him highly for doing it. He was indeed what we Scotch call ‘weel respeckit’ wherever he went. But he was a reserved man; made few intimate friends, though those he did make were warmly attached to him. My family were; and though it is now five years since we have heard anything of or from him, we remember him still.”

Five years! The letter dropped from her hands. Lost and found, yet found and lost. What might not have happened to him in five years? But she read on, dry-eyed: women do not weep very much or very easily at her age.

“I will do my utmost, madam, that your letter shall reach the hands for which I am sure it was intended; but that may take some time, my only clue to Mr. Roy’s whereabouts being the branch house at Melbourne. I can not think he is dead, because such tidings pass rapidly from one to another in our colonial communities, and he was too much beloved for his death to excite no concern.

“I make this long explanation because it strikes me you may be a lady, a friend or relative of Mr. Roy’s, concerning whom he employed me to make some inquiries, only you say so very little—absolutely nothing—of yourself in your letter, that I can not be at all certain if you are the same person. She was a governess in a family named Dalziel, living at St. Andrews. He said he had written to that family repeatedly, but got no answer, and then asked



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me, if any thing resulted from my inquiries, to write to him to the care of our Melbourne house. But no news ever came, and I never wrote to him, for which my wife still blames me exceedingly. She thanks you, dear madam, for the kind things you say about our poor child, though meant for another person. We have seven boys, but little Bell was our youngest, and our hearts' delight. She died after six hours' illness.

"Again begging you to pardon my unconscious offense in reading a stranger's letter, and the length of this one, I remain your very obedient servant, R. Roy

"P.S.—I ought to say that this Mr. Robert Roy seemed between thirty-five and forty, tall, dark-haired, walked with a slight stoop. He had, I believe, no near relatives whatever, and I never heard of his having been married."

Unquestionably Miss Williams did well in retiring to her chamber and locking the door before she opened the letter. It is a mistake to suppose that at thirty-five or forty—or what age?—women cease to feel. I once was walking with an old maiden lady, talking of a character in a book. "He reminded me," she said, "of the very best man I ever knew, whom I saw a good deal of when I was a girl." And to the natural question, was he alive, she answered, "No; he died while he was still young." Her voice kept its ordinary tone, but there came a slight flush on the cheek, a sudden quiver over the whole withered face—she was some years past seventy—and I felt I could not say another word.

Nor shall I say a word now of Fortune Williams, when she had read through and wholly taken in the contents of this letter.

Life began for her again—life on a new and yet on the old basis; for it was still waiting, waiting—she seemed to be among those whose lot it is to "stand and wait" all their days. But it was not now in the absolute darkness and silence which it used to be. She knew that in all human probability Robert Roy was alive still some where, and hope never could wholly die out of the world so long as he was in it. His career, too, if not prosperous in worldly things, had been one to make any heart that loved him content—content and proud. For if he had failed in his fortunes, was it not from doing what she would most have wished him to do—the right, at all costs? Nor had he quite forgotten her, since even so late as five years back he had been making inquiries about her. Also, he was then unmarried.

But human nature is weak, and human hearts are so hungry sometimes.

"Oh, if he had only loved me, and told me so!" she said, sometimes, as piteously as fifteen years ago. But the tears which followed were not, as then, a storm of passionate despair—only a quiet sorrowful rain.



For what could she do? Nothing. Now as ever, her part seemed just to fold her hands and endure. If alive, he might be found some day; but now she could not find him—oh, if she could! Had she been the man and he the woman—nay, had she been still herself, a poor lonely governess, having to earn every crumb of her own bitter bread, yet knowing that he loved her, might not things have been different? Had she belonged to him, they would never have lost one another. She would have sought him, as Evangeline sought Gabriel, half the world over.



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And little did her two girls imagine, as they called her down stairs that night, secretly wondering what important business could make “Auntie” keep tea waiting fully five minutes, and set her after tea to read some “pretty poetry,” especially Longfellow’s, which they had a fancy for—little did they think, those two happy creatures, listening to their middle-aged governess, who read so well that sometimes her voice actually faltered over the line, how there was being transacted under their very eyes a story which in its “constant anguish of patience” was scarcely less pathetic than that of Acadia.

For nearly a year after that letter came the little family of which Miss Williams was the head went on in its innocent quiet way, always planning, yet never making a change, until at last fate drove them to it.

Neither Helen nor Janetta were very healthy girls, and at last a London doctor gave as his absolute fiat that they must cease to live in their warm inland village, and migrate, for some years at any rate, to a bracing sea-side place.

Whereupon David Dalziel, who had somehow established himself as the one masculine adviser of the family, suggested St. Andrews. Bracing enough it was, at any rate: he remembered the winds used almost cut his nose off. And it was such a nice place too, so pretty, with such excellent society. He was sure the young ladies would find it delightful. Did Miss Williams remember the walk by the shore, and the golfing across the Links?

“Quite as well as you could have done, at the early age of seven,” she suggested, smiling. “Why are you so very anxious we should go to live at St. Andrews?”

The young fellow blushed all over his kindly eager face, and then frankly owned he had a motive. His grandmother’s cottage, which she had left him, the youngest and her pet always, was now unlet. He meant, perhaps, to go and live at it himself when—he was of age and could afford it; but in the mean time he was a poor solitary bachelor, and—and—

“And you would like me to keep your nest warm for you till you can claim it? You want us for your tenants, eh, Davie?”

“Just that. You’ve hit it. Couldn’t wish better. In fact, I have already written to my trustees to drive the hardest bargain possible.”

Which was an ingenious modification of the truth, as she afterward found; but evidently the lad had set his heart upon the thing. And she?

At first she shrank back from the plan with a shiver almost of fear. It was like having to meet face to face something—some one—long dead. To walk among the old familiar



places, to see the old familiar sea and shore, nay, to live in the very same house, haunted, as houses are sometimes, every room and every nook, with ghosts—yet with such innocent ghosts—Could she bear it?

There are some people who have an actual terror of the past—who the moment a thing ceases to be pleasurable fly from it, would willingly bury it out of sight forever. But others have no fear of their harmless dead—dead hopes, memories, loves—can sit by a grave-side, or look behind them at a dim spectral shape, without grief, without dread, only with tenderness. This woman could.



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After a long wakeful night, spent in very serious thought for every one's good, not excluding her own—since there is a certain point beyond which one has no right to forget one's self, and perpetual martyrs rarely make very pleasant heads of families—she said to her girls next morning that she thought David Dalziel's brilliant idea had a great deal of sense in it; St. Andrews was a very nice place, and the cottage there would exactly suit their finances, while the tenure upon which he proposed they should hold it (from term to term) would also fit in with their undecided future; because, as all knew, wherever Helen or Janetta married, each would take her fortune and go, leaving Miss Williams with her little legacy, above want certainly, but not exactly a millionaire.

These and other points she set before them in her practical fashion, just as if her heart did not leap—sometimes with pleasure, sometimes with pain—at the very thought of St. Andrews, and as if to see herself sit daily and hourly face to face with her old self, the ghost of her own youth, would be a quite easy thing.

The girls were delighted. They left all to Auntie, as was their habit to do. Burdens naturally fall upon the shoulders fitted for them, and which seem even to have a faculty for drawing them down there. Miss Williams's new duties had developed in her a whole range of new qualities, dormant during her governess life. Nobody knew better than she how to manage a house and guide a family. The girls soon felt that Auntie might have been a mother all her days, she was so thoroughly motherly and they gave up every thing into her hands.

So the whole matter was settled, David rejoicing exceedingly, and considering it “jolly fun,” and quite like a bit out of a play, that his former governess should come back as his tenant, and inhabit the old familiar cottage.

“And I'll take a run over to see you as soon as the long vacation begins, just to teach the young ladies golfing. Mr. Roy taught all us boys, you know; and we'll take that very walk he used to take us, across the Links and along the sands to the Eden. Wasn't it the river Eden, Miss Williams? I am sure I remember it. I think I am very good at remembering.”

Other people were also “good at remembering.” During the first few weeks after they settled down at St. Andrews the girls noticed that Auntie became excessively pale, and was sometimes quite “distract” and bewildered-looking, which was little wonder, considering all she had to do and arrange. But she got better in time. The cottage was so sweet, the sea so fresh, the whole place so charming. Slowly, Miss Williams's ordinary looks returned—the “good” looks which her girls so energetically protested she had now, if never before. They never allowed her to confess herself old by caps or shawls, or any of those pretty temporary hindrances to the march of Time. She resisted not; she let them dress her as they please, in a reasonable way, for she felt they loved her; and as to her age, why, *she* knew it, and knew that nothing could alter it, so what



did it matter? She smiled, and tried to look as nice and as young as she could for her girls' sake.



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I suppose there are such things as broken or breaking hearts, even at St. Andrews, but it is certainly not a likely place for them. They have little chance against the fresh, exhilarating air, strong as new wine; the wild sea waves, the soothing sands, giving with health of body wholesomeness of mind. By-and-by the busy world recovered its old face to Fortune Williams—not the world as she once dreamed of it, but the real world, as she had fought it through it all these years.

“I was ever a fighter, so one fight more!” as she read sometimes in the “pretty” poetry her girls were always asking for—read steadily, even when she came to the last verse in that passionate “Prospice:”

“Till, sudden, the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute’s at end:
And the elements rage, the fiend voices that rave
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace, then a joy,
Then a light—then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!”

