Barr Amelia E.

A Reconstructed Marriage

Amelia Barr

A Reconstructed Marriage

Barr A.

A Reconstructed Marriage / A. Barr — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

Barr Amelia E.
A Reconstructed Marriage

CHAPTER I
A PROSPECTIVE MOTHER-IN-LAW

As it was Saturday morning, Mrs. Traquair Campbell was examining her weekly accounts and clearing off her week's correspondence; for she found it necessary to her enjoyment of the Sabbath Day that her mind should be free from all worldly obligations. This was one of the inviolable laws of Traquair House, enunciated so frequently and so positively by its mistress, that it was seldom violated in any way.

It was therefore with fear and uncertainty that Miss Campbell ventured to break this rule, and to open softly the door of her mother's room. No notice was taken of the intruder for a few moments, but her presence proving disastrous to the total of a line of figures which Mrs. Campbell was adding, she looked up with visible annoyance and asked:

"What do you want, Isabel? You are disturbing me very much, and you know it."

"I beg pardon, mother, but I think the occasion will excuse me."

"What is the occasion?"

"There is something in my brother's room that I feel sure you ought to see."

"Could you not have waited until I had finished my work here?"

"No, mother. It is Saturday, and Robert may be home by an early train. I think he will, for he is apparently going to England."

"Going to England, so near the Sabbath? Impossible! What set your thoughts on that track?"

"His valise is packed, and directed to Sheffield; but I think he will stop at a town called Kendal. He may go to Sheffield afterwards, of course."

"Kendal! Where is Kendal? I never heard of the place. What do you know about it?"

"Nothing at all. But in going over the mail, I noticed that four letters with the Kendal post-office stamp came to Robert this week. They were all addressed in the same handwriting – a woman's."

"Isabel Campbell!"

"It is the truth, mother."

"Why did you not name this singular circumstance before?"

"It was not my affair. Robert would likely have been angry at my noticing his letters. I have no right to interfere in his life. You have – if it seems best to do so."

"Have you told me all?"

"No, mother."

"What else?"

"There is on his dressing table, loosely folded in tissue paper, an exquisite Bible."

"Very good. Robert cannot have The Word too exquisitely bound."

"I do not think Robert intends this copy of the Word for his own use. No, indeed!"

"Why should you think different?"

"It is bound in purple velvet. The corner pieces are of gold, and a little gold plate on the cover has engraved upon it the word *Theodora*. Can you imagine Robert Traquair Campbell using a Bible like that? It would be remarked by every one in the church. I am sure of it."

Mrs. Campbell had dropped her pencil and had quite forgotten her accounts and letters. Her hard, handsome face was flushed with anger, her tawny-colored eyes full of calculating mischief, as she demanded with scornful passion:

"What is your opinion, Isabel?"

"I can only have one opinion, mother. You know on what occasion a young man gives such a Bible. I am compelled to believe that Robert is engaged to marry some woman called Theodora, who lives probably at Kendal."

"He can not! He shall not! He must marry Jane Dalkeith, – Jane, and no other woman. I will not permit him to bring a stranger here, and an Englishwoman is out of all consideration. *Theodora, indeed! Theodora!*" and she flung the three words from her with a scorn no language could transcribe.

"It is not a Scotch name, mother. I never knew any one called Theodora."

"Scotch? the idea! Does it sound like Scotch? No, not a letter of it. There were never any Theodoras among the Traquairs, or the Campbells, and I will not have any. Robert will find that out very quickly. Why, Isabel, Honor is before Love, and Honor compels Robert to marry Jane Dalkeith. Her father saved Robert's father from utter ruin, and I believe Jane holds some claim yet upon the Campbell furnaces. It has always been understood that Robert and Jane would marry, and I am sure the poor, dear girl loves Robert."

"I do not believe, mother, that Jane could love any one but herself; and I feel sure that if the Campbells owed her money, she would have collected it long ago. Why do you not ask Robert about the money? He will know if anything is owing."

"Because Scotch men resent women asking questions about their business. They will not answer them truly; often they will not answer them at all."

"Ask Jane Dalkeith herself."

"Indeed, I will not. When you are as old as I am, you will have learned to let sleeping dogs lie."

"Will you go and look at the Bible?"

"It is not likely I will be so foolish. Surely you do not require to be told that Robert left it there for that purpose. He has his defence ready on the supposition that I will ask him about this Theodora. On the contrary, he shall bring the whole tale to me, beginning and end, and I shall make the telling of it as difficult and disagreeable as possible."

"I am afraid I have interfered with your Saturday's duties, mother; but I thought you ought to know."

"As mother and mistress I ought to know all that concerns either the family or Traquair House. I will now finish my examinations and correspondence. And Isabel, when Robert comes home, ask him no questions, and give him no hint as to what has been discovered. I am very angry at him. He ought to have told me about the woman at the very beginning of the affair; and I should have put a stop to it at once. It might have been more easily managed then than it will be now."

"Can you put a stop to it at all, mother?"

"Can I put a stop to it?" she cried scornfully. "I can, and I will!"

"Robert is a very determined man."

"And I am a very positive woman. At the last and the long, in any dispute, the woman wins."

"Sometimes the man wins."

"Nonsense! If he does win now and then, it is always a barren victory. He loses more than he gains."

"I don't wish to discourage you, mother, but Robert is gey stubborn, and I feel sure that in this case he will take his own way, and no other person's way."

"I desire you not to contradict me, Isabel." She turned to her papers, lifted her pencil, and to all appearance was entirely occupied by her bills and letters. Isabel gave her one strange, inexplicable look ere she left the room, shutting the door this time without regard to noise and with something very like temper.

In the corridor she hesitated, standing with one foot ready to descend the stairs, but urged by a variety of feelings to take the upward flight which led to her own and her sister Christina's rooms. At present she was "out" with Christina, and they had not spoken to each other, when alone, for three

days. But now the pleasure of having something new and unusual to tell, the desire to talk it over, and perhaps also a modest little wish to be friends with her sister, who was her chief confidant and ally, induced her to seek Christina in her room.

She knocked gently at the door, and Christina said in an imperative voice, "Come in." She thought it was one of the maids, and Christina wasted no politeness on any one, unless manifestly to her own interest or pleasure. But Isabel understood the curt permission was not intended for her, and, opening the door, went into the room. Christina, who was reading, lifted her eyes and then dropped them again to the book. For she was amazed at her sister's visit, and knew not what to say, priority of birth being in English and Scotch families of some consequence. In their numerous disagreements Christina had never expected Isabel to make the first advances towards reconciliation. Almost without exception she had been the one to apologize, and she had been thinking about ending their present trouble when Isabel visited her.

For a few minutes she was undecided, but as Isabel took a comfortable chair and was evidently going to remain, Christina realized that her elder sister had made a silent advance, and that she was expected to speak first. So she laid down her book, and pushing a stool under Isabel's feet, said in a fretful, worried voice:

"I am so glad to see you, sister. I have been very unhappy without your company. You know I have no friend but you. I am sorry I spoke rudely to you. Forgive me!"

"Christina, we are the world to each other. No one else seems to care anything about us, and it is foolish to quarrel."

"It was my fault, Isabel. I ought to have known you were not wearing my collar intentionally."

"Why should I? I have plenty of collars of my own. But we will not go into explanations. It is better to agree to forget the circumstance."

"Life is so lonely without you, and our little chats with each other are the only pleasure I have. I wonder if there is, in all Glasgow, a house so dull as this house is."

"It will soon be busy and gay enough. Things are going to be very different in Traquair House. They may not effect our lives much – it is too late for that, Christina – but we shall have the fun of watching the rows there are sure to be with mother. Bring your chair near to me. I have a great secret to tell you."

As they sat down together it was impossible to avoid noticing how much they resembled each other personally. Nature had intended both of them to be beautiful, but their obtuse, grieved faces had been marred in early years by the disappointments, sorrows, and tragic mistakes of the children of long ago; and later by their pathetic acquiescence in their ill-assorted fates, and the cruel certainty of youth gone forever, without the knowledge of youth's delights. Isabel was now thirty-three years old, and Christina twenty-eight, and on their dark faces, and in their sombre, black eyes, there was a resentful gloom; the shadow of lives that felt themselves to be blighted beyond the power of any good fortune to redeem.

The two sisters had lost hope early, and for this weakness they were partly excusable, since they had the most crushing and unsympathetic of mothers. Mrs. Campbell was a woman of iron constitution, iron nerves, and principles of steel. She was never sick, and she was angry if her children were sick; she met every trouble with fight, she was contemptuous to those who wept; she was never weary, but she made life a burden to all under her sway.

In another way their father had been still more unfortunate to them. Intensely vain and arrogant, he had inherited a large business which he had not had the ability or the intelligence to manage. When he had nearly ruined it, the generosity of a distant relative – jealous for the honor of the name – came to the rescue; but he placed over all other authority a manager who knew what he was doing, and who was amenable to advice. Then Traquair Campbell, unwilling to acknowledge any superior, became a semi-invalid; and retired to a seclusion which had no other duty than the indulgence of his every whim and desire, making his two daughters the handmaids of his idle, self-centred hours. Year after

year this slavery continued, and their youth, beauty, and education, their hopes, pleasures, and even their friends, were all demanded in sacrifice to that dreadful incarnation of Self, who made filial duty his claim on them. It was scarcely two years since they had been emancipated by his death, and the terror of the past and the shadow of it was yet over them.

Such treatment would have soured even good dispositions, but the nature of both these girls was as awry by inheritance, as their destiny in regard to parental influence and environment had been tragically unfortunate. Only the loftiest or the sweetest of spirits could have dominated the evil influences by which they were surrounded, and turned them into healthy and happy ones. And neither Isabel nor Christina knew the uplifting of a lofty ideal, nor yet the gentle power of the soft word and the loving smile.

Sitting close together and moved by the same feelings, their physical resemblance was remarkable. As before said, Nature had intended them to be beautiful. Their features were regular, their hair abundant, their eyes dark and well formed, their figures tall and slender, but they lacked those small accessories to beauty without which it appears crude and undeveloped. Their faces were dull and uninteresting for want of that interior light of the soul and intellect without which "the human face divine" is not divine – is indeed only flesh and blood. Their abundant hair was badly cared for, and not becomingly arranged; their figures, in spite of tight lacing, badly managed and ungracefully clothed; their eyes, though dark and long-lashed, carried no illumination and were only expressive of evil or bitter emotions; they knew not either the languors or the sweet lights of love or pity. Isabel and Christina had slipped about sick rooms too much; and they had been too little in the busy world to estimate themselves by comparison with others, and so find out their deficiencies.

This morning their likeness to each other was accentuated by the fact that they were dressed exactly alike in dark brown merino, with a narrow band of white linen round their throats. Each had fastened the linen band with a gold brooch of the same pattern, and both wore a small Swiss watch pinned on her plain, tight waist.

Isabel reclined in her chair, and as she knew all there was to know at present, a faint smile of satisfaction was on her face. Christina sat upright, with an almost childish expression of expectation.

"What do you know, Isabel?" she asked impatiently. "How, or why, are things going to be different in Traquair House?"

"Because there is to be a marriage in the family."

"A marriage! Is it mother? Old lawyer Galt has been very attentive lately."

"No, it is not mother."

"Then it is Robert?"

Isabel nodded assent.

Christina's eyes filled with a dull, angry glow, and there were tears in her voice, as she cried:

"If that is so, Isabel, I will leave Traquair House. I will not live with Jane Dalkeith. She is worse than mother. She would count every mouthful we ate, and make remarks as nasty as herself."

"Exactly. That would be Jane's way; but I am led to believe Robert will never marry Jane Dalkeith."

"Who then is he going to marry? I never heard of Robert paying attention to any girl."

"I have found out the person he is paying attention to."

"Who is it, Isabel? Tell me. I will never mention the circumstance."

"Her name is Theodora."

"What a queer name – Miss Theodora. Do you know, it sounds like a Christian name; it surely can not be a surname."

"You are right. I do not know her surname."

"How did you find it out – I mean Robert's love affair?"

Isabel described the discovery of the velvet-bound Bible while Christina listened with greedy interest. "You know, Christina," she added, "that a young man on his engagement always gives the girl a Bible."

"Yes, I know; even servant girls get a Bible when they are engaged. Our Maggie and Kitty did; they showed them to me. Do the men swear their love and promises on them?"

"I should not wonder. If so, a great many are soon forsworn!"

"Is that all you know, Isabel?"

"Four times this week she has written to Robert. I saw the letters in the mail."

"Love letters, I suppose?"

"No doubt of it."

"How immodest! Do you know where she lives?"

"At a town called Kendal."

"I never heard of the place. Is it near Motherwell? Robert often goes to Motherwell."

"It is in England."

"Oh, Isabel, you frighten me! An Englishwoman! Whatever will mother say? How could Robert think of such a dreadful thing! What shall we do?"

"I see no occasion for us either to say or to do. There will be some grand set-tos between mother and Robert. We may get some amusement out of them."

"Mother will insist on Robert giving up the Englishwoman. She will make him do it."

