

BARR AMELIA E.

A KNIGHT OF THE NETS

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Amelia E. Barr

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*Grey sky, brown waters: as a bird that flies
My heart flits forth to these;
Back to the winter rose of Northern skies,
Back to the Northern seas.*

CHAPTER I

THE WORLD SHE LIVED IN

It would be easy to walk many a time through "Fife and all the lands about it" and never once find the little fishing village of Pittendurie. Indeed, it would be a singular thing if it was found, unless some special business or direction led to it. For clearly it was never intended that human beings should build homes where these cottages cling together, between sea and sky,—a few here, and a few there, hidden away in every bend of the rocks where a little ground could be levelled, so that the tides in stormy weather break with threat and fury on the very doorstones of the lowest cottages. Yet as the lofty semicircle of hills bend inward, the sea follows; and there is a fair harbour, where the fishing boats ride together while their sails dry in the afternoon sun. Then the hamlet is very still; for the men are sleeping off the weariness of their night work, while the children play quietly among the tangle, and the women mend the nets or bait the lines for the next fishing. A lonely little spot, shut in by sea and land, and yet life is there in all its passionate variety—love and hate, jealousy and avarice, youth, with its ideal sorrows and infinite expectations, age, with its memories and regrets, and "sure and certain hope."

The cottages also have their individualities. Although they are much of the same size and pattern, an observing eye would have

picked out the Binnie cottage as distinctive and prepossessing. Its outside walls were as white as lime could make them; its small windows brightened with geraniums and a white muslin curtain; and the litter of ropes and nets and drying fish which encumbered the majority of thatches, was pleasantly absent. Standing on a little level, thirty feet above the shingle, it faced the open sea, and was constantly filled with the confused tones of its sighing surges, and penetrated by its pulsating, tremendous vitality.

It had been the home of many generations of Binnies, and the very old, and the very young, had usually shared its comforts together; but at the time of my story, there remained of the family only the widow of the last proprietor, her son Andrew, and her daughter Christina. Christina was twenty years old, and still unmarried,—a strange thing in Pittendurie, where early marriages are the rule. Some said she was vain of her beauty and could find no lad whom she thought good enough; others thought she was a selfish, cold-hearted girl, feared for the cares and the labours of a fisherman's wife.

On this July afternoon, the girl had been some hours mending the pile of nets at her feet; but at length they were in perfect order, and she threw her arms upward and outward to relieve their weariness, and then went to the open door. The tide was coming in, but the children were still paddling in the salt pools and on the cold bladder rack, and she stepped forward to the edge of the cliff, and threw them some wild geranium and ragwort. Then she stood motionless in the bright sunlight, looking down the shingle

towards the pier and the little tavern, from which came, in drowsy tones, the rough monotonous songs which seamen delight to sing—songs, full of the complaining of the sea, interpreted by the hoarse, melancholy voices of sea faring men.

Standing thus in the clear light, her great beauty was not to be denied. She was tall and not too slender; and at this moment, the set of her head was like that of a thoroughbred horse, when it pricks its ears to listen. She had soft brown eyes, with long lashes and heavy eyebrows—eyes, reflecting the lances of light that darted in and out of the shifting clouds—an open air complexion, dazzling, even teeth, an abundance of dark, rippling hair, and a flush of ardent life opening her wide nostrils, and stirring gently the exquisite mould of her throat and bust. The moral impression she gave was that of a pure, strong, compassionate woman; cool-headed, but not cold; capable of vigorous joys and griefs.

After a few minutes' investigation, she went back to the cottage, and stood in the open doorway, with her head leaning against the lintel. Her mother had begun to prepare the evening meal; fresh fish were frying on the fire, and the oat cakes toasting before it. Yet, as she moved rapidly about, she was watching her daughter and very soon she gave words to the thoughts troubling and perplexing her motherly speculations.

"Christina," she said, "you'll not require to be looking for Andrew. The lad is ben the house; he has been asleep ever since he eat his dinner."

"I know that, Mother."

"Well then, if it is Jamie Logan, let me tell you it is a poor business. I have a fear and an inward down-sinking anent that young man."

"Perfect nonsense, Mother! There is nothing to fear you about Jamie."

"What good ever came through folk saved from the sea? Tell me that, Christina! They bring sorrow back with them. That is a fact none will deny."

"What could Andrew do but save the lad?"

"Why was the lad running before such a sea? He should have got into harbour; there was time enough. And if it was Andrew's duty to save him, it is not your duty to be loving him. You may take that much sense from me, anyway."

"*Whist, Mother!* He has not said a word of love to me."

"He perfectly changes colours every time he sees you, and why so, if it be not for love of you? I am not liking the look of the thing, Christina, and your brother is not liking it; and if you don't take care of yourself, you'll be in a burning fever of first love, and beyond all reasoning. Even now, you are making yourself a speculation to the whole village."

"Jamie is a straight-forward lad. I'm thinking he would lay his life down for me."

"I thought he had not said a word of love to you."

"A girl knows some things that are not told her."

"Very fine; but it will not be the fashion now to lie down and die for Annie Laurie, or any other lass. A young man who wants

a wife must bustle around and get siller to keep her with. Getting married, these days is not a thing to make a song about. You are but a young thing yet, Christina, and you have much to learn."

"Would you not like to be young again, Mother?"

"No, I would not! I would not risk it. Besides, it would be going back; and I want to go forward and upward. But you need not try to turn the talk from Jamie Logan that way. I'll say again what I said before, you will be in a fever of first love, and not to be reasoned with, if you don't take care of yourself."

The girl flushed hotly, came into the house, and began to rearrange the teacups with a nervous haste; for she heard Jamie's steps on the rocky road, and his voice, clear as a blackbird's, whistling gayly "In the Bay of Biscay O!"

"The teacups are all right, Christina. I am talking anent Jamie Logan. The lad is just a temptation to you; and you will require to ask for strength to be kept out of temptation; for the Lord knows, the best of us don't expect strength to resist it."

Christina turned her face to her mother, and then left her answer to Jamie Logan. For he came in at the moment with a little tartan shawl in his hand, which he gallantly threw across the shoulders of Mistress Binnie.

"I have just bought it from a peddler loon," he said. "It is bonnie and soft, and it sets you well, and I hope you will pleasure me by wearing it."

His face was so bright, his manner so charming, that it was impossible for Janet Binnie to resist him. "You are a fleeching,

flattering laddie," she answered; but she stroked and fingered the gay kerchief, while Christina made her observe how bright were the colours of it, and how neatly the soft folds fell around her. Then the door of the inner room opened, and Andrew came sleepily out.

"The fish is burning," he said, "and the oat cakes too; for I am smelling them ben the house;" and Janet ran to her fireside, and hastily turned her herring and cakes.

"I'm feared you won't think much of your meat to-night," she said regretfully; "the tea is fairly ruined."

"Never mind the meat, Mother," said Andrew. "We don't live to eat."

"Never mind the meat, indeed! What perfect nonsense! There is something wrong with folk that don't mind their meat."

"Well then, you shouldn't be so vain of yourself, Mother. You were preening like a young girl when I first got sight of you—and the meat taking care of itself."

"Me, vain! No! No! Nobody that knows Janet Binnie can ever say she is vain. I wot well that I am a frail, miserable creature, with little need of being vain, either for myself or my children. You are a great hand at arguing, Andrew, but you are always in the wrong. But draw to the table and eat. I'll warrant the fish will prove better than it is bonnie."

They sat down with a pleasant content that soon broadened into mirth and laughter, as Jamie Logan began to tell and to show how the peddler lad had fleeced and flethered the fisher wives

out of their bawbees; adding at the last "that he could not come within sight of their fine words, they were that civil to him."

"Senselessly civil, no doubt of it," answered Janet. "A peddler aye gives the whole village a fit of the liberalities. The like of Jean Robertson spending a crown on him! Foolish woman, the words are not to seek that she'll get from me in the morning."

Then Jamie took a letter from his pocket, and showed it to Andrew Binnie. "Robert Toddy brought it this morning," he said, "and, as you may see, it is from the firm of Henderson Brothers, Glasgow; and they say there will be a berth for me very soon now in one of their ships. And their boats are good, and their captains good, and there is chances for a fine sailor on that line. I may be a captain myself one of these days!" and he laughed so gayly, and looked so bravely into the face of such a bold idea, that he persuaded every one else to expect it for him. Janet pulled her new shawl a little closer and smiled, and her thought was: "After all, Christina may wait longer, and fare worse; for she is turned twenty." Yet she showed a little reserve as she asked:—

"Are you then Glasgow-born, Jamie?"

"Me! Glasgow-born! What are you thinking of? I am from the auld East Neuk; and I am glad and proud of being a Fifer. All my common sense comes from Fife. There is none loves the 'Kingdom' more than I, Jamie Logan. We are all Fife together. I thought you knew it."

At these words there was a momentary shadow across the door, and a little lassie slipped in; and when she did so, all put

down their cups to welcome her. Andrew reddened to the roots of his hair, his eyes filled with light, a tender smile softened his firm mouth, and he put out his hand and drew the girl to the chair which Christina had pushed close to his own.