To that life to come, during all the burden and heat of the day (no, the afternoon, a time, faded, yet hot and busy still, which is often a very trying bit of woman’s life) she now began yearningly to look. To meet him again, even in old age, or with death between, was her only desire. Yet she did her duty still, and enjoyed all she could, knowing that one by one the years were hurrying onward, and the night coming, “in which no man can work.”

Faithful to his promise, about the middle of July David Dalziel appeared, in overflowing spirits, having done very well at college. He was such a boy still, in character and behavior; though—as he carefully informed the family—now twenty-one and a man, expecting to be treated as such. He was their landlord too, and drew up the agreement in his own name, meaning to be a lawyer, and having enough to live on—something better than bread and salt—“till I can earn a fortune, as I certainly mean to do some day.”

And he looked at Janetta, who looked down on the parlor carpet—as young people will. Alas! I fear that the eyes of her anxious friend and governess were not half wide enough open to the fact that these young folk were no longer boy and girls, and that things might happen—in fact, were almost certain to happen—which had happened to herself in her youth—making life not quite easy to her, as it seemed to be to these two bright girls.

Yet they were so bright, and their relations with David Dalziel were so frank and free—in fact, the young fellow himself was such a thoroughly good fellow, so very difficult to shut



her door against, even if she had thought of so doing. But she did not. She let him come and go, “miserable bachelor” as he proclaimed himself, with all his kith and kin across the seas, and cast not a thought to the future, or to the sad necessity which sometimes occurs to parents and guardians—of shutting the stable door *after* the steed is stolen.



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Especially, as not long after David appeared, there happened a certain thing to all but her, and yet to her it was, for the time being, utterly overwhelming. It absorbed all her thoughts into one maddened channel, where they writhed and raved and dashed themselves blindly against inevitable fate. For the first time in her life this patient woman felt as if endurance were *not* the right thing; as if wild shrieks of pain, bitter outcries against Providence, would be somehow easier, better: might reach His throne, so that even now He might listen and hear.

The thing was this. One day, waiting for some one beside the laurel bush at her gate—the old familiar bush, though it had grown and grown till its branches, which used to drag on the gravel, now covered the path entirely—she overheard David explaining to Janetta how he and his brothers and Mr. Roy had made the wooden letter-box, which actually existed still, though in very ruinous condition.

“And no wonder, after fifteen years and more. It is fully that old, isn’t it Miss Williams? You will have to superannuate it shortly, and return to the old original letter-box—my letter-box, which I remember so well. I do believe I could find it still.”

Kneeling down, he thrust his hand through the thick barricade of leaves into the very heart of the tree.

“I’ve found it; I declare I’ve found it; the identical hole in the trunk where I used to put all my treasures—my ‘magpie’s nest,’ as they called it, where I hid every thing I could find. What a mischievous young scamp I was!”

“Very,” said Miss Williams, affectionately, laying a gentle hand on his curls—“pretty” still, though cropped down to the frightful modern fashion. Secretly she was rather proud of him, this tall young fellow, whom she had had on her lap many a time.

“Curious! It all comes back to me—even to the very last thing I hid here, the day before we left, which was a letter.”

“A letter!”—Miss Williams slightly started—“what letter?”

“One I found lying under the laurel bush, quite hidden by its leaves. It was all soaked with rain. I dried it in the sun, and then put it in my letter-box, telling nobody, for I meant to deliver it myself at the hall door with a loud ring—an English postman’s ring. Our Scotch one used to blow his horn, you remember?”

“Yes,” said Miss Williams. She was leaning against the fatal bush, pale to the very lips, but her veil was down—nobody saw. “What sort of a letter was it, David? Who was it to? Did you notice the handwriting?”

“Why, I was such a little fellow,” and he looked up in wonder and slight concern, “how could I remember? Some letter that somebody had dropped, perhaps, in taking the rest

out of the box. It could not matter—certainly not now. You would not bring my youthful misdeeds up against me, would you?” And he turned up a half-comical, half-pitiful face.



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Fortune's first impulse—what was it? She hardly knew. But her second was that safest, easiest thing—now grown into the habit and refuge of her whole life—silence. “No, it certainly does not matter now.”

A deadly sickness came over her. What if this letter were Robert Roy's, asking her that question which he said no man ought ever to ask a woman twice? And she had never seen it—never answered it. So, of course, he went away. Her whole life—nay, two whole lives—had been destroyed, and by a mere accident, the aimless mischief of a child's innocent hand. She could never prove it, but it might have been so. And, alas! alas! God, the merciful God, had allowed it to be so.

Which is the worst, to wake up suddenly and find that our life has been wrecked by our own folly, mistake, or sin, or that it has been done for us either directly by the hand of Providence, or indirectly through some innocent—nay, possibly not innocent, but intentional—hand? In both cases the agony is equally sharp—the sharper because irremediable.

All these thoughts, vivid as lightning, and as rapid, darted through poor Fortune's brain during the few moments that she stood with her hand on David's shoulder, while he drew from his magpie's nest a heterogeneous mass of rubbish—pebbles, snail shells, bits of glass and china, fragments even of broken toys.

“Just look there. What ghosts of my childhood, as people would say! Dead and buried, though.” And he laughed merrily—he in the full tide and glory of his youth.

Fortune Williams looked down on his happy face. This lad that really loved her would not have hurt her for the world, and her determination was made. He should never know any thing. Nobody should ever know any thing. The “dead and buried” of fifteen years ago must be dead and buried forever.

“David,” she said, “just out of curiosity, put your hand down to the very bottom of that hole, and see if you can fish up the mysterious letter.”

Then she waited, just as one would wait at the edge of some long-closed grave to see if the dead could possibly be claimed as our dead, even if but a handful of unhonored bones.

No, it was not possible. Nobody could expect it after such a lapse of time. Something David pulled out—it might be paper, it might be rags. It was too dry to be moss or earth, but no one could have recognized it as a letter.

“Give it me,” said Miss Williams, holding out her hand.



David put the little heap of “rubbish” therein. She regarded it a moment, and then scattered it on the gravel—“dust to dust,” as we say in our funeral service. But she said nothing.

At the moment the young people they were waiting for came, to the other side of the gate, clubs in hand. David and the two Miss Moseleys had by this time become perfectly mad for golf, as is the fashion of the place. They proceeded across the Links, Miss Williams accompanying them, as in duty bound. But she said she was “rather tired,” and leaving them in charge of another chaperon—if chaperons are ever wanted or needed in those merry Links of St. Andrews—came home alone.



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Chapter 5

“Shall sharpest pathos blight us, doing no wrong?”

So writes our greatest living poet, in one of the noblest poems he ever penned. And he speaks truth. The real canker of human existence is not misery, but sin.

After the first cruel pang, the bitter wail; after her lost life—and we have here but one life to lose!—her lost happiness, for she knew now that though she might be very peaceful, very content, no real happiness ever had come, ever could come to her in this world, except Robert Roy’s love—after this, Fortune sat down, folded her hands, and bowed her head to the waves of sorrow that kept sweeping over her, not for one day or two days, but for many days and weeks—the anguish, not of patience, but regret—sharp, stinging, helpless regret. They came rolling in, those remorseless billows, just like the long breakers on the sands of St. Andrews. Hopeless to resist, she could only crouch down and let them pass. “All Thy waves have gone over me.”

Of course this is spoken metaphorically. Outwardly, Miss Williams neither sat still nor folded her hands. She was seen every where as usual, her own proper self, as the world knew it; but underneath all that was the self that she knew, and God knew. No one else. No one ever could have known, except Robert Roy, had things been different from what they were—from what God had apparently willed them to be.

A sense of inevitable fate came over her. It was now nearly two years since that letter from Mr. Roy of Shanghai, and no more tidings had reached her. She began to think none ever would reach her now. She ceased to hope or to fear, but let herself drift on, accepting the small pale pleasures of every day, and never omitting one of its duties. One only thought remained; which, contrasted with the darkness of all else, often gleamed out as an actual joy.

If the lost letter really was Robert Roy’s—and though she had no positive proof, she had the strongest conviction, remembering the thick fog of that Tuesday morning, how easily Archy might have dropped it out of his hand, and how, during those days of soaking rain, it might have lain, unobserved by any one, under the laurel branches, till the child picked it up and hid it as he said—if Robert Roy had written to her, written in any way, he was at least not faithless. And he might have loved her then. Afterward, he might have married, or died; she might never find him again in this world, or if she found him, he might be totally changed: still, whatever happened, he had loved her. The fact remained. No power in earth or heaven could alter it.

And sometimes, even yet, a half-superstitious feeling came over her that all this was not for nothing—the impulse which had impelled her to write to Shanghai, the other impulse, or concatenation of circumstances, which had floated her, after so many changes, back



to the old place, the old life. It looked like chance, but was it? Is any thing chance? Does not our own will, soon or late, accomplish for us what we desire? That is, when we try to reconcile it to the will of God.



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She had accepted His will all these years, seeing no reason for it; often feeling it very hard and cruel, but still accepting it. And now?

I am writing no sensational story. In it are no grand dramatic points; no *Deus ex machina* appears to make all smooth; every event—if it can boast of aught so large as an event—follows the other in perfectly natural succession. For I have always noticed that in life there are rarely any startling “effects,” but gradual evolutions. Nothing happens by accident; and, the premises once granted, nothing happens but what was quite sure to happen, following those premises. We novelists do not “make up” our stories; they make themselves. Nor do human beings invent their own lives; they do but use up the materials given to them—some well, some ill; some wisely, some foolishly; but, in the main, the dictum of the Preacher is not far from the truth, “All things come alike to all.”