"I do not think she will be able. Mind what I say."

"Robert has been under mother all his life."

"That is so, but he will make a stand about this Theodora, and mother will have to give in. He is now master of the works, and you will see that he will be master of the house also. He will take possession of himself, and everything else. I fancy we shall all find more changes than we can imagine."

"I don't care if we do! Anything for a change. I am almost weary of my life. Nothing ever happens in it."

"Plenty will happen soon. Robert has a way of his own, and that will be seen and heard tell of."

"He will not dare to counter mother very much. She will talk strict and positive, and hold her head as high as a hen drinking water. You know how she talks and acts."

"I know also how Robert will take her talking. I have seen Robert's way twice lately."

"What is his way?"

"A dour, cold silence, worse than any words – a silence that minds you of a black frost."

Having finished her story Isabel looked at her watch, and said: "I'll be going now, Christina, and you can think over what is coming. We be to consider ourselves in any change. I am almost sure Robert will be home to-day at one o'clock, for if I am not mistaken, it will be the Caledonian Railway Station at three o'clock. That train will land him in Kendal about eight o'clock, just in time to drink a cup of tea with Theodora, and have a stroll after it. There is a full moon to-night."

"How did you find out about Kendal?"

"Bradshaw; I suppose he knows."

"Of course, but it will be late Saturday night when Robert arrives, and surely he will not think of making love so near the Sabbath Day. I would not believe that of him, however much he likes Theodora."

"A handsome young Master of Iron Works can make love any day he pleases; even Scotchwomen would listen gladly to what he had to say. I think I would myself."

"I would, but it might be wrong, Isabel."

"I don't believe it would; anyway I would risk it."

"So would I; but neither of us will be led into the temptation."

"I fear not. Now I will be stepping downstairs. I have no more to say at present and I should not like to miss Robert."

"We are friends again, Isabel?"

"We are aye friends, Christina. Whiles, there is a shadow between us, but it is only a shadow – nothing to it but what a word puts right. There is the lunch bell."

"I had no idea it was so late."

"Let us go down together. I hate the servants to be whispering and snickering anent our little terrivees."

They had scarcely seated themselves at the table when Robert entered the room. He was a typical Scot of his order – tall, blonde, and very erect. His eyes were his most noticeable feature; they were modern eyes with that steely point of electric light in them never seen in the older time. The lids, drawn horizontally over them, spoke for the man's acuteness and dexterity of mind, and perhaps also for his superior cunning. He was arrogant in manner, a trait either inherited or assumed from his mother. In disposition he was kindly disposed to all who had claims on him, but these claims required to be brought to his notice, for he did not voluntarily seek after them. He certainly had humanity of feeling, but of the delicacies and small considerations of life he was very ignorant.

As yet he was commonplace, because nothing had happened to him. He had neither lost money, nor broken down in health, nor been unfairly treated or unjustly blamed. He had never known the want of money, nor the necessity for work; he had lost nothing by death and was only beginning to gain by loving. In the eyes of all who knew him his conduct was blameless. He was very righteous, and a great stickler for morality and all respectable conventions; so much so, that even if he should sin, it would be done with a certain decorum. But spiritually his soul lived in a lane – the narrow lane of a bigoted Calvinism.

This morning he was in high spirits, and inclined to be unusually talkative. But it was not until the meal was nearly over that he said: "There will be a new preacher in our church to-morrow morning. I am sorry I shall not be able to hear him. Dr. Robertson says he has a wonderful gift in expounding the Word."

"When did you see the doctor?" asked Mrs. Campbell.

"This morning. He called at my office on a little matter of business."

"And why will you not hear the new preacher?"

"I am going to England by the three o'clock train, mother."

At this answer Isabel looked at Christina, and Mrs. Campbell said: "I suppose you are going to Sheffield?"

"Yes, I shall go to Sheffield."

"You go there a great deal."

"It belongs to my duty to go there."

With these words he suddenly became – not exactly cross – but reserved and ungracious. His mother's words had betrayed her. As soon as she remarked on the frequency of his visits to Sheffield, he knew that she was aware of the facts that she had positively asserted she would not name, and he divined her intention to put him in the position of one who confesses a fault or acknowledges a weakness. He retired immediately into the fortress of his manly superiority. He was not going to be put to catechism by a cabal of women, so he hastily finished his lunch and rose from the table.

"When will you return, Robert?" asked his mother.

"In a few days. You had better give liberally to the church collection to-morrow – paper or gold – silver from you will be remarked on." He opened the door to these words, and, turning a moment, said "good-bye" with a glance which included every one in the room.

Silence followed his exit. Mrs. Campbell cut her veal chop into minute strips, which she did not intend to eat; Isabel crumbled her bread on her plate, lifted her scornful eyes a moment, and then began to fold her napkin; Christina took the opportunity to help herself to another tartlet. It was an

uncomfortable pause, not to be relieved until Mrs. Campbell chose to speak or rise. She continued the purposeless cutting of her food, until Isabel's patience was worn out, and she asked: "Shall I ring the bell, mother?"

"No, I have not finished my lunch; you can safely bide my time. Christina, pass me a tart."

"Take two, mother. McNab makes them smaller every day. There is only a mouthful in two of them."

Mrs. Campbell took no notice of the criticism.

"Isabel," she said, "what do you think of Robert's behavior?"

"Do you mean the sudden change in his manner?"

"Yes."

"He had his own 'because' for it. I do not rightly comprehend what it could be, unless he suspected from your remark that you had seen the Bible, and were trying to lure him on to talk of Theodora."

"That is uncommonly likely, but I'm not caring if he did."

"Robert is very shrewd, and he sees through people as if they were made of glass."

"If he is going to marry the girl, why should he object to tell us about her? Is she too good to talk about? Such perfect unreasonableness!"

"He wished to tell us in his own time, and way, and thought a plot had been laid to force his confidence. Robert Campbell is a very suspicious man. He has a bad temper too. It is always near at hand, and short as a cat's hair. And he hates a scene."

"So do I. Goodness knows, I have always lifted myself above the ordinary of quarrelling and disputing. Not so, Robert. He investigates the outs and the ins of everything, and argues and argues about the most trifling matter; but I must say, he is always in the wrong. And he can keep his confidence as long as he wants to – the longer the better. I shall never give him another opportunity."

"It is a pity you offered him one this morning, mother."

"I do not require to be reminded, Isabel. The whole affair, as it stands, is an utterly unspeakable business. We will let it alone until we have more facts, and more light given us."

"Just so," answered Isabel.

"Mother," interrupted Christina, "what do you say about the new preacher and the collection?"

"I know nothing about the new preacher. Dr. Robertson has aye got some wonderfully gifted tongue in his pulpit, and all just to beguile the silver out o' your purse."

"Robert said we were not to give silver."

"You will each of you give a silver crown piece; that, and not a bawbee over it. As for myself, I am not going to church at all to-morrow. I am o'erfull of my own thoughts and trouble. God will excuse me, I have no doubt, for He knows the heart of a wounded mother."

"Do you know what the collection is for, mother?"

"The Foreign Missionary Fund. I have always been opposed to Foreign Missions. The conversion of the heathen is in God's wise foreknowledge, and He will accomplish it in His own way and time. It is not clear to me that we have any right to interfere with His plans."

"The world will come to an end when the heathen are converted," said Christina. "Dr. Robertson read us prophecies to prove it, and then will occur the Millennium, and the second coming of – "

"Hush, Christina!" cried Mrs. Campbell impatiently. "The world is a very good world, and suits me well enough in spite of Theodora, and the like of her. I hope the world will not come to an end while I live. As to the collection, you might each of you, as I said before, give a silver crown piece. It is enough. Young people are not expected to give extravagantly."

"We are not young people, mother."

"You are not married people. Women without husbands are not supposed to have money to give away; women with husbands don't often have it either, poor things!"

"The greatest of all calamities is to be born a woman," said Isabel, bitterly.

"Especially a Scotchwoman," added Mrs. Campbell. "I have heard that in the United States of America women are very honorably treated. Mrs. Oliphant, who is from New York, told me a respectable man always consulted his wife about his business, and his pleasure, and all that concerns him, 'and in consequence,' she added, 'they are happy and prosperous.'"

"I did not know Mrs. Oliphant was an American," said Isabel. "Mr. Oliphant comes from Inverness."

"Inverness men are *too far north* to be fools; and Tom Oliphant soon found out that his wife's judgment and good sense more than doubled his working capital. People say, 'Tom Oliphant has been lucky,' and so he has, because he had intelligence enough to take his wife's advice. But this is not a profitable or improving conversation, so near the Sabbath. I will go to my room for an hour or two, girls. I have much to think about."

She left them with an air of despondency, but her daughters knew she was not really unhappy. Some opposition to her supremacy she foresaw, but the impending struggle interested her. She was not afraid of it nor yet doubtful of its result.

"I know my own son, I hope," she whispered to herself, "and as for Theodora —*that* for Theodora!" And she snapped her fingers scornfully and defiantly.

Isabel and Christina followed their mother, taking the long, broad stairway with much slower steps. Their dull faces, listless tread, and monotonous speech were in remarkable contrast to the passionate eagerness of the elder woman, whose whole body radiated scorn and anger. As they began the ascent, the clock struck three, and Isabel looked at Christina, who answered her with a slight movement of the head.

"He is just leaving the Caledonian Station," she said.

"For Theodora," replied Christina bitterly.

"How I hate that name already!"

"And the girl also, Isabel?"

"Yes, the girl also. What has she to do in our family? The Campbells can live without her – fine!"

"I wonder if Mrs. Robertson will ask us to meet this new minister."

"I hope not. He will just be one of her 'divinity lads,' with his license to preach fresh in his pocket. They are all of them poor and sickeningly young. No man is fit to marry until he is forty years old, unless you want the discipline of training him."

"That is some of Mrs. Oliphant's talk, Isabel."

"Mrs. Oliphant knows what she is talking about, Christina."

"I wonder what you see in that American!"

"Everything I would like to be – if I dared."

"Why do you not call on her, then?"

"Mother does not approve either of her conversation, or her dress, Christina."

"Her dress is lovely. I wish I could dress like her."

"Christina Campbell! Her neck is shockingly uncovered, and her trains half fill a small room. Mother says her modesty begins at her feet – and stops there; but she is certainly very clever, and her husband waits on her like a lover. The men look at him as if they thought him a fool, but very likely he is the only wise man among them. What are you going to do this afternoon?"

"Dress and then unpick the work I did yesterday. It is all wrong."

"How interesting!"

"As much so as anything else. I should like to practise a little, but the piano is closed on Saturdays."

"That's all right. You always had a knack of playing unsuitable music on Saturdays."

"Mother makes two Sundays in a week. It isn't fair."

By this time they were on the corridor of the floor on which their rooms were situated, and as they stood at the door of Isabel's room, Christina said: "At eight o'clock to-night, I wish you would make a remark about Robert being with Theodora."

"Make it yourself, Christina."

"You know mother pays no attention to anything I say. You are the eldest."

But at dinner time Mrs. Campbell was in a mood so gloomy, that even Isabel did not care to remind her of her son's delinquency. She did not speak during dinner, and when tea was served she rose from the sofa with a sigh so portentous, it caused the footman to stand still in the middle of the drawing-room with the little silver kettle steaming in his hand. She took her own cup with a sigh, and every time she lifted it or put it down, she sighed deeply. Very soon Isabel began to sigh also, and Christina ventured timidly to express her feelings in the same miserable manner. But there was no spoken explanation of these mournful symptoms, unless they typified disapproval and sorrow beyond the reach of words.

As they sat thus with their teacups in their hands, a little clock on the mantel struck eight. Mrs. Campbell cast reproachful eyes upon it. "It reminds me, Isabel," she sighed; "you said eight o'clock, I think. My poor son! He is now entering the gates of temptation."

"I should not worry, mother. Robert is quite able to take care of himself."

Judging from the happy alacrity with which Robert left the train at Kendal Station, Isabel's opinion was well founded. He had no doubts about the road he was taking. He leaped into a cab, left his valise at the Crown Inn, and then rode rapidly down the long antique street to a pretty cottage standing with a church, or chapel, in a green croft surrounded by poplar trees.

The moon was full in the east, and the twilight still lingered in the west, and in that heavenly gloaming a woman walked lightly towards the little gate to welcome him. She had a tall, elastic, slender figure, and moved with swift, graceful steps; her white dress, in that shadowy mysterious light, giving her an ethereal beauty beyond description.

Robert took both her hands, kissed them passionately, and led her to a little rustic bench under the poplars. For a few moments they sat there, and he filled his eyes and heart with her loveliness. Then they went into the cottage and he found – as Isabel had predicted – that tea was waiting for him. Theodora's mother, a woman of scrupulous neatness, simple and unadorned, was sitting at the table; she smiled and gave him her hand, and he sat down beside her.

"How is Mr. Newton?" asked Robert.

"He is in his study," she answered. "He will be here in a few minutes. He does not wish us to wait for him."