"You are welcome, and more than welcome, Sophy," said the Mistress; but for all that, she gave Sophy a glance in which there was much speculation not unmixed, with fear and disapproval. For it was easy to see that Andrew Binnie loved her, and that she was not at all like him, nor yet like any of the fisher-girls of Pittendurie. Sophy, however, was not responsible for this difference; for early orphanage had placed her in the care of an aunt who carried on a dress and bonnet making business in Largo, and she had turned the little fisher-maid into a girl after her own heart and wishes.

Sophy, indeed, came frequently to visit her people in Pittendurie; but she had gradually grown less and less like them, and there was no wonder Mistress Binnie asked herself fearfully, "what kind of a wife at all Sophy would make for a Fife fisherman?" She was so small and genty, she had such a lovely face, such fair rippling hair, and her gown was of blue muslin made in the fashion of the day, and finished with a lace collar round her throat, and a ribbon belt round her slender waist.

"A bonnie lass for a carriage and pair," thought Janet Binnie; "but whatever will she do with the creel and the nets? not to speak of the bairns and the housework?"

Andrew was too much in love to consider these questions.

When he was six years old, he had carried Sophy in his arms all day long; when he was twelve, they had paddled on the sands, and fished, and played, and learned their lessons together. She had promised then to be his wife as soon as he had a house and a boat of his own; and never for one moment since had Andrew doubted the validity and certainty of this promise. To Andrew, and to Andrew's family, and to the whole village of Pittendurie, the marriage of Andrew Binnie and Sophy Traill was a fact beyond disputing. Some said "it was the right thing," and more said "it was the foolish thing," and among the latter was Andrew's mother; though as yet she had said it very cautiously to Andrew, whom she regarded as "clean daft and senselessly touchy about the girl."

But she sent the young people out of the house while she redd up the disorder made by the evening meal; though, as she wiped her teacups, she went frequently to the little window, and looked at the four sitting together on the bit of turf which carpeted the top of the cliff before the cottage. Andrew, as a privileged lover, held Sophy's hand; Christina sat next her brother, and facing Jamie Logan, so it was easy to see how her face kindled, and her manner softened to the charm of his merry conversation, his snatches of breezy sea-song, and his clever bits of mimicry. And as Janet walked to and fro, setting her cups and plates in the rack, and putting in place the tables and chairs she did what we might all do more frequently and be the wiser for it—she talked to herself, to the real woman within her, and thus got to the bottom

of things.

In less than an hour there began to be a movement about the pier, and then Andrew and Jamie went away to their night's work; and the girls sat still and watched the men across the level sands, and the boats hurrying out to the fishing grounds. Then they went back to the cottage, and found that Mistress Binnie had taken her knitting and gone to chat with a crony who lived higher up the cliff.

"We are alone, Sophy" said Christina; "but women folk are often that." She spoke a little sadly, the sweet melancholy of conscious, but unacknowledged love being heavy in her heart, and she would not have been sorry, had she been quite alone with her vaguely happy dreams. Neither of the girls was inclined to talk, but Christina wondered at Sophy's silence, for she had been unusually merry while the young men were present.

Now she sat quiet on the door step, clasping her left knee with little white hands that had no sign of labour on them but the mark of the needle on the left forefinger. At her side, Christina stood, her tall straight figure fittingly clad in a striped blue and white linsey petticoat, and a little josey of lilac print, cut low enough to show the white, firm throat above it. Her fine face radiated thought and feeling; she was on the verge of that experience which glorifies the simplest life. The exquisite glooming, the tender sky, the full heaving sea, were all in sweetest sympathy; they were sufficient; and Sophy's thin, fretful voice broke the charm and almost offended her.

"It is a weary life, Christina. How do you thole it?"

"You are just talking, Sophy. You were happy enough half an hour since."

"I wasn't happy at all."

"You let on like you were. I should think you would be as fear'd to act a lie, as to tell one."

"I'll be going away from Pittendurie in the morning."

"What for?"

"I have my reasons."

"No doubt you have a 'because' of your own. But what will Andrew say?"

He is not expecting you to leave to-morrow."

"I don't care what Andrew says."

"Sophy Traill!"

"I don't. Andrew Binnie is not the whole of life to me."

"Whatever is the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

Then there was a pause, and Christina's thoughts flew seaward. In a few minutes, however, Sophy began talking again. "Do you go often into Largo, Christina?" she asked.

"Whiles, I take myself that far. You may count me up for the last year; for I sought you every time."

"Ay! Do you mind on the road a real grand house, fine and old, with a beautiful garden and peacocks in it—trailing their long feathers over the grass and gravel?"

"You will be meaning Braelands? Folks could not miss the

place, even if they tried to."

"Well then, did you ever notice a young man around? He is always dressed for the saddle, or else he is in the saddle, and so most sure to have a whip in his hand."

"What are you talking about? What is the young man to you?"

"He is brawly handsome. They call him Archie Braelands."

"I have heard tell of him. And by what is said, I should not think he was an improving friend for any good girl to have."

"This, or that, he likes me. He likes me beyond everything."

"Do you know what you are saying, Sophy Traill?"

"I do, fine."

"Are you liking him?"

"It would not be hard to do."

"Has he ever spoke to you?"

"Well, he is not as shy as a fisher-lad. I find him in my way when I'm not thinking. And see here, Christina; I got a letter from him this afternoon. A real love letter! Such lovely words! They are like poetry; they are as sweet as singing."

"Did you tell Andrew this?"

"Why would I do that?"

"You are a false little cutty, then. I would tell Andrew myself, but I am loath to hurt his true heart. Now you are to let Archie Braelands alone, or I will know the reason why."

"Preserve us all! What a blazing passion for nothing at all! Can't a lassie chat with a lad for a half hour without calling a court of sessions about it?" and she rose and shook out her dress,

saying with an air of offence:—

"You may tell Andrew, if you like to. It would be a very poor thing if a girl is to be miscalled every time a man told her she was pretty."

"I'm not saying any woman can help men making fools of themselves; but you should have told Braelands that you were all the same as married, being promised so long to Andrew Binnie. And you ought to have told Andrew about the letter."

"Everybody can't live in Pittendurie, Christina. And if you live with a town full of folk, you cannot go up and down, saying to every man you meet, 'please, sir, I have a lad of my own, and you are not to cast a look at me, for Andrew Binnie would not like it.'"

"Hold your tongue, Sophy, or else know what you are yattering about. I would think shame to talk so scornful of the man I was going to marry."

"You can let it go for a passing remark. And if I have said anything to vex you, we are old friends, Christina, and it is not a lad that will part us. Sophy requires a deal of forgiving."

"She does," said Christina with a smile; "so I just forgive her as I go along, for she is still doing something out of the way. But you must not treat Andrew ill. I could not love you, Sophy, if you did the like of that. And you must always tell me everything about yourself, and then nothing will go far wrong."

"Even that. I am not given to lying unless it is worth my while. I'll tell you aught there is to tell. And there is a kiss for Andrew, and you may say to him that I would have told him I was going

back to Largo in the morning, only that I cannot bear to see him unhappy. That a message to set him on the mast-head of pride and pleasure."

"I will give Andrew the kiss and the message, Sophy. And you take my advice, and keep yourself clear of that young Braelands. I am particular about my own good name, and I mean to be particular about yours."

"I have had your advice already, Christina."

"Well, this is a forgetful world, so I just mention the fact again."

"All the same, you might remember, Christina, that there was once a woman who got rich by minding her own business;" and with a laugh, the girl tied her bonnet under her chin, and went swiftly down the cliff towards the village.

CHAPTER II

CHRISTINA AND ANDREW

This confidence greatly troubled Christina; and as Sophy crossed the sands and vanished into the shadows beyond, a strange, sad presentiment of calamity oppressed her heart. Being herself in the enthusiasm of a first love, she could not conceive such treachery possible as Sophy's word seemed to imply. The girl had always been petted, and yet discontented with her situation; and had often made complaints which had no real foundation, and which in brighter moods she was likely to repudiate. And this night Andrew, instead of her Aunt Kilgour, was the object of her dissatisfaction—that would be all. To-morrow she would be complaining to Andrew of her aunt's hard treatment of her, and Andrew would be whispering of future happiness in her ears.

Upon the whole, therefore, Christina thought it would be cruel and foolish to tell her brother a word of what Sophy had said. Why should she disturb his serene faith in the girl so dear to him, until there was some more evident reason to do so? He was, as his mother said, "very touchy" about Sophy, being well aware that the village did not approve of the changes in her dress, and of those little reluctances and reserves in her behaviour, which had sprung up inevitably amid the refinements and wider

acquaintances of town life.

"And so many things happen as the clock goes round," she thought. "Braelands may say or do something that will put him out of favour. Or he may take himself off to a foreign country—he is gey fond of France and Germany too—and Goodness knows he will never be missed in Fifeshire. Or *them behind* may sort what flesh and blood cannot manage; so I will keep a close mouth anent the matter. One may think what one dare not say; for words, once spoken, cannot be wiped out with a sponge—and more's the pity!"

Christina had also reached a crisis in her own life,—a crisis so important, that it quite excused the apparent readiness with which she dismissed Sophy's strange confidence. For the feeling between Jamie Logan and herself had grown to expression, and she was well aware that what had hitherto been in a large measure secret and private to themselves, had this night become evident to others. And she was not sure how Jamie would be received. Andrew had saved his life in a sudden storm, and brought him to the Binnie cottage until he should be able to return to his own place. But instead of going away, he had hired his time for the herring season to a Pittendurie fisherman; and every spare hour had found him at the Binnie cottage, wooing the handsome Christina.