A whole winter had passed by, and the spring twilights were beginning to lengthen, tempting Miss Williams and her girls to linger another half hour before they lit the lamp for the evening. They were doing so, cozily chatting over the fire, after the fashion of a purely feminine household, when there was a sudden announcement that a gentleman, with two little boys, wanted to see Miss Williams. He declined to give his name, and said he would not detain her more than a few minutes.

“Let him come in here,” Fortune was just about to say, when she reflected that it might be some law business which concerned her girls, whom she had grown so tenderly anxious to save from any trouble and protect from every care. “No, I will go and speak to him myself.”

She rose and walked quietly into the parlor, already shadowed into twilight: a neat, compact little person, dressed in soft gray homespun, with a pale pink bow on her throat, and another in her cap—a pretty little fabric of lace and cambric, which, being now the fashion, her girls had at last condescended to let her wear. She had on a black silk apron, with pockets, into one of which she had hastily thrust her work, and her thimble was yet on her finger. This was the figure on which the eyes of the gentleman rested as he turned around.

Miss Williams lifted her eyes inquiringly to his face—a bearded face, thin and dark.

“I beg your pardon, I have not the pleasure of knowing you; I—”

She suddenly stopped. Something in the height, the turn of the head, the crisp dark hair, in which were not more than a few threads of gray, while hers had so many now, reminded her of—someone, the bare thought of whom made her feel dizzy and blind.



“No,” he said, “I did not expect you would know me; and indeed, until I saw you, I was not sure you were the right Miss Williams. Possibly you may remember my name—Roy, Robert Roy.”

Faces alter, manners, gestures; but the one thing which never changes is a voice. Had Fortune heard this one—ay, at her last dying hour, when all worldly sounds were fading away—she would have recognized it at once.



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The room being full of shadow, no one could see any thing distinctly; and it was as well.

In another minute, she had risen, and held out her hand.

“I am very glad to see you, Mr. Roy. How long have you been in England? Are these your little boys?”

Without answering, he took her hand—a quiet friendly grasp, just as it used to be. And so, without another word, the gulf of fifteen—seventeen years was overleaped, and Robert Roy and Fortune Williams had met once more.

If anybody had told her when she rose that morning what would happen before night, and happen so naturally, too, she would have said it was impossible. That, after a very few minutes, she could have sat there, talking to him as to any ordinary acquaintance, seemed incredible, yet it was truly so.

“I was in great doubts whether the Miss Williams who, they told me, lived here was yourself or some other lady; but I thought I would take the chance. Because, were it yourself, I thought, for the sake of old times, you might be willing to advise me concerning my two little boys, whom I have brought to St. Andrews for their education.”

“Your sons, are they?”

“No. I am not married.”

There was a pause, and then he told the little fellows to go and look out of the window, while he talked with Miss Williams. He spoke to them in a fatherly tone; there was nothing whatever of the young man left in him now. His voice was sweet, his manner grave, his whole appearance unquestionably “middle-aged.”

“They are orphans. Their name is Roy, though they are not my relatives, or so distant that it matters nothing. But their father was a very good friend of mine, which matters a great deal. He died suddenly, and his wife soon after, leaving their affairs in great confusion. Hearing this, far up in the Australian bush, where I have been a sheep-farmer for some years, I came round by Shanghai, but too late to do more than take these younger boys and bring them home. The rest of the family are disposed of. These two will be henceforward mine. That is all.”

A very little “all”, and wholly about other people; scarcely a word about himself. Yet he seemed to think it sufficient, and as if she had no possible interest in hearing more.

Cursorily he mentioned having received her letter, which was “friendly and kind;” that it had followed him to Australia, and then back to Shanghai. But his return home seemed to have been entirely without reference to it—or to her.



So she let all pass, and accepted things as they were. It was enough. When a shipwrecked man sees land—ever so barren a land, ever so desolate a shore—he does not argue within himself, “Is this my haven?” he simply puts into it, and lets himself be drifted ashore.

It took but a few minutes more to explain further what Mr. Roy wanted—a home for his two “poor little fellows.”



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“They are so young still—and they have lost their mother. They would do very well in their classes here, if some kind woman would take them and look after them. I felt, if the Miss Williams I heard of were really the Miss Williams I used to know, I could trust them to her, more than to any woman I ever knew.”

“Thank you.” And then she explained that she had already two girls in charge. She could say nothing till she had consulted them. In the mean time—

Just then the bell sounded. The world was going on just as usual—this strange, commonplace, busy, regardless world!

“I beg your pardon for intruding on your time so long,” said Mr. Roy, rising. “I will leave you to consider the question, and you will let me know as soon as you can. I am staying at the hotel here, and shall remain until I can leave my boys settled. Good evening.”

Again she felt the grasp of the hand: that ghostly touch, so vivid in dreams for these years, and now a warm living reality. It was too much. She could not bear it.

“If you would care to stay,” she said—and though it was too dark to see her, he must have heard the faint tremble in her voice—“our tea is ready. Let me introduce you to my girls, and they can make friends with your little boys.”

The matter was soon settled, and the little party ushered into the bright warm parlor, glittering with all the appendages of that pleasant meal—essentially feminine—a “hungry” tea. Robert Roy put his hand over his eyes as if the light dazzled him, and then sat down in the arm-chair which Miss Williams brought forward, turning as he did so to look up at her—right in her face—with his grave, soft, earnest eyes.

“Thank you. How like that was to your old ways! How very little you are changed!”

This was the only reference he made, in the slightest degree, to former times.

And she?

She went out of the room, ostensibly to get a pot of guava jelly for the boys—found it after some search, and then sat down.

Only in her store closet, with her house-keeping things all about her. But it was a quiet place, and the door was shut.

There is, in one of those infinitely pathetic Old Testament stories, a sentence—“And he sought where to weep: and he entered into his chamber and wept there.”



She did not weep, this woman, not a young woman now: she only tried during her few minutes of solitude to gather up her thoughts, to realize what had happened to her, and who it was that sat in the next room—under her roof—at her very fireside. Then she clasped her hands with a sudden sob, wild as any of the emotions of her girlhood.

“Oh, my love, my love, the love of all my life! Thank God!”



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The evening passed, not very merrily, but peacefully; the girls, who had heard a good deal of Mr. Roy from David Dalziel, doing their best to be courteous to him, and to amuse his shy little boys. He did not stay long, evidently having a morbid dread of “intruding,” and his manner was exceedingly reserved, almost awkward sometimes, of which he seemed painfully conscious, apologizing for being “unaccustomed to civilization and to ladies’ society,” having during his life in the bush sometimes passed months at a time without ever seeing a woman’s face.

“And women are your only civiliziers,” said he. “That is why I wish my motherless lads to be taken into this household of yours, Miss Williams, which looks so—so comfortable,” and he glanced round the pretty parlor with something very like a sigh. “I hope you will consider the matter, and let me know as soon as you have made up your mind.”

“Which I will do very soon,” she answered.

“Yes, I know you will. And your decision once made, you never change.”

“Very seldom. I am not one of those who are ‘given to change.’”

“Nor I.”

He stood a moment, lingering in the pleasant, lightsome warmth, as if loath to quit it, then took his little boys in either hand and went away. There was a grand consultation that night, for Miss Williams never did any thing without speaking to her girls; but still it was merely nominal. They always left the decision to her. And her heart yearned over the two little Roys, orphans, yet children still; while Helen and Janetta were growing up and needing very little from her except a general motherly supervision. Besides, *he* asked it. He had said distinctly that she was the only woman to whom he could thoroughly trust his boys. So—she took them.

After a few days the new state of things grew so familiar that it seemed as if it had lasted for months, the young Roys going to and fro to their classes and their golf-playing, just as the young Dalziels had done; and Mr. Roy coming about the house, almost daily, exactly as Robert Roy had used to do of old. Sometimes it was to Fortune Williams the strangest reflex of former times; only—with a difference.

Unquestionably he was very much changed. In outward appearance more even than the time accounted for. No man can knock about the world, in different lands and climates, for seventeen years, without bearing the marks of it. Though still under fifty, he had all the air of an “elderly” man, and had grown a little “peculiar” in his ways, his modes of thought and speech—except that he spoke so very little. He accounted for this by his long lonely life in Australia, which had produced, he said, an almost unconquerable habit of silence. Altogether, he was far more of an old bachelor than she was of an old maid, and Fortune felt this: felt, too, that in spite of her gray hairs she was



in reality quite as young as he—nay, sometimes younger; for her innocent, simple, shut-up life had kept her young.



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And he, what had his life been, in so far as he gradually betrayed it? Restless, struggling; a perpetual battle with the world; having to hold his own, and fight his way inch by inch—he who was naturally a born student, to whom the whirl of a business career was especially obnoxious. What had made him choose it? Once chosen, probably he could not help himself; besides, he was not one to put his shoulder to the wheel and then draw back. Evidently, with the grain or against the grain, he had gone on with it; this sad, strange, wandering life, until he had “made his fortune,” for he told her so. But he said no more; whether he meant to stay at home and spend it, or go out again to the antipodes (and he spoke of those far lands without any distaste, even with a lingering kindness, for indeed he seemed to have no unkindly thought of any place or person in all the world), his friend did not know.

