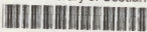




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THE STORY OF A MOTHER

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

THE GREEN GRAVES OF BALGOWRIE.

A DAUGHTER OF STRIFE.

RACHEL.

*WITH MARY FINDLATER*

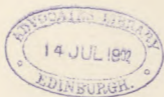
TALES THAT ARE TOLD.

x

# THE STORY OF A MOTHER

BY

JANE HELEN FINDLATER



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# THE STORY OF A MOTHER

## CHAPTER I

THE old manse of Carradale turned its back upon the beating northern sea and faced south-west, so that the front windows were sure to get all the sunshine that was going. The autumn winds blew in from the west over leagues of heather—scented like a honeycomb, a joy to breathe ; but, oh, in the seven weary months of winter over what wastes of snow and ice the winds came blowing !

Then young Zachary Hosëason would look out over the steppe-like moors and wonder if the spring would ever come. Winter was one long penance to the boy for the sins of summer—a penance he suffered at the hands of his father, the Rev. John Hosëason, better known over a hundred miles of desolate country by

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his appropriate nickname of the Archbishop. There are ecclesiastics in every age and in every church, men of an adroit, masterful nature who will dominate all the weaker minds about them, and build up a structure of ecclesiasticism on the barest elements of truth. Religion is one spirit with many manifestations; but every manifestation tends really to this one end, the building up of a structure of man's devising upon the simple, structureless truths of God.

In some men less, in some men more, this ecclesiastical tendency shows itself. John Hosëason, a minister of the Church of Scotland, had the tendency in its most pronounced form. He was by nature a ruler of men, loving to have pre-eminence in everything. Rule he must, and that in a pompous, important manner. He loved ceremonies and forms, and would invent them whenever it was possible to do so. Such a man is wasted in a Presbyterian church; John Hosëason would have been in his right place in the Church of Rome, shocked as he would have been to

be told so. But Fate had willed otherwise, so behold him a parish minister, not a cardinal.

It said a great deal for the Archbishop that with this dominating nature he was not disliked; this was explained by the fact of his entire sincerity. His fellow-ministers got into the habit of leaning upon him instead of opposing him, and his parishioners regarded him as a sort of Jove, at whose nod they came and went.

He was a very tall and rather stout man, clean shaven, with small, deep-set, keen grey eyes. His skin was sallow and his features pronounced almost to harshness. He always walked slowly—no one had ever seen John Hosëason in a hurry—and this physical characteristic was only the outward sign of inward graces: the graces of decision, temperate judgment, and self-reliance. In this year of grace 1813 he ruled over the parish of Carradale with undisputed sway.

This was the rather overwhelming personality that had shaded Zachary's childhood.

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I cannot in honesty assert that Zachary was devoted to his father. He dreaded him far too much to feel great affection for him ; but then affection was not openly expressed between parents and children in these days, so the want of it was not noticed as it would be now. Throughout the winter months the Archbishop devoted a large part of every day to his son's education : a great classical scholar himself, he had decided that Zachary must be the same, and with a view to this had kept the boy at home, under his own severe tuition, long after most boys would have been at school for years. At the age of sixteen Zachary had never been out of the remote parish of Carra-dale.

He had had, none the less, more Latin and Greek thrashed into him than is generally managed at home. Not that Zachary was a scholar by nature—very far from it ; but it would have taken a vast amount of courage to appear before John Hosëason with an ill-prepared lesson. 'The Study'—almost a sacred room to the Hosëason children—was Zachary's school-

room. While the other sitting-rooms looked to the south this austere chamber faced north. From the deep window-seat where he prepared his lessons Zachary could catch sight only of the sea—the sea and the long miles of sand, where the breakers rolled in with a calling that was never done. In stormy weather the gulls and other birds would often dash up against the window-panes with a noise that made the boy look up from his grammar. Once, when Zachary was alone in the study, deep in Latin translation, came a poor, wind-buffed gull, and flung itself against the pane. Stunned with the blow, the bird fell on the grass below the window, and lay there with not a feather stirring. Zachary threw up the window (and threw down his *Cæsar*) and jumped out to secure the gull—it had been sinful waste to lose such a prize! But of course the door must open at that very moment.

‘Zachary,’ said an awful voice, ‘lay down that bird and come in again. . . .’

Zachary never saw a bird dashed against

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the window again without a thrill of painful remembrance.

Wandering thoughts were Zachary's great snare, and this window looking seawards fostered these to an extent that his father had no idea of. For the sea was always calling, calling to the boy; there was the highway of the nations, that led everywhere; following it, where might he not find himself? 'I might steer away from just out there,' Zachary often thought, 'and reach the very ends of the earth! And here father keeps me shut up between these four walls, studying the Latin grammar!' Sometimes, in his impotent hate of the grammar, he would take the book by the two boards and shake it: 'What do I want with grammar? Oh, I want to see the world, and cross the seas, and have adventures, and see strange sights!' This was the cry of Zachary's heart that grew more and more clamorous every year he lived—to cross the seas, to sail away from Carradale, that was all his desire. But instead of sailing away to see the world poor Zachary stayed on at

home, his days and years as monotonous as beads on a string. He could have counted on his fingers those red-letter days that had contained any variety for him. Sometimes, mounted on a Shetland pony, he would ride with his father to the next manse, which was fifteen miles away, there to sit in silence while John Hosëason and Mr. MacCulloch talked their uninteresting dry-as-dust talk. Or another day he might ride to Orna, the sheep farm kept by Hugh Frazer, one of his father's elders. There was more amusement to be had there, and always a delightful farmhouse tea to be eaten. Once he had been storm-stayed at the lighthouse on the West Cape, where he had gone with his father to 'a catechising'—that was a day to be remembered for ever! But somehow things had been duller than usual lately; at least Zachary thought so—because with the growing body comes the growing mind that is ever stretching forward to something it wants, it knows not what—something new and brilliant and untried. And the things of every day become

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irksome and apparently unnecessary, and the unattainable alone has attractions for it.

About this time Zachary began, suddenly, to find the society of Mary and Isobel, his little sisters, quite insupportable—they were such children, and didn't understand anything that he felt. Still, they had their uses—they were convenient safety-valves for speech; and stretched at ease among the heather one long spring day, gazing up into the blue, Zachary gave vent to strange and revolutionary sentiments—

'I wonder, Mary, what it is like beyond Carradale—do you ever want to go away? I am going to be a sailor, and sail round and round the world.'

'No, Zack, I would rather stay at home,' said Mary, the unimaginative; but Isobel, with greater spirit, volunteered to follow the adventurer.

'We would hear the sirens sing, you know,' Zack pursued, 'for I wouldn't stuff my ears with anything, and we would be caught, and kept on desert islands by goddesses, and we



would marry them, and have other wives at home and never mind, and come back to them just when we chose, and dress up and see if they knew us, and——'

'That would be splendid,' said Isobel. Her classical education was defective, so she thought that the imaginative gifts of her brother had supplied the whole fabric of this dream. Doubts, however, invaded her at this point.

'But, Zack, you know you wont be allowed to go away to sea,' she suggested; 'and neither would I be.' Her meaning was plain, if her sentence had got a little mixed.

'Oh, well, you could never be a sailor, of course,' said Zack quickly, 'but I can. Before very long, father says I am to go to college, so instead of that I'll say, "I think I am going to sea"; I hate books.'

'Zack,' said the literal Mary, 'you know you would never dare to say that to father.'

'Yes, I would, Mary. I'm not afraid of any one, not even of father, and I've a will of my own,' retorted the boy, though in his

heart of hearts he was not very sure that he spoke the truth.'

Such conversations as these were common about this time between Zack and his sisters.

Spring seemed to fever the boy's blood and make him more and more restless. In the bitter winter months it was easier to forget the outside world that must lie beyond the sea and behind the jagged blue hills: now in this smiling weather, when all the earth was green again, what hindered that he should explore the great, untried, interesting, wonderful world? Nothing but his father, Zack said bitterly to himself—ay, and to the little girls too, which was very wrong of him. But spring wore away, and summer came while all this ferment was working in Zack's young brain. The season of the summer 'preachings,' as the Communion services used to be called, had come round again. The 'preachings' were a tremendous occasion in those now far-away days in the north country. Whether there was really a greater interest in spiritual matters then is a question for wise heads to ponder

over; what concerns us now is the immediate effect of this solemn occasion on Zachary Hosëason.

It was the height of the holiday season, and very splendid weather. The long nights melted into the mornings with scarcely any line of darkness to divide them, as is the way in the far north, and these interminable summer days were capable of holding an almost unlimited amount of pleasure for Zack, now that lessons were over; walking and riding and rowing and fishing—all the dear and hardy joys of youth and health, were crowded into those delicious days. So all the more to be regretted was that pause which fell over these pursuits when 'The Occasion,' as the Sacramental season was often called, came round.

Thursday was to be the Fast Day. On Wednesday afternoon the ministers who were to preach the next day arrived, and that evening Zack was bidden to don his best clothes. It was the beginning of the end, he thought, as he stood before the looking-glass and wrenched at

the button of his collar. At this moment the door opened to admit Mrs. Hosëason. It was one of the many peculiarities of Zack's mother that she had an inordinate pride in the appearance of her children. Rarely good-looking herself, this must have been some subtle form of vanity. She was for ever getting new clothes for the children, and Zack, who had not yet reached the age of vanity, was sorely bothered by her solicitude on his behalf.

'Let me see you, Zack,' she said, seizing the comb and turning him to face the light. 'How often have I told you to divide your hair straightly, and not to brush it flat that way—the curl scarcely shows in it. You might have hair as flat as Sandy Dow the ploughman!'

'I wish I had, then,' said Zack, for the comb tugged his curly locks.

'And your tie is squint, too,' said the mother further, twitching it into place with a quick, clever touch. 'Now come downstairs and shake hands with Mr. MacCulloch and Dr. Grant; they have both arrived.'

There was none of that fuss made over

children then that we make now—the three young people received a shake of the hand from each of the ministers, and then were dismissed to chairs at the dark end of the parlour, there to listen, with such patience as they could muster, to the improving, but to them unintelligible, conversation of their elders. Mary and Isobel were rather awed by the solemnity of company and the general hush that was over the house; but Zack's soul was filled with bitterness. This was Wednesday; to-morrow they would be in church most of the day; Friday's services, though less severe, were still to follow, and Saturday's after that, and then Sunday! Heaven send that Sunday be a fine day and the preachings be held out of doors! Then some little diversion was always occurring: the flight of birds across the sky; the distant sound of the sea to listen to; the sudden patter of a shower over the impassive crowd; the bliss of a fight between some of the sheep-dogs, or the excitement of a pony broken loose from its tether cantering past the outskirts of the throng! But then it might be

very wet, and the whole livelong day he might be boxed up in church. And then was there not Monday too to be lived through? Alas, poor Zack, you had not learned patience then, for five days seemed to you like five years in prospect!

Lost in these bitter thoughts, Zack sat kicking his heels the whole evening; it was on the way upstairs to bed that the fire, long smouldering, broke out.

'I hate ministers; I hate services; I don't know how I'm going to live until Tuesday,' cried Zack on the top step of the garret stair.

'Oh . . ., oh . . .,' went the little girls, and then Mary in her baldest manner spoke words of wisdom.

'You're going to be made a minister yourself, Zack; I heard father say so to Dr. Grant to-night, so you needn't speak that way.'

'Made into one! I'll make my own life; I won't have any other person—no, not my father or any one—make my life for me. I'll live how I like, and where and how—you talk as if I were my father's slave!'

He strode along the passage, slammed the door and locked it, and began to fling off his best clothes in a way that would have sickened his mother's very soul.

He meant to pass a night of passionate rebellion in thought—to come to great decisions—perhaps even to fly at break of day towards the outer world where happiness and freedom lay. But instead, he laid his curly head on the pillow, and three minutes later was sleeping a dreamless sleep—a harmless young revolutionary in a pink cotton night-shirt.

## CHAPTER II

So the inevitable morning broke, and found Zack just where he had been the night before. And the whole day was to be spent in services. These began at twelve o'clock, and by five o'clock of that glowing July afternoon the benediction had not yet been pronounced. It certainly was something of an ordeal for children, and Zack, who held himself too old to sleep nowadays, was hard pressed to invent amusement for the long hours. To him, as, alas! to too many Scottish children, the Bible had become a weariness from over-repetition of its contents; so that the grand words simply ran through his mind like water, conveying no meaning at all. So as there was no interest in the service for him, he fell to examining the people, of course; but how stolid, how unchanging they all appeared!



There was, however, always his mother left to admire: no one in the world, Zack thought, was so lovely as his mother. This afternoon as he sat watching her a curious rebel thought sprang up in the boy's brain—

‘I wonder now what made my mother marry my father. . . . I don't *know*, but I think there must be men somewhere more like her.’ . . .

His eyes wandered again over the congregation: Helen Hosëason sat there on the green slope of the hillside (the preaching was out of doors that day) wrapped in a long blue cloak with a hood; but because the weather was so hot, the hood had slipped off unnoticed, and the breeze blew her rippled black hair back from her forehead. Her blue eyes, as keen as swords, were fixed on the officiating minister as she leant forward, her dainty-shaped chin resting on her hand.

‘Now,’ thought Zack, ‘how strangely unlike my father she is!’ For there, on the opposite slope, sat John Hosëason, so grave, so pompous, so unbending.

‘Would any of the other men here have

suited her better?' Zack pursued, terrified by his own audacious thought, yet delightedly amused.

'Would Dr. Grant or Mr. MacCulloch? Oh no—no—neither of them; or Frazer the sheep-farmer?—no again; or Sutherland the land-agent from Skiebuie?—no; but there must be other men in the world,'—and here Zack's wandering thoughts were brought up short by the benediction.

A few minutes more and the congregation went scattering off over the moor, and Zack, walking with his mother, turned his steps homeward. The boy walked in silence, but if the truth be told, his thoughts were very mundane: there was always such nice food on the Fast Day! (the thought did not provoke a smile). Food was really the only pleasure that could reasonably be looked for for the next four days, so it was as well to make the most of it. There would be roasted chickens, and salmon, and currant tart and cream, and baker's bread (a great luxury), and cream cheese—Zack's healthy young appetite awoke

at the thought of these good things, and he insensibly quickened his pace.

'Zachary, do not walk so quickly,' said his mother, and the pace was moderated again. Mary and Isobel, sorely wearied, poor lambs, by the long services, followed slowly behind.

'Oh dear! how dull, how long until dinner-time,' Zack thought, and then as they turned the corner and came towards the Manse, his heart gave a great leap of delight. What was this that he saw? For there stood before the Manse gate a great coach drawn by a pair of shining black horses that champed their bits and shook their heads in the sunshine.

'Tis Lord Ruxton, Zachary!' cried his mother. 'Tell me, has my hood fallen off? Catch it round my hair,' she added, feeling for the strings of the cloak that hung loosely off her shoulders.

'Is it the Lord Ruxton I'm named after, mother?' Zack asked in great excitement. He had often heard of this dignitary, but had never seen him; for though Lord Ruxton

owned the whole of the parish of Carradale he seldom lived in Scotland.

‘Yes, yes, of course it is the same,’ replied Mrs. Hosëason. ‘I heard he was come to Arden, but no one expected him here.’

The little girls were as delighted as Zack at this sudden excitement. Isobel, indeed, in her childish joy called out to the lagging Mary to hasten, for ‘The Lord has come!’ she added in her shrill voice. Helen Hosëason, in her flurry over the reception of this unlooked-for and distinguished guest, did not notice her daughter’s mistake; but Lord Ruxton, as he came forward to meet them, caught the words.

‘Your daughter’s words tell of a vast amount of sermon hearing, Mrs. Hosëason,’ he said laughing. ‘And I am afraid I have come at an inconvenient time. Indeed I was just going to turn the horses’ heads home again when you appeared, for I had found the Manse shut up.’

‘My lord, I would never have forgiven you if you had left my house without a welcome

from us'; cried Mrs. Hosëason. 'And you must do us the honour to dine here; for though there are two ministers with us, there is enough and to spare at our table for any who come.'

'The honour will be mine,' said Lord Ruxton, who was looking with open admiration at the beautiful Mrs. Hosëason and her children. 'And I wish to make the acquaintance of my nameson, too,' he added.

Helen was always proud to show off her children. She bade Zack come forward and shake hands, and let Lord Ruxton look at him.

'I must not make open compliments to this young man; so may I say, "Like mother like son"?' said Lord Ruxton. Helen blushed with pleasure, not for the implied compliment to herself, but for joy over Zack's beauty, which was far dearer to her than her own. Zack on his part, being entirely indifferent to his own good looks, pondered over this speech and concluded that it was very silly. He began, however, to examine the

visitant from the outer world with intense interest.

Lord Ruxton was quite a young man; he was not more than two-and-thirty then; but looked some eight or ten years older from the lines about his mouth and the dark circles round his eyes. Zack was too ignorant to notice these things. What he noticed and wondered at was the intangible atmosphere of the great world which this man carried with him. Zack, of course, did not give it such a fine name as an intangible atmosphere; but he wondered what made Lord Ruxton different from the other men he knew. How funny Dr. Grant and Mr. MacCulloch would look beside him! No, it wasn't their black clothes, thought the sapient Zack, it would be that there was something different in their faces; '*something that looked out different,*' he expressed it to himself. He had no idea what it was that looked out from Lord Ruxton's face; but it was something new, and therefore delightful. Life was moving on.

They had gone up the path to the Manse

door by this time, and Mrs. Hosëason was showing Lord Ruxton into the drawing-room, talking all the time about her children.

‘Yes, Zachary is a very well grown boy of his age, though perhaps I should not say so—Will you sit here by the window, my lord?—and Mary and Isobel, too, are not amiss. Isobel, my lamb, come here and speak to Lord Ruxton.’

Isobel shook back the funny mop of curly hair that hung over her face, and trotted forward. Lord Ruxton held out his hands kindly to her. She came and stood between his knees, laying a fat little hand on each of them, and gazing up into his face with her eyes as wide as saucers. ‘*Are you the Lord?*’ she asked, in a half-disappointed whisper that conveyed her meaning beyond a doubt.

Helen caught up the child in her arms laughing.

‘Too many sermons, as you say, my lord,’ she said. She kissed Isobel, and set her down again, telling her to run away.

'Isobel is very silly,' said Mary grandly, sure that she would never thus have compared the temporal and spiritual.

Mrs. Hosëason had spoken truly when she said there would be 'enough' for all her guests.

The hospitality of the age and region demanded that the tables should groan with food in a way that is never seen in our degenerate days. Long years afterwards Zack could remember how the Manse dining-room looked that summer day—the room faced south-west, and the rich afternoon light struck across the table on the shining linen and silver that were his mother's pride. At the foot of the table sat his father, looking very grave, as befitted the occasion; at the head of the table sat his mother, looking more than usually lovely; at her right hand Lord Ruxton, leaning forward in his chair and playing with his wine-glass; then on either side of the table sat the sombre black-coated Dr. Grant and Mr. MacCulloch. Zack himself had a seat beside his mother, and was so much interested in



listening to all that was said that he almost forgot to enjoy the long-dreamed-of dinner.

For here at last he saw before him a man out of another world. It is true that for the most part he was talking about the affairs of the parish of Carradale ; but sometimes, under cover of the other men's talk, Zack heard him say a word or two aside to his hostess, as—

‘And what are you going to do with this Zachary now you have him?—are you going to make a minister of him?’

‘I fear . . . I mean I hope so,’ Zack heard his mother say.

‘Well, see you make him happy, whatever you do with him ; let his heart go with what he does.’

‘Who is happy, my lord?’—certainly not the saints, and I think not the sinners,’ she answered in a quick aside.

Then the talk would drift off into less personal matters again. Zack listened and listened, looked and looked, finally was bidden by his mother to go and play with his sisters now that dinner was over. He left the table

reluctantly and went out into the garden alone, avoiding the little girls. A Sabbath stillness was over everything; an oppression Zack would have named it had he known the word; an absence of the cheery sounds of life and labour in the yard; no echo of either work or play anywhere. Zack sat down on the garden wall and realised it all, with the ridiculous vividness of extreme youth. '*I can't bear it till Tuesday,*' he said to himself.

He rose and looked all round him. No face at any window that he could see; no watcher at any door. He opened the garden gate and affected to stroll down the long stretch of straight white road that led along the moor. For nearly a mile from the house the road was visible, then it turned, and was not seen again from the Manse. Zack reached this turn before he quickened his pace from the demure stroll he had first affected. Then he started at a run across the moor, for the road took a wide curve here, and by taking a short cut it was possible to rejoin it some four miles farther on without having traversed half that distance.

Zack looked neither to the right hand nor the left as he ran, but forged straight ahead across heather and bog until a little white-stemmed birchwood came in sight, and he found the road again. 'Now I'll wait,' he said, and flung himself down in the shade of the wood.

It was nearing sundown by this time, and a delicious coolness had sprung up. 'He can't be long now,' thought Zack.

But I think he had fallen asleep when the sound of wheels came through the stillness. He sprang up and called out something—he scarcely knew what—to the coachman. The next moment, wide awake now, Zack stood blushing and stammering at the door of the carriage.

'Take me with you, my lord—just until Tuesday. I can't go home now; my father would never forgive me if he found out,' he blurted out.

'Here, get in, sonny,' laughed Lord Ruxton, 'but I am going only to the Lodge to-night, and that, you know, is only twenty miles from

Carradale ; you will scarcely be safe even with me from your father's wrath !'

'He won't know where I am,' said Zack.

'Ah, but that would scarcely do ; your pretty mother would have grey hair before the morning if she thought she had lost you.' He took out a card and wrote a few words on it as he spoke. 'Here, John,' he said to the footman, 'take this back to the Manse and give it to Mrs. Hosëason from me ; ask her to put you up to-night, and they'll send over for you from the lodge to-morrow—drive on, Duncan.'

Zack listened to the order, and then watched the man walk off through the heather in his top hat and silver-buttoned coat, and he thought that lords could arrange anything. 'I've found the person I wanted,' he thought.

### CHAPTER III

THE carriage rolled on through the dusk, along the lonely white road. Lord Ruxton did not speak for a few minutes, and Zack, taking advantage of the silence, gave himself up to an ecstasy of sensation. It had never been his good fortune before to drive in any vehicle more luxurious than the Manse gig, or behind any horse fleetier than the useful animal his father drove. In imagination, it is true, he and Mary and Isobel had driven in coaches from their infancy, but up to this time in imagination only—now Zack had the delightful experience of realising a day-dream. ‘What would the children think if they could see me?’ he thought, and wished a fugitive wish that they too had been with him, which he as quickly rejected—‘No, it would have quite spoilt it; they are such children. Now

I am alone with Lord Ruxton, just as if I were his own age—I'm glad they aren't here.' Lord Ruxton, in the meantime, was looking at Zack with great amusement.

'Now, you must tell me what the meaning is of this exploit, Zachary,' he said, 'and what I am to do with you. You know there is a law against aiding and abetting fugitives of law and order.'

'It's the preachings, my lord,' Zack burst out. 'I can't bear them—I thought I would die before Tuesday—I had to get away.'

'Oh, 'tis "the preachings," is it? Well, I'll answer for it you get no surfeit of grace with me. But why do you dislike the preachings?'

Zack looked up and looked down before he found an answer.

'I feel just as if it would choke me,' he said at last, laying his hand on his heart.

'It? What?'

'I think it is the solemn way they look and talk, and—and, my lord, what is it all about?'

Lord Ruxton leant back, looking up into the sky, and repeated the boy's words, 'What is it

all about?' 'I'll tell you what it's about; it's all an attempt to find an answer to the question *how to live*—a question that, I take it, has not troubled you much as yet.'

'Yes it has,' said Zack boldly, 'for father wishes me to live one way, and I wish to live another; and he wants me to be a minister, just like himself or Dr. Grant, and I want to be a sailor, and sail round and round the world. And I hate books—I mean Latin and Greek books—not the other kind; I rather like them—the ones about men and women, I mean—I mean' . . . He paused, perfectly incoherent with all he wished to say. He had found a listener of the right sort at last—a man, young, and unlike all the other men that had as yet come under his observation. All at once Zack discovered that he had burst the bonds of his childhood, and escaped into a world where he might say exactly what he chose. The thought almost maddened him with delight.

'May I say just what I think about everything to you, my lord? And oh! if you please,

will you keep me with you until Tuesday?' he pleaded. Lord Ruxton felt inclined to laugh, but Zack was too obviously in earnest to be laughed at.

'Say what you please to me, Zachary, I'll understand—and yes, of course you shall stay with me as long as you please. I'm bound to make the acquaintance of my nameson, you know, in any case, am I not?'

'O sir—my lord, I mean—I've never spoken to a lord before, you know, and I forget—I would like so much if you "made my acquaintance,"' said Zack from the very depth of his heart.

'Very well, we are going to be good friends then,' said Lord Ruxton, holding out his hand across the carriage to the boy. 'Shake hands upon it, and come and sit at this side of the carriage, and we shall talk all the way to the Lodge; the dusk is a good time for talk.'

Zack tumbled across into the seat beside Lord Ruxton, and drew the fur rug over his knees as he was told to do. 'It's like heaven,'



he said then; and at this Lord Ruxton laughed aloud at last. 'I'm afraid your father would say you have "a carnal mind," Zachary, if this is your conception of the Upper Bliss.'

Above them, in the dusky blue vault of the sky, troops of stars began to shine, and over Ben Aan—the 'white mountain,' as the country people call it—the evening star hung low down exactly as if a lamp had been lit suddenly in the heavens. Ben Aan had always seemed to Zack the barrier between himself and the world. These jagged bare peaks had frowned down upon him ever since he could remember anything, shutting off Carradale from the wider less barren country of Strath Carra that lay on the other side. Now, the road the carriage was following skirted the base of Ben Aan, and to-morrow, thought Zack in delight, to-morrow they would have passed the barrier, and would drive down Strath Carra, away into the great world!

'I suppose you know why you were named after me, Zachary? I remember all about it,' said Lord Ruxton.

‘Yes, mother told me often, how you came to the Manse the day I was born.’

‘That was it. I was quite a boy—about the age that you are now,—it was soon after my father died. I had never been in Carradale before, and my mother sent me to visit all my tenants. I didn’t care much about doing it, but she insisted it was to be done. Well, I drove over to Carradale to call on your father, who frightened me more than I would have confessed. He took me into his study and shut the door——’

‘Oh yes; *I* know,’ Zack interpolated.

‘— and spoke to me for half an hour on the responsibilities of my position, now that I was the head of my family. Then he told me about my father—the regard and admiration he had had for him—and impressed on me how I could never be such an one as he. I stayed to dinner with your father, and he was most hospitable to me; and after dinner, in the most aloof, detached manner, he told me, as though it were the most ordinary event, that his wife had got a son that morning. I offered my

best wishes, and it was after that that your father told me he wished to name the boy after my father. "Let it be after me rather, Mr. Hosëason," I said very flippantly. "Perhaps if I know a child is named after me, I'll be more careful." He looked very solemn for a minute, and then he smiled and held out his hand to me, and said, "The child's name shall be Zachary." I sent you a silver porridge bowl, and never thought about you again till half an hour ago! So much for responsibilities.'

Zachary looked up at the young man beside him wonderingly.