The village was not unanimously in his favour. No one could say anything against Jamie Logan; but he was a stranger, and that fact was hard to get over. A man must serve a very strict and long

probation to be adopted into a Fife fishing community, and it was considered "very upsetting" for an unkent man to be looking up to the like of Christina Binnie,—a lass whose forbears had been in Pittendurie beyond the memory or the tradition of its inhabitants.

Janet also was not quite satisfied; and Christina knew this. She expected her daughter to marry a fisherman, but at least one who owned his share in a good boat, and who had a house to take a wife to. This strange lad was handsome and good-tempered; but, as she reflected, and not unfrequently said, "good looks and a laugh and a song, are not things to lippen to for housekeeping." So, on the whole, Christina had just the same doubts and anxieties as might trouble a fine lady of family and wealth, who had fallen in love with some handsome fellow whom her relatives were uncertain about favouring.

A week after Sophy's visit, however, Jamie found the unconquerable hour in which every true love comes to its blossoming. It was the Sabbath night, and a great peace was over the village. The men sat at their doors talking in monosyllables to their wives and mates; the children were asleep; and the full ocean breaking and tinkling upon the shingly coast. They had been at kirk together in the afternoon, and Jamie had taken tea with the Binnies after the service. Then Andrew had gone to see Sophy, and Janet to help a neighbour with a sick husband; so Jamie, left with Christina, had seized gladly his opportunity to teach her the secret of her own heart.

Sitting on the lonely rocks, with the moonlit sea at their feet, they had confessed to each other how sweet it was to love. And the plans growing out of this confession, though humble enough, were full of strange hope and happy dreaming to Christina. For Jamie had begged her to become his wife as soon as he got his promised berth on the great Scotch line, and this event would compel her to leave Pittendurie and make her home in Glasgow, —two facts, simply stupendous to the fisher-girl, who had never been twenty miles from her home, and to whom all life outside the elementary customs of Pittendurie was wonderful and a little frightsome.

But she put her hand in Jamie's hand, and felt his love sufficient for whatever love might bring or demand. Any spot on earth would be heaven to her with him, and for him; and she told him so, and was answered as women love to be answered, with a kiss that was the sweetness and confidence of all vows and promises. Among these simple, straight-forward people, there are no secrecies in love affairs; and the first thing Jamie did was to return to the cottage with Christina to make known the engagement they had entered into.

They met Andrew on the sands. He had been disappointed. Sophy had gone out with a friend, and her aunt had seemed annoyed and had not asked him to wait. He was counting up in his mind how often this thing had happened lately, and was conscious of an unhappy sense of doubt and unkindness which was entirely new to him. But when Christina stepped to his side,

and Jamie said frankly, "Andrew, your dear sweet sister loves me, and has promised to be my wife, and I hope you will give us the love and favour we are seeking," Andrew looked tenderly into his sister's face, and their smiles met and seemed to kiss each other. And he took her hand between his own hands, and then put it into Jamie's.

"You shall be a brother to me, Jamie," he said; "and we will stand together always, for the sake of our bonnie Christina." And Jamie could not speak for happiness; but the three went forward with shining eyes and linked hands, and Andrew forgot his own fret and disappointment, in the joy of his sister's betrothal.

Janet came home as they sat in the moonlight outside the cottage. "Come into the house," she cried, with a pretense of anger. "It is high time for folk who have honest work for the morn to be sleeping. What hour will you get to the week's work, I wonder, Christina? If I leave the fireside for a minute or two, everything stops but daffing till I get back again. What for are you sitting so late?"

"There is a good reason, Mother!" said Andrew, as he rose and with Jamie and Christina went into the cottage. "Here is our Christina been trysting herself to Jamie, and I have been giving them some good advice."

"Good advice!" laughed Janet. "Between you and Jamie Logan, it is the blind leading the blind, and nothing better. One would think there was no other duty in life than trysting and marrying. I have just heard tell of Flora Thompson and George

Buchan, and now it is Christina Binnie and Jamie Logan. The world is given up, I think, to this weary lad and lass business."

But Janet's words belied her voice and her benign face. She was really one of those delightful women who are "easily persuaded," and who readily accept whatever is, as right. For she had naturally one of the healthiest of human souls; besides which, years had brought her that tender sagacity and gentleness, which does not often come until the head is gray and the brow furrowed. So, though her words were fretful, they were negatived by her beaming smile, and by the motherly fashion in which she drew Christina to her side and held out her hand to Jamie.

"You are a pair of foolish bairns," she said; "and you little know what will betide you both."

"Nothing but love and happiness, Mother," answered Jamie.

"Well, well! look for good, and have good. I will not be one to ask after evil for you. But mind one thing, Jamie, you are marrying a woman, and not an angel. And, Christina, if you trust to any man, don't expect over much of him; the very best of them will stumble once in a while."

Then she drew forward the table, and put on the kettle and brewed some toddy, and set it out with toasted cake and cheese, and so drank, with cheerful moderation, to the health and happiness of the newly-promised lovers. And afterwards "the books" were opened, and Andrew, who was the priest of the family, asked the blessing of the Infinite One on all its relationships. Then the happiness that had been full of smiles and

words became too deep for such expression, and they clasped hands and kissed each other "good night" in a silence, that was too sweetly solemn and full of feeling for the translation of mere language.

Before the morning light, Mistress Binnie had fully persuaded herself that Christina was going to make an unusually prosperous marriage. All her doubts had fled. Jamie had spoken out like a man, he had the best of prospects, and the wedding was likely to be something beyond a simple fisherman's bridal. She could hardly wait until the day's work was over, and the evening far enough advanced for a gossiping call on her crony, Marget Roy. Last night she had fancied Marget told her of Flora Thompson's betrothal with an air of pity for Christina; there was now a delightful retaliation in her power. But she put on an expression of dignified resignation, rather than one of pleasure, when she made known the fact of Christina's approaching marriage.

"I am glad to hear tell of it," said Marget frankly. "Christina will make a good wife, and she will keep a tidy house, I'll warrant her."

"She will, Marget. And it is a very important thing; far more so than folks sometimes think. You may put godliness into a woman after she is a wife, but you can not put cleanliness; it will have to be born in her."

"And so Jamie Logan is to have a berth from the Hendersons? That is far beyond a place in Lowrie's herring boats."

"I'm thinking he just stopped with Lowrie for the sake of

being near-by to Christina. A lad like him need not have spent good time like that."

"Well, Janet, it is a good thing for your Christina, and I am glad of it."

"It is;" answered Janet, with a sigh and a smile. "The lad is sure to get on; and he's a respectable lad—a Fifer from Kirkcaldy—handsome and well-spoken of; and I am thinking the *Line* has a big bargain in him, and is proud of it. Still, I'm feared for my lassie, in such an awful, big, wicked-like town as Glasgow."

"She'll not require to take the whole town in. She will have her Bible, and her kirk, and her own man. There is nothing to fear you. Christina has her five senses."

"No doubt. And she is to have a floor of her own and all things convenient; so there is comfort and safety in the like of that."

"What for are you worrying yourself then?"

"There's contingencies, Marget,—contingencies. And you know Christina is my one lassie, and I am sore to lose her. But 'lack a day! we cannot stop the clock. And marriage is like death—it is what we must all come to."

"Well Janet, your Christina has been long spared from it. She'll be past twenty, I'm thinking."

"Christina has had her offers, Marget. But what will you? We must all wait for the right man, or go to the de'il with the wrong one."

Thus the conversation went on, until Janet had exhausted all the advantages and possibilities that were incident to Christina's

good fortune. And perhaps it was out of a little feeling of weariness of the theme, that Marget finally reminded her friend that she would be "lonely enough wanting her daughter," adding, "I was hearing too, that Andrew is not to be kept single much longer; and it will be what no one expects if Sophy Traill ever fills Christina's shoes."

"Sophy is well enough," answered Janet with a touch of pride. "She suits Andrew, and it is Andrew that has to live with her."

"And you too, Janet?"

"Not I! Andrew is to build his own bigging. I have the life rent of mine. But I shall be a deal in Glasgow myself. Jamie has his heart fairly set on that."

She made this statement with an air of prideful satisfaction that was irritating to Mistress Roy; and she was not inclined to let Janet enter anew into a description of all the fine sights she was to see, the grand guns of preachers she was to hear, and the trips to Greenock and Rothesay, which Jamie said "would just fall naturally in the way of their ordinary life." So Marget showed such a hurry about her household affairs as made Janet uncomfortable, and she rose with a little offence and said abruptly:—

"I must be going. I have the kirkyard to pass; and between the day and the dark it is but a mournful spot."

"It is that," answered Marget. "Folks should not be on the road when the bodiless walk. They might be in their way, and so get ill to themselves."

"Then good night, and good befall you;" but in spite of the benediction, Janet felt nettled at her friend's sudden lack of interest.

"It was a spat of envy no doubt," she thought; "but Lord's sake! envy is the most insinuating vice of the lot of them. It cannot behave itself for an hour at a time. But I'm not caring! it is better to be envied than pitied."

These reflections kept away the thought and fear of the "bodiless," and she passed the kirkyard without being mindful of their proximity; the coming wedding, and the inevitable changes it would bring, filling her heart with all kinds of maternal anxieties, which in solitude would not be put aside for all the promised pride and *eclat* of the event. As she approached the cottage, she met Jamie and Christina coming down the cliff-side together, and she cried, "Is that you, Jamie?"