His friend. That was the word. No other. After her first outburst of uncontrollable emotion, to call Robert Roy her “love,” even in fancy, or to expect that he would deport himself in any lover-like way, became ridiculous, pathetically ridiculous. She was sure of that. Evidently no idea of the kind entered his mind. She was Miss Williams, and he was Mr. Roy—two middle-aged people, each with their different responsibilities, their altogether separate lives; and, hard as her own had been, it seemed as if his had been the harder of the two—ay, though he was now a rich man, and she still little better than a poor governess.

She did not think very much of worldly things, but still she was aware of this fact—that he was rich and she was poor. She did not suffer herself to dwell upon it, but the consciousness was there, sustained with a certain feeling called “proper pride.” The conviction was forced upon her in the very first days of Mr. Roy’s return—that to go back to the days of their youth was as impossible as to find primroses in September.

If, indeed, there were any thing to go back to. Sometimes she felt, if she could only have found out that, all the rest would be easy, painless. If she could only have said to him, “Did you write me the letter you promised? Did you ever love me”? But that one question was, of course, utterly impossible. He made no reference whatever to old things, but seemed resolved to take up the present a very peaceful and happy present it soon grew to be—just as if there were no past at all. So perforce did she.

But, as I think I have said once before, human nature is weak, and there were days when the leaves were budding, and the birds singing in the trees, when the sun was shining and the waves rolling in upon the sands, just as they rolled in that morning over those two lines of foot-marks, which might have walked together through life; and who knows what mutual strength, help, and comfort this might have proved to both?—then it was, for one at least, rather hard.

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Especially when, bit by bit, strange ghostly fragments of his old self began to re-appear in Robert Roy: his keen delight in nature, his love of botanical or geological excursions. Often he would go wandering down the familiar shore for hours in search of marine animals for the girls' aquarium, and then would come and sit down at their tea-table, reading or talking, so like the Robert Roy of old that one of the little group, who always crept in the background, felt dizzy and strange, as if all her later years had been a dream, and she were living her youth over again, only with the difference aforesaid: a difference sharp as that between death and life—yet with something of the peace of death in it.

Sometimes, when they met at the innocent little tea parties which St. Andrews began to give—for of course in that small community every body knew every body, and all their affairs to boot, often a good deal better than they did themselves, so that there was great excitement and no end of speculation over Mr. Roy—sometimes meeting, as they were sure to do, and walking home together, with the moonlight shining down the empty streets, and the stars out by myriads over the silent distant sea, while the nearer tide came washing in upon the sands—all was so like, so frightfully like, old times that it was very sore to bear.

But, as I have said, Miss Williams was Miss Williams, and Mr. Roy Mr. Roy, and there were her two girls always besides them; also his two boys, who soon took to "Auntie" as naturally as if they were really hers, or she theirs.

"I think they had better call you so, as the others do," said Mr. Roy one day. "Are these young ladies really related to you?"

"No; but I promised their father on his death-bed to take charge of them. That is all."

"He is dead, then. Was he a great friend of yours?"

She felt the blood flashing all over her face, but she answered, steadily: "Not a very intimate friend, but I respected him exceedingly. He was a good man. His daughters had a heavy loss when he died, and I am glad to be a comfort to them so long as they need me."

"I have no doubt of it."

This was the only question he ever asked her concerning her past life, though, by slow degrees, he told her a good deal of his own. Enough to make her quite certain, even if her keen feminine instinct had not already divined the fact, that whatever there might have been in it of suffering, there was nothing in the smallest degree either to be ashamed of or to hide. What Robert Roy of Shanghai had written about him had continued true. As he said one day to her, "We never stand still. We either grow better or worse. You have not grown worse."



Nor had he. All that was good in him had developed, all his little faults had toned down. The Robert Roy of today was slightly different from, but in no wise inferior to, the Robert Roy of her youth. She saw it, and rejoiced in the seeing.



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What he saw in her she could not tell. He seemed determined to rest wholly in the present, and take out of it all the peace and pleasantness that he could. In the old days, when the Dalziel boys were naughty, and Mrs. Dalziel tiresome; and work was hard, and holidays were few, and life was altogether the rough road that it often seems to the young, he had once called her "Pleasantness and Peace." He never said so now; but sometimes he looked it.

Many an evening he came and sat by her fireside, in the arm-chair, which seemed by right to have devolved upon him; never staying very long, for he was still nervously sensitive about being "in the way," but making himself and them all very cheerful and happy while he did stay. Only sometimes, when Fortune's eyes stole to his face—not a young man's face now—she fancied she could trace, besides the wrinkles, a sadness, approaching to hardness, that never used to be. But again, when interested in some book or other (he said it was delicious to take to reading again, after the long fast of years), he would look around to her for sympathy, or utter one of his dry drolleries, the old likeness, the old manner and tone would come back so vividly that she started, hardly knowing whether the feeling it gave her was pleasure or pain.

But beneath both, lying so deep down that neither he nor any one could ever suspect its presence, was something else. Can many waters quench love? Can the deep sea drown it? What years of silence can wither it? What frost of age can freeze it down? God only knows.

Hers was not like a girl's love. Those two girls sitting by her day after day would have smiled at it, and at its object. Between themselves they considered Mr. Roy somewhat of an "old fogey;" were very glad to make use of him now and then, in the great dearth of gentlemen at St. Andrews, and equally glad afterward to turn him over to Auntie, who was always kind to him. Auntie was so kind to every body.

Kind? Of course she was, and above all when he looked worn and tired. He did so sometimes: as if life had ceased to be all pleasure, and the constant mirth of these young folks was just a little too much for him. Then she ingeniously used to save him from it and them for a while. They never knew—there was no need for them to know—how tenfold deeper than all the passion of youth is the tenderness with which a woman cleaves to the man she loves when she sees him growing old.

Thus the days went by till Easter came, announced by the sudden apparition, one evening, of David Dalziel.

That young man, when, the very first day of his holidays, he walked in upon his friends at St. Andrews, and found sitting at their tea-table a strange gentleman, did not like it at all—scarcely even when he found out that the intruder was his old friend, Mr. Roy.

“And you never told me a word about this,” said he, reproachfully, to Miss Williams.
“Indeed, you have not written to me for weeks; you have forgotten all about me.”



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She winced at the accusation, for it was true. Beyond her daily domestic life, which she still carefully fulfilled, she had in truth forgotten every thing. Outside people were ceasing to affect her at all. What *he* liked, what *he* wanted to do, day by day—whether he looked ill or well, happy or unhappy, only he rarely looked either—this was slowly growing to be once more her whole world. With a sting of compunction, and another, half of fear, save that there was nothing to dread, nothing that could affect any body beyond herself—Miss Williams roused herself to give young Dalziel an especially hearty welcome, and to make his little visit as happy as possible.

Small need of that; he was bent on taking all things pleasantly. Coming now near the end of a very creditable college career, being of age and independent, with the cozy little fortune that his old grandmother had left him, the young fellow was disposed to see every thing *couleur de rose*, and this feeling communicated itself to all his friends.

It was a pleasant time. Often in years to come did that little knot of friends, old and young, look back upon it as upon one of those rare bright bits in life when the outside current of things moves smoothly on, while underneath it there may or may not be, but generally there is, a secret or two which turns the most trivial events into sweet and dear remembrances forever.

David's days being few enough, they took pains not to lose one, but planned excursions here, there, and every where—to Dundee, to Perth, to Elie, to Balcarras—all together, children, young folks, and elders: that admirable *melange* which generally makes such expeditions "go off" well. Theirs did, especially the last one, to the old house of Balcarras, where they got admission to the lovely quaint garden, and Janetta sang "Auld Robin Gray" on the spot where it was written.

She had a sweet voice, and there seemed to have come into it a pathos which Fortune had never remarked before. The touching, ever old, ever new story made the young people quite quiet for a few minutes; and then they all wandered away together, Helen promising to look after the two wild young Roys, to see that they did not kill themselves in some unforeseen way, as, aided and abetted by David and Janetta, they went on a scramble up Balcarras Hill.

"Will you go too?" said Fortune to Robert Roy. "I have the provisions to see to; besides, I can not scramble as well as the rest. I am not quite so young as I used to be."

"Nor I," he answered, as, taking her basket, he walked silently on beside her.

It was a curious feeling, and all to come out of a foolish song; but if ever she felt thankful to God from the bottom of her heart that she had said "No," at once and decisively, to the good man who slept at peace beneath the church-yard elms, it was at that moment. But the feeling and the moment passed by immediately. Mr. Roy took up the thread of conversation where he had left it off—it was some bookish or ethical argument, such as



he would go on with for hours; so she listened to him in silence. They walked on, the larks singing and the primroses blowing. All the world was saying to itself, "I am young; I am happy;" but she said nothing at all.



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People grow used to pain; it dies down at intervals, and becomes quite bearable, especially when no one sees it or guesses at it.

They had a very merry picnic on the hilltop, enjoying those mundane consolations of food and drink which Auntie was expected always to have forthcoming, and which those young people did by no means despise, nor Mr. Roy neither. He made himself so very pleasant with them all, looking thoroughly happy, and baring his head to the spring breeze with the eagerness of a boy.

“Oh, this is delicious! It makes me feel young again. There’s nothing like home. One thing I am determined upon: I will never quit bonnie Scotland more.”