'Oh, you're quite different from every one else,' he said.

'From every one else you know; am I? Where is the difference, Zachary?'

'I think you are not so serious,' said Zack.

Lord Ruxton laughed. 'Is every one you know in Carradale so serious then? Your pretty mother—eh? What about her? she seems as if she could laugh.'

'Oh yes, mother laughs a great deal when father is not there,' said Zack; 'and she loves

dancing, but my father does not let her dance. And you know, last year when our ploughman was married, I went with father and mother to the marriage, and there was a supper after it. Mother and I stayed to supper, but my father was busy, and left before it; and after he had gone I saw all the people whispering together, and hesitating, and looking at mother. You know, my lord, every one is so fond of mother here; and then a piper began to play all at once, and all the people began to dance; and, do you know, mother just listened for one minute, and then she beckoned to Donald Macleod, the keeper—he's the best dancer in Carradale—and when he came across the room to speak to her, she said (for I heard her) "Donald, *I must dance, or die*"; and when she stood up with him, all the people clapped their hands and laughed, they were so pleased.'

'Why was I not there!' said Lord Ruxton.

'Yes, it was great fun,' Zack admitted. 'But I think father was very angry about it, for mother's eyes were red with crying next morn-

ing at breakfast, and it must have been about the dancing ; for when I said something about it, father looked angry, and mother told me not to speak about it, and she began to cry again.'

'Your father is very strict in his views, I understand?' said Lord Ruxton. Zack was rather perplexed by the question ; he had never met before with any one holding any other views from those his father held, so he believed them to be the views of all the world. Lord Ruxton, guessing at this, quickly changed his question to suit the comprehension of his companion.

'Your father is very strict with you, I mean?' he asked.

'Oh yes,' Zack answered, with the sudden relief of understanding what was meant this time, but adding with boyish impartiality, 'strict enough.'

'I wonder what he will say to this adventure of yours, Zachary?'

There was an expressive silence. Zack's imagination refused to picture the parental anger, or perhaps pictured it all too clearly.

‘Well, I daresay I can arrange that; and in the meantime we are coming near the Lodge,’ said Lord Ruxton, for he saw by the boy’s silence that he was troubled. Zack’s fears vanished, and he came back to the splendid present, forgetting the possibly dark future.

‘I ’m sorry the drive is done,’ he said regretfully, as he jumped out of the carriage at the Lodge door.

‘Never mind, you will have to drive all day to-morrow also,’ said Lord Ruxton; ‘you will be tired enough of it before you reach Arden.’

## CHAPTER IV

THE pen and words are poor weak instruments. Neither the one nor the other can ever express or convey the eighth part of any picture. The happy painter has it in his power to convince his audience after a fashion that the writer can never hope to emulate. For the painter can show to the eye, by clear sight and open vision, what it has never seen before; while word-pictures always convey to the mind only recollections of things seen. This haunting thought torments the writer, making him often despair and ask himself what is the use of writing descriptions. Often, too, it makes him fall back upon the ruse of asking the reader to remember his own sensations in similar circumstances—as if it were necessary to ask this. The reader reads always by the aid of his recollections, and by them alone visualises the story

as it goes along. After which preamble, the writer must confess that it would be impossible by words to convey any impression of Zachary Hosëason's turbulent happiness on the morning he awoke at the Lodge. Long before it was day, the boy, still heavy with sleep, had turned on his pillow and sighed. He dreamt it had all been a dream, and woke with the cold conviction that he had never driven through the twilight in Lord Ruxton's carriage, and escaped the preachings. Then, wide awake with disappointment, Zack sat up in bed and looked about him, leapt out of bed and gazed out, then almost shouted with joy, for it was all true, not a dream; he was at the Lodge sure enough, and the preachings and home were twenty miles away. With genuine pity Zack's thoughts travelled back to poor Mary and Isobel; but after all they were young enough to sleep in church still, and old Miss Phemie Fraser always brought raisins in her bag for them, and they were allowed to accept these, and munch them sedately all through the second sermon. Yes, it wasn't quite so bad for them.



But it was impossible to congratulate himself enough upon his escape from ordinances, and his arrival in a new world. Zack did not try to sleep again, now that he fully realised his own good fortune, but lay in bed feasting his eyes upon the new objects round him. Breakfast was very late, and Lord Ruxton did not seem conversational, Zack thought. He confessed, indeed, to being in bad temper.

‘Everything is wrong this morning, Zachary,’ he said; ‘I think the world is not a good place, and that I am not the most fortunate of men. So eat your breakfast and don’t speak.’

Zack obeyed, in the automatic manner which his father’s rule had fostered, eating and drinking in steady silence till Lord Ruxton laughed.

‘Do you always obey your elders as implicitly,’ he asked.

‘Yes, my lord,’ said Zachary.

‘Then speak.’

‘Oh,’ said Zack, needing no further encouragement, ‘I was thinking about Mary and Isobel; they’ll be at prayers just now.’

Dr. Grant has such dreadfully long prayers! I once fell asleep on my knees while he was praying—that was at night, though—I'm glad I'm not there this morning.'

'I think I could imagine much more unhappy circumstances than being at the Manse of Carradale,' said Lord Ruxton, and laughed, passing his hand across his eyes.

Zack was impatient to start immediately after breakfast, for he felt that every mile he put between himself and Carradale was a gain in safety. They might send for him here without much difficulty; what if they did? What if he was never to see the outer world after all? He could scarcely conceal his impatience as Lord Ruxton, having dawdled through his breakfast, strolled about at the Lodge door, and at last went off to look at the kennels and the stables.

'Come and look at the dogs, Zachary,' he said; 'I think you will like them.'

At any other time Zack would have found this the most interesting amusement, but this morning the dogs could not hold his attention

for a moment. At last Lord Ruxton noticed the boy's absent look. 'I am afraid you don't care about dogs?' he said. 'I used to think a visit to these kennels the best thing in the world when I was a boy.'

Zack's self-control broke down at this suggestion.

'It isn't that, my lord; there's nothing I like so much as dogs and horses; but I am so afraid they will send for me from home. Oh, won't you start soon in case they do? Father might come, you know—come and take me back with him.'

'Is that the trouble? I thought there was something wrong. Well, we can start at once, if it will make you happier. Duncan, get the carriage ready; I shall start immediately,' said Lord Ruxton. He watched the shadow roll away from Zack's tell-tale face, and wondered at the intensity of childhood's troubles.

'*Now, now,*' Zack said, more to himself than aloud, as they drove off from the Lodge.

His exclamation meant that the Manse gig could never overtake them—that the world

was at last opening out before him, that nothing could stop him now!

All the day they drove on across the moors towards Arden. There was scarcely a sign of human habitation all the way, just the white ribbon of road that attached one hamlet to another. Sometimes they drove by the side of sullen-looking lochs dropped down like mirrors into the wilderness, and reflecting the jagged blue hills deep down in their hearts, but more often they drove only across wastes of heather, where the deer were feeding and grouse rose whirring at the sound of wheels.

Late in the evening they drew near the village of Arden, and the stern wilderness was left behind. There were signs of cultivation, and some cottages came in sight; then they passed through a high old gateway, and forthwith were in an enchanted land. On either side of the smooth carriage-way stretched turf such as Zack had never seen before, and from flower-beds, now invisible in the dusk, rose scents of bewildering newness. The horses' feet seemed to make no sound, the wheels to

pass noiselessly over the smooth roadway; only a clink of the harness chains now and then kept Zack from thinking it was all a delicious dream.

‘Oh, how delightful!’ he cried, rising up in the carriage to gather in more quickly these new impressions that assailed his keen young senses.

‘It’s a sweet spot enough,’ said Lord Ruxton listlessly; ‘but I am tired and hungry now.’

The carriage drew up before the door, and Zack looked up at rows upon rows of little windows all brightly lit up, and thought that Arden was a very large house—which it was not.

‘Come upstairs with me, Zack,’ said Lord Ruxton, and he led the boy up a long twisting stone stair, and along curious criss-cross passages into a low-roofed room, where an old lady in a mob cap and a young girl were sitting at work.

‘I have brought you a visitor all the way from Carradale,’ he said to the old lady; ‘this is my nameson, young Zachary Hosëason; and Zack, this is my mother, Lady Ruxton.’

Zack was winking still with the sudden transition from the outer dusk into this brightly lit room; he was shy, too, and found not a word to say. The old lady held out her hand very kindly to him, and asked him if he had ever been at Arden before, but Zack could not answer her. Then the girl, who had watched this introduction, came forward smiling and looking very pleased.

‘This is my cousin, Eppie Gordon,’ said Lord Ruxton; ‘I think she is older than you are, Zack, and she certainly is much better, but she’s very good company for all her virtues, as you will find.’

Zack would have liked to say something this time also, but again found nothing to say. The bright lights and new faces and strange voices in this very new world had quite dazed him.

‘You are dreaming, Zack, or half-asleep,’ said Lord Ruxton at last. ‘You must go to bed.’

So a few minutes later Zack found himself under the guardianship of a rather pert young man-servant, who looked at him with undisguised amusement.

‘This way, sir, down this passage ; and now, can I assist you with anything?’ he said.

‘I am very sleepy,’ said Zack, looking round the unfamiliar room.

‘There, now, I’ll bring you a brush and comb, and one of his lordship’s shirts,’ said the man, laughing again, for the account of Zack’s adventure had reached his ears.

‘Thank you, I don’t want to brush my hair,’ said Zack, with great honesty.

‘Very good, sir, and will you have nothing to eat or drink?’

‘No, thank you.’

‘Well, here’s a shirt, sir ; but Lord knows how much too large it may be,’ said the man, unfolding the garment and measuring Zack with his eye. ‘If you get into bed, sir, I’ll lay by your clothes for you.’

‘I am not accustomed to be waited on,’ said Zack ; ‘my mother makes me fold my own clothes, so if you please don’t trouble.’

‘*Will* you fold ’em—that’s the question?’ laughed the man ; ‘for what would his lordship say if he came in here and found a heap of

clothes on the floor; *I* would get the blame, you see.'

'I'll—I'll fold them to-night,' said Zack, conscious in his soul of many a night when the duty had been unfulfilled.

'Well, well, a good-night to you, my young gentleman,' said the man, and Zack heard him laugh aloud as he walked away down the quiet carpeted passage.



## CHAPTER V

As the door closed behind Zack, Eppie Gordon rose and slipped her hand through Lord Ruxton's arm, standing beside him.

'What a pretty boy, cousin Zachary! Tell me about him,' she said.

'O Eppie, you will love the creature; it is the most delightfully artless, unsophisticated bit of flesh and blood I've ever seen!'

Lady Ruxton looked up from her work at this. 'My dear son,' she said, in her even, clear old voice, 'if you would sit down and tell us in a coherent way about this strange young visitor you have brought us, it would satisfy Eppie and my curiosity better.'

'I told my story before. He is my nameson, mother. You remember old Hosëason at Carradale wanted to call him after my father, but declined on me instead. Well, the boy

pleaded with me to bring him here, and I brought him—that is all.'

'And what do you propose to do with him here?' asked Lady Ruxton.

'I propose to let him enjoy himself for a little, away from that cast-iron father of his.'

'Zachary, I have always heard Mr. Hosëason spoken of with great respect,' said Lady Ruxton.

'Respect—yes; I respect the man myself; but he is cast-iron none the less.'

'And the boy's mother?' the old lady asked.

'Have you ever seen her, mother?' Lord Ruxton asked suddenly, instead of answering the question.

'Have I ever seen Mrs. Hosëason? Let me see—memory is such a false friend. Yes; I saw her several—many years ago. She was just married then; I drove over to call upon her, with my husband.'

'And what did you think of her then, mother?'

Lady Ruxton worked on in silence for a full

minute, apparently quite absorbed in her work, before she answered—

‘I thought her, as you did evidently, the loveliest woman I had ever seen.’

‘Oh tell me about her, cousin Zachary!’ Eppie exclaimed. ‘Was she really lovely, and was she nice?’

‘The sort of woman who long ago was answerable for the death of Uriah the Hittite, if your scriptural knowledge extends so far, Eppie,’ said Lord Ruxton.

‘Uriah the Hittite?’ Eppie repeated, then shook her head. ‘The Sisters never allowed me to read the Bible, you know, cousin, so I am afraid I don’t know what you mean.’

‘Eppie, my love, pray go upstairs and fetch me my knitting-needle case,’ Lady Ruxton interrupted. ‘You will find it upon the right-hand side of the table in the east window.’

Eppie ran off down the long room, and they heard her singing to herself, as she went along the passage, some fragment of an old French chant.

‘Zachary, if there are two young creatures in the house, you must be more careful of what you say,’ said Lady Ruxton, raising her eyes to her son’s face. ‘Both of them have been brought up very strictly, for I doubt if Eppie’s convent was any more rigid than the Manse of Carradale.’

‘Probably not as bad in some ways. Yes, I must try to be more careful ; but Eppie did not understand just now.’

Eppie re-appeared with the needles, and taking up her work again, sewed a few stitches at the flower she was embroidering.

‘Will you tell me the story of Uriah the Hittite, cousin Zachary?’ she asked, in her little flute-like voice that had a suggestion of French in its tones. ‘Or shall I get you a Bible, and you will read it to me? I so love your reading ; you seem always to feel everything that you read.’

‘I am too tired to tell it with dramatic force to-night, Eppie ; we will postpone the story.’

‘Well, for some other day? The world, I find, is so full of stories. The Sisters did

not let us read romances, and I wish to hear them all now.'

'My dear Eppie, that would be a long hearing!' said Lord Ruxton laughing. 'How am I to satisfy the two young creatures I find in my house—one of them wishing to hear all the romances of the world, and the other wishing to see everything there is to see in it!'

'Perhaps I don't want to hear all of them; it is only the beautiful stories I like,' she said. 'And some of the rather distressing ones,' she added honestly.

'And in the meantime you will entertain Zachary Hosëason, Eppie?'

'But I cannot entertain a boy; I know nothing about them. You know, cousin Zachary, that I have never, never had anything to do with them. What does one say to them?'

'Ah! I shall leave you to find that out for yourself.'

Zack looked a little blank the next morning when Lord Ruxton told him that Eppie would entertain him. The two young creatures stood

looking at each other in silence, overcome with shyness. Eppie wrung her fingers together desperately, began to speak and stopped, then tried again, and managed to get out some words this time.

‘ Shall we come out into the garden ? and am I to call you Zachary, like my cousin ? ’ she asked.

‘ No ; Zack, please ; the other is so long, ’ said Zack, following Eppie obediently to the front door. Then another awful silence fell. Poor Eppie was very nearly in tears, and quite at her wits’ end, when Zack suddenly took the direction of affairs.

‘ What do you do now ? ’ he asked, tossing up his cap into the air and catching it again, by way of making a momentary amusement for himself.

‘ Oh, I sit in the garden and sew in the mornings generally, ’ said Eppie.

‘ Is there a boat ? Can I go out in it ? I mean, can I take you ? ’ Zack asked, torn between pleasure and politeness.

‘ Oh, I don’t like boats ; please don’t take me in one, ’ Eppie cried. Zack laughed.

'*I'm* not going to sit in the garden and sew,' he said, with such an infectious grin at the idea that Eppie had to laugh too.

'What would you like to do then?' she asked.

'Fish,' said Zack without a moment's hesitation. 'Would Lord Ruxton lend me a rod? I'll go and ask him.' He turned back into the house, then returned to where Eppie stood. 'Won't you fish, too?' he asked, ashamed to have seemed anxious to get rid of her.

'I will come with you, but I don't think I would like fishing,' said Eppie. Then struck with a sudden thought, 'Oh,' she cried, 'will we go to the Kelpie's Loch. I love it, when there is any one with me, but I am afraid to go alone. I know there are very good fish there; will you ask Lord Ruxton about it. I can knit while you fish, if you won't go very far away from where I am.'

Zack rather fancied himself in the capacity of protector: 'What are you frightened of?' he asked.

‘Of the water-kelpie, of course—it’s such a *horrid* story,’ said Eppie, with a thrill of fascinated horror in her voice.

The Kelpie’s Loch was a melancholy, reedy tarn, dropped down among the heathery grass some two miles across the moor from Arden. A bank of pure white gravel had been drifted up at one side by the constant lapping of the water, and here Eppie sat knitting while Zack went off to fish on the other side of the loch. They could almost have spoken to one another across the water; but Zack was far too eager over his fishing to have anything to say, so Eppie was left to her own thoughts. As time went on, however, Zack began to get hungry, so he came back to where Eppie sat and begged for some food.

‘Here it is,’ said the girl, spreading out the provender on the ground. ‘I had quite forgotten that it was lunch-time; how funny that you should remember! I think I would like to come and live up here beside the loch away from every one, only that story always comes back into my mind, and then I can’t stay



another minute here if I am alone.' Zack laughed unsympathetically.

'You seem to be always frightened about something,' he said. 'Tell me about the kelpie, and perhaps I'll be frightened too.'

Eppie let her knitting fall into her lap and turned round to face her auditor, so that she might give more emphasis to her story—

'Well, this was the kelpie-story, and you know, Zack, it is quite true; I *believe* every word of it. I know it all happened, just here where we are sitting, and if I shut my eyes I can see it just like a picture. . . .

'There was a girl once (I call her very pretty in my heart, for it makes it nicer, I think). She was a fisher-girl from Orna, and she had come over here to help at the harvest. They were making hay down in the fields below, that we crossed before we got up to the moor, and Janet got tired with the work, and thought she would slip away. She got up here to the loch and sat down on the gravel beach and looked across the loch. Well, as she looked, she saw a man rise up through the

water and come wading slowly to shore. He came right up the beach to where she sat, flung himself down at her feet, laid his head against her knees, and just said slowly, "*Comb my hair!*" Janet was frightened a little, and so she began parting his long yellow hair with her fingers. It was all tangled together, it was so long; and as she combed away at it she saw that it was tangled up with water weeds, and that long green slimy stuff that grows at the bottom of the loch, and then there were bits of stick and little shells and sand all mixed up among his hair. As she combed away at it he fell asleep, still leaning against her knees. And looking at him, Janet suddenly felt rather than saw that he wasn't human—(oh, *isn't* that horrible?)—and she knew he was a kelpie come up out of the water to catch her. Janet wore, as all the fisher-girls do, a lot of thick blue linsey petticoats one over the other. She began very gently to slip off the top one, rolling it gradually up into a bundle as she got it off, and then she slipped it under the kelpie-man's head, and

drew away her knees. He settled down against the petticoat-pillow quite comfortably, and never knew she had gone. Janet ran and ran, and never looked behind her. The next day the harvesters told her that they had heard such terrible howls and shrieks from the direction of the loch that they had gone to see what was wrong. They found no one there; but the beach was all torn up and trampled as if some creature had been pawing it up, and there were some rags of blue stuff lying about on it, all that was left of Janet's petticoat!

Eppie drew a long breath after she had done with this striking tale. Zack seemed quite pleasantly inclined to believe it, for he had not come to the provoking age of scepticism.

'Oh, I daresay it happened,' he said; '*anything* may come up out of the sea, or out of water; there's the sea-serpent, you know. My father says it's what he calls a "myth"; but the lighthouse man at the West Cape told me he had seen it twice, just wallowing along in the trough of the waves, and putting up its

great head now and then and looking round it; he fired at it once, and it went under the waves and didn't come up.'

'Don't you think we might go home now?' Eppie suggested, giving a fearful glance across the tarn. 'If you really think there are things in the loch, I do not wish to stay any longer.'

'Oh, I'll look after you,' said Zack; 'don't be afraid.'

Eppie drew a little nearer to him, and lowered her voice. 'I have a reason for being specially frightened that I never told any one before; but you will not laugh, will you, if I tell you?'

'No,' said Zack, sucking a pear with great zest, his blue eyes fixed on Eppie.

'Well, I had some one tell my fortune a short time ago, and she said, '*A man from the sea will be your Fate.*' Eppie stopped and shuddered. Zack finished his pear and threw away the core: 'The water-kelpie wasn't from the sea, only from a loch; it's not the same thing,' he said.

Eppie was quite relieved by this suggestion.

‘Well, perhaps, if you don’t go very far away, we might stay a little longer,’ she said.

There was something in Zack’s attitude towards the marvellous and the horrible that she found most sustaining. For while she shuddered at these things he delighted in them.

‘How I wish that kelpie-man would come wading ashore just now!’ he said, with such infectious courage, that Eppie almost wished along with him.

‘Do you know, Zack, I think that if you stayed here for a good long time I would be less frightened about things,’ she said, as they were walking home in the late afternoon.

‘It’s these nuns that have frightened you,’ said Zack in a superior tone ; for by this time he had heard, you must know, most of Eppie’s short experience of this world, and had in return given her the complete history of his brief sixteen summers.

## CHAPTER VI

ZACK found, when he got back to Arden that evening, that two letters had come back with John from Carradale, and a portmanteau of clothes packed for him by his careful mother. The first letter was to Lord Ruxton from Zack's father; it expressed in his usual pompous style his sense of the honour that Lord Ruxton had done him by electing to take Zack with him to Arden, and further hoped that Lord Ruxton would not be over-indulgent to the boy, 'who has good parts, but is wild, passionate, and in need of much correction.' The second letter was in Helen Hosëason's large scrawly handwriting:—

'DEAR SON,—As his lordship has taken you off to Arden, I herewith send you clothes. There is linen for a fortnight, and your best suit. Be sure to change your collar when—

ever soiled—be it thrice a day—and do not go rabbit-hunting to destroy your clothes. Remember to brush your hair before each meal, and to show the curl in it—not to brush flat. Keep your hands clean, too. Do as you are told in everything. — Your affectionate mother,

HELEN HOSEASON.

I doubt whether one of these instructions was ever carried out. Zack was far too busy enjoying himself to think about such minor matters. The Manse of Carradale, his father and mother and the little girls, all seemed part of another life—a thousand miles away from this new and exciting existence. With the extraordinary assimilative powers of youth, Zack had quickly adjusted his standards to the changed conditions in which he found himself. In a week's time he had ceased to be the child he had been, and his personality, freed from the repression of a lifetime, had asserted itself. It had been John Hoseason's practice to reprove any expression of opinion on Zack's part—not even a like or dislike

might be voiced by the boy ; but here Zack found that he might freely express his preferences, and that he was not expected to sit in silence. Now, for all his boyishness, Zack had thought a great deal about many things, and, like all young creatures, had tormented himself with a thousand unanswerable questions. The thoughts he expressed to Eppie, the questions he referred to Lord Ruxton, finding in one the sweetest of listeners and in the other the most obliging of informants.

‘What would your father say to me if he heard all the things I tell you, Zack?’ Lord Ruxton would say ; ‘I never heard anything like the unending questions you invent. Where have you been storing them up all these years?’

‘In my head. But I don’t store them up really, my lord ; new ones invent themselves every day. I find some of them in books, too. My father allows me to read all his books, if I like.’

Lord Ruxton was amused to notice, by the



end of a week's time, that Zack and Eppie were the best of friends. 'I find it is really *quite* easy to entertain a boy,' Eppie said; 'I do not think I shall be frightened of them again; I think Zack is really nicer than a grown man.'

'Not a doubt about that, Eppie; but why do you think so?'

Eppie just nodded her head gravely, and did not reply. She could not put into words to her cousin the bright jollity of Zack's companionship—how it chased away all her morbid terrors and infused life with sudden zest. The French convent, with the demure, black-veiled Sisters, seemed a lifeless, sunless dream when she looked back upon it. Surely this 'world' that Zack was always talking about must really be a better place, with its large adventures, its promises, prizes, efforts, joys, and responsibilities! New horizons seemed to open before her, new ambitions sprang up in her heart.

'I used to think that I too would become a Sister,' she said to Zack one day; 'but I am

not quite sure about it now ; perhaps it would be better to wait until I am old, until I have seen something of the world.'

'Yes, of course,' said Zack. 'What is the use of being alive at all if you are going to be shut up in a convent?'

'One could then serve God,' said Eppie. She had lived so long in an atmosphere of religious thought and speech that she had the rare faculty of being able to mention religious matters in a perfectly natural voice. Zack could not complain of any want of pious upbringing certainly; but the Scotland of these days did not adopt a natural tone when speaking of things unseen as yet. To Zack 'religion' was something quite divorced from daily life, an awful vestment, assumed on Sunday and taken off thankfully on Monday. Eppie's unchanged, cheerful mention of the work of God rather astonished and almost scandalised the boy.

'Oh, would you want to?' he blurted out, giving unconscious expression to his whole view of the subject.

‘Oh yes, Zack! The Sisters tell me that nothing else matters!’

‘That’s all nonsense; everything else matters more. I’m sure of it, Eppie. Religion goes on the top; father is just father under it, and Dr. Grant is just Dr. Grant, and Mr. MacCulloch just Mr. MacCulloch—I’ve watched them all,’ said Zack, in a burst of vehemence.

‘But,’ said Eppie, shocked by his words, ‘but I thought that your father was a very holy man?’

‘Well, yes; I think he is holy,’ Zack admitted. ‘You don’t see what I mean in the least. I mean—I mean—somehow, that a man is always just himself in the first place, so you see the religious part of him is only added on the top.’

Eppie did not see the case clearly, however. She held to her own view of it. ‘But I think I shall wait for a time before I become a Sister,’ she said.

‘I would; I’d get married first if I were you, and see what that is like,’ Zack suggested.

‘Would you? The Mother Superior had been married, it is true, but she had been unhappy about something; she told me that a Sister’s life was “a refuge for the broken-hearted.” I remember the words.’

‘Well, then, if your heart gets broken you can become a Sister,’ Zack said; ‘but I’m sure there’s a lot to enjoy in the world before it comes to that.’

‘Perhaps, perhaps,’ Eppie admitted. She was a gloomy little person at heart. Following that invariable law of the attraction of opposites, Eppie found Zack’s cheerful outlook on life quite irresistible; she liked to express her most melancholy ideas to him now, for the mere pleasure of hearing him scoff at them.

It was a relief to her, too, to have all her numberless terrors laughed to scorn by Zack, who had never known what it was to be afraid of anything.

‘I believe you are afraid of your own shadow,’ he said to her one evening as they were walking home together in the dusk.

Eppie started and looked round. ‘There is

no shadow—O Zack, did you see anything?’ she exclaimed.

‘No ; what could I see ? Can you get over the fence here, Eppie ? It will save us half a mile if we go across the field instead of round by the road.’

‘But this is the field where the tame stag lives. I *can't*—no, really, I can't pass him, Zack. He has a way of coming up so quietly behind one, and suddenly pushing his great nose into one's hand.’

‘Come along, I'll look after you,’ said Zack. But Eppie still held back. Standing by the side of the fence, she gazed across the field. ‘I don't see him ; do you think he is lying down under the trees ?’ she asked.

‘Probably, he won't hurt you ; he is as quiet as a lamb. Come along, Eppie ; oh, surely you aren't afraid ?’

‘Yes, I am, horribly,’ said Eppie, but she gave him her hand and scrambled over into the field, resolving to conquer her fears.

About half-way across it, however, she stood

still, mastered by her timidity, for there was a stag coming towards them.

'There—there's the stag,' she whispered, clutching Zack's hand.

'Yes, there he is, I'll whistle to him as Lord Ruxton does,' said Zack.