"As far as I know, it's myself, Mother," answered Jamie.

"Then turn back, and I'll get you a mouthful of bread and cheese. You'll be wanting it, no doubt; for love is but cold porridge to a man that has to pull on the nets all night."

"You have spoken the day after the fair, Mother," answered Jamie.

"Christina has looked well to me, and I am bound for the boats."

"Well, well, your way be it."

Then Christina turned back with her mother, and they went silently back to the cottage, their hearts being busy with the new

hopes and happiness that had come into their hitherto uneventful lives. But reticence between this mother and daughter was not long possible; they were too much one to have reserves; and neither being sleepy, they soon began to talk over again what they had discussed a hundred times before—the wedding dress, and the wedding feast, and the napery and plenishing Christina was to have for her own home. They sat on the hearth, before the bit of fire which was always necessary in that exposed and windy situation; but the door stood open, and the moon filled the little room with its placid and confidential light. So it is no wonder, as they sat talking and vaguely wondering at Andrew's absence, Christina should tell her mother what Sophy had said about Archie Braelands.

Janet listened with a dour face. For a moment she was glad; then she lifted the poker, and struck a block of coal into a score of pieces, and with the blow scattered the unkind, selfish thoughts which had sprung up in her heart.

"It is what I expected," she answered. "Just what I expected, Christina. A lassie dressed up in muslin, and ribbons, and artificial roses, isn't the kind of a wife a fisherman wants—and sooner or later, like goes to like. I am not blaming Sophy. She has tried hard to be faithful to Andrew, but what then? Nothing happens for nothing; and it will be a good thing for Andrew if Sophy leaves him; a good thing for Sophy too, I'm thinking; and better *is* better, whatever comes or goes."

"But Andrew will fret himself sorely."

"He will; no doubt of that. But Andrew has a good heart, and a good heart breaks bad fortune. Say nothing at all to him. He is wise enough to guide himself; though God knows! even the wisest of men will have a fool in his sleeve sometimes."

"Would there be any good in a word of warning? Just to prepare him for the sorrow that is on the road."

"There would be no sense in the like of it. If Andrew is to get the fling and the buffet, he will take it better from Sophy than from any other body. Let be, Christina. And maybe things will take a turn for the dear lad yet. Hope for it anyhow. Hope is as cheap as despair."

"Folks will be talking anon."

"They are talking already. Do you think that I did not hear all this clash and clavers before? Lucky Sims, and Marget Roy, and every fish-wife in Pittendurie, know both the beginning and the end of it. They have seen this, and they have heard that, and they think the very worst that can be; you may be sure of that."

"I'm thinking no wrong of Sophy."

"Nor I. The first calamity is to be born a woman; it sets the door open for every other sorrow—and the more so, if the poor lassie is bonnie and alone in the world. Sophy is not to blame; it is Andrew that is in the fault."

"How can you say such a thing as that, Mother?"

"I'll tell you how. Andrew has been that set on having a house for his wife, that he has just lost the wife while he was saving the siller for the house. I have told him, and better told him to

bring Sophy here; but nothing but having her all to himself will he hear tell of. It is pure, wicked selfishness in the lad! He simply cannot thole her to give look or word to any one but himself. Perfect scand'lous selfishness! That is where all the trouble has come from."

"*Whist, Mother!* He is most at the doorstep. That is Andrew's foot, or I am much mista'en."

"Then I'll away to Lizzie Robertson's for an hour. My heart is knocking at my lips, and I'll be saying what I would give my last bawbee to unsay. Keep a calm sough, Christina."

"You need not tell me that, Mother."

"Just let Andrew do the talking, and you'll be all right. It is easy to put him out about Sophy, and then to come to words. Better keep peace than make peace."

She lifted the stocking she was knitting, and passed out of one door as Andrew came in at the other. He entered with that air of strength and capability so dear to the women of a household. He had on his kirk suit, and Christina thought, as he sat down by the open window, how much handsomer he looked in his blue guernsey and fishing cap.

"You'll be needing a mouthful and a cup of tea, Andrew?" she asked.

Andrew shook his head and answered pleasantly, "Not I, Christina. I had my tea with Sophy. Where is mother?"

"She is gone to Lizzie Robertson's for an hour. Her man is yet very badly off. She said she would sit with him till the night

turned. Lizzie is most worn out, I'm sure, by this time."

"Where is Jamie?"

"He said he was going to the fishing. He will have caught his boat, or he would have been back here again by this hour."

"Then we are alone? And like to be for an hour? eh, Christina?"

"There will be no one here till mother comes at the turn of the night.

What for are you asking the like of them questions, Andrew?"

"Because I have been seeking this hour. I have things to tell you, Christina, that must never go beyond yourself; no, not even to mother, unless the time comes for it. I am not going to ask you to give me your word or promise. You are Christina Binnie, and that is enough."

"I should say so. The man or woman who promises with an oath is not to be trusted. There is you and me, and God for our witness. What ever you have to say, the hearer and the witness is sufficient."

"I know that. Christina, I have been this day to Edinburgh, and I have brought home from the bank six hundred pounds."

"Six hundred pounds, Andrew! It is not believable."

"*Whist, woman!* I have six hundred pounds in my breast pocket, and I have siller in the house beside. I have sold my share in the '*Sure-Giver*,' and I have been saving money ever since I put on my first sea-boots."

"I have always thought that saving money was your great fault,

Andrew."

"I know. I know it myself only too well. Many's the Sabbath day I have been only a bawbee Christian, when I ought to have put a shilling in the plate. But I just could not help it."

"Yes, you could."

"Tell me how, then."

"Just try and believe that you are putting your collection into the hand of God Almighty, and not into a siller plate. Then you will put the shilling down and not the bawbee."

"Perhaps. The thought is not a new one to me, and often I have forced myself to give a white shilling instead of a penny-bit at the kirk door, just to get the better of the de'il once in a while. But for all that I know right well that saving siller is my besetting sin. However, I have been saving for a purpose, and now I am most ready to take the desire of my heart."

"It is a good desire; I am sure of that, Andrew."

"I think it is; a very good one. What do you say to this? I am going to put all my siller in a carrying steamer—one of the Red-White fleet. And more to it. I am to be skipper, and sail her from the North Sea to London."

"Will she be a big boat, Andrew?"

"She will carry three thousand 'trunks' of fish in her ice chambers."

"What do you think of that?"

"I am perfectly dazzled and dumbfounded with the thought of it. You will be a man of some weight in the world, when that

comes to pass."

"I will be Captain Binnie, of the North Sea fleet, and Sophy will have reason enough for her muslins, and ribbons, and trinkum-trankums—God bless her!"

"You are a far forecasting man, Andrew."

"I have been able to clear my day and my way, by the help of Providence, so far," said Andrew, with a pious reservation; "just as my decent kirk-going father was before me. But that is neither here nor there, and please God, this will be a monumental year in my life."

"It will that. To get the ship and the wife you want, within its twelve bounds, is a blessing beyond ordinary. I am proud to hear tell of such good fortune coming your way, Andrew."

"Ay; I knew you would. But I have the siller, and I have the skill, and why shouldn't I lift myself a bit?"

"And Sophy with you? Sophy will be an ornament to any place you lift her to. And you may come to own a fishing fleet yourself some day, Andrew!"

"I am thinking of it," he answered, with the air of a man who feels himself master of his destiny. "But come ben the house with me, Christina. I have something to show you."

So they went together into an inner room, and Andrew moved aside a heavy chest of drawers which stood against the wall. Then he lifted a short plank beneath them, and putting his arm far under the flooring, he pulled forth a tin box.

The key to it was in the leather purse in his breast pocket, and

there was a little tantalizing delay in its opening. But when the lid was lifted, Christina saw a hoard of golden sovereigns, and a large roll of Bank of England bills. Without a word Andrew added the money in his pocket to this treasured store, and in an equal silence the flooring and drawers were replaced, and then, without a word, the brother and sister left the room together.

There was however a look of exultation on Christina's face, and when Andrew said "You understand now, Christina?" she answered in a voice full of tender pride.

"I have seen. And I am sure that Andrew Binnie is not the man to be moving without knowing the way he is going to take."

"I am not moving at all, Christina, for three months or perhaps longer. The ship I want is in dry dock until the winter, and it is all this wealth of siller that I am anxious about. If I should go to the fishing some night, and never come back, it would be the same as if it went to the bottom of the sea with me, not a soul but myself knowing it was there."

"But not now, Andrew. You be to tell me what I am to do if the like of that should happen, and your wish will be as the law of God to me."

"I am sure of that, Christina. Take heed then. If I should go out some night and the sea should get me, as it gets many better men, then you will lift the flooring, and take the money out of hiding. And you will give Sophy Traill one half of all there is. The other half is for mother and yourself. And you will do no other way with a single bawbee, or the Lord will set His face against it."

"I will do just what you tell me."

"I know it. To think different, would be just incredible nonsense. That is for the possibilities, Christina. For the days that are coming and going, I charge you, Christina Binnie, never to name to mortal creature the whereabouts of the money I have shown you."

"Your words are in my heart, Andrew. They will never pass my lips."