It was the first clear intimation he had given of his intentions regarding the future, but it thrilled her with measureless content. If only he would not go abroad again, if she might have him within reach for the rest of her days—able to see him, to talk to him, to know where he was and what he was doing, instead of being cut off from him by those terrible dividing seas—it was enough! Nothing could be so bitter as what had been; and whatever was the mystery of their youth, which it was impossible to unravel now—whether he had ever loved, or loved her and crushed it down and forgotten it, or only felt very kindly and cordially to her, as he did now, the past was—well, only the past!—and the future lay still before her, not unsweet. When we are young, we insist on having every thing or nothing; when we are older, we learn that “every thing” is an impossible and “nothing” a somewhat bitter word. We are able to stoop meekly and pick up the fragments of the children’s bread, without feeling ourselves to be altogether “dogs”.

Fortune went home that night with a not unhappy, almost a satisfied, heart. She sat back in the carriage, close beside that other heart which she believed to be the truest in all the world, though it had never been hers. There was a tremendous clatter of talking and laughing and fun of all sorts, between David Dalziel and the little Roys on the box, and the Misses Moseley sitting just below them, as they had insisted doing, no doubt finding the other two members of the party a little “slow.”

Nevertheless Mr. Roy and Miss Williams took their part in laughing with their young people, and trying to keep them in order; though after a while both relapsed into silence. One did at least, for it had been a long day and she was tired, being, as she had said, “not so young as she had been.” But if any of these lively young people had asked her the question whether she was happy, or at least contented, she would have never hesitated about her reply. Young, gay, and prosperous as they were, I doubt if Fortune Williams would have changed lots with any one of them all.



Chapter 6

As it befell, that day at Balcarras was the last of the bright days, in every sense, for the time being. Wet weather set in, as even the most partial witness must allow does occasionally happen in Scotland, and the domestic barometer seemed to go down accordingly. The girls grumbled at being kept in-doors, and would willingly have gone out golfing under umbrellas, but Auntie was remorseless. They were delicate girls at best, so that her watch over them was never-ceasing, and her patience inexhaustible.



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David Dalziel also was in a very trouble-some mood, quite unusual for him. He came and went, complained bitterly that the girls were not allowed to go out with him; abused the place, the climate, and did all those sort of bearish things which young gentlemen are sometimes in the habit of doing, when—when that wicked little boy whom they read about at school and college makes himself known to them as a pleasant, or unpleasant, reality.

Miss Williams, whom, I am afraid, was far too simple a woman for the new generation, which has become so extraordinarily wise and wide-awake, opened her eyes and wondered why David was so unlike his usual self. Mr. Roy, too, to whom he behaved worse than to any one else, only the elder man quietly ignored it all, and was very patient and gentle with the restless, ill-tempered boy—Mr. Roy even remarked that he thought David would be happier at his work again; idling was a bad thing for young fellows at his age, or any age.

At last it came out, the bitterness which rankled in the poor lad's breast; with another secret, which, foolish woman that she was, Miss Williams had never in the smallest degree suspected. Very odd that she had not, but so it was. We all find it difficult to realize the moment when our children cease to be children. Still more difficult is it for very serious and earnest natures to recognize that there are other natures who take things in a totally different way, and yet it may be the right and natural way for them. Such is the fact; we must learn it, and the sooner we learn it, the better.

One day, when the rain had a little abated, David appeared, greatly disappointed to find the girls had gone out, down to the West Sands with Mr. Roy.

"Always Mr. Roy! I am sick of his very name," muttered David, and then caught Miss Williams by the dress as she was rising. She had a gentle but rather dignified way with her of repressing bad manners in young people, either by perfect silence, or by putting the door between her and them. "Don't go! One never can get a quiet word with you, you are always so preternaturally busy."

It was true. To be always busy was her only shield against—certain things which the young man was never likely to know, and would not understand if he did know.

"Do sit down, if you ever can sit down, for a minute," said he, imploringly; "I want to speak to you seriously, very seriously."

She sat down, a little uneasy. The young fellow was such a good fellow; and yet he might have got into a scrape of some sort. Debt, perhaps, for he was a trifle extravagant; but then life had been all roses to him. He had never known a want since he was born.

"Speak, then, David; I am listening. Nothing very wrong, I hope!" said she, with a smile.



“Nothing at all wrong, only—When is Mr. Roy going away”?

The question was so unexpected that she felt her color changing a little; not much, she was too old for that.



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“Mr. Roy leaving St. Andrews, you mean? How can I tell? He has never told me. Why do you ask?”

“Because until he gone, I stay,” said the young man, doggedly. “I’m not going back to Oxford leaving him master of the field. I have stood him as long as I possibly can, and I’ll not stand him any longer.”

“David! you forget yourself.”

“There—now you are offended; I know you are, when you draw yourself up in that way, my dear little auntie. But just hear me. You are such an innocent woman, you don’t know the world as men do. Can’t you see—no, of course you can’t—that very soon all St. Andrews will be talking about you?”

“About me?”

“Not about you exactly, but about the family. A single man—a marrying man, as all the world says he is, or ought to be, with his money—can not go in and out, like a tame cat, in a household of women, without having, or being supposed to have—ahem!—intentions. I assure you”—and he swung himself on the arm of her chair, and looked into her face with an angry earnestness quite unmistakable—“I assure you, I never go into the club without being asked, twenty times a day, which of the Miss Moseleys Mr. Roy is going to marry.”

“Which of the Miss Moseleys Mr. Roy is going to marry!”

She repeated the words, as if to gain time and to be certain she heard them rightly. No fear of her blushing now; every pulse in her heart stood dead still; and then she nerved herself to meet the necessity of the occasion.

“David, you surely do not consider what you are saying. This is a most extraordinary idea.”

“It is a most extraordinary idea; in fact, I call it ridiculous, monstrous: an old battered fellow like him, who has knocked about the world, Heaven knows where, all these years, to come home, and, because he has got a lot of money, think to go and marry one of these nice, pretty girls. They wouldn’t have him, I believe that; but nobody else believes it; and every body seems to think it the most natural thing possible. What do you say?”

“I?”

“Surely you don’t think it right, or even possible? But, Auntie, it might turn out a rather awkward affair, and you ought to take my advice, and stop it in time.”



“How?”

“Why, by stepping him out of the house. You and he are great friends: if he had any notion of marrying, I suppose he would mention it to you—he ought. It would be a cowardly trick to come and steal one of your chickens from under your wing. Wouldn’t it? Do say something, instead of merely echoing what I say. It really is a serious matter, though you don’t think so.”

“Yes, I do think so,” said Miss Williams, at last; “and I would stop it if I thought I had any right. But Mr. Roy is quite able to manage his own affairs; and he is not so very old—not more than five-and-twenty years older than—Helen.”

“Bother Helen! I beg her pardon, she is a dear good girl. But do you think any man would look at Helen when there was Janetta?”



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It was out now, out with a burning blush over all the lad's honest face, and the sudden crick-crack of a pretty Indian paper-cutter he unfortunately was twiddling in his fingers. Miss Williams must have been blind indeed not to have guessed the state of the case.

"What! Janetta? Oh, David!" was all she said.

He nodded. "Yes, that's it, just it. I thought you must have found it out long ago: though I kept myself to myself pretty close, still you might have guessed."

"I never did. I had not the remotest idea. Oh, how remiss I have been! It is all my fault."

"Excuse me, I can not see that it is any body's fault, or any body's misfortune, either," said the young fellow, with a not unbecoming pride. "I hope I should not be a bad husband to any girl, when it comes to that. But it has not come; I have never said a single word to her. I wanted to be quite clear of Oxford, and in a way to win my own position first. And really we are so very jolly together as it is. What are you smiling for?"

She could not help it. There was something so funny in the whole affair. They seemed such babies, playing at love; and their love-making, if such it was, had been carried on in such an exceedingly open and lively way, not a bit of tragedy about it, rather genteel comedy, bordering on farce. It was such a contrast to—certain other love stories that she had known, quite buried out of sight now.

Gentle "Auntie"—the grave maiden lady, the old hen with all these young ducklings who would take to the water so soon—held out her hand to the impetuous David.

"I don't know what to say to you, my boy: you really are little more than a boy, and to be taking upon yourself the responsibilities of life so soon! Still, I am glad you have said nothing to her about it yet. She is a mere child, only eighteen."

"Quite old enough to marry, and to marry Mr. Roy even, the St. Andrews folks think. But I won't stand it. I won't tamely sit by and see her sacrificed. He might persuade her; he has a very winning way with him sometimes. Auntie, I have not spoken, but I won't promise not to speak. It is all very well for you; you are old, and your blood runs cold, as you said to us one day—no, I don't mean that; you are a real brick still, and you'll never be old to us, but you are not in love, and you can't understand what it is to be a young fellow like me to see an old fellow like Roy coming in and just walking over the course. But he sha'nt do it! Long ago, when I was quite a lad, I made up my mind to get her; and get her I will, spite of Mr. Roy or any body."

Fortune was touched. That strong will which she too had had, able, like faith, to "remove mountains," sympathized involuntarily with the lad. It was just what she would

have said and done, had she been a man and loved a woman. She gave David's hand a warm clasp, which he returned.

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“Forgive me,” said he, affectionately. “I did not mean to bother you; but as things stand, the matter is better out than in. I hate underhandedness. I may have made an awful fool of myself, but at least I have not made a fool of her. I have been as careful as possible not to compromise her in any way; for I know how people do talk, and a man has no right to let the girl he loves be talked about. The more he loves her, the more he ought to take care of her. Don’t you think so?”