Theodora was at Robert's right hand, and never before had he thought her beauty so bewildering. It had the magic of a countenance where the intellect was of a high order, and the perfect features were the portrait of a pure, translucent soul such as God loves. Her eyes transfigured her, but the process was not intentional. Her sensitive lips, her bright soft smile, her joyful heart, the fulness of her health and life, all these things were entrancing, and made still more so, by an unconsciousness sincere and natural as that of a bird, or a flower. Robert Campbell might well feel his unworthiness, and tremble lest so great a blessing should escape him.

In a short time Mr. Newton entered. He had a tall, intellectual figure, with the stoop forward and piercing glance of one straining after things invisible. A singular unearthliness pervaded the whole man, and his spare form appeared to be the suitable apparel for a pure and exalted spirit. Prayer was his native air. He prayed even in his dreams.

After some inquiries about the journey, the conversation turned naturally to the subject of preaching. Robert Campbell remarked that, "Sunday newspapers, Sunday magazines, and above all Sunday trips down the river, had in Glasgow greatly injured Sabbath observance and weakened the influence of the pulpit."

"No, no, sir!" cried the preacher; "books, papers, amusements, nothing, can take the place of sermons. The *face to face* element is indispensable. It is *the Word made Flesh* that prevails. As soon as a real preacher appears, what crowds follow him! Not to go back to the preachers of old, consider only Farrar, Liddon, Spurgeon, Hyacinthe, Lacordaire, and the great American Beecher. Think of Spurgeon for thirty years preaching twice every Sunday to six thousand souls!"

"Then you believe, sir, the influence of the pulpit depends on the preacher?"

"Yes. If there is a good intelligent man in the pulpit, there will be good intelligent men in the pews."

"Then you would have only highly-cultured, up-to-date men in the pulpit?"

"I would not have men in the pulpit whom no one would think of listening to, out of the pulpit. The people want sermons that bring the pulpit near to the hearth, the table, and the counter; sermons of homely fertility, local allusions, and personal application, such as Christ gave them. Remember for a moment His everyday similes and parables: the lighting of a candle, the seeking of a piece of lost silver, the search for the lost sheep. That is one kind of sermon that always draws hearers. There is another kind that is irresistible to a very large number – sermons full of the spirit of Paul, reaching out to the Heavenly Church with its invisible rites and the splendor and music in the soul of the saints."

There was a silence, for the preacher was pursuing his thoughts, leaning forward with a burning look, drinking in the joy of his own spiritual vision.

Robert broke the pause by saying: "We Scots are used to logical and argumentative discourses," but he spoke in a much lower tone than was usual to him.

"Then your preachers must talk to their congregations in the pulpit, as they never would think of talking to them out of it."

"Well, we are not in favor of mingling sacred and material things; we believe it might have a tendency to bring preaching into contempt."

"Mr. Campbell," said Newton, "preaching is a great example of the survival of the fittest. If it could have been killed by contempt, or inefficiency, or ignorance, or too much book learning, or by any other cause, the imbecile sermons preached every Sunday through the length and breadth of the land would have killed it long ago."

"Do you then consider oratorical power a necessity to preaching, sir?"

"No. Other power can take its place, such as great piety, great sincerity, the simplicity of the Gospel, or the personal character of the preacher. I once heard Newman preach. He was far from what we are accustomed to call eloquent. One long sentence was followed by another equally long, separated by a sharp fracture like the utterance of a primitive saint or martyr; but also like a direct message from heaven. And never, while I live, shall I forget the ecstasy of love and longing with which he cried out: 'Oh that I knew where to find Him! that I might come into His presence!' The church of St. Mary was crowded with young men, and I believe the heart of every one present burned within him, and he longed as I did, to fall down and kiss the feet of Christ."

Conversation akin to this sweetened the simple meal, and after it Robert and Theodora walked up and down the pretty lane running past the Chapel Croft. It had a hedge of sweet-briar which perfumed the warm, still air, and the full moon made everything beautiful, and Theodora loveliest of all. And though it was near the Sabbath, Robert did not hold his sisters' creed regarding love-making at that time. He could no more help telling Theodora how beautiful she was, and how he loved her excellencies and her beauty, than he could help breathing.

It was no new tale. He had told it to her ever since they first met. But this night he felt he must venture all, to win all. The light on her face, the sweet gentleness of her voice, the touch of her hand on his arm, all these things urged him to ask that question, which if asked from the heart, is never forgotten. Theodora answered it with a shy but loving honesty. The little word which made all things sure was softly spoken, and then the purple Bible was given, and clasping it between their hands, they

made over it their solemnly happy promises of eternal love and faithfulness. And what conversation followed is not to be written down; it was every word of it in the delicious, stumbling patois of love.

The next morning Robert went to the Methodist Chapel with Theodora, but his Calvinism was in no degree prejudiced by the Arminian sermon, for he did not hear a word of it. He was listening to the tale of love in his heart, Theodora sat at his side, and he would not have changed places with the king on his throne. Love had thrown the gates of life wide open for the Queen of Love to enter in, and for the first time in all his thirty years of existence, he knew what it was to be joyful.

He left Kendal on Monday afternoon and went to Sheffield, and did much profitable business there. And he was so gay and good-natured that many thought they had misjudged him on former occasions, and that after all he was really a fine fellow. Others wondered if he had been drinking, and no one but a woman, the wife of one of his business friends with whom he dined, had the wit to see, and to say:

"The man is in love, and the girl has accepted him – poor thing!"

"Why 'poor thing,' Louise?"

"Because he will get out of love some day, and then – "

"Then, what?"

"He will be the old Robert Campbell, a little older, a little more selfish, a little more sure of his own infallibility, and a great deal worse-tempered."

"That will depend on the girl, Louise."

"And on circumstances! Generally speaking, women may write themselves circumstances' 'most obedient servants.' They can't help it."

In spite, however, of the disagreeable journey between Sheffield and Glasgow, Campbell reached home in very good spirits. It was then four o'clock in the afternoon, and he resolved to sleep a couple of hours before seeing any one. He thought after dinner would be as good a time as any for the communication he had to make to his family. Something of a blusterer among men, he feared the woman he called mother. His sisters he had never taken seriously, but he remembered they would come close to Theodora, and that it might be prudent to have their good will. They certainly could make things unpleasant if they wished to do so.

He had always been able to sleep, on his own order to sleep, and was proud of the circumstance; but this afternoon he had somehow lost this control. Sleep would not obey his demand, yet he lay still, because he had resolved to spend two hours in bed; nevertheless he rose unrested, and decidedly anxious.

Dinner was served at seven, and he entered the dining-room precisely at that hour. His place was prepared for him, but the women knew better than to fret him with exclamations, or with inquiries of any kind. He was permitted to take his chair as silently as if he had never missed a meal with them. And though this behavior was in exact accord with his own desires, it did not suit him that night. He had seen a different kind of family life at the Newtons', and no man is so self-reliant as to find kind inquiries effusive and tiresome, if the kindness and interest is lavished on himself.

He was, however, good-tempered enough to praise the dinner, and to say "Scotch broth and good Scotch collops were pleasant changes from the roast beef of old England, her Yorkshire pudding and cherry pies." Mrs. Campbell smiled graciously at this compliment, and answered:

"I consider collops, Robert, as the most nutritive and delicious of all the ways in which beef is cooked. I attribute my good health to eating them so regularly, and though Jepson is constantly complaining of McNab's extravagance and ill-temper, I always say, 'I don't care, Jepson, what faults McNab has, she can cook collops.' Very few can make a good dish of collops, so I think I am right."

"Tell Jepson I say he is to let McNab alone. How did you like Dr. Robertson's last *protégé*?"

"I did not go to church. I was not well. The girls were there."

"What is your opinion, Isabel?"

"That he is very like the lave of the doctor's wonderfuls. Mrs. Robertson told us, he had astonished his college by the tenderness of his conscience and his spirituality; and when I asked her the particulars, she said he had utterly refused to study the Latin Grammar because it contained nothing spiritual. Greek and Hebrew, of course, for they were necessary to a right reading of the Scriptures; but the Latin Grammar had no spiritual relations with literature of any kind – far from it. From what he had been told it was both idolatrous and immoral in its outcome. I suppose he is from Argyle, for when there was talk of expelling him for not conforming to rules, he wrote to the Duke, and the great Duke stood by the lad, and complimented him on his tender conscience, and the like, and took him under his own protection – and so on. Mrs. Robertson is of the opinion, he may come to be the Moderator of the Assembly with such backing."

"And what do you think?"

"I would not wonder if he did. He has the conceit for anything, and he is a black Celt, and very likely has their covetous eye and greedy heart. He will get on, no doubt of it. Why not? The great Duke at his back, and himself always pushing to the front."

"I thought he was nice-looking," said Christina timidly. "His fine black eyes were fairly ablaze when he was preaching."

"He is a ferocious Calvinist," added Isabel.

"Well, he had fine eyes and was good-looking," persisted Christina.

"Good looks are nothing, Christina," said Robert severely. "Beauty is not a moral quality."

"People who are good-looking get on in this world. I notice that. I wish I was bonnie."

"You are well enough, Christina," said Mrs. Campbell. "If you cannot talk more sensibly, keep quiet."

Christina with a wronged, grieved look subsided, and Mrs. Robertson's reception for the conscientious youth, under the Argyle protection, furnished the conversation until the cloth was drawn, and the ladies had trifled awhile with their walnuts and raisins. Then Campbell rose, drank the glass of wine that had been standing before him, and said:

"I am going to the library to smoke half-an-hour. Then, mother, you and the girls will join me there. I have something important to tell you."

He did not wait for an answer, and his mother was furious at the request. "Did you notice his tone, Isabel?" she inquired. "His words sounded more like a command than a request. It is adding insult to injury to summon me to his room – for nobody goes to the library but himself – to hear the thing he has to tell. I shall go to my own room, and he can come there and tell me his important news."

"Mother, why not send for him to return here in half-an-hour?"

This proposal was acceptable, and in half-an-hour Jepson was sent with "Mrs. Campbell's compliments, and she hopes Mr. Campbell will return to the dining-room, as she feels unable to bear the smell of tobacco to-night."

Mr. Campbell uttered two words in a low voice which sounded like "Confound it!" but he bid Jepson tell Mrs. Campbell "he would return to the dining-room immediately." Upon hearing which, Mrs. Campbell took a reclining position on the sofa, and on her face there was the satisfied, close-mouthed smile of one who compliments herself on winning the first move.

CHAPTER II
PREPARING FOR THE BRIDE

Campbell returned to the dining-room pleasantly enough. He placed his chair at his mother's side, and asked: "Are you feeling ill, mother?"

"Rather, Robert, and the library is objectionable to me, since you began to smoke there. In fact, I have long been prejudiced against the room, for your father had a trick of sending for me to come there, whenever he was compelled to tell me of some misfortune. Consequently, I have associated the library with calamity, and I did not wish to hear your important news there."

"Calamity? No, no! My news is altogether happy and delightful. Mother, I am going to be married in October, to the loveliest woman in the world, and she is as good and clever as she is beautiful."

"Married! May I ask after the lady's name?"

"Theodora Newton. Her father is the Methodist preacher at Kendal, a town in Westmoreland."

"England?"

"Yes."

"She is an Englishwoman?"

"Of course!"

"I might have known it. I never knew a Scotchwoman called Theodora."

"It is a good name and suits her to perfection. Her father belongs to the Northumberland Newtons, a fine old family."

"It may be. I never heard of them. You say he is a Methodist preacher?"

"A remarkable preacher. I heard him last Sunday."

"Robert Campbell! Have you fairly forgotten yourself? Methodists are Arminians, and Arminians I hold in utter abomination, as every good Calvinist should."

"I know nothing about such subjects. This generation, mother, is getting hold of more tolerant ideas. But it makes no matter to me what creed Theodora believes in. I should love her just the same even if she were a Roman Catholic."

"A man in love, Robert, suffers from a temporary collapse o' good sense. But when I hear you say things like that, I think you are mad entirely."

"No, mother. I never was so happy in all my five senses as I am now. The world was never so beautiful, and life never so desirable, as since I loved Theodora."

"Doubtless you think she is a nonsuch, but I call your case one of lamentable self-pleasing. To the lures of what you consider a beautiful woman, you are sacrificing your noblest feelings and traditions. Don't deceive yourself. Was there not in all Scotland a girl of your own race and faith, good enough for you to marry?"

"I never saw one I wanted to marry."

"I might mention Jane Dalkeith."

"You need not. I would not marry Jane if she was the only woman in the world!"

"You prefer above all others an Englishwoman and a Methodist?"

"Decidedly."

"You have made up your mind to marry this doubly objectionable woman?"

"Positively, some time next October."

"And what is to become of me, and your sisters?"

"That is what I wish to understand."