"Then that is enough of the siller. I have had a happy day with Sophy, and O the grace of the lassie! And the sweet innocence and loveliness of her pretty ways! She is budding into a very rose of beauty! I bought her a ring with a shining stone in it, and a gold brooch, and a bonnie piece of white muslin with the lace for the trimming of it; and the joy of the little beauty set me laughing with delight. I would not call the Queen my cousin, this night."

"Sophy ought to love you with all her heart and soul, Andrew."

"She does. She has arled her heart and hand to me. I thank *The Best* for this great mercy."

"And you can trust her without a doubt, dear lad?"

"I have as much faith in Sophy Traill, as I have in my Bible."

"That is the way to trust. It is the way I trust Jamie. But you'll mind how ready bad hearts and ill tongues are to give you a sense of suspicion. So you'll not heed a word of that kind, Andrew?"

"Not one. The like of such folk cannot give me a moment's trouble—there was Kirsty Johnston—"

"You may put Kirsty Johnston, and all she says to the wall."

"I'm doing it; but she called after me this very evening, 'take care of yourself, Andrew Binnie.' 'And what for, Mistress?' I asked. 'A beauty is hard to catch and worse to keep,' she answered; and then the laugh of her! But I didn't mind it, not I; and I didn't give her word or look in reply; for well I know that women's tongues cannot be stopped, not even by the Fourth Commandment."

Then Andrew sat down and was silent, for a happiness like his is felt, and not expressed. And Christina moved softly about, preparing the frugal supper, and thinking about her lover in the fishing boats, until, the table being spread, Andrew drew his chair close to his sister's chair, and spreading forth his hands ere he sat down, said solemnly;—

"This is the change of Thy Right Hand, O Thou Most High! Thou art strong to strengthen; gracious to help; ready to better; mighty to save, Amen!"

It was the prayer of his fathers for centuries—the prayer they had used in all times of their joy and sorrow; the prayer that had grown in his own heart from his birth, and been recorded for ever in the sagas of his mother's people.

CHAPTER III

THE AILING HEART

Not often in her life had Christina felt so happy as she did at this fortunate hour. Two things especially made her heart sing for joy; one was the fact that Jamie had never been so tender, so full of joyful anticipation, so proud of his love and his future, as in their interview of that evening. The very thought of his beauty and goodness made her walk unconsciously to the door, and look over the sea towards the fishing-grounds, where he was doubtless working at the nets, and thinking of her. And next to this intensely personal cause of happiness, was the fact that of all his mates, and even before his mother or Sophy, Andrew had chosen *her* for his confidant. She loved her brother very much, and she respected him with an equal fervour. Few men, in Christina's opinion, were able to stand in Andrew Binnie's shoes, and she felt, as she glanced at his strong, thoughtful face, that he was a brother to be very proud of.

He sat on the hearth with his arms crossed above his head, and a sweet, grave smile irradiating his strong countenance, Christina knew that he was thinking of Sophy, and as soon as she had spread the frugal meal, and they had sat down to their cakes and cheese, Andrew began to talk of her. He seemed to have dismissed absolutely the thought of the hidden money, and to be

wholly occupied with memories of his love. And as he talked of her, his face grew vivid and tender, and he spoke like a poet, though he knew it not.

"She is that sweet, Christina, it is like kissing roses to kiss her. Her wee white hand on my red face is like a lily leaf. I saw it in the looking-glass, as we sat at tea. And the ring, with the shining stone, set it finely. I am the happiest man in the world, Christina!"

"I am glad with all my heart for you, Andrew, and for Sophy too. It is a grand thing to be loved as you love her."

"She is the sweetness of all the years that are gone, and of all that are to come."

"And Sophy loves you as you love her? I hope she does that, my dear Andrew."

"She will do. She will do! no doubt of it, Christina! She is shy now, and a bit frightened at the thought of marriage—she is such a gentle little thing—but I will make her love me; yes I will! I will make her love me as I love her. What for not?"

"To be sure. Love must give and take equal, to be satisfied. I know that myself. I am loving Jamie just as he loves me."

"He is a brawly fine lad. Peddie was saying there wasn't a better worker, nor a merrier one, in the whole fleet."

"A good heart is always a merry one, Andrew."

"I'm not doubting it."

Thus they talked with kind mutual sympathy and confidence; and a certain sweet serenity and glad composure spread through the little room, and the very atmosphere was full of the peace

and hope of innocent love. But some divine necessity of life ever joins joy and sorrow together; and even as the brother and sister sat speaking of their happiness, Christina heard a footstep that gave her heart a shock. Andrew was talking of Sophy, and he was not conscious of Jamie's approach until the lad entered the house. His face was flushed, and there was an air of excitement about him which Andrew regarded with an instant displeasure and suspicion. He did not answer Jamie's greeting, but said dourly:—

"You promised to take my place in the boat to-night, Jamie Logan; then what for are you here, at this hour? I see one thing, and that is, you cannot be trusted to."

"I deserve a reproof, Andrew, for I have earned it," answered Jamie; and there was an air of candid regret in his manner which struck Christina, but which was not obvious to Andrew as he added, "I'll not lie to you, anent the matter."

"You needn't. Nothing in life is worth a lie."

"That may be, or not be. But it was just this way. I met an old friend as I was on my way to the boat, and he was poor, and hungry, and thirsty, and I be to take him to the 'public,' and give him a bite and a sup. Then the whiskey set us talking of old times and old acquaintances, and I clean forgot the fishing; and the boats went away without me. And that is all there is to it."

"Far too much! Far too much! A nice lad you will be to trust to in a big ship full of men and women and children! A glass of whiskey, and a crack in the public house, set before your promised word and your duty! How will I trust Christina to you?

When you make Andrew Binnie a promise, he expects you to keep it. Don't forget that! It may be of some consequence to you if you are wanting his sister for a wife."

With these words Andrew rose, went into his own room without a word of good-night, and with considerable show of annoyance, closed and bolted the door behind him. Jamie sat down by Christina, and waited for her to speak.

But it was not easy for her to do so. Try as she would, she could not show him the love she really felt. She was troubled at his neglect of duty, and so sorry that he, of all others, should have been the one to cast the first shadow across the bright future which she had been anticipating before his ill-timed arrival. It was love out of time and season, and lacked the savour and spontaneity which are the result of proper conditions. Jamie felt the unhappy atmosphere, and was offended.

"I'm not wanted here, it seems," he said in a tone of injury.

"You are wanted in the boat, Jamie; that is where the fault lies. You should have been there. There is no outgait from that fact."

"Well then, I have said I was sorry. Is not that enough?"

"For me, yes. But Andrew likes a man to be prompt and sure in business. It is the only way to make money."

"Make money! I can make money among Andrew Binnie's feet, for all he thinks so much of himself. A friend's claims are before money-making. I'll stand to that, till all the seas go dry."

"Andrew has very strict ideas; you must have found that out, Jamie, and you should not go against them."

"Andrew is headstrong as the north-wind. He goes clear o'er the bounds both sides. Everything is the very worst, or the very best. I'm not denying I was a bit wrong; but I consider I had a good excuse for it."

"Is there ever a good excuse for doing wrong, Jamie? But we will let the affair drop out of mind and talk. There are pleasanter things to speak of, I'm sure."

But the interview was a disappointment. Jamie went continually back to Andrew's reproof, and Christina herself seemed to be under a spell. She could not find the gentle words that would have soothed her lover, her manner became chill and silent; and Jamie finally went away, much hurt and offended. Yet she followed him to the door, and watched him kicking the stones out of his path as he went rapidly down the cliff-side. And if she had been near enough, she would have heard him muttering angrily:—

"I'm not caring! I'm not caring! The moral pride of they Binnies is ridic'lus! One would require to be a very saint to come within sight of them."

Such a wretched ending to an evening that had begun with so much hope and love! Christina stood sadly at the open door and watched her lover across the lonely sands, and felt the natural disappointment of the circumstances. Then the moon began to rise, and when she noticed this, she remembered how late her mother was away from home, and a slight uneasiness crept into her heart. She threw a plaid around her head, and was going to the

neighbour's where she expected to find her, when Janet appeared.

She came up to the cliff slowly, and her face was far graver than ordinary when she entered the cottage, and with a pious ejaculation threw off her shawl.

"What kept you at all, Mother? I was just going to seek you."

"Watty Robertson has won away at last."

"When did he die?"

"He went away with the tide. He was called just at the turn. Ah, Christina, it is loving and dying all the time! Life is love and death; for what is our life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away."

"But Watty was well ready for the change, Mother?"

"He went away with a smile. And I staid by poor Lizzie, for I have drank of the same cup, and I know how bitter was the taste of it. Old Elspeth McDonald stretched the corpse, and her and I had a change of words; but Lizzie was with me."

"What for did you clash at such a like time?"

"She covered up his face, and I said: 'Stop your hand, Elspeth. Don't you go to cover Watty's face now. He never did ill to any one while he lived, and there's no need to hide his face when he is dead.' And we had a bit stramash about it, for I can't abide to hide up the face that is honest and well loved, and Lizzie said I was right, and so Elspeth went off in a tiff."

"I think there must be 'tiffs' floating about in the air to-night. Jamie and Andrew have had a falling out, and Jamie went away far less than pleased with me."

"What's to do between them?"

"Jamie met with an old friend who was hungry and thirsty, and he went with him to the 'public' instead of going to the boat for Andrew, as he promised to do. You know how Andrew feels about a word broken."