“Yes.”

“I’d cut myself up into little pieces for Janetta’s sake,” he went on, “and I’d do a deal for Helen too, the sisters are so fond of one another. She shall always have a home with us, when we are married.”

“Then,” said Miss Williams, hardly able again to resist a smile, “you are quite certain you will be married? You have no doubt about her caring for you?”

David pulled his whiskers, not very voluminous yet, looked conscious, and yet humble.

“Well, I don’t exactly say that. I know I’m not half good enough for her. Still, I thought, when I had taken my degree and fairly settled myself at the bar, I’d try. I have a tolerably good income of my own too, though of course I am not as well off as that confounded Roy. There he is at this minute meandering up and down the West Sands with those two girls, setting every body’s tongue going! I can’t stand it. I declare to you I won’t stand it another day.”

“Stop a moment,” and she caught hold of David as he started up. “What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know and I don’t care, only I won’t have my girl talked about—my pretty, merry, innocent girl. He ought to know better, a shrewd old fellow like him. It is silly, selfish, mean.”

This was more than Miss Williams could bear. She stood up, pale to the lips, but speaking strongly, almost fiercely:

“You ought to know better, David Dalziel. You ought to know that Mr. Roy had not an atom of selfishness or meanness in him—that he would be the last man in the world to compromise any girl. If he chooses to marry Janetta, or any one else, he has a perfect right to do it, and I for one will not try to hinder him.”

“Then you will not stand by me any more?”

“Not if you are blind and unfair. You may die of love, though I don’t think you will; people don’t do it nowadays” (there was a slightly bitter jar in the voice): “but love ought to make you all the more honorable, clear-sighted, and just. And as to Mr. Roy—”



She might have talked to the winds, for David was not listening. He had heard the click of the garden gate, and turned round with blazing eyes.

“There he is again! I can’t stand it, Miss Williams. I give you fair warning I can’t stand it. He has walked home with them, and is waiting about at the laurel bush, mooning after them. Oh, hang him!”

Before she had time to speak the young man was gone. But she had no fear of any very tragic consequences when she saw the whole party standing together—David talking to Janetta, Mr. Roy to Helen, who looked so fresh, so young, so pretty, almost as pretty as Janetta. Nor did Mr. Roy, pleased and animated, look so very old.



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That strange clear-sightedness, that absolute justice, of which Fortune had just spoken, were qualities she herself possessed to a remarkable, almost a painful, degree. She could not deceive herself, even if she tried. The more cruel the sight, the clearer she saw it; even as now she perceived a certain naturalness in the fact that a middle-aged man so often chooses a young girl in preference to those of his own generation, for she brings him that which he has not; she reminds him of what he used to have; she is to him like the freshness of spring, the warmth of summer, in his cheerless autumn days. Sometimes these marriages are not unhappy—far from it; and Robert Roy might ere long make such a marriage. Despite poor David's jealous contempt, he was neither old nor ugly, and then he was rich.

The thing, either as regarded Helen, or some other girl of Helen's standing, appeared more than possible—probable; and if so, what then?

Fortune looked out once, and saw that the little group at the laurel bush were still talking; then she slipped up stairs into her own room and bolted the door.

The first thing that she did was to go straight up and look at her own face in the glass—her poor old face, which had never been beautiful, which she had never wished beautiful, except that it might be pleasant in one man's eyes. Sweet it was still, but the sweetness lay in its expression, pure and placid, and innocent as a young girl's. But she saw not that; she saw only its lost youth, its faded bloom. She covered it over with both her hands, as if she would fain bury it out of sight; knelt down by her bedside, and prayed.

“Mr. Roy is waiting below ma'am—has been waiting some time; but he says if you are busy he will not disturb you; he will come to-morrow instead.”

“Tell him I shall be very glad to see him to-morrow.”

She spoke through the locked door, too feeble to rise and open it; and then lying down on her bed and turning her face to the wall, from sheer exhaustion fell fast asleep.

People dream strangely sometimes. The dream she dreamt was so inexpressibly soothing and peaceful, so entirely out of keeping with the reality of things, that it almost seemed to have been what in ancient times would be called a vision.

First, she thought that she and Robert Roy were little children—mere girl and boy together, as they might have been from the few years' difference in their ages—running hand in hand about the sands of St. Andrews, and so fond of one another—so very fond! With that innocent love a big boy often has for a little girl, and a little girl returns with the tenderest fidelity. So she did; and she was so happy—they were both so happy. In the second part of the dream she was happy still, but somehow she knew she was dead—had been dead and in paradise for a long time, and was waiting for him to



come there. He was coming now; she felt him coming, and held out her hands, but he took and clasped her in his arms; and she heard a voice saying those mysterious words: "In heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God."

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It was very strange, all was very strange, but it comforted her. She rose up, and in the twilight of the soft spring evening she washed her face and combed her hair, and went down, like King David after his child was dead, to “eat bread.”

Her young people were not there. They had gone out again; she heard, with Mr. Dalziel, not Mr. Roy, who had sat reading in the parlor alone for upward of an hour. They were supposed to be golfing, but they staid out till long after it was possible to see balls or holes; and Miss Williams was beginning to be a little uneasy, when they all three walked in, David and Janetta with a rather sheepish air, and Helen beaming all over with mysterious delight.

How the young man had managed it—to propose to two sisters at once, at any rate to make love to one sister while the other was by—remained among the wonderful feats which David Dalziel, who had not too small an opinion of himself, was always ready for, and generally succeeded in; and if he did wear his heart somewhat “on his sleeve,” why, it was a very honest heart, and they must have been ill-natured “daws” indeed who took pleasure in “pecking at it.”

“Wish me joy, Auntie!” he cried, coming forward, beaming all over, the instant the girls had disappeared to take their hats off. “I’ve been and gone and done it, and it’s all right. I didn’t intend it just yet, but he drove me to it, for which I’m rather obliged to him. He can’t get her now. Janetta’s mine!”

There was a boyish triumph in his air; in fact, his whole conduct was exceedingly juvenile, but so simple, frank, and sincere as to be quite irresistible.

I fear Miss Williams was a very weak-minded woman, or would be so considered by a great part of the world—the exceedingly wise and prudent and worldly-minded “world.” Here were two young people, one twenty-two, the other eighteen, with—it could hardly be said “not a half-penny,” but still a very small quantity of half-pennies, between them—and they had not only fallen in love, but engaged themselves to married! She ought to have been horrified, to have severely reproached them for their imprudence, used all her influence and, if needs be, her authority, to stop the whole thing; advising David not to bind himself to any girl till he was much older, and his prospects secured; and reasoning with Janetta on the extreme folly of a long engagement, and how very much better it would be for her to pause, and make some “good” marriage with a man of wealth and position, who could keep her comfortably.

All this, no doubt, was what a prudent and far-seeing mother or friend ought to have said and done. Miss Williams did no such thing, and said not a single word. She only kissed her “children”—Helen too, whose innocent delight was the prettiest thing to behold—then sat down and made tea for them all, as if nothing had happened.



But such events do not happen without making a slight stir in a family, especially such a quiet family as that at the cottage. Besides, the lovers were too childishly happy to be at all reticent over their felicity. Before David was turned away that night to the hotel which he and Mr. Roy both inhabited, every body in the house knew quite well that Mr. Dalziel and Miss Janetta were to be married.



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And every body had of course suspected it long ago, and was not in the least surprised, so that the mistress of the household herself was half ashamed to confess how very much surprised *she* had been. However, as every body seemed delighted, for most people have a “sneaking kindness” toward young lovers, she kept her own counsel; smiled blandly over her old cook’s half-pathetic congratulations to the young couple, who were “like the young bears, with all their troubles before them,” and laughed at the sympathetic forebodings of the girls’ faithful maid, a rather elderly person, who was supposed to have been once “disappointed,” and who “hoped Mr. Dalziel was not too young to know his own mind.” Still, in spite of all, the family were very much delighted, and not a little proud.

David walked in, master of the position now, directly after breakfast, and took the sisters out for a walk, both of them, declaring he was as much encumbered as if he were going to marry two young ladies at once, but bearing his lot with great equanimity. His love-making indeed was so extraordinarily open and undisguised that it did not much matter who was by. And Helen was of that sweet negative nature that seemed made for the express purpose of playing “gooseberry.”

Directly they had departed, Mr. Roy came in.

He might have been a far less acute observer than he was not to detect at once that “something had happened” in the little family. Miss Williams kept him waiting several minutes, and when she did come in her manner was nervous and agitated. They spoke about the weather and one or two trivial things, but more than once Fortune felt him looking at her with that keen, kindly observation which had been sometimes, during all these weeks now running into months, of almost daily meeting, and of the closest intimacy—a very difficult thing to bear.

He was exceedingly kind to her always; there was no question of that. Without making any show of it, he seemed always to know where she was and what she was doing. Nothing ever lessened his silent care of her. If ever she wanted help, there he was to give it. And in all their excursions she had a quiet conviction that whoever forgot her or her comfort, he never would. But then it was his way. Some men have eyes and ears for only one woman, and that merely while they happen to be in love with her; whereas Robert Roy was courteous and considerate to every woman, even as he was kind to every weak or helpless creature that crossed his path.

Evidently he perceived that all was not right; and, though he said nothing, there was a tenderness in his manner which went to her heart.

“You are not looking well to-day; should you not go out?” he said. “I met all your young people walking off to the sands: they seemed extraordinarily happy.”