"I have my dower-house in Saltcoats, but it is small and uncomfortable. If I go there, I shall have to leave the Kirk I have sat in for thirty-seven years, the minister who is dear and profitable to me, all the friends I have in the world, and the numerous – "

"Mother, I wish you to do none of these things. This house is large enough for us all. The south half, which you now occupy, you can retain for yourself and my sisters. I shall refurnish, as Theodora desires, the northern half, and if you will continue the management of the house and table, we can all surely eat in our present dining-room. There will only be one more to cater for, and I will allow liberally for that in the weekly sum for your expenditure. Theodora is no housekeeper and does not pretend to be. She is immensely clever and intellectual, and has been a professor in a large Methodist College for girls."

"You will be a speculation to all who know you."

"I am not caring a penny piece. They can speculate all they choose to. I shall meanwhile be extremely indifferent. I have come at last, mother, to understand that in a great love there is great happiness. The whole soul can take shelter there."

"The soul takes shelter in nothing and in no one related to this earth. That is some of last Sabbath's teaching, I suppose."

"Yes," he answered. "I was at Theodora's side all last Sunday and I learned this lesson in the sweetest way imaginable."

"I wish you to talk modestly before your sisters, and I do not like to hear the Sabbath called Sunday."

Robert laughed and answered: "Well, mother, we have so little sunshine in Scotland, we really cannot speak of any day as Sunday."

"You may laugh, Robert, but such things are related to spiritual ordinances, and are not joking matters."

"You are right, mother. Let us get back to business. Will you accept my proposal, or do you prefer to go to your own home?"

"I have been used to consider this house my own home, for thirty-seven years, and if I leave it, I wonder what kind of housekeeping will go on in it, with a college woman to superintend things? You would be left to the servant lasses, and their doings and not-doings would be enough to turn my hair gray."

"Then, mother, you will stay here, as I propose?"

"I cannot do my duty, and leave."

"I thank you, mother." Then, turning to his sisters, he said: "I hope you are satisfied, girls."

"There is no other course for us," answered Isabel. "We must stay where mother stays. It would be unkind to leave her now – when you are practically leaving her."

"I hope Theodora will be nice," said Christina. "If she is, we may be happy."

"Do your best, Christina, to make all pleasant, and you will please me very much," said Robert. "And, Isabel, I am not leaving any of you. Marriage will not alter me in regard to my relationship to mother, yourself, and Christina. I promise you that."

"If you intend to make many alterations in the house, you will have to see about them at once," said Mrs. Campbell.

"To-morrow I shall send men to remove all the old furniture from the rooms I intend to decorate."

"To remove it! Where to?"

"To Bailey's auction rooms."

"Robert Campbell! Your poor, dear father's rooms, and he not gone two years yet!"

"To-morrow will be nine days short of the two years. Do you wish his rooms to remain untouched for nine days longer, mother?"

"It is no matter. Let his lounge, and his chair and his bagatelle board go – let all go! The dead, as well as the living, must make way for Theodora."

"And, mother, as the hall will be entirely changed, and there will be much traffic through it, you had better remove early in the morning those huge glass cases of impaled insects and butterflies. If you wish to keep them, take them to your rooms; if not, let them go to Bailey's."

"They may as well go with the rest. Your father valued them highly in this life, but – "

"They are the most lugubrious, sorrowful objects. They make me shudder. How could any one imagine they were ornamental?"

"Your father thought them to be very curious and instructive, and they cost a great deal of money."

"If during the night you remember any changes you would like to make, we can discuss them in the morning," said Robert.

He went out gaily, and as he closed the door, began to sing:

"My love is like a red, red rose,
That's newly blown in June;
My Love is like a melody,
That's sweetly played in tune."

Then the library shut in the singer and the song, and all was silence.

Mrs. Campbell did not speak, and Isabel looked at her with a kind of contemptuous pity. She thought her mother had but lamely defended her position, and was sure she could have done it more effectively. Christina was simply interested. There was really something going to happen, and as far as she could see, the change in the house would bring other changes still more important. She was satisfied, and she looked at her silent mother and sister impatiently. Why did they not say something?

At length Mrs. Campbell rose from the sofa, and began to walk slowly up and down the room, and with motion came speech.

"I think, Isabel," she said, "I signified my opinions and desires plainly enough to your brother."

"You spoke with your usual wisdom and clearness, mother."

"Do you think Robert understood that I consider this house my house, and that I intend to be mistress in it? Why, girls, your father made me mistress here more than thirty-seven years ago. That ought to be enough for Robert."

"Robert is now in father's place," said Christina.

"Robert cannot take from me what your father gave me. This house is morally mine, and always will be, while I choose to urge my claim. I am not going to be put to the wall by two lovesick fools. No, indeed!"

"I think Robert showed himself very wise for his own – and Theodora's interests; and he would refute your moral claim, I assure you, mother, without one qualm of conscience."

"Refute me! He might as well try to refute the Bass rock. A mother is irrefutable, Isabel! But his conduct will necessitate us all using a deal of diplomacy. You do not require to be told why, or how, at the present time. I have a forecasting mind, and I can see how things are going to happen, but just now, we must keep a calm sound in all our observes, for the man is in the burning fever of an uncontrollable love, and clean off his reason – on the subject of that Englishwoman, he is mad entirely."

"I wonder what Dr. Robertson, and the Kirk, and people in general, will say?"

"What they will say to our faces is untelling, Isabel; what they will say when we are not bodily present, it is easy to surmise. Every one will consider Robert Campbell totally beyond his senses. He is. That creature in a place called Kendal, has bewitched him. As you well know, the prime and notable quality of Robert Campbell was, that he could make money, and especially save money. He

always, in this respect, reminded me of his grandfather, whom every one called 'Old Economy.' Now, what is he doing? Squandering money on every hand! Expensive journeys for the sole end of love-making, expensive presents no doubt, half of Traquair House redecorated and refurnished, wedding expenses coming on, honeymoon expenses; goodness only knows what else will be emptying the purse. And for whom? An Englishwoman, a Methodist, a poor school-teacher. She will neither be to hold nor to bind in her own expenses; for coming to Traquair House will be to her like entering a superior state of existence, and she won't know how to carry herself in it. We may take that to be a certainty. But I think I can teach her! Yes, I think I can teach her!"

"How will you do it, mother?"

"I cannot exactly specify now. She will give me the points, and opportunities; and correcting, and advising, come most effectively from the passing events of daily life. As I said, she will give me plenty of occasions or I'm no judge of women – especially brides."

"You might be flustered if you were in a hurry and unprepared, mother, and miss points of advantage, or get more than you gave, but if you had a plan thought out – "

"No, no, Isabel! I have lived long enough to learn the wisdom of building my wall with the stones I find at the foot of it."

"Many a sore heart the poor thing will get!" said Christina, with an air of mock pity.

"We cannot say too much or go too far, while Robert is as daft in love as he is at present," continued Mrs. Campbell. "We must be cautious, and that is the good way – the bit-by-bitness is what tells; now a look, now a word, now a hint, there a suspicion, there a worriment, there a hesitation or a doubt. It is the bit-by-bitness tells! This is a forgetful world, so I mention this fact again. And remember also, that men are the most uncertain part of creation. I have known Robert Campbell thirty years and I have just found him out. He is a curious creature, is Robert. He thinks himself steady as the hills, but in reality he is just as unstable as water. Good-night, girls! We will go for our sleep now, though I'm doubting if we get any."

"Theodora won't keep *me* awake," said Christina. Isabel did not speak then, but as they stood a moment at their bedroom doors, she said: "Mother is not to be trifled with. She is going to make Theodora trouble enough. I'm telling you."

"I don't care if she does! Anything for a change. Good-night!"

"Good-night! I do not expect to sleep."

"Perfect nonsense! Why should you keep awake for a woman in Kendal? Shut your eyes and forget her. Or dream that she brings you a husband."

"I'll do no such thing. That's a likely story!" and the two doors shut softly to the denial, and Christina's low laugh at it.

When the three women came down to breakfast in the morning, they found a dozen men at work dismantling the hall and the rooms on the north side of the house. The glass cases of insects and butterflies, and the old-fashioned engravings of Sir Robert Peel, Lord Derby, the Duke of Wellington, and Queen Victoria's marriage ceremony were just leaving the house. Mrs. Campbell, walking in her most stately manner, approached the foreman and began to give him some orders. He listened impatiently a few moments, and then answered with small courtesy:

"I have my written directions, ma'am, from the master, and I shall follow them to the letter. There is no use in you bothering and interfering," and with the last word on his lips, he turned from her to address some of his workmen.

She looked at him in utter amazement and speechless anger; then with an apparent haughty indifference, turned into the breakfast-room bringing the word "interfering" with her, and flavoring every remark she made with it. She was in a white heat of passion, and really felt herself to have been insulted beyond all pacification. Isabel had been a little in advance, and had not seen and heard the affront, but she was in thorough sympathy with her mother. Christina was differently affected. The idea of a workman telling her mother not to interfere in her own house was so flagrantly impudent,

that it was to Christina flagrantly funny. Every time Mrs. Campbell imitated the man, she felt that she must give way, and at length the strain was uncontrollable, and she burst into a screaming passion of laughter.

"Forgive me, mother!" she said as soon as speech was possible. "That man's impertinence to you has made me hysterical, for I never saw you treated so disrespectfully before. I was very nervous when I rose this morning."

"You must conquer such absurd feelings, Christina. Observe your sister and myself. We should be ashamed to exhibit such a total collapse of will power."

"Excuse me, mother. I will go to my room until I feel better."

"Very well, Christina. You had better take a drink of water. Remember, you must learn to meet annoyance like a sensible woman."

"I will, mother."

But after breakfast when Isabel came to her, she went off into peals of laughter again, burying her face in the pillows, and only lifting it to ejaculate: "It was too delicious, Isabel – too deliciously funny for anything! If you had seen that man stare mother in the face – and tell her not to interfere! I wondered how he dared, but I admired him for it; he was a big, handsome fellow. Oh, how I wished I was like him! What privileges men do have?"

"Do you mean to call it a privilege to tell mother not to interfere?"

"Many a time I would like to have done it; yes, many a time. I know it is wicked, but mother does interfere too much. It is her specialty!" and Christina appeared ready for another fit of laughter.

"If you laugh any more, Christina, I shall feel it my duty to throw cold water in your face. Mother told me to do so."

"Such advice comes from her interfering temper. That handsome fellow was right."

"Behave yourself, Christina. What is the matter with you?"

"It is the change, Isabel. To see lots of men in the hall, and that heavy black furniture and the poor beetles and butterflies, and the great men's pictures going away – "

"Can't you speak correctly? Are you sick?"

"I must be!"

"Go back to bed, and I will get mother to give you a sleeping powder."

"That will be better than cold water. If you could only have seen mother's face, Isabel, when that man told her not to interfere. As for him, he had a wink in his eyes, I know. I hope I shall never see him again. If I do – "

"I trust you will behave decently, as Christina Campbell ought to do."

"If he winks, I shall laugh. I know I shall."

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"I am, but what good does that do?"

"See here, Christina, there are going to be many changes in this house, and if you intend to meet them with this idiotic laughter, what pleasure can you expect? Be sensible, Christina."

Poor Christina! The keenest of all her faculties was her sense of the ridiculous. On this side of her nature, her intellect could have been highly developed, but instead it had been ruthlessly depressed and ignored. The comic page of the newspapers, the only page she cared for, was generally removed; she could tell a funny story delightfully, but no one smiled if she did so; she saw the comical attributes of every one, and everything, but it was a grave misdemeanor to point them out; and thus snubbed and chided for the one thing she could do, she feared to attempt others which she knew only in a mediocre manner.

At the dinner table she was able to take her place in a placid, sensible mood. She found the family deep in the discussion of an immediate removal to the seashore. It was at any rate about the usual time of their summer migration, and Robert was advising his mother to go to the Isle of Arran. But Mrs. Campbell had resolved to go to Campbelton, where she had many relations. "We can stay

at the *Argyle Arms*," she said, "and then neither the Lairds nor the Crawfords will have the face to be dropping in for a few days' change, at my expense."

Christina looked distressed, and touched Isabel's foot to excite her to rebellion. "Mother," said Isabel dolorously, "Christina and I hate Campbelton! It smells of whiskey and fish, and not even the great sea winds can make the place clean and sweet."

"It makes me ill," ventured Christina.

"My family have lived there for generations, Christina, and it never made them ill. They are, indeed, very robust and healthy."

"There is nothing to see, mother."

"I am ashamed of you, Christina. It is a town of the greatest antiquity, and was, as you ought to know, the capital of the Dalriadan kingdom in the sixth and seventh century."

"I know all about its antiquities, mother. I wish I didn't."

"Christina, what is the matter with you to-day?"

"I am tired of living, mother."

"Robert, do you hear your sister?"

"Why are you tired of living, Christina?" asked Robert, not unkindly.

"We do not live, brother; that is the reason."

"What do you mean?"

"Life is variety. To us every day is the same, except the Sabbath, and that is the worst day of all. I don't blame you, brother, for a desperate effort to change your life. If I were a man I should run away."

"What do you mean by a desperate effort, Christina?"

"I mean marriage. Sometimes I feel that I would run away with any man that would marry me."

"*Hush!* Such a feeling is shameful. What do you wish instead of Campbelton?"