'No, don't, he'll come if you do—O Zack, he *is* coming!'

There was no doubt he was coming. Zack stood still for a moment and watched the great beast. 'I say, Eppie, turn and run back the way we came—he's angry,' Zack said suddenly.

Eppie turned and ran with no more telling—she scarcely felt the ground under her feet as she went, and only as she reached the fence and scrambled over it did she turn to speak to Zack: 'Oh, how could you bring me here!' she panted, and then found that she spoke to the empty air; Zack was not beside her. Across the field she could see the stag with his head lowered to the ground, and that must be Zack, that heap that lay there.

Eppie stood still for one awful minute, thinking what to do. Should she go back and

try to help Zack herself? Should she run to the house and get other help? Zack might be dead if she went for help, yet she could do nothing for him. 'I can't leave him,' she said, and with the courage of sheer desperation, she flung herself over the fence again, and began to run back to where Zack lay. The stag lifted his big antlered head, and stamped his foot as she came towards him: Eppie's poor, beating little heart seemed to stand still inside her breast, and then, from the other side of the field she heard a shout, and saw a man with a couple of dogs making his way across the field.

'Keep tae the side, missie, keep tae the side,' he bawled, and sent the dogs flying at the stag. Eppie, in her terror and bewilderment, stood still where she was, and watched the issue of the fight. The stag had turned from Zack, and now, with his antlers down, was waiting for the dogs. The man, a minute later, had reached Zack, and lifted him up. He carried him over to where Eppie stood, near the fence. She could not speak, but one

glance at Zack's face told her more than she wished to know.

'He's near deid,' said the man as he lifted Zack over the fence, and laid him on the grass.

'And now will you please go to Arden and fetch Lord Ruxton,' said Eppie to the man; 'I will stay here till he comes.'

She sat down and took poor Zack's limp, cold hand in her own, and held it—it was all she could do.

A thousand terrors took hold of Eppie as she sat there in the dim light. Was Zack dead? and if so, his ghost must be standing quite close to her. She thought that something touched her shoulder ever so lightly—was it a spirit hand? She feared to look round, for a white figure might be standing beside her. Zack a ghost! how strange, how terrible; 'perhaps I would not mind his ghost like another one,' she thought, 'it would be quite a cheerful one.' Then a gust of wind swept through the tree-tops above her, and suddenly an owl gave a hoot that almost made her



scream with fear. At last there came a hurried tramp of feet down the road, undoubtedly human feet, as she confessed with a heart-beat of relief—and Lord Ruxton appeared, followed by several men. He knelt down, bending over Zack in the uncertain light.

‘Ah, my poor boy, was it for this you came with me?’ he said.

## CHAPTER VII

JOHN HOSĒASON and his wife were sitting at breakfast the next morning when a messenger arrived from Arden, having ridden all night long over the moors with news of Zack's ill-fortune.

John Hosĕason pursed his lips and broke the seal with his usual deliberation; but before he could speak up rose Mrs. Hosĕason and caught the letter from his hand to read its contents for herself.

'My son—my beautiful boy!' she cried. 'Ah, John, what can I do?'

'You can compose yourself, Helen,' was the answer, which the mother did not wait to hear: she ran upstairs, calling to the servants to saddle the horse for her, and going meantime through the terrible, lightning-quick calculations of love. Forty miles of moorland road

lay between her and her son—and how was she to traverse these forty miles in time? Wheeled vehicles were not much used in that part of the country, where it was generally found easier to go long distances on horseback. Now, even for practised riders, forty miles is accounted a long ride; but Helen Hosëason never thought of herself for a moment—her only thought was how long she would take to accomplish the distance.

Her husband followed her in his leisurely way: 'You must drive, Helen,' he said; 'you need not have put on your riding-dress, the distance is too great for you to ride.'

For answer Helen caught up the skirt of her habit as she ran downstairs: 'I can't wait, John,' she called over her shoulder to him as she went.

'Helen, this is folly—I have . . .' began John Hosëason, he whose every word was law to all save his wife. His words did not reach her—she was running down the gravel path to the garden gate, where Sandy, the ploughman, had led round the minister's horse saddled for her use.

‘This is awfu’, mistress’ . . . Sandy began to say; for Mrs. Hosëason’s passion for her son was well known, and the servants stood at the doors whispering in awed excitement over the calamity. But the mistress neither looked or spoke to one of them, she scarcely availed herself of Sandy’s help to mount, and with a cut of her riding-switch set the horse off sharply across the moor.

‘Ye’ll get a fresh horse at Skiebuie Inn, mistress!’ Sandy roared after her, and turned to face the wrath of his master, who came marching down to the gate, his face ominous with anxiety and displeasure.

‘You did very ill, Dow, to let Mrs. Hosëason go off in that fashion; she is half-demented with grief,’ he said.

Sandy rubbed the back of his head and tacitly acknowledged his guilt—no one ever disputed a reprimand from John Hosëason.

‘The mistress she’s a grand rider,’ he said, apologetically, following with his eye the already distant figure of Mrs. Hosëason.

‘Go now,’ said the minister in his most

gravely reproving voice, 'Go now to Mrs. Forbes at the inn, Dow, and with my compliments beg her best horse to take me to Arden. Bring it back with you, and saddle it as quickly as may be. It is possible I may overtake Mrs. Hosëason yet.'

But Helen was not so easily overtaken: in general as tender-hearted to beast as to man, to-day she pressed her poor nag without pity. Nor did she stop at Skiebuie to get a fresh mount—only whipped up her horse and rode on. With God knows what terrors of love gripping her heart the poor woman went on her way—her whole passionate, tender nature was roused, and a curious turmoil seethed in her mind. She remembered all her life—that only numbered three-and-thirty years yet—her strange marriage, when she was sixteen, and Zachary's birth a year later, and how gradually she had grown up and realised that her husband was such worlds away from her; but she had Zachary, and every year he lived she thought the boy grew more like herself. And in him she would live again her own life—the

life she might have lived had she not been Mrs. Hosëason. He would be a man and would go out into the world and play a great part in it. Better far to have a son to act for you than to act for yourself—after all, life was not for women, the great moving stir of life—their part was far other from that; she was content that self should disappear and Zachary come forward. . . . And now, suddenly this thunderbolt fell upon her: Zachary might die, might even now be dead—and that he should die was but a more exquisitely painful form of death to her . . . she surely felt both his pain and her own. . . .

There was not an inn or a farmhouse in all that desolate bit of country where Helen Hosëason was not known and loved—her beauty and her impulsive warm-heartedness endeared her to every one,—but to-day she passed by the farms and never looked at them. At the Ferry Inn her horse would go no farther, so stop she must; she left the poor foundered beast at the door, and made her way into the well-known kitchen, with the peat fire on

the floor, where Joanna Mackay conducted business.

Joanna rose with that delightful welcoming note of voice that north-country women have the special art of—it is between a coo and an exclamation.

‘A-ah, Mrs. Hosëason, it’s yourself.’ . . . But Helen went straight to the point with that endearing directness she had.

‘Joanna, Joanna, my son is dying; can you give me another horse?’ she cried, taking both of Joanna’s large red hands in her own for a moment as she spoke.

‘The Lord help us!—there’s the colt in the stable—and sit you down and have a taste of spirits and an oatcake,’ cried Joanna. She drew Mrs. Hosëason to a chair and pressed the stimulant to her lips; but Helen all the time was listening for the clatter of the colt’s feet at the door, and she started up and ran out at the first sound, with never another word to Joanna, mounted again, and rode away. It was late at night when she reached Arden, having ridden alone all the way. She walked

in at the door without knocking, and across the hall, where she accosted a surprised man-servant. 'I am Mrs. Hosëason,' she said; 'is my son still alive?'

'Yes, madam, the doctor says there is hope,' said the man compassionately.

'Take me to him,' said she.

Lord Ruxton was sitting in Zack's room, beside the white-curtained bed. He rose and came forward to meet Mrs. Hosëason without speaking, then drew back the curtain that she might see Zack. She stood looking down at him for a moment in silence, then made a terrible gesture of despair and dismay more eloquent than words. 'Is this my son?' it seemed to say.

Lord Ruxton told her in whispers all that the doctor had said, but Helen scarcely heard his words. She sat down by the bed and took Zack's hand in hers; it lay like a dead thing in her soft warm palm.

'I think you had better leave me, my lord,' she said; 'I will be alone with him if he dies.'



She signed to the attendant also to leave the room, and began her long watching.

Hour after hour she sat there motionless : they came and brought her food, which she ate without noticing what it was, her eyes fixed all the time on Zack's unconscious face. Her husband arrived and sat beside her, but she never spoke to him ; the dawn came in and she was still sitting there, as white and rigid as a statue.

At last Zack stirred, cried out with pain, and opened his eyes.

'O mother! . . . how did you come here?' was his unemotional question.

## CHAPTER VIII

So Zack was going to live: Helen's heart seemed to stand still for joy, then to beat on so loudly that it choked her.

'Don't speak, my son,' she said, bending down over him; 'and take this, it will do you good.'

Zack sucked up the spoonful of food and gave a little grunt of satisfaction. 'I'm sleepy, mother,' he said, closing his blue eyes.

Helen sat down again and watched him. Very gradually the pained look passed off his face, till at last he was sleeping quite placidly. Then she laid her head down on his pillow and cried as if, to use the well-worn phrase, her heart would break. For she had had one of those terrible flashes of truth that come to us seldom in life; she had seen what life would have been to her wanting Zack, and the sight was not a good sight.

At last she rose, wiped her eyes, and went to the door. The daylight had come in, and long beams of morning sun were slanting in through the windows. Helen did not know the house, but Lord Ruxton had told her that they would wait in the next room all night, so that they might be near her if anything were wanted. She stepped out into the passage and stood still to listen. There was a low sound of talk in the opposite room, so she opened the door and looked in.

Lord Ruxton and her husband sat together by the window; they both rose as she came in, and John Hosëason made an almost hurried step towards her.

'My boy is going to live, John,' she cried, holding out her hands to him.

Her beautiful face was so glorified with love and self-forgetfulness that she might have been a spirit with no bonds to earth at all. But earth had its claims upon her none the less, for a moment later she sank down on to a chair, covering her face with her hands.

‘Oh, I am so tired ; go and sit with Zack, John!’ she cried.

Zack’s convalescence was not a slow one, and in two days John Hosëason had decided to return to Carradale, leaving his wife in charge of the invalid.

‘The affairs of my parish leave me little time to spare,’ he explained, when Lord Ruxton begged him to remain for a few days longer at Arden. The younger man was not altogether sorry to hear this ; the company of ‘the Archbishop’ was not much to his mind. But with the most lively interest he looked forward to seeing more of Mrs. Hosëason, as her duties in the sick-room became less absorbing. There was about Helen an inimitable freshness of outlook, an irresistible piquancy, though I must freely admit to you that she was not a well-educated woman. But these defects of education were amply made up for by the brightness of that intelligence—I had almost called it instinct—which unerringly showed her the root of any matter.

She had grown up in that solitary place like

a slowly developing tree, gaining year by year the invaluable wisdom of those who think over their experiences : she had a keen judgment, and she had lived with a well-educated man. Such was her equipment—not a large one, as we count education now, but there might have been worse.

Now it is the gravest mistake to suppose that having seen much of the world makes an amusing companion. Helen Hosëason, who had never crossed the Border, could furnish one with more amusement in half an hour than the average citizen of the world can afford one in a year. It is the particular which amuses in conversation, not the general ; and those who have seen too much are terribly prone to generalising in their talk, to its entire ruin. Helen, for instance, would tell you with arresting detail the story of how Dr. Grant's wig had been made out of the hair of a favourite grey Skye terrier owned by that eccentric and economical man, instead of giving an intelligent description of the Colosseum by moonlight, the Lake of Geneva or the Catacombs.

Once to have enjoyed the racy note of her talk was to long for it incessantly, as Lord Ruxton was not slow to discover.

Sitting by Zack's bed, playing games with the boy in the long days of convalescence, Lord Ruxton first became aware that Helen's beauty was only her secondary claim to admiration.

'Bless my soul, Mrs. Hosëason, where do you get that zest for life that you have?' he asked her one day. 'Everything amuses you, everything interests you, nothing bores you.'

'Why, it is because I have seen so little, I suppose,' said she; 'I have to make the most of what I have. Have you ever gone to the village shop, my lord, and seen the old wives spend a sixpence? Ah! you'd be surprised to see what they can get for it.'

'Tell him,' suggested Zack, looking up, 'tell him, mother, what you saw old Peggy buy one day.'

'Oh, just a ha'penny-worth of tea, and a ha'penny-worth of sugar; two farthing rushlights (that's a penny ha'penny); a ha'-

penny-worth of snuff, a penny-worth of flour (that made threepence); a penny-worth of meal, three eggs (they were three a penny—that made fivepence); a ha'penny-worth of skim-milk, and then she had one ha'penny left to put into the plate on Sunday; but she couldn't afford so much, so she had it changed for two farthings, and that did two Sundays.' Mrs. Hosëason laughed over the telling of this simple tale; but her eyes were bright with tears as she concluded it.

'There's a sorry difference between me and Peggy, Lord Ruxton,' she said; 'I lay out my sixpence perhaps, but I don't lay aside my farthings for God!'

Zack looked up in a puzzled way.

'How could you give that sort of change to God, mother?' he asked, for he had followed her analogy quite closely up to this point: it went a little beyond his comprehension here.

'Ah, well, Zack, if you don't see what I mean, I cannot explain,' said Helen.

Zack caught at her hand and cuddled it up against his face admiringly.

‘Don’t you think mother’s hands would look beautiful quite covered with rings, like the people in books?’ he asked Lord Ruxton. ‘You see her fingers run into points just like a well-sharpened pencil.’

‘My dear Zack, before you have to make pretty speeches, you must learn to find more poetical similes,’ laughed Lord Ruxton.

‘I shall never want to make pretty speeches to any one,’ said Zack.

‘Oh—so much the better, perhaps; ’tis a foolish habit,’ said Lord Ruxton.

There was a short silence then, Lord Ruxton and Zack had finished their game; Zack had turned round on his pillow, and Lord Ruxton was gathering up the cards. Mrs. Hosëason stitched away at her work without looking up, till the silence made her glance at Zack. He had fallen sound asleep. She pointed to the sleeping boy, and smiled across to Lord Ruxton, who drew his chair nearer to hers, and began to talk in that curiously frank, detached manner which was his characteristic.

‘. . . Just to be young again, and begin it



all over afresh—would you begin again, Mrs. Hosëason, if you had your way?’ he asked—pointing down at Zack asleep on the pillow with his hands flung out over the quilt, his face so untouched yet with Time’s writing.

Helen’s eyes rested delightedly on her son’s face, and she smiled as she answered—

‘No, my lord, the future seems very interesting to me; when you have children of your own you will understand what I mean.’

‘Not I! my own life would always be first with me, and it should be with every rational man and woman. Now, what will happen to you when Zachary goes out into the world and leaves you?’

‘I have my other children,’ said Helen; but she knew that the answer rather begged the question.

‘You have: well, I was going to speak to you about Zachary—you must let me do something for him, since he has come to such grief under my care.’

Helen held her breath for delight before she answered—

‘My husband has decided that Zack shall enter the ministry, but I know that it is not the life for him ; he would be miserable in it—what can I do?’

‘What about a commission? That could be easily arranged,’ suggested Lord Ruxton.

‘My husband would never consent to that : he says no son of his shall enter the army ; he calls it “a by-way to hell.”’

Lord Ruxton laughed and shrugged his shoulders. ‘There are so many by-ways to hell—but there’s none so steep (to my mind) as an unsuitable calling. I don’t think that the learned professions would suit Zack.’

Mrs. Hosëason was not quite pleased with this, however. ‘Zachary’s powers are none so few,’ she said, quite tartly ; ‘many a worse man has been put into the learned professions.’

‘Surely, surely : I did not mean to depreciate the boy’s abilities in the least,’ said Lord Ruxton, ‘but merely to say that I fancied a stirring life would suit him the best. Well, there is one thing that I may propose, and your husband cannot fail to see the wisdom of it.

Zachary can't be fit for hard study after this accident; the doctor assures me that he needs a long rest from brain-work. Now I propose going abroad this autumn, and I shall take Zack with me to see the world, if you and your husband will trust him with me—then when he comes home you can fight it out about the ministry—he will be older, and let us hope wiser.'

'He will have seen more,' said Helen. Already, while the words were yet in the uttering, she had decided that Zachary must go abroad with Lord Ruxton.

How boundless this mother's ambitions for her son were it would be difficult to say. I think she thought every known career was open to a boy of his perfections; but one thing she was quite decided upon, and that was that the ministry was not the profession for him. She had come to this decision slowly, after years of anxious thought and many searchings of heart. For she held the Church in great reverence, and had a great respect also for the opinion of her husband.

It was the unalterable decision of John Hosëason—and against his decisions there was seldom any appeal—that Zachary was to be ‘made a minister of.’ Yet year by year as Zachary grew up beside her—or rather year by year as she grew up herself, Helen came to see that peculiar gifts are needed for the calling of the ministry—gifts which, with all her ideas of Zack’s cleverness, she knew he did not possess. ‘Ministers are born, not made,’ she said to herself; ‘and Zachary was born something else.’

Helen had come to this decision about her son after making a deliberate study of the subject for many years. She had passed in review every minister in the Presbytery, good, bad, and indifferent, and had, so to speak, formed an abstract from them. She fully and clearly grasped the clerical character now, and it was a character quite unlike what she knew her son would possess when he had grown to man’s estate. But though Helen had come to this conclusion, she had never spoken of it to her husband. She had been waiting for she

knew not what to help her. Suddenly it appeared to her that deliverance was at hand. The landowners of Scotland wielded a power in those days that is uncommon among them now, when the world has become so democratic. Lord Ruxton, who owned all the land for miles round Carradale, and was, moreover, the patron of the living, had, therefore, a great deal in his power. 'Supposing then,' thought Helen, 'that Lord Ruxton should suggest a more suitable calling for Zack, would his influence have weight with my husband?' It seemed to her that a door had suddenly opened where hitherto she had only seen a blank wall—Lord Ruxton was the person to help her about Zack's career.

## CHAPTER IX

IN the intervals of sick-nursing, Helen had found time to make friends both with Lady Ruxton and Eppie. At first the old lady, who was very frail, had only sent polite messages to the sick-room through Eppie and her son. But as time went on, and Eppie's accounts of their guest became more and more enthusiastic, Lady Ruxton began to be curious to see her again.

'Produce your minister's wife, Eppie,' she said; 'I know that she is beautiful, but I am anxious to see what you find so charming in her.'

'Oh, you will soon find it out, too,' Eppie assured her. 'If she would only leave Zack and come downstairs.'

But this was exactly what Mrs. Hosëason refused to do, until her son's last grave

symptom had disappeared, and he was able to sit up in his own room. Then, yielding to Eppie's entreaties, Helen said that she would come downstairs to see Lady Ruxton.

'Though I would have liked to look better than I do,' she said, going to the glass to arrange her hair. 'Remember it is twelve years since Lady Ruxton saw me last, Eppie,—and twelve years change a woman's looks sadly.'

'Oh, come, why do you think about that? I am sure that you are far nicer-looking now than you can ever have been before,' said Eppie. But Helen demurred.

'And I have no dress fit to be seen, child,' she said. 'Look at me, in a blue printed gown and a white apron!'

But Eppie took her hand and led her out of the room without farther parley, Zack jeering at them as they went, in high delight.

'Oh-ho, mother, you're quite vexed! Wouldn't you like to send to Carradale for another

gown?' Perhaps in her heart of hearts Helen did not believe that she was so dependent on her garments. She laughed, and ran downstairs with Eppie, almost like a child.

Lady Ruxton was sitting in her usual chair when they came in.

'I've brought Mrs. Hosëason to see you at last,' said Eppie; 'here she is.' The old lady held out her hand to Helen and smiled.

'I have heard a great deal about you of late, Mrs. Hosëason,' she said, 'and now I am to have the pleasure of meeting you. You see I am confined to my chair, and cannot go about the house as young people do.'

Helen, looking at Lady Ruxton, resolved to love her there and then, after a rather dangerous way that she had.

She sat down on a low chair beside the old lady, and spoke at once of what lay nearest her heart.

'My boy is better, Lady Ruxton,' she said ;



'he walked across the room by himself to-day, and now he is sitting up, and does not need me to look after him.'

'Then I hope your nursing is almost over, and now you can stay with us for a little and rest, after all this anxiety.'

'Ah, but you forget my good husband—my dear children!' Helen exclaimed, and at these words the old lady looked at Helen again out of her sagacious, dim old eyes, repeating to herself, with an altered emphasis: '*good* husband, dear *children*,' and recalling for a moment the grim aspect of John Hosëason as he had stalked into the room to pay his respects to her some days before. Surely this was an ill-assorted husband and wife. Why did Fate play these provoking tricks, giving to women who could not grace it, position and opportunity, while this lovely creature was set down in the Manse of Carradale, and married to John Hosëason? 'They say that there is no waste in Nature,' she thought, 'but I have noticed a good deal of it on my way through the world.'

Helen stayed with Lady Ruxton, talking over Zack, and about her life at Carradale, and Mary and Isobel—their perfections, their charms—till the dusk fell, and she said she must go and put Zack back to bed. A little later, when Lord Ruxton came into the room, he found the old lady sitting alone, looking into the fire, apparently lost in thought.

‘Well, mother,’ he said, taking her hand in his, ‘you look unusually grave; does anything trouble you?’

‘Trouble me? No; nothing troubles me, Zachary; but I am often surprised at the temptations that are thrown in our paths.’

‘What are you thinking about specially as a temptation?’ the young man asked, and there was a short silence.

‘That woman, that dear woman, is an edged tool, Zachary,’ said Lady Ruxton.

‘So you have seen her, and capitulated like the rest of us?’

‘I have. O Zachary, be careful—for her sake as well as your own!’

There was another uneasy silence, till Lord Ruxton spoke—

‘Has God been careful for me? Was it any fault of mine that she came here? What can a man do against Fate? Is there anything left for me to do?’ he cried.

‘Yes; much, I think, Zachary—the whole making or marring of your life. Ah, my dear, the lines have fallen for you in far too pleasant places till now!’ She paused and looked pityingly at the young man who sat beside her, his face covered with his hands, his whole attitude eloquent of misery. Then she spoke again—

‘Why should the old heroic breed be extinct, Zachary? Is it no longer possible for a man to suffer torture bravely, as they did long ago? It was not their custom then to groan, and I pray it may not be your practise now. Stand up to it like a man; feel what you like, so long as you keep your feelings to yourself. I shall never mention this matter to you again, but I will know how it is with you, and will understand.’

'I cannot bear it,' said Lord Ruxton slowly. 'I've taken it too hard; some things are past endurance.'

'O Zachary, must I sit here, and in my age and weakness hear my son name himself a coward? Nothing is past endurance to the brave heart.'

'This is—this I cannot bear,' he said.

"Then what do you propose to do?" as Talleyrand said.'

'God knows, Who has sent this misery upon me,' said Lord Ruxton. 'Perhaps the best thing that I can do is to go away at once, and never see her again.'

Lady Ruxton sat silent for a little. The sorrows of a long life had worn her face into lines of strange expressiveness.

'Yes, Zachary, if you are a weak man, run for your life; if you are strong, stay and face this matter out. Judge for yourself; I cannot advise you, she said.

'What a terrible counsellor you are,' said Lord Ruxton. 'Your meaning is clear enough.'

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‘I have found, in a long life, Zachary, that easy counsellors are generally false comforters. Will you ring the bell for my maid? I am tired with so much conversation. I will go to my own room.’



## CHAPTER X

LORD RUXTON did not leave Arden; and Helen, unconscious of the trouble she was making, stayed on there, wrapt in the happiest dreams of all that was to befall Zack through this (almost) lucky accident. Her dear son was to go abroad, she hoped, to see the world he so longed to see, and that under the best of auspices. It was really quite worth having been ill to have such a chance in life. Her one fear was that Zack's father would not see as clearly as she did the advantages of the scheme.

'Do you think that I should write to my husband about it?' she asked Lady Ruxton one day; 'or should I wait until I get home? I write such bad letters; but I can generally get my husband to agree to what I want when I ask it.'

'Wait—wait, my dear—he might refuse

hastily, and then feel it necessary to keep to his word, as men so often do,' said Lady Ruxton. But the difficulty was solved a few days later when Lord Ruxton came in with a letter in his hand.

'This is from your husband, Mrs. Hosëason,' he said; 'I wrote to him some days ago asking his sanction to this scheme of mine for taking Zack abroad.' He paused for a moment, and Helen rose from her chair and came towards him blushing with excitement.

'I am glad to say that he finds no difficulty about it,' pursued Lord Ruxton. 'This is his letter, perhaps you would like to read it.'

It was one of John Hosëason's usual letters, written in his small, beautifully legible hand, dated with entire precision, begun and ended off with admirable periods.

'Now, how like John!' cried his wife, as she read the composition. 'Had I been writing this, I must have said only, "Dear Lord Ruxton, you seem to me to be a good angel"; and here John goes on with his neatly rounded sentences and preambles before coming to the

point. But we both mean the same, my lord ; that we are grateful and delighted on Zack's account.'

'I am only sorry that your husband does not allow me to take Zack at my charges. I fear, Mrs. Hosëason, that pride must be a ruling passion at Carradale?'

Mrs. Hosëason laughed. 'Ah, well ; but why should we not pay our son's expenses after all? I am afraid I had never thought about that practical side of the question, but you see my husband is so business-like.'

'I must remonstrate with him ; of course I never intended this when I proposed taking Zack with me,' said Lord Ruxton. Helen shook her head. 'Oh, you may remonstrate and begin again, my lord ; when John says a thing he always means it, and never changes his determination.'

The truth of this remark was shown in the next letter from Carradale, which came in answer to one from Lord Ruxton on the subject of expenses.

'I must inform your lordship,' it ran, 'that



my son either goes abroad at his father's expense or stays at home. The living of Carradale, as your lordship must be aware, is one of the best in the north of Scotland, and I am therefore in a position to give my son the advantages of foreign travel without in the least crippling my resources.'

So it was agreed that there was to be no more discussion of the matter. Zack was to leave with the Ruxtons in October, and was to stay with them for a year. He had now so far recovered as to be able to be moved out into the garden, where he sat all day, under his mother's vigilant eye. Now that her anxieties about Zack were at rest, Helen threw herself into the life at Arden with whole-hearted enjoyment. All the small affairs of the household became matters of the most vital interest to her :—Had the silk for Eppie's embroidery arrived by the mail-gig? Could Lady Ruxton's maid get the ink-stain out of her mistress's Indian shawl? Had the missing volume of Addison been found in the library? Helen had the peculiar gift of taking as much

interest in the affairs of other people as in her own—a gift to which she largely owed her popularity at Carradale—here at Arden the charm worked as potently as ever. And with just the same unaffected zest, she would recount all her own simple home news. She had had a letter from her husband—the children were well—(how she was wearying to see them!). The servants were washing blankets; the dairymaid had made five pounds of butter; the pony had gone lame. . . .

‘My dear, we shall be so dull when you leave us,’ said Lady Ruxton; ‘we shall mope ourselves away altogether!’