"*Toots!* Andrew Binnie has a deal to learn yet. You should have told him it was better to show mercy, than to stick at a mouthful of words. Had you never a soft answer to throw at the two fractious fools?"

"How could I interfere?"

"Finely! If you don't know the right way to throw with a thrawn man, like Andrew, and to come round a soft man, like Jamie, I'm sorry for you! A woman with a thimble-full of woman-wit could ravel them both up—ravel them up like a cut of worsteds."

"Well, the day is near over. The clock will chap twelve in ten minutes, and I'm going to my bed. I'm feared you won't sleep much, Mother. You look awake to your instep."

"Never mind. I have some good thoughts for the sleepless. Folks don't sleep well after seeing a man with wife and bairns round him look death and judgment in the face."

"But Watty looked at them smiling, you said?"

"He did. Watty's religion went to the bottom and extremity of things. I'll be asking this night for grace to live with, and then I'll get grace to die with when my hour comes. You needn't fash your heart about me. Sleeping or waking, I am in His charge. Nor

about Jamie; he'll be all right the morn. Nor about Andrew, for I'll tell him not to make a Pharisee of himself—he has his own failing, and it isn't far to seek."

And it is likely Janet had her intended talk with her son, for nothing more was said to Jamie about his neglect of duty, and the little cloud was but a passing one, and soon blew over. Circumstances favoured oblivion. Christina's love encompassed both her brother and her lover, and Janet's womanly tact turned every shadow into sunshine, and disarmed all suspicious or doubtful words. Also, the fishing season was an unusually good one; every man was of price, and few men were better worth their price than Jamie Logan. So an air of prosperity and happiness filled each little cottage, and Andrew Binnie was certainly saving money—a condition of affairs that always made him easy to live with.

As for the women of the village, they were in the early day up to their shoulders in work, and in the more leisurely evenings, they had Christina's marriage and marriage presents to talk about. The girl had many friends and relatives far and near, and every one remembered her. It was a set of china from an aunt in Crail, or napery from some cousins in Kirkcaldy, or quilts from her father's folk in Largo, and so on, in a very charming monotony. Now and then a bit of silver came, and once a very pretty American clock. And there was not a quilt or a tablecloth, a bit of china or silver, a petticoat or a ribbon, that the whole village did not examine, and discuss, and offer their congratulations

over.

Christina and her mother quite enjoyed this popular manifestation of interest, and Jamie was not at all averse to the good-natured familiarity. And though Andrew withdrew from such occasions, and appeared to be rather annoyed than pleased by the frequent intrusion of strange women, neither Janet nor Christina heeded his attitude very much.

"What for would we be caring?" queried the mother. "There is just one woman in the world to Andrew. If it was Sophy's wedding-presents now, he would be in a wonder over them! But he is not wanting you to marry at all, Christina. Men are a selfish lot. Somehow, I think he has taken a doubt or a dislike to Jamie. He thinks he isn't good enough for you."

"He is as good as I want him. I'm feared for men as particular as Andrew. They are whiles gey ill to live with. Andrew has not had a smile for a body for a long time, and he has been making money. I wonder if there is aught wrong between Sophy and himself."

"You might away to Largo and ask after the girl. She hasn't been here in a good while. And I'm thinking yonder talk she had with you anent Archie Braelands wasn't all out of her own head."

So that afternoon Christina put on her kirk dress, and went to Largo to see Sophy. Her walk took her over a lonely stretch of country, though, as she left the coast, she came to a lovely land of meadows, with here and there waving plantations of young spruce or fir trees. Passing the entrance to one of these sheltered

spots, she saw a servant driving leisurely back and forward a stylish dog-cart; and she had a sudden intuition that it belonged to Braelands. She looked keenly into the green shadows, but saw no trace of any human being; yet she had not gone far, ere she was aware of light footsteps hurrying behind her, and before she could realise the fact, Sophy called her in a breathless, fretful way "to wait a minute for her." The girl came up flushed and angry-looking, and asked Christina, "whatever brought her that far?"

"I was going to Largo to see you. Mother was getting worried about you. It's long since you were near us." "I am glad I met you. For I was wearied with the sewing to-day, and I asked Aunt to let me have a holiday to go and see you; and now we can go home together, and she will never know the differ. You must not tell her but what I have been to Pittendurie. My goodness! It is lucky I met you."

"But where have you been, Sophy?"

"I have been with a friend, who gave me a long drive."

"Who would that be?"

"Never you mind. There is nothing wrong to it. You may trust me for that, Christina. I was fairly worn out, and Aunt hasn't a morsel of pity. She thinks I ought to be glad to sew from Monday morning to Saturday night, and I tell you it hurts me, and gives me a cough, and I had to get a breath of sea-air or die for it. So a friend gave me what I wanted."

"But if you had come to our house, you could have got the sea-air finely. Sophy! Sophy! I am misdoubting what you tell me.

How came you in the wood?"

"We were taking a bit walk by ourselves there. I love the smell of the pines, and the peace, and the silence. It rests me; and I didn't want folks spying, and talking, and going with tales to Aunt. She ties me up shorter than needs be now."

"He was a mean fellow to leave you here all by yourself."

"I made him do it. Goodness knows, he is fain enough to be seen by high and low with me. But Andrew would not like it; he is that jealous-natured—and I just *be* to have some rest and fresh air."

"Andrew would gladly give you both."

"Not he! He is away to the fishing, or about his business, one way or another, all the time. And I am that weary of stitch, stitch, stitching, I could cry at the thought of it."

"Was it Archie Braelands that gave you the drive?"

"Ay, it was. Archie is just my friend, nothing more. I have told him, and better told him, that I am to marry Andrew."

"He is a scoundrel then to take you out."

"He is nothing of the kind. He is just a friend. I am doing Andrew no wrong, and myself a deal of good."

"Then why are you feared for people seeing you?"

"I am not feared. But I don't want to be the wonder and the talk of every idle body. And I am not able to bear my aunt's nag, nag, nag at me. I wish I was married. It isn't right of Andrew to leave me so much to myself. It will be his own fault if he loses me altogether. I am worn out with Aunt Kilgour, and my life is

a fair weariness to me."

"Andrew is getting everything brawly ready for you. I wish I could tell you what grand plans he has for your happiness. Be true to Andrew, Sophy, and you will be the happiest bride, and the best loved wife in all Scotland."

"Plans! What plans? What has he told you?"

"I am not free to speak, Sophy. I should not have said a word at all. I hope you will just forget I have."

"Indeed I will not! I will make Andrew tell me his plans. Why should he tell you, and not me? It is a shame to treat me that way, and he shall hear tell of it."

"Sophy! Sophy! I would as lief you killed me as told Andrew I had given you a hint of his doings. He would never forgive me. I can no forgive myself. Oh what a foolish, wicked woman I have been to say a word to you!" and Christina burst into passionate weeping.

"*Whist!* Christina; I'll never tell him, not I! I know well you slipped the words to pleasure me. But giff-gaff makes us good friends, and so you must just walk to the door with me and pass a word with my aunt, and say neither this nor that about me, and I will forget you ever said Andrew had such a thing as a 'plan' about me."

The proposal was not to Christina's mind, but she was ready to face any contingency rather than let Andrew know she had given the slightest hint of his intentions. She understood what joy he had in the thought of telling his great news to Sophy at

its full time, and how angry he would naturally feel at any one who interfered with his designs. In a moment, without intention, with the very kindest of motives, she had broken her word to her brother, and she was as miserable as a woman could be over the unhappy slip. And Sophy's proposal added to her remorse. It made her virtually connive at Sophy's intercourse with Archie Braelands, and she felt herself to be in a great strait. In order to favour her brother she had spoken hastily, and the swift punishment of her folly was that she must now either confess her fault or tacitly sanction a wrong against him.

For the present, she could see no way out of the difficulty. To tell Andrew would be to make him suspicious on every point. He would then doubtless find some other hiding place for his money, and if any accident did happen, her mother, and Sophy, and all Andrew loved, would suffer for her indiscretion. She took Sophy's reiterated promise, and then walked with the girl to her aunt's house. It was a neat stone dwelling, with some bonnets and caps in the front window, and when the door was opened, a bell rang, and Mistress Kilgour came hastily from an inner room. She looked pleased when she saw Sophy and Christina, and said:—

"Come in, Christina. I am glad you brought Sophy home in such good time. For I'm in a state of perfect frustration this afternoon. Here's a bride gown and bonnet to make, and a sound of more work coming."

"Who is to be married, Miss Kilgour?"

"Madame Kilrin of Silverhawes—a second affair, Christina,

and she more than middle-aged."

"She is rich, though?"

"That's it! rich, but made up of odds and ends, and but one eye to see with: a prelatie woman, too, seeking all things her own way."

"And the man? Who is he?"

"He is a lawyer. Them gentry have their fingers in every pie, hot or cold. However, I'm wishing them nothing but good. Madame is a constant customer. Come, come, Christina, you are not going already?"

"I am hurried to-night. Mistress Kilgour. Mother is alone. Andrew is away to Greenock on business."

"So you came back with Sophy. I am glad you did. There are some folks that are o'er ready to take charge of the girl, and some that seem to think she can take charge of herself. Oh, she knows fine what I mean!" And Miss Kilgour pointed her fore-finger at Sophy and shook her head until all the flowers in her cap and all the ringlets on her front hair dangled in unison.