The courage of the desperate possessed Christina and she answered: "I should like to travel. I want to see Edinburgh and London and Paris like other girls whose families have money, and Isabel feels as badly at our restrictions as I do."

"What do you say, mother? Will you go with the girls to Edinburgh and London? Paris is out of the question. I will pay all expenses."

"I will do nothing of the kind. I am going to Campbelton. I suppose the girls can go by themselves."

"You know better, mother."

"English girls go all over the world by themselves, and some kinds of Scotch girls are beginning to think mothers an unnecessary institution."

Robert looked at Isabel, and she said: "We might have a courier. I mean a lady courier."

"I will not permit my daughters to go stravaging round the world with any strange woman. Robert, I think you have behaved most imprudently to propose any such thing."

"In *your* company, mother, was my suggestion. I do think an entire change of people and surroundings would do both you and my sisters a great deal of good."

"Changes are plentiful; too many are now in progress."

So the subject died in bad temper, and Robert felt his proffered kindness to have been very ungraciously received. But when he rose from the table, Christina touched his arm as he passed her chair. "Thank you, brother," she said. "You wished to give us a little pleasure. It is not your fault we are deprived of it."

He saw that her eyes were full of tears, and her weary, plaintive voice touched his heart, so he turned to his mother and said:

"Think of what I have proposed. I will not stint you in expenses. Give the girls and yourself a little pleasure – do."

"Your own expenses are going to be tremendous, Robert, furnishing, travelling and what not. I can't conscientiously increase them."

At these words Christina left the room. Robert did not answer his mother's remark, but he looked at Isabel, and she understood the look as entrusting the further prosecution of the subject to her.

Mrs. Campbell, however, refused to give up Campbelton. "I heard," she said, "that Mrs. Walter Galbraith was going to France and Italy. Perhaps she will allow you to travel with her."

Isabel looked at her mother with something like reproach. "You know well, mother, that Mrs. Galbraith dresses and travels in the most extravagant fashion. She would not be seen with two old maids in plain brown merino suits. We should look like her servants. Even if we got stylish travelling gowns, we should want dinner dresses, and opera dresses, and cloaks and changes, and small necessities innumerable. It would cost a thousand pounds, if not more, to clothe us both for a three months' travel with Mrs. Galbraith."

"Then be sensible women and go to Campbelton. You can take your wheels and on the firm sands of Macrihanish Bay have a five miles' unbroken spin. There are boating and fishing and very interesting walks."

"And Christina will find company for her wheel and walks, mother. The last time we were in Campbelton, the schoolmaster, James Rathey, was constantly with her. He was in love, and Christina liked him. After we came home he wrote to her, and I had hard work to prevent her answering his letters."

"You ought to have told me this before."

"I was sorry for her. Poor girl, he was the only lover she ever had!"

"Such folly! I shall watch the schoolmaster myself this summer. I have influence enough to get him dismissed. He shall not teach in Campbelton another year."

"Oh, mother, how cruel and unjust that would be! I am sorry I told you." And Isabel felt the case to be hopeless, and did not make another plea.

She went straight to her sister's room. "Mother is not to be moved, Christina," she said. "We shall have to go to Campbelton."

"So be it. Jamie Rathey will be having his vacation now, and he can play the fiddle and sing '*The Laird o' Cockpen*' worth listening to. He promised to buy a wheel before I came again, and then we will away to Macrihanish sands for a race. I won't be cheated out of that pleasure, Isabel, and you need not say a word about it."

"You cannot hide it. Every one but mother knew about you and James Rathey last year, and Aunt Laird would have told mother, but I begged her not. If you begin that foolishness again, I must attend to the matter."

"You mean you will tell mother?"

"Yes, decidedly."

"Then you will be an ill-natured sister."

A little later Mrs. Campbell appeared and told them to pack their trunks, and lock up the clothing they did not intend to take with them. "The paperers and painters are coming into the house to-morrow morning," she said. "We shall take the boat for Campbelton directly after an early breakfast."

As neither Isabel nor Christina made any protest, she added: "You may go at once and buy yourselves a couple of suits, one for church, and a white one that will be easily laundered. I suppose hats, gloves, shoes, and some other things will be necessary. You can each of you spend forty pounds. This is a gift, I shall not take it from your allowance."

"I cannot see through mother," observed Christina as they were on their shopping expedition.

"Can you see through anything, Christina? I cannot."

"She had a great fit of the liberalities this morning. What for?"

"She was buying us. One way or another, she has us all under her feet."

"Poor Theodora!"

"Keep your pity for poor Christina. If Theodora has been a schoolmistress she knows fine how to hold her own."

"With schoolgirls – perhaps. Mother is different."

"The difference is not worth counting. Women, old and young, are very much alike."

"Do you believe the paperers and painters begin work to-morrow?"

"Mother said so. It is one of her virtues to tell the truth. You know how often she declares she would not lie even to the devil."

"Yes – but was that the truth?"

"It is not right to criticise and question what your mother says, Christina."

In the morning the arrival of a number of men with pails, and brushes, and paint-pots, justified Mrs. Campbell's assertion, and the three women were glad to escape the dirt, noise, and confusion in Traquair House, even for the *Argyle Arms* in Campbelton. Robert went with them to the boat, and Isabel's pathetic acceptance of what she disliked, and the tears in Christina's eyes made him a little unhappy. He slipped some gold into their hands, as he bid them good-bye, and their silent looks of pleasure at his remembrance, soothed the uncertain sense of some unkindness or unfairness which had troubled him since Christina's rebellious outbreak. He was glad he had gone with them to the boat, and glad that he had given them a parting token of his brotherly care, and he felt that he could now turn cheerfully to his own pressing but delightful affairs.

He was singularly happy in them, and really glad to be rid of all advice and interference. Men who had known him for many years, wondered at his boyish joyfulness. He was a different Robert Campbell, but then it was generally known he was in love, and all the world loves a lover. No one was cruel or malicious enough to warn, or advise, or shadow the glory of his expectations by any doubt of their full accomplishment. The initiated gossiped among themselves, and some said: "Campbell is a fool to be making such a fuss about any woman;" and others spoke of Mrs. Traquair Campbell, and "wondered how the English girl would manage her."

"The poor lassie will be at her mercy," said one old man.

"She will," answered his companion, "for the Traquair Campbells' ways will be dark to a stranger. It takes a Scotchwoman to match a Scotchwoman."

"Yet I have heard that the old lady is a wonder o' good sense and prudence. Her husband was a useless body, but she managed him fine, and was one o' those women that are a crown to their husbands."

The first speaker laughed peculiarly. "Man, David!" he said, "little you ken, if you take King Solomon's ideas of a comfortable wife to live wi'. The women who are a crown to a poor man are generally a crown o' thorns, I'm thinking."

But no doubts or fears troubled Robert Campbell. He thought only of his marvellous fortune in winning a woman so lovely and so good. He was not unmindful of either her intellect or her education, but he did not talk of these excellencies, even to his chief friend Archie St. Claire. He had a feeling that intellect and learning were masculine attributes, and he preferred to dwell entirely on the sweet feminine virtues of his beloved. But this, or that, there was no other woman in the world but Theodora to Robert Campbell, for lovers are selfish creatures, and Lord Beaconsfield says truly: "To a man in love, all other women are uninteresting, if not repulsive."

So the days and the weeks went happily past, in preparing a home for Theodora. He went over and over very frequently the last few words – "a home for Theodora!" and they sung, and swung, and shone in his heart, and made his life a fairy story. "I never knew what it was to be happy before," he said repeatedly; and it was the truth, for up to this time he had never felt the joy of that mystical blending of two souls, when self is lost and found again in the being of another.

Twice he took a trip to Campbelton, and found all to his satisfaction. His mother was surrounded by her kindred, a situation a Scotch man or woman tolerates with an equanimity that is astonishing; and Isabel and Christina wore their usual air of placid indifference to everything. They were all desirous to know what had been done in the house, but he refused to enter into explanations. "It is ill praising or banning half-done work," he said in excuse, "but I promise on my next visit to take you home with me, and then you will see the work finished."

"And then you will go and get married?" asked Christina, and he answered with a smile, "Then I shall go and get married."

"When you bring Theodora home she will give us a little pleasure, I hope."

"I am sure she will. Theodora is fond of company and entertainments, and she will wish you to share them with us, and that will add to my pleasure also."

"We shall see."

"Do you doubt what I say?"

"My dreams never come true, Robert."

"Theodora will make them come true."

Then Christina laughed a little, and Isabel looked at her mother's dour, scornful face and copied it.

Robert noticed the expression, and he asked pleasantly: "What kind of summer have you had, Isabel?"

"Exactly the summer we expected. Sometimes the minister called, and talked in an exciting manner about Calvinism, and the smallpox; and we have been surrounded by a crowd of relatives. Mother has enjoyed them very much; she had not seen some of her fourth and fifth cousins for nearly seven years; they had increased in number considerably during that interval, and their names, and dispositions, the sicknesses they had been through, the various talents they showed, have all been to talk over a great many times. Oh, mother has enjoyed it much! It makes no matter about Christina and myself."

"It does make matter, Isabel. This coming winter I intend to see you go out as much as you desire."

"Thank you, brother. Christina will enjoy the opportunities. I have outlived the desire for amusements. I would rather travel, and see places and famous things. People no longer interest me."

"I think with a little inquiry that can be managed. I am so happy, Isabel, I wish every one else to be happy."

She looked at her brother wonderingly, and at night as the sisters sat doing their hair in Christina's room she said: "Love must be an amazing thing, Christina, to change any one the way it has changed Robert Campbell. The man has been in a sense converted – he has found grace, whether it be the grace of God, or the grace of Love, I know not, no, nor anybody else just yet."

"St. John says, 'God is love.' I have often wondered about those words."

"Then keep your wonder. If you ask for explanations about things, all the wonder and the beauty goes out of them. When I was at school, and had to pull a rose to pieces and write down all the Latin names of its structure, its beauty was gone. The rose was explained to us, but it wasn't a rose any longer. God is Love. We will thank St. John for telling us that beautiful truth, but we will not ask for explanations. Maybe you may find out some day all that Love means. You are not too old, and would be handsome if you were dressed becomingly, and were happy."

"Happy?"

"Yes. Happiness makes people beautiful. Look at Robert. He was rather good-looking before he was in love, he is now a very handsome man. Theodora has worked wonders in his appearance."

"He takes more pains with his dress."

"That helps, of course."

"My hair is very good yet, Isabel."

"You have splendid hair, and fine eyes. Properly dressed you would not look over twenty-two years old."

"You think so, because you love me a little."

"I love you better than I love anything else. We have suffered a great deal together. I do not mean afflictions and big troubles, but a lifelong, never-lifted repression and depression, and a perfect starvation of heart and soul."

"Not soul, Isabel. We could always go to the Kirk, and we had our Bible and good books, and the like."

"It was all dead comfort. There was no life, no love in it."

"Maybe it was our fault, perhaps we ought to have stood up for our rights. Girls have begun to do so now."

"We may be to blame, who knows? Good-night."

Three weeks after this conversation, Robert came to Campbelton for his mother and sisters. He was in the same glad mood, and what was still more remarkable, patient and cheerful with all the small worries and explanations and contradictory directions of Mrs. Campbell. She was carrying back to Glasgow two Skye terriers, a tortoise-shell cat, presents of kippered herring and cheeses, and, above all, a tiny marmoset monkey given her by a third cousin, who was master of a sailing vessel trading to South American ports. She was immoderately fond and proud of this gift, and no one but Robert was allowed to carry the basket in which it was cradled in soft wool.

But encumbered on every hand and charged continually about this, that, and the other, Robert kept his temper better than his sisters; and at length, with the help of two or three vehicles, brought all safely to Traquair House. Now, if Mrs. Campbell had thus loaded and impeded herself and her whole family for the very purpose of making their entry into the renovated home a scene of confusion, in which it was impossible to observe things, she could not have succeeded better. Christina, indeed, uttered an exclamation of delight, but the great interest of all parties was to get rid of their various impediments. Each of the girls had a Skye terrier, Mrs. Campbell had the cat, Robert the marmoset, and there were bundles, bonnet boxes, parcels, umbrellas, parasols, rugs, etc., all to be carried in, counted, and checked off Mrs. Campbell's list of her belongings.

But in an hour the confusion had settled, and by the time the travellers had removed their hats and wraps and washed and dressed, a good dinner was on the table. It put every one in a more agreeable temper, and when they had eaten it, there was still light enough to examine the changes that had been made. Mrs. Campbell declared she was tired, but she could not resist the offer of Robert's arm and the way in which he said: "Come, mother, I shall not be happy without your approval; I never knew you to be tired with any day's work, no matter how it might tire others."

The compliment won her. She rose instantly, and leaning on her son's arm passed into the hall. It had been dark and gloomy, though fairly handsome. It was now finished in the palest shades, was light and airy and looked much larger. Where the cases of impaled beetles and crucified butterflies had stood, there were pots of ferns and flowers, and the special furniture necessary was of light woods and modern designs. All the rooms leading from this hall were richly and elegantly furnished; the same idea of lightness and gracefulness being admirably carried out. Nothing had been forgotten, even the most trivial toilet articles were present in their most beautiful form. Isabel lifted some of these, and asked: "How did you know about such things, Robert?"