The days passed so quickly that Helen could scarcely believe that she had been six weeks at Arden, though the fading heather and the streaks of yellow every here and there among the bracken were harbingers of autumn. There was a crispness stealing into the air too, for summer, slow to come, is swift to leave the northern land, and has scarcely arrived before it begins to think of departure.

Zack was vastly excited by the thought of

his travels. The rapturous news had been broken to him by his mother, not without tears, for were they not to be parted for a whole year? At first Zack could scarcely believe his own good fortune, but every day now, as his strength returned, he began to realise it more and more.

One evening, as Helen was walking in the garden with Eppie, Lord Ruxton joined them, and they walked together down the long turf walk which led to an old sundial. Here they stood still, Helen leaning on the stone, tracing the hours with her forefinger.

‘It seems to me you need this reminder here at Arden,’ she said; ‘for the time slips away as I have never known time do before.’

Eppie sauntered off down the walk, and Helen and Lord Ruxton remained standing by the sundial.

‘Oh, my lord, I was going to ask you ——’ Helen began suddenly, looking up at the young man; then as suddenly she stopped. Her heart stood still, and she forgot everything that she had been going to say. For though

Lord Ruxton did not say a word, Helen all at once discovered the truth. She looked down at the dial again, and after just a moment's hesitation, went on—

‘I was going to ask you, but I am almost afraid to do it, for I know that you will laugh—and indeed Highlanders are very superstitious, they have it in their blood: Can I have a carriage to-morrow morning early to take me to Carradale?’ She paused, adding a moment later, ‘I have a premonition of evil. I dare not stay. I must get home to my dear children—to my husband.’

## CHAPTER XI

FEW things in life are more tedious than tales of Continental travel, and for this reason I am not going to tell you anything of what befell Zachary Hosëason in that eventful year which he passed with the Ruxtons on the Continent. Nowadays the whole world goes abroad—Tom, Dick, and Harry, so to speak, but in these days it was mostly great people who did so, or people of great wealth it might be better to say.

Perhaps this made it a little excusable for Zachary to return home in the summer of 1816, just a year after his accident, with a good many very ridiculous airs of fine gentlemanhood. True, he arrived at the Manse gate in no more distinguished vehicle than the mail-gig; but he alighted from it with the air of a young prince at least. The little girls who had come

running out on to the road in their holland pinafores (which they had got all stained with black currants) were abashed before him, and Mrs. Hosëason, as she came down to the gate, questioned if this were really her son. For in the twelve months of his absence Zachary had grown tremendously—into, oh, such a handsome young man! Yes, she could not pretend that he was the same boy who had left her—he was changed almost past recognition; and what was that curious thing between his lips that he flung away as the cart stopped? and what a funny smoky smell his lips had; and he was far taller than herself. . . . A flood of sensations came over Helen as Zack (having thrown away the cigarette, unknown in decent Scotland ninety years ago!) passed his arm through hers in a strange, new, grown-up way that she did not know at all, and then turned back to give Hugh the driver what seemed a great deal of money.

‘Jove, mother, I think you’re prettier than ever!’ exclaimed this new-found son then, and Helen’s fond eyes filled with tears at this

compliment—the boy that was gone would never have paid it!

They went into the house, Helen gulping down her tears, Zack fighting against that dream-like feeling that overtakes most of us when we reach home after a long absence from it.

‘Come and see your father; he is in the study,’ said Mrs. Hosëason. The passage seemed extraordinarily narrow and dark to Zack.

‘I think I’ve grown too big for the house, mother,’ he said laughing.

‘This is Zack, John,’ said Mrs. Hosëason, preceding her son into the study; ‘and he is so changed that I don’t know him.’

John Hosëason wiped his pen carefully before he rose to meet his first-born, for emotion was not his characteristic.

‘You are earlier than we had looked for you, Zachary,’ he said; ‘you must have left Inverness at an early hour.’

‘At four in the morning, sir,’ said Zack, standing there before his father for inspection,

in all the bravery of his newly added inches and all the elegance of his fine London clothes. Nor one nor other impressed 'the Archbishop' in the least.

'I suppose you imagine yourself to be quite a man, Zachary,' he said smiling; 'but I cannot forget that you are only one year older than when you left home.'

'Yes, sir, only a year, but I have seen a great deal of the world since then,' said Zack.

'A little of it, a little of it,' said the father in his most majestic manner, and Zack felt, naturally, rather nettled.

'May I have some food, mother?' he said, turning rather sharply away; 'I am very hungry.'

The meal which followed was somewhat constrained. Zack remembered the last time he had sat in the old dining-room, and how little he had thought it would be the last time for so long—that day when Lord Ruxton had arrived unexpectedly on the summer Fast Day! His mother was apt to be tearful still, the little girls were silent and gobbled their



food, his father gave him solemn recital of parish news. And all the time Zack felt that he had left everything that was interesting and amusing behind him, and that home was very dull. Now this is not the conventional sentiment of the home-comer; but it is a very common sentiment for all that, if people would only confess it. Nothing is more difficult than the sudden change of mental atmosphere which occurs when we leave one set of people and come to another; and home is very often more difficult to return to than any other place. So Zack sat at the well-known table, feeling himself curiously out of sympathy with the affairs of the parish of Carradale. During the progress of the meal, too, he made two great mistakes—

‘Jove, mother! you do make fine currant tart!’ he exclaimed, and his father coughed ominously.

‘Do not employ that exclamation in my presence again,’ he said in his most awful voice. Zachary, who indeed used the expletive because he thought it manly, bit his lip with anger, and said nothing.

To cover his vexation, he rose and walked to the sideboard, where the whisky-bottle lived, poured himself out some, and returned with the glass to the table.

‘Zachary,’ said the Archbishop with unflinching disapproval, ‘at your age you drink water—in my house.’

Zack pushed the glass aside with an impatient gesture; it was soon to feel the curb applied, he thought, and felt again a rising antagonism to his father.

Mrs. Hosëason came round to the side of the table, and laid her hand on his shoulder.

‘Zack, you must be tired, come upstairs and go to bed,’ she suggested.

‘We will have worship first,’ said John Hosëason. ‘Zachary, ring the bell for the servants, and bring me the Bible from the table in the window.’

Zack did as he was told, and felt himself suddenly pushed back from his newly-attained dignities into the old subservient childish days.

‘I’ll fight with my father now—I know it—I feel it,’ he said impulsively to his mother,

as she said good-night to him half an hour later.

‘Zack! my dear son, why do you think such a thing?’ she asked.

‘Because he wishes me to take his way, and I’ll have my own, that’s all, mother. Good-night.’

‘Good-night,’ said she. The home-coming had not been all she had hoped for.

## CHAPTER XII

'ZACHARY!' called John Hosëason, and again  
'Zachary!'

'Coming, sir—I was just going out to fish,' Zack explained, standing in the doorway of the study, twisting some flies round his cloth cap as he spoke.

'Lay aside your rod and come in. Close the door, and sit down. I wish to speak to you of a very serious matter,' said his father.

'Well, sir?' Zack asked. A critical onlooker might have said that there was a slight lack of respect in the boy's manner now, that used not to be there.

'The subject is this,' said John Hosëason, 'that I intend you to go to college at Aberdeen this autumn, to begin your studies for the Church. You have, owing to various circumstances, been already too long in

beginning your course; but your abilities are good, and if you have a mind to do so, there is no reason why you should not very soon make up for the time you have lost.'

Zack sat silent for a minute, gazing out past his father into the sunny outside world.

'I am not going to be a minister,' he said at last.

'Ah! and what do you propose then as your career?' his father asked.

'I am going abroad—to America or the West Indies, or India, or Africa—or—or anywhere; but I won't stay at home and be a parson.'

'A what?'

'A parson—a minister, I mean.'

'H'm . . . I propose writing to-day to Aberdeen to my various friends there among the college authorities . . . I will make all arrangements for your sojourn there.'

'But I told you, sir, that I did not intend to become a minister,' said poor Zack.

'When you are of a reasonable age, Zachary, you may then protest against the plans of

those older and wiser than yourself. In the meantime, being entirely dependent upon me for the bread you eat, the clothes you wear, the training you are to receive, you will find it better to agree to all that I arrange for you. I have decided, then, that you go to Aberdeen this autumn ; so to Aberdeen you shall go. I cannot, of course, make you prosecute your studies diligently, that is in your own hands, but I hope that the scholastic influences which will surround you will kindle some small ambition after excellence even in your un-scholarly mind. There is nothing stronger than example, Zachary. You have been living for the last twelve months in a circle far removed from the interests of the student ; when you find yourself where knowledge is sought after, I hope you will begin to prize it yourself.'

'Father,' said Zack, looking him straight in the face, 'father, it isn't fair of you to make me do this against my will.'

'Zachary, you forget yourself ; that is not a way in which to speak to your father.'

‘I will speak, though—I see no reason why you should spoil my life just because you happen to be my father—my life is *mine, mine, mine*, and no other being has another word of right over it.’

John Hosëason only sat back in his chair looking with calm amusement at the excited boy.

‘When you are older, Zachary, I fear you will be forced to confess that even your precious life is not entirely in your own hands. We are all forced to act directly against our inclinations continually throughout life. This is what is known as the discipline of life. Now you may go, and consider this matter settled. You go to Aberdeen in October.’

Zack went out of the room hot and blind with rage. He had never loved his father, now he thought he hated him. The drawing-room door stood open as he passed out into the passage, and his mother was standing by the open window laying out stalks of lavender on the sill into bundles for the linen-press. He came up to where she stood and rubbed his cheek against hers in a sudden caress.

‘I’ve been fighting with my father, mother,’ he said.

‘O Zack!’

‘He is going to send me to college, and I don’t wish to go; I cannot be a minister.’

Mrs. Hosëason sat down to face this long-dreaded moment which had come at last. All her sympathies, as you know, were with Zack; all her conventional feeling made it necessary for her to support her husband’s decision—it was a sorry pass to come to.

‘But, Zack, what can you do?’ she asked. ‘You cannot refuse to do as your father wishes.’

‘Yes, I can: father isn’t almighty, though he thinks that he is.’

Helen did not voice her disapproval of this irreverent speech, stern as that disapproval was; she understood too intensely the bitterness it sprang from.

‘My love,’ she said again, ‘what else can you do?’

‘Oh, Lord Ruxton will help me—I’m going to see him—to tell him all about it—*he* under-



stands—*he* isn't made of wood—*he* feels things, mother.'

Helen hesitated for a moment before she spoke. 'Have you not taken enough from Lord Ruxton already?' she asked. 'It is a pity to be under too great an obligation to any one, however kind.'

'O mother, have you turned against me too? Are you going to side with father and try to make me wretched?' cried Zack.

Helen caught at his hand and held it. 'I must, Zack; there is nothing else left me to do. I cannot disagree with your father about this,' she said.

'Then you would rather see me miserable than disagree with father?' Zack asked bitterly. 'I don't see myself why he should always have his way about everything. Isn't it better to oppose him now than to spoil my whole life? Oh, can't you see, mother, how ridiculous it is even to talk of making me a minister? I don't care a damn for study——'

'Zack!' . . .

'And how could I ever advise people about

their souls as my father does? What do I know about souls? Or preach, when I know nothing about religion. Mother, mother, the thing is impossible; and if I cared as much as father says he cares about religion, I would not ask any one so unsuitable as I am to profess it.'

Helen knew only too well how truly Zack spoke: she agreed with every word that he said, but she held to her point.

'I don't pretend to disagree with you, Zack,' she said, 'for I must speak truth always with you and with every one else; all I say is, that you must obey your father just now, whatever you feel about it.'

'Just now?' Zack questioned, grasping at the suggestion of escape that lay in the words.

'Yes, just now. Perhaps when your father sees more clearly that you are not suited to be a minister he may not insist upon it. In the meantime you must go to Aberdeen as he wishes you to do.'

'Aberdeen!' said Zack, putting a disgusted

emphasis upon the word that made his mother laugh.

'And why not Aberdeen, my dear, stupid son?' she asked. 'Believe me, hearts beat—and break too—just as surely in Aberdeen as in Paris—though you think it such a poor, dull place.'

'Well, I know mine would break there quickly enough,' said Zack. 'O mother, I can't settle down to study theology in Aberdeen; I must go and see the world, and be alive!'

'Men and women make the world, Zack, and they are everywhere,' said Helen again; but Zack was rather too young yet to see things in this light.

'No, no—they don't—indeed, mother, they don't—the world outside our world is wonderful—full of things we have not even a taste of here, sights, and ideas, and people. I want to live always in that world; this one is "too strait" for me, as the young man in the Bible said.'

'Then it is not Aberdeen itself that you dislike?' Helen asked with a smile.

‘Yes, it is—I know well enough what it would be like—and I am not going if I can help it. I shall go to-morrow to see Lord Ruxton and ask him.’

‘Zack, is it not more suitable for you to take your father’s advice, and mine, than the advice of a comparative stranger like Lord Ruxton?’ said Helen slowly.

Zack looked at her gravely for a minute. ‘It’s *not* your advice, mother; and I do not care about my father’s in the least; and Lord Ruxton is the best friend I have, and he knows far more about what I feel than any one else in the world—except you,’ he added quickly, noticing the sudden flash of jealousy in his mother’s face.

‘Zack, I am afraid that your father does not wish you to see much of Lord Ruxton. I think he will be displeased if you go over to the Lodge to-morrow. Why, you have scarcely come home!’

‘I am afraid I don’t mind much, mother, whether he is displeased or not,’ said Zack, with such a threatening expression in his fear-

less blue eyes that Helen knew his words were only too true. She sighed, and began to sort out the lavender stalks again on the window sill.

'I can say no more then, Zack,' she said.

Next morning at breakfast matters came to a climax.

'I am going down to the Lodge at Orna to-day, mother,' Zack announced, with somewhat of his fine air. 'Lord Ruxton has come there for the shooting; he told me to come whenever I wanted to.'

'He is most kind,' . . . Mrs. Hosëason murmured, looking uneasily across at her husband.

'You are not to go,' said John Hosëason, bringing down the palm of his hand heavily on the table as if to emphasise the absolute nature of his commands.

'Why not, sir?' asked Zack. His mother heard the angry sound in his voice, though the words were quiet enough.

'Because I have decided that you are to see

no more than is necessary of Lord Ruxton. Your path in life is likely to be widely separate from his, and it is a pity to associate too much at your age with people whose interests are other than your own. Since your return home, Zachary, I have seen with some displeasure many traces of Lord Ruxton's influence over you. I do not wish you to regulate your life by his standards. I repeat that you are not to go to the Lodge.'

John Hosëason rose from the table as he spoke and left the room. There was a horrid silence between Zack and his mother.

'You must obey your father, Zack,' said Helen softly; her eyes were full of tears of vexation.

'Well, *I just will not!*' cried Zack. 'I am old enough surely to choose my own friends. I like Lord Ruxton and all his ways and "standards of life," as father calls them. I like them far better than I like my father's ways and standards. I . . . I . . .'

He banged out of the room in a very ugly temper, without waiting to hear what his

mother said, and she, wise woman that she was, never dreamt of following him.

But Zack did not put in an appearance at dinner, no, nor at supper ; and when the long northern daylight was quite gone he had not yet returned. Helen did not voice her suspicions to her husband, as she sat spinning by the fire. She broke her thread so often, however, that an observant person might have guessed at her agitation.

‘Zachary is late,’ said John Hosëason at last. ‘It is time that we had worship,’ and he rang the bell for the servants with great energy. I am afraid that Helen could not have told you much of the devotions that followed: she was listening, listening for Zack’s whistle as he came down the road, and the sound of his step coming up the path to the door ; but everything was quiet as the grave outside, only the booming waves and now and then the cry of a belated curlew sounded through the stillness.

When worship was over John Hosëason looked at the clock—for he was very

exact ; then calling to Janet, one of the servants,

‘ Janet,’ he said, ‘ you may lock the doors now.’

‘ Mr. Zachary’s no’ in yet, sir,’ Janet objected.

‘ Lock the doors,’ said the minister, with finality in his voice.

‘ I think Zack will surely be in before long ; he is seldom so late,’ cried Mrs. Hosëason, with the ghost of a sob in her voice.

‘ It is nearly eleven o’clock, Helen ; I think it unlikely that Zachary will come home to-night,’ replied her husband.

‘ But if he were to come and find the doors locked. . . .’

‘ It would be a lesson in punctuality to him. It is a fine night ; he will get no harm on the moor.’

‘ John, you are hard to the boy !’ cried Mrs. Hosëason, with a flash of the temper which poor Zack had inherited from her. She swept together all the confusions of her spinning with one or two deft movements, and pushing the wheel into its place, went quickly out of the



room and upstairs. How she strained her eyes looking out over the dark moor for a coming figure, but at last with a heavy heart she confessed that Zack must have gone to the Lodge after all. What would the end of these things be ?

## CHAPTER XIII

ZACK had prepared a very painful and ridiculous trouble for himself by this foolish bit of disobedience, but fully to realise all that it meant to him the reader must try to remember the sensitive pride and self-consciousness of seventeen, the absurd value it puts on appearances, its ridiculous idea of its own importance. Zack had quite argued himself into the belief that he had done something very fine and heroic in disobeying his father. He hired a gig at the inn, and as he drove across the moors to the Lodge he was quite elated by a sense of his own emancipation from old-fashioned control. He felt really quite a grown man when he arrived there.

‘Is Lord Ruxton at home?’ he asked, feeling it scarcely necessary to go through such a formality in a house he knew so well.

Yes, Lord Ruxton was at home, and scarcely less pleased to see Zack than Zack was to see him. 'Why, it has been sad here without you, Zack,' he said, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, 'and I did not hope that they would spare you to us so soon again. I thought your mother would claim you for her own property for weeks to come.'

'I've—I've come without their leave,' Zack blurted out.

'What! run away a second time from home? What is it this time—not "preachings" again surely?'

'No; something much worse,' said Zack.

And out he jumbled his griefs—the bitter case he was in, his horror of the ministerial calling, his father's determination that he should follow it.

'You will help me, won't you, sir?' he cried, laying his hand on Lord Ruxton's knee. 'You opened the door for me before; you won't let it shut on me again?'

Lord Ruxton sat silent for a little. 'What does your mother think about it?' he asked.

‘Oh, she is siding against me too,’ said Zack bitterly. ‘She doesn’t want me to be a minister a bit, but she says I must obey my father.’

‘Then you must do it, I think,’ said Lord Ruxton slowly, ‘for your mother is a very wise, a very prudent woman—the wisest, the most vigorously prudent woman I have ever known.’ Zack looked up, surprised by Lord Ruxton’s words; but his expression was just the same as it always was.

‘Even *you* won’t help me!’ the poor boy cried. ‘I thought you would—I thought you would understand.’

‘I do—I do,’ said Lord Ruxton quickly. ‘I see it all, Zack, but I cannot conspire with you against both your parents; that would scarcely be honourable conduct, would it?’

‘I don’t care about honourable conduct, I want to be happy,’ cried poor Zack. His best hope had failed him. Short of fairly running away from home, there was now no course open to him but obedience.

‘Come,’ said Lord Ruxton, ‘suppose you try

a compromise. Why do you not consent to go to college without making any farther difficulty over it, and see how you get on for a year. After all, Zack, you are not overburdened with knowledge, are you?’

No, Zack assented, he was not—not that he wished for more, however.

Lord Ruxton leant back in his chair looking at the boy, with an expression half of amusement, half of pity.

‘You will find, Zack, that “making the best of bad bargains” is one of the main occupations of life, as you go on with it,’ he said; ‘it is so constantly all that one can do.’ Zack groaned in assent to this assertion.

‘Oh, it’s easy for you to say that,’ he said. ‘You have no bad bargains to make the best of!’

‘None—none at all,’ said Lord Ruxton; and something in his voice made Zack look at him again in surprise.

‘At least—well, perhaps I don’t quite know all about your bargains,’ he said. With the quick intuition he had inherited from his

mother, Zack saw that he had stumbled across something he did not understand. Lord Ruxton rose and went to the door. 'Come, Zack, we will try to find my mother and Eppie,' he said, 'for I think there is not much more to be said on this vexed subject.'

## CHAPTER XIV

EPPIE had grown up almost as much as Zack in this year of absence abroad. The thick cloud of black hair that used to hang over her shoulders was now 'up,' as girls call it, and she wore long skirts.

When Zack came into the room, Eppie was sitting at the window, gazing out across the moor so intently, that she did not turn to see who had come in. Her work had fallen on to the floor unnoticed. Zack walked across the room to where she sat, and laid his hand for a moment on her arm.

'Eppie,' he said, 'I've come back, you see.'

Time, the merciful healer of wounds, is also a pitiless blotter out of remembrances: along with our griefs there are often buried a thousand wonderful, tender little joys. So it is, perhaps, foolish to expect many elderly

people to recall, for Eppie's sake, the youth of their love—they have probably forgotten half the incidents that painted the morning for them then with all the colours of hope. But those (and there are a few such persons), who do not forget, will know what this little incident of Zack's unlooked-for arrival meant to Eppie.

Long, long years after, she could close her eyes and seem to see him stand beside her in the bright autumn sunshine, and hear him say, 'Eppie, I've come back,' and feel the touch of his hand upon her shoulder; I do not think she ever forgot. But it took just a moment for this impression to stamp itself on Eppie's heart. She jumped up, and held out her hand to Zack, blushing with pleasure.

'O Zack! it seems such a long time since we said good-bye at Inverness!' she said.

'Yes,' said Zack, 'doesn't it.' And then they looked hard at each other, and said nothing. Eppie was the first to recover her speech.

'I hope Mrs. Hosëason is well? and did you find the children much altered?' she asked.

'Eppie,' said Zack, with that rather dismay-



ing veracity, which was his characteristic, 'everything at home is horrible.'

'Horrible!' Eppie repeated, 'oh, surely not, I hoped you were so happy.'

'Well, if you want to know,' said Zack, 'I am just miserable; everything is all wrong; I fight with my father, and he is going to make me become a minister.'

Eppie made him sit down and tell her everything, from the hour of his home-coming to the hour of his starting for the Lodge, and when she had heard it all, Zack felt considerably better. He felt, too, that he had acted in a very wise, independent manner, and Eppie quite fostered the belief; time was to teach him his mistake. The evening passed delightfully, and the next morning broke bright and cloudless. After breakfast, as they stood together at the front door, Zack suddenly laughed aloud.

'O Eppie, do you know that that morning long ago'—(it was only one year ago, though it seemed so distant to Zack)—'when I stopped here for the night with Lord Ruxton, I was so

unhappy in the morning before we got away—I was afraid my father would send after me and take me home. I couldn't enjoy anything, I was so frightened!

'Perhaps your father will send for you this morning in reality,' said Eppie mischievously. And they both laughed again at the thought.

And then—then——

Down the rough moor road came a high old gig, drawn by a black horse, and driven by a man in very toil-soiled garments.

By the side of the driver sat a well-known figure in clerical clothes. Zack's heart stood still inside his breast—was he going to be hauled home like a truant schoolboy by his father, before Eppie's eyes? The sunlight was dark about him as he watched the gig come bumping down the hilly road.

'Who can that be?' cried Eppie. 'What a queer old gig!'

'It's my father,' said Zack, and pulled himself together to face the worst.

'Ah, Mr. Hosëason! this is quite unexpected!' said Lord Ruxton, as the gig drew

up before the door, and Mr. Hosëason, with his usual unruffled pomposity of manner, descended from the vehicle.

‘I have come in search of my son, Zachary, who, I perceive, is here,’ said the minister; and there was a movement of surprise among the little group.

‘I hope there is nothing wrong at home, sir?’ asked Lord Ruxton. ‘You must have made a very uncomfortably early start to reach us so soon in the day; I hope there is no untoward reason for it?’

‘There is nothing wrong with us, my lord; the reason of my coming is only to bring Zachary back with me—he came here against my express commands.’

A harder heart than Lord Ruxton’s would have felt sorry for poor Zack at this point. Here, before them all, he was to be coerced by this unyielding father! Eppie, who was too young to appreciate the special pathos of the position, was cruel enough to give a titter, which Zack heard quite distinctly—it was the most bitter drop in his cup.

Lord Ruxton, however, would not let the scene be any more painful than was necessary. He affected to make very light of the whole thing.

'Very stupid of you, Zack, I'm sure,' he said; 'and if I were your father I'd have nothing more to say to you, instead of troubling myself to fetch you—show the man the way round to the stables now, will you? and in the meantime your father will come and have some refreshment.'

'Sandy,' said the minister, addressing his driver then, 'the horse will have rested in two hours' time; come round for us at one o'clock.'

Sandy grunted an assent, and jerked at the horse's mouth.

Lord Ruxton and the minister disappeared indoors, and the two young people stood rather blankly side by side, not knowing what to say. The keeper with his dogs moved away, and they were left alone.

'Well,' said Zack, 'I suppose I must go home.'

'I wish your father hadn't come,' pouted

Eppie, 'because it makes you seem so *very* young, Zack. I had just begun to think that you were, perhaps, rather grown-up and interesting. I like men to be grown-up,' she added, quite unaware of her Irish way of putting it.

'Oh, I suppose I am too young to please you, Eppie, and—and . . .' Zack's dignity broke down, and he stumbled into incoherent, eager, ridiculous love-making. . . . 'I am so unhappy without you—I can't care about anything—I'll never forget you——'

Till Eppie, frightened as most girls are of their first lover, drew away her hand and ran into the house, leaving Zack to stand there forlorn in the sunshine. Well, since Eppie would have nothing to say to him, he thought it did not much matter now what happened. He would go home with his father, and go to college, and become a minister, and live a dull, dull life, and die a stupid death, and be buried, and there would be an end of it. To his shortsighted young eyes the long journey to the grave seemed one quickly accomplished. He had yet to learn the length of the way.

So it was a very sullen-faced young man indeed who climbed up on to the back seat of the gig two hours later.

'How did you come here yesterday, Zachary?' his father asked as they drove off.

'I came in a gig, sir.'

'What gig?'

'From the inn, sir.'

'Did you pay for it?'

'No, sir.'

'Who is to do so?'

'Mother will if you won't,' cried Zack, goaded to sudden fury at last, and Sandy gave a grunt of laughter, which he tried to pretend was a cough; he knew that Zack spoke the truth there.

## CHAPTER XV

THE friction between Zack and his father did not grow less after this incident. Which of us at seventeen could bear to be constantly checked for things which we thought ourselves quite old enough to judge of without help?

Doubtless it is trying for old people to see the young floundering into all manner of quite unnecessary mistakes and troubles; but if they would only believe it they do more harm than good by interference. Not one of us ever yet learnt from anything but experience the folly of our own ways; and the dearest and wisest old people are those who have mastered this bit of wisdom. But Zack's father was not of this sort. Young people, he thought, were mere tools in the hands of their elders. He held to the utmost the theory of parental responsibility and authority. Not even in the most inessential matters would he let poor Zack have his own

way, but would bend the boy's will at every point to accordance with his own. The conflict of their wills became so painful and so unceasing that Mrs. Hosëason began to long for October to come that Zack should leave for Aberdeen.

Well, the day of parting came at last: a very chill morning in October—the mist lay in sheets low down on the hills, the sea roared in over the sands with a sound that carried far inland on the motionless air.