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Fortune was much perplexed. She did not like not to tell him the news—him, who had so completely established himself as a friend of the family. And yet to tell him was not exactly her place; besides, he might not care to hear. Old maid as she was, or thought herself, Miss Williams knew enough of men not to fall into the feminine error of fancying they feel as we do—that their world is our world, and their interest our interest. To most men, a leader in the *Times*, an article in the *Quarterly*, or a fall in the money market is of far more importance than any love affair in the world, unless it happens to be their own.

Why should I tell him? she thought, convinced that he noticed the anxiety in her eyes, the weariness at her heart. She had passed an almost sleepless night, pondering over the affairs of these young people, who never thought of any thing beyond their own new-born happiness. And she had perplexed herself with wondering whether in consenting to this engagement she was really doing her duty by her girls, who had no one but her, and whom she was so tender of, for their dead father's sake. But what good was it to say any thing? She must bear her own burden. And yet—

Robert Roy looked at her with his kind, half-amused smile.

“You had better tell me all about it; for, indeed, I know already.”

“What! did you guess it?”

“Perhaps. But Dalziel came to my room last night and poured out everything. He is a candid youth. Well, and am I to congratulate?”

Greatly relieved, Fortune looked up.

“That's right,” he said; “I like to see you smile. A minute or two ago you seemed as if you had the cares of all the world on your shoulders. No, that is not exactly the truth. Always meet the truth face to face, and don't be frightened by it.”

Ah, no. If she had had that strong heart to lean on, that tender hand to help her through the world, she never would have been “frightened” at any thing.

“I know I am very foolish,” she said; “but there are many things which these children of mine don't see, and I can't help seeing.”

“Certainly; they are young, and we are—well, never mind. Sit down here, and let you and me talk the matter quietly over. On the whole, are you glad or sorry?”

“Both, I think. David is able to take care of himself; but poor little Janetta—my Janetta—what if he should bring her to poverty? He is a little reckless about money, and has only a very small certain income. Worse; suppose being so young, he should by-and-by get tired of her, and neglect her, and break her heart?”



“Or twenty other things which may happen, or may not, and of which they must take the chance, like their neighbors. You do not believe very much in men, I see, and perhaps you are right. We are a bad lot—a bad lot. But David Dalziel is as good as most of us, that I can assure you.”



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She could hardly tell whether he was in jest or earnest; but this was certain, he meant to cheer and comfort her, and she took the comfort, and was thankful.

“Now to the point,” continued Mr. Roy. “You feel that, in a worldly point of view, these two have done a very foolish thing, and you have aided and abetted them in doing it?”

“Not so,” she cried, laughing; “I had no idea of such a thing till David told me yesterday morning of his intentions.”

“Yes, and he explained to me why he told you, and why he dared not wait any longer. He blurts out every thing, the foolish boy! But he has made friends with me now. They do seem such children, do they not, compared with old folks like you and me?”

What was it in the tone or the words which made her feel not in the least vexed, nor once attempt to rebut the charge of being “old?”

“I’ll tell you what it is,” said Robert Roy, with one of his sage smiles, “you must not go and vex yourself needlessly about trifles. We should not judge other people by ourselves. Every body is so different. Dalziel may make his way all the better for having that pretty creature for a wife, not but what some other pretty creature might soon have done just as well. Very few men have tenacity of nature enough, if they can not get the one woman they love, to do without any other to the end of their days. But don’t be disappointed yourself about your girl. David will make her a very good husband. They will be happy enough, even though not very rich.”

“Does that matter much?”

“I used to think so. I had so sore a lesson of poverty in my youth, that it gave me an almost morbid terror of it, not for myself, but for any woman I cared for. Once I would not have done as Dalziel has for the world. Now I have changed my mind. At any rate, David will not have one misfortune to contend with. He has a thoroughly good opinion of himself, poor fellow! He will not suffer from that horrible self-distrust which makes some men let themselves drift on and on with the tide, instead of taking the rudder into their own hands and steering straight on—direct for the haven where they would be. Oh, that I had done it.”

He spoke passionately, and then sat silent. At last, muttering something about “begging her pardon,” and “taking a liberty,” he changed the conversation into another channel, by asking whether this marriage, when it happened—which, of course could not be just immediately—would make any difference to her circumstances.

Some difference, she explained, because the girls would receive their little fortunes whenever they came of age or married, and the sisters would not like to be parted;



besides, Helen's money would help the establishment. Probably, whenever David married, he would take them both away; indeed, he had said as much.

"And then shall you stay on here?"

"I may, for I have a small income of my own; besides, there are your two little boys, and I might find two or three more. But I do not trouble myself much about the future. One thing is certain, I need never work as hard as I have done all my life."

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“Have you worked so very hard, then, my poor—”

He left the sentence unfinished; his hand, half extended, was drawn back, for the three young people were seen coming down the garden, followed by the two boys, returning from their classes. It was nearly dinner-time, and people must dine, even though in love; and boys must be kept to their school work, and all the daily duties of life must be done. Well, perhaps, for many of us, that such should be! I think it was as well for poor Fortune Williams.

The girls had come in wet through, with one of those sudden “haars” which are not uncommon at St. Andrews in spring, and it seemed likely to last all day. Mr. Roy looked out of the window at it with a slightly dolorous air.

“I suppose I am rather *de trop* here, but really I wish you would not turn me out. In weather like this our hotel coffee-room is just a trifle dull, isn't it, Dalziel? And, Miss Williams, your parlor looks so comfortable. Will you let me stay?”

He made the request with a simplicity quite pathetic. One of the most lovable things about this man—is it not in all men?—was, that with all his shrewdness and cleverness, and his having been knocked up and down the world for so many years, he still kept a directness and simpleness of character almost child-like.

To refuse would have been unkind, impossible; so Miss Williams told him he should certainly stay if he could make himself comfortable. And to that end she soon succeeded in turning off her two turtle-doves into a room by themselves, for the use of which they had already bargained, in order to “read together, and improve their minds.” Meanwhile she and Helen tried to help the two little boys to spend a dull holiday indoors—if they were ever dull beside Uncle Robert, who had not lost his old influence with boys, and to those boys was already a father in all but the name.

Often Fortune watched them, sitting upon his chair, hanging about him as he walked, coming to him for sympathy in every thing. Yes, every body loved him, for there was such an amount of love in him toward every mortal creature, except—

She looked at him and his boys, then turned away. What was to be had been, and always would be. That which we fight against in our youth as being human will, human error, in our age we take humbly, knowing it to be the will of God.

By-and-by in the little household the gas was lighted, the curtains drawn, and the two lovers fetched in for tea, to behave themselves as much as they could like ordinary mortals, in general society, for the rest of the evening. A very pleasant evening it was, spite of this new element; which was got rid of as much as possible by means of the window recess, where Janetta and David encamped composedly, a little aloof from the rest.



“I hope they don’t mind me,” said Mr. Roy, casting an amused glance in their direction, and then adroitly maneuvering with the back of his chair so as to interfere as little as possible with the young couple’s felicity.



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“Oh no, they don’t mind you at all,” answered Helen, always affectionate, if not always wise. “Besides, I dare say you yourself were young once, Mr. Roy.”

Evidently Helen had no idea of the plans for her future which were being talked about in St. Andrews. Had he? No one could even speculate with such an exceedingly reserved person. He retired behind his newspaper, and said not a single word.

Nevertheless, there was no cloud in the atmosphere. Every body was used to Mr. Roy’s silence in company. And he never troubled any body, not even the children, with either a gloomy look or a harsh word. He was so comfortable to live with, so unfailingly sweet and kind.

Although there was a strange atmosphere of peace in the cottage that evening, though nobody seemed to do any thing or say very much. Now and then Mr. Roy read aloud bits out of his endless newspapers—he had a truly masculine mania for newspapers, and used to draw one after another out of his pockets, as endless as a conjurer’s pocket-handkerchiefs. And he liked to share their contents with any body that would listen; though I am afraid nobody did listen much to-night except Miss Williams, who sat beside him at her sewing, in order to get the benefit of the same lamp. And between his readings he often turned and looked at her, her bent head, her smooth soft hair, her busy hands.

Especially after one sentence, out of the “Varieties” of some Fife newspaper. He had begun to read it, then stopped suddenly, but finished it. It consisted only of a few words: “*Young love is passionate, old love is faithful; but the very tenderest thing in all this world is a love revived.*” That is true.”

He said only those three words, in a very low, quiet voice, but Fortune heard. His look she did not see, but she felt it—even as a person long kept in darkness might feel a sunbeam strike along the wall, making it seem possible that there might be somewhere in the earth such a thing as day.

About nine P.M. the lovers in the window recess discovered that the haer was all gone, and that it was a most beautiful moonlight night; full moon, the very night they had planned to go in a body to the top of St. Regulus tower.

“I suppose they must,” said Mr. Roy to Miss Williams; adding, “Let the young folks make the most of their youth; it never will come again.”

“No.”

“And you and I must go too. It will be more *comme il faut*, as people say.”

So, with a half-regretful look at the cozy fire, Mr. Roy marshaled the lively party, Janetta and David, Helen and the two boys; engaging to get them the key of that silent garden



of graves over which St. Regulus tower keeps stately watch. How beautiful it looked, with the clear sky shining through its open arch, and the brilliant moonlight, bright as day almost, but softer, flooding every alley of that peaceful spot! It quieted even the noisy party who were bent on climbing the tower, to catch a view, such as is rarely equaled, of the picturesque old city and its beautiful bay.