"I did not know, Isabel," he answered, "but I went to a place where such things are sold, and told them to fit a lady's toilet perfectly, with all that ladies use and desire. Theodora may not like the perfumes; indeed, I do not think she uses perfume of any kind, but they can be sent back, or changed."

"Well, Robert," said Mrs. Campbell, when all apartments had been examined, "these rooms are fit for a queen, and many a poor queen never had anything half so splendid and comfortable. Theodora will be confounded by their richness and beauty. I should say she never saw anything like them."

"Indeed, you are mistaken, mother. I met her first at John Priestley's, Member of Parliament for Sheffield, where she was the guest of his daughter, and in their mansion the rooms are much handsomer than anything we have here. Theodora has been a guest in some of the finest manor houses in England. These rooms are quite modest compared with some she has occupied."

"I think, then, she will be too fine for this family. But Robert, I can not, and I will not, change my ways at my time of life. I may be plain and common – perhaps – I may be vulgar in Theodora's eyes, but – "

"My dear mother, you are all a woman and a mother should be. You represent the finest ladies of your generation. Theodora is the fruit and flower of a later one, different, but no better than your own. You are everything I want. I would not have you changed in any respect." He looked into her face with eyes full of love, and gently pressed her arm against his side.

Such appreciative words as these were most unusual, and Mrs. Campbell felt them thrill her heart with pleasure. She even half-resolved to try to like Robert's wife, and spoke enthusiastically about the taste her son had displayed. In the morning she was still more delighted, for then she discovered that her own drawing-room had been redecorated, a new light carpet laid, and many beautiful pieces of furniture added to brighten its usual gloom. Nor had Isabel's and Christina's rooms been forgotten; in many ways they had been beautified, and only the family dining-room had been left in the gloom of its dark, though handsome furniture. But Robert hoped by the following summer his mother would be willing to have it totally changed, for he remembered hearing Theodora say that the room in which people eat ought to be, above all other rooms in the house, bright, and light, and cheerful. Indeed, she thought it a matter of well-being to eat under the happiest circumstances possible.

In the height of the women's delight and gratitude, Robert set off on his wedding journey. His joy infected the whole house. Even the cross McNab and the mournful Jepson were heard laughing, and Christina spoke of this as among the wonderfuls of her existence. Perhaps the one most pleased was Mrs. Campbell. She had been surrounded by the same depressing furniture and upholstery for thirty-seven years, and she had almost a childish pleasure in the new white lace curtains which had been hung in her rooms. They gave her a sense of youth, of something unusually happy and hopeful. Many times in a day, she went, unknown to any one, into the drawing-room and took the fine lace drapery in her fingers, to examine and admire its beauty. The girls also were more cheerful. Indeed, the tone of the house had been uplifted and changed, and all through the influence of more light, some graceful modern furniture, and a little – alas, that it was so little! – good will and gratitude.

On the fifth of October Robert Campbell was married, and about a week afterwards, Archie St. Claire called one evening upon his family.

"I have just returned from Kendal," he said, "and I thought you would like to hear about the wedding. You were none of you there."

"We had satisfactory reasons for not going," answered Mrs. Campbell.

"I was Robert's best man."

"I supposed so. Robert said very little about his arrangements. What do you think of the bride?"

"She is a most beautiful woman, fine-natured and sweet-tempered, and loved by all who come near her. Robert has found a jewel."

"How was she dressed?" asked Isabel.

"Perfectly. White satin and lace, of course, but what I liked was the simplicity of the gown. I heard some one call it a Princess shape. It fit her beautiful form without a crease, and fell in long soft folds to her white shoes."

"White shoes? Nonsense!" ejaculated Mrs. Campbell.

"White shoes with diamond buckles."

"Paste buckles more likely."

"They looked like diamonds. Her veil fell backward and touched the bottom of her dress."

"Backward! Then of what use was it? I thought brides wore a veil to cover their faces."

"It would have been a sin and a shame to have covered her face. She looked like an angel. She wore no jewels, and she carried instead of flowers a small Bible bound in purple velvet and gold."

"Were there many present?"

"The streets were crowded, and the church was crowded. The Blue Coat Boys – a large old school in Kendal – scattered flowers before her as she walked from the church gates to the altar; and the old rector who had married her father and mother was quite affected by the ceremony. He kissed and blessed her at the altar-rail, after it was over."

"Kissed Robert Campbell's bride. Surely you are joking, Mr. St. Claire."

"No, it is a common thing in English churches after the bridal ceremony if the minister is a friend. It was a solemn and affecting sight."

"Then her father did not marry her?"

"He gave her away. He could not have performed the ceremony in the parish church."

"Do you mean that she was not married in her father's church?"

"She was married in the parish church, one of the most beautiful places of worship I was ever in – a grand old edifice."

"Do you mean that my son was married in an Episcopal church, at the very horns of an Episcopal altar?" asked Mrs. Campbell indignantly.

"It was the most beautiful marriage service I ever saw. And the sweet old bells chimed so joyously, I can never forget them."

"Was there a wedding breakfast?" asked Isabel.

"About twenty guests sat down to a very prettily decorated breakfast table, and after the meal, Robert and his bride began their journey through life together. I have brought you some bride cake," and he took from a box in his hand three smaller white boxes, tied with white ribbon, and presented them. Mrs. Campbell laid hers unopened on the table without a word of thanks or courtesy, and Isabel and Christina followed her example.

"There was a crowd at the railway station," continued Mr. St. Claire, "and the Blue Coat Boys met the bride singing a wedding-hymn. Robert gave them a noble check for their school."

"I'll warrant he did. The more fool he!"

"And the last thing they heard as they left Kendal must have been the church bells chiming joyfully – '*Hail, Happy Morn*'!"

"Do you know where they went? Robert was not sure when he left Scotland."

"I think I do, Mrs. Campbell. They had intended going through the Fife towns, and by old St. Andrews to Wick, and so to the Orkneys and Shetlands. But it was late in the season for this trip, so they went to Paris and the Mediterranean. I think they were right."

"Paris, of course. All the fools go there!"

"Well, Mrs. Campbell, Scotland is a bleak place for a honeymoon."

"Mr. St. Claire, if it does for a man's home, it may do to honeymoon in. That is my opinion."

"I don't agree with you, Mrs. Campbell. A honeymoon is a sort of transcendental existence, and a man naturally wants to spend it as nearly in Paradise as possible. There's no place like the Mediterranean for sunshine, and it is poetical and picturesque, and just the place for lovers."

Failing, with all his willing good nature, to rouse any apparent interest in a subject he considered highly interesting, he felt a little offended, and rose to depart. But ere he reached the parlor door he turned and said: "I had nearly forgotten one very remarkable thing about the bride."

"Let us hear it, by all means," said Mrs. Campbell.

"I stayed a few days after the marriage, in order to visit Windermere and Keswick Lake with Mr. Newton – by-the-by, wonderfully beautiful spots, nothing like them in Scotland – and one day while waiting in his study, I picked up a book. Imagine my astonishment, when I saw it had been written by the bride."

At this information Mrs. Campbell threw up her hands with a laugh that terminated in something like a shriek. Isabel laid her hand on her mother's arm, and asked: "Are you ill, mother?"

"No," she answered promptly. "I am only like Mr. St. Claire, astonished. I need not have been. Every girl scribbles a little now. Poetry, of course."

"You mean Mrs. Campbell's book?"

"Yes."

"On the contrary, it was a most learned and interesting study of ancient and sacred geography."

"A schoolbook!" and the words were scoffed out with utter contempt.

"Then a most fascinating one. It gave the Latin and Saxon names of our own old cities, and all the historical and biographical incidents connected with them. It treated the names in the Bible and ancient history in the same way. The preacher was very modest about it, but said it was now in all the best schools, and that his daughter had quite a good income from the royalty on its sale. And he added: 'Since you have discovered her secret, I may tell you that she has written two novels, and a volume of – '"

"Plays, I dare say."

"No, ma'am, of Social Essays."

"Really, Mr. St. Claire, we can stand no more revelations concerning the bride's perfections! Robert Campbell is only a master of iron workers and coal miners, and I fear he will feel painfully his inferiority to such a marvellously beautiful and intellectual woman. As for myself, and my poor girls, I can only say – grant us patience!"

St. Claire bowed, and made a hurried exit. "Ill-natured and envious creatures as ever I met," he mused. "I'm sorry for Mrs. Robert! She will have troubles great and small with those women under her roof, and I wonder if Robert will have the gumption to stand by her. He was always extraordinarily afraid of his mother. I should be afraid of her myself. I am thankful my mother isn't the least like her! My mother is made of love and sweet-temper, and she is more of a lady in her winsey skirt and linen short gown than Mrs. Traquair Campbell is in all her silk and lace and jewelry. Thank God for His mercies! The Book says a good wife is from the Lord. I know, by personal experience, that a good mother is even more so. I'll just write mother a letter this very night, and tell her all about the wedding. She will enjoy every word of it, and at the end say: 'God bless the young things! With His blessing they'll do weel enough, whatever comes.'"

There was no blessing in Mrs. Campbell's heart. She looked at her girls in silence until she heard the closing of the front door, then she asked: "What do you say to Mr. St. Claire's story?" and Isabel answered: "I say what you said, mother – grant us patience!"

"Tut, Isabel! Patience? Nonsense! I think little of that grace. Theodora may be a beauty, a school-teacher, and an authoress, but we three women can match her."

"Whatever made Robert marry her?"

"That is past speculating about! But she is the man's choice – such as it is. Doubtless he thinks her without a fault, but, as I told you before, the bit-by-bitness can soon change that opinion – a little mustard seed of suspicion or difference of any kind, can grow to a great tree. I'm telling you! Do not forget what I say. I am just distracted as yet with the situation. This world is a hard place."

"I think so too, mother," said Christina, "and it is small comfort to be told the next is probably worse."

"I have had lots of trouble in my life, girls, but the worst of all comes with what your father called 'the lad and lass business.' It was that drove your brother David beyond seas, and I have not heard a word from him since he went away one day in a passion. But this or that, mind you, I have always come out of every tribulation victorious – and there is now three of us – we shall be hard enough to beat."

"Theodora has a good many points in her favor," said Christina.

"Count them up, then; count them up! She is a beauty, a genius, an Englishwoman, a Methodist, a teacher of women, a writer of books, and no doubt she will try to set up the golden image of her manifold perfections in Traquair House – but which of us three will bow down before it? Tell me! Tell me that, Christina!"

"Not I, mother."

"Nor I," added Isabel.

"Nor I, you may take an oath on that," said Mrs. Campbell. "And what says the Good Book, 'a threefold cord is not easily broken?' Now you may give me Dr. Chalmer's last sermons, and I'll take a few words from him to settle my mind and put me to sleep; for I am fairly distracted with the prospect of such a monumental woman among us. But I'll say nothing about her, one way or the other, and then I cannot be blamed. I would advise you both to be equally prudent."

But Isabel and Christina were not of their mother's mind. Such a delightful bit of gossip had never before come into their lives, and they went to Isabel's room to talk it all over again, for Isabel being the eldest had the largest and the best furnished room. Isabel made a social event of it, by placing a little table between them, set with the special dainties she kept for her private refreshment. And they felt it to be a friendly and cheerful thing, to have this special woman to season the rich cates and fruit provided. So it had struck twelve before Christina rose and remarked:

"You told me, Isabel, there were going to be changes, and you are right. The next one will be the home-coming, and I dare say Robert will descend on us in the most unexpected time and way."

"You are much mistaken, Christina. I am sure Robert will be telegraphing Jepson from every station on the road. The most trivial things will be directed by him. Let us go to bed now; I am sleepy."

"So am I. Thank you for the good things. They sweetened a disagreeable subject."

"Perhaps she may be better than we expect. One can never tell what the unknown may turn out to be. Mother is inclined to be suspicious of all strangers," said Isabel.

"If mother's eyes were out, she would see faults in any one."

"Perhaps, if they were coming into Traquair House. She does not trouble herself about people who leave the Campbells alone."

"She spoke of poor brother David to-night. Did you notice it?"

"Yes."

"It was the first time I have heard her mention him since he left us."

"She has spoken of him to me, three or four times – a word or two – no more."

"Do you know where he is?"

"No."

"Does mother know?"

"No."

"Does any one know?"

"No. Mother is sure he is dead. I think so myself. He would have written to Robert if he was alive. He was gey fond of Robert."

"I was at school when he went away. I never heard why he went, for when I came home I was forbidden to name him. Did he do anything wrong?"

"No, no! You must not suppose such a thing. He was the most loving and honorable of men."

"Then why did he go away? Do you know?"

"Yes, I know all about it."

"Tell me, Isabel. I will never name the subject again. What did he do?"

"Just what Robert has done – married a girl not wanted in the family."

"Who was the girl? Why was she not wanted?"