Sophy had turned suddenly sulky and made no reply, and Miss Kilgour continued: "It is her way always, when she has been to your house, Christina. Whatever do you say to her? Is there anything agec between Andrew and herself? Last week and the week before, she came back from Pittendurie in a temper no saint could live with."

"I'm so miserable. Aunt. I am miserable every hour of my life."

"And you wouldn't be happy unless you were miserable, Sophy. Don't mind her talk, Christina. Young things in love don't know what they want."

"I am sick, Aunt."

"You are in love, Sophy, and that is all there is to it. Don't go, Christina. Have a cup of tea first?"

"I cannot stop any longer. Good-bye, Sophy. I'll tell Andrew to come and give you a walk to-morrow. Shall I?"

"If you like to. He will not come until Sunday, though; and then he will be troubled about walking on the Sabbath day. I'm not caring to go out."

"That is a lie, Sophy Traill!" cried her aunt. "It is the only thing you do care about."

"You had better go home, Christina," said Sophy, with a sarcastic smile, "or you will be getting a share of temper that does not belong to you. I am well used to it."

Christina made an effort to consider this remark as a joke, and under this cover took her leave. She was thankful to be alone with herself. Her thoughts and feelings were in a tumult; she could not bring any kind of reason out of their chaos. Her chagrin at her own folly was sharp and bitter. It made her cry out against herself as she trod rapidly her homeward road. Almost inadvertently, because it was the shortest and most usual way, she took the route that led her past Braelands. The great house was thrown open, and on the lawns was a crowd of handsomely dressed men and women, drinking tea at little tables set under the trees and among

the shrubbery. Christina merely glanced at the brave show of shifting colour, and passed more quickly onward, the murmur of conversation and the ripple of laughter pursuing her a little way, for the evening was warm and quiet.

She thought of Sophy among this gay crowd, and felt the incongruity of the situation, and a sense of anger sprung up in her breast at the girl's wicked impatience and unfaithfulness. It had caused her also to err, for she had been tempted by it to speak words which had been a violation of her own promise, and yet which had really done no good.

"She was always one of those girls that led others into trouble," she reflected. "Many a scolding she has got me when I was a wee thing, and to think that now! with the promise to Andrew warm on my lips, I have put myself in her power! It is too bad! It is not believable!"

She was glad when she came within sight of the sea; it was like a glimpse of home. The damp, fresh wind with its strong flavour of brine put heart into her, and the few sailors and fishers she met, with their sweethearts on their arms and their blue shirts open at their throats, had all a merry word or two to say to her. When she reached her home, she found Andrew sitting at a little table looking over some papers full of strange marks and columns of figures. His quick glance, and the quiet assurance of his love contained in it, went sorely to her heart. She would have fallen at his feet and confessed her unadvised admission to Sophy gladly, but she doubted, whether it would be the kindest and wisest thing

to do.

And then Janet joined them, and she had any number of questions to ask about Sophy, and Christina, to escape being pressed on this subject, began to talk with forced interest of Madame Kilrin's marriage. So, between this and that, the evening got over without suspicion, and Christina carried her miserable sense of disloyalty to bed and to sleep with her—literally to sleep, for she dreamed all night of the circumstance, and awakened in the morning with a heart as heavy as lead.

"But it is just what I deserve!" she said crossly to herself, as she laced her shoes, "what need had I to be caring about Sophy Traill and her whims? She is a dissatisfied lass at the best, and her love affairs are beyond my sorting. Serves you right, Christina Binnie! You might know, if anybody might, that they who put their oar into another's boat are sure to get their fingers rapped. They deserve it too."

However, Christina could not willingly dwell long on sorrowful subjects. She was always inclined to subdue trouble swiftly, or else to shake it away from her. For she lived by intuition, rather than by reason; and intuition is born of, and fed by, home affection and devout religion. Something too of that insight which changes faith into knowledge, and which is the birthright of primitive natures, was hers, and she divined, she knew not how, that Sophy would be true to her promise, and not say a word which would lead Andrew to doubt her. And so far she was right. Sophy had many faults, but the idea of breaking

her contract with Christina did not even occur to her.

She wondered what plans Andrew had, and what good surprise he was preparing for her, but she was in no special hurry to find it out. The knowledge might bring affairs to a permanent crisis between her and Andrew,—might mean marriage—and Sophy dreaded to face this question, with all its isolating demands. Her "friendship" with Archie Braelands was very sweet to her; she could not endure to think of any event which must put a stop to it. She enjoyed Archie's regrets and pleadings. She liked to sigh a little and cry a little over her hard fate; to be sympathised with for it; to treat it as if she could not escape from it; and yet to be nursing in her heart a passionate hope to do so.

And after all, the process of reflection is unnatural and uncommon to nine tenths of humanity; and so Christina lifted her daily work and interests, and tried to forget her fault. And indeed, as the weeks went on, she tried to believe it had been no fault, for Sophy was much kinder to Andrew for some time; this fact being readily discernible in Andrew's cheerful moods, and in the more kindly interest which he then took in his home matters.

"For it is well with us, when it is well with Sophy Traill, and we have the home weather she lets us have," Janet often remarked. The assertion had a great deal of truth in it. Sophy, from her chair in Mistress Kilgour's workroom, greatly influenced the domestic happiness of the Binnie cottage, even though they neither saw her, nor spoke her name. But her moods made Andrew happy or miserable, and Andrew's moods made Janet and Christina

happy or miserable; so sure and so wonderful a thing is human solidarity. Yes indeed! For what one of us has not known some man or woman, never seen, who holds the thread of a destiny and yet has no knowledge concerning it. This thought would make life a desperate tangle if we did not also know that One, infinite in power and mercy, guides every event to its predestined and its wisest end.

For a little while after Christina's visit, Sophy was particularly kind to Andrew; then there came a sudden change, and Christina noticed that her brother returned from Largo constantly with a heavy step and a gloomy face. Occasionally he admitted to her that he had been "sorely disappointed," but as a general thing he shut himself in his room and sulked as only men know how to sulk, till the atmosphere of the house was tingling with suppressed temper, and every one was on the edge of words that the tongue meant to be sharp as a sword.

One morning in October, Christina met her brother on the sands, and he said, "I will take the boat and give you a sail, if you like, Christina. There is only a pleasant breeze."

"I wish you would, Andrew," she answered. "This little northwester will blow every weariful thought away."

"I'm feared I have been somewhat cross and ill to do for, lately. Mother says so."

"Mother does not say far wrong. You have lost your temper often, Andrew, and consequent your common sense. And it is not like you to be unfair, not to say unkind; you have been that

more than once, and to two who love you dearly."

Andrew said no more until they were on the bay, then he let the oars drift, and asked:—

"What did you think of Sophy the last time you saw her? Tell me truly, Christina."

"Who knows aught about Sophy? She hardly knows her own mind. You cannot tell what she is thinking about by her face, any more than you can tell what she is going to do by her words. She is as uncertain as the wind, and it has changed since you lifted the oars. Is there anything new to fret yourself over?"

"Ay, there is. I cannot get sight of her."

"Are you twenty-seven years old, and of such a beggary of capacity as not to be able to concert time and place to see her?"

"But if she herself is against seeing me, then how am I going to manage?"

"What way did you find out that she was against seeing you?"

"Whatever else could I think, when I get no other thing but excuses? First, she was gone away for a week's rest, and Mistress Kilgour said I had better not trouble her—she was that nervous."

"Where did she go to?"

"I don't believe she was out of her aunt's house. I am sure the postman was astonished when I told him she was away, and her aunt's face was very confused-like. Then when I went again she had a headache, and could hardly speak a word to me; and she never named about the week's holiday. And the next time there was a ball dress making; and the next she had gone to the

minister's for her 'token,' and when I said I would go there and meet her, I was told not to think of such a thing; and so on, and so on, Christina. There is nothing but put-offs and put-bys, and my heart is full of sadness and fearful wonder."

"And if you do see her, what then, Andrew?"

"She is that low-spirited I do not know how to talk to her. She has little to say, and sits with her seam, and her eyes cast down, and all her pretty, merry ways are gone far away. I wonder where! Do you think she is ill, Christina?" he asked drearily.

"No, I do not, Andrew."

"Her mother died of a consumption, when she was only a young thing, you know."

"That is no reason why Sophy should die of a consumption. Andrew, have you ever told her what your plans are? Have you told her she may be a lady and live in London if it pleases her? Have you told her that you will soon be *Captain Binnie* of the North Sea fleet?"

"No, no! What for would I bribe the girl? I want her free given love. I want her to marry plain Andrew Binnie. I will tell her everything the very hour she is my wife. That is the joy I look forward to. And it is right, is it not?"

"No. It is all wrong. It is all wrong. Girls like men that have the spirit to win siller and push their way in the world."

"I cannot thole the thought of Sophy marrying me for my money."

"You think o'er much of your money. Ask yourself whether

in getting money you have got good, or only gold. And about marrying Sophy, it is not in your hand. Marriages are made in heaven, and unless there has been a booking of your two names above, I am feared all your courting below will come to little. Yet it is your duty to do all you can to win the girl you want; and I can tell you what will win Sophy Traill, if anything on earth will win her." Then she pointed out to him how fond Sophy was of fine dress and delicate living; how she loved roses, and violets, and the flowers of the garden, so much better than the pale, salt blossoms of the sea rack, however brilliant their colours; how she admired such a house as Braelands, and praised the glory of the peacock's trailing feathers. "The girl is not born for a poor man's wife," she continued, "her heart cries out for gold, and all that gold can buy; and if you are set on Sophy, and none but Sophy, you will have to win her with what she likes best, or else see some other man do so."