The mail-gig which was to carry Zack and his fortunes started at four in the morning, so when he looked back at the Manse for the last time, the windows were all red with firelight and lamplight; the brightness shone far out into the chill dark of the morning, giving cheerful suggestion of the warmth and plenty of that unstinted home. Zack drew the rug more closely round his knees and wished it was not so cold. He was not inclined to be sentimental over his departure—home had been none so pleasant of late, even Aberdeen and study would be preferable,



he thought, to living on with that intolerant, overbearing old man his father.

And then he began to talk with Hugh the driver. The miles slipped past, the day broke coldly in the east, home fell far behind, and a new chapter of life was opening for him along with the new day.

. . . . .

There is an old and very true proverb which says that you may lead a horse to the water but you cannot make him drink ; and perhaps the wells of knowledge have more unwilling horses led up to them annually than any other of the fountains of earth.

You must not think, therefore, that Zack was an entirely worthless young man when I tell you that before six months of his college course at Aberdeen had run he had thrown off all pretence of study. You may be sure that he found many another page in the book of life which he cared to con, though he turned a deaf ear to all that the professors could teach him. His father had made Zack a very liberal allowance, and he spent it with great carelessness,

being by nature 'open-handed' and heedless. Study he would not—why waste time over books when everything else in the round world was so much more interesting, he argued? Then, some rumour of his idle ways having reached Carradale, a long and severe letter came one day from John Hoseason. To this Zack paid no heed at all—he laughed at it, lit his pipe with it, and sent the fragments of blackened paper up the chimney—and time went on.

When a year had gone in this way another letter reached Zack at which he did not laugh, for it was from his mother (one of her scrawly, ill-spelt letters), and it prayed him to come home immediately. 'I need your help, my dear son,' it ran, 'for your father lies at death's door with the palsy, and I do not know what next to do.'

Happily for Zack he did not realise all that this news meant when he started on the long journey northwards to Carradale. The full meaning of the word anxiety is hidden from youth because anxiety is generally one of the

sorry fruits of experience, and those who have only travelled a short way in life are ignorant of all they have to face in it. So Zack had only a few forebodings and a good many twinges of conscience as he journeyed home.

But as the gig drew up at the Manse gate late on a wild autumn night of wind and rain, there swept over Zack a shiver of premonition, for the house had an altogether unfamiliar air; the windows that he last remembered so bright with fire and candlelight were quite dark—only one had a faint glow in it. The door, which generally stood open, was shut against the driving storm, and no one seemed on the outlook to welcome him. Zack tugged his portmanteau out from under the seat of the gig, and carried it up to the closed door. Then he entered this strangely quiet house—what were the children doing, they could make a great noise in general; and the servants must surely be asleep; and his mother?’

Zack struggled out of his long, wet travelling coat, and stood listening in the passage for a moment. A door opened upstairs, and

his mother came out on to the landing and looked down. Then she came slipping down the stair noiselessly, and motioned to Zack to follow her into the study.

How girlish and pretty she looked : was it possible she was the mother of this very grown-up son ?

‘ Ah, Zack, you have come—he is better,’ she said, flinging her arms round her son and devouring him with her eyes after the long absence.

Zack’s spirits rose and his chill premonitions were pushed aside. ‘ That’s right, mother—I am so glad ; has he been very ill ? ’

Helen sat down and looked straightly at Zack with her keen blue eyes. ‘ So ill, Zack, that he will never be well again. When I said he was better, I meant only that your father’s life was not in danger still.’

‘ But, mother, my father has always been so strong, surely he will regain his health with care ? ’

‘ He will never be able to work again. Ah, Zack, he can’t move—he is quite, quite helpless!’

Zack sat silent before these tidings. ‘ What

does that mean then, mother?' he said at last, almost afraid to ask.

'He is far too ill to think of anything just now,' said Helen. 'But when he gets better and his brain is clearer I think he will resign the living. Could you fancy your father staying on here in the Manse and drawing a salary for work he couldn't do?'

'No,' Zack admitted, 'but . . .'

'They will put in another man, probably, and offer your father half of the stipend—if he will take it.'

'And if he won't?'

'Ah!' She said no more; and Zack again sat silent, stricken with shame and dismay. How had he been so unscrupulous as to waste his own time and his father's money as he had done in Aberdeen, so that now he was no nearer earning a livelihood than if he had been a child of six!

To Helen these were moments of horrible suspense: she sat gazing at Zack, and all the time she kept asking herself if he was all she hoped—if he was to be depended upon, or

if he was going to fail her at this supreme moment?

She rose and stood looking down at him. 'Zachary,' she cried, 'you must play the man! You have wasted your time long enough.'

It was the first time in her life that Mrs. Hosëason had brought herself to say an unpleasant truth to her son, and Zack, who knew her partial judgment of himself in general, winced at the words.

'O mother, what a fool I've been!' he cried. But here the mother's old habit of defending her son asserted itself.

'You could not have foreseen this,' she said quickly, 'and you knew there was always plenty and to spare.'

Zack shook his head. 'No, no, that was no excuse,' he said. But here again Helen demurred.

'Ah, it is some excuse,' she said; 'the question is what you can do now to earn money. I am too proud, Zack, to hear people say that my son either can't or won't work for his parents.'

‘I certainly will never do it with book-learning now, mother, even if I could go to college in earnest now, which I can’t do; but I’d work my body like a slave before I saw you or the children want for anything.’

‘Work does not come very easily all at once, Zack; you have been idle all your life.’

‘And I suppose,’ said Zack mournfully, ‘that it isn’t very easy to get.’

‘It just depends on two things, my son: whether you are anxious to get it, and whether you will take what you can get.’

Zack looked up quickly. He did not speak, but he nodded twice, as if the whole situation had become plain to him.

## CHAPTER XVI

ZACK passed the first sleepless night of his life after this interview with his mother. A hundred schemes, each as barren as the other, drifted through his mind between the darkness and the dawn. At last, when the tardy daylight began to whiten the panes, he rose and looked out. On either side the moor stretched away, sodden with the autumn rains, till it was lost in the surrounding mist, while to the north there was only a sheet of grey sea, flecked with white—ah, such a colourless, dispiriting landscape! ‘It seems to me that I have wakened at last,’ thought Zack; ‘I’ve been dreaming all my life till now; now I am wide awake, and life is just like that country out there—bleak, terrible, impossible. I see nothing that I can do, and yet everything depends on me.’ How changed the home of



his childhood seemed, with this cloud of disaster brooding over it! All its tranquil prosperity had vanished, and everything was dreary and unhomelike. Could it be true, as his mother said, that they would need to leave the Manse, with all its comfort and plenty? Why, the very foundations of life would be stirred if that were to come true. Zack dressed at last and went downstairs. The rooms wore their usual air of order, and big fires blazed in the grates; but there was not a sound in the house, and the servant who brought in breakfast walked on tiptoe up the passage from the kitchen. Then Mary and Isobel came stealthily downstairs, and flung themselves in wordless delight into Zack's arms, saying in whispers, 'We have to be like mice just now, Zack, or we would *scream* with joy at seeing you.' They drew their chairs noiselessly up to the table, talking across it to their brother in low tones.

'We are so tired of never making a noise,' they explained. 'It's a whole week, now—no, nearer a fortnight—since we have

laughed, and yesterday, when Isobel fell and skinned her knee, she had just to run out, and ever so far along the road, before she could scream.' Zack would have laughed at this bit of heroism in former days; to-day he had no heart for laughter. But when his mother came into the room things brightened up a little. She spoke quite in her natural voice, and did not seem to expect any of them to talk in whispers.

'You must come upstairs to see your father after breakfast, Zack,' she said. 'I wonder if he will quite realise who you are; if he does, it will do him good to see you, I think.'

Zack rather shrank from seeing his father. Their last interview had not been of the happiest. 'Should I not wait for a few days?' he suggested, but Helen insisted upon the visit. She had her own ends in view, though Zack did not know it, and with her unerring knowledge of his nature she judged that a sight of his father would help Zack to hear a rather trying story she had to tell him. For if Zack was anything he was generous

and chivalrous by nature, with a heart easily touched to pity—so much she knew.

They went upstairs together, and Helen preceded Zack into the sickroom. She drew back the curtain a little, to let the light fall on her husband's face.

'Come, Zack,' she said in a steady voice; and Zack drew near the bed.

'O mother, that's not father!' Zack exclaimed in horrible pity. He fell on his knees by the bed and caught at his father's stiff right hand that lay out across the sheet—a heavy, iron hand it used to be—how nerveless and dead it felt now!

'O father, I'm so sorry,' Zack cried; 'I've been a fool, and worse, to act as I have.' The quiet face on the pillow scarcely stirred, except that the eyelids fluttered and the muscles round the mouth gave a slight twitch.

'He does not quite know you,' Helen explained; perhaps later in the day he will waken up more. Come away, Zack, I wish to speak with you; Janet will sit here with your father.'

They went downstairs again, and Zack, quite

unsuspectingly, turned the conversation to the very subject his mother had meant to speak of.

‘Have you heard anything about Lord Ruxton lately, mother?’ he asked. ‘I have not had a letter from him for quite a long time, but there was something in his last letter that interested me. He said he was going across to Carradale to speak to my father about me. Did he ever come? What was it about?’

‘Yes, Zack, he came, and he spoke,’ said Helen. She paused for a moment, and then went on with her story, as a spirited horse will try to rush a hill.

‘He came, Zack, to ask your father to let you go with him round the world. He is to be away from home for two years. He wished to take you with him, and thought that perhaps you might, under his direction, have found work more to your liking in the Colonies. But your father would not hear of it. He was determined that you were to go on with your College work.’

‘He didn’t—mother, he surely never refused *that* for me?’ cried Zack.

‘Yes, he did, dearest.’

‘O mother, it was cruel—cruel,’ said Zack bitterly.

‘Remember what you have just seen,’ said Helen. ‘Surely, Zack, you can’t feel resentment against him now. God’s hand is pressing sorely on him.’

Zack stammered, uncertain. ‘Not now—no; I think not now,’ he said.

‘This is the time to forget, my son,’ said Helen. ‘The old difficulties and disputes are over for ever. Ah, my poor boy, you’ll have only too much of your own way now!’

Yes, Zack realised that : that broken, nerveless, scarcely breathing creature who lay upstairs could never govern any one again. ‘I am free at last,’ he thought; but the thought did not give him any satisfaction, and, instead, a cold wave of helplessness washed over him; he felt suddenly so young, so inexpressibly foolish, so weak. ‘O mother,’ he cried, ‘will father not get over this and look after us all again?’ Helen shook her head.

‘Never, never, Zack; that would be to hope

too much. After this it is you who must take care of him.'

'But I am not able for it—not fit for it in any way.'

'There is no such thing as an impossible duty,' said Helen; 'if your duty lies here—well, you can do it.'

She rose, and stood beside her son, her figure drawn up to its full height. She smiled, and her smile spoke of courage.

'We have had a life of plenty and of comfort, Zack,' she said. 'Now, if God is sending us want and difficulty, we should be ready to face them both.'

'But I am not ready; I am about as unready as any one could be,' said Zack, with rueful knowledge of the truth.

## CHAPTER XVII

IF we look attentively at the sorrows of the world, we are, I think, forced to confess that every man is given just that one trial which seems unbearable to him. This may seem to be a gloomy view of the universe; and it is, unless we hold along with it the belief that each man's trial is his opportunity. Perhaps we all hold this belief tacitly—our very use of the word 'trial' shows it—we are being 'tried' to find what we are; it is our opportunity to show what stuff is in us.

It would indeed have been impossible to find a more severe trial for poor Zack than the one that had fallen on him now. For a young man very pleasure-loving, gay, adventurous, heedless, and extravagant, to be shut up without companions, occupation, or amusements in a desolate country place is a very sore trial

indeed. For the Manse had lost all its old-time cheerfulness: the hush of illness brooded over it, and all the activities of the household seemed to have come to a standstill now that the master of the house was not there to superintend them. The winter was closing in over Carradale too, with that grim ferocity of which the favoured South knows nothing. With short days and howling nights the weeks crept on. Sometimes for days together the rain would beat upon the sodden moor, or, when the wind blew from the north, the spray was carried in, salt and bitter, off the sea, and crusted the window-panes. Upstairs the sick man lay in his bed, helpless, and changing little from week to week; his wife sat beside him, giving no thought to the rest of the household in her anxiety to do everything for him. Downstairs were Zack and the two little girls—Zack restless and unhappy, the children very awed and unlike themselves.

Mrs. Hoséason was watching her son quite as anxiously as she watched her husband. 'What was he going to do with himself?' she



asked continually ; ' would he have force enough to originate work for himself, or was she to suggest it ? ' For a long time it seemed to her anxious eyes that Zack was going to do nothing. He went out early and stayed out late, and wore a grave, troubled look that was very unlike him. Sometimes he would bring in fish, and tell her he had been out in the boats with the men : sometimes he would tell her he had been pitting the potatoes with Sandy, or carting peats from the bog. But always he wore the same heavy, anxious air.

Though Mrs. Hosëason had tried to make Zack believe that he was to have the responsible task of settling their future plans as a family, she had really been making up her own mind on the subject, and it was not long before she told her son the conclusions which she had come to.

She began to work round her subject, approaching it in circles, as women often do :—

' You have not fitted yourself for any learned

profession, Zack,' she said, 'and there is, after all, very little choice among untrained workers.'

Zack assented sadly to this undeniable truth.

'Your father has so many old friends in the country, though,' proceeded Helen, 'that through their kindness you might hear of some work. There are the bankers at Inverness, now—they might give you a post, though I fear you have little knowledge of money matters.'

'Ah, mother, I could never bear to sit in an office all day—also, I could not do it if I would.'

'There is, then,' said Helen, 'there is the possibility that you may have to go into a shop. I have dealt for years with MacPherson and Grant, of Inverness—it is a respectable business; they might be glad to get a young man like you to help in their warehouse.'

'Mother, I would die in a shop,' cried Zack.

His mother laughed and shook her head:

'Tis not so easy to die, my son ; but I believe you would be very unhappy. Still, " Beggars cannot choose," as the proverb tells us.'

'I would rather far be a ploughman,' said Zack desperately.

'And do you think a ploughman needs no training, Zack ? and you've lived in the country all your days ! There's not a farmer in the county would trust you to plough his land.'

'Well, I suppose I could break stones,' said Zack humbly, 'or cart peats, or feed cattle—an "orra man" they call it, don't they ?'

But at this suggestion Mrs. Hosëason beat about the bush no longer. 'It comes to this, Zack,' she said, 'that we must rent a croft of our own, and if you make mistakes there will be no master to blame you for them. We shall keep a cow and a horse and some sheep and hens. You shall do the field work and I can do the rest—the cow and hens. I doubt if there is a woman in Carradale knows more of cows and poultry than I do. It will be hard work for both of us, but I am not afraid of it

myself, and hard work never hurt a young man yet.'

Zack looked down at his hands: they were very shapely, and he twisted a ring which Lord Ruxton had given him round and round on his finger.

'Better take that off, I think,' said his mother, with a little dawning smile round her mouth; and then she thought that she had been cruel to say this just now, and came round and passed her hand caressingly over Zack's pretty black curls. Zack drew the ring quickly off his finger and began to fit it on each finger of her hand until he found the right one for it.

'There, that will be better,' he said, with rather a forced smile, for the ring had been a cherished vanity.

'Ah, Zack, I'll have little use for finger rings or finery if we carry out this scheme. If so be I may keep a roof over my poor husband's head and feed the children, I'll ask for little more,' said Mrs. Hosëason,

Zack did not reply. He sat looking into the fire, and his face was very grave.

'I wanted more,' he said suddenly in his downright way, and Helen could not understand at first what he meant.

'Why, Zack,' she objected, 'I did not know that you were ambitious—you must not think me unkind when I say that it did not look as if you were.'

Zack winced under this deserved rebuke.

'I was ambitious along different lines, mother. I mean that I had no ambition to succeed at college; but I was not going to be a failure for all that,' he said.

'Then what did you mean to do?'

'Oh, I meant to go abroad, and make my fortune there as other men have done, and come home——' Zack stopped short and looked up at his mother. 'I suppose you know what was to come then?' he asked. Helen shook her head. 'No, Zack, my divinations scarcely go so far.'

'I meant to come home and marry Eppie, of course,' he said.

‘Is that why my sweet son is so unhappy?’ Helen asked smiling.

‘Yes, yes; oh, surely you know, mother?’

‘My dear child—no. But, Zack, the thing is impossible. Why, you are too young to think seriously about marriage yet; it is absurd. Six or seven years after this you might think of it perhaps.’

‘And will six or seven years of working a croft make it any more possible?’ Zack asked bitterly. ‘I suppose Eppie would be allowed to marry a crofter, wouldn’t she? I suppose she would want to, would she? Yes, that’s impossible if you like, mother.’

‘Oh yes, quite impossible if Eppie is that sort of girl.’

‘I scarcely know what you mean,’ cried Zack, quite angrily.

‘If she minds difficulties—disadvantages—Zack,’ Helen cried, rising in her excitement and standing beside him. ‘Zack, if I were a man I would care nothing for a girl who gave a second thought to money or position. What do these things matter? The one thing need-

ful is love—and if you have that you have all things, and if you have not you are poorer than the poorest.’

‘Do you really think that?’ Zack asked, almost awed by the earnestness of her speech.

‘Think it? I know it. Believe me, Zack—for you are so young and cannot know it for yourself—believe me, that if Eppie Gordon loves you now, she will love you better far when you are poor and struggling. Love has that nature, Zack—it grows best under difficulties.’

‘But then,’ said Zack gloomily, ‘I am afraid that she does not love me.’

To an onlooker there must have been an element of absurdity in this conversation, so extremely serious, over the first love of a boy of eighteen. But to Helen Hosëason her son appeared so irresistible that she saw no absurdity in the matter. He was indeed, standing there beside her, as goodly a youth as the sun ever shone upon. ‘A princess might be proud to have him for a lover—far less Eppie Gordon,’ thought this proud mother. It cut

her to the heart that she must press the boy to follow some unwelcome calling ; yet, looking round her, Helen could see no help out of the difficulty except the plan she had proposed to Zack. If only Lord Ruxton had been at home, she thought, he might have been able to help them ; but he was gone, and who could tell how long it might be till he returned ? They must help themselves—generally, when all is said and done, the best thing to do.

This conclusion, which perhaps sounds rather a hard one, Helen daily impressed upon her son, till Zack, who had inherited from her a good deal of hard common-sense, began to see that there was truth in what she said. For though a dozen old friends and acquaintances of his father's hastened to offer their help and their advice to Zack, each of their schemes when analysed came to very little. There was always a premium needed—a 'mere nothing,' but quite an impossibility—or 'former training' or 'experience' were required, just what Zack had not got.

So gradually the boy had fallen back upon



his mother's wisdom, and recognised that he was his own best helper. 'Unless I can help myself, no one will ever do much for me,' he said.

At last one evening Zack came in and sat down beside his mother. He had almost stopped now asking the question that used at first to be so often on his lips, 'How is father?' for it had become so painful always to hear the same reply.

'Father seems to be no better this week,' he said.

'No, Zack—just the same. I fear we can't look for quick improvement.'

'Do you think he will be able to be moved in spring, mother—to a new house?'

'We cannot stay on here indefinitely.'

'Mother, do you know that the old mill at Carra is to be sold at the spring term? William Mackenzie is going to America, to his son; I was seeing him to-day.'

'Well?'

'I have four months to learn in, mother.'

'To learn what?'

'I want you to lease the mill and the croft. I'll work them both.'

Mrs. Hosëason looked at her son with brightening eyes. 'What is the size of the croft, Zack?' she said.

'Five acres, mother.'

'And the rent?'

'Five-and-twenty pounds.'

'And is Mackenzie willing to teach you? Have you spoken to him?'

'Yes.'

'Without consulting me?'

'Yes.'

'Why?'

'Because I had made up my mind.'

'But if I disapprove?'

'You won't.'

'But your father may.'

'Do you think he will, mother? I am afraid he thinks so badly of me, he would be glad to see me take to any honest work.'

Mrs. Hosëason considered this speech for some time. 'Well, Zack, I cannot trouble him about anything just now. I doubt if he

will ever be able to arrange anything for us again,' she said. 'When he is able to say whether he wishes to stay on in the Manse, that will decide a great deal. In the meantime you are better to find employment for yourself, without reference to that.'

'Well, give me your blessing then,' laughed Zack.

'You will make the best-looking miller in Scotland,' said this fond mother. It was a foolish speech enough, but if she had spoken what she really thought she would have said 'the world' instead of 'Scotland,' which would have been, if possible, a more foolish speech still.

## CHAPTER XVIII

A GREAT deal of nonsense is talked in this world about the pleasures of rest after a lifetime of toil, the truth of the matter being that the man who feels his work is done wants but one rest—the longest. Among all the piteous sights of earth this is one of the saddest: the useless man who has once been useful. When poor John Hosëason came back slowly to the land of the living, it was to realise that his part in the active life of men was over. For weeks he lay there, apparently quiet and contented, speaking only a word now and then to his wife, but all the time this terrible truth was coming home to his heart—his work was done, he was useless now; it would be better far if he died. What part had he any more in anything that was done under the sun?

‘Helen,’ he said at last, beckoning his wife to come and sit beside him. She took his hand in hers—an unusual demonstration of feeling—and asked him what he wanted.

‘My work is done,’ he said, and closed his eyes in weariness before he added; ‘we must leave the Manse.’

‘Ah, John, don’t trouble yourself about that—the Manse is ours as long as you are here,’ cried Mrs. Hosëason; but as she spoke she knew that she might as well speak to the wind. The sick man gathered himself together for the effort of speech: ‘It is my intention to leave the Manse; I cannot burden a parish with my uselessness; my pride forbids it, Helen. If I cannot work I cannot stay.’

‘We shall arrange it after a time, John—when you are better,’ she said.

‘We shall arrange it now,’ said her husband, with a ghost of the old overbearing spirit; ‘I wish my resignation of this living to be sent in immediately; I wish to leave the Manse as soon as possible; I wish . . .’

the words died away on his stiff, blue lips, and then, with a curiously childish gesture of confidence, he pressed his wife's hand— 'You will arrange it all, Helen. I feel dazed; curiously, I cannot think of things.' . . .

She bent over him for a moment like a mother over her child: 'You have a son to arrange things for you, John, and to support you, and me, and the children,' she said.

'Ah—Zack; I had almost forgotten the boy,' he said, and dozed off into a light slumber.

That day he said no more on this sorry subject; but time and again he returned to it, always with the same cry, 'We must leave the Manse.' And with the same pertinacity Mrs. Hosëason held to her idea, and repeated it to her husband—

'You must depend upon Zack, John; it will be the making of our son if he can only take this burden up. Yes, he is young; yes, I have done my best to spoil him; yes, he has wasted his time at college

and has no profession—there is the more need to make a man of him now.’

With this end in view, Helen did not discourage her husband in his desire to resign the living and manage as best they could upon what Zack might earn, and the tiny income which was theirs. But, indeed, any remonstrances on her part would have been quite vain. John Hosëason was as determined now as he had been in the days of his strength—he would leave the Manse, and he would not accept money for work which he could not do. In her secret heart Helen rejoiced at this decision, for she saw in it her son’s salvation. ‘It will make a man of him,’ she said to herself.

But, for all her rejoicing, Helen had many anxious thoughts about the future as she sat spinning beside her husband. If he, as he asserted he would, refused to accept the half of his stipend from the Church, their income for the year would scarcely amount to fifty pounds. It is true that a working man with fifty pounds over and above his

earnings would count himself rich; but you must remember that the Hosëasons all their married life had lived in the greatest plenty and comfort, and that makes all the difference in these things. Besides, it was yet to be seen whether Zack would succeed as a miller. Perhaps people would not be satisfied with his work, and would send their corn elsewhere; perhaps he would work the croft badly, and they would lose by it; perhaps—perhaps—all the crowding fears that come to every thinking being when a great change in life is contemplated came to Mrs. Hosëason, though to her husband she made light of them all.

The winter seemed as if it would never wear away. But as the days began to lengthen out, John Hosëason struggled back to a measure of strength, and was able to sit in a chair by the fire. But they were dreary days these, when with all the irritation and mental powerlessness of convalescence he wondered how the twelve hours of the day were ever to pass. Parishioners, kind



but ill-advised, came often to see the minister, and took the opportunity (as your Scotsman always will) to tell him that he was terribly failed, and not long for this world. John Hosëason did not resent these remarks—he only hoped, indeed, that they were correct, but somehow the visits did not cheer him much.

When all the final arrangements for the resignation came to be made, there were long and trying visits from members of Presbytery, who, with the best intentions in the world, only irritated the sick man by attempting to make him change his mind and stay on in the Manse. Each of them in turn made this vain attempt, and came away shaking their heads and saying that John Hosëason was John Hosëason still, set upon his own way and unheeding the advice of others.

## CHAPTER XIX

It was a relief to every one concerned when these arrangements were completed, and a date was fixed for leaving the Manse.

But it is, alas! easier to leave an old home than to make a new one—a fact which Mrs. Hosëason realised when she reached the mill of Carra one chill spring afternoon.

Not all the familiar bits of Mansë furniture which stood in the cottage, not the unchanged ticking of the eight-day clock, or the well-known dishes on the table, could give any illusion of home to the unfamiliar walls.

In the field below the mill the Manse cow was 'routing' in the strange field; while indoors the old white cat (the children's friend, which they had carried over in a

basket) walked suspiciously through the cottage, sniffing at everything, and giving faint, mystified mews. It was scarcely to be supposed that human newcomers would be any happier.

The cottage consisted only of four rooms, but they were well-sized and comfortable. Mrs. Hosëason stood still on the threshold, with the darting thought that passes through the mind of every imaginative person as they enter a new home, 'What will happen to me here?' She went on into the kitchen and looked around her.

'Zack, come and blow up the fire, she said, 'the place seems cold and cheerless.'

Zack was all white with meal, and the children clapped their hands in delight at his appearance. Zack was able to laugh at it himself now, though he had been rather sensitive on the point at first. He blew up the peats to a flame, and Helen began to make tea ready. The kitchen looked cheerful enough now, with the firelight and the spread table; but if the truth were told, Helen was

not as cheerful as she appeared. She felt rather overwhelmed at this moment, for everything seemed to need to be done at once. Her husband, tired with the move, to be attended to, the meal to be got ready, the children to be put to bed, the cow to milk, the hens to feed, the whole machinery of the household to be worked. Why had she not allowed old Janet to come with her from the Manse for a few days, as she had wished to do?

But there—if she was going to complain of too much work already, she was a poor creature, she concluded; and going to the point, as was her invariable habit, Mrs. Hosëason swept the children off to bed with direful directness, as being the most troublesome elements that had to be coped with. She moved through the little house like a breeze of wind, ‘enchanting it to order,’ as the poet, who had evidently never done any housework, expressed it.

John Hosëason sat by the fireside, his head sunk upon his breast, his hands stretched idle

on his knees. He watched the quick, light movements of his wife out of his dull eyes, and sometimes would glance round the unaccustomed walls, but he did not speak.

‘Mother, you should never have had any one to do your work for you, you look so pretty when you do it,’ said Zack.