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"A 'comfortable place to sleep in,' as some one once said to me in a Melbourne churchyard. But 'east or west, home is best.—I think, Bob, I shall leave it in my will that you are to bury me at St. Andrews.'"

"Nonsense, Uncle Robert! You are not to talk of dying. And you are to come with us up to the top of the tower. Miss Williams, will you come too?"

"No, I think she had better not," said Uncle Robert, decisively. "She will stay here, and I will keep her company."

So the young people all vanished up the tower, and the two elders walked silently side by side the quiet graves—by the hearts which had ceased beating, the hands which, however close they lay, would never clasp one another any more.

"Yes, St. Andrews is a pleasant place," said Robert Roy at last. "I spoke in jest, but I meant in earnest; I have no wish to leave it again. And you," he added, seeing that she answered nothing—"what plans have you? Shall you stay on at the cottage till these young people are married?"

"Most likely. We are all fond of the little house."

"No wonder. They say a wandering life after a certain number of years unsettles a man forever; he rests nowhere, but goes on wandering to the end. But I feel just the contrary. I think I shall stay permanently at St. Andrews. You will let me come about your cottage, 'like a tame cat,' as that foolish fellow owned he had called me—will you not?"

"Certainly."

But at the same time she felt there was a strain beyond which she could not bear. To be so near, yet so far; so much to him, and yet so little. She was conscious of a wild desire to run away somewhere—run away and escape it all; of a longing to be dead and buried, deep in the sea, up away among the stars.

"Will those young people be very long, do you think?"

At the sound of her voice he turned to look at her, and saw that she was deadly pale, and shivering from head to foot.

"This will never do. You must 'come under my plaidie,' as the children say, and I will take you home at once. Boys!" he called out to the figures now appearing like jackdaws at the top of the tower, "we are going straight home. Follow us as soon as you like. Yes, it must be so," he answered to the slight resistance she made. "They must all take care of themselves. I mean to take care of you."



Which he did, wrapping her well in the half of his plaid, drawing her hand under his arm and holding it there—holding it close and warm at his heart all the way along the Scores and across the Links, scarcely speaking a single word until they reached the garden gate. Even there he held it still.

“I see your girls coming, so I shall leave you. You are warm now, are you not?”

“Quite warm.”

“Good-night, then. Stay. Tell me”—he spoke rapidly, and with much agitation—“tell me just one thing, and I will never trouble you again. Why did you not answer a letter I wrote to you seventeen years ago?”



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“I never got any letter. I never had one word from you after the Sunday you bade me good-by, promising to write.”

“And I did write,” cried he, passionately. “I posted it with my own hands. You should have got it on the Tuesday morning.”

She leaned against the laurel bush, that fatal laurel bush, and in a few breathless words told him what David had said about the hidden letter.

“It must have been my letter. Why did you not tell me this before?”

“How could I? I never knew you had written. You never said a word. In all these years you have never said a single word.”

Bitterly, bitterly he turned away. The groan that escaped him—a man’s groan over his lost life—lost, not wholly through fate alone—was such as she, the woman whose portion had been sorrow, passive sorrow only, never forgot in all her days.

“Don’t mind it,” she whispered—“don’t mind it. It is so long past now.”

He made no immediate answer, then said,

“Have you no idea what was in the letter?”

“No.”

“It was to ask you a question, which I had determined not to ask just then, but I changed my mind. The answer, I told you, I should wait for in Edinburgh seven days; after that, I should conclude you meant No, and sail. No answer came, and I sailed.”

He was silent. So was she. A sense of cruel fatality came over her. Alas! those lost years, that might have been such happy years! At length she said, faintly, “Forget it. It was not your fault.”

“It was my fault. If not mine, you were still yourself—I ought never to have let you go. I ought to have asked again; to have sought through the whole world till I found you again. And now that I have found you—”

“Hush! The girls are here.”

They came along laughing, that merry group—with whom life was at its spring—who had lost nothing, knew not what it was to lose!

“Good-night,” said Mr. Roy, hastily. “But—to-morrow morning?”



“Yes.”

“There never is night to which comes no morn,” says the proverb. Which is not always true, at least as to this world; but it is true sometimes.

That April morning Fortune Williams rose with a sense of strange solemnity—neither sorrow nor joy. Both had gone by; but they had left behind them a deep peace.

After her young people had walked themselves off, which they did immediately after breakfast, she attended to all her household duties, neither few nor small, and then sat down with her needle-work beside the open window. It was a lovely day; the birds were singing, the leaves budding, a few early flowers making all the air to smell like spring. And she—with her it was autumn now. She knew it, but still she did not grieve.

Presently, walking down the garden walk, almost with the same firm step of years ago—how well she remembered it!—Robert Roy came; but it was still a few minutes before she could go into the little parlor to meet him. At last she did, entering softly, her hand extended as usual. He took it, also as usual, and then looked down into her face, as he had done that Sunday. “Do you remember this? I have kept it for seventeen years.”



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It was her mother's ring. She looked up with a dumb inquiry.

"My love, did you think I did not love you?—you always, and only you?"

So saying, he opened his arms; she felt them close round her, just as in her dream. Only they were warm, living arms; and it was this world, not the next. All those seventeen bitter years seemed swept away, annihilated in a moment; she laid her head on his shoulder and wept out her happy heart there.

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The little world of St. Andrews was very much astonished when it learned that Mr. Roy was going to marry, not one of the pretty Miss Moseleys, but their friend and former governess, a lady, not by any means young, and remarkable for nothing except great sweetness and good sense, which made every body respect and like her; though nobody was much excited concerning her. Now people had been excited about Mr. Roy, and some were rather sorry for him; thought perhaps he had been taken in, till some story got wind of its having been an "old attachment," which interested them of course; still, the good folks were half angry with him. To go and marry an old maid when he might have had his choice of half a dozen young ones! when, with his fortune and character, he might, as people say—as they had said of that other good man, Mr. Moseley—"have married any body!"

They forgot that Mr. Roy happened to be one of those men who have no particular desire to marry "any body;" to whom *the* woman, whether found early or late—alas! in this case found early and won late—is the one woman in the world forever. Poor Fortune—rich Fortune! she need not be afraid of her fading cheek, her silvering hair; he would never see either. The things he loved her for were quite apart from any thing that youth could either give or take away. As he said one, when she lamented hers, "Never mind, let it go. You will always be yourself—and mine."

This was enough. He loved her. He had always loved her: she had no fear but that he would love her faithfully to the end.

Theirs was a very quiet wedding, and a speedy one. "Why should they wait? they had waited too long already," he said, with some bitterness. But she felt none. With her all was peace.

Mr. Roy did another very foolish thing which I can not conscientiously recommend to any middle-aged bachelor. Besides marrying his wife, he married her whole family. There was no other way out of the difficulty, and neither of them was inclined to be content with happiness, leaving duty unfulfilled. So he took the largest house in St. Andrews, and brought to it Janetta and Helen, till David Dalziel could claim them;



likewise his own two orphan boys, until they went to Oxford; for he meant to send them there, and bring them up in every way like his own sons.

Meantime, it was rather a heterogeneous family; but the two heads of it bore their burden with great equanimity, nay, cheerfulness; saying sometimes, with a smile which had the faintest shadow of pathos in it, "that they liked to have young life about them."



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And by degrees they grew younger themselves; less of the old bachelor and old maid, and more of the happy middle-aged couple to whom Heaven gave, in their decline, a St. Martin's summer almost as sweet as spring. They were both too wise to poison the present by regretting the past—a past which, if not wholly, was partly, at least, owing to that strange fatality which governs so many lives, only some have the will to conquer it, others not. And there are two sides to every thing: Robert Roy, who alone knew how hard his own life had been, sometimes felt a stern joy in thinking no one had shared it.

Still, for a long time there lay at the bottom of that strong, gentle heart of his a kind of remorseful tenderness, which showed itself in heaping his wife with every luxury that his wealth could bring; better than all, in surrounding her with that unceasing care which love alone teaches, never allowing the wind to blow on her too roughly—his “poor lamb,” as he sometime called her, who had suffered so much.

They are sure, humanly speaking, to “live very happy to the end of their days.” And I almost fancy sometimes, if I were to go to St. Andrews, as I hope to do many a time, for I am as fond of the Aged City as they are, that I should see those two, made one at last after all those cruel divided years, wandering together along the sunshiny sands, or standing to watch the gay golfing parties; nay, I am not sure that Robert Roy would not be visible sometimes in his red coat, club in hand, crossing the Links, a victim to the universal insanity of St. Andrews, yet enjoying himself, as golfers always seem to do, with the enjoyment of a very boy.

She is not a girl, far from it; but there will always be a girlish sweetness in her faded face till its last smile. And to see her sitting beside her husband on the green slopes of the pretty garden—knitting, perhaps while he reads his eternal newspapers—is a perfect picture. They do not talk very much; indeed, they were neither of them ever great talkers. But each knows the other is close at hand, ready for any needful word, and always ready with that silent sympathy which is so mysterious a thing, the rarest thing to find in all human lives. These have found it, and are satisfied. And day by day truer grows the truth of that sentence which Mrs. Roy once discovered in her husband's pocket-book, cut out of a newspaper—she read and replaced it without a word, but with something between a smile and tear—*“Young love is passionate, old love is faithful; but the very tenderest thing in all this world is a love revived.”*