"Her name was Agnes Symington. She was a minister's daughter."

"Was she pretty?"

"Very pretty, and good and sweet as a woman could be."

"Pretty, and good, and sweet, and a minister's daughter! What more did mother want?"

"Money."

"Was she poor?"

"Yes. Her father was dead, and she had learned dressmaking to support her mother and herself. She came to make our winter dresses, and David saw her and loved her. Though she was a minister's daughter, mother had always sent her to the servants' table, and she was nearly mad to think David had married a girl from the servants' table. It was disgraceful – in a way. The servants talked, and so did every one that knew us. But David loved her, and when he went he took both Agnes and her mother with him."

"What did father say?"

"He took David's part. He took it angrily. He amazed us. He sold David's share in the works for him, and so let strangers into the company, and he sent him away with his blessing, and plenty of money. David was crying when he bid father good-bye; and father was never the same after David left. We always believed that father knew where he went, and that he heard from him, through Mr. Oliphant or Dr. Robertson. But mother could get no words from him about David, except 'The boy did right. God pity the man whose wife is chosen for him!' I think father had to marry mother to save the works. I think so; I was not told it as a fact. Do not breathe a word of what I have told you. It is a dead story. David and father are both gone, and I dare say David's wife is married again."

"Thank you for telling me the story, Isabel. I will keep your confidence. Do not doubt it. I do not blame David. I think he did right. I wish I could do the same thing. I – "

"Good-night!"

"I would run away to-morrow."

CHAPTER III
THE BRIDE'S HOME-COMING

Robert Campbell's home-coming was after the fashion Isabel had supposed it would be. On the eighth of November, Jepson received a telegram from him before nine in the morning, ordering fires to be kept burning brightly all day in his rooms. At eleven there was another telegram, directing Jepson to have the ferns and plants in the hall renewed, and flowers in vases put in the parlor and Mrs. Campbell's dressing-room. At two o'clock Jepson's message contained the information that Mr. and Mrs. Campbell would be at the Caledonian Railway Station at half-past three o'clock, and they would expect the carriage there for them.

So when Theodora arrived at Traquair House, she was met by Jepson with obsequious attentions, the door was wide open to receive her, and the rooms were shining and glowing with light and warmth and beauty. Thus far, all her expectations were realized, but she missed the human welcome which ought to have vitalized its material symbols. Robert was evidently annoyed at the absence of his mother and sisters, and he asked sharply after them.

"They went to their rooms after lunch, sir, before I had time to inform them of the train you specified," Jepson answered.

Campbell seemed glad of so reasonable an excuse, and, turning to Theodora, said: "You must have a cup of tea, dear, and then rest for a couple of hours. I dare say we shall see no one before dinner. I suppose dinner is at seven, Jepson?"

"Yes, sir. Seven o'clock exactly, sir."

After her cup of tea Theodora went through their rooms with her husband and was charmed with everything that had been done for her comfort. "Robert," she said, "there is nothing wanting in these rooms. Everything I could desire is here, except the smile and the kind words of welcome to them from your family."

"Those will come later, my sweet Dora. The Scotch are slow and undemonstrative. My mother and sisters always retire to their rooms after lunch, and it is extremely difficult for them to break a habit. That is their way."

"If habits are kind and good, it is a very good way – in its way. But do you not think, Robert, that a little spontaneity is sometimes a refreshing and comforting thing?"

"It may be, but our temperaments are not spontaneous. Now, try and sleep before you dress. I will come for you at two minutes before seven. Be sure you are ready! Mother waits for no one, not even myself."

But in spite of all the thoughtful care which her husband had taken for her comfort, Theodora was invaded by a feeling of melancholy. Her heart sank fathoms deep, and she could not follow his advice to sleep. She felt chilled and depressed by the atmosphere she was breathing – an atmosphere impregnated with the personalities of people inimical to her. Being conscious of this hostility, she began to reason about it, a thing in itself unwise; for happiness should never be analyzed.

Very soon she became aware of the futility of her thoughts. "They lead me to no certain end, for I am reasoning from premises unknown to me," she said to herself. "I have heard of these three women, but I have not seen them. I will wait until we look at each other face to face."

Then she called her maid, a fresh, honest-hearted girl from the Westmoreland fells, whom she had hired in Kendal. "Ducie," she said, "have you been in the kitchen yet?"

"Oh yes, ma'am. They are a queer lot there. Only one old man had a good word for any of the family. They were asking me if you knew that the Crawfords of Campbelton had been occupying your rooms for two weeks. 'Plenty of hurrying and scurrying,' they said, 'to get them away and put

the rooms in order, and the old lady beside herself with anger, at Mr. Campbell not giving a longer notice of his coming.'"

"Mr. Campbell gave plenty of time, if the rooms had not been occupied."

"And, if you please, ma'am, the trunks sent here from Kendal just after your marriage have all been opened, and I may say, ma'am – ransacked. Every thing in them is pell-mell, and the dresses not folded straight, and the neckwear and such like, topsy-turvy. And, ma'am, your beautiful ermine furs have been worn, for they are soiled; other things look likewise. I don't know what to make of such ways, I'm sure."

To this information Theodora listened in dismay and anger. It seemed to her such an incredible outrage on decency, honor, and even honesty. She rose instantly and went to look at her trunks. Ducie had made a very moderate complaint. It was only necessary to lift the lids to convince herself that the accusation was a just one. For a moment or two she stood looking at the disarranged garments; her face flushed, she locked her fingers together, and was speechless. Then she sat down to consider the circumstance, and her lovely face had on it an expression half-pleading and half-defiant. It was the face of a woman you could hurt, but could not move.

In half-an-hour she called Ducie. "Do not touch the four trunks that were sent here from Kendal," she said. "Open the one we had with us, and take from it my steel-blue silk costume, and my set of pearls."

"Will you wear the silk waist, ma'am?"

"No, the lace waist of the same color. And, Ducie, keep silence concerning all you see and hear in these rooms. I know you will do so, but it does no harm to remind you, for you are not used to living among a crowd of servants, and might fall into some trap set for you. Just remember, Ducie, that every word you say will likely be repeated, for we are in a strange country and in a way among strangers."

"I know, ma'am. New relations are not like old ones. The old ones feel comfortable like old clothes; the new ones, like new clothes, need a deal of taking in and letting out to make them fit."

"That is so, Ducie. I am a little annoyed about the open trunks, but – but, I must dress now, or I will be late."

"I wouldn't be annoyed, ma'am, for brooding over annoyances just hatches more; and I will have little to say to any one. You may trust me. I will be as good as my word."

Theodora dressed carefully, and when Robert came for her he was charmed with the quiet beauty of her costume. "It is just right, Dora," he said, "perhaps the pearls are a little too much."

"Oh no, Robert. The dress requires them. They are like moonlight on it, and make each other lovelier."

"Come, then, we have not a moment to lose. It will strike seven immediately."

They entered the dining-room as it struck the hour. Mrs. Traquair Campbell had taken her seat at the foot of the table, and Robert with his bride on his arm walked to her side and said:

"Mother, this is Theodora. I hope you will give her your love and welcome."

Mrs. Campbell did not rise, but, looking into Theodora's face, asked: "Had you a pleasant journey? Are you tired? Railroads are fatiguing kind of travel."

That was all. She did not say one kind word of welcome, nor did she offer her hand. In fact, she had lifted the carving knife as they entered the room, and she kept it in her grasp. Then Robert took her to his sisters, and as Isabel sat on one side of the table, and Christina on the other, the introduction had to be made three times. In each case it was about the same, for the girls copied both their mother's attitude and her words.

But all were frank and friendly with Robert, asking him many questions about the places they had visited, and as he invariably referred some part of these queries to Theodora, she was drawn unavoidably into the conversation. Very soon the desire to conquer these women by the force and magnetism of love came into her heart, and she smiled into their dark, cold faces, and discoursed with such charming grace and social sympathy, that the frost presently began to thaw, and Isabel found

herself asking the unwelcome bride all kinds of questions about their travel, and saying at last with a sigh: "How much I should have liked to have been with you!"

"I am sorry you were not with us," answered Theodora, "but we shall go again to the Mediterranean – for we only got glimpses of places and things, and must know them better. We shall go again, shall we not, Robert?"

Then Robert denied all his promises and said: "I fear not, for a long time. Business must be attended to."

"I am glad you are regaining your senses, Robert," said his mother. "Your business has been dreadfully neglected for more than half-a-year."

"It has taken no harm, mother, and I shall double my attention now."

"I hope you will – but I doubt it."

"Dora," said Christina, "may I call you Dora?"

"Dora, certainly," interrupted Mrs. Traquair Campbell. "Theodora is too long a name for conversation. Do you wish any more ice? Do you, Isabel?"

Theodora was confounded by such rude and positive ignoring. The question had been addressed to her, and referred to her Christian name – the most personal of all belongings. Yet it had been peremptorily decided for her without any regard to her right or wish. Her cheeks flushed hotly, and she looked at her husband. Surely he would spare her the distressing position of denying her mother-in-law's decision, or affirming her own. But Robert Campbell was as one that heard not. His eyes were upon his plate, and he was embarrassed even in the simple act of eating. At that moment she had almost a contempt for him. But seeing that he did not intend to interfere, she smiled at Christina, and said:

"You will call me Dora, I suppose, as you are bid to do so, and when I feel like it, I shall answer to that name. When I do not feel disposed to answer to Dora, I shall be silent. That is, you know, my privilege." She spoke with a smile and charming manner, and then, looking at her husband, rose from the table. Robert sauntered after her, making some remark about tea to his mother as he passed her.

She could not answer him. This leave-taking, unauthorized by her example, stupefied the elder woman. "Do you see, Isabel," she cried, "what I shall have to endure?"

"Dinner was really finished, mother."

"That makes no difference! No one has a right to leave the table until I rise. I consider Dora's behavior a piece of impertinence."

"I do not think she intended it to be impertinent."

"Her intention makes no difference. No one has a right to leave my table until I set the example. And if Dora's behavior was not impertinent, then it was stupid ignorance, and I shall instruct her in the decencies of respectable life. And I tell you both to remember that her name is Dora. I will have no Theodoras here. Fancy people going about the house calling 'The-o-do-ra.' Ridiculous!"

"Well, mother, I ask leave to say that I should not like any one without my permission to call me Bell, nor do I believe Christina would care to be called Kirsty. And I really think Robert's wife wished to be agreeable, and even friendly, if we had encouraged her. Why not give her a fair trial? I think she could teach Christina and myself many things."

"I think you are bewitched as well as your brother. I never knew you, Isabel, to make any exceptions to my opinions – or to see me insulted without feeling a proper indignation with me."

"Oh, dear mother, you are mistaken! The day will never come when your daughter Isabel will not stand shoulder to shoulder with you."

"I am sure of that. I wish Christina had not asked such an obtrusive question. I had to answer it as I did, in order to show that woman that we – in our own home here – would call her just what we preferred to call her, without let or hindrance; yet I wish that Christina had kept her foolish question for a little longer. I was hardly ready for active opposition. It is premature. Christina always interferes at the wrong moment." So Christina, snubbed and blamed for her malapropos question, subsided into

sullen indifference externally, while inwardly passing on the blame for her correction to Theodora, who, she decided, was going to be unlucky to her.

In the meantime Robert had walked with his wife to the parlor door of their own apartments, but he did not enter with her. "I am going to leave you half-an-hour, Dora," he said. "I wish to smoke a cigar in the library."

"I should like to go with you, Robert, as I have always done. I enjoy good tobacco."

"Walking on some lovely balcony, overlooking the Mediterranean, it was pleasant; but here it is not the thing. If you went with me, I might have the whole family, as the library, like the dining-room, is common ground. Circumstances alter cases, Dora. You know that, my dear! I will return in half-an-hour."

She had a slight struggle with herself to answer pleasantly, but that free and loving thing, the human soul, was in Theodora's case under kind but positive control, so she replied with a smile:

"As you wish, dear Robert – yet I shall miss you."

She was alone in her splendid rooms, and her heart fell. The day had been a hard one. From the moment they left Kendal, Robert had been disagreeably silent. He knew that he was going home to a struggle with his family, and he dreaded the experience. Had it been a struggle with business difficulties he would have risen bravely to its demands. A dispute with women irritated him. In his thoughts he called it "trivial." But had he known all that such a dispute generally involves, he would have sought out for it the most portentous and distracting word in all the languages of earth.

So Theodora left to herself sat down with a sinking heart. The change in her husband's temper troubled her; the total absence of all human welcome to her new home troubled her still more. The occupation of her rooms by strangers, the rifling of her trunks, the half-quarrelsome dinner, the despotic changing of her name might be – as compared with death, accident, or ruin – "trivial" troubles, but she was poignantly wounded in her feelings by them. And their crowning grief was one she hardly dared to remember – her husband's failure to defend the name he had so often passionately sworn he loved better than all other names. True, she had permitted him to call her Dora, but that was a secret, sacred, pet name, to be used between themselves, and by that very understanding denied to all others.