‘Don’t talk nonsense, Zachary,’ said she—she always called him Zachary when she was a little cross. ‘Work is unbecoming to every woman. Go and get in that cow to the byre, and I don’t suppose you can milk her?’

No—Zack admitted that he could not. ‘Well, you can feed the hens.’

‘Yes, if you mix the food.’

‘Give them some corn to-night. I’ve no time to mix food, if you are so useless; there’s surely plenty of corn *here*.’ Zack laughed, and went out to the mill for the corn.

‘Zack, where’s the milk-pail,’ called his mother after him, ‘and were the milk-pans sent up, and where did you put them?’ She was searching in the meantime for an apron to

put on while she milked the cow, but then the apron seemed to have disappeared, and where could it be?

‘Helen, I feel much exhausted,’ said her husband at this opportune moment, ‘I would like to go to my bed now, if it is ready.’

When was a bed ever ready in a newly ‘flitted’ house? Poor Mrs. Hosëason, who thought that she had foreseen and arranged everything, was struck with shame at her own bad management. ‘Yes, John, it will be ready directly,’ she cried, abandoning all thought of the cow, though it was lowing at the door by this time.

‘Mother, I’ve brought the cow up from the field,’ said Zack’s voice outside.

‘Helen, I am much fatigued,’ repeated her husband—while in the next room little Isobel set up a sudden, ear-splitting scream: ‘Mother, I’ve got toothache!’

Well, the bed was got ready somehow, and the invalid helped into it, and the child was soothed, and the cow was milked, and the hens

were fed, and the dishes were washed—but perhaps you will not wonder that Mrs. Hosëason, to her latest hour, carried a distracted memory of her first evening in the new home.

## CHAPTER XX

You must not suppose that confusion reigned for long at the mill of Carra. Before two days had passed the cottage was as orderly as a cottage could be, and the work seemed to be done by machinery instead of being the result of Helen Hosëason's clever hands and more clever head. Never was a woman better fitted for the life she had undertaken. To see her come to the door to welcome some of the neighbours was a study in behaviour; for the neighbours were filled with curiosity as well as friendliness, and this Helen was perfectly well aware of. Now the difficulty was to be sufficiently dignified to baffle their curiosity without offending probable customers for Zack's mill. I seem to see her coming forward to the door in answer to a visitor's knock



—her smile ready on her lips, a soft (yet slightly surprised) exclamation on her tongue :—

‘Ah, Mr. Sutherland! are you come to see the minister or the miller? or perhaps it will be both? Will you come into the kitchen? Mr. Hosëason will be pleased to see you.’ And the visitor never found matter for spiteful comment there: the glowing peat fire, the ever-ready refreshments (alas for the Temperance Cause, I fear that refreshments in these days meant always cake and whisky!), and Mrs. Hosëason with her pleasant talk, as she moved about the little room. Many and many a sack of corn found its way to the mill owing to this artful mother with her beauty and her tactful ways! Zack was turning into an excellent workman, but perhaps it would have been too much to expect that he should be perfect in his trade all at once; the great fault he had to fight was his carelessness, for where pleasure stepped in, Zack was apt to throw work to the winds. Sacks of corn will not grind themselves when the miller chooses to go off fishing

for the day, and alas! more than once Zack was guilty of this sin.

They had been settled some two months at the mill when Helen began to be very anxious again about her husband's health. There is a superstition that old people often die when they leave one home for another. Whether it is that the uprooting is too painful for them, or whether it is only a coincidence, the fact remains that they very often pass away after such a change has been made.

Helen was Celtic enough to be superstitious, and she confided her fears to Zack.

'O mother, you're over-anxious; father is all right,' said he.

But Helen shook her head:—

'No, no, I see a change upon him—he thinks more and speaks less; it is moving from the old home that has done it.'

'I think you are very superstitious, my dear mother,' said Zack.

He refused to listen to these fancies, and went off whistling to his work. Later in the day his mother spoke of it again: 'Zack, your

father was praying when I went into his room just now—praying aloud: "O Lord, I am ready and willing," I heard him say. Is that the prayer of a man who is long for this world?'

Zack felt awed at her words: in his fulness of life and health it seemed to him incredible that any one should long for the end of this blessed world.

'He may not have meant death, mother,' he suggested.

'What else? what else? Ah, my poor husband!' she said.

Zack wondered at the words; his mother always spoke in this strangely aloof way of her husband, as if he were very far off from her. What did it mean? And yet she nursed him with such devotion. . . . Ah! it was a puzzling world when it came to men and women, thought Zack.

In the evening, after the children had gone to bed, Mrs. Hosëason came out to the door. She looked pale, and passed her hand across her eyes.

‘I cannot shake it off,’ she said.

‘What?’ asked Zack. He was standing by the door, jointing his rod together.

‘I feel that something is going to happen, Zack,’ she said.

Zack leant the rod up against the cottage wall, and came and passed his hand through his mother’s arm.

‘Nothing is going to happen. I think you have been working too hard,’ he said; ‘come and walk down through the meadow with me to the river; it will do you good.’

‘No, no. I should go in and sit with your father,’ said Helen, but she turned towards the meadow as she spoke, and Zack taking up his rod, they strolled down the path together. The field was full of flowers and tall grasses—an embroidery of rich design.

‘Oh, how lovely!’ cried Helen, and then suddenly she turned back to the house. ‘I cannot get rid of this idea, Zack,’ she said, ‘not even out here among the flowers.’

'You must be ill, mother; there is nothing wrong,' he persisted.

'Not just now, but there will be. It is your father, Zack; he is going to die, I am sure.'

In vain Zack argued and laughed at her fancy; she clung to it the more.

'Go away to your fishing; I am keeping you back,' she said at last. And Zack went.

He came in late, a little anxious at the remembrance of his mother's premonition; but the house was just as usual.

'Nothing wrong, I hope?' he asked, as he swung his basket off his shoulder. 'See my fish, mother,' he added.

Mrs. Hosëason looked dully at the fish. 'Yes, they are very good. No, there is nothing wrong,' she said, 'but I feel anxious and troubled.'

'There—you see what foolish things premonitions are,' said Zack.

'Perhaps—perhaps,' his mother admitted. She stood leaning her head against the post of the door, gazing out into the dusk, with

an anxious, nervous expression on her face that was very unlike her usual cheerful alertness.

'I seem to hear all manner of strange sounds this evening, Zack,' she said. 'As I stood here, before you came up through the meadow, I heard quite distinctly a hammering noise — you know what that means . . .' She paused, and Zack glanced at her uneasily. He had never seen his mother in this mood before.

'No indeed, I've no idea what hammering could mean,' he said cheerfully, though he had a tolerable idea of her meaning. 'There are woodpeckers in the thatch often, mother; that is what you heard.'

Helen smiled an eerie, Celtic smile. 'Not woodpeckers, Zack; the sound was far away, but coming nearer and nearer: yet, however near it came, it never was loud—just like a carpenter hammering nails.'

'Really, mother, this is quite absurd,' said Zack; but he came and stood beside her, slipping his arm round her in a com-

forting way to try to reassure her. She leant back against him.

‘I could have declared, too, Zack, that I heard some one digging, digging, digging out there behind the house——’

‘Come, mother, this will never do; you must come in and go to bed. I think you are ill yourself to imagine such things,’ said Zack.

He led her into the house, and tried to persuade her that these fears were groundless. But she would not be persuaded. ‘Go to bed, Zack,’ she said; ‘you are sleepy and tired; I can’t rest, I must sit up until two in the morning at least. If sick people are going to die, they generally die then——’

‘Die! my dear mother, there is no question of dying. My poor father is no worse than he has been for months past,’ Zack argued.

‘Very well, Zack, if you feel happy about him, perhaps you are right; but I cannot believe that there is nothing wrong. Go to

bed and sleep, my son; perhaps I will laugh at my fears when the morning comes.' Zack kissed her, and went off to bed and his usual dreamless slumbers.

Helen sat by the fire in a tense, listening attitude. The door which led into the room where her husband lay was ajar. She could hear his breathing, slow and laboured, in the stillness. Once or twice, as the hours passed, she went to the door and looked at the sleeper. Suddenly his breathing became louder. She stepped across to the bed, and glanced down at the twitching, unconscious face. Louder and louder came the strangling breaths. Helen ran across the passage to Zack's room, and shook him awake. 'Get up, get up, Zack; your father is dying!' she cried.

Zack rubbed his eyes and sprang out of bed. 'O mother, not really; what can I do?' he cried.

'Nothing, nothing, Zack; come, and be beside him when he dies,' she said.

'Shall I bring the children too?' he asked.



'No, it would frighten them; come!' she said.

They went into the other room and stood beside the dying man. His departure was very quiet; and Zack, surprised, could not believe his mother when she said it was all over. He was awed, stirred, as we all are in the presence of the great mystery; but he watched his mother curiously, and wondered what she was feeling.

'He was a good husband to me,' was all she said.

## CHAPTER XXI

It was in June that John Hosëason died. His going made a curious, impalpable change in the household; neither his wife nor his son spoke of the change to each other, but they both felt it in their hearts. Till now Mrs. Hosëason had held herself bound in honour to take her husband's view of everything, though she had secretly sided always with Zack; and he, even when quite aware of this, had known that he could expect no other conduct from his mother. Now the unacknowledged barrier between them had fallen, and they knew that there would be no more difficulties of this kind. The summer passed away into autumn—the early autumn of northern latitudes, and then, suddenly, a great change befell the household at the mill. This was how it came about.

Mrs. Hosëason sat spinning at the door one fine afternoon, as she often did, when, lifting her eyes, she saw two riders, a man and a woman, coming down the road. The horses came slowly, because the road was stony, so she had time to examine her visitors as they approached, and time also to feel supremely annoyed when she recognised Lord Ruxton and Eppie.

‘Why, I did not think Lord Ruxton would be back again so soon,’ she thought, and a tide of colour swept across her cheeks. She could not try to disguise from herself any longer what she had known and refused to acknowledge for so long. Lord Ruxton must have turned back homewards immediately whenever the letter in which Zack told of his father’s death had reached him—this was perfectly clear to Helen, and the realisation of this fact shocked her beyond expression. ‘How could he?—how could he?’ she said. ‘Ah, what a thing it is to be a woman alone!—and why is Zack not older? and why am I still so good-looking?’ She rose, as these

thoughts passed through her mind, and went a few steps down the path to meet her visitors.

No one watching Helen Hosëason at that moment would have guessed that she was annoyed or displeased. Her manner was very quiet ; perhaps not so welcoming as it generally was, but quite unruffled.

‘Oh, Lord Ruxton, you surely have come home sooner than you expected to do,’ she said. ‘And Eppie, my dear, it is a long time since I have seen you—how you are grown !’

The embarrassment, indeed, seemed to be all on Lord Ruxton’s part.

‘I—I got tired of foreign parts,’ he stammered ; ‘and home seemed to draw me like a magnet.’

‘Ah, well ; yes, home is home,’ said Helen ; ‘and I have only a sad new one to welcome you both to—not the dear old Manse at Carradale.’ Her blue eyes filled with sudden tears, and she turned away and patted Eppie’s horse to hide her agitation.

‘Yes, everything is changed since the last

time we met,' said Lord Ruxton. 'I could scarcely realise it all when Zack's letter reached me.' He stopped, uncertain whether to offer his condolences more directly or not, then went on: 'When I saw your husband last autumn, Mrs. Hosëason, he seemed as strong as ever. This has been—he appeared . . .'

Perhaps half-hearted condolences are the most awkward form of lie that it is possible to frame; Lord Ruxton certainly came no speed with his, for words failed him altogether. Eppie, too, like all young creatures, was embarrassed in the presence of sorrow; she did not know what to say, and stood looking down at the ground. This may have been the reason why Lord Ruxton suggested that she should go down to the mill and find Zack—a proposition which Mrs. Hosëason did not second with any cordiality.

'O my dear, the mill is a horrible, floury place. Will you not come into the house and rest? Zack will come back immediately, I am sure,' she said. But Eppie looked her

deep disappointment so expressively that no one could have resisted her.

‘Do let me go down to the mill,’ she pleaded; ‘I have never seen a mill working; I would like to see Zack at work.’

‘Let her go, Mrs. Hosëason,’ said Lord Ruxton; ‘the flour will do her no harm. Let me tie the horses to the gate, and I will come in, if I may, and wait for Zack.’

‘Do, my lord,’ said Helen quietly, ‘and I will call the children; you will find them much altered.’ Lord Ruxton led the horses back to the gate, biting his lips with vexation and anger. He could hear Helen’s clear voice calling to the little ones: ‘Isobel! Mary! children dear, come in; there is some one here who wishes to see you.’

‘*Wishes to see you!*’ echoed Lord Ruxton; but he had recovered his temper by the time he came back to the cottage, and was able to be very amiable to Mary and Isobel, who stood shyly beside their mother, quite dumb, and vastly interested in this visitor, of whom they had heard so much and seen so little.

Eppie, in the meantime, had made her way down to the mill. The path was rough, and her riding-skirt was long—she stumbled more than once as she went ; it seemed to her that she could not go quickly enough.

The mill was a small, low-roofed building, noisy and dusty ; the rafters were hung with floury cobwebs, and the place was full of the clanking of the awkward old machinery and the rushing sound of the mill-stream. It was dark, yet peering into the corners Eppie could see no one.

‘Zack!’ she called, ‘are you here?’ There was no answer, and she called again.

‘Is that you, mother?’ said a voice from overhead, and looking up, Eppie saw that a ladder led to a grain loft above the mill.

‘No—it’s—it’s me,’ she called lamely.

Zack, at this, came down the ladder with more haste, I fear, than if his mother had summoned him.

He stood before Eppie, and laughed at her surprise. His shirt was collarless, his clothes white with meal, his curly black hair dusted

over with it, it even lay in quaint white tips on his eyelashes. Yet standing there, Zack was conscious that he had the upper hand at last. Eppie could call him a boy no longer.

‘You don’t know me, do you?’ he asked.

‘Oh, I didn’t know . . .’ Eppie began.

‘That I was the miller here? O Eppie, what a fib!’

‘No, not that—I mean to say I knew that—I mean that you would be grown up like this,’ she explained with great incoherence.

‘Did you think you would find me a boy still? You forget how long it is since you saw me last.’ Eppie looked down, and began to speak, and broke off, and then began again—

‘I—I think you must have thought me very unkind that morning. I wanted to write to you and ask you to forget, and then somehow I didn’t, and will you forget now?’ She raised her eyes suddenly at the last words.

‘I was a fool to be annoyed about it; any one would have laughed. What a young ape I was, to be sure,’ said Zack.



‘No, I don’t think you were. I don’t know how I could hurt another person’s feelings so much.’

‘Well, it’s an old story now, and I hope I am wiser by this time.’

Zack paused, looked hard at Eppie for a moment, and then went on: ‘You might have written to me about something else, though. I didn’t mind your laughing at me, but why did you not answer the question I asked you?’

‘Why?—oh, I—I—Zack, what a noise that wheel makes!’

‘Just wait a moment till I stop the machinery,’ said Zack. There fell a sudden hush; the little building ceased to vibrate all through and through, and Zack returned to where Eppie stood.

‘These sacks of corn are rather good to sit on,’ he suggested. ‘Only you will get all white in here, everything is covered with white dust.’ Little did Eppie care about the dust, she wanted nothing better than to stay there.

‘Do you like being a miller?’ she asked;

'you used to say you were going to sea, do you remember?'

'Yes, but one has to give up one's own views sometimes. You see I have my mother to work for now.'

'Ah, your pretty mother. You must be very proud to work for her.'

Yes; Zack admitted he was proud to work for her; but his eyes were fixed on Eppie with an expression that said something else quite plainly. Eppie clasped her hands together and held her breath. Oh, would he never say it? would this terrible moment not soon be over? If he could look like that, why in the world did he not speak?

A long, embarrassing silence fell between them.

Through the stillness came the sound of voices, steps coming down the path.

'Eppie, I hear some one coming!' cried Zack desperately. 'Come up to the loft, I want to speak to you—I must.'

Eppie scrambled up the ladder, tripping on her long skirt, praying that somehow

Mrs. Hosëason and Lord Ruxton should be detained.

‘Oh, be quick!’ cried Zack. ‘Give me your hand, and let me help you.’ He drew her up into the dusky, dusty loft among the sacks of corn, but he did not let go her hand then.

‘Quick, quick, Eppie, tell me it’s all right; tell me you understand, before they come,’ he said.

‘O Zack, how stupid of you to need to ask!’ she replied.

‘And you do love me?’

‘With all my heart.’

‘You don’t mind?’

‘What?’ she asked.

Zack touched his floury coat and smiled.

‘Why, I never saw you look so nice before,’ she cried. And Zack, without further ado, put his arm round her, regardless of flour and its well-known adhesive properties.

‘Can’t they leave us alone,’ he exclaimed a minute later, as the sound of his mother’s voice was heard in the mill.

'Oh, I'm all white, Zack!' cried Eppie in great confusion.

'Never mind, say you were looking at the flour—come along,' said he, and they appeared at the top of the ladder in response to his mother's repeated calls.

'Ah, my dear!' cried that lady at sight of Eppie, 'how did Zack take you up to that loft, he should have known better? You are covered over with meal!' She began to dust the tell-tale marks off Eppie's habit as she spoke. Zack was staring at Lord Ruxton with undisguised perplexity.

'Why, I thought you were in Australia!' he exclaimed. 'Did you get my letter, Lord Ruxton?'

'I got it just before I left Australia,' he answered, with questionable veracity. Zack was rather too much excited at that moment to piece together the date of his letter with the time it would take to come from Australia after receiving it: he only looked puzzled for a moment, but was really far too much pre-occupied with his own affairs to think seriously

about the matter. They all went back to the house together, and Helen prepared tea for her visitors. Now when there is any constraint between people, meal-times are a painful ordeal. I cannot say that either Lord Ruxton or Helen enjoyed that excellent tea of which they partook that afternoon. The cream was thick, the scones perfection, the butter might have been laid before a king; but all those dainties were as dust to these two very unhappy persons. They were equally wasted on Eppie and Zack, because they were too happy; so Mary and Isobel, eating silently but steadily at the corner of the table, were the only two who enjoyed the meal.

‘Aren’t you going to ask Zack to our tenants’ ball?’ Eppie asked Lord Ruxton, to fill in a pause that threatened to prolong itself too far.

‘Ah, yes, I had forgotten. Zack, will you come over on Thursday to Arden? We are having the ball out-of-doors if the night is fine, for Eppie’s special benefit. She has never seen one out-of-doors; will you come? Let

work slide for a day; I'll send over to the Lodge for you, if you can get that length,' said Lord Ruxton.

Zack was delighted; but his mother spoke unexpected and decided words.

'Zack, you must not go,' she said, and turning to Lord Ruxton, 'My lord, it is scarcely six months since my husband died. I think it would be a want of respect to his memory if Zack were to go to this.' Zack had never seen his mother look so severe.

'I'm sorry, mother; I—I forgot for a moment,' he said. Lord Ruxton looked very uncomfortable, and Eppie blushed with embarrassment. There was a moment of painful constraint, till Helen told the children they might go, and rose herself from the table. Her voice had regained its usual tones again, and she looked quite composed, but it was a relief to every one when Lord Ruxton said that he and Eppie must go. Helen begged them to rest a little longer, though with doubtful sincerity.

Just as Eppie was saying good-bye she flung

her arms round Helen's neck: 'I will come very soon again to see you,' she whispered; 'Zack will tell you.'

'Come, Eppie, let me help you to mount,' said Lord Ruxton, leading forward her horse; but Eppie looked round for Zack, who held the other horse a few steps away.

'I haven't said good-bye to you, Zack,' she said. He dropped the reins and sprang forward to clasp her hand; and he, somehow, not Lord Ruxton, swung Eppie up into her saddle.

As we get older we find it easier to keep such happiness as we get to ourselves. For with a superstition which is often born of experience, we like to make sure that the joy we think we have grasped is really ours before we talk about it to other people.

But Eppie, poor child, had yet to learn this bit of hard-won wisdom; so she had not ridden a mile from the mill of Carra before she told Lord Ruxton all about her happiness.

'You mean to say . . .' he began, almost

pulling up his horse short in the middle of the road.

‘Yes, yes! indeed, I can’t believe it,’ said Eppie.

‘You mean to tell me that Zachary Hosëason, in his present circumstances, had the brazen effrontery to make love to you, Eppie?’

‘I see nothing wrong with his circumstances, and I don’t know what you mean by saying he has “brazen effrontery,”’ said Eppie.

‘My dear child, it is the most ridiculous thing I ever heard of. Let me instruct you further on the point; come and ride close to me, so that you may hear me distinctly.’

Eppie brought her horse across the road, and they went along at a foot-pace, while Lord Ruxton began his remonstrances.

‘Well, Eppie, this is how the matter stands. Love is generally supposed to lead to marriage—now, how in the name of wonder do you imagine that you and Zack could possibly marry in the existing state of affairs?’

‘I really do not see why we should not,’ said



Eppie, the tears starting to her eyes; 'and what do you call "the existing state of affairs"?'

'I mean that he can't support you as you are accustomed to live. Do you seriously propose to yourself to marry a man who is now, to all intents and purposes, a working man, whatever his education and former position have been?'

'Yes, of course I mean to marry him. Oh, how can you be so unkind; how can you make me unhappy, just when everything had come right?' cried Eppie.

Lord Ruxton was rather softened at the sight of her tears, but he continued relentlessly—

'Now, don't be childish, Eppie, but look at the case fairly. How would you do all the work of that house? Bless my soul! I would not like to be your poor husband, had you the cooking of my dinners!'

'Mrs. Hosèason would teach me how to cook: she tells me it is quite easy,' Eppie protested.

‘She may not be always there,’ said Lord Ruxton.

‘Ah, we would never let her go away, Zack and I, because we wanted to be alone!’ cried Eppie.

‘There are other possibilities in the case,’ said Lord Ruxton, and then added quickly—‘but, my dear Eppie, the whole thing is absurd—out of the question—and this is what you must do: say nothing about it at present, you have plenty of time, at both your ages, and in the meantime I’ll try what I can do for Zack; he can’t remain a miller if he is going to marry you.’

‘I think you are very prejudiced and unkind,’ said Eppie. ‘He is far nicer as a miller than he was before he became one.’

Lord Ruxton here lost his temper completely. ‘Women are like eels when you try to convince them! slip round and off another way. Do you suppose I don’t see what a good thing the boy has done? How can I convince you that I am looking at what *you* would find that sort of life?’

‘I think you are really finding fault with Zack, somehow, all the same,’ said Eppie.

‘In one sense I am, not in another. No one is fonder of Zack than I am, as you know. I’ve always loved the boy, and you will never find a handsomer husband, Eppie, if you search England over, but that does not make his present position any more eligible.’

‘I think it does,’ said Eppie, a little doggedly, at last.

‘Well, take my advice, and say nothing about it just now to my mother or to any other person. I’ll see Zack, and talk to him, and we shall see what can be done.’

‘He won’t allow you to put him into anything now.’

‘Oh! why not, pray?’

‘I think he seems to have chosen his own life,’ said Eppie, proudly, ‘and I fancy he will keep to it.’

## CHAPTER XXII

‘. . . And Eppie did not seem to mind that I am a miller,’ Zack concluded, as he told his mother all that had happened that afternoon.

‘How could you imagine that she would?’ Helen answered; but she laid down her work and looked into the fire as she spoke. Then she added, a moment later—

‘Of course, it is a terribly difficult position for her to be placed in, Zack.’

‘But, mother, you said a minute ago that you could not imagine her minding about it,’ said Zack, perplexed.

‘I spoke about her heart—not her head,’ said Helen. ‘For myself, Zack, I would marry a chimney-sweeper, if I loved him; but it would not be a very sensible thing to do for all that.’

No, Zack agreed, he saw the difference—and now what was to be done?

Helen laughed, taking up her sewing again, and stitching away at it while she spoke.

‘Wait, my dear son—wait, of course—till you are of a reasonable age to speak of marrying any one, and till you have fought for a year or two with the world. Who knows then what may arrive for you?’

‘But, mother, I cannot—we cannot wait . . .’ Zack began.

‘O my dearest, dearest boy, don’t speak such nonsense!’ his mother cried. ‘Why, you are scarcely old enough to know your own mind yet, far less to get married, were that possible, which, I’m thankful to say, it is not.’

‘I did not think that you would be so unkind,’ said Zack, rising to leave the room with an assumption of dignity that was surely an inheritance from his father, it was so unlike his usual rather boisterous exits. Helen smiled—and then reproached herself for being unsympathetic. ‘Am I growing old and hard, and forgetting what it is to be young and warm at

the heart?' she asked herself. Her face fell then into graver lines. 'No, I think I am not unsympathetic, but I see what a desperately serious matter it is—serious to fall in love too early—and more serious to put it off too long—far more serious.'

She leant forward suddenly, covering her face with her hands. 'What am I to do?' she asked herself; 'the man is in love with me, I cannot fight it off any longer. *Do I wish to?* Oh, let me be prudent; don't let me be a fool. Why did he come home so soon? What will people say? what will they think? Am I to blame? Could I have done anything more than I have done? O my poor pretty face, it has brought me into trouble at last! . . .'

'Mother,' said Zack's voice from the cottage door,—'Mother, I'm going across the hill to Carradale, and I won't be back to-night. I want to go out sea-fishing with Kenneth Munro; all the boats will be leaving to-night.'

Mrs. Hosëason sat up and resumed her work, restored to the present by Zack's words.

‘Very well, Zack. I suppose you will be back for your breakfast; you are generally punctual enough where meals are concerned,’ she said. ‘And what will you take with you in the boat—bread and cheese?’

‘Anything, mother, but plenty of it,’ said Zack, going off to change his mealy clothes for more nautical attire.

Helen had lived too long by the sea to think anything of an expedition of this kind, as some fond mothers might have done; she was delighted that Zack should find amusement, for his days were, after all, rather tame, and she remembered the wise proverb about ‘all work and no play.’ So she packed up Zack’s supper for him, and bade him a cheerful good-night. She sat up late sewing, till the fire had died down to a heap of silver ash. Suddenly, down the wide old cottage chimney came a gust of wind that sent the ash flying out all over the floor.

‘Tut, tut, tut!’ grumbled the orderly Mrs. Hosëason, catching up her sewing to shake off the dust from it. ‘What a tossing

Zack will have,' she thought. 'A strange thing the love of discomfort there is in young creatures, that Zack should prefer a night at sea to one in his warm bed.' She took the lamp and went into the little back room where the children slept; they were sound asleep, and never stirred. Then she went to bed herself, and fell asleep.

It must have been some hours later that Helen woke with a start. 'What a strange time of year for thunder,' she thought, 'and yet it is not thunder—what was that?' There came a wild howl of wind down the chimney, and all the windows shook and rattled sharply. The children wakened with the noise, and called out in their fright—

'Mother, mother! come!'

Helen jumped up and groped her way into the dark kitchen. Lucifer matches were not then the everyday things they are now, but there was always a peat arranged in the grate in a scientific manner, so that with dexterous blowing it glowed in a few minutes. She knelt down before the cold hearth and raked



away the ash, calling out to the children not to be frightened.

‘Are you there, really, mother?’ cried little Isobel.