"Then I will be buying her, and not winning her."

"Oh you unspeakable man! Your conceit is just extraordinary! If you wanted any other good thing in life, from a big ship to a gold ring, would you not expect to buy it? Would your loving it, and wanting it, be sufficient? Jamie Logan knew well what he was about, when he brought us the letter from the Hendersons' firm. I love Jamie very dearly; but I'm free to confess the letter came into my consideration."

Talking thus, with the good wind blowing the words into his heart, Christina soon inspired Andrew with her own ideas and

confidence His face cleared; he began to row with his natural energy; and as they stepped on the wet sands together, he said almost joyfully:—

"I will take your advice, Christina. I will go and tell Sophy everything."

"Then she will smile in your face, she will put her hand in your hand; maybe, she will give you a kiss, for she will be thinking in her heart, 'how brave and how clever my Andrew is.' And he will be taking me to London and making me a lady!" and such thoughts breed love, Andrew. You are well enough, and few men handsomer or better—unless it be Jamie Logan—but it isn't altogether the man; it is what the man *can do*."

"I'll go and see Sophy to-morrow."

"Why not to-day?"

"She is going to Mariton House to fit a dress and do some sewing. Her aunt told me so."

"If I was you, I would not let her sew for strangers any longer. Go and ask her to marry you at once, and do not take 'no' from her."

"Your words stir my heart to the bottom of it, and I will do as you say, Christina; for Sophy has grown into my life, like my own folk, and the sea, and the stars, and my boat, and my home. And if she will love me the better for the news I have to tell her, I am that far gone in love with her I must even put wedding on that ground. Win her I must; or else die for her."

"Win her, surely; die for her, nonsense! No man worth the

name of man would die because a woman wouldn't marry him. God has made more than one good woman, more than one fair woman."

"Only one woman for Andrew Binnie."

"To be sure, if you choose to limit yourself in that way. I think better of you. And as for dying for a woman, I don't believe in it."

"Poor Matt Ballantyne broke his heart about Jessie Graham."

"It was a very poor heart then. Nothing mends so soon as a good heart. It trusts in the Omnipotent, and gets strength for its need, and then begins to look around for good it can do, or make for others, or take to itself. If Matt broke his heart for Jessie, Jessie would have been poorly cared for by such a weak kind of a heart. She is better off with Neil McAllister, no doubt."

"You have done me good, Christina. I have not heard so many sound observes in a long time."

And with that Janet came to the cliff-top and called to them to hurry. "Step out!" she cried, "here is Jamie Logan with a pocket full of great news; and the fish is frying itself black, while you two are daundering, as if it was your very business and duty to keep hungry folk waiting their dinner for you."

CHAPTER IV

THE LAST OF THE WHIP

With a joyful haste Christina went forward, leaving her brother to follow in more sober fashion. Jamie came to the cliff-top to meet her, and Janet from the cottage door beamed congratulations and radiant sympathy.

"I have got my berth on the Line, Christina! I am to sail next Friday from Greenock, so I'll start at once, my dearie! And I am the happiest lad in Fife to-day!"

He had his arms around her as he spoke, and he kissed her smiles and glad exclamations off her lips before she could put them into words. Then Andrew joined them, and after clasping hands with Jamie and Christina, he went slowly into the cottage, leaving the lovers alone outside. Janet was all excitement.

"I'm like to greet with the good news, Andrew," she said, "it came so unexpected Jamie was just daundering over the sands, kind of down-hearted, he said, and wondering if he would stay through the winter and fish with Peddle or not, when little Maggie Johnston cried out, 'there is a big letter for you, Jamie Logan,' and he went and got it, and, lo and behold! it was from the Hendersons themselves! And they are needing Jamie now, and he'll just go at once, he says. There's luck for you! I am both laughing and crying with the pride and the pleasure of it!"

"I wouldn't make such a fuss, anyway, Mother. It is what Jamie has been looking for and expecting, and I am glad he has won to it at last."

"Fuss indeed! Plenty of 'fuss' made over sorrow; why not over joy? And if you think me a fool for it, I'm not sure but I might call you my neighbour, if it was only Sophy Traill or her affairs to be 'fussed' over."

"Never mind Sophy, Mother. It is Jamie and Christina now, and Christina knows her happiness is dear to me as my own."

"Well then, show it, Andrew. Show it, my lad! We must do what we can to put heart into poor Jamie; for when all is said and done, he is going to foreign parts and leaving love and home behind." And she walked to the door and looked at Jamie and Christina, who were standing on the cliff-edge together, deeply engaged in a conversation that was of the highest interest to themselves. "I have fancied you have been a bit shy with Jamie since yon time he set an old friend before his promise to you, Andrew; but what then?"

"I wish Christina had married among our own folk. I have no wrong to say in particular of Jamie Logan, but I think my sister might have made her life with some good man a bit closer to her."

"I thought, Andrew, that you were able to look sensibly at what comes and goes. If it was a matter of business, you would be the first to see the advantage of building your dyke with the stones you could get at. And you may believe me or not, but there's a deal of the successful work of this life carried through on that

principle. Well, in marrying it is just as wise. The lad you *can* get, is happen better than the lad you *want*. Anyhow Christina is going to marry Jamie; and I'm sure he is that loving and pleasant, and that fond of her, that I have no doubt she will be happy as the day is long."

"I hope it is the truth, Mother, that you are saying."

"It is; but some folks won't see the truth, though they are dashing their noses against it. None so blind as they who won't see."

"Well, it isn't within my right to speak to-day."

"Yes, it is. It is your right and place to speak all the good and hopeful words you can think of. Don't be dour, Andrew. Man! man! how hard it is to rejoice with them that do rejoice! It takes more Christianity to do that than most folks carry around with them."

"Mother, you are a perfectly unreasonable woman. You flyte at me, as if I was a laddie of ten years old—but I'll not dare to say but what you do me a deal of good;" and Andrew's face brightened as he looked at her.

"You would hardly do the right thing, if I didn't flyte at you, Andrew. And maybe I wouldn't do it myself, if I was not watching you; having nobody to scold and advise is very like trying to fly a kite without wind. Go to the door and call in Jamie and Christina. We ought to take an interest in their bit plans and schemes; and if we take it, we ought to show we take it."

Then Andrew rose and went to the open door, and as he went

he laid his big hand on his mother's shoulder, and a smile flew from face to face, and in its light every little shadow vanished. And Jamie was glad to bring in his promised bride, and among her own people as they eat together, talk over the good that had come to them, and the changes that were incident to it. And thus an hour passed swiftly away, and then "farewells" full of love and hope, and laughter and tears, and hand-clasping, and good words, were said; and Jamie went off to his new life, leaving a thousand pleasant hopes and expectations behind him.

After he was fairly out of sight, and Christina stood looking tearfully into the vacancy where his image still lingered, Andrew led her to the top of the cliff, and they sat down together. It was an exquisite afternoon, full of the salt and sparkle of the sea; and for awhile both remained silent, looking down on the cottages, and the creels, and the drying nets. The whole village seemed to be out, and the sands were covered with picturesque figures in sea-boots and striped hanging caps, and with the no less picturesque companion figures in striped petticoats. Some of the latter were old women, and these wore high-crowned, unbordered caps of white linen; others were young women, and these had no covering at all on their exuberant hair; but most of them displayed long gold rings in their ears, and bright scarlet or blue kerchiefs round their necks. Andrew glanced from these figures to his sister; and touching her striped petticoat, he said:—

"You'll be changing this for what they call a gown, when you go to Glasgow! How soon is that to be, Christina?"

"When Jamie has got well settled in his place. It wouldn't be prudent before."

"About the New Year, say?"

"Ay; about the New Year."

"I am thinking of giving you a silk gown for your wedding."

"O Andrew! if you would! A silk gown would set me up above every thing! I'll never forget such a favour as that."

"I'll do it."

"And Sophy will see to the making of it. Sophy has a wonderful taste about trimming, and the like of that. Sophy will stand up with me, and you will be Jamie's best man; won't you, Andrew?"

"Ay, Sophy will see to the making of it. Few can make a gown look as she can. She is a clever bit thing"—then after a pause he added sadly, "there was one thing I did not tell you this morning; but it is a circumstance I feel very badly about."

"What is it? You know well that I shall feel with you."

"It is the way folks keep hinting this and that to me; but more, that I am mistrusting Mistress Kilgour. I saw a young fellow standing at the shop door talking to her the other morning very confidential-like—a young fellow that could not have any lawful business with her."

"What kind of a person was he?"

"A large, dark man, dressed like a picture in a tailor's window. His servant-man, in a livery of brown and yellow, was holding the horses in a fine dog-cart. I asked Jimmy Faulds what his name

was and he laughed and said it was Braelands of Braelands, and he should think I knew it and then he looked at me that queer, that I felt as if his eyes had told me of some calamity. 'What is he doing at Mistress Kilgour's?' I asked as soon as I could get myself together, and Jimmy answered, 'I suppose he is ordering Madame Braelands' millinery,' and then he snickered and laughed again, and I had hard lines to keep my hands from striking him.'

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