She could not but admit to herself that she was bitterly disappointed in her home-coming. She had thought Robert's mother and sisters would meet her on the threshold with kisses and words of welcome. She had yet to learn the paucity of kisses and tender words in a Scotch household. The fact is general, but the causes for this familiar repression are various, and may be either good or evil. Theodora felt them in her case to be altogether unkind. What could she do about it? There was the perilous luxury of complaint to her husband and there was her father's lifelong advice: "Shut up a trouble in your heart, and you will soon sing over it." Which course should she take? She was waiting for a true instinct, a clear, lawful perception, when Robert entered the room.

She looked up with a smile that brought him swiftly to her side, and when he spoke kindly, all her fearing discontent slipped away. Very soon their conversation turned naturally to their apartments. Robert was proud of them, not so much for the money lavished on their adornment, as for the taste he thought himself to have shown. Going here and there in them, he happened to find, on a beautiful cabinet, an old curl paper and a couple of bent hairpins.

"Look here, Dora," he said, and his voice was so full of displeasure, that she rose hastily and went to him.

"What kind of maid have you hired? She ought to know better than to leave these things in your parlor."

"And you ought to know better, Robert," was the indignant answer, "than to suppose these things belong to me. Do I ever put my hair in newspaper twists? Do I ever fasten it with dirty, rusty, wire pins like these?"

"Then tell Ducie to keep her pins and curl papers in her own room."

"They are not Ducie's. She would not put such dreadful things in her pretty hair."

"How do they come here, then?"

"I suppose the people who have been occupying these rooms left them."

"No one has occupied these rooms since they were redecorated and refurnished."

"You are mistaken, Robert. They have been fully occupied for the last three weeks."

"Dora, what are you saying?"

"The truth! Call any of your servants, and they will tell you so."

Without further words he rang the bell, and Ducie appeared. "Ducie," he asked, "who told you there had been people staying in these rooms?"

"The kitchen, sir; that is, the men and women in the kitchen. I was taken all aback, for my lady had told me – "

"Do you know who the people were?"

"Mrs. and Miss Crawford, Mrs. Laird and her granddaughter, Miss Greenhill."

"Oh, they were relations, Dora," he said in a voice which indicated they had a right there, and that he was neither grieved nor astonished at their invasion of his apartments.

"If you please, sir," interposed Ducie, "my lady's trunks were all opened by Mrs. Crawford and the rest. It gave me such a turn!"

"The rest? Who do you mean?"

"Miss Crawford, Mrs. Laird, and Miss Greenhill."

"Then give the ladies their proper names."

"Yes, sir, Mrs. and Miss Crawford, Mrs. Laird, and Miss Greenhill have opened and ransacked all the four trunks belonging to my lady, which were sent on here directly after her marriage. She had given me the keys of them, and when I saw them open it fairly took my breath away. I am afraid many things are destroyed, and some things that cost no end of money stolen. Not liking to be blamed for the same, I wish the matter looked into."

"Stolen! You should be careful how you use such a word."

"Sir, excuse me, but people who open locked trunks, and use and destroy what is not theirs are just as likely as not to carry off what they want. My character is in danger, sir. I wish the trunks examined."

"I suppose you have been through them."

"No, indeed, sir. When my lady went to her dinner, I called in one of the kitchen girls. I wanted a witness that I had never touched them."

"How dare you make such charges, then?"

"Ask my lady."

"Dora, is there any truth in this girl's words?"

"I fear she speaks too truly, Robert. I have only looked cursorily through one trunk, but I found much fine clothing spoiled, and I fear some jewelry gone. The ruby and sapphire ring given me by my college history class as a wedding gift is not in the jewel case it was packed in, and my turquoise necklace was scattered among my neckwear. It ought to have been in the jewel box."

"Perhaps you forgot in the hurry of packing where you put it."

"I was not hurried. Those four trunks were all leisurely and carefully packed, and the day we left Kendal for Paris – "

"You mean our wedding-day?"

"Yes."

"Then why do you avoid saying so!"

"I do not, but on that same day these four trunks were forwarded here. If you remember, I only took one trunk on our – wedding journey. I supposed these four would be quite safe in this house. But look here, Robert," she continued, lifting a set of valuable ermine furs, "these were given me by

Mrs. Priestley. They were of the most exquisite purity, but they look now as if they had been dipped in a light solution of Indian ink."

"The Glasgow rain," he answered carelessly. "Ducie, I do not think we shall blame you."

"Sir, I will take no blame, either about things spoiled, or stolen."

"There is no question of theft. If the ladies using these rooms for a day or two – "

"For three weeks, sir."

"Used also some clothing found in the rooms – "

"Not found, sir, I beg pardon, but locked trunks were opened for them, which the men in the kitchen say is clear burglary – perhaps wishing to frighten me, sir. But this way, or that way, sir, things have been ruined that cost no end of money, and when I saw my lady's spoiled gowns and furs, and broken jewelry, they fairly took my breath away! Yes, sir, they did."

"You may go now, Ducie."

"I cannot and will not be blamed, sir, and I want that fact clear."

"You may go, now. I have told you that once before. If I have to tell you again, you can leave the house altogether."

"Ducie," said Theodora, "I wish you would look after clean linen for the beds and dressing tables."

"What is the matter with the linen, Dora?"

"It is not clean. It looks as if it had been used for two or three weeks."

"Are you sure?"

"Look at it! I can do without many things, Robert, but I cannot do without clean linen."

"Of course not! It is awfully provoking. I tried so hard to have everything spotlessly clean and comfortable, but – " He turned away with an air of angry disappointment.

Dora went to his side and praised again all he had done. She said she would forget all that was spoiled, or broken, or stolen for his sake, and for sweet love's sake, and she emphasized all her tender words with kisses and endearing names.

And she found, as many women find, that the more she renounced her just displeasure and chagrin the harder it was to conciliate her husband's. Whether he enjoyed Dora's efforts to comfort him, or was really of that childish temper which gets more and more injured, as it is more and more consoled, it was at this stage of her married life impossible for Theodora to decide. However, in a little while he condescended to forgive Theodora for the annoyances others had caused him, and said: "It is later than I thought it. We have forgotten tea."

"I do not want any."

"I am going to speak to mother. Shall I send you a cup?"

"No, thank you. Do not stop long, Robert."

She went to the window and looked out into the dreary night. A heavy rain was falling, and not a star was visible in that muffled atmosphere. Sorrowful feelings pervaded all her thoughts, and she asked her soul eagerly for some password out of the tangle of small trials, which like brambles made her path difficult and painful. For the circumstances in which she so suddenly found herself, confounded and troubled her. Had Robert deceived her? Had she been deceived in Robert?

It was, however, a consciousness of having fallen below herself, which hurt her worst of all. She had made concessions, where concession was wrong; she had made apologies for her husband, whereas he ought to have made them to her.

"I have been weak," she whispered to her Inner Woman, and that truthful monitor replied:

"*To be weak is to be wicked.*"

"I have resigned my just rights and my just anger."

"*And so have encouraged others to be unjust and unkind, and to sin against you.*"

"And I have gained nothing by my cowardly self-sacrifice."

"*Nothing but humiliation and suffering, which you deserve.*"

"What can I do?"

"*Retrace your first wrong step, in order to take your first right step.*"

Ere this mental catechism was finished, Ducie entered the rooms with her arms full of clean linen, and Theodora said: "I see you have got the linen, Ducie. Make up my bed first."

"Got it! Yes, ma'am, after a fight for it. The chambermaid was willing enough, but madame held the keys, and madame said the beds had been changed four days ago, and she would not have them changed but once a week. I refused to go away, and the girl went back to her, and was ordered to leave the room. Then I went, and told her that whether she was willing or unwilling I had to have clean linen, as the beds had been stripped, and Mr. Campbell wanted to go to sleep, and Mrs. Campbell had a headache. Then she flew into a passion, and I do not think I durst have stayed in her presence longer, but Mr. Campbell was heard coming, so she flung the keys to one of the young ladies, and told her to 'see to it.' Then I had a fresh fight for pillow-cases, and covers for the dressing tables, and I was told to remember that I would get no more linen for a week. 'Fresh linen once a week is the rule in this house,' the young lady said, 'and no rules will be broken for Mrs. Robert. You can tell her Miss Campbell said so.'"

"Well, Ducie, we must look out for ourselves. I will buy linen to-morrow, and then we can change every day in the week, if we want to."

Robert had been requested not to stay long, but his interview with his mother proved to be both long and stormy. The old lady had felt the irritation of the dinner table, and though she herself was wholly to blame for its quarrelsome atmosphere, she was not influenced by a truth she chose to ignore. Ever since dinner she had been talking to her daughters of Theodora, and her smouldering dislike was now a flaming one. The application for clean linen had made her furious, and she was scolding about it when Robert entered the room. But he knew before he opened the door of his mother's parlor what he had to meet, and the dormant demon of his own temper roused itself for the encounter. He went into her presence with a face like a thundercloud, and asked angrily:

"Why did you let any one – I say any one – into my rooms, mother? I think their occupancy without my permission a scandalous piece of business."

"Keep your temper, Robert Campbell, for your wife. She will need it, I warrant."

"Answer my question, if you please!"

"Well, then, if it is scandalous to entertain your kindred, it would have been much more scandalous to have turned them out of the house."

"Kindred! It is a far cry to call kindred with that Crawford and Laird crowd. I will not have them here! Take notice of that."

"They will come here when they come to Glasgow."

"Then I shall turn them out."

"Then I shall go out with them."

"My rooms – "

"Preserve us! No harm has been done to your rooms."

"They have been defiled in every way – old curl papers, dirty hairpins, stains on the carpets and covers. I burn with shame when I think of my wife seeing their vulgar remains."

"Your wife? Your wife, indeed! She is – "

"I don't want your opinion of my wife."

"You born idiot! What do you want?"

"I want you to write to the women who opened my wife's trunks, and ruined her clothing, and stole her jewelry, or I – "

"Don't you dare to throw '*or*' at me. I can say '*or*' as big as you. What before earth and heaven are you saying!"

"That my rooms have been entered, my wife's trunks broken open – "

"You have said that once already! I had the Dalkeiths in my spare rooms. Was I to turn the Crawfords and the Lairds on to the sidewalk because your rooms had been refurnished for Dora Newton?"

"Campbell is my wife's name."

"I thank God your kindred had the first use of your rooms! You ought to be glad of the circumstance. And pray, what harm is there in opening a bride's trunks?"

"Only burglary."

"Don't be a tenfold fool. A bride's costumes are always examined by her women kin and friends. My trunks were all opened by the Campbells before your father brought me home. Every Scotch bride expects it, and if you have married a poor, silly English girl, who knows nothing of the ways and manners of your native country, I am not to blame."

"Let me tell you – "

"Let me finish, sir. I wish to say there was nothing in Dora Newton's trunks worth looking at – home-made gowns, and the like."

"Yet two of them have been worn and ruined."

"Jean Crawford and Bell Greenhill wore them a few times. They wanted to go to the theatre or somewhere, and had not brought evening gowns with them. I told them to wear some of Dora's things. Why not? She is in the family now, more's the pity."

"They had no right to touch them."

"I'm sure I wish they had not worn them. Jean and Bell are stylish-looking girls in their own gowns. Dora's made them look dowdy and common. I was fairly sorry for them."

"Which of them wore Theodora's ring? That ring must come back —*must*, I say. Understand me, mother, it must come back."

"If it is lost – "

"It will be a case for the police – sure as death!"

The oath frightened her. "You have lost your senses, Robert," she cried; "you are fairly bewitched. And oh, what a miserable woman I am! Both my lads!" and she covered her face with her handkerchief, and began to sigh and sob bitterly.

Then Isabel went to her mother's side, and as she did so said with scornful anger:

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Robert Campbell. You have nearly broken your mother's heart by your disgraceful marriage. Can you not make Dora behave decently, and not turn the old home and our poor simple lives upside down, with all she requires?"

"Isabel, do you think it was right to put people in the rooms I had spent so much time and money in furnishing?"

"Quite right, seeing the people were our own kindred. It was not right to spend all the time and money you spent on those rooms for a stranger. You ought to be glad some of your own family got a little pleasure in them first of all."

"They did not know how to use them. Both the Crawfords and Lairds are vulgar, common, and uneducated women. They know nothing of the decencies of life."

"That may be true, but they are mother's kin, and blood is thicker than water. The Crawfords and Lairds are blood-kin; Dora is only water."

"Theodora is my wife. I see that mother will no longer listen to me. Try and convince her that I am in earnest. My rooms are *my* rooms, and no one comes into them unless they are invited by Theodora or myself. My wife's clothing and ornaments of all kinds belong to my wife, and not to the whole family. Write to Jean Crawford, and Bell Greenhill, and tell them to return all they have taken, or I shall make them do so."

"I suppose, Robert, they have only borrowed whatever they have. They often borrow my rings and brooches and even my dresses."

"Isabel, when people borrow even a ring, without the knowledge and consent of the owner, the law calls it stealing; and the person who has so borrowed it, the law calls a thief. I hope you understand me."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.