‘Yes, Isobel, blowing up the fire; we will have a fire in a few minutes. There is nothing to be frightened of.’

But the children liked ocular demonstration; they crept out of bed and, hand in hand, pattered into the kitchen and caught hold of their mother with the utmost firmness.

She knelt there, with all her long black hair tumbled down over her white nightdress, and blew at the fire, where a rosy spot had now showed itself. Then a tiny blue flame shot up, devouring the dry edge of the peat, then a yellow flame, then there was quite a little fire.

Helen lighted the lamp, and began to scold the children, in a perfunctory manner, for getting out of bed. ‘See, your feet are like frogs, my lambs,’ she cried, ‘and indeed I’m no wiser myself to come in here with so little on.’ She carried the light into the children’s room, and sent them back to bed

while she dressed, for the rising storm outside made sleep out of the question. The wind came in terrible blasts that could be heard approaching like a charge of cavalry : louder and louder came the noise, and then, like the onslaught of a thousand furies, the wind broke upon the house till the walls rocked. After that came a deadly stillness, more terrible far than the noise ; it seemed as if the Furies held their breath.

‘Mother, aren’t you frightened?’ whispered Isobel.

‘No, Isobel, not in the least ; but perhaps a scone and jam would make you forget?’ Helen suggested.

She went into the kitchen, where the fire burned brightly now, but instead of spreading scones with jam she fell on her knees to pray. Her lips could not form any words ; she rocked herself backwards and forwards, and wrung her hands together in the extremity of her fear. . . . Could any boat live out this gale?

‘Mother,’ piped Mary from the bedroom, ‘are there no scones?’

‘Plenty of scones, dear; I am just bringing them.’

‘May we have a lot of jam on them to-night, please,’ Isobel chimed in, ‘because we are so frightened.’

‘As much as you like, dear.’

Helen rose, and mechanically spread the scones with jam. Which of us has not had some such thing to do, while the solid ground was reeling under us, the very foundations of life overturned for us?

‘Where is Zack, mother?’ asked Isobel, as she munched her scone a minute later.

‘In God’s hand, as we all are,’ said her mother.

## CHAPTER XXIII

A LIVID dawn crept up the sky and disclosed the track of the storm. It had swept across the land like a vast reaping instrument, laying down trees and fences in swathes. Its course might have been traced with a ruler from west to east by these cruel markings!

Mrs. Hosëason had taken one look out across the ravaged land, and then she came into the cottage and closed the door behind her. All morning she moved about at her work with only a word now and again to the children. But at the least sound outside she would stand still and listen, as if expecting some one.

‘Mother,’ cried Isobel suddenly, ‘I see Sandy Dow coming up the road; may we go and meet him?’ Sandy was an old friend; why did the sight of him so chill Mrs.

How season that she shivered and could not answer her child's question? She went to the door and opened it. Sandy stood there dumbly, but evil tidings were written on his face.

'What is it, Sandy?' she asked.

'Eh, mistress——' the man cried, and could say no more.

'Come in—sit down; tell me all there is to tell,' said Helen.

With well-meant circumlocution Sandy began his tale, and somehow or other worked slowly through it.

Three boats had gone out from Carradale the night before, but only one had come back in safety. The wreckage of the two others had been thrown up by the waves on the Long Sands that morning, along with the dead bodies of five men who had manned them. Among the dead men was Kenneth Munro, in whose boat Zack had sailed. The men who returned had a tale to tell of the gale, and they told also of a strange ship that drove past them through the storm, hailed them, and disappeared.

'There's just the chance, mistress,' Sandy said, with little sound of hope in his voice, 'they might ha'e got them.' Kenneth's son, too, was amissing.

Mrs. Hosëason listened to the story in silence.

'Thank you for coming to tell me,' she said, when Sandy was done, 'and now I must go across the hill to Carradale.'

She called the children to her and told them that she must leave them for the day.

'I'll take you with me the length of Mrs. Thomson's croft,' she said; 'you are to be good girls, and stay there till I return.'

Then, wrapping herself in her long blue cloak, Mrs. Hosëason set off across the moor to Carradale. Five weary miles it was, and then the sea came in sight, and the Long Sands. Beginning at the village of Carradale, these sands stretch in an unbroken line to that great headland which stands out to sea some two miles west of the village.

Along the whole length of the bay—generally an expanse of bare yellow sands—the

waves had thrown up mounds and ridges of weed, a harvest reaped in far-off sea-meadows by the furious sickle of the last night's gale.

Some men from Carradale were searching among the wrack with long poles, but at sight of Mrs. Hosëason they instinctively turned away, as if to make their object less apparent.

She beckoned to them to come nearer, and one of them came, but she could not speak to him.

'No, no,' he said, shaking his head in reply to the unspoken question.

'I must look for him myself,' she said, turning away from the man.

Up and down those weary shores she went on that terrible searching after what she dreaded to find. Before each drift of seaweed she halted, sick and trembling to think that it might conceal the dead body of her son.

The men came and searched along with her, probing into the weeds; and thus they traversed the whole length of the bay, but

found nothing. When at last they had reached the cliffs to the west of Carradale they came to a halt. 'There's no more we can be doing, Mrs. Hosëason,' said one of them.

'No more, Mackay; you have been kind neighbours to me to-day, all of you,' she said. She turned and sat down on the rocks, looking out to sea. The men moved away in silence.

The restraint of their presence gone, Helen abandoned herself to her grief. All the fountains of her passionate nature were broken up, and remembering Zack, his strength and beauty, the joy and promise of his youth, she wept aloud.

With deep griefs come terrible questionings: they are the bewildered revolt of the soul, rising up to battle for its inalienable right of happiness: such questionings God does not blame. Why had Zack been given to her, the poor woman cried, only to be taken away? But this was just a preliminary struggle of the sorrowful heart, the deeper, the paralysing



question came a moment later : Did God regard her grief ; was all the teaching of all the churches not a lie ? The kind God—the present help in time of trouble—was deaf to her cries, far off, perhaps not there at all ? . . .

The great waves came swinging up against the cliff with monotonous regularity, and listening to their roar Helen recalled a verse heard years ago in the days of her happiness. Its meaning had been hidden from her then—she understood it all too well now :—

To me the waves that ceaseless beat  
 Along that dangerous coast,  
 Hoarsely and ominously spoke  
 Of all my treasure lost.

And then to her kind heart there came the remembrance of all the trouble that had fallen on other people. Out of the six or seven cottages that formed the village of Carradale, four had been visited by the Angel of Death that night. Ah, she must go and see her poor friends ! She had been thinking only of her own sorrow.

The dusk was falling when Helen reached

the village. A hush was over it, the usual signs of life were absent. She went from one cottage to the other, entered without knocking, after the fashion of one who knew herself always welcome, her hands held out in greeting to her friends, the tears running down her face. It was not for her own trouble only that Helen wept—she was ever thus, ready to grieve with others as deeply as she grieved for herself. She went from house to house on this sad pilgrimage of sympathy, stood and looked at the dead men, and heard the story of how each had come ashore.

Last visit of all, she came to the house where Kenneth Munro's wife lived. She, who by this storm had lost both husband and son, was a little, shrivelled woman, who stood rubbing her poor, knobby, old hands together as she spoke to Mrs. Hosëason.

'It was to be—it was to be,' she repeated, as if she found in this a consolation for her double loss. Then she drew Helen towards the bed, and uncovered the face of the dead man who lay there.

'I've gotten him hame,' she said with sad satisfaction: '*He's no rumblin' in the Firth the nicht.*'

Mrs. Hosëason gave a sharp little cry, and turning away walked swiftly out of the cottage, and so home to the desolate hearth that awaited her.

## CHAPTER XXIV

AT Arden, forty miles away from Carradale, the storm had been little more than an autumn gale: a branch or two had been blown down from some of the trees, and slates, where the houses boasted of slates, had fallen off. Lord Ruxton and Eppie, in their capacity of entertainers, were glad that the gale had passed the night before the ball. Not a leaf moved now; the air had that feeling of weary serenity that comes into the atmosphere after storms. Out in the Kyle the water lay motionless, and scarcely a ripple broke along the shore.

‘Do, cousin Zachary, have the dance out-of-doors as you thought of having it,’ Eppie pleaded. ‘It feels like summer come back again to-day; and the air is so still, the bonfire will blaze up into the very sky.’

‘Yes, if we have no rain,’ said Lord

Ruxton thoughtfully, examining the brooding clouds.

‘Oh, don’t be so elderly; even if it did rain they could come back to the big barn: let them begin at least out on the shore. I should love to dance out-of-doors!’ cried Eppie.

The shore of the Kyle at Arden was rocky, but at one point a long, broad promontory stood out into the water. The sward was short, and the ground beautifully level, so it had been chosen as the dancing-place. A huge bonfire was piled up at the point of the promontory ready to be lit when the dusk fell.

Eppie had her own way, for the clouds did not melt even into a shower, and Lord Ruxton had to confess that the night was quite good enough for dancing out-of-doors. He was in very good spirits that evening, a fact which Eppie remarked upon as they walked down to the shore together in the dusk. ‘You are quite gay—for you, Cousin Zachary,’ she said. ‘Why, I heard you whistling a tune just now; and you are going to dance half the night, aren’t you? Now, really, it is far nicer than a ball-

room this, is it not? Ah, there's the bonfire lit! Look how the flame jumps up through it! And do you hear the pipes beginning? Oh, what fun! Why wasn't Zack here? I do think dear Mrs. Hosëason might have allowed him to come—don't you?' The girl prattled on, and Lord Ruxton smiled to himself in the dusk. He was in the best of humour somehow.

'Now, Eppie, you must dance first with the factor, and then with Frazer the sheep-farmer, and then perhaps with me, and go on to the keepers and gillies, and, if you have time, take a reel with some of the shepherds,' he instructed Eppie as they drew near the crowd round the bonfire.

'Yes, yes, what fun it will be! but I'll *never* have time for them all unless I dance all night, for there's that nice groom, and there's John the footman, and the young gardener too—lots of them that I know quite well. Now, Cousin Zachary, you are to be really nice, and not get sleepy and bored too soon, and say I am to come away—you won't, will you?'

'Um—well—remember I have more than

once figured at this sort of thing,' said Lord Ruxton, laughing; 'and I am getting too old to find it so desperately amusing. However, I will do my best. Come on, Eppie.'

There was a great clapping of hands in the crowd as they appeared. Then with little more delay the dancing began. Eppie had thought a great deal about her dress for this ball, and had bought it, with a view to suitability, of silk tartan. Now silk tartan is, generally speaking, rather a trying 'wear,' as shopmen call it, but as Eppie danced that night in the glow of the bonfire, in her tartan gown she looked as charming as any girl need wish to look.

'I believe the child is more in love even than she knows,' thought Lord Ruxton; 'nothing else on earth lights up a woman's face like that.'

She came up to him at the moment, laughing, and panting a little. 'I must rest for a few minutes,' she said; 'I've been danced almost off my feet.'

A man came round with a bottle and glasses on a tray, and Lord Ruxton poured out a

mouthful of whisky and gave it to Eppie. 'This is to drink a toast, Eppie; you must not refuse it,' he said, filling his own glass.

Eppie waited to hear the toast. Lord Ruxton raised his glass, looking out over the misty sea to the westward, where Carradale lay.

'To the merry future, Eppie,' he said.

'To the merry future,' she echoed, laughing, and giving a sip at the fiery liquor before she set down her glass.

'There's a late comer from the other side of the Kyle,' said Lord Ruxton. He pointed to a boat that was rowing across; it had come into the light of the bonfire for a moment, then it disappeared into the dark again, and there was a grating sound as it rushed up over the shingle. A minute later a man came up through the crowd, with a letter in his hand. He came towards Lord Ruxton.

'This is from Mrs. Hosëason, your lordship,' he said, and fell back into the crowd.

Lord Ruxton broke open the envelope, and



read with some difficulty the line or two of scrawly handwriting.

‘MY LORD, — Will you tell poor Eppie? My boy was drowned last night.

‘HELEN HOSEASON.’

Lord Ruxton stood quite still, looking at the letter for a moment; then he folded it up carefully and beckoned to the man who had brought it to come forward. From him he heard those details which the letter had left untold.

Eppie was dancing again with great vigour; it seemed to Lord Ruxton that the reel would never end. When it did, he went up to where she stood, and said that they must go back to the house now.

‘Why, it’s only twelve o’clock!’ cried Eppie; ‘surely you are not going home so soon?’

‘Come, my dear, I think it is better you should come,’ he said. ‘I have had bad news,’ he added, for Eppie showed signs of rebellion.

‘Bad news! Where from?—not Aunt Ruxton ill, is it? She was quite well when we came out.’

‘No, not that. Come away, Eppie; I’ll tell you when we get away from all this noise.’

He brought Eppie her wrap, and they made their way through the crowd, out on to the white road, and then through the park gates up towards Arden. In the distance the pipes were playing on and on the endless reeling tunes.

‘Now, tell me,’ said Eppie; though she was not apprehensive, she was curious.

‘My child, something has happened to Zachary Hosëason,’ said Lord Ruxton. The words would scarcely utter themselves.

‘But—happened!—how do you mean? He hasn’t been hurt by anything? Oh, not by that mill-wheel, or—or——?’

‘No, Eppie—by the storm last night.’ Eppie stood still, clasping her hands together.

‘Please tell me at once; I would rather know—I think I know already,’ the poor child cried.

‘He went out fishing last night; the boat has never returned,’ said Lord Ruxton. ‘The man he went with was drowned; I fear there is no hope for Zack.’

‘Oh—oh!’ said Eppie, in one poor, broken little sob. She walked on without another word towards the house.

## CHAPTER XXV

EARLY the next morning Lord Ruxton started for the Lodge, where he stopped that night, and the next day rode on to Carradale. Each step of the way he turned over and over in his mind how he could best meet Helen Hosëason, and then, as most of us do in a difficulty, decided to trust to the impulse of the moment for his words.

The mill wore a deserted air as he drew near it. The white collie that always sat on the doorstone ran out and barked, but no one appeared to call back the dog. The cottage door stood open, but no sound of work or of voices was to be heard.

Lord Ruxton led his horse up to the door and looked in. He could see Mrs. Hosëason sitting by the fire—only a fire in name, however, for nothing but a heap of ashes lay upon the hearth.

‘May I come in?’ he called from the doorway. She did not stir.

‘Come in,’ she answered, in a toneless, dull voice, ‘though I do not know who you are.’ He tied up his horse to the door, and came in silently to the room, sat down beside her, and took her hand in his.

‘My poor friend,’ he said.

The sight of Lord Ruxton, who was so connected in her mind with Zack, seemed to rouse Helen’s grief afresh. She wrung her hands together in an agony of despair.

‘What have I done that my son has been taken from me?’ she cried, with the old cry of the heart under the awful calamities of God. ‘Have I been more sinful than other women? I cannot bear it, and yet I cannot die!’

Grief had wrought such havoc with her beauty that Lord Ruxton would scarcely have known her. He had a sudden remembrance of how she had looked that summer afternoon long ago when he arrived at the Manse of Carradale—how she came across the

moor in a blue cloak, with the hood fallen off, and her curly hair blown about by the breeze—her lovely children round her, the picture of womanhood at its best and happiest. Now, in her grief and desolation, sitting alone in her disordered house, how changed she was!

‘Tell me about Zack,’ he said at last.

‘My lord, I’ve nothing to tell!’ she cried. ‘He was with me—and now he is gone, and no one knows if he is alive or dead. But I cannot hope any longer. If I even had had his body given back to me.’ She rose and walked up and down the little room, wringing her hands together—she seemed to forget that any one was there.

‘O Zack! where are you?’ she cried. ‘The sun must be shining down on you somewhere, alive or dead, yet I can’t find you!’

Lord Ruxton did not attempt to say anything consoling—what was there to be said? He waited until an opportunity offered, and then began quietly to talk about Zack.

Helen came and sat down, beguiled to listen by the sound of her son’s name.

‘I seem almost to envy the boy,’ said Lord Ruxton, ‘leaving the world when it was so bright for him. I would like to think it the goodly place that he thought it. Do you remember years ago, Mrs. Hosëason, you asked me, “Who was happy in this world?” and you added, “Certainly not the saints, and I think not the sinners.” I always remembered it.’

‘I think I have been happy, till now,’ said she, with a smile at this funny scrap of long-remembered talk.

‘Happy? Yes, I believe you have been happy, for you have loved some one else more than yourself. I never have—myself and my own affairs have always been the first consideration with me all my life—*till now*,’ he added in a low voice—so low that Helen never noticed the words.

What a blessed feeling it was, he thought—like a thaw after long frost—this escape from the cold, solitary life of self into the warm fellowship of love.

The woman who sat there beside him was

no longer young, and her beauty was all marred with grief; she was poor, and burdened with the support of two children; she was not in his own rank; and, worst of all, she, no doubt, was entirely indifferent to him. But the welfare of this woman had become the most important thing in the world to him; all that he cared for was to win her love.

The poor, disordered cottage room seemed to him the very gate of heaven. 'I'll let no one else live here after this; I'll keep it all my life,' he thought.

Such a long silence had fallen that it roused Mrs. Hosëason from her sorrowful thoughts. She sprang up with something of her old manner.

'What have I been thinking of?' she exclaimed. My trouble has taken such hold of me that I forget everything. What will you have to eat or drink, my lord, after your long ride? and will your horse have a feed of corn? I hear the poor beast stamping there at the door, and me so forgetful!' She moved about



the room, ashamed now of its neglected look, and brought out refreshment for her guest and laid it before him. You must see the children too,' she said; 'they are growing into great tall girls now. Isobel is nearly twelve, and Mary is ten. I am anxious about their education; they are both going to be very good-looking,' she added, with the pride for her children that had always been one of her characteristics.

Lord Ruxton found this was a favourable moment in which to ask Mrs. Hosëason what she thought of doing in the future. Did she mean to stay on at the mill? what arrangements could be made? 'You must allow me to help you in any way that I can,' he added.

'I shall stay on for the present,' said Helen, 'because I scarcely know what else to do. I can get enough out of the land to keep my children—many women have less than I have to support a whole family upon.'

'But their education? it isn't only a question of feeding and clothing with children,' suggested Lord Ruxton. It struck Helen suddenly that the interest her visitor showed in her affairs

was extraordinary. She looked up at him for a moment in surprise, and the next moment she stepped to the door.

‘I must call the children for you to see, my lord,’ she said; ‘and Isobel will get some corn for your horse, it will be a rare pleasure to the child to feed him.’

‘Heaven help me! what a ticklish business it is!’ said Lord Ruxton, conscious to his finger tips of the slight reproof that had been administered to him. He came out to the door and watched in silence while the children fed the horse. Mrs. Hosëason, however, showed no sign of displeasure, and thanked him for his kindness in coming to see her, when at last he said it was time for him to go. She stood at the door and watched him ride off across the moor; then she turned back into the house, stood irresolutely looking down at the fire for a few minutes, then went into her own room and sat down in front of the looking-glass.

‘Men, men!’ she said aloud, ‘and my poor husband not cold in his grave!’

## CHAPTER XXVI

UP to this time the lives of those few persons whose story I have been trying to tell you have moved on gradually from one event to another, but, as sometimes happens, it seemed just now that one single event—poor Zack's death—had brought all these lives to a standstill.

His mother scarcely cared now whether she lived or died, in the extremity of her grief; and Lord Ruxton had to confess to himself that this was no time at which to speak to her of love and marriage. While Eppie, poor childish Eppie, was tasting the first great trouble of her life, and so was about to leave childishness behind her for ever.

Lord Ruxton, I am afraid, felt very impatient. Those who are in love seldom imagine that any other subject has the least

importance compared with their own passion. Why, (he thought,) it was of course tragic and heartrending to a degree that Zack should have been taken away; yet surely there still remained much for the poor boy's mother to live for—and Eppie was so young, the grief of very young people was always short-lived; in fact he actually reasoned himself into the belief that he was by far the greatest sufferer by this sad event. For why should the great, the tremendously important business of his love wait for anything? Love was such a wonderful thing, surely every other matter in life should stand aside before it? 'And yet I suppose she just won't listen to me at present; I had better go away from here for six months; it is the best chance I have,' he concluded. Six months! how was he ever to pass them? No place in all the world had the least interest for him now, except a barren bit of moor in the north of Scotland where there stood a thatched cottage and a little mill. He might go away to the ends of the earth, and his thoughts would be turning back

to that little rain-drenched cottage standing among the sodden moors, wrapped about in the autumn mists, and beaten upon by the winter storms.

When Eppie heard that it was decided that they were all to go abroad for the winter, she begged to be left behind.

'I wish to go and live with Zack's mother; I think I would be happier there,' she said. But this suggestion was firmly combated by Lady Ruxton. 'Never indulge a grief, my dear,' she said; 'it sounds a hard saying, but I have learned it in the course of a long life. You shall come abroad and go into society as usual.'

'I can't, I can't,' sobbed the poor girl, but the old and kind woman of the world was inexorable.

'Just as usual, Eppie. If you loved poor Zack as sincerely as you suppose, not all the balls and operas in Europe would ever make you forget him; if you did not, perhaps 'tis better to find out the delusion.'

So with a sad heart Eppie was carried off

southwards as the autumn began to close in over Carradale.

It is one of the many ameliorations which wealth is able to bestow, that its possessors may generally leave the scene of their troubles behind them, which is the next best thing to leaving the trouble itself behind. For the four walls of a house—the chairs and tables even, have the power to bring back the past so vividly before one, that it seems ever present, not to be put by. This trial the poor must always face: Heaven help them, how many a ghastly illness they nurse to the end, and then quietly resume their everyday life again in the same haunted little room with all its poignant memories.

Helen hesitated long before she could open the door of her son's room and go into it. When she did enter she stood still, blind with her thick-falling tears at the sight of the well-known confusion it was in. I suppose a day of her life had never passed when Zack was with her that Helen had not scolded him vehemently for his untidiness, and

ended in laying away all his possessions with exquisite neatness. Here the familiar heap of garments met her eye, just as Zack had flung them down; boots and collars lay about on the floor; the floury coat he wore in the mill was tossed upon the bed. Helen gathered the things together one by one and laid them aside, reducing the room to perfect and dreary order. Then she came away and locked the door behind her.

There were long snows that winter—storms that shut off the household at the mill from all communication with the outer world for weeks at a time. The little girls in after years carried in their hearts very cheerful memories of these weeks of white siege; they were rather too young to feel their brother's loss acutely, and Mrs. Hosëason was not the mother to let them suffer by her grief. She had the spirit of eternal youth, which is a necessity for the right amusement of children—the faculty of turning work into play for them with untiring vigour.

‘I cannot teach them much, poor loves,’ she

admitted to herself, 'but they shall learn all that I know.' It was not much 'book learning' certainly; but of household arts she had unknown treasure. The system she pursued might perhaps be criticised by modern professors of education, for it was mainly by prizes that the children were urged to perform those feats of elaborate sewing which they accomplished. Prizes, too, so far from shops, had always to take the form of confectionery. You might have seen Helen, with her big-printed edition of the redoubtable Meg Dodds' cookery-book, busy in the preparation of some delicious sweetmeat any Saturday afternoon. For Saturday evening was the great event of the week to the children; their work for the preceding days was displayed and judged of, and, if satisfactory, rewarded with the much-coveted sweets. Saturday, too, was made delightful to them by the washing of Tweed, the white collie, a work of supererogation, as Helen confessed with a smile, but one which seemed to afford unending joy to the children. Tweed was very gentle (he had need to be), and allowed him-



self to be squeezed into a wash-tub and half-blinded with suds quite amiably if it was the children who inflicted the torture. The next day his white brush was magnificent in its purity—but a single rabbit-hunt soon smirched its whiteness. They had ducks too, these happy children, and hens, whose feeding was a great pleasure, and a greater was the finding of the eggs, especially in the scarce season.

Young children do not suffer from monotony, for every hour holds its own minute interest for them ; so, as I have said, that winter passed very happily for the children at the mill. But to their mother it seemed as if those terrible winter months would never pass. The small and not overly comfortable house contrasted painfully with the old Manse—how warm and well-built it used to feel in the winter storms! Worse far than all was the loneliness of her life. One crofter and his wife lived in a cottage half a mile away, but not another soul was there between that and Carradale, five miles distant. Dear as the children were, they were

no companions, and Mrs. Hosëason, as you know, had a lively, sociable nature.

The last snowstorm of the year came in March. It was very heavy, and for three weeks made the moorland road impassable. But there came a breathing over the drifts one day; the thatch began to drip, here and there a stone showed black where it was thinly covered—the thaw had come.

Then great pools of water spread out over the slushy moor, and at last green patches showed, and the 'dry land appeared.'

Helen had gone to the door to look out, when down the road came an unusual sight—a gig—the postman's gig, as she soon perceived. Now to us a postman may not be a sight to cause great excitement, but try to live for three weeks shut up by a snowstorm within the four walls of a lonely house, and say then if his advent is wholly devoid of excitement.

Letters at all times were an unusual event at the mill, so when a large sealed packet was delivered into her hands, Helen could ill

conceal her surprise. She did so, however, and held the missive quietly in her hand unopened for fully ten minutes, while she talked with the postman on the state of the roads, and other interesting subjects.

At last, when the gig had driven off again, she turned into the house and sat down to read the letter. Something, she scarcely knew what, made Helen pause for a moment and pass her hand across her eyes in a puzzled manner. Then she broke the big red seal and began to read Lord Ruxton's letter. It was not very long or very interesting on the face of it: 'He was coming to the Lodge for a few weeks, feeling in need of rest and quiet . . .' ('*Quiet* he will get certainly,' thought Mrs. Hosëason.) 'He hoped to have the pleasure of coming to see her one day, to hear how she had fared all this long winter—a longer winter he had never known. . . . He wondered if she had made any further plans for the future, "which is involved in such uncertainty for each of us." . . . He wondered how the children were? how their education had gone on? . . .'

‘Tut, tut, tut!’ went Mrs. Hosëason, her fine eyebrows drawn together in a sharp frown. She rose and moved the peats on the fire till the flame sprang up between them, walked to the window and looked out, then came back again to the fire. ‘I’m too old, too old, close on forty years of age now; what is the man thinking of?’ she said to herself. ‘Surely I’m dreaming, though; the whole thing is impossible. Lord Ruxton! The man in the moon would be quite as likely to come a-courting me! I must be mistaken. I wish I had more experience. I had no time for lovers before I married; I know nothing about them or their ways. Oh, I am a fool surely!—and what’s this he writes?—“*Let me know whether I may come to see you.*” What would hinder him to come to see one of his own tenants? And how am I to let him know? Write, I suppose—and if I did not write at all, would he come? or would he stay away?’

It was a sad dilemma for a prudent woman to be in; but before she had thought out the

matter for two or three days, Mrs. Hosëason had found a way out of it. She wrote one of her short and scrawly letters to Lord Ruxton : in it she hoped very shortly to have the honour of seeing him at Carra, 'where the winter has been long ; but, thank God, the children have been in good health.' '*I have got my old servant, Janet Ross, to live with me just now,*' the letter concluded.

Helen smiled as she closed the letter, but she said nothing to Janet of the expected visitor, and Janet thought it most natural that 'the mistress' should have sent over to Carra-dale for her after the thaw ; she was lonesome, no doubt, since good Mr. Hosëason was gone, and oh, poor dear Mr. Zachary that was ! So Janet hobbled about the house, half-servant, half-guest, very welcome in either capacity.

## CHAPTER XXVII

HELEN sat spinning by the fire one bright March afternoon; Janet in the background was busy with some cooking operation, and the children had gone out. The sunshine—so unusual in the northern winter—and the fire together made the kitchen very bright. Helen had a pile of newly-carded wool all round her, and the wheel moved so rapidly that it seemed almost to be standing still. The yarn reeled out between her long white fingers at a wonderful rate.

‘There’s a man and horse coming down the road, ma’am,’ announced Janet; ‘it’ll be the factor, nae doot.’

‘Probably,’ said Mrs. Hosëason. Her yarn snapped off, and she affected great interest in mending it. ‘Go to the door, Janet, and ask Mr. Forbes to come in,’ she added.

Janet hobbled to the door, and a moment later ushered in, not the factor, but Lord Ruxton. Helen rose, blushing a brilliant, girlish blush, and held out her hand.

‘I am very pleased to see you,’ she said. ‘Janet, bring a chair for his lordship.’

Janet brought the chair, and retreated to the far end of the kitchen to work, but also to listen, as Lord Ruxton was not slow to observe. The old woman’s presence was the last thing he desired, yet it seemed impossible to be rid of it. He tried to speak coherently while he thought out the position.

‘Well, I have come really to speak to you on a matter of business,’ he said at length, taking the difficulty, so to speak, by the horns. ‘Could I speak to you alone for a few minutes, Mrs. Hosëason?’

‘Janet,’ said Helen, ‘will you go out and see what the children are doing?’ She knew now that the dreaded interview could not be avoided any longer. ‘I am no girl to be afraid of him,’ she said to herself; but she was very much afraid none the less, and after

Janet had creaked out of the room, closing the door after her, there was a moment of painful silence.

‘I suppose you guess what I have come to say to you,’ said Lord Ruxton, bending forward and taking her hand in his, ‘for you have tried to avoid it so plainly.’

‘O my lord, I’m not a schoolgirl, or a fool,’ cried Helen, with something between a laugh and a sob, ‘but indeed it would be better for you to say no more, and let our old friendship remain unchanged.’

‘But, my dear love,’ said he, ‘what is this nonsense that you say, speaking to me of “friendship” when you know that you are all the world to me and more.’

‘Oh, it’s impossible, impossible! I am quite old now, and I fear my looks are gone that once I used to be proud of. I have nothing to give you but a broken heart, and that’s what no man cares to get,’ said Mrs. Hosëason, in her funnily simple way.

‘But perhaps I might help to mend the broken heart,’ said Lord Ruxton. ‘For, my



dearest, to live alone here, and brood over all that you have lost, only makes the ache sorer. Let me comfort you, Helen, and protect you, and care for the children. If you can love me, I'll be the richer; but if you can't, why even then I shall be the gainer if you let me provide for you.'

Helen sat and listened as if it were a dream; her thoughts surged back to the past, and the solemn figure of John Hosëason, her husband, seemed to rise up between her and this man. She did not hide from herself the fact that these were the first real words of love that she had ever heard: she remembered her other wooing, its bold unsentimentality, the words in which her father had said, 'John Hosëason wishes you to become his wife, Helen; he is a very godly man; you will do well to accept him.' That was about all that it had amounted to. This now was love—not prudent, not self-seeking, not worldly wise, but an irresistible tide of feeling that swept away considerations of suitability and prudence.

'Oh, what am I to do?' she cried. 'You

offer me so much that it confuses my judgment. I am so lonely and sad here, and poor, and with the children growing up in want of everything, and you come and offer me love and care and wealth. O Lord Ruxton, go away and think twice before you spoil your life for me.'

'Spoil my life! I have never been alive till now,' said he. 'Ah, Helen, don't refuse me, for pity's sake.'

There was a long silence between them. Lord Ruxton leant back in his chair with his arms folded, waiting for Helen's reply. She sat with her eyes fixed upon the floor, and did not speak. At last she looked up.

'I can't do it,' she said; 'you must go away and forget me.'

'You have answered too quickly; you have not taken time to think; you will give me another answer to-morrow,' he cried.

'No, no—I have considered; I have given you my answer.'

Lord Ruxton rose and held out his hand to say good-bye. 'Perhaps the sooner I go the

better, if this is to be the way of it,' he said. Helen could not speak, and he turned away and went out of the cottage door to where his horse stood tied to the fence. His steps died away down the path, and there was a horrible silence in the cottage room.

Helen listened to the silence for just about half a minute, then she rose and went to the door. Lord Ruxton had unfastened his horse, and was leading him to the gate. She hesitated for a moment, and would have returned into the silent house, but at the gate Lord Ruxton looked back and saw that she had come to the door. He stood still, undecided whether to return or not, and the next minute she came down the path to meet him.

'Take me away from this terrible, haunted little house,' she cried; 'I can't stay in it now; I want to come to you.'

## CHAPTER XXVIII

LORD RUXTON'S romantic marriage with Mrs. Hosëason was a nine-days' wonder in the parish of Carradale. But it was generally admitted that Lord Ruxton could scarcely have got either a handsomer or a more pleasing bride. The marriage, indeed, was a very popular one, and it was with sincere regret that the neighbours heard that the new Lady Ruxton had decided never to live at Arden. 'I wish to go away from Carradale and never see it again,' she said to her husband. 'I can never forget, but at least I need not be reminded.' He knew that she spoke of her lost son—the one passion of her life.

Now I would need to begin a fresh volume—and would willingly do so—to describe to you all the new life that began after this for Helen

Ruxton : difficulties it had in plenty, of course, and some troubles, perhaps, and much novelty, and a larger proportion of happiness than she had thought ever to taste of again.

In a fastidious society she disarmed criticism by her simplicity and her beauty ; but no doubt she often felt at a disadvantage—she was too quick-witted to do anything else. Through what is generally conceded to be the most crucial of all tests—the judgment of a mother-in-law—Helen Ruxton passed unscathed ; for the old lady loved her from the first, and had no word of criticism to make upon her son's unworldly marriage. ' I am going away, and shall take Eppie with me,' she had said at first after the marriage.

But Helen would not listen to such a proposal.

' For how am I to get on in this new world if you and Eppie desert me ?' she asked with a smile—the smile of a woman who knew perfectly well that she got on wherever she went.

The little girls were sent to school, and old

Lady Ruxton then lectured Helen on her duties in the matter of Eppie. Eppie must go out into society, whatever her feelings were, and Helen must go with her. 'And you must be careful not to look very much handsomer than she does,' the old lady added, with a twinkle in her eye, 'for that would be quite unkind to Eppie.'

It was a curious new experience to Helen when she was thus launched out into the fashionable world. At first she had great searchings of heart over it, which she confided to her mother-in-law.

'I can't get over the idea that it is wicked to wear such fine clothes, and all these jewels that my husband has given me, and to go about from one gaiety to another. You know I used to be taught in my childhood that all these things were of the Evil One, and now——'

'And now, grown wiser, you see that, alas! the Evil One cannot be confined to places of amusement. I wish he could be; it would then be so easy to avoid him,' said the old lady.

But in spite of her misgivings Helen thoroughly enjoyed her new life. She had an intense interest and pride in her own beauty still, and to see herself, as she now did for the first time, in beautiful clothes, gave her great pleasure. Only, as she gazed at her own reflection, she would say from the depths of her heart, 'Why—oh, why had I never clothes like these when I was nineteen?'

Gradually—very gradually, Lord Ruxton thought that all these exciting new scenes and pleasures were effacing the first intensity of her loss. She never spoke of Zack now; but from the first she had steadily refused to call her husband Zachary, and elected to address him by his second name of George instead.

One night, wearing a new and specially becoming dress, Helen came down to the drawing-room. She was going out with her husband, and the new dress had been donned for the occasion.

'Now, George,' she exclaimed, half in jest, half in earnest, 'did you ever see me look so well before?'

‘By Jove, Helen, you get prettier every day!’ he said ; all unknowingly using the self-same words that poor Zack had used years ago, to his mother’s dismay. He had scarcely uttered them before Helen turned and ran out of the room. ‘She must have forgotten something,’ Lord Ruxton thought. But as time went on and Helen did not appear again, he went in search of her.

‘My dear Helen, that new dress——,’ he began, as he came into her room, then stopped short in dismay. For Helen was kneeling beside the bed, with her arms flung out despairingly across the counterpane, and all the magnificence of her satin robes crumpled about her. She had snatched off her necklace and thrown it down on the quilt—it flashed back the firelight as it lay there, a little heap of brightness.

‘Helen! what is the matter?’ said her husband, bending down to her and stroking her hand. She did not answer for a minute, and then she sat up, crying out in a wild, despairing voice, ‘I want my boy—my beautiful



Zachary; and look at me all dressed up in satin and diamonds, and he in his grave! Go away and leave me, George, I can't come out with you to-night.'

Nor would any persuasions move her; neither would she explain her sudden access of grief. Lord Ruxton had to go without her, and thought it best not to allude again to the matter, though he puzzled over it to himself.

It was about a year after this that a son and heir was born to the Ruxtons. 'Helen will forget now,' thought Lord Ruxton, very pleased with his son, and apt, as we all are when pleased with any special thing, to fancy that all the world is glad along with us. He was a little disappointed, however, by his wife's attitude to their child—there was a curious aloofness in her relation to him at first, and she admired him much as she would have admired the child of some other person. 'Are you not pleased with him, Helen?' Lord Ruxton asked her at last, and she smiled and kissed the child, and said he was 'a sweet boy—very

strong and healthy'; that was all she said. But when the question arose of what the boy was to be called, I regret to say that Helen and her husband had their first quarrel.

'He is to be named after his father,' said Lord Ruxton.

'George, you mean?' Helen asked, though she knew quite well.

'Zachary George,' said he, and at the words Helen sprang up and caught hold of her husband's arm.

'He shan't be called Zachary—I can't bear it—he isn't to bear my son's name. There was one Zachary in all the world for me, and there shall never be another,' she cried.

'I am very sorry, but he is to be called Zachary. I cannot allow you to be so foolish,' said Lord Ruxton.

'You are very cruel, George. I thought you had more feeling; and you will make me hate that baby if you insist on this,' said Helen.

‘Very well, hate him if you like,’ said Lord Ruxton with great finality ; and the child was christened Zachary George, and called Geordie by his mother (and his father too) ever after.

## CHAPTER XXIX

AND now—because, though life is long, stories must be short—I must ask you to skip over in imagination a great number of years—sixteen, and find this Zachary George Ruxton a tall schoolboy, standing on the steps of his father's London house one lovely spring afternoon. He had just stretched out his hand to the knocker when a man sprang up the steps behind him.

‘Can you tell me if Lord Ruxton still lives in this house?’ he asked the boy.

He was so good to look upon that Geordie turned and eyed him in surprise: a very tall man, very dark, with curly black hair and bright blue eyes; he wore the blue linen dress and slouch cap of foreign sailors.

‘Yes, my father lives here; do you want to see him?’ Geordie asked, and added, ‘You’re

a sailor, aren't you? Where do you come from? What do you want with father? I expect he's out.'

'So you are Lord Ruxton's son? Yes, I wish to see your father; he—he was very kind to me long ago, when I was about your own age.'

'Well, if you wait a minute we'll ask James if he's in,' said Geordie, reaching up to the knocker this time and executing a sounding rap with it. While they waited he turned again and looked at the sailor with a mystified expression.

'Oh, I say, I daresay you know a lot of stories,' he said, by way of making conversation.

'Yes, more stories than you would believe, I daresay,' said the sailor.

'I'd like to hear them.'

'I'm not very sure that you would, if I began,' said the man.

'The door opened then, and James looked with great surprise at the young master's new-found companion.

'James, this man wishes to see my father,' Geordie began.

'Oh, I daresay he do, sir ; I'll shut the door on him,' said James.

But Geordie passed into the hall, and called the butler to him, and whispered, 'he—he isn't quite like that, James—he speaks like a gentleman—he says my father was kind to him long ago,' he urged.

'Yes, sir, no doubt ; that kind always 'as their story ready. Let me shut the door, sir,' and he would have done so, but Geordie would not let him. He came back to where the sailor stood, and looked at him again.

'Father's out,' he said, 'but suppose you leave your name and come to see him again ?'

'Yes, I'll do that. Will you tell him that Zachary Hosëason was here? It's rather a catchy name to remember, but as I was called after your father, you won't forget the first part.'

'Oh, I say—James—please, James, come

here,' called Geordie in great bewilderment. 'He's called after both my father and my mother—don't you think——'

James drew near, very suspicious of the stranger, but his suspicions were rather disarmed on a nearer view; there was a wonderful attraction in the whole bearing of the man.

'Would you like to see her ladyship?' he suggested, after this survey.

'Ah, I fear Lady Ruxton would know nothing about me; she probably never heard of me. No, I had better come again when Lord Ruxton will be at home,' said the man; and then, as if a sudden thought had struck him, he added, 'I am afraid old Lady Ruxton cannot be here now—no, it is scarcely possible.'

'Dead and gone these ten years and more,' said James; but his suspicions were still more set aside by this man's evident knowledge of the Ruxton family. Geordie, too, was impressed; he stood looking at the sailor, and exclaimed in a mystified tone—

‘But my mother’s name was Hosëason.’

The sailor did not reply for quite a long time. He looked at the boy with a puzzled expression, and then repeated his words incredulously: ‘Your mother’s name was Hosëason?’

‘Yes; shall I get mother?’ said Geordie. He turned and ran across the hall without waiting for an answer, leaving James and the sailor to look at each other.

‘Whom did Lord Ruxton marry?’ asked the sailor abruptly, and James pursed up his lips for a moment before he replied: ‘Her ladyship was a Mrs. Hosëason, I’ve been told—very fine-lookin’.’

‘Ah,’ said the sailor.

Geordie burst into the drawing-room, where his mother sat with Eppie, and jumbled out his story without preface.

‘Mother, there’s a sailor downstairs who wishes to see father; he’s as like you as I am—liker, and he says his name’s Zachary Hosëason, and James won’t let him in.’

The two women looked at each other with-



out a word. Helen rose, letting all her work fall in a heap to the floor. She pushed Geordie aside almost roughly, and walked out into the hall. Just one glance she gave at the sailor, and then with a cry flung herself into his arms.

‘Zack, Zack! O my son, my son!’

## CHAPTER XXX

THROUGH the open door Eppie saw and heard all that went on. Bewildered, and scarcely believing the evidence of her senses, she stood and looked and listened. She rubbed her eyes, pinched her arm, tried to tell herself that this was only a dream of extraordinary vividness; but the dream stayed.

Then Helen came into the room, holding Zack by the hand. Still Eppie could not move; she could only stand and gaze at Zack. He had changed, and yet not changed, in all these years—the soft, boyish mouth had set into hard, firm, rather sorrowful lines; the bright, blue eyes looked straight at her, just as they did long ago, but something quite different looked out from them. The face was passionate, arresting, almost terrible in expression.

Zack came forward into the room, stopped,

bowed slightly to Eppie, and turned to his mother.

‘Can I not see you alone, mother?’ he asked. He did not recognise poor Eppie.

‘O Zack, it’s Eppie!’ Helen cried.

Only a woman can realise and understand the bitterness of that moment to Eppie. She saw again the lover of her youth; but time had dealt roughly with her, and while he stood there in the very prime of manhood, she had left youth far behind her. A wave of bitter feeling swept over her. Here she was, old and sad—forgotten even by the man for whom she had lost her youth. ‘Why hast thou troubled my rest?’ cried her wounded heart; ‘better far never to come back than this.’

The next moment Zack had caught her to his heart, and her cheek was warm with his kisses. The long years were blotted out as if they had never been; they were young again— young and together.

Thus was Zack brought back, as it were, from the very grave itself. He stood there

before his mother and Eppie in visible form, yet no word came from him of how or from where he was come. Only, with his bright, piercing eyes, he looked from one of them to the other and back again, then would try to speak, and the words failing him, would gaze and gaze again at these dear faces, as if that were enough without speech.

‘Where have you been? O Zack, where have you come from?’ Helen cried at last; but he only shook his head.

‘I can’t tell you—not now. O mother, I’m tired, tired,’ he said, turning to her with an almost childish appeal in his voice. ‘Why, you’ll have to give me a bed to lie down in, and clothes to wear, and food to eat. I’m a beggar, as you see, with nothing in the world but the clothes I stand in.’

‘Ah, my poor boy!’ cried Helen.

Zack looked at her hungrily. ‘Dios! but it’s good to hear you say that again,’ he said, and Helen noticed the strange foreign accent he spoke with. His words came haltingly too, as if he spoke in an unknown tongue.

He passed his hand across his eyes as he spoke, with a wearied action. 'I think if I could sleep and sleep and sleep, in a soft bed, I might waken and be able to speak to you,' he said.

'Ah, Zack, you are ill!' his mother cried, but he shook his head.

'Not ill—not ill in any way, mother,' he said; 'only tired to death—too tired to speak or explain.'

'Come, dearest,' said Helen, 'you shall rest—"sleep and sleep and sleep" till you have slept the weariness away.'

She led him upstairs and tended him like a child, her heart heavy and anxious all the time. For what was the meaning of this strange return? What mystery lay behind this silence—this strange, wild look that her son had? A sickening remembrance came to Helen of words she had once heard: '*It is possible to pray too earnestly for what we desire; by this means many have got their desire, and a broken heart with it.*'

Had God indeed heard her many prayers—

vehement, rebellious petitions that clamoured for an answer—and had their answer come in the bitter form of a rebuke?

One awful misgiving assailed her: Had Zack committed a crime? There was the stamp of some terror on his face, whatever it might be, and he had something to tell that he found it impossible to relate just now. What was it?

But no trace of these fears showed in Helen's face. She sent for food and drink, and made Zack eat while a room was prepared for him, and then she bade him go to bed and sleep till the morning.

'Go to bed and sleep! Mother, it's eighteen years since I've slept in a bed,' said Zack. He stood and looked round the room in a bewildered way, then he went and felt the pillows, fingered the sheets and blankets and curtains. 'I think it will keep me awake—it's too comfortable,' he said.

'My boy, where have you been?' Helen cried, the agony in her voice breaking through at last.

Still Zack did not reply. He only looked at her in a dulled way and shook his head; but, catching hold of her hand, he held it against his heart with a sudden passionate caress. 'Mother, will you come and sit beside me, and hold my hand while I sleep—all the night through, as you used to do long ago, that time when I was ill—will you, mother?'

'Yes, yes, Zack—a dozen nights, if you like,' she cried, wondering at the strange request. 'Let me go and tell Eppie that I am going to sit up with you; I will come back soon.'

She went downstairs and found Eppie. They looked at each other for a moment without speaking. 'What is it?' Eppie asked at last in a trembling voice. Helen shook her head. 'There is something wrong; I have not found out what it is yet. I cannot leave him alone; I shall sit beside him to-night, and see if he sleeps.' Her eyes were dry; but there was the sound of tears in her voice.

## CHAPTER XXXI

HELEN went slowly upstairs again to Zack's room. 'I never felt old till this moment,' she thought as she went. 'It's when the heart fails that youth is gone—years don't do it.'

It was useless to try to fight down her fears; a thousand possibilities crowded upon her, each darker than the last.

She opened the door of Zack's room and went in, shading the light with her hand.

'Are you in bed, Zack?' she asked. There was no answer. Zack was asleep already. Helen sat down beside the bed and took his hand in hers, as she had promised to do. She passed her hand lightly down his arm, and felt its iron strength; she noticed his tanned skin, and with that her heart felt lighter. She scarcely allowed herself to



frame the words in her mind, but they passed through it all the same: 'He cannot have been in prison.'

Hour after hour Zack slept on—an almost death-like sleep, it was so profound. Helen could hear all the sounds of the household going on downstairs—footsteps coming and going, doors shutting, sometimes a voice or a laugh; then the house became very quiet, and Helen knew that every one had gone to bed. Still Zack slept on. But suddenly he rose up on the pillows and flung his arm out, as if aiming a desperate blow at some one.

'There, there,' he shouted. 'And may you burn in as hot a hell as you've made for me.' Helen rose and stood beside him, laying her hand on his shoulder.

'Zack, Zack,' she said, 'waken.'

But Zack was waken already. He sat up and looked round the room wildly for a moment. 'Ah—I was dreaming—a bad dream,' he said.

Helen sank down on her knees by the

side of the bed, flinging her arms about him.

‘Tell me now, Zack; better tell me now,’ she whispered. ‘See how dark it is, and we are all alone; you can tell me anything, my dear love.’

‘Come, then,’ said Zack, ‘you shall hear it all.’ He grasped Helen’s hands in his, and leant his head back upon her shoulder. ‘There, mother, I’ll begin; only don’t let me make you ill—stop me when I do.’

‘Go on,’ said Helen, her heart beating thick with apprehension.

‘There was a moon the night we sailed from Carradale,’ Zack began, as if searching back in his memory over the long years that lay behind—‘a moon and stars. Then a chopping sea, and suddenly from the west a rush of black clouds that covered the moon, and a blatter of rain, and the sails torn to ribbons; and we fell into the trough of the waves. All in a moment the sea was white with foam, like a sheet spread out. I saw one of the other boats crack and go down like a nutshell; and then

poor Kenneth Munro was washed off our boat, and went down like lead. All of a sudden the clouds were blown away from before the moon, and it shone as clear as day. I saw a ship close up to us. She hailed us as we drove past. I don't remember anything after that except a struggle in the water, till I came to again with a lot of men talking a language I didn't understand beside me. It must have been hours later, for the gale was almost over, and the dawn was just breaking over the sea. I came round then quickly enough, and tried to make the men understand where I came from. I pointed to the land, and so on; they only laughed and pointed west—always west. They were quite kind to me—fed me, and all: but always we sailed westwards. After a week's time I knew we must be going to America or the West Indies. I was vexed to think about you, mother; but, on the whole, I was rather amused and pleased to get a trip to foreign parts after all. I used to help with the work of the ship, and they were quite pleased with me. Then it got hotter and

hotter, and we passed land in the distance—Jamaica, they told me. And late one night we put into a shore, where there seemed to be no town. It was no use to ask questions, of course, as they didn't understand. We sailed up a creek, and landed——' Zack paused, and drew a long breath.

'Well?' Helen asked.

'Landed—and I was sold for a slave,' said Zack.

Helen could not speak. She tightened her hold of Zack's hand, and he went on—

'I fetched a fine price, you see, being so healthy. My first master was a Spaniard. I was under him for ten years. Great Lord! how they worked me—a horse was nothing to it. I was given a wife there, too,—to console me; dark, poor girl, but not bad for all that. Mother, shall I go on?'

'Yes,' said Helen.

'Then I was sold to another man; and there I lived for seven years more, till I tried to escape. They caught me; and marked me there, to prevent a second escape, if possible.'

Zack drew back the shirt from his shoulder, and Helen shuddered, and looked away.

‘Then I thought I would either escape or die. I got off this time, and I worked my passage home on a French ship.’

‘Did you kill your second master?’ Helen asked, in a trembling voice; she must know the worst, whatever it cost her.

‘No—I wish I had,’ said Zack, slowly. The depth of hate in his voice made Helen shiver; but a weight rolled off her heart.

‘You have told me everything, Zack?’ she asked.

‘Is it not enough? Oh, I could touch up the picture for you, I daresay,’ he answered.

But Helen shuddered. ‘I want no more details, Zack; tell me only you have done no wrong to any man.’

‘None, mother; the wrongs were all done to me.’

‘I thank God,’ said Helen. She sat with closed eyes, her head bent low.

Suddenly she rose and went across to the window, and drew up the blind. Long streaks

of yellow were appearing in the black sky—  
forerunners of the dawn.

‘See, Zack!’ she cried, ‘see the day breaking—mists and smokes of earth, with the sun piercing through.’

Zack sat up on his elbow and gazed out. ‘Yes; I see what you wish me to see, mother. I know your meaning; but—the fogs have wrapped me round too closely—I cannot believe the sun will come through.’

‘It will—it will.’

Zack turned heavily on his pillow.

‘Ah, my cheerful mother!’ he said, half bitterly, as he fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XXXII

IT took a long time for the sun to come through for Zack.

Before he had been many days at home he made a sad discovery—that Eppie had inherited money from old Lady Ruxton.

After this Zack went away to Carradale, and passed several weeks of great unhappiness there. When the haunts of one's childhood are revisited it should be under bright auspices, otherwise the visit is apt to be a failure. This thought had occurred to Zack as he sat by the shore one summer afternoon, looking out over that sea he had crossed so many years before.

'What a failure I've made of life—what a failure it has been made for me, rather!' he said to himself, remembering the high hopes of long ago, the bright anticipations and bounding

fancies that had gilded his childhood's days.

'Zack,' said a voice behind him. He looked round, and saw Eppie standing there.

'Why, Eppie! where have you come from?' Zack exclaimed, starting up.

'We, Helen and I, came to the Lodge yesterday. Helen cannot be happy so far away from you as she was in London,' said Eppie laughing; but her eyes had a dim look, as if tears were in them. She sat down on the grass and looked out to sea, and neither of them spoke for a moment. 'Is mother here too, then?' Zack asked at length.

'Yes, we drove over just now; she has gone up to the Manse to see the minister's wife. I said I would come and look for you. I thought you would be here. Zack, have you been happy since you came back to Carra-dale?'

'Happy? Ah, well, Eppie, happiness is a large word; it is a long time since I've been happy.'

'But,' said Eppie, looking up at him, 'are



you not happy to have got back to us all?' The tears suddenly brimmed over her eyes, and ran down her cheek. 'You can never know how we missed you,' she said. 'When I remember all these sad years I have to cry, even now when you are sitting there beside me.'

'Did you care so much?' Zack asked.

'Ah, Zack, do you need to ask; can you look at me and ask that?' said Eppie. 'Did any one ever grow old so quickly, all for nothing?'

'It is all for nothing,' Zack cried passionately, 'worse than nothing, Eppie. Look at me, come back here a beggar. I can't dare to come near you. Let me go away again; it would have been better if I had never returned. Curse that wretched money of yours, I wish it were at the bottom of the sea!'

'My money!' Eppie exclaimed. 'Why, Zack, what harm does my money do?' She looked up at him in perfect amazement as she spoke.

‘What do you suppose would be said about me if I were to ask you to marry me now, Eppie?’ he asked bitterly. ‘It was bad enough when I was a miller, and you had no money of your own; I wonder how it would be now?’

‘I suppose people would say that you wanted my money,’ said Eppie slowly, a flush mounting up over her cheeks. ‘I am too old and ugly now for any one to think it possible you wanted to marry me for any other reason.’ A little tearful smile trembled about the corners of her mouth; she looked down at the sand, and drew a pattern on it with her finger.

. . . . .  
‘I suppose,’ said Eppie at last, ‘I suppose we must go up to the Manse for your mother; we have kept her waiting a very long time.’

But before they came to the Manse gate Helen met them. She looked from one to the other for a moment without speaking, then

held out her hands to them in quickest sympathy.

‘My dear children!’ she said, and added, half to herself, half to them, ‘*Long grief, long joy.*